



**UNIVERSIDAD
DE GRANADA**

Facultad de Psicología
Departamento de Psicología Social
Programa de Doctorado en Psicología

TESIS DOCTORAL

**Análisis de la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja desde una Perspectiva
de Género: Consecuencias para el Bienestar de Jóvenes**

Analysis of Cyberdating Abuse from a Gender Perspective:
Consequences for the Well-being of Young People

MENCIÓN DE DOCTORADO INTERNACIONAL

M. Dolores Sánchez Hernández

Directoras:

Francisca Expósito Jiménez

M. Carmen Herrera Enríquez

Granada, Junio de 2023

Editor: Universidad de Granada. Tesis Doctorales
Autor: María Dolores Sánchez Hernández
ISBN: 978-84-1195-503-4
URI: <https://hdl.handle.net/10481/96719>

La presente tesis doctoral ha sido financiada a través del programa de Formación del Profesorado Universitario (FPU 2018: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Gobierno de España), al que ha estado vinculada la doctoranda desde Septiembre de 2019 hasta Septiembre de 2023 (Ref. FPU18/00756), así como por los proyectos “*Nuevas formas de violencia de género: Factores de riesgo y protectores para el bienestar psicosocial*” (Ref. PSI2017-84703-R), “*Violencia de género en la era digital: ¿Las nuevas tecnologías de la comunicación y la información empoderan o someten a la mujer?*” (Ref. B-SEJ-472-UGR18) y “*Violencia contra las mujeres: Consecuencias para su bienestar psicosocial*” (Ref. PID2021-123125OB-I00), concedidos por el Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad (MINECO/AEI/FEDER/UE). Los estudios desarrollados en esta tesis cuentan con la aprobación del Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Universidad de Granada (nº: 1050/CEIH/2020).

A mi familia

Table of Contents

Índice de Contenidos

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Resumen..... | 15 |
| Abstract..... | 23 |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 31 |
| 1. Gender-Based Violence..... | 33 |
| 1.1. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)..... | 33 |
| 1.1.1. Analysis of IPV in Youth from a Gender Perspective..... | 35 |
| 1.1.2. Main Theoretical Approaches to IPV | 37 |
| 1.1.2.1. Attachment Theory | 37 |
| 1.1.2.2. Social Role Theory | 40 |
| 1.1.2.3. Ambivalent Sexism Theory | 42 |
| 1.1.2.4. Heterosexual Script Theory | 45 |
| 2. Cyberdating Abuse (CDA) | 47 |
| 2.1. Conceptualization of CDA | 47 |
| 2.2. The Role of Relationship, Information, and Communication Technologies (RICT) and Relational Dynamics in CDA | 48 |
| 2.3. Prevalence of CDA..... | 50 |
| 2.4. Tolerance to CDA..... | 51 |
| 2.5. Consequences Associated with CDA | 53 |
| 3. Antecedents of CDA | 55 |
| 3.1. Individual Variables | 55 |
| 3.1.1. Online Disinhibition | 55 |
| 3.1.2. Online Moral Disengagement..... | 58 |
| 3.2. Relational Variables | 61 |
| 3.2.1. Partner Electronic Surveillance | 61 |
| 3.2.2. Online Jealousy..... | 63 |
| 4. Coping with CDA | 65 |
| 4.1. Coping Strategies..... | 66 |
| 4.2. The Role of RICT in Coping with CDA..... | 69 |
| References | 73 |
| Motivation and Objectives | 97 |

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

| | |
|--|------------|
| Chapter 2. Exploring the Social Perception of CDA | 111 |
|--|------------|

Controlling Behaviors in Couple Relationships in the Digital Age: Acceptability of Gender Violence, Sexism, and Myths about Romantic Love 113

Abstract..... 115

Introduction 117

Study 1 121

 Method..... 122

 Results 125

 Discussion..... 130

Study 2..... 133

 Method..... 134

 Results 136

 Discussion..... 142

General Discussion 145

References 148

Supplementary Material 154

Perception of CDA from the Victims' Perspective: Effect of the Type of Suffered Behavior and Gender 161

Abstract..... 163

Introduction 165

Method..... 170

Results 176

Discussion..... 184

References 191

Supplementary Material 197

Chapter 3. Exploring Antecedents of CDA 203

Does the Digital Environment Evoke Anxiety Cycles in Romantic Relationships? The Roles of Social–Interpersonal and Individual Factors in CDA Perpetration

..... 205

Abstract..... 207

Introduction 209

Study 1 217

 Method..... 218

 Results 221

Brief Discussion 225

| | |
|--|------------|
| Study 2 | 226 |
| Method | 226 |
| Results | 230 |
| General Discussion | 237 |
| References | 243 |
| Supplementary Material | 251 |
| Is Online Disinhibition Related to CDA Perpetration by Moral Disengagement? The Moderating Role of Gender, Sexism, and Cybervictimization..... | 261 |
| Abstract..... | 263 |
| Introduction | 265 |
| Method..... | 272 |
| Results | 277 |
| Discussion..... | 286 |
| References | 292 |
| Supplementary Material | 299 |
| Chapter 4. Exploring Coping Strategies to Manage CDA | 307 |
| Impact of CDA Victimization on Individual Well-Being: The Role of Destructive Responses, Relational Power, and Relationship Inclusiveness | 309 |
| Abstract..... | 311 |
| Introduction | 313 |
| Study 1 | 316 |
| Method..... | 317 |
| Results | 320 |
| Brief Discussion | 328 |
| Study 2..... | 328 |
| Method..... | 330 |
| Results | 332 |
| General Discussion | 338 |
| References | 344 |
| Supplementary Material | 351 |
| Chapter 5: General Discussion | 365 |
| Social Perception of CDA | 367 |
| Antecedents of CDA | 371 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Coping Strategies to Manage CDA and its Consequences | 376 |
| Limitations | 378 |
| Future Lines of Research..... | 380 |
| Conclusions and Practical Implications | 381 |
| References | 383 |

Resumen

En las últimas décadas, se ha producido un incremento exponencial de los niveles de violencia íntima en la pareja (VIP), principalmente, entre las personas más jóvenes. Los patrones tradicionales de abuso existentes en las relaciones íntimas se están trasladando al entorno online donde adoptan nuevas vías y formas de expresión. Si bien es cierto que, tanto hombres como mujeres ejercen ciberviolencia hacia la pareja, las motivaciones, la forma en la que se percibe y experimenta, así como sus consecuencias, no son las mismas para ambos géneros. Estas diferencias no resultan sorprendentes, dado que el modo en que las personas piensan, sienten y actúan suele estar sesgado por las normas sociales de género. Pese a los avances observados en materia de igualdad, la socialización de género diferencial sigue impregnando nuestra sociedad, relegando a las mujeres a una posición de vulnerabilidad que las expone a múltiples formas de violencia. Esta tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo general esclarecer la asimetría de género implícita en la ciberviolencia en la pareja, focalizando la atención en el contexto en el que tiene lugar (entorno online) y en la influencia de la socialización de género. En concreto, se centra en examinar tres cuestiones fundamentales: (a) qué factores determinan el modo diferencial en que los y las jóvenes perciben y experimentan la ciberviolencia en la pareja (Objetivo 1); (b) cómo ciertas variables (individuales, relacionales y culturales) interactúan entre sí para explicar su perpetración, examinando posibles patrones de género (Objetivo 2); y (c) qué estrategias utilizan las víctimas para afrontar los comportamientos ciberabusivos y cómo esto afecta a su bienestar (Objetivo 3).

En conjunto, la presente tesis consta de un total de cinco capítulos. El Capítulo 1 ofrece una visión sintética de la literatura existente sobre ciberviolencia en la pareja, donde se describe las principales aproximaciones teóricas que sustentan el marco de la tesis doctoral, así como la conceptualización, antecedentes y consecuencias de esta problemática. Seguidamente, se detallan las motivaciones y objetivos específicos de la tesis.

El Capítulo 2 recoge una serie de tres estudios (Estudios 1–3) que, mediante una metodología experimental, tratan de ofrecer una primera aproximación al estudio de las variables que promueven la justificación y normalización de la VIP, aplicando un enfoque de género (Objetivo 1). En concreto, los Estudio 1 y 2 ($N_{total} = 344$) examinan cómo el rol que las personas adoptan en una situación de VIP contra la mujer (protagonista vs. observadora) y el contexto en que esta ocurre (cara a cara vs. WhatsApp) afecta a la percepción de la violencia, mientras se analiza la influencia de determinadas variables ideológicas (aceptabilidad de la VIP contra la mujer, sexismo ambivalente y mitos sobre el

Resumen

amor romántico). Los principales resultados mostraron que, en condiciones en las que las mujeres eran víctimas (vs. observadoras) de una situación de control abusivo, reconocían en menor grado el riesgo de VIP (Estudio 1). Por su parte, se observó que los hombres, cuando eran perpetradores (vs. observadores) de tal situación, reconocían en menor medida el abuso (control) que ejercían hacia su pareja y tendían a no considerar la amenaza al poder como la causa de su comportamiento (Estudio 2). Asimismo, los hallazgos indicaron que los y las jóvenes con altos niveles de sexismo ambivalente, alta aceptabilidad de VIP contra la mujer y elevada aceptación de los mitos del amor romántico, mostraron una mayor justificación del abuso, menor percepción de gravedad y menor identificación de la VIP (Estudio 1 y 2).

Profundizando en las experiencias de cibervictimización, el Estudio 3 ($N = 92$) fue dirigido a examinar cómo hombres y mujeres perciben de manera diferencial los comportamientos ciberabusivos que sufren en sus relaciones, en términos de ofensa y gravedad, y qué motivaciones atribuyen al abuso del que son objeto, dependiendo de si se trata de cibercontrol o ciberagresión directa. Los resultados mostraron que las mujeres percibieron los comportamientos ciberabusivos de su pareja como más graves y ofensivos que los hombres, principalmente, cuando se trataba de un incidente de ciberagresión directa (vs. cibercontrol). Así mismo, los hombres (vs. mujeres) informaron con mayor frecuencia que sufrían ciberviolencia debido a que sus parejas eran inseguras, desconfiadas y dependientes emocionalmente; mientras que las mujeres (v. hombres) indicaron en mayor medida que habían sido víctimas de ciberabuso porque sus parejas experimentaron desinhibición online. Finalmente, se observó que, según la perspectiva de la víctima, la ciberagresión directa (vs. cibercontrol) de la pareja estaba más motivada por la ira/frustración y la desinhibición online, mientras que las conductas de cibercontrol (vs. ciberagresión directa) estaban más motivadas por ciertos rasgos de personalidad (inseguridad, desconfianza, dependencia emocional) y celos. En conjunto, el Capítulo 2 proporciona evidencia que respalda la situación de mayor vulnerabilidad a la que están expuestas las mujeres en sus relaciones. Así mismo, denota que el impacto de su sufrir ciberviolencia en la pareja, especialmente, ciberagresión directa, parece ser más negativo para éstas (vs. hombres).

El Capítulo 3 agrupa una serie de tres estudios (Estudios 4–6) en los que, desde una metodología no experimental, se pretende comprender cómo determinadas variables (individuales, relacionales y contextuales) interactúan entre sí para predecir la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja, examinando posibles patrones de género. Asimismo,

teniendo en cuenta la naturaleza e intencionalidad distintiva de los comportamientos ciberabusivos (cibere agresión directa y cibercontrol), este capítulo trata de aproximarse a la comprensión de los mecanismos explicativos que subyacen a cada tipo de abuso (Objetivo 2). En concreto, los Estudios 4 y 5 ($N_{total} = 698$) examinan por primera vez (a) el papel moderador del género y la aceptación del guión heterosexual en la asociación positiva entre el apego ansioso y la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja y, (b) el efecto indirecto del apego ansioso en la comisión de este tipo de violencia a través del seguimiento electrónico de la pareja y los celos online. Los resultados mostraron que altos niveles de apego ansioso predecían una perpetración más frecuente de ciberagresión directa contra la pareja en hombres (pero no en mujeres; Estudio 4). Además, cuando se contemplaba el efecto de la adherencia al guión heterosexual, los resultados indicaban que el apego ansioso se asociaba con una mayor frecuencia de ciberagresión directa, principalmente, en hombres con alta (vs. baja) aceptación de dicho guión (Estudio 5). Así mismo, los hallazgos indicaron que las personas con alto apego ansioso, usaban en mayor medida las redes sociales para hacer un seguimiento de la pareja, lo que suscitaba en éstas mayores niveles de celos online, y, en consecuencia, les llevaba a ejercer con más frecuencia cibercontrol (pero no ciberagresión directa) hacia la pareja (Estudio 5).

Por su parte, el Estudio 6 ($N = 362$) es pionero en comprobar si la desinhibición online y la desconexión moral operan para predecir la perpetración de ciberagresión directa hacia la pareja. Específicamente, examina (a) el efecto indirecto de la desinhibición online en la comisión de este tipo de violencia a través de la desconexión moral, y (b) la influencia del género, el sexismo ambivalente y la frecuencia de victimización como moderadores de la asociación previa. Los resultados mostraron que las personas que experimentaban alta desinhibición online, tendían a activar en mayor medida la desconexión moral, lo que les conducía a perpetrar ciberagresión directa contra la pareja (pero no cibercontrol) con mayor frecuencia. Sin embargo, el efecto anterior ocurría bajo determinadas circunstancias. Específicamente, se observó que niveles elevados de desinhibición online se asociaron con una alta desconexión moral, principalmente en los hombres (vs. las mujeres), lo que, a su vez, se relacionó con una mayor frecuencia de perpetración de ciberagresión directa sólo cuando éstos, a su vez, sufrían con elevada frecuencia (vs. baja frecuencia) comportamientos ciberabusivos en su relación. En suma, el Capítulo 3 proporciona evidencia novedosa acerca de los mecanismos psicosociales que podrían desencadenar los diferentes comportamientos ciberabusivos (ciberagresión directa y cibercontrol), mientras se vislumbran ciertas asimetrías de género.

Resumen

El Capítulo 4 contiene dos estudios (Estudios 7 y 8) de naturaleza no experimental, que ofrecen una aproximación inicial a la comprensión del afrontamiento de la ciberviolencia en la pareja y sus consecuencias desde una metodología cuantitativa (Objetivo 3). Específicamente, los Estudios 7 y 8 ($N_{total} = 618$) examinan (a) si la victimización de ciberviolencia en la pareja se asocia con un menor bienestar psicológico y menor satisfacción con la relación en las mujeres (vs. hombres), y (b) si el impacto negativo de la victimización en tales aspectos del bienestar se incrementa a través del uso de estrategias que se han considerado tradicionalmente ineficaces (huida, lealtad, negligencia). A partir de los hallazgos preliminares del Estudio 7, los cuales indicaron que el uso de respuestas destructivas (huida y negligencia) media el efecto de la victimización en el bienestar psicológico y la satisfacción con la relación, el Estudio 8 fue dirigido a profundizar en la comprensión de los factores relacionales que podrían promover el uso de estas estrategias destructivas. Concretamente, se examinó (c) si el bajo poder percibido en la relación podría explicar la relación positiva entre la victimización de ciberviolencia en la pareja y el uso de estrategias destructivas (huida y negligencia), y (d) si el grado de inclusión de la pareja en el autoconcepto moderaría el efecto del poder percibido en las respuestas de huida. Los resultados de ambos estudios mostraron de manera consistente que, la victimización de ciberagresión directa predecía una menor satisfacción en la relación, principalmente, en las mujeres (vs. hombres). Así mismo, ambos estudios indicaron que, las personas que experimentaban ciberviolencia en la pareja con alta frecuencia (ya sea cibercontrol, ciberagresión directa o ambos tipos) eran más propensas a utilizar respuestas destructivas (huida y negligencia), lo que se asoció con un peor bienestar psicológico y menor satisfacción con la relación. Profundizando en esta cuestión, se encontró que las personas altamente cibervictimizadas, mostraban niveles bajos de poder percibido en la relación, lo que parecía explicar el uso frecuente de respuestas destructivas (huida y negligencia; Estudio 8). Finalmente, los resultados mostraron que, la percepción de bajo poder que experimentaban las personas altamente cibervictimizadas, dirigía al uso de respuestas de huida sólo cuando éstas manifestaban baja inclusividad (vs. alta inclusividad) de la pareja en el autoconcepto (Estudio 8). En conjunto, los resultados proyectados en el Capítulo 4 consituyen la primera evidencia empírica que respalda que, el estilo de afrontamiento puede determinar el ajuste psicosocial de las víctimas de ciberviolencia en la pareja y su satisfacción con la relación. Asimismo, resalta la necesidad de considerar otros factores relacionales como el poder relacional percibido y la

inclusividad de la pareja en el autoconcepto, a la hora de explorar las respuestas de afrontamiento ante la ciberviolencia en la pareja.

Finalmente, en el Capítulo 5, se describen los resultados y contribuciones más relevantes de la tesis doctoral, para, posteriormente, discutir las principales implicaciones teóricas y prácticas, así como las posibles limitaciones y futuras líneas de investigación. En conjunto, se espera que esta tesis pueda proporcionar una visión más amplia sobre cómo las mujeres y los hombres jóvenes perciben, ejercen y experimentan la ciberviolencia en la pareja de manera diferente, al objeto de promover políticas sociales y recursos específicos para la prevención e intervención eficaz de esta problemática desde un enfoque de género. De acuerdo con los requisitos del Doctorado Internacional de la Universidad de Granada, algunas secciones de esta tesis doctoral están descritas en español, otras en inglés, y otras en ambos idiomas. Además, los estudios incluidos en los capítulos empíricos han sido redactados como artículos de investigación para su posterior publicación en revistas científicas. Es posible, por tanto, que parte de la información expuesta a lo largo de los capítulos resulte redundante.

Abstract

In recent decades, the levels of intimate partner violence (IPV) have exponentially increased, mainly among younger people. Traditional patterns of abuse in intimate relationships are transferring to the online environment by adopting new ways and forms of expression. Although both men and women engage in cyberdating abuse behaviors, how it is perceived and experienced, as well as the motivations and consequences are not the same for both genders. These differences are not surprising, given that the way people think, feel, and act is often biased by gendered social norms. Despite the progress observed in terms of equality, differential gender socialization continues to permeate our society, relegating women to a position of vulnerability that exposes them to multiple forms of violence. The general objective of this doctoral thesis is to clarify the gender asymmetry implicit in cyberdating abuse, focusing on the context in which it takes place (online environment) and on the influence of gender socialization. Specifically, it focuses on examining three fundamental questions: (a) what factors determine the differential way in which young people perceive and experience cyberdating abuse (Objective 1); (b) how do certain variables (individual, relational, and cultural) interact with each other to explain its perpetration, examining possible gender patterns (Objective 2); and (c) what strategies do victims use to cope with cyberabusive behaviors and how does this affect their well-being (Objective 3).

Overall, this dissertation consists of a total of five chapters. Chapter 1 offers a synthetic view of the existing literature on cyberdating abuse, where the main theoretical approaches that support the framework of the doctoral thesis are described, as well as the conceptualization, antecedents, and consequences of this problem. Next, the motivations and specific objectives of the thesis are detailed.

Chapter 2 includes a series of three studies (Studies 1–3) that, using an experimental methodology, attempt to approximate the variables that promote the justification and normalization of IPV from a gender perspective (Objective 1). Specifically, Studies 1 and 2 ($N_{total} = 344$) examine how the role that people adopt in a situation of IPV against women (protagonist vs. observer) and the context in which it occurs (face-to-face vs. WhatsApp) affect the perception of violence while analyzing the influence of certain ideological variables (acceptability of IPV against women, ambivalent sexism, and myths about romantic love). The main results showed that in conditions in which women were victims (vs. observers) of a situation of abusive control, they recognized to a lesser degree the risk of IPV (Study 1). On the other hand, it was observed that when they were perpetrators (vs. observers) of such a situation, men recognized to a

Abstract

lesser extent the abuse (control) they exerted toward their partners and tended not to consider the threat to power as the cause of their behavior (Study 2). Likewise, the findings indicated that young men and women with high levels of ambivalent sexism, high acceptability of IPV against women, and high acceptance of romantic love myths showed greater justification of abuse, lower perception of seriousness, and lower identification of IPV (Studies 1 and 2).

Delving deeper into experiences of cybervictimization, Study 3 ($N = 92$) aimed at examining how men and women differentially perceive the cyberabusive behaviors they experience in their relationships in terms of offensiveness and severity and what motivations they attribute to the abuse they are subjected to, depending on whether it is cybercontrol or direct cyberaggression. The results showed that women perceived their partners' cyberabusive behaviors as more severe and offensive than men, mainly, when it was an incident of direct cyberaggression (vs. cybercontrol). Likewise, men (vs. women) reported more frequently that they suffered cyberviolence due to their partners being insecure, distrustful, and emotionally dependent, whereas women (vs. men) indicated to a greater extent that they had been victims of cyberabuse because their partners experienced online disinhibition. Finally, depending on the victim's perspective, direct cyberaggression (vs. cybercontrol) by the partner was motivated more by anger/frustration and online disinhibition, whereas cybercontrol behaviors (vs. direct cyberaggression) were more motivated by certain personality traits (insecurity, distrust, and emotional dependence) and jealousy. Overall, Chapter 2 provides evidence that supports the situation of greater vulnerability to which women are exposed in their relationships. It also shows that the impact of their suffering cyberdating abuse, especially direct cyberaggression, seems to be more negative for women (vs. men).

Chapter 3 comprises a series of three studies (Studies 4–6) in which, from a nonexperimental methodology, we seek to understand how certain variables (individual, relational, and contextual) interact with each other to predict the perpetration of cyberdating abuse, examining possible gender patterns. Also, taking into account the distinctive nature and intentionality of cyberabusive behaviors (direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol), this chapter attempts to approach the understanding of the explanatory mechanisms underlying each type of abuse (Objective 2). Specifically, Studies 4 and 5 ($N_{total} = 698$) examine for the first time (a) the moderating role of gender and heterosexual script acceptance in the positive association between anxious attachment and the perpetration of intimate partner cyberviolence and (b) the indirect effect of anxious

attachment on the perpetration of this type of violence through partner electronic surveillance and online jealousy. Results showed that high levels of anxious attachment predicted more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression against partners in men (but not in women; Study 4). Furthermore, when the effect of adherence to the heterosexual script was considered, the results indicated that anxious attachment was associated with a higher frequency of direct cyberaggression, mainly in men with high (vs. low) acceptance of the heterosexual script (Study 5). Likewise, the findings indicated that people with a high anxious attachment used social networks to a greater extent to track their partners, which provoked higher levels of online jealousy in them and, consequently, led them to exercise more frequent cybercontrol (but not direct cyberaggression) toward their partners (Study 5).

Study 6 ($N = 362$) is pioneering in testing whether online disinhibition and moral disengagement predict the perpetration of direct cyberaggression toward a partner. Specifically, it examines (a) the indirect effect of online disinhibition on the perpetration of this type of violence through moral disengagement and (b) the influence of gender, ambivalent sexism, and frequency of victimization as moderators of the prior association. Results showed that individuals who experienced high online disinhibition tended to activate moral disengagement to a greater extent, leading them to perpetrate direct cyberaggression against a partner (but not cybercontrol) more frequently. However, the former effect occurred under certain circumstances. Specifically, high levels of online disinhibition were associated with high moral disengagement, primarily in men (vs. women), which, in turn, was related to a higher frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration only when they, in turn, suffered from high frequency (vs. low frequency) of cyberdating abuse. In sum, Chapter 3 provides novel evidence about the psychosocial mechanisms that might trigger different cyberabusive behaviors (direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol), while glimpsing certain gender asymmetries.

Chapter 4 contains two studies (Studies 7 and 8) of a nonexperimental nature that offer an initial approach to understanding cyberdating abuse coping and its consequences from a quantitative methodology (Objective 3). Specifically, Studies 7 and 8 ($N_{total} = 618$) examine (a) whether cyberdating abuse victimization is associated with lower psychological well-being and lower relationship satisfaction in women (vs. men), and (b) whether the negative impact of victimization on such aspects of well-being is increased through strategies traditionally considered ineffective (exit, loyalty, and neglect). Building on the preliminary findings of Study 7, which indicated that the use of destructive

Abstract

responses (exit and neglect) mediates the effect of victimization on psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction, Study 8 aimed at deepening the understanding of relational factors that might promote the use of these destructive strategies. Specifically, we examined (c) whether low perceived power in the relationship could explain the positive relationship between cyberdating abuse victimization and the use of destructive strategies (exit and neglect), and (d) whether the degree of partner inclusion in the self-concept would moderate the effect of perceived power on exit responses. The results of both studies consistently showed that direct cyberaggression victimization predicted lower relationship satisfaction, primarily, in females (vs. males). Likewise, both studies indicated that individuals who experienced a high frequency of cyberdating abuse (either cybercontrol, direct cyberaggression, or both) were more likely to use destructive responses (leaving and abandonment), which were associated with poorer psychological well-being and lower relationship satisfaction. Delving deeper into this question, highly cybervictimimized individuals showed low levels of perceived power in the relationship, which seemed to explain the frequent use of destructive responses (exit and neglect; Study 8). Finally, the results showed that the perception of low power experienced by highly cybervictimimized individuals led to the use of exit responses only when they manifested low inclusiveness (vs. high inclusiveness) of the partner in the self-concept (Study 8). Altogether, the results projected in Chapter 4 constitute the first empirical evidence supporting that the coping style may determine the psychosocial adjustment of victims of cyberdating abuse and their satisfaction with the relationship. It also highlights the need to consider other relational factors such as perceived relational power and partner inclusiveness in self-concept when exploring coping responses to cyberdating abuse.

Finally, in Chapter 5, the most relevant results and contributions of the dissertation are described, followed by a discussion of the main theoretical and practical implications, as well as possible limitations and future lines of research. Overall, this thesis can provide a broader view of how young women and young men perceive, exercise, and experience cyberdating abuse differently to promote social policies and specific resources for the prevention and effective intervention of this problem from a gender approach. Following the requirements of the International Doctorate of the University of Granada, some sections of this doctoral thesis are described in Spanish, others in English, and others in both languages. In addition, the studies included in the empirical chapters have been written as research articles for subsequent publication in scientific journals. Therefore, some of the information presented throughout the chapters may be redundant.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introducción

1. Violencia de Género

La violencia de género es un problema social y de salud pública que afecta a millones de mujeres y niñas de todo el mundo (Ali y Naylor, 2013). La declaración de la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas (NU) sobre la Eliminación de la Violencia contra la Mujer la define como "todo acto de violencia basado en la pertenencia al sexo femenino que causa o es susceptible de causar a las mujeres daño o sufrimiento físico, sexual o psicológico, e incluye las amenazas de tales actos, y la restricción o privación arbitraria de la libertad, tanto en la vida pública como en la privada" (Res. A. G. 48/104; NU, 1994, p. 2). La violencia de género refleja una clara violación de los derechos humanos (derecho a la dignidad, a la seguridad, a la vida y a la integridad mental y física) y, por ende, del sistema democrático. Dicha violencia se ejerce contra las mujeres por razón de sexo e incluye múltiples expresiones como el feminicidio, la violencia sexual, la trata de mujeres, el matrimonio forzado, la mutilación genital femenina, la violencia íntima en la pareja (VIP), las ciberviolencias machistas, etc.

Durante mucho tiempo, la violencia de género ha sido invisibilizada en nuestra sociedad bajo la influencia del patriarcado. Esto es, un sistema social, cultural y político que, de manera estructural y simbólica, ha otorgado al hombre el poder y control sobre la mujer, supeditándola a una posición de subordinación, vulnerabilidad y dependencia (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016). La inferioridad de la mujer respecto al hombre se fundamenta en el sexismo (desprecio) y/o la misoginia (odio). Por tanto, la violencia de género se considera un tipo de violencia instrumental que, fruto del desequilibrio de poder entre hombres y mujeres, tiene como fin último dominar y someter a la mujer. Si bien es cierto que se ha alcanzado una mayor sensibilización y rechazo social hacia este tipo de violencia, la realidad muestra que la violencia contra las mujeres sigue siendo una lacra social que precisa ser erradicada.

1.1. Violencia Íntima en la Pareja

La violencia íntima en la pareja (VIP) contra las mujeres es reconocida como una de las manifestaciones de violencia de género más comunes a nivel mundial, cuyo impacto se extiende a todos los sectores de la sociedad (López-Ossorio et al., 2018). Esta se define como toda agresión física, sexual o psicológica (incluidos los actos coercitivos) ejercida por parte de la pareja o expareja masculina, sea o no el cónyuge, con la intencionalidad de adquirir y/o mantener el control y dominio sobre la mujer (Centro para el Control y la

Prevención de Enfermedades, 2022). Según datos recogidos por la Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS; 2021), se estima que una de cada tres mujeres (30%) a nivel mundial ha sufrido violencia física y/o sexual por parte de su pareja o expareja al menos una vez en su vida. En el mundo, casi un tercio (27%) de las mujeres de entre 15 y 49 años que han mantenido una relación de pareja han experimentado VIP a lo largo de sus vidas, y un 13% en los últimos 12 meses. En España, los datos recogidos por la Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género (DGVG; 2022) indican que 1.206 mujeres víctimas de VIP han sido asesinadas por su pareja o expareja desde el 1 de enero de 2003 hasta la actualidad. Asimismo, desde 2013, fecha en la que empiezan a contabilizarse estos datos, se ha constatado la muerte de 49 menores víctimas de VIP. En concreto, 49 mujeres murieron en España en 2022 a manos de su pareja (65.3%) o expareja (o en proceso de ruptura; 34.7%), de las cuales, el 40.8% (20) había interpuesto una denuncia, y aproximadamente la mitad (40.7%) tenían entre 16 y 40 años.

Pero la VIP contra las mujeres no sólo se manifiesta en la edad adulta, sino que cada vez tiene un mayor impacto en la adolescencia y juventud (Borrajo y Gámez-Guadix, 2015). A nivel mundial, se estima que una de cada cuatro mujeres de 15 a 24 años ha sufrido VIP (OMS, 2021). En España, la última Macroencuesta de Violencia contra la Mujer (2019), en la que se entrevistaron a 9.568 mujeres residentes en España de 16 o más años, indicó que el 14.2% había sufrido violencia física y/o sexual por parte de su pareja o expareja alguna vez en la vida, de las cuales, el 97% había sufrido además violencia psicológica. Asimismo, los datos mostraron que las manifestaciones de VIP que más habían experimentado las chicas jóvenes (16-24 años) en sus relaciones fueron el abuso emocional (17.3%), seguido del control abusivo general (17.1%) y el control a través de smartphone (14.9%). A su vez, un 11.1% afirmó haber sido presionada por el chico con el que salían para llevar a cabo actividades sexuales en las que no querían participar.

La situación es alarmante en tanto que, la adolescencia tardía y la edad adulta temprana son etapas en las que empiezan a fundamentarse las bases y principios de las relaciones románticas o de pareja, lo que sin duda tiene un efecto determinante en el desarrollo y bienestar psicosocial de las personas. Los resultados de numerosas investigaciones han subrayado que la victimización de VIP en la adolescencia y juventud puede derivar en un mayor riesgo de sufrir enfermedades mentales (e.g., síntomas depresivos, ansiedad, ideación suicida), un incremento de las conductas de riesgo (e.g., comportamientos delictivos, consumo de sustancias, actividad sexual de riesgo) y un empeoramiento de la salud física (e.g., enfermedades de transmisión sexual, autolesiones;

Lu et al., 2018; Wright, 2016; para una revisión, véase Tanquette y Monteiro, 2019). Asimismo, múltiples autores han constatado que la victimización de VIP a edades tempranas incrementa la probabilidad de sufrir o ejercer este tipo de violencia en etapas posteriores (e.g., Stein et al., 2019, 2022).

Si bien es cierto que los hombres también pueden sufrir abuso por parte de la (ex)pareja femenina a lo largo de sus vidas, cabe señalar que la naturaleza o causas del abuso, así como sus consecuencias, no son las mismas en unos casos y en otros. Desde nuestro punto de vista, es crucial no perder de vista el hecho de que, ser mujer, constituye un factor de riesgo de sufrir violencia en múltiples contextos, incluido el ámbito de la pareja. Debido a su posición de vulnerabilidad psicológica en el marco relacional y social, las mujeres son quienes sufren mayoritariamente VIP y los hombres quienes la infringen en mayor medida (García-Moreno, 2000). Asimismo, la investigación empírica ha constatado que las consecuencias psicológicas y emocionales de sufrir VIP son más perjudiciales para las mujeres. En comparación con los hombres, las mujeres tienen mayor probabilidad de experimentar síntomas de ansiedad, estrés, depresión, baja autoestima, miedo y malestar psicológico, lo que a largo plazo puede traducirse en vergüenza, culpa, aislamiento y pensamientos suicidas (e.g., Alleyne-Green et al., 2016; Martz et al., 2016; Taquette y Monteiro, 2019).

1.1.1. Análisis de la VIP en Jóvenes desde una Perspectiva de Género

Las formas clásicas de abordar la VIP contra las mujeres no se ajustan al estudio de la violencia que surge en el ámbito de las relaciones de pareja a edades tempranas. Se necesita una perspectiva más amplia cuyo enfoque vaya más allá del estudio de las características psicológicas del agresor y/o de la víctima, o de una investigación centrada en las relaciones familiares (mujeres casadas con hijos a su cargo). En las últimas décadas, la investigación feminista ha abordado el estudio de la VIP contra las mujeres desde un enfoque socio-cultural que pone el foco en la construcción social del género y las asimetrías de poder, lo cual amplía su efecto a hombres y mujeres de cualquier edad y condición social, posibilitando el estudio de múltiples formas de violencia en diferentes contextos relacionales entre hombres y mujeres. Sin embargo, con la incorporación y constante desarrollo de las tecnologías de la relación, información y comunicación (TRIC), la imagen emergente de la VIP contra las mujeres en la juventud se hace cada vez más compleja, suscitando un análisis apremiante.

Un cuerpo creciente de literatura sugiere que, en lugar de erradicarse la VIP perpetrada por los hombres, las mujeres se están sumando a este tipo de violencia ejerciendo comportamientos abusivos contra la (ex)pareja a través de las TRIC (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016). Asimismo, la investigación empírica ha estimado que, haber sufrido actos violentos a través de Internet por parte de la (ex)pareja, incrementa el riesgo de perpetrar este tipo de comportamientos, debido a que, en el contexto virtual, las víctimas pueden más fácilmente ejercer violencia reactiva y asumir el rol de perpetradoras (e.g., Fernández-González et al., 2020; Villorra et al., 2021). La complejidad de esta problemática ha contribuido a que, de manera errónea según nuestro punto de vista, se extraigan conclusiones alejadas de la realidad, como que la VIP es bidireccional y/o simétrica. Desde este enfoque, se ha considerado el uso de las TRIC como una herramienta que "nivela el terreno de juego en una relación abusiva", es decir, la persona más débil o vulnerable de la relación (menos poderosa) puede ejercer violencia contra la pareja más fuerte o poderosa. Sin embargo, ¿este "poder" cibernético realmente ayuda a igualar una relación de pareja abusiva entre jóvenes, o simplemente añade un nuevo escenario donde reproducir las dinámicas relacionales y violencias del contexto offline? ¿Son las chicas proactivas o reactivas en la violencia que ejercen contra sus parejas en el entorno virtual?

Sin duda la aparición de Internet supuso una revolución en cuanto a las formas tradicionales de comunicación y acceso a la información que, constituía un excelente escenario para la mejora y la innovación. Las nuevas formas de interrelación, aparentemente accesibles a cualquier persona, se tejieron bajo un discurso de neutralidad y horizontalidad que pretendía diluir las categorías sociales (género, etnia, clase, etc.) y asimetrías de poder existentes en el contexto tradicional (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016). Sin embargo, esta disyuntiva entre el entorno en línea (online) y fuera de línea (offline) ha sido ampliamente cuestionada por la literatura. Lejos de la realidad, el espacio virtual no es un entorno neutro como podría pensarse. Los modelos tradicionales de dominación basados en la estructura social jerárquica y la distinción sexual se han trasladado a este nuevo entorno, consolidando estereotipos y una violencia simbólica que perpetua el statu quo de dominación hacia grupos discriminados como son las mujeres y todas aquellas personas que se desvían de las imposiciones normativas del patriarcado (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018).

De acuerdo con este enfoque, la literatura ha estimado que la VIP puede ser sufrida o ejercida a través de las TRIC como un continuo de los comportamientos abusivos (e.g., Borrajo et al., 2015a; Morelli et al., 2018; Stonard et al., 2014). Es decir, la violencia

psicológica y sexual que tiene lugar en el contexto tradicional de la pareja se transfiere al entorno virtual, donde adopta nuevas formas y vías de expresión. Asimismo, se ha demostrado que las manifestaciones de violencia a través de Internet adquieren patrones de violencia similares a las formas de agresión experimentadas offline, y a menudo, se solapan o incluso ocurren de manera simultánea, lo que lleva a una polivictimización en las relaciones íntimas (e.g., Marganski y Melander, 2018, Paat et al., 2020). Por tanto, la violencia que los/as jóvenes ejercen contra la pareja a través de Internet es un fenómeno complejo, arraigado al contexto sociocultural, que precisa ser comprendido dentro de las normas sociales y culturales de género que lo impregnan. Desde una perspectiva de género, la presente tesis doctoral pone en diálogo las normas socioculturales de género, las dinámicas relacionales y la ideosincrasia del entorno virtual para comprender los mecanismos psicosociales que rigen la perpetración VIP a través de Internet.

1.1.2. Principales Aproximaciones Teóricas en la Violencia Íntima en la Pareja

La investigación sobre las relaciones íntimas ha desarrollado numerosas teorías sólidas con el fin de conocer los factores relacionales, sociales y culturales que contribuyen a la perpetuación y normalización de la VIP, en sus diversas manifestaciones. En particular, la *teoría del apego* (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), la *teoría del rol social* (Eagly, 1987; Eagly y Wood, 2012), la *teoría del sexismo ambivalente* (Glick y Fiske, 1996), y la *teoría del guión heterosexual* (Simon y Gagnon, 1986; Kim et al., 2007) han sido especialmente influyentes, por lo que guiarán el desarrollo de la presente tesis doctoral.

1.1.2.1. Teoría del Apego

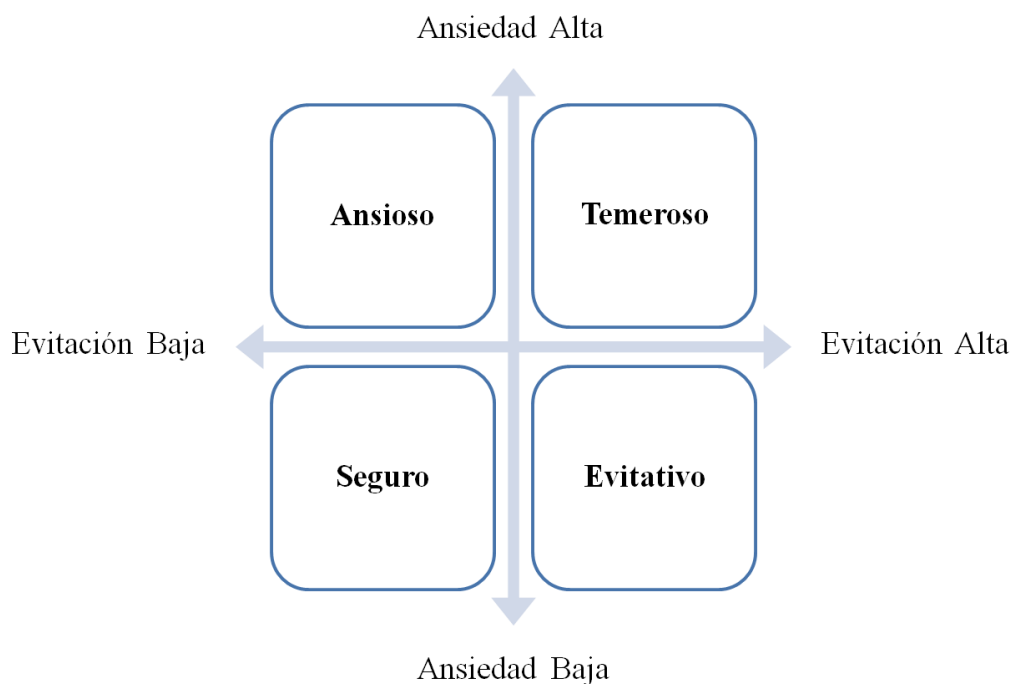
La teoría del apego (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), ampliada posteriormente por Ainsworth (1989), fue adaptada en la década de 1980 para explicar la naturaleza de las relaciones románticas (Hazan y Shaver, 1987). De acuerdo con la teoría, las personas tienen un sistema cognitivo basado en las experiencias previas de disponibilidad, capacidad y calidad del apoyo, que determina la manera en la que se involucran en sus relaciones cercanas, especialmente cuando se sienten amenazadas o estresadas. Estos esquemas mentales guían las respuestas conductuales, cognitivas y afectivas, haciendo que se suprima o active la necesidad de apoyo interpersonal (Fraley et al., 2002). Es decir, dependiendo de cómo las personas hayan sido tratadas en sus relaciones anteriores, éstas

manifiestan diferentes modos de percibir y desarrollar sus vínculos afectivos futuros (Mikulincer y Shaver, 2016).

Una de las conceptualizaciones más reconocidas sobre las diferencias individuales en los estilos de apego en la edad adulta, es la desarrollada por Batholomew y Horowitz (1991). Como ilustra la Figura 1, los autores determinaron cuatro categorías de apego que varían en base a dos dimensiones: ansiedad (alta/baja) y evitación (alta/baja). La primera se caracteriza por el temor al abandono, la dependencia al apoyo de los demás y una imagen negativa de sí mismo que cuestiona la propia valía. La segunda, en cambio, se define por la incomodidad ante la cercanía emocional y la desconfianza en las relaciones, que se sostiene en una imagen negativa de los demás.

Figura 1

Estilos de Apego Adulto



Al combinar dichas dimensiones, los autores determinaron que las personas podían presentar los siguientes estilos de apego:

- a. *Apego seguro*, se caracteriza por niveles bajos de ansiedad y evitación. En general, las personas con apego seguro han mantenido relaciones de calidad basadas en la seguridad y apoyo, por lo que poseen una visión positiva de sí mismas y los demás. Es decir, muestran niveles óptimos de autoestima y autonomía, se sienten cómodos con la búsqueda de proximidad e intimidad en sus

relaciones, se apoyan en los demás y gestionan de manera más constructiva los problemas de la relación.

- b. *Apego inseguro ansioso*, se define por una ansiedad elevada y bajos niveles de evitación. Generalmente, las personas con este tipo de apego han recibido una atención y apoyo ambivalente en sus relaciones, por lo que muestran miedo al abandono y una alta preocupación por sentirse queridas. Esto suscita en ellas una necesidad constante de reciprocidad, cercanía e intimidad que se traduce en una alta dependencia emocional y baja autoestima. Consecuentemente, se encuentran en estado de alerta ante las posibles señales de rechazo, lo que deriva en fuertes sentimientos de angustia y un comportamiento disfuncional (hostilidad, agresión, violencia, etc.), principalmente, cuando se dan situaciones de conflicto o surgen problemas que ponen en riesgo la relación.
- c. *Apego inseguro evitativo*, se caracteriza por niveles bajos de ansiedad y elevada evitación. En general, las personas con apego inseguro han sido rechazadas en sus relaciones previas, lo que les lleva a desconfiar de los demás y a cuestionar la naturaleza persistente de las relaciones. En consecuencia, evitan la cercanía e intimidad, tienden a alejarse de las personas cuando surgen problemas, se vuelven más autosuficientes y muestran mayor dificultad para aceptar a la pareja romántica.
- d. *Apego inseguro temeroso*, está determinado por niveles altos de ansiedad y evitación. Las personas con apego temeroso desean establecer lazos afectivos cercanos, pero, al mismo tiempo, temen ser rechazadas o abandonadas. Esta contraposición que experimentan se deriva de una visión negativa tanto de sí mismo/a como de los demás. En consecuencia, evitan mantener relaciones íntimas, lo que conduce a sensación de inseguridad social, baja asertividad y dificultad para gestionar situaciones estresantes y/o con fuerte carga emocional.

Un cuerpo amplio de literatura se ha centrado en examinar cómo los sistemas del apego romántico afectan a las dinámicas relacionales y al bienestar de las personas (e.g., Li y Chan, 2012; Simpson y Rholes, 2012). En esta línea, se ha observado que el apego ansioso a la pareja es un predictor robusto de insatisfacción (Wright, 2015, 2017) y violencia en las relaciones, tanto en el contexto offline (e.g., Barbaro y Shackelford, 2019; Sommer et al., 2017) como online (e.g., Bui y Pasalich, 2021; Villorra et al., 2021). En lo que respecta al entorno online, la literatura reciente sugiere que las posibilidades que

ofrece la comunicación digital (inmediatez, fácil accesibilidad, conectividad permanente con la pareja, etc.) facilitan que las personas con apego ansioso a la pareja adopten hábitos insanos en las relaciones (e.g., supervisar la actividad de la pareja de manera excesiva, presionarla para que responda de manera inmediata, demandar una atención o contacto permanente) y ejerzan conductas ciberabusivas (e.g., controlar o invadir la privacidad de la pareja a través de medios digitales, presionar a la pareja para realizar determinadas prácticas sexuales) como estrategia para gestionar las inseguridades y preocupaciones sobre el estado de la relación (Sullivan, 2021). Por tanto, uno de los objetivos de esta tesis se centra en examinar cómo los esquemas del apego ansioso pueden influenciar el procesamiento de la información de la pareja en el entorno virtual y dirigir a comportamiento ciberviolentos en las relaciones.

1.1.2.2. Teoría del Rol Social

La *teoría del rol social* (Eagly, 1987; Eagly y Wood, 2012) adopta una perspectiva funcionalista para explicar cómo la socialización de género influye, de forma diferencial, en el comportamiento de hombres y mujeres. Concretamente, la teoría postula que las diferencias biológicas físicas entre mujeres y hombres, esto es, el mayor tamaño y fuerza de los hombres y la capacidad de las mujeres para reproducirse, influyen diferencialmente en las tareas distribuidas a cada sexo: mientras que a las mujeres se les asigna tradicionalmente la actividad reproductiva (cuidadoras), a los hombres se les confiere las tareas de fuerza (proveedores; Eagly y Mitchell, 2004; Wood y Eagly, 2002).

Esta división de funciones o tareas por sexo ha fomentado el desarrollo de expectativas normativas acerca de lo que se considera un comportamiento masculino y femenino apropiado, a lo que se le denomina *roles de género* (Eagly et al., 2000; Wood y Eagly, 2002). Dichos comportamientos diferenciales se perciben como inherentes a la propia naturaleza física de los géneros y, en consecuencia, tienden a normalizarse. De este modo, se ha considerado comúnmente apropiado que los hombres asuman comportamientos relacionados con el liderazgo y la toma de decisión, y las mujeres, aquellos relacionados con el cuidado y el afecto. Esta forma de distribuir los roles ha favorecido una jerarquización de género. Las tareas reproductivas y de cuidado son actividades que relegan a las mujeres al ámbito privado y requieren mucho tiempo y energía, lo que frena su participación en la esfera pública (trabajo remunerado, viajes, eventos sociales, etc.). Por el contrario, a los hombres se les concede el dominio público.

Es decir, socialmente, se les otorga el poder y status para tomar decisiones y acceder a los recursos económicos, lo que los sitúa en una posición de ventaja con respecto a las mujeres. Si bien es cierto que en las sociedades actuales la división de tareas es menos extrema, las expectativas normativas acerca de las funciones de género siguen impregnando nuestras vidas, desencadenando diferentes situaciones de discriminación y violencia hacia las mujeres, ya sea en el ámbito laboral, social o doméstico.

Asimismo, la teoría del rol social expone que la división de tareas por género no sólo conduce a expectativas normativas de los roles que asumen hombres y mujeres en la sociedad, sino que estos, a su vez, favorecen la inferencia de diferentes rasgos o características relacionados con sus roles, a lo que se le denomina *estereotipos de género* (Eagly, 1987; Eagly y Wood, 2012). Así, los estereotipos de género se derivan de las diferentes tareas que hombres y mujeres realizan en el cumplimiento de sus roles, y no de las diferencias de personalidad de origen biológico (Bosak et al., 2008). La masculinidad se ha asociado tradicionalmente con rasgos *agenticos*, los cuales promueven el dinamismo y la toma de decisión (competitividad, seguridad, asertividad, agresividad, etc.). En cambio, la feminidad se ha asociado con rasgos *comunales*, esto es, aquellas características que facilitan el desarrollo y mantenimiento de las relaciones interpersonales (calidez, sensibilidad, amabilidad, solidaridad, etc.; Diekman y Eagly, 2008).

Un elemento clave que se contempla en esta teoría es el rol que desempeña el reforzamiento social. Se infiere que las personas que se ajustan a los roles de género tradicionales son más exitosas y productivas en la sociedad. Como resultado de dicha inferencia, se observa una tendencia a reforzar y aprobar socialmente a aquellas personas que se comportan de acuerdo con lo que se espera de ellas. Por el contrario, cuando las personas se desvían de los estándares de género, se las sanciona y discrimina socialmente. Aunque tanto hombres como mujeres son rechazados al comportarse de manera contraestereotípica, normalmente las mujeres reciben más sanciones debido a su posición de inferioridad en la jerarquía social (Sutherland et al., 2015). Por tanto, los roles de género son un elemento clave en la comprensión del contexto social y cultural que relega a las mujeres a una situación de vulnerabilidad y las expone a situaciones de discriminación y violencia, principalmente, cuando éstas se desvían de los estándares de género preestablecidos (Sugihara y Warner, 2002).

En este sentido, la literatura ha demostrado de manera consistente que la adherencia a los roles tradicionales de género se asocia con mayores niveles de perpetración (e.g., Lichter y McCloskey, 2004; McCauley et al., 2013) y victimización (e.g., Foshee et al.,

2004; Lichter y McCloskey, 2004) de VIP contra la mujer, así como con una mayor tendencia a apoyar actitudes de violencia en el noviazgo (e.g., Archer et al., 2003; Lichter y McCloskey, 2004). Concretamente, un estudio longitudinal indicó que las actitudes tradicionales sobre el rol género predecían un mayor riesgo de perpetración de violencia física en el noviazgo 18 meses después entre los chicos que reportaban alta, pero no baja, aceptación de la violencia en el noviazgo (Reyes et al., 2016). En lo que respecta al entorno online, menos investigación se ha dirigido a examinar la relación entre las creencias tradicionales de género y la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja. Algunos datos recientes sugieren que las convicciones tradicionales de género se relacionan positivamente con la perpetración de diferentes formas de ciberabuso en las relaciones (cybercontrol, cybercoerción sexual y ciberagresión directa; Reed et al., 2021b; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020; Villorra et al., 2019a, 2019b). No obstante, parecen observarse patrones diferentes en hombres y mujeres: mientras que las chicas con convicciones tradicionales son más propensas a ejercer conductas de cibervigilancia y cybercontrol de la pareja (e.g., usar los medios digitales para controlar la actividad de la pareja en redes sociales o conocer su paradero), los chicos con tales creencias son más proclives a ejercer cybercoerción sexual (e.g., presionar a la pareja para realizar determinadas prácticas sexuales online) y ciberagresión directa (e.g., insultar, amenazar o humillar a la pareja a través de los medios digitales; Reed et al., 2021b). Por tanto, examinar el posible efecto diferencial de la socialización de género en la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja guiará gran parte de esta tesis doctoral.

1.1.2.3. Teoría del Sexismo Ambivalente

El patriarcado ha impactado profundamente, no solo en el desarrollo de roles y estereotipos de género, sino también en las relaciones de poder que se dan entre hombres y mujeres en el ámbito privado (Guttentag y Secord, 1983). Tradicionalmente, el control estructural masculino ha sido asociado con la manifestación de hostilidad hacia las mujeres, como grupo discriminado. Sin embargo, la dependencia que los hombres tienen generalmente sobre las mujeres por su rol de esposas y madres ha atenuado dicha hostilidad, favoreciendo actitudes intergrupales benevolentes. Estas constituyen una forma eficaz de discriminación que, pese a adquirir un tono positivo y agradable, relegan a la mujer al rol de género preestablecido y legitiman el poder de los hombres (Glick y Fiske,

1996). A estas actitudes de discriminación basadas en los estereotipos y roles tradicionales de género se les denomina sexismo.

De acuerdo con la *teoría del sexismo ambivalente* (Glick y Fiske, 1996), el sexismo tradicional se fundamenta en dos componentes diferenciados, pero estrechamente relacionados: sexismo hostil y sexismo benévolo. El componente hostil expresa afecto negativo y hostilidad hacia las mujeres, principalmente, hacia aquellas que no se adhieren a los roles de feminidad normativos y que, por tanto, cuestionan la supremacía masculina. El sexismo benévolo, en cambio, adopta una visión positiva de respeto y adoración hacia las mujeres que asumen los roles preestablecidos, considerándolas seres que precisan de afecto y protección masculina (Glick y Fiske, 2001). Si bien ambos componentes, hostil y el benévolo, difieren en la visión que ofrecen de la "mujer" como objeto de actitud, ambos presuponen que la mujer es el sexo débil y contribuyen a la justificación y mantenimiento del sistema patriarcal.

Glick y Fiske (1996) señalan en su teoría, que el sexismo ambivalente está fundamentado en tres elementos básicos: el paternalismo, la diferenciación de género y la heterosexualidad.

En relación al *paternalismo*, la versión hostil del sexismo señala el paternalismo dominador, el cual asume que las mujeres son seres inferiores, incompetentes e incapaces de cuidar de sí mismas y requieren de una figura masculina que las controle y proteja. En contraposición, en su dimensión benévola, el paternalismo protector alega que los hombres, desde su posición de poder, deben proveer a las mujeres de protección y recursos necesarios para garantizar su bienestar. Esta segunda dimensión se basa en el reconocimiento de que el hombre es dependiente de la mujer para la reproducción, el cuidado de los hijos/as y la satisfacción de necesidades afectivas y sexuales, y que, por tanto, la mujer debe ser situada en un pedestal (Glick y Fiske, 1996).

En cuanto a la *diferenciación de género*, se distinguen también dos vertientes. Por un lado, la diferenciación de género competitiva (componente hostil), la cual considera que las mujeres no están suficientemente calificadas para triunfar en la esfera pública, por ejemplo, para acceder y controlar puestos de alta responsabilidad (Glick y Fiske, 1996). De este modo, se asume que la mujer debe ser relegada al ámbito privado y se rechaza socialmente a todas aquellas mujeres que alcanzan éxito profesional (Ferrer y Bosch, 2000). Por su parte, la diferenciación de género complementaria (componente benévolo) asume que hombres y mujeres adoptan roles que se complementan entre sí. Esto es, los hombres realizan el trabajo productivo para proveer recursos materiales y económicos a la

familia, mientras que las mujeres asumen el trabajo reproductivo y las responsabilidades asociadas al cuidado del hogar y la familia (Eagly y Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

El tercer componente del sexismo ambivalente refiere a las *relaciones heterosexuales*. Este, a su vez, se divide en hostilidad heterosexual, relativa al componente hostil, e intimidad heterosexual, referente al componente benévolo. En relación al primero, se asume que las mujeres tienden a usar su atractivo físico como armas de seducción para manipular a los hombres y conseguir poder (Glick y Fiske, 1996). Asimismo, se advierte que los hombres pueden mostrar cierto resentimiento, rencor y hostilidad hacia las mujeres al percibirse como dependientes de estas. Esta aversión, consecuentemente, puede dar lugar a ideologías que justifican y promueven la violencia de género (Moya, 2004). Sin embargo, dicha hostilidad hacia las mujeres es atenuada por el componente benévolo, la intimidad heterosexual, el cual sostiene que la mujer es la mejor compañera del hombre y a quien el hombre necesita para sentirse completo. Esto es, quien provee apoyo, afecto y comprensión al hombre (Glick y Fiske, 1996).

De acuerdo con esta teoría, la literatura empírica ha demostrado ampliamente que las actitudes sexistas tienen un importante peso explicativo en la VIP contra la mujer (Gómez et al., 2014). En concreto, el sexismo ambivalente, especialmente, el sexismo hostil se ha asociado positivamente con actitudes de tolerancia hacia la VIP (Herrero et al., 2017; Janos y Espinosa, 2018; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018), así como con la tendencia a culpabilizar y responsabilizar a las mujeres víctimas de los incidentes de violencia (Gracia et al., 2014; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018; Vidal-Fernández y Megías, 2014). En la misma línea, se ha observado que ambas actitudes sexistas, hostiles y benevolentes, se relacionan con mayores niveles de perpetración de VIP contra la mujeres en el contexto offline (e.g., Carrascosa et al., 2019; García-Díaz et al., 2018). Atendiendo a la ciberviolencia en la pareja, algunos trabajos sugieren que el sexismo hostil en los chicos jóvenes predice la perpetración de formas directas (ciberagresión; Martínez-Pecino y Durán, 2019; Rodríguez-Domínguez, Durán, y Martínez-Pecino, 2018) e indirectas (cibercontrol) de abuso (Cava et al., 2020). El sexismo ambivalente, en cambio, parece ser un predictor de ciberagresión directa hacia la pareja (pero no de cibercontrol) en las chicas (Cava et al., 2020). En vista de lo anterior, ahondar en la comprensión de cómo las actitudes sexistas influyen en la percepción y perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja constituirá otro de los objetivos de esta tesis doctoral.

1.1.2.4. Teoría del Guión Heterosexual

La *teoría del guión sexual* (Simon y Gagnon, 1986) ha sido una de las principales teorías que explica cómo las normas y expectativas culturales sobre la sexualidad guían los comportamientos y actitudes individuales. Sin embargo, estos guiones sexuales no se aplican de igual modo a hombres y mujeres, sino que el comportamiento sexual aceptable y apropiado difiere según el género. Kim et al. (2007) proporcionan un enfoque de género al análisis del guión sexual e integran la teoría de los guiones sexuales (Simon y Gagnon, 1986) y la teoría feminista (Rich, 1980) para una mejor comprensión de las dinámicas de poder que se gestan en las relaciones heterosexuales. De acuerdo con esta perspectiva teórica, el guión heterosexual plasma la “naturaleza” interactiva y complementaria de los géneros en el contexto de las relaciones íntimas. Este se fundamenta en cuatro componentes básicos que conceptualizan el conjunto de roles complementarios, estereotipados, desiguales y sexistas que tradicionalmente se asignan a mujeres y hombres en sus vínculos románticos y/o sexuales (Kim et al., 2007; Tolman et al., 2007):

- a. *Doble estándar sexual*, asume que las relaciones sexuales constituyen un aspecto esencial de la masculinidad. Por tanto, son los hombres quienes piensan continuamente en mantener relaciones sexuales y deben buscar e iniciar el sexo; mientras que las mujeres deben establecer los límites sexuales y mantener su sexualidad bajo control.
- b. *Estrategias de cortejo asociadas a cada género*, determina que los hombres son sujetos activos que usan el poder para atraer a las mujeres, ya sea mediante la destreza física, la agresividad o los recursos materiales; mientras que las mujeres muestran su interés sexual de manera pasiva, por ejemplo, esperando a que los hombres tomen la iniciativa o vistiendo de forma sexualizada para atraer la atención de éstos.
- c. *Compromiso*, establece que, mientras que los hombres evaden el compromiso, las mujeres priorizan en las relaciones románticas y las necesidades de su pareja, haciendo sacrificios para mantener a salvo la relación.
- d. *Atracción por el mismo sexo*, asume que los hombres evitan cualquier comportamiento que pueda ser considerado estereotípicamente femenino o “gay” y que, por tanto, ponga en duda su masculinidad. En cambio, se acepta que las

mujeres se sientan atraídas por personas de su mismo sexo porque se percibe apropiado para el placer masculino.

El guión heterosexual muestra una dicotomía de género activa/pasiva y poderosa/no poderosa. Esto es, los hombres adoptan un papel activo y poderoso en sus relaciones, mientras que las mujeres asumen un rol pasivo y subordinado (Seabrook et al., 2016). De este modo, las normas y expectativas sexuales de género se complementan entre sí para definir lo que culturalmente se consideraría una relación heterosexual apropiada (Tolman, 2006). Fundamentado en los supuestos del patriarcado, el guión heterosexual se expone como “natural” e ineludible y contribuye a la jerarquización de género (Rich, 1980), lo que relega a las mujeres a una posición de poder limitado en sus relaciones y las anima a que acepten y mantengan el orden “natural” preestablecido (Tolman y Porche, 2000).

La investigación empírica que examina la influencia del guión heterosexual en las relaciones íntimas ha observado que, la adherencia al doble estándar sexual en las mujeres, se asocia con una menor autonomía y asertividad sexual, así como con una mayor probabilidad de involucrarse en relaciones sexuales de riesgo (e.g., Danube et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2019). En los hombres, en cambio, la aceptación de dicho estándar se relaciona con actitudes más favorables hacia la VIP contra la mujer y una mayor inclinación a ejercer agresión sexual contra éstas (Moyano, et al., 2017). Asimismo, otras investigaciones señalan que la adhesión al guión heterosexual disminuye la capacidad de las mujeres para identificar la violencia de tipo sexual en el noviazgo (Kim et al., 2019; Garrido-Macías et al., 2020) e incrementa la probabilidad de sufrir o ejercer VIP (Álvarez-Muelas et al., 2020; Martínez-Gómez et al., 2021; Zaikman y Marks, 2017).

En conjunto, la *teoría del rol social* (Eagly, 1987; Eagly y Wood, 2012), la *teoría del sexismo ambivalente* (Glick y Fiske, 1996), y la *teoría del guión heterosexual* (Simon y Gagnon, 1986; Kim et al., 2007) han guiado de manera fructífera multitud de investigaciones empíricas, demostrando cómo las creencias y actitudes culturales de género determinan el modo diferencial en que hombres y mujeres piensan, sienten y actúan en sus relaciones. Concretamente, a partir de ellas, numerosos/as autores/as sugieren que la socialización de género juega un papel determinante en la manifestación y justificación de diferentes manifestaciones de violencia contra las mujeres (Fiske, 2018). Partiendo de esta fundamentación teórica, la presente tesis doctoral pretende analizar el papel que desempeñan las expectativas culturales de género y las actitudes sexistas en el modo en

que se percibe y experimenta la ciberviolencia en la pareja, para tratar de visibilizar la asimetría de género existente en torno a esta problemática.

2. Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

2.1. Conceptualización de la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

En los últimos años, se han designado múltiples términos a nivel internacional para referir a la violencia que se ejerce contra la (ex)pareja a través de Internet, por ejemplo, *cyberdating abuse* (Zweig et al., 2013a), *cyber-aggression* (Schnurr et al., 2013), *electronic dating violence* (Hinduja y Patchin, 2011) o *intimate partner cyber harassment* (Melander, 2010; para una revisión ver Caridade et al., 2019). En el contexto Español, *ciberviolencia en la pareja* ha sido uno de los conceptos más usados cuando se analiza este tipo de VIP en población joven, por lo que será el término que se use, de manera consistente, en la presente tesis doctoral. En concreto, la ciberviolencia en la pareja puede definirse como el control, acoso y abuso que se sufre o ejerce contra una (ex)pareja a través de las TRIC e Internet. Dicha violencia puede manifestarse a través de múltiples aplicaciones (mensajería instantánea, redes sociales, correo electrónico, videollamadas, etc.) y dispositivos digitales (móvil, ordenador, tablet, etc.), e incluye una amplia variedad de comportamientos como vigilar o controlar a la (ex)pareja, publicar o enviar mensajes amenazantes, ofensivos y humillantes a la (ex)pareja, ciberacosar a la (ex)pareja mediante llamadas o mensajes insidiosas, o difundir mensajes, fotos o vídeos de la (ex)pareja personales y/o de contenido sexual sin su consentimiento (Bennett et al., 2011; Burke et al., 2011; Zweig et al., 2013a).

La investigación empírica ilustra un esfuerzo continuado por establecer categorías sobre los comportamientos ciberabusivos que las personas experimentan en el contexto de las relaciones íntimas. Según la revisión de Gámez-Guadix et al. (2018), estos comportamientos pueden clasificarse en tres tipologías de abuso: *monitoreo o cibercontrol psicológico* (actos tecnológicos dirigidos a controlar, en todo momento, el paradero o actividad de la pareja o expareja), *ciberacoso* (e.g., llamadas repetidas o mensajes insidiosos), y *ciberagresión psicológica y verbal* (e.g., insultos, amenazas y humillaciones a través de medios digitales). Por su parte, Zweig et al. (2013a) basaron su clasificación en la naturaleza sexual de los comportamientos ciberabusivos y distinguieron entre *ciberabuso sexual* (e.g., el envío de fotos íntimas y/o de contenido sexual de la pareja o expareja sin su permiso) y *ciberabuso no sexual* (e.g., insultos o amenazas a través de

diferentes vías electrónicas). Otros autores han delineado tipologías diferentes, por ejemplo, Watkins et al. (2018) establecieron tres categorías de comportamientos: ciberagresión psicológica, ciberagresión sexual y ciberagresión de acoso.

Hoy día, una de las clasificaciones más usadas es la propuesta por Borrajo et al. (2015b). En su trabajo, las autoras observaron que los comportamientos de ciberviolencia en la pareja pueden dividirse en dos tipologías: ciberagresión directa y cibercontrol. La *ciberagresión directa* incluye actos deliberados dirigidos a dañar a la (ex)pareja a través de medios electrónicos e Internet, como puede ser amenazas, insultos, la difusión de información privada o la suplantación de identidad. Por su parte, el *cibercontrol* es una forma de abuso orientado a controlar a la (ex)pareja e incluye comportamientos relacionados con la vigilancia o la invasión de la privacidad (e.g., utilizar medios digitales para conocer dónde y con quién está la pareja, revisar su teléfono móvil o acceder a sus cuentas personales sin consentimiento). La categorización de los comportamientos ciberabusivos varía en base a su naturaleza: mientras que los comportamientos de ciberagresión directa adoptan manifestaciones más explícitas y reconocibles de violencia que implican una intencionalidad de infligir daño; los comportamientos de cibercontrol comprenden expresiones abusivas indirectas y, a menudo, “sutiles” que pueden pasar desapercibidas en las relaciones (Borrajo et al., 2015b; Stonard et al., 2017).

2.2. El papel de las TRIC y las Dinámicas Relacionales en la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

Las TRIC muestran ciertas particularidades que favorecen nuevas estrategias y escenarios en los que reproducir y ejercer violencia hacia la (ex)pareja con menos obstáculos y restricciones (Stonard, 2020). Según Harris y Woodlock (2019), la ciberviolencia en la pareja carece de espacio en el sentido de que "trasciende las fronteras y los límites de nuevas maneras" (p. 537); las personas son vulnerables a sufrir este tipo de violencia dondequiera que utilicen las TRIC. Es decir, no se precisa de proximidad física entre los miembros de la pareja para que la violencia ocurra (Bhogal, Rhead, y Tudor, 2019). Además, las TRIC pueden facilitar o incluso exacerbar los comportamientos ciberviolentos como resultado del contacto permanente entre los miembros de la (ex)pareja, al tiempo que amplía, o al menos diversifica, el repertorio de posibilidades y estrategias (Baker y Carreño, 2016). Así, las personas pueden acceder a sus (ex)parejas de manera inmediata a través de múltiples vías (llamadas, redes sociales, mensajería

instantánea, etc.) y dispositivos digitales (móviles, ordenadores, tablets, etc.) para acosarlas o infligirles daño. Asimismo, la comunicación digital se caracteriza por la ausencia de lenguaje no verbal y de respuestas emocionales directas, lo que puede potenciar malentendidos en la relación y la desinhibición hacia comportamientos ciberviolentos en la pareja (Stonard, 2020). En conjunto, la literatura sugiere que un uso inapropiado de las TRIC puede propiciar una escalada en las discusiones, comportamientos intrusivos y agresiones psicológicas y sexuales en las relaciones de pareja.

Por otro lado, cabe señalar que las peculiaridades de las TRIC no sólo incrementan el riesgo de exposición a la VIP, sino que, además, exacerban los daños a los que son expuestas las víctimas (Sánchez et al., 2016). En el contexto virtual, las personas son incapaces de estimar cuándo y cómo se repetirán las agresiones de su (ex)pareja, lo que les genera una sensación de indefensión y miedo permanente (Garaigordobil, 2011; Sánchez et al., 2016). Además, las humillaciones que sufren las víctimas por parte de la (ex)pareja (difusión de rumores o envío de mensajes, fotos y/o vídeos embarazosos de la víctima sin su consentimiento, etc.) se agravan exponencialmente cuando son expuestas en el entorno online; la facilidad y rapidez con la que la información es difundida a través de Internet y compartida con una amplia audiencia hace que se pierda totalmente el control de la situación (Hinduja y Patchin, 2011; Torres-Albero et al., 2014). A ello se le suma, la dificultad para eliminar el contenido que se publica en Internet y el contacto permanente con el agresor, lo que limita la capacidad de las víctimas para escapar del abuso y las expone a una situación constante de revictimización (Agudo, 2012).

Por tanto, aunque el uso de las TRIC podría ayudar a mitigar y hacer frente a los comportamientos abusivos en las relaciones íntimas a través de la comunicación y el apoyo mutuo (Paat et al., 2020), la investigación ha constatado que dicho uso también amplifica la esfera de comportamientos abusivos en la pareja y sus consecuencias más allá de los límites espaciales y temporales anteriores. Como resultado, las TRIC posibilitan tipos específicos de VIP (Dragiewicz et al., 2018) y nuevas oportunidades para ejercer violencia que no eran posibles antes de que estas se desarrollaran e integraran en las dinámicas de la relación (Stonard, 2021), lo que justifica la necesidad de abordar la ciberviolencia en la pareja desde un análisis diferencial.

2.3. Prevalencia de la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

En los últimos años, multitud de trabajos empíricos han sido dirigidos a examinar la prevalencia de la ciberviolencia en la pareja, arrojando cifras preocupantes de victimización y perpetración a nivel internacional. En una revisión de 12 estudios, Stonard et al. (2014) observaron que la violencia en la pareja en la adolescencia, alcanzaba tasas de victimización y perpetración del 55%. Similarmente, un estudio reciente realizado con una muestra de jóvenes estudiantes (i.e., Soriano-Ayala et al., 2023) mostró que el 53.3% de los encuestados/as reportó haber perpetrado ciberviolencia en la pareja en el último año, mientras que un 62.1% reconoció haberla sufrido. Asimismo, una revisión sistemática de 44 estudios sobre ciberviolencia en la pareja en la juventud (Caridade et al., 2019) documentó niveles de incidencia del 93,7% para la perpetración y el 92 % para la victimización. Cuando se analizan las prevalencias de acuerdo con la clasificación de Borrajo et al. (2015), los hallazgos muestran que las tasas de victimización por ciberagresión directa oscilan entre el 14% (Borrajo et al., 2015b) y el 31.7% (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2016), mientras que la victimización por cibercontrol oscila entre el 65% (Van Ouytsel et al., 2017) y el 81% (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2016). Del mismo modo, la prevalencia de perpetración de ciberagresión directa oscila entre el 10,6% (Borrajo et al., 2015a) y el 14,7% (Caridade et al., 2019), y la de perpetración de cibercontrol entre el 49,6% (Van Ouytsel et al., 2017) y el 88,4% (Borrajo et al., 2015b).

De manera global, la evidencia empírica ha producido resultados extremadamente variables en torno a las prevalencias de ciberviolencia en la pareja, lo que ha obstaculizado la posibilidad de extraer conclusiones y determinar con claridad el verdadero alcance del problema. El panorama es muy similar cuando se examinan las tasas de ciberviolencia en hombres y mujeres. Si bien algunos estudios no arrojan diferencias de género en la perpetración (Borrajo, 2015a) y victimización (Borrajo et al., 2015b; Villorra et al., 2021) de este tipo de violencia en población joven, otros investigadores han observado (en muestras de estudiantes universitarios) que las mujeres perpetran, con mayor frecuencia que los hombres, comportamientos de cibercontrol (e.g., Barter et al., 2017; Bennett et al., 2011; Villorra et al., 2021) y ciberagresión directa (Villorra et al., 2021). Por el contrario, otros estudios mostraron mayores niveles de perpetración de ciberviolencia en hombres (vs. mujeres; e.g., Deans y Bhogal, 2019; Martínez-Pecino y Durán, 2019).

Esta disparidad en los datos existentes, podría deberse, en gran medida, a la falta de consenso en la definición y operacionalización de la ciberviolencia en la pareja, así como a

la variabilidad de medidas y heterogeneidad en las características metodológicas usadas (contexto de muestreo, tamaño de la muestra, intervalo de tiempo o edad considerada, etc.; Soto y Ibabe, 2022). Además, numerosas investigaciones han sugerido que, en parte, esta inconsistencia en los resultados podría deberse a que, las intenciones subyacentes de hombres y mujeres para ejercer ciberviolencia en la pareja, pese a estar relacionadas, podrían ser diferentes, mostrando, por tanto, patrones comportamentales diferenciados (Barter et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2021a, 2021b). De manera similar a como ocurre en el contexto offline, los hombres son más propensos a manifestar comportamientos de agresión más directa y explícita como la coacción sexual digital, mientras que las mujeres tienden a usar conductas más indirectas como el cibercontrol (Linares et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2021b; Zweig et al., 2013b). En este sentido, la ciberviolencia en la pareja, pese a estar moldeada por las singularidades y posibilidades de uso que ofrecen las TRIC, sigue estando incrustada en las dinámicas relacionales y el contexto sociocultural más amplio. Más allá de la identidad de género individual, las normas socioculturales sobre cómo se espera que se comporten hombres y mujeres en las relaciones pueden ayudar a comprender las diferencias de género en el significado, motivaciones y estrategias para ejercer ciberviolencia en la pareja.

2.4. Tolerancia a la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

De manera similar a como ocurre en otros países, en España los/as jóvenes conceptualizan las manifestaciones explícitas y directas de VIP, es decir, la agresión sexual, física o verbal (Luken, 2015). Estas expresiones de violencia tienden a ser reconocidas y rechazadas en las relaciones, principalmente, por las mujeres (vs. hombres), quienes son más sensibles a identificar cualquier manifestación de VIP (Sylaska y Walters, 2014). Sin embargo, los/las jóvenes suelen tolerar conductas abusivas psicológicas, como el control de la pareja o la devaluación de las conductas (e.g., no alabar los logros o cualidades de la pareja o menospreciar su opinión y conocimiento; Luken, 2015; Wood et al., 2011).

Con el desarrollo de las TRIC, las manifestaciones de abuso psicológico en las relaciones se han incrementado exponencialmente (Draucker y Martsolf, 2010). Concretamente, la literatura ha estimado que el cibercontrol en la pareja es la forma de violencia online que más se ejerce y menos se identifica entre la población joven (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018). En el medio virtual, los/as jóvenes disponen de un abanico más

amplio de posibilidades para controlar a la pareja de manera sencilla y con menos restricciones que en el entorno offline (Van Ouytsel et al., 2018). Por ejemplo, imaginemos la siguiente situación: “Es sábado por la noche. María había quedado con unos amigos y amigas para salir, pero su novio Juan, con el que lleva cerca de 3 años, se ha quedado en casa. María está disfrutando de un buen rato con sus amigos/as y pierde la noción del tiempo, por lo que pasa varias horas sin consultar su teléfono móvil. Juan, en casa, empieza a sentirse angustiado y enfadado; le había escrito varios mensajes por WhatsApps a María pero ella aún no había respondido. Decide entonces llamarla pero no obtiene respuesta. Tras varios intentos fallidos, Juan decide acceder al perfil de Instagram de María en busca de información sobre el paradero de su pareja. Rápidamente, observa que María ha sido etiquetada en una foto donde aparece muy feliz rodeada de un grupo de chicos y chicas, lo que acrecenta aún más su malestar”.

Tal y como muestra la literatura, las conductas de cibercontrol que se ejemplifican en la situación anterior (i.e, mensajes y llamadas insidiosas, intrusión en redes sociales para controlar a María) a menudo se perciben como una posibilidad que ofrece el uso de las TRIC más que una forma de abuso hacia la pareja (Belotti et al., 2022). En este sentido, el comportamiento de Juan podría considerarse una conducta socialmente aceptable al no suponer una clara violación de la intimidad de María y, por tanto, de los códigos morales de comportamiento (Utz y Beukeboom, 2011). Los/as jóvenes no consideran que el uso de las TRIC para controlar a la (ex)pareja sea una forma de violencia, puesto que las propias características de las TRIC (fácil acceso a la información, vinculación permanente con la pareja, invisibilidad, publicación expresa de la actividad social en redes, etc.) lo permiten. Además, muchos/as jóvenes tienden a interpretar las conductas de cibercontrol en la pareja como expresiones de amor, cuidado y preocupación, lo que incrementa aún más la permisividad y tolerancia de este tipo de abuso (e.g., Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Smith-Darden et al., 2017). En el ejemplo anterior, Juan podría argumentar que su comportamiento se debió a que estaba preocupado por ella o que sintió miedo de perderla. Por su parte, María podría pensar que, pese a que el comportamiento de su pareja le resultó molesto e irritante, él lo hizo en un intento de proteger la relación porque la quiere.

Estas creencias distorsionadas sobre el amor y las dinámicas relacionales insanas que se gestan en el entorno virtual, pueden estar contribuyendo conjuntamente a la justificación, minimización y normalización de las conductas de cibercontrol hacia la pareja. Los jóvenes toleran este tipo de abuso en sus relaciones sin ser conscientes del riesgo que implica y sin identificarlo como una expresión de VIP (Baker y Carreño, 2016).

Muchos/as jóvenes incluso naturalizan el acto de compartir con la pareja las contraseñas personales de acceso a diferentes medios digitales (e.g., redes sociales, correo electrónico, teléfono móvil), especialmente, al principio de una relación romántica. Este gesto suele interpretarse como un signo de confianza y compromiso en la relación. Por el contrario, negarse a compartirlas, suele interpretarse como una señal de desconfianza y un indicio de que la pareja oculta algo (Baker y Carreño, 2016; Bevan, 2017). Paradojicamente, se ha estimado que las personas que comparten sus cuentas personales con la pareja son tres veces más propensas a sufrir cibercontrol en sus relaciones, constituyendo, por tanto, un factor de riesgo y un desencadenante de violencia futura (Hinduja y Patchin, 2011).

No obstante, la investigación centrada en el estudio de la percepción de ciberviolencia en la pareja en jóvenes, ha señalado que la mayoría de ellos/as declaran haber observado alguna vez conductas de control hacia la (ex)pareja en el entorno online, sin embargo, reconocen en menor medida, haber sido víctimas o agresores de este tipo de abuso en sus relaciones (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020). La urgencia de centrarse en el análisis de la ciberviolencia en la pareja radica en que, a base de minimizar y normalizar los comportamientos de cibercontrol, los/as jóvenes pueden estar perdiendo sensibilidad y capacidad de respuesta hacia este tipo de violencia, lo que incrementa el riesgo de revictimización y sus potenciales consecuencias. Y es que, el hecho de que las conductas de cibercontrol sean comportamientos prevalentes y comúnmente percibidos como normativos, no los exime de causar un riesgo potencial para los individuos y para la relación.

2.5. Consecuencias Asociadas a la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

Dada la rápida y constante evolución que experimentan las TRIC, las consecuencias emocionales, psicológicas y sociales que genera la violencia en el entorno online aún resultan incalculables. No obstante, parece evidente que, por diversas razones, las secuelas de sufrir ciberviolencia por parte de la (ex)pareja pueden superar con creces al daño que ocasionaría su homólogo en el contexto offline. A este respecto, la investigación empírica ha demostrado que experimentar ciberviolencia en la pareja repercute negativamente en el bienestar psicosocial de las víctimas y en el ajuste diádico (Borrajo y Gámez-Guadix, 2016). Concretamente, la victimización de este tipo de violencia se ha asociado con baja autoestima, ansiedad, sintomatología depresiva, emociones negativas (ira/hostilidad), angustia emocional, baja autoeficacia, mayor implicación en conductas

delictivas y comportamientos de riesgo como el consumo de sustancias o el mantenimiento de relaciones sexuales sin protección (Borrajo y Gámez-Guadix, 2016; Hancock et al., 2017; Hinduja y Patchin, 2021; Lu et al., 2018; Zweight et al., 2014). Además, numerosos autores/as han observado que la victimización de ciberviolencia en la pareja coexiste con otras formas de violencia en las relaciones románticas (coerción sexual, agresiones verbales y físicas; e.g., Marganski, y Melander, 2018; Zweig et al., 2013b). Así mismo, se ha estimado que sufrir ciberviolencia en la pareja a edades tempranas predice la victimización de este tipo de violencia en etapas posteriores así como desajustes socioemocionales durante 4 años (i.e., la ideación suicida, depresión y ansiedad; Wright, 2016). En lo que respecta al ajuste diádico, la victimización de ciberviolencia en la pareja se ha asociado con un menor compromiso en la relación y una menor satisfacción con la misma (Borrajo y Gámez-Guadix, 2016; Madlock y Westerman, 2011; Watkins et al., 2018).

Por otro lado, la literatura ha demostrado de manera consistente que los efectos de sufrir ciberviolencia en la pareja son más perniciosos para las mujeres (vs. hombres), debido, entre otras razones, a la posición de vulnerabilidad psicológica que ocupan en el contexto relacional y social (e.g., Borrajo et al., 2015a; Dick et al., 2014; Reed et al., 2017). En comparación con los hombres, las mujeres tienen mayor probabilidad de sufrir problemas emocionales y psicológicos (vergüenza, angustia emocional, sintomatología depresiva, ansiedad, estrés; Álvarez et al., 2012) como consecuencia de experimentar ciberviolencia en la pareja y son más propensas a incurrir en el consumo de sustancias o padecer enfermedades de transmisión sexual (Exner-Cortens et al. 2013; Stonard et al., 2017), lo que a largo plazo puede traducirse en aislamiento e ideación suicida (Álvarez et al., 2012). Asimismo, numerosas investigaciones han estimado diferencias de género en el impacto emocional de este tipo de violencia. En particular, las mujeres tienden a percibir las conductas ciberabusivas de su pareja como más molestas y ofensivas que los hombres, y perciben una mayor dificultad para detener o escapar de la situación de maltrato. Los hombres, en cambio, parecen identificar en menor medida la severidad e impacto de este tipo de violencia (Brown et al., 2022; Stonard et al., 2017). Además, se ha constatado que las mujeres manifiestan más reacciones de angustia (i.e., miedo, llanto, vergüenza o enfado) que los hombres, especialmente, ante los actos ciberviolentos de su pareja que incluyen coerción sexual (e.g., ser presionada por la pareja para realizar determinadas prácticas sexuales online) o agresiones directas (e.g., ser difamada o humillada por la pareja en redes sociales, ser amenazada y/o chantageada por la pareja con en el envío de

material con contenido sexual explícito; Reed et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2016a). Para concluir, aunque tanto hombres como mujeres pueden verse involucrados en relaciones ciberabusivas, la forma en que perciben y experimentan la ciberviolencia en la pareja parece ser diferente: las mujeres jóvenes (vs. hombres jóvenes) muestran un mayor nivel de conciencia a la hora de identificar situaciones de VIP y parecen experimentar un mayor impacto emocional como consecuencia de la victimización. Por tanto, la presente tesis doctoral adopta un enfoque sensible al género, asumiendo que la ciberviolencia en las relaciones heterosexuales es asimétrica.

3. Antecedentes de la Perpetración de Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

La ciberviolencia en la pareja presenta una serie de peculiaridades asociadas al uso de las TRIC que merecen un análisis específico. Uno de los aspectos que más atención ha recibido es el estudio de las variables vinculadas al entorno virtual que, junto con las variables socioculturales (actitudes sexistas, adherencia a los estereotipos y roles de género, aceptación de los mitos del amor romántico, etc.) y relacionales (e.g., apego romántico) contribuyen a los procesos de justificación y perpetuación de la ciberviolencia en la pareja. Concretamente, en este apartado se abordarán algunas variables individuales y relacionales que potencian la participación en comportamientos abusivos contra la (ex)pareja y que están estrechamente ligadas al uso de las TRIC.

3.1. Variables Individuales

La literatura reciente sobre violencia en el entorno online ha observado que el uso de las TRIC han favorecido una serie de procesos cognitivos que pueden potenciar la desinhibición de los actos ciberabusivos. Concretamente, la desinhibición online y la desconexión moral han sido dos de las variables más estudiadas.

3.1.1. Desinhibición Online

Las peculiaridades de las TRIC (inmediatez, fácil accesibilidad a la información, contacto permanente, etc.) promueven un estado psicológico por el que las personas se sienten más liberadas, desinhibidas y dispuestas a ejercer determinados comportamientos, lo que se ha denominado como *desinhibición online* (Wang et al., 2021). Este mecanismo que opera en las interacciones digitales contribuye a la comprensión de por qué las personas, en el entorno online, se expresan y/o comportan de manera diferente a como lo

harían en el contexto offline (Longden, 2014). En este sentido, algunas personas se sienten atraídas por la flexibilidad que otorga el espacio virtual y disfrutan de su relativa libertad para llevar a cabo conductas que con menor probabilidad llevarían a cabo en el contexto tradicional.

Si bien es cierto que el fenómeno de desinhibición online ha sido abordado en varias disciplinas, en el ámbito de la psicología, la conceptualización realizada por Suler (2004) ha sido la más reconocida. En su trabajo, Suler (2004) determinó que las personas pueden manifestar dos tipos de desinhibición online: *desinhibición benigna* (estado de disposición y liberación para compartir experiencias o expresar emociones, gustos, preferencias o amabilidad con otros/as usuarios/as online) y *desinhibición tóxica* (estado de disposición y liberación para manifestar comportamientos inapropiados en el entorno virtual, por ejemplo, ira, insultos, amenazas o críticas contra otras personas). De acuerdo con este modelo teórico, la desinhibición tóxica es la que determina la participación en comportamientos desviados y violentos en el contexto online. No obstante, más allá de los tipos de desinhibición online descritos, Suler (2004) distinguió seis factores que interactúan entre sí y determinan el fenómeno de desinhibición:

- a. *Anonimato disociativo*, hace referencia al grado en que una persona cree que puede cambiar u ocultar su identidad en el entorno virtual. Esta característica permite a las personas separar sus acciones de su propia identidad. En consecuencia, muestran mayor disposición a expresarse y realizar ciertos comportamientos libres de las limitaciones o expectativas impuestas por quienes les conocen. El anonimato disociativo, por tanto, se percibe como una oportunidad para librarse de los riesgos y costes de las sanciones sociales y evadir las propias responsabilidades, lo que conduce a una mayor expresión de comportamientos desinhibidos y desregulados en el contexto virtual.
- b. *Invisibilidad*, refiere a la inclinación que muestran las personas a percibir que no pueden ser vistas físicamente por los demás en este entorno. Algunos individuos se sienten más protegidos así, ante la posibilidad de “ocultarse” detrás de una pantalla y navegar libremente sin restricciones. En muchas situaciones, las personas no pueden verse entre sí durante las interacciones digitales. Esta ausencia de contacto visual y de comunicación cara a cara reduce la capacidad de reconocer las consecuencias emocionales de los propios actos y sentir empatía, propiciando un escenario idóneo para la desinhibición tóxica.

- c. *Asincronía*, alude a la percepción que tienen las personas de que la comunicación online permite retrasar las respuestas durante las interacciones interpersonales. En el entorno virtual la comunicación es asincrónica, es decir, no presenta limitaciones temporales ni geográficas. Al no interactuar en “tiempo real” las personas pueden elegir no responder de manera inmediata, disfrutando de más tiempo para gestionar y dar una respuesta, lo que a menudo puede suscitar comportamientos desinhibidos.
- d. *Introyección solipsista*, tendencia que tienen las personas a interpretar los mensajes ambiguos del entorno online basándose en las propias expectativas o creencias. Dada la ausencia de señales físicas y verbales, las personas a menudo atribuyen, consciente o inconscientemente, características imaginarias a otras personas durante las interacciones digitales. Específicamente, los individuos se forman una visión o imagen acerca de cómo son o cómo se comportan los demás, en parte, por cómo se presentan a sí mismos a través de la comunicación online, pero también por el sistema de representación interno basado en las expectativas, deseos y necesidades personales. En ese momento, la realidad se configura a partir de nuestros esquemas mentales, es decir, de nuestra imaginación. Esta mezcla de proyecciones mentales e identidades pueden hacer que las personas se sientan desinhibidas, porque en la imaginación, las personas se sienten libres y seguras para decir y hacer cosas que no harían en otro contexto.
- e. *Imaginación disociativa*, es la inclinación que tiene una persona a ver el entorno online como un mundo imaginario sin vinculación aparente con la realidad. Las personas con alta imaginación disociativa configuran una identidad ficticia y ven la vida online como una especie de juego con reglas y normas que no se aplican a la vida cotidiana o “mundo real” (offline). De este modo, cuando desconectan del mundo digital y vuelven a su rutina, creen que pueden dejar atrás ese “juego” y su identidad online, evadiéndose de cualquier responsabilidad sobre lo que ocurre en el entorno virtual, incluida la responsabilidad atribuida a la ejecución de comportamientos violentos.
- f. *Minimización de la autoridad*, percepción de que la influencia de las figuras de autoridad en el entorno online es inexistente o menor a la que existe en el contexto tradicional. En el entorno offline, las figuras de autoridad expresan su estatus y su poder a través de señales físicas como su vestimenta y su lenguaje corporal. Sin embargo, la ausencia de dichas señales en el entorno online hace que se reduzca el impacto de la autoridad. Las personas normalmente no están dispuestas a mostrarse

como son o lo que realmente piensan cuando se encuentra frente a una figura de autoridad; el miedo a la desaprobación y el castigo merma el comportamiento. En el entorno virtual, en cambio, las personas suelen experimentar una sensación de impunidad, y por ende, una mayor desinhibición para llevar a cabo comportamientos antinormativos y violentos.

La investigación empírica reciente ha observado que la desinhibición online se asocia positivamente con la participación en comportamientos ciberviolentos como, por ejemplo, el cyberbullying (e.g., Wang et al., 2022; Wang y Nagai, 2020; Wright y Wachs, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). En este sentido, diversas investigaciones sugieren que, muchas personas se sienten liberadas en el entorno online para llevar a cabo conductas intencionadas, provocadoras y antisociales, con el propósito de molestar o infligir daño a otros/as usuarios/as (Sanfilippo et al., 2017; Lowry et al., 2016). Si bien es cierto que el estudio de la desinhibición online está recibiendo gran atención en el ámbito del cyberbullying, no hay estudios conocidos que examinen la influencia de este estado psicológico en la perpetración de ciberabuso hacia la pareja. Abordar esta cuestión constituye, por tanto, uno de los objetivos de esta tesis doctoral.

3.1.2. Desconexión Moral Online

En el entorno virtual las personas navegan por relaciones y situaciones sociales sin fronteras interpersonales claras ni códigos de comportamiento. Esto facilita que las personas agresoras se desprendan fácilmente de las responsabilidades y auto-sanciones morales del comportamiento transgresor (Bandura, 2016). Por ejemplo, se pueden sentir más liberadas de los principios morales debido a la distancia psicológica y física que les separa de sus víctimas, o a la desconexión entre las propias acciones y el reconocimiento del daño que infligen (Naquin et al., 2010). La inactivación voluntaria de los procesos cognitivos de autosanción interna se denomina desconexión moral (Bandura, 1986, 1999) e implica la utilización selectiva de una serie de mecanismos sociocognitivos que promueven la transgresión de las normas morales y, por ende, la desinhibición de actos agresivos y/o comportamientos ilícitos (Bandura, 1990, 2002).

Bandura (1999) teoriza que el control moral interno puede desvincularse de la conducta censurable en base a cuatro dominios: (a) la reconstrucción de la propia conducta para que no se considere inmoral, (b) el oscurecimiento de la agencia de acción (i.e., capacidad de actuar intencionalmente) para minimizar la propia responsabilidad en la

causación del daño, (c) la tergiversación o ignorancia de las consecuencias perjudiciales que se derivan de las acciones, o (d) el desprecio hacia las víctimas del maltrato devaluándolas como seres humanos y culpándolas de los hechos.

Más allá de los dominios descritos, Bandura (1990, 2002) distinguió ocho mecanismos de desconexión moral:

- a. *Justificación moral*, la conducta transgresora se reconstruye cognitivamente para hacerla personal y socialmente aceptable y se muestra al servicio de fines dignos o valores morales.
- b. *Etiquetado eufemístico*, la conducta censurable se transforma en respetable y benévola mediante el uso de un lenguaje aséptico y enrevesado.
- c. *Comparación ventajosa*, la conducta transgresora se compara con actos más censurables para hacerla parecer benévola y menos perniciosa.
- d. *Desplazamiento de la responsabilidad*, las reacciones de autocensura se evitan porque las personas consideran que las propias acciones surgen de las presiones sociales y que, por tanto, no son las verdaderas responsables de sus actos.
- e. *Difusión de la responsabilidad*, la responsabilidad individual se difumina cuando la toma de decisiones y la conducta transgresora se ejecuta de manera colectiva o cuando otras personas de un grupo realizan el mismo comportamiento.
- f. *Distorsión de las consecuencias*, las personas ignoran, minimizan y distorsionan las consecuencias negativas de los propios actos para evitar enfrentarse al daño que infligen.
- g. *Deshumanización*, las reacciones de autocensura se desactivan al despojar a las personas victimizadas de sus cualidades humanas.
- h. *Atribución de culpa*, se consigue la autoexoneración culpabilizando a las víctimas de su propio sufrimiento y considerando que las acciones transgresoras de uno/a a son forzadas por las circunstancias y, por tanto, no se dan por voluntad propia.

Las características específicas del contexto online (e.g., anonimato, invisibilidad y minimización de la autoridad) proporcionan un escenario idóneo para que las personas, principalmente, las más jóvenes, se desvinculen de sus responsabilidades morales (Paciello et al., 2020). Por ejemplo, imaginemos que Juan se ha instalado una aplicación móvil para rastrear a su pareja, María, que le permite ver el historial de su navegador, conocer su ubicación en tiempo real, controlar todos sus mensajes y llamadas, etc. A través de las

activaciones de diferentes mecanismos de desconexión moral, Juan podría llegar a la conclusión de que su comportamiento no es inmoral por diferentes razones. Por un lado, podría pensar que no está cometiendo ningún acto ilícito puesto que se han desarrollado aplicaciones móviles específicas para rastrear a la (ex)pareja, a las que todo el mundo tiene acceso (*atribución de culpa*) y que muchas personas utilizan en sus relaciones sin restricciones o sanciones aparentes (*difusión de la responsabilidad*). Asimismo, Juan podría considerar que lo más importante es proteger a María de cualquier peligro y salvaguardar la relación (*justificación moral*) o que invadir la privacidad de la pareja mediante el uso de las TRIC es un acto insignificante comparado con maltratarla o agredirla físicamente (*comparación ventajosa*).

De manera similar a como se refleja en el ejemplo anterior, en las interacciones digitales los individuos activan selectivamente diferentes estrategias de desconexión moral. Esos procesos cognitivos por los que se inactiva el razonamiento moral pueden promover la justificación y perpetuación de ciberviolencia en la pareja (Cuadrado-Gordillo y Fernández-Antelo, 2019; para una revisión, véase Zhao y Yu, 2021), así como de otros comportamientos ciberabusivos, sin que se experimenten sentimientos de culpa o condena (Bandura, 1986, 1999). Por tanto, Internet se ha considerado un escenario omnipresente y desregulado que desafía el cumplimiento códigos morales y éticos y potencia multitud de comportamientos violentos.

La investigación empírica ha identificado la desconexión moral como uno de los procesos psicológicos más relevantes que explica una variedad de conductas transgresoras y violentas, tanto en el contexto tradicional (e.g., Caprara et al., 2014; Paciello et al., 2013) como en el virtual (e.g., Wang et al., 2022; Wang & Ngai, 2020). Atendiendo al entorno online, investigaciones recientes sugieren que los procesos de desconexión moral operan con la desinhibición online para explicar determinados comportamientos ciberviolentos (Wang et al., 2022; Wang y Nagai, 2020; Wu et al., 2023). Más concretamente, Wang y Ngai (2020) encontraron que ciertos factores de desinhibición online (i.e., el anonimato y la asincronía) se relacionaban indirectamente con la perpetración de ciberbullying a través de la desconexión moral. Sin embargo, hasta donde alcanza nuestro conocimiento, el posible efecto interactivo de estas variables en el ámbito de la ciberviolencia en la pareja está aún por explorar. No obstante, cabría la posibilidad de que la desconexión moral fuese un potencial mecanismo que explicase cómo la desinhibición online conduce a la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja, aspecto que evaluaremos en esta tesis doctoral.

3.2. Variables Relacionales

En la sociedad digital actual, las redes sociales (eg., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) son las grandes protagonistas. Estas plataformas digitales en las que las personas pueden expresarse libremente, desarrollar vínculos sociales y compartir experiencias envuelven una serie de dinámicas que, a menudo resultan insanas para las relaciones íntimas y precipitan violencia hacia la (ex)pareja. Concretamente, dos de las variables que más se han examinado en la literatura sobre ciberviolencia en la pareja y que están estrechamente relacionadas con el uso de las TRIC y, en particular, con el uso de redes sociales, son el seguimiento electrónico de la pareja y los celos online.

3.2.1. Seguimiento Electrónico de la Pareja

El éxito y popularidad de las redes sociales se debe principalmente a que proporcionan (a) mayor acceso a la información personal, (b) ubicaciones y actividades exactas de otros/as usuarios/as, y (c) una oportunidad para rastrear libremente la vida de otras personas (Tokunaga, 2011). En lo relativo a las relaciones íntimas, las redes sociales hacen el entorno de la (ex)pareja más visible. Esto facilita que las personas participen en comportamientos de búsqueda de información sobre la (ex)pareja de una manera sociablemente aceptable y legítima, sin que ello suponga una violación de la intimidad (Utz y Beukeboom, 2011). Este tipo de actividad en el entorno de redes sociales se ha denominado como seguimiento electrónico de la pareja o *electronic partner surveillance* (Schokkenbroe et al., 2022) y se expresa a través de conductas como prestar atención a las actualizaciones del perfil de la pareja en redes sociales, ver las fotos que publica, leer los comentarios que recibe por parte de sus amistades online o comprobar el estado de la relación (i.e., soltero, en una relación, comprometido, etc.; Ruggieri et al., 2021).

Más concretamente, Tokunaga (2011) identificó cuatro características distintivas de las redes sociales que facilitan el seguimiento electrónico de la (ex)pareja:

- a. *Fácil accesibilidad*, las personas pueden acceder de manera instantánea a diversas redes sociales, donde la información de la (ex)pareja se hace pública.
- b. *Multimodalidad de la información*, la información objeto de rastreo puede mostrarse en redes sociales a través de diversos formatos como imágenes, vídeos, mensajes de texto o audios.

- c. *Persistencia de la información*, la información publicada en redes sociales puede registrarse y archivar, haciéndose perdurable en el tiempo.
- d. *Invisibilidad*, las personas pueden consultar la información contenida en redes sociales sin ver vistos y sin que la (ex)pareja sea consciente de estar siendo rastreada.

Si bien es cierto que el uso de las redes sociales para obtener información sobre la pareja puede proporcionar beneficios para la relación (e.g., facilitar que los miembros de la pareja se conozcan, incrementen su conectividad, compartan experiencias e intereses y se proporcionen atención y apoyo mutuo; Hand et al., 2013), la excesiva intromisión interpersonal y el seguimiento continuado de la actividad de la (ex)pareja en redes sociales pueden dirigir a dinámicas relacionales insanas y violentas (Leadbeater et al., 2018). Van Ouytsel et al. (2019) observaron que los/as adolescentes que tendían a supervisar la funcionalidad de “doble tick”, operativa en las aplicaciones de mensajería instantánea (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook), se sentían irritados/as cuando detectaban que la pareja había leído el mensaje y no había respondido de manera inmediata. La percepción de conectividad permanente con la pareja y la baja sensación de privacidad que se derivan del uso de redes sociales, hacen que los/as jóvenes a menudo se sientan presionados y/o presionen a la pareja para responder de manera inmediata durante las interacciones digitales. Este tipo de situaciones suscitan a menudo conflictos relacionales que implican una fuerte carga emocional y afectan negativamente al bienestar de las personas (Reed et al., 2016b; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Además, el seguimiento electrónico excesivo de la (ex)pareja en redes sociales puede elicitar celos románticos (e.g., Doucette et al., 2021; Frampton y Fox, 2018; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Este tipo de tesituras plantea desafíos importantes para las personas más jóvenes, quienes pueden ser relativamente inexpertos en la gestión de emociones como los celos, y podrían, por tanto, adoptar estrategias de afrontamiento disfuncionales (Rogers et al., 2018).

En línea con lo anterior, varias investigaciones han encontrado que un elevado seguimiento electrónico de la pareja en redes sociales incrementa la probabilidad de llevar a cabo comportamientos abusivos como cibercontrol (Reed et al., 2016b; Tokunaga, 2011), conductas amenazantes, abuso físico y agresiones de carácter verbal y emocional (Doucette et al., 2021). Asimismo, cabe señalar que, dado que las redes sociales pueden facilitar los comportamientos de control de la (ex)pareja de una manera socialmente aceptable, el seguimiento excesivo de la (ex)pareja en redes sociales puede ser un reflejo o

continuo de la violencia que tiene lugar en el contexto offline (Tokunaga, 2011). En otras palabras, los/as jóvenes que ejercen control en sus relaciones pueden incurrir en el uso de redes sociales como una estrategia adicional para rastrear a la pareja y tenerla controlada.

Pese a que la investigación sobre la naturaleza y consecuencias del seguimiento electrónico de la (ex)pareja es escasa y poco concluyente, los hallazgos previos sugieren que dicho hábito puede ser un indicativo de disfunción relacional y un factor de riesgo de VIP. La relevancia de atender a esta práctica radica en que existe una percepción normalizada de los comportamientos de seguimiento de la (ex)pareja en redes sociales que justifica la intrusión excesiva de la privacidad y situaciones de abuso en las relaciones (Doucette et al., 2021).

3.2.2. Celos Online

Los celos online han sido considerados uno de los efectos más negativos asociados al uso de las redes sociales. Tradicionalmente, los celos románticos se definen como los pensamientos y sentimientos negativos de inseguridad que se experimentan como resultado de percibir una amenaza, real o imaginaria, a la relación sentimental. Atendiendo al contexto virtual, los celos online refieren a la respuesta emocional negativa que se deriva de inferir amenazas potenciales a la relación durante las interacciones digitales (Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2022).

En particular, la investigación empírica sugiere que, debido a su naturaleza, las redes sociales pueden actuar como un entorno potenciador de celos que acrecentan las inseguridades y preocupaciones sobre el estado o futuro de la relación sentimental (Giordano et al., 2010; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2022). Uno de los aspectos más característicos de las redes sociales es que la información contenida en sus plataformas está descontextualizada y supeditada a un alto grado de interpretación (Bevan, 2017). Esto incrementa la probabilidad de que las personas interpreten negativamente las señales ambiguas de la pareja y, en consecuencia, experimenten celos románticos (Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2022). Así, por ejemplo, los/as jóvenes suelen experimentar celos online ante posibles señales de infidelidad expresadas en un aparente coqueteo de la pareja con otras personas (e.g., si ésta envía mensajes afectuosos a una persona del sexo contrario) o cuando perciben la presencia de rivales potenciales, es decir, personas externas a la relación que muestran interés por la pareja sentimental (e.g., si una persona del sexo opuesto publica un comentario halagador en el perfil de la pareja; Elphinston y Noller, 2011; Van

Ouytsel et al., 2016). No obstante, cabe señalar que los celos online no son desencadenados por las redes sociales, sino por la interacción de un conjunto de factores relacionales (inseguridad, dependencia emocional, desconfianza, etc.) y actitudinales (aceptación de los mitos del amor romántico, adherencia al guión heterosexual, etc.; Belotti et al., 2022). En otras palabras, los celos románticos pueden experimentarse independientemente de que se usen o no las redes sociales y, pese a estar moldeados por el uso de TRIC, se explican por las dinámicas de la relación y la conformidad a las normas sociales.

Teniendo en cuenta lo anterior, la preocupación por examinar los celos online reside en que estos sentimientos que, con frecuencia, se dan en el entorno de redes sociales, pueden incrementar las inseguridades sobre la relación y sesgar aún más las interpretaciones negativas que los/as jóvenes hacen de la información relativa a sus (ex)parejas, precipitando comportamientos problemáticos y violencia en las relaciones. A este respecto, la evidencia empírica ha mostrado que una de las formas más frecuentes en las que se expresan los celos online es a través de los comportamientos de cibercontrol (Baker y Carreño, 2016; Bevan, 2017, 2018). Las personas que experimentan celos románticos y rumian sobre el estado de la relación, pueden activar estrategias de autorregulación destructivas dirigidas a reducir el malestar e incertidumbre relacional. Tales estrategias pueden incluir desde comportamientos de abuso indirecto como el uso de tácticas de control a través de redes sociales u otros medios digitales (e.g., revisar las actualizaciones del perfil de la pareja en redes sociales, acceder a sus cuentas personales o revisar su teléfono móvil sin su consentimiento), a manifestaciones más explícitas y directas de violencia (mensajes ofensivos o amenazantes, humillaciones en redes sociales, abuso físico, etc.; Frampton y Fox, 2018; Giordano et al., 2010; Muise et al., 2014; Wright, 2017). Por tanto, si bien es cierto que los celos online están muy normalizados entre la población joven, considerándose incluso una señal de amor y compromiso (Nardi-Rodríguez et al. 2018), sus efectos perniciosos en el bienestar y funcionamiento de la relación son incuestionables.

Vinculando la literatura revisada anteriormente, observamos que el apego ansioso es un predictor significativo del seguimiento electrónico de la pareja, los celos online y la perpetración de ciberabuso en las relaciones (e.g., Perles et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2015). Por su parte, el uso excesivo de redes sociales para supervisar la actividad de la pareja se ha relacionado positivamente con los celos románticos (e.g., Muise et al., 2014; Perles et al., 2019) y la VIP (e.g., Doucette et al., 2021; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). De manera

similar, los celos online se han reconocido como un factor de riesgo de ciberviolencia en la pareja (e.g., Frampton y Fox, 2018; Wright, 2017). Aunque la investigación empírica reciente muestra las relaciones existentes entre las variables mencionadas, menos atención se ha dirigido a profundizar en la comprensión de estos correlatos. En virtud de lo anterior, consideramos que el seguimiento electrónico de la pareja y los celos online podrían ayudar a comprender cómo las personas con apego ansioso a la pareja adoptan dinámicas insanas en las redes sociales que incrementan el malestar e inseguridad y, en consecuencia, dirigen a comportamientos ciberabusivos hacia la pareja. Esta conjetura será objeto de estudio en la presente tesis doctoral.

4. Afrontamiento de la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

Las personas que experimentan de manera recurrente abuso por parte de la (ex)pareja tienen que lidiar en su día a día con eventos estresantes que demandan la activación de respuestas de afrontamiento, es decir, estrategias cognitivas y/o conductuales dirigidas a preservar el bienestar psicológico y físico. Las estrategias de afrontamiento pueden ser *funcionales* (eficaces) si permiten controlar, modificar, o resolver eficazmente los problemas o eventos estresantes de la relación sin socavar la salud y bienestar del propio individuo. Por el contrario, éstas resultan *disfuncionales* (ineficaces) si al ponerlas en práctica se ve afectado el bienestar físico y psicológico del individuo (Najdowski y Ullman, 2011). A este respecto, la literatura ha señalado que las consecuencias y gravedad de sufrir violencia en el ámbito de la pareja depende, en gran medida, de los recursos individuales que tienen las víctimas para hacer frente a las eventos estresantes (e.g., Flicker et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2015). Por tanto, uno de los principales objetivos en el estudio de las relaciones íntimas ha sido comprender cómo las víctimas de VIP gestionan el abuso. En el siguiente apartado se abordarán las principales categorizaciones acerca de los tipos de respuestas o estrategias que las personas adoptan para resolver los conflictos o situaciones estresantes en la relación. A continuación, se examinarán las consecuencias asociadas al uso de las diferentes estrategias de afrontamiento y, por ende, la eficacia de los estilos de respuesta. Finalmente, se analizará el papel de las TRIC en el afrontamiento de la ciberviolencia en la pareja.

4.1. Estrategias de Afrontamiento

Cuando una relación de pareja se vuelve insana y violenta, comprender cómo las personas afrontan los eventos estresantes de la relación se vuelve crucial para determinar si la relación continua o si, por el contrario, se disuelve (Metts y Cupach, 2007). Una amplia extensión de la literatura se ha centrado en discernir qué tipo de estrategias utilizan las personas para afrontar los problemas de la relación, estableciéndose hasta la fecha diversas categorizaciones.

El *modelo de afrontamiento del estrés* desarrollado por Lazarus y Folkman (1984) estableció una de las primeras taxonomías sobre estrategias de afrontamiento que, posteriormente, se ha aplicado al estudio de la VIP contra las mujeres. En su modelo, los autores diferenciaron dos estilos de afrontamiento: afrontamiento centrado en el problema, dirigido a modificar el problema en cuestión (e.g., generación de un plan de acción, evaluación de las consecuencias o buscar ayuda); y afrontamiento centrado en la emoción, dirigido a regular el malestar emocional asociado a la situación estresante (e.g., negación, la evitación o la reformulación cognitiva).

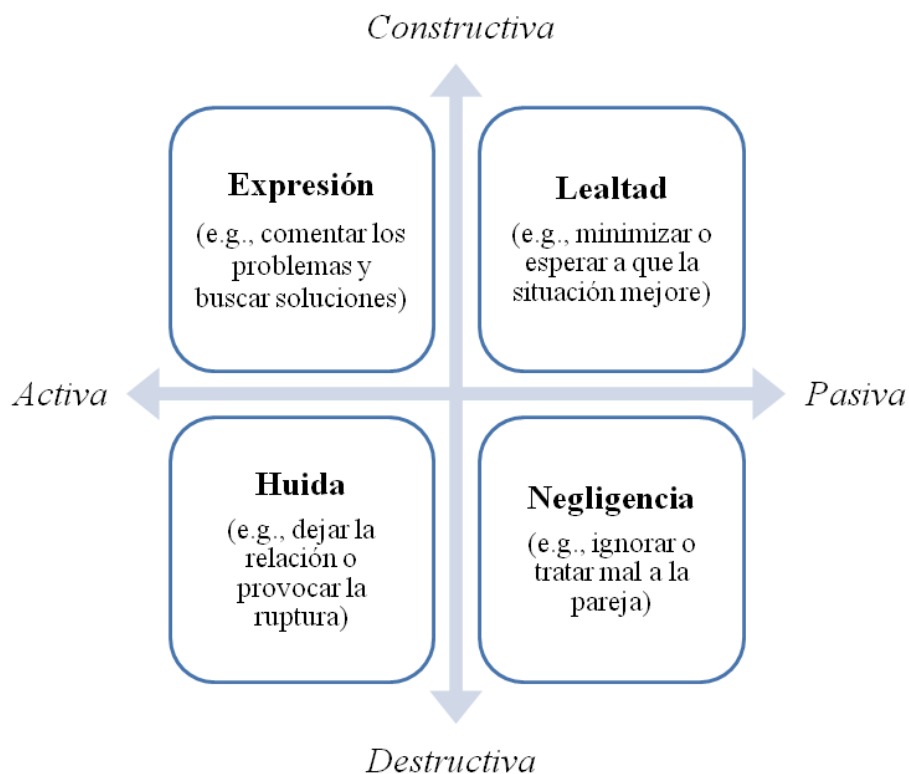
Posteriormente, la *teoría dual de la preocupación* (Pruitt y Rubin, 1986) propuso que las estrategias que las personas adoptan antes los conflictos de la relación dependen de su orientación motivacional, siendo esta el resultado de combinar una mayor/menor preocupación por sí mismo/a con una mayor/menor preocupación por los/as demás. Como combinación de estas dos dimensiones de preocupación, los autores identificaron cinco tipos de respuestas o estrategias de resolución de conflictos: (a) *coacción* (alta preocupación por uno/a y baja preocupación por la pareja), dirigida a imponer los propios intereses, deseos y objetivos sobre la pareja, por ejemplo, mediante argumentos persuasivos o amenazas; (b) *obediencia* (baja preocupación por uno/a y alta preocupación por la pareja), orientada a aceptar la voluntad de la pareja mediante concesiones y ayuda a la misma; (c) *evitación* (baja preocupación por uno/a y por la pareja), centrada en eludir los problemas u obstáculos de la relación minimizando la importancia de los mismos y suprimiendo los pensamientos sobre la pareja; (d) *solución de problemas* (alta preocupación por uno/a y por la pareja), orientada a alcanzar un acuerdo que satisfaga lo máximo posible los propósitos de ambos miembros de la pareja; y (e) *compromiso* (preocupación intermedia por uno/a y por la pareja), centrada en la búsqueda de una solución intermedia que favorezca a ambos miembros de la relación.

Por su parte, Kurdek (1994) establece un punto intermedio entre las clasificaciones anteriores y determina cuatro estrategias de afrontamiento posibles ante los conflictos relacionales: (a) *solución de problemas positiva*, orientada a tratar de comprender la posición de la otra persona para hacer frente al problema de manera constructiva y resolverlo; (b) *participación en el conflicto*, implica respuestas desreguladas y destructivas que acrecentan el problema (e.g., agresiones verbales, enfado, pérdida de autocontrol, etc.); (c) *retirada*, dirigida a evadir el problema, por ejemplo, evitando hablar sobre el mismo; y (d) *conformidad*, consistente en ceder o aceptar la solución propuesta por la pareja sin expresar la propia opinión.

Finalmente, la categorización más reconocida y ampliamente usada en el contexto de las relaciones de pareja ha sido la propuesta por Rusbult y Zembrodt (1983), actualizada posteriormente por Overall y McNulty (2017). Dichas autoras distinguieron cuatro tipos de respuestas o estrategias de resolución de conflictos de pareja—expresión, lealtad, huida y negligencia—que se diferencian entre sí en base a dos dimensiones: valencia (constructiva/destructiva) y dirección (activa/pasiva; véase Figura 2).

Figura 2

Tipología de Estrategias de Resolución de Conflictos de Pareja (Rusbult et al., 1986)



Las estrategias constructivas muestran un tono emocional positivo, fomentan la cooperación y están dirigidas a revivir y preservar la relación (Overall y McNulty, 2017). Por el contrario, las estrategias destructivas son aquellas respuestas que ponen fin a la relación o favorecen su deterioro mediante comportamientos hostiles que infligen daño y generan competitividad y negatividad entre los miembros de la pareja. Por otro lado, las estrategias activas son aquellas que las personas utilizan para abordar el problema, mientras que las estrategias pasivas son respuestas que no hacen frente al problema de manera directa.

Como combinación de estas dimensiones, las autoras identificaron las siguientes estrategias de afrontamiento:

- a. *Expresión*, respuestas activas y constructivas que implican la búsqueda de soluciones mediante la negociación (e.g., comentar los problemas con la pareja, sugerir soluciones, buscar fuentes de ayuda, etc.).
- b. *Lealtad*, respuestas pasivas y constructivas que las personas utilizan para mantener la relación pero que no abordan las causas del problema (e.g., esperar a que los problemas mejoren por sí solos o las condiciones mejoren, minimizar la importancia o gravedad del problema).
- c. *Huida*, respuestas activas y destructivas que las personas llevan a cabo para poner fin a la relación o provocar la ruptura (e.g., dejar la relación o incitar situaciones que desencadenan la ruptura).
- d. *Negligencia*, respuestas pasivas y destructivas que conllevan un deterioro paulatino de la relación (e.g., ignorar a la pareja, evitar pasar tiempo con ella, tratarla mal, etc.).

De acuerdo con la clasificación anterior, la literatura muestra que las personas que asumen respuestas destructivas de forma recurrente (huida y negligencia) causan daños en la relación que a menudo son irreparables (Overall y Simpson, 2013). En particular, esta estrategia genera resentimiento entre los miembros de la pareja, debilita la satisfacción en la relación y obstaculiza el empleo de respuestas de apoyo mutuo (Overall et al., 2009). En cuanto a las respuestas constructivas, es su carácter activo o pasivo lo que parece determinar su eficacia. Por un lado, se ha observado que las respuestas constructivo-activas (expresión) se asocian a un mejor funcionamiento de la relación y una mayor satisfacción con la misma (Rusbult et al., 1986). En estos casos, los miembros de la pareja

discuten respetuosamente los problemas y sugieren posibles soluciones, lo que conduce a un equilibrio óptimo de la relación (Overall y Simpson, 2013). Por el contrario, el uso sistemático de respuestas pasivo-constructivas (lealtad) puede ser perjudicial para el funcionamiento de la relación, dado que los problemas permanecen en el tiempo sin resolverse y las personas no llegan nunca a superar los conflictos u obstáculos que se presentan en la relación (Overall, 2010). En general, la literatura sugiere que las estrategias de huida, negligencia, y lealtad reflejan una peor resolución del conflicto, mientras que la expresión parece ser la estrategia más efectiva (Overall et al., 2010; Valor-Segura et al., 2020).

4.2. El Papel de las TRIC en el Afrontamiento de la Ciberviolencia en la Pareja

Las TRIC también proporcionan una serie de vías y herramientas adicionales para hacer frente a los problemas de la relación. Más concretamente, la comunicación digital proporciona un conjunto específico de circunstancias que promueve estrategias de afrontamiento únicas. En lo que respecta al objeto de estudio de esta tesis, la ciberviolencia en la pareja, cada vez son más los estudios que señalan que los/as jóvenes usan los medios digitales como vía para afrontar los conflictos de la relación, observándose determinados patrones de respuesta. Por ejemplo, las personas utilizan las TRIC *para establecer límites* en las interacciones digitales y distanciarse de la (ex)pareja agresora, incluyendo respuestas como no responder a sus mensajes o llamadas, poner el teléfono móvil en modo silencio, bloquearla o eliminarla en redes sociales (e.g., Draucker y Martsof, 2010; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016; Weathers et al., 2019). Este patrón se observa en mayor medida en los chicos, quienes son más propensos a usar respuestas de bloqueo que impiden que la (ex)pareja acceda a ellos cuando experimentan comportamientos cibercontroladores en sus relaciones (Reed et al., 2017; Stonard et al., 2014). Las chicas, en cambio, tienden a usar este tipo de respuestas ante agresiones más directas de la (ex)pareja como el envío de mensajes ofensivos o amenazantes (Reed et al., 2017). Si bien estas estrategias pueden parecer eficaces a corto plazo, porque proporcionan a las víctimas cierto grado de control percibido y alivio (Matheson et al., 2007), esos beneficios aparentes no se traducen en un afrontamiento activo del problema. Además, esta forma de afrontamiento puede ser contraproducente, ya que, normalmente genera una reacción de ira en la (ex)pareja que agrava el conflicto y desencadena nuevos episodios de abuso (Draucker y Martsof, 2010).

Otro de los patrones encontrados consiste en *autocensurar la actividad online*. Se trata de una estrategia usada fundamentalmente por las mujeres que limitan y autocensuran su propia actividad online (e.g., reducir el uso de Internet, limitar el contenido publicado en las redes sociales o eliminar cuentas de redes sociales; LeFebvre et al., 2015; Vitak et al., 2017; Weathers et al., 2019). Se trataría por tanto de respuestas generalmente usadas de manera preventiva para evitar posibles situaciones de conflicto y abuso en la relación o como una manera de mostrar lealtad y fidelidad a la pareja. Asimismo, ante la sensación de indefensión y miedo, algunas mujeres adoptan este tipo de respuestas para intentar romper cualquier contacto con su agresor, incluso cuando han puesto fin a la relación abusiva. Si bien es cierto que estas estrategias de afrontamiento pueden ser beneficiosas o adaptativas en una situación determinada de abuso, en un contexto más amplio, resultan ser perjudiciales para las víctimas (Tennen et al., 2000). La autocensura de la propia participación en redes sociales puede conducir gradualmente a un mayor aislamiento, sentimientos de soledad y un deterioro del bienestar general en las víctimas (LeFebvre et al., 2015; Vitak et al., 2017). Además, estas estrategias resultan ineficaces ya que no abordan el origen del problema, y las personas agresoras normalmente encuentran el modo de contactar con la (ex)pareja y continuar con el abuso, a veces, incluso, intensificándose (Torres-Albero et al., 2014).

A diferencia de la VIP offline, las personas que sufren ciberviolencia en la pareja pueden fácilmente asumir el papel de agresoras e incurrir en *violencia reactiva*, siendo este otro de los patrones de respuesta observados (Smith et al., 2018; Wong-Lo y Bullock, 2014). Las características del entorno virtual (e.g., la sensación de estar protegido detrás de una pantalla o la distancia física entre el agresor y la víctima) parecen estar contribuyendo igualmente a la desinhibición en las víctimas, quienes a menudo emplean la ciberviolencia reactiva como una estrategia para afrontar el abuso que sufren por parte de la (ex)pareja (Stonard et al., 2017; Wong-Loy Bullock, 2014). De acuerdo con la literatura clásica sobre intencionalidad de la agresión, la violencia reactiva es una respuesta defensiva ante una provocación o amenaza percibida, ya sea real o infundada (Expósito y Herrera, 2011; Velasco-Gómez, 2013). Esta forma de afrontar los conflictos se caracteriza principalmente por la carencia de habilidades inhibitorias, bajo autocontrol y elevados niveles de hostilidad e impulsividad (Raine et al., 2006). Atendiendo al entorno online, durante las interacciones digitales, las personas pueden autoperibirse con más control para reaccionar de manera impulsiva y violenta ante el abuso de la (ex)pareja, socavando aún más la capacidad inhibitoria. Sin embargo, la violencia reactiva a través de las TRIC, más que

proporcionar control a la persona victimizada, refleja un déficit en las habilidades para gestionar los conflictos de la relación. En otras palabras, los/as jóvenes pueden estar perdiendo la capacidad de responder de manera saludable al abuso por parte de la (ex)pareja, poniendo en práctica estrategias de afrontamiento destructivas y disfuncionales que incrementan los problemas de la relación y contribuyen a una percepción normalizada del ciberabuso en las relaciones íntimas (Álvarez, 2012).

Finalmente, otro de los patrones utilizados frecuentemente por los/as jóvenes se basa en *minimizar* y *reconceptualizar* la ciberviolencia que sufren en sus relaciones. Por ejemplo, algunos/as autores/as han señalado que los comportamientos ciberabusivos hacia la (ex)pareja a menudo se enmascaran bajo situaciones de “broma” o “juego” (Borrajo et al., 2015a; Madlock y Westerman, 2011). Este modo de conceptualizar el abuso resulta especialmente dañino, ya que diluye la intencionalidad maliciosa del agresor/a y dificulta que las víctimas identifiquen y reconozcan la violencia (Weathers et al., 2019). Asimismo, diversas investigaciones han observado que las personas que sufren ciberviolencia en la pareja a menudo justifican los actos ciberabusivos de los que son objeto y minimizan la gravedad de los mismos, principalmente, cuando se trata de conductas de cibercontrol (Baker y Carreño, 2016; Bevan, 2017; Nardi et al., 2018). El uso de este tipo de estrategias pasivas no promueve un afrontamiento eficaz de la violencia; por el contrario, sitúa a las víctimas en una posición de vulnerabilidad que incrementa la tolerancia y el riesgo de revictimización (Kuijpers et al., 2011).

En general, la investigación sobre ciberviolencia en la pareja denota una desconexión entre las estrategias de afrontamiento que los/as jóvenes utilizan para hacer frente a los conflictos relacionales y su capacidad para mantener o proteger su bienestar a medio y largo plazo. Las TRIC se están usando como una herramienta para afrontar los comportamientos ciberabusivos de la (ex)pareja que, en lugar de promover soluciones saludables, parecen potenciar el uso de estrategias desadaptativas que conducen a un deterioro paulatino de la relación e intensifican los efectos negativos de la victimización (Álvarez, 2012; Weathers et al., 2019). Dada la gravedad de la ciberviolencia en la pareja y el impacto que esta tiene, principalmente, en las mujeres, la búsqueda de ayuda en materia de VIP es imperativa para que se desarrollen habilidades de afrontamiento eficaces que garanticen la seguridad y bienestar de las víctimas (Caridade, 2018). Sin embargo, en la mayoría de los casos, la búsqueda de ayuda no parece ser una estrategia de afrontamiento prioritaria en el contexto de la ciberviolencia en la pareja, a no ser que los actos abusivos adquieran manifestaciones de violencia explícitas y graves (Alsawalq, 2021). En conjunto,

la tolerancia y normalización de ciertos comportamientos ciberabusivos en las relaciones y la dificultad para autoperibirse como víctima de violencia en la pareja, parecen obstaculizar la activación de respuestas dirigidas a disolver la relación (huida) o buscar ayuda formal (profesionales de la salud, autoridades de la policía criminal, profesores/as, etc.) e informal (familiares, amigos/as, compañeros/as de trabajo, etc.). Por tanto, detectar, comprender y abordar adecuadamente este fenómeno resulta crucial para romper el ciclo progresivo de violencia.

Sorprendentemente, pocos esfuerzos se han dirigido a examinar cómo las víctimas de ciberviolencia en la pareja afrontan el abuso, y cómo las estrategias que utilizan repercuten sobre su bienestar y el funcionamiento de la relación. Los estudios existentes en torno a esta cuestión han adoptado una metodologían cualitativa y evalúan múltiples experiencias de cibervictimización (Alsawalq, 2021; Draucker y Martsof, 2010; Weathers et al., 2019), lo que dificulta la posibilidad de extraer conclusiones sólidas. Asimismo, pese a que la investigación sugiere que la socialización se género influye, de manera diferencial, en el modo en que hombres y mujeres manejan los conflictos (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019; para un revisión, véase Dildar y Amjad, 2017), no se han llevado a cabo estudios comparativos entre hombres y mujeres que permitan esclarecer el papel del género en el afrontamiento de la ciberviolencia en la pareja. La presente tesis profundirá en el estudio de las estrategias de resolución de conflictos asociadas a la victimización de ciberviolencia en la pareja y sus consecuencias, mientras explora posibles diferencias de género.

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Motivation and Objectives

Motivación y Objetivos

Motivación y Objetivos

Resulta irónico que las relaciones de pareja sean una de las principales fuentes de bienestar y felicidad de las personas (e.g., Ellis y Dumas, 2018; Hancock et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2012), pero también uno de los vínculos afectivos en los que emergen más comportamientos problemáticos y/o violentos (Overall y McNulty, 2017). La evidencia empírica acumulada muestra que, debido al mal uso de las TRIC, los comportamientos abusivos hacia la (ex)pareja se han incrementado exponencialmente en los últimos años (Caridade et al., 2019). Si bien es cierto que las manifestaciones de violencia a través de Internet adquieren patrones similares a las formas de agresión experimentadas en el contexto offline (Marganski y Melander, 2018, Paat et al., 2020), la ciberviolencia en la pareja muestra una serie de características distintivas (mayor dificultad para escapar del abuso, humillaciones frente a una amplia audiencia online, contacto permanente con el agresor, sensación de impunidad, etc.) que ponen en relieve la necesidad de un análisis específico (Caridade et al., 2019). Sin embargo, son pocas las investigaciones que han tratado de examinar las variables asociadas al contexto online que podrían explicar la perpetración de los diferentes comportamientos ciberabusivos hacia la (ex)pareja (ciberagresión directa y cibercontrol). Similarmente, aunque estudios recientes han tratado de examinar cualitativamente cómo las víctimas de ciberviolencia en la pareja afrontan el abuso que sufren en sus relaciones, la eficacia de las estrategias utilizadas y sus efectos en el bienestar han recibido menor atención. Finalmente, cabe señalar que numerosas investigaciones han realizado análisis comparativos entre hombres y mujeres reportando índices de perpetración y victimización similares. No obstante, la mayoría de estos estudios no han adoptado una perspectiva de género en la comprensión de este tipo de violencia, por lo que, a menudo, arrojan conclusiones erróneas que, desde nuestro punto de vista, vulnerabilizan aún más a las mujeres.

En consecuencia, la presente tesis surgió con el interés de hacer explícita la asimetría de género invisibilizada en la ciberviolencia en la pareja, analizando principalmente el papel de las TRIC y la socialización de género en dicha problemática. Sobre esta base, los objetivos generales de esta tesis doctoral son analizar: (a) cómo hombres y mujeres perciben y experimentan los comportamientos de ciberviolencia en la pareja; (b) cómo determinadas variables (individuales, relacionales y culturales) influyen de manera diferencial en el modo en que hombres y mujeres ejercen comportamientos ciberabusivos en sus relaciones; y (c) cómo la forma en la que las víctimas gestionan el

ciberabuso de la pareja puede determinar su bienestar individual, mientras se examinan posibles diferencias de género. En base a los objetivos generales descritos, la presente tesis está compuesta de tres capítulos empíricos, en los que, de manera secuencial, se pusieron a prueba diferentes objetivos específicos.

El **Capítulo 2** se centra en abordar el *primer objetivo general* de la tesis, dirigido a estudiar y comprender la percepción de los/as jóvenes sobre la ciberviolencia en la pareja. Para ello, se desarrollaron tres estudios (Estudios 1–3) que han sido agrupados en dos artículos científicos.

De acuerdo con la literatura, parece existir una percepción generalizada sobre la magnitud de violencia que se ejerce contra la pareja en el contexto online. Sin embargo, son pocas las personas que se identifican como víctimas o agresoras de este tipo de abuso (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018). Por este motivo, se pretendió realizar una primera aproximación al estudio de aquellas variables que podrían obstaculizar el reconocimiento de la VIP. En concreto, examinamos por primera vez cómo el rol que las personas adoptan en una situación de VIP contra la mujer (protagonista vs. observadora) y el contexto en que este ocurre (cara a cara vs. WhatsApp) afecta a la percepción de la violencia, mientras se examina la influencia de determinadas variables ideológicas (aceptabilidad de la VIP contra la mujer, sexismo ambivalente y mitos sobre el amor romántico). Para abordar tales objetivos específicos, se llevaron a cabo dos estudios: un estudio con mujeres (Estudio 1) y otro estudio con hombres (Estudio 2). En ambos casos manipulamos el rol de los/as participantes (protagonista vs. observador/a) y el contexto de la VIP (cara a cara vs. WhatsApp) usando una metodología de escenarios hipotéticos y, a continuación, evaluamos la gravedad percibida, la justificación del abuso y el grado de identificación de la violencia. En particular, esperábamos que en la condición de protagonista (vs. condición de observador/a), tanto mujeres (quienes adoptaban el rol de víctimas) como hombres (quienes asumían el rol de agresores) percibirían el incidente como menos grave, justificarían más el abuso y mostrarían mayor dificultad para identificar la VIP. Asimismo, esperábamos que cuando el incidente tuviese lugar a través de WhatsApp (vs. cara a cara), los y las jóvenes percibirían menor gravedad, justificarían más el comportamiento abusivo e identificarían en menor medida la VIP. Finalmente, esperábamos que elevados niveles de sexismo ambivalente, aceptabilidad de la VIP contra la mujer y mitos del amor romántico se asociasen con una menor percepción de gravedad, mayor justificación de la violencia y menor grado de identificación de la VIP. Los resultados de los Estudio 1 y 2 han sido publicados en la revista *Psychosocial Intervention*.

Una vez se había examinado cómo determinados factores influyen en la percepción de los y las jóvenes sobre la VIP, nos propusimos abordar el estudio de la la ciberviolencia en la pareja desde la perspectiva de la víctima. La investigación empírica ha observado diferencias de género, no sólo en la manera en que hombres y mujeres conceptualizan y perciben la ciberviolencia en la pareja, sino también en el modo en que experimentan este abuso en sus relaciones (e.g., Brown et al., 2022; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2017). Sin embargo, hasta donde alcanza nuestro conocimiento, no hay estudios que hayan examinado experimentalmente cómo el tipo comportamiento sufrido (ciberagresión directa vs. cibercontrol) afecta de manera diferente a los chicos y las chicas jóvenes. Para abordar este hueco en la literatura, desarrollamos un estudio experimental (Estudio 3) en el que, mediante la técnica de incidente crítico (Flanagan, 1954), comprobamos si el tipo de victimización (por ciberagresión directa vs. por cybercontrol) y el género de la víctima influyen en las motivaciones que éstas atribuyen al comportamiento de su agresor/a y en la percepción de ofensa y gravedad del abuso. Esperábamos que la victimización por ciberagresión directa (cybercontrol) se asociase con una mayor percepción de ofensa y gravedad, debido a la naturaleza inherente de cada tipo de abuso (Borrajo et al., 2015). Asimismo, dado que las mujeres son más sensibles a identificar la VIP (Sylaska y Walters, 2014), esperábamos que éstas (vs. hombres) manifestasen mayor ofensa y gravedad percibida, principalmente cuando se trataba de una situación de victimización por ciberagresión directa (vs. cybercontrol). Similarmente, pese a ser un objetivo exploratorio, nosotras inferimos que las motivaciones que las víctimas atribuirían al comportamiento de su agresor/a estarían influenciadas por el tipo de victimización y por su género.

El **Capítulo 3** se centró en examinar cómo determinadas variables individuales, relacionales y socioculturales influyen en la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja (diferenciando entre ciberagresión directa y cibercontrol), desde un enfoque de género. Para abordar este *segundo objetivo* de la tesis, se desarrollaron tres estudios (Estudio 4–6) que se agruparon en dos artículos científicos.

La literatura psicológica ha demostrado que el apego ansioso a la pareja dirige a la perpetración de ciberviolencia en las relaciones íntimas (e.g., Bui y Pasalich, 2021; Villorra et al., 2021; Wright, 2015, 2017). Sin embargo, se ha prestado menos atención a examinar los factores que moderan y median el efecto del apego ansioso en la perpetración de CDA. De manera similar a como sucede en el contexto tradicional de la VIP, nos preguntamos si los esquemas cognitivos y conductuales asociados al apego ansioso

podrían operar con las creencias culturales sobre el género y el guión heterosexual para explicar diferencias de género en la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja (Hammond y Overall, 2017). Asimismo, nos planteamos si el uso de redes sociales por parte de las personas con elevado apego ansioso, podría potenciar dinámicas relacionales insanas (seguimiento electrónico de la pareja y celos) que precipitan comportamientos ciberviolentos hacia la pareja. Para dar respuesta a estas preguntas, se desarrollaron dos estudios (Estudios 4 y 5) dirigidos a examinar (a) el papel moderador del género y el guión heterosexual en la asociación positiva entre el apego ansioso y la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja y (b) el efecto indirecto del apego ansioso en la perpetración de este tipo de violencia a través del seguimiento electrónico de la pareja y los celos online. Concretamente, esperábamos que el apego ansioso predijera una mayor frecuencia de perpetración de ciberagresión directa principalmente en hombres con alta (vs. baja) adherencia al guión heterosexual y una mayor frecuencia de perpetración de cibercontrol en mujeres con alta (vs. baja) adherencia al guión heterosexual. Asimismo, esperábamos que el apego ansioso se asociara con un mayor seguimiento de la pareja en redes sociales, lo que, a su vez, estaría relacionado con una mayor frecuencia de celos online, y esto, en consecuencia, con una perpetración más frecuente de ciberagresión directa y cibercontrol hacia la pareja. Los resultados de los Estudio 4 y 5 han sido publicados en la revista *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*.

Por otro lado, la investigación empírica sobre violencia online ha demostrado recientemente que existen una serie de procesos cognitivos (desinhibición online y desconexión moral) asociados al contexto virtual que incrementan la probabilidad de incurrir en comportamientos desviados como el ciberbullying (e.g., Wang et al., 2022; Wang y Nagai, 2020; Wu et al., 2023). Sin embargo, hasta donde alcanza nuestro conocimiento, no se ha prestado atención a cómo estos mecanismos desinhibidores influyen en la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja. Para abordar este hueco en la literatura, llevamos a cabo un estudio (Estudio 6) en el que analizamos (a) el efecto de desinhibición online en la perpetración de ciberviolencia en la pareja a través de la desconexión moral, y (b) la influencia del género, las actitudes sexistas y las experiencias de victimización de ciberviolencia en la pareja como posibles moderadoras de la asociación previa. De manera similar a como se ha observado en el ámbito del ciberbullying (véase Wang y Ngai, 2020), esperábamos que la desinhibición online se asociara con una mayor desconexión moral, lo que, a su vez, se relacionaría con una perpetración más frecuente de actos explícitos de ciberabuso contra la pareja, es decir,

ciberagresión directa (pero no de cibercontrol). Además, esperábamos que la desinhibición online predijera mayor desconexión moral principalmente en hombres (vs. mujeres) con altos niveles de sexismo ambivalente (vs. bajos niveles), y que la desinhibición online y la desconexión moral se asociaran con una mayor frecuencia de ciberagresión directa hacia la pareja en participantes que, a su vez, sufrían con frecuencia ciberviolencia en su relación (vs. baja frecuencia).

El **Capítulo 4** pretendió profundizar en el estudio de las respuestas o estrategias que las víctimas de ciberviolencia en la pareja ponen en marcha para manejar el abuso y sus consecuencias para el bienestar individual, en función del género. Para abordar este *tercer objetivo* de la tesis, se desarrollaron dos estudios (Estudios 7–8) que se agruparon en un artículo científico.

El análisis de las estrategias de afrontamiento en el ámbito de la ciberviolencia en la pareja apenas ha recibido atención y los estudios conducidos han adoptado un enfoque cualitativo. No obstante, los hallazgos previos denotan que los y las jóvenes que sufren ciberviolencia en la pareja están adoptando estrategias de afrontamiento ineficaces e insanas que pueden incrementar, aún más, los efectos negativos de la victimización (e.g., Alsawalq, 2021; Draucker y Martsof, 2010). Por tanto, identificar los factores que promueven estrategias perjudiciales de resolución de conflictos es una laguna importante que debe abordarse para ayudar a los/as jóvenes a construir relaciones más sanas y felices. En un primer estudio (Estudio 7), nos preguntamos (a) si las consecuencias de sufrir ciberviolencia en la pareja son más perjudiciales para las mujeres (vs. hombres), y (b) si la cibervictimización por parte de la pareja podría asociarse con un deterioro del bienestar psicológico y menor satisfacción con la relación debido al elevado uso de estrategias de resolución de conflicto ineficaces (huida, lealtad, negligencia). A partir de los hallazgos obtenidos, los cuales indicaron que las respuestas destructivas (huida y negligencia) median el efecto de la victimización en el bienestar individual, se desarrolló un segundo estudio (Estudio 8) dirigido a explorar algunos factores relacionales (poder percibido en la relación e inclusividad de la pareja en el autoconcepto) que podrían promover el uso de dichas estrategias destructivas. Concretamente, se examinó (a) si el bajo poder percibido en la relación podría explicar la relación entre la victimización de ciberviolencia en la pareja y el uso de estrategias destructivas (huida y negligencia), y (b) si el grado de inclusión de la pareja en el autoconcepto moderaría el efecto del poder percibido en las respuestas de huida. En línea con investigaciones previas que sugieren que las respuestas

destructivas (e.g., agresión, hostilidad) pueden usarse como medio para corregir los desequilibrios de poder percibidos en las relaciones íntimas (e.g., Cross et al., 2019; Overall et al., 2016), esperábamos que una frecuente cibervictimización por parte de la pareja se asociara con el uso de respuestas destructivas (huida y negligencia) a través de una baja sensación de poder relacional. Finalmente, esperábamos que el bajo poder percibido en la relación por parte de las personas que sufren ciberviolencia en la pareja de manera frecuente predijese respuestas de huida cuando estas muestran una baja inclusión de la pareja en el autoconcepto (vs. alta inclusión) y, por tanto, son menos propensas a hacer esfuerzos para mantener la relación (Keltner et al., 2003).

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Empirical Studies

Estudios Empíricos

Chapter 2

*Exploring the Social Perception of
Cyberdating Abuse*

**Controlling Behaviors in Couple Relationships in the Digital Age: Acceptability of
Gender Violence, Sexism, and Myths about Romantic Love**

María Dolores Sánchez-Hernández

M^a Carmen Herrera Enríquez

Francisca Expósito Jiménez

Mind, Brain, and Behavior Research Center (CIMCYC)

Department of Social Psychology

University of Granada

This article has been published:

Sánchez-Hernández, M.D., Herrera, M.C., & Expósito, F (2020). Controlling Behaviors in Couple Relationships in the Digital Age: Acceptability of Gender Violence, Sexism, and Myths about Romantic Love. *Psychosocial Intervention*, 29(2), 67–81. <https://doi.org/10.5093/pi2020a1>

Abstract

Young people have incorporated information and communication technology (ICT) and its influence on socialization as a new instrument to exercise controlling behaviors in their relationships. The present research aims to analyse the influence of some variables that affect the social perception of those controlling behaviors, such as the adopted role on the scene (protagonist vs. observer) and the means of control that is used (face-to-face vs. WhatsApp) while considering the effect of ideological variables: the acceptability of intimate partner violence against women (A-IPVAW), ambivalent sexism, and myths about romantic love. Two studies were implemented: Study 1 included women ($N = 224$) and Study 2 included men ($N = 120$), all of them college students. The main results revealed that both women and men perceive controlling behaviors among other peer couples; however, few of them recognize suffering or the exercise of these behaviors within their relationships. In addition, the data pointed out that the adopted role on the scene and the ideological variables (ambivalent sexism, A-IPVAW, and myths about romantic love) influenced the social perception of dating violence; however, there was no influence of the means of control. This research contributes to the previous literature, evidencing that controlling behaviors through technological means are accepted and normalized among young people. Additionally, it shows novel data about the social perception that young people have regarding controlling behaviors in relationships, depending on whether they adopt the role of observer or protagonist in the violent situation.

Keywords: ICT, dating violence, social perception, sexism, myths

Controlling Behaviors in Couple Relationships in the Digital Age: Acceptability of Gender Violence, Sexism, and Myths about Romantic Love

Gender-based violence is defined as violence that men exercise against women in order to maintain control and domination over them. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines this type of violence as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (Res. A. G. 48/104, ONU, 1994, p.2). In Spain, intimate partner violence (IPV) constitutes a public health problem. It is the most common violence suffered by women (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018), whose impact reaches all sectors of society (López-Ossorio et al., 2018).

This social phenomenon not only manifests itself in adulthood, but it has an increasingly greater impact on youth and adolescence (Borrajó & Gámez-Guadix, 2015). Terms such as *courtship violence* or *dating violence* have been coined to refer to abuse at the stage of courtship or first date. Dating violence is the most used concept globally and concerns “physical aggression, psychological and emotional, verbal or implied abuse and which takes place both in public and private” (Ely et al., 2002). A review by Leen et al. (2013) examined the prevalence of abuse in this stage and found that the psychological mistreatment (from 22–77%) was the most frequent form, followed by physical (from 2–44%) and sexual (from 1–15%) violence. Psychological abuse is the most-used form amongst young couples. O’Leary and Slep (2003) asserted that it is assessed according to three indicators: verbal aggression (i.e., shouting), behaviors of control and dominance (i.e., controlling the partner’s relationships with friends) and behaviors of jealousy (i.e., checking where the partner has been; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2011).

Gender-based violence embodies multiple forms that evolve according to society. As a result of the incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) in relationships, violence has not been eradicated but it is occurring in a different way (Flores & Browne, 2017). In this sense, violence through ICT is a recent problem that expresses new forms of traditional violence, but it is still being caused for the same patriarchal cultural reasons.

ICT

It is important to pay attention to new forms of socialisation that emerge in today's society and affect people's lives and their personal and social development. According to the National Statistics Institute (NSI, 2016), in Spain there were 28 million Internet users, of which 82.9% used it every day; the mobile phone was the most widely used dispositive (93.3%) by young people. The ability to communicate, share personal experiences, find solutions or support, and access any person from any place or at any time have caused ICT to become the primary source of interaction amongst young people (Mejías & Rodríguez, 2014), who have been identified as the digital generation.

Controlling Behaviors Through ICT

Researchers have documented both positive and negative impacts that arise from young people's use of new technologies (Best et al., 2014). For example, online interaction via mobile phones can provide opportunities to strengthen relationships with friends and partners (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008); however, these same situations can become opportunities to threaten, harass, and attack other users (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010; Gómez-Franco & Sendín, 2014). Although ICT has fostered instruments that facilitate interpersonal communication, such devices also have become a means of control and violence against an abuser's partner. According to Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2017), control behaviors are the most frequent form of online violence; examples of such behavior include constantly checking up on the where about of one's partner and confirming who she is with, checking her mobile phone, forcing the partner to stop chatting with someone, forcing her to delete photos or her social network friends or asking for the password to access her personal accounts or social networks.

The situation is serious. One of the first studies about gender violence and social perception found that the abusive online control through a mobile phone is the most exercised form by young people; however, it is not perceived as gender violence (Díaz-Aguado, 2013). Recent research has compared both contexts, online and face-to-face, and determined that 90% of young people believe there is more gender violence in the online context (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018). On the other hand, young people state that they have observed violent behaviors in their online network, but few of them declare to have been a victim or aggressor (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018). In this way, it seems that there is a widespread perception about the magnitude of violence that is exercised through ICT instruments, but few people identify themselves as victims or perpetrators. According to Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2018), gender seems to be the best indicator of the type of response a person has to dating violence:

adolescent boys adopt more passive behaviors when they observe gender violence in the online context, whereas girls provide the victims more help full behaviors.

Relationships are an important source of well-being and happiness (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2010). However, when the relationship is conflicting and violent, it could become one of the main causes of suffering (Garrido-Macías et al., 2017; Valor-Segura et al., 2014). The inability to properly confront this situation could affect different psychosocial areas such as self-esteem, loneliness, social support, and life satisfaction (Gómez-Franco & Sendín, 2014). Some of the strategies used by women to confront cyberdating violence are to delete published content in their social networks, change publications to avoid anger, diminish activity in social networks, or disable their accounts (Vitak et al., 2017); that is to say, behaviors that isolate and limit women's lives in the technological realm are similar to those that occur in conjunction with traditional violence (Expósito, 2011). In this issue, sexist attitudes and myths about romantic love acquire special importance as they are perpetuated even more intensely through online environment.

Sexist Attitudes and Myths about Romantic Love

Sexist attitudes and myths about romantic love are situated at the base of these new forms of relationship between young people. Sexism is defined as the beliefs and attitudes held in traditional gender stereotypes regarding the roles that are considered appropriate for men and women and the relationships that must be maintained between both members of the couple (Moya, 2003). According to ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996), traditional sexism is divided in two different components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. The hostile component reflects a negative view of women and is manifested towards those who do not assume traditional roles and, therefore, represent a threat to the superiority and domination of the male (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Benevolent sexism carries a positive connotation because it considers that women need affection and protection and positively value those who assume traditional roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

Different authors agree that ambivalent sexism is related positively to justification of violent attitudes against the partner in the traditional context (Herrera et al., 2012; Herrero et al., 2017; Valor-Segura et al., 2011) and victim-blaming (Gracia et al., 2014; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018; Vidal-Fernández & Megías, 2014). Furthermore, a association has been found between the acceptability of intimate partner violence against women (A-IPVAW) and the perpetration of it (Copp et al., 2016; Gracia et al., 2015), so high grades of

A-IPVAW increase the likelihood that men exercise violence in the couple and that this violence will be justified and normalized by victims (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018; Waltermaurer, 2012). Additionally, high levels of A-IPVAW have been associated with high levels of ambivalent sexism (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018). In the technological context, several researchers agree that ICT devices facilitate the consolidation of gender stereotypes and a symbolic violence that legitimates models of domination based on patriarchal culture and the distinction by sex (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016; Flores & Browne, 2017). In particular, Ellsberg et al. (2015) pointed out that the sexist ideology regularly manifest itself as possessiveness and as controlling behaviors when ICT (WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) is used. However, ICT can also be used as a tool for combating sexism and for educating on equality. For example, Navarro-Pérez et al., (2019) recently determined that an intervention with a mobile app for reducing sexism, which Navarro-Pérez et al., (2018) designed, was effective, decreasing the level of sexism in adolescents between six and 12%.

On the other hand, myths about romantic love refer to the set of unreal and distorted beliefs about the supposed nature of love (i.e., soul mates, exclusivity, faithfulness, jealousy, etc.; Ferrer et al., 2010; Yela, 2003). These myths are socially accepted and contribute to the maintenance of gender stereotypes and the asymmetric power between men and women (Bosch & Ferrer, 2012; Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2013). Young people are especially vulnerable to the influence of myths about romantic love; they have a distorted impression about what love is and how the members of the couple relate to each other (Ferrer et al., 2010; Sharpe & Taylor, 1999). Borrajo et al. (2015) found that beliefs in myths about romantic love were related to the controlling behaviors in the couple fostered by new technology. Young people justify and accept these abusive behaviors (i.e., constantly checking where and with whom one's girlfriend may be or sharing passwords in their social networks) because they consider them to be expressions of love or worry in their relationships (Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018; Redondo et al., 2011). On the other hand, Caro and Monreal (2017) observed in a sample of undergraduate students that women are more vulnerable than men to the influence of myths about romantic love. Concretely, they pointed out that the women show an idealization of love, an unconditional commitment to the relationship, including a high sense of protection and care of the other above the satisfaction of their own needs and interests. As teenagers and young adults prefer the use of technology in order to communicate and traditional forms of contact are less frequent (Colás et al., 2013), it is necessary to analyse the use of ICT instruments and the variables that affect the process of minimization, normalization, and perpetuation of dating violence.

Overview Research

The present research was aimed at analysing the social perception that young people have about controlling behaviors in the couple that is fostered by ICT. Two studies were carried out, the first with women and the second with men. The studies share the objectives to (a) understand the frequency with which young people experience and perceive control in relationships and (b) analyse the influence of some variables that may affect the social perception of controlling behaviors such as the adopted role on the scene (protagonist vs. observer), the means of control that is used (face-to-face vs. WhatsApp), and certain ideological variables (A-IPVAW, ambivalent sexism, and myths about romantic love).

Study 1

Hypothesis

H1. Young women identify more easily with violence against the partner when they adopt the role of observer (vs. protagonist), so it is expected that they:

H1a. express a lower justification of the violent behavior

H1b. perceive a greater severity of the situation

H1c. perceive a greater risk of suffering dating violence

H2. Young women identify controlling behaviors amongst the couple to a lesser extent when it takes place through WhatsApp (vs. face-to-face). Specifically, it is expected that they:

H2a. express a greater justification of the violent behavior

H2b. perceive a lower severity of the situation

H2c. perceive a lower risk of suffering dating violence

H3. Ideological variables (ambivalent sexism, the A-IPVAW, and myths about romantic love) affect young women's social perceptions about dating violence, so it is expected that participants with high scores for these ideological variables express the following:

H3a. a greater justification of the violent behavior

H3b. a lower perception of severity

H3c. a lower risk of suffering dating violence

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 224 female undergraduate students at the University of Granada, Spain. The age of the participants ranged from 18–34 years ($M = 20$, $SD = 2.2$). A total of 88.8% of participants had Spanish nationality, 10.7% were immigrants and 0.4% did not indicate their nationalities. Regarding their sexual orientations, 90.6% of participants were heterosexual, 2.7 % were homosexual, 5.4% were bisexual and 1.3% did not indicate their sexual orientations. Concerning their relational statuses, the majority of the participants were single (73.2%), 0.4% were married, 0.4% were divorced, and 25.9% were dating.

Design and Procedure

A between-subjects 2 (adopted role on the scene: protagonist vs. observer) x 2 (means of control used: face-to-face vs. WhatsApp) factorial design was employed through the scenario manipulation technique.

The sample was obtained through incidental sampling in different classrooms within several faculties at the University of Granada, Spain. First, we contacted the course teacher of each class by email and asked for the teacher's permission to conduct the investigation during his or her class period. Next, a researcher was trained to give to participants appropriate instructions and to carry out the experiment. All participants were assured that their information and responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The students were informed that their participation in this research was voluntary, and that they could quit of the study at any time. Having obtained informed consent, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions and were given approximately 15 minutes to complete a single questionnaire in a paper-pencil format. The task was performed in a single session in the students' classrooms, with the course teacher always present. Once all students had completed the questionnaire, they were informed of the study's objectives.

Measures

A questionnaire containing all of the variables to be measured was designed. The first step was to present a scenario about dating violence, corresponding to experimental manipulation (see Supplementary Material [SM1.1]). To design the fictitious scenarios, we used the previous research of Navarro-Pérez, et al. (2018) as our basis. In this way, we

recreated situations of daily life, adapting them to the WhatsApp context, with the aim of giving it more realism. Thereafter, the following measures were administered:

Manipulation Check. Two items with a dichotomous response format (yes vs. no) were used to verify the effectiveness of each experimental manipulation: a) independent variable (IV) “adopted role on the scene”: “Is it a scenario that occurred between a young couple, Juan and María?” (MC₁) and “Is it a hypothetical situation between you and your partner?” (MC₂); and b) IV “means of control”: “The communication between the man and woman was through a mobile platform (WhatsApp)?” (MC₃) and “The communication between the man and the woman has been personal (face-to-face)?” (MC₄).

Perceived Severity. We evaluated the perception of severity through the item: “How severe do you consider the described episode?”, which was an adaptation of those that other authors used in their studies (Garrido-Macías et al., 2017; Milesi et al., 2019; Valor-Segura et al., 2011; Vidal-Fernández and Megías, 2014). The response format was a Likert type that ranged from 1 (*nothing severe*) to 7 (*very severe*).

Justification of Violent Behavior. This variable was measured through an item based on previous previous works (Garrido-Macías et al., 2017; Milesi et al., 2019; Valor-Segura et al., 2011; Vidal-Fernández and Megías, 2014). This item varied as a function of the experimental condition: “How justified do you consider Juan’s behaviour to be” (observer condition) or “How justified do you consider your partner’s behaviour to be” (protagonist condition). The response format was a Likert type that ranged from 1 (*completely unjustified*) to 7 (*completely justified*).

Experiences of Controlling Behaviors in the Participants’ own Relationships. We used an item based on the Gender Cyber Violence Questionnaire (Donoso-Vázquez, 2014) to evaluate the frequency at which young people experience controlling behaviors in their relationships: “How often have you experienced similar or equal situations in your relationships?” The response format was a Likert type that ranged from (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*).

Frequency of Controlling Behaviors in Young Couples. Using the Gender Cyber Violence Questionnaire (Donoso-Vázquez, 2014) as our basis, we evaluated the frequency at which young people perceive controlling behaviors amongst other young couples through the following item: “How often do you think these situations occur amongst young couples?” The response format was a Likert type that ranged from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*).

Subjective Risk Perceived of Dating Violence. This element was evaluated by using an adaptation of the self-anchoring scaling design by Kilpatrick and Cantril (1960), which

consisted of showing to the participants a pictorial non-verbal scale, such as the 10-point ladder scale, preceded by the following instructions: “Suppose the next ladder represents various levels of the risk of violence in the couple. The highest part of the ladder represents a maximum risk of violence within the relationship, whereas the lowest part represents a minimum risk”. Next, we asked them to mark the box that best represented their perceptions of the risk of suffering dating violence.

A-IPVAW. We administered the A-IPVAW scale (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018) to assess the participants’ acceptance of IPV against women. It consisted of 20 items measuring: (a) *physical violence* (e.g., “I think it is acceptable for a man to hit his partner if she has been unfaithful”); (b) *verbal violence or coercion* (e.g., “I think it is acceptable for a man to shout at his partner if she is constantly nagging/arguing”); and (c) *emotional violence* (e.g., “I think it is acceptable for a man to threaten to injure his partner or others if she leaves him”). Participants answered using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *nothing acceptable* to 4 = *very acceptable*). High scores were indicative of greater A-IPVAW. The alpha coefficient for the total scale was .60. In this study, only global scores were analysed because the primary objective was to obtain an overview of A-IPVAW rather than a detailed analysis of each specific dimension.

Ambivalent Sexism. We used the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Expósito et al., 1998) to evaluate the participants’ sexist attitudes. The ASI was composed of 22 items divided into two dimensions: (a) *hostile sexism* (11 items; e.g., “Women get easily offended”); and (b) *benevolent sexism* (11 items; e.g., “Women are bestowed with a purity that few men possess”). Participants responded using a 6-point Likert-type response format ranging from 0 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). High scores revealed more sexist attitudes. The alpha coefficient of the hostile sexism subscale was .87; that of the benevolent sexism subscale was .82.

Myths Toward Love. We administered the Myths Scale Toward Love (Bosch et al., 2007; adapted in an adolescent sample by Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2013) to assess the participants’ endorsement of myths toward romantic love. This measure consisted of seven items with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *totally disagree* to 5 = *totally agree*). Example items include “Jealousy is proof of love” or “True love can do anything”. The alpha coefficient for the scale was .69.

Sociodemographic Characteristics. We collected data about participants’ gender (“What is your gender? Male/Female/Other [specify]”), age (“What is your age?”), nationality (“What is your nationality? Spanish/Other [specify]”), sexual orientation (“What is

your sexual orientation? Heterosexual/Homosexual/Bisexual/Other [specify]”), and relational status (“What is your relational status? single/dating/married/divorced/other [specify]”).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the SPSS program, version 23. Firstly, we performed a chi-squared test to assess the manipulations’ efficacy. After that, we performed descriptive analyses of frequencies to examine the frequency at which young women experience and perceive controlling behaviors in their relationships and amongst others young couples. Next, to verify our predictions about the influence of the adopted role on the scene (Hypothesis 1), the means of control used (Hypothesis 2), and the ideological variables (A-IPVAW, sexism, and myths about romantic love; Hypothesis 3) on the social perception of dating violence, we conducted several hierarchical regression analyses with the following dependent variables: 1) perceived severity of the situation, 2) justification of violent behavior, and 3) the perceived subjective risk of dating violence. We applied the same procedure for each analysis. Step 1 assessed the adopted role on the scene (0 = *protagonist*, 1 = *observer*), the means of control (0 = *face to face*, 1 = *whatsapp*) and the ideological variables, separately (sexist attitudes, A-IPVAW, or myths about romantic love). Step 2 involved second-order interactions between the experimental manipulations and the ideological variables (see Table 1). Scores were standardized before analyses were performed.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Manipulation Check. The analysis revealed that all of the experimental manipulations were effective. Regarding the IV “adopted role on the scene”, in MC₁, 100% of the participants indicated that the episode happened between Juan and María when they belonged to the observer condition, and 57% of women indicated that the situation did not happen between Juan and María when they belonged to the protagonist condition, so the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, 223) = 78.66, p < .001$. According to using the rules of thumb for low, moderate, and large effect sizes (Cohen, 1988, p. 532), the analysis showed a Cramer’s V coefficient = .59, so a large effect size was obtained. In MC₂, 60% of the young women said that the situation was a hypothetical situation about their relationships when they were allocated to the protagonist condition, whereas 90.27% of the participants did not consider this to be a hypothetical situation about their relationships when they were

allocated to the observer condition, $\chi^2(1, 223) = 62.30, p < .001$. The Cramer's V coefficient was .53, revealing a large effect size.

Regarding the IV "means of control", in MC₃, 99.1% of the participants indicated that the communication took place via a mobile phone when they belonged to the WhatsApp condition, whereas 96.4% of the participants who were allocated to the face-to-face condition indicated that the communication did not take place via a mobile phone, $\chi^2(1, 224) = 204.59, p < .001$. The analysis showed a coefficient Cramer's V = .96, so a large effect size was obtained. In MC₄, the results revealed that 99.1% of the participants considered that the communication occurred in person when they were allocated to the face-to-face condition, whereas 99.1% indicated that the communication did not take place in person when they belonged to the WhatsApp condition, $\chi^2(1, 223) = 215.07, p < .001$. A large effect size was obtained (Cramer's V = .98).

Frequency of Controlling Behaviors in Relationships. The results showed that 84.8% ($n = 190$) of young women considered controlling behaviors to frequently occur amongst young couples; however, 82.9% ($n = 186$) declared that they had never or hardly ever suffered from these behaviors in their relationships.

Influence of the Adopted Role on the Scene, the Means of Control Used, and Ideological Variables on the Social Perception of Dating Violence

According to Hypothesis 1, in the first step of the regression analyses, we found a significant effect of the IV "adopted role on the scene" on the perceived subjective risk of dating violence ($b = -0.23, p < .001$). Thus, the participants who were allocated to the observer condition perceived a greater subjective risk of dating violence in comparison with the participants who were allocated to the protagonist condition, which supported H1c (see Table 1).

Table 1

Role on the Scene, Means of Control, and Attitudinal Variables as Predictors of Social Perception of Dating Violence

| | Severity | | | Justification | | |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|----------------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | | | |
| IV1 | 0.01 | 0.19 | [-0.12, 0.14] | -0.08 | -1.28 | [-0.21, 0.04] |
| IV2 | -0.01 | -0.07 | [-0.14, 0.13] | 0.001 | 0.02 | [-0.12, 0.13] |
| HS | -0.12 | -1.49 | [-0.27, 0.04] | 0.23** | 3.04 | [0.08, 0.38] |
| BS | -0.14 | -1.77 | [-0.30, 0.02] | 0.14 | 1.85 | [-0.01, 0.29] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .05 (.03) | | | .11 (.10) | | |
| A-IPVAW | -0.29*** | -4.39 | [-0.41, -0.16] | 0.35*** | 5.61 | [0.23, 0.48] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .08 (.07) | | | .13 (.12) | | |
| Myths | -0.11 | -1.60 | [-0.24, 0.03] | 0.15* | 2.22 | [0.02, 0.28] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .01 (.01) | | | .03 (.04) | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | | | |
| IV1xVI2 | 0.04 | 0.53 | [-0.10, 0.17] | -0.06 | -0.87 | [-0.18, 0.07] |
| IV1xHS | -0.04 | -0.50 | [-0.20, 0.12] | 0.001 | 0.010 | [-0.15, 0.15] |
| IV2xHS | -0.05 | -0.42 | [-0.39, 0.25] | -0.06 | -0.48 | [-0.39, 0.23] |
| VI1xBS | 0.08 | 0.99 | [-0.08, 0.24] | 0.07 | 0.93 | [-0.08, 0.23] |
| IV2xBS | 0.26* | 2.44 | [0.08, 0.73] | -0.13 | -1.27 | [-0.52, 0.11] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .09 (.05) | | | .14 (.11) | | |
| IV1xA-IPVAW | 0.06 | 0.95 | [-0.07, 0.20] | 0.10 | 1.47 | [-0.03, 0.23] |
| IV2xA-IPVAW | 0.21** | 2.50 | [0.07, 0.62] | -0.05 | -0.60 | [-0.35, 0.19] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .11 (.08) | | | .14 (.12) | | |
| IV1xMyths | 0.01 | 0.13 | [-0.13, 0.14] | -0.02 | -0.24 | [-0.15, 0.12] |
| IV2xMyths | -0.13 | -1.43 | [-0.46, 0.07] | 0.09 | 1.04 | [-0.15, 0.12] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .02 (.01) | | | .04 (.01) | | |

Note. IV1= role on the scene; IV2 = means of control; HS = hostile sexism; BS = benevolent sexism; A-IPVAW = acceptability of intimate partner violence against women; CI = confidence interval.

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

Table 1

Role on the Scene, Means of Control, and Attitudinal Variables as Predictors of Social Perception of Dating Violence (Continued)

| | Risk of dating violence | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------------|
| | β | t | 95% CI |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | |
| IV1 | 0.23 | 3.50*** | [0.10, 0.35] |
| IV2 | 0.04 | 0.559 | [-0.09, 0.16] |
| HS | -0.19 | -2.41* | [-0.34, -0.03] |
| BS | -0.09 | -1.15 | [-0.24, 0.06] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .11 (.09) | | |
| A-IPVAW | -0.21 | -3.19*** | [-0.33, -0.08] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .09 (.08) | | |
| Myths | -0.25 | -3.93*** | [-0.38, -0.13] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .11 (.10) | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | |
| IV1xVI2 | 0.04 | 0.62 | [-0.09, 0.17] |
| IV1xHS | 0.09 | 1.14 | [-0.06, 0.24] |
| IV2xHS | 0.16 | 1.31 | [-0.10, 0.52] |
| VI1xBS | 0.07 | 0.92 | [-0.08, 0.23] |
| IV2xBS | 0.03 | 0.28 | [-0.27, 0.36] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .14 (.11) | | |
| IV1xA-IPVAW | -0.04 | -0.62 | [-0.18, 0.09] |
| IV2xA-IPVAW | -0.001 | -0.01 | [-0.28, 0.27] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .09 (.07) | | |
| IV1xMyths | 0.09 | 1.42 | [-0.04, 0.22] |
| IV2xMyths | -0.04 | -0.45 | [-0.31, 0.20] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .12 (.10) | | |

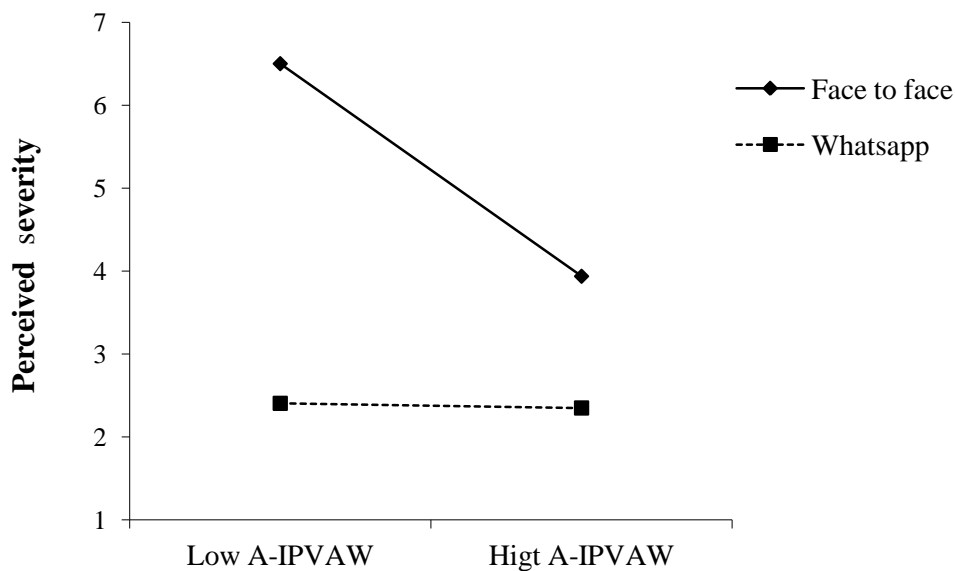
Note. IV1= role on the scene; IV2 = means of control; HS = hostile sexism; BS = benevolent sexism; A-IPVAW = acceptability of intimate partner violence against women; CI = confidence interval.

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

Regarding to the IV “means of control”, the regression analyses did not show any simple effect on dependent variables ($p > .05$), rejecting Hypothesis 2 (see Table 1). However, the second step revealed the effect of a statistically significant interaction between the means of control that was used and the A-IPVAW on the measure of perceived severity of the situation ($b = 0.21, p = .013$). Specifically, in the face-to-face condition, low levels of A-IPVAW predicted a greater perception of severity in comparison with high levels. However, in the WhatsApp condition, the A-IPVAW did not predict the perceived severity (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Interaction Between Means of Control and A-IPVAW on Perceived Severity

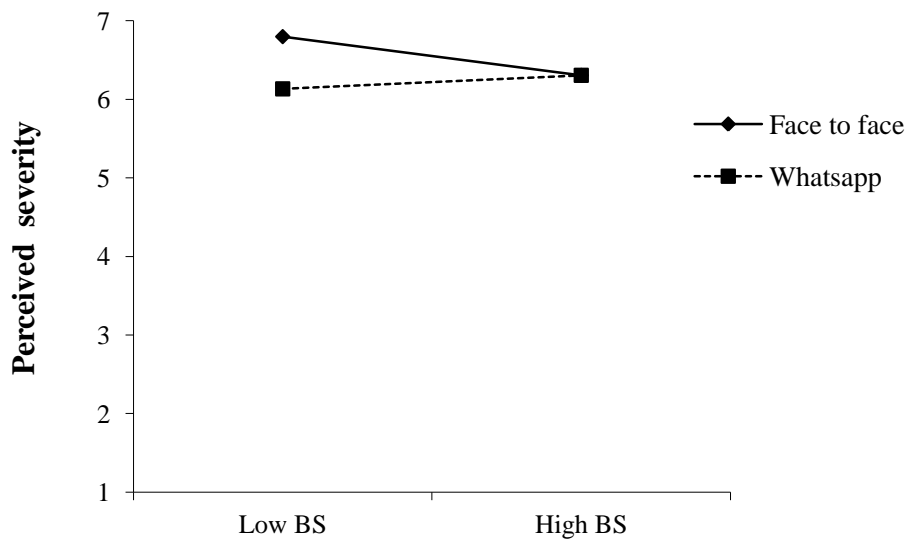


Note. A-IPVAW = acceptability of intimate partner violence against women. A-IPVAW is graphed at $-1 SD$ (low) and $+1 SD$ (high).

In addition, the regression analyses showed the effect of another statistically significant interaction between the IV “means of control” and benevolent sexism on the measure of perceived severity of the situation ($b = 0.26, p = .016$). In the same way, in the face-to-face condition, low levels of benevolent sexism predicted a greater perception of severity in comparison with high levels. In contrast, in the WhatsApp condition, the benevolent sexism did not predict the perceived severity (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Interaction Between Means of Control and Benevolent Sexism on Perceived Severity



Note. BS = benevolent sexism. BS is graphed at $-1 SD$ (low) and $+1 SD$ (high).

Finally, the regression analyses indicated the ideological variables predict significantly the social perception of controlling behaviors in the relationship, which supported Hypothesis 3. In particular, high levels of hostile sexism predicted a greater justification of the violent behavior ($b = 0.23, p = .003$) and a lower perceived risk of dating violence ($b = -0.19, p = .02$). On the other hand, high scores for A-IPVAW predicted a greater justification of the violent behavior ($b = 0.35, p < .001$), a lower perceived severity ($b = -0.29, p < .001$), as well as a lower perceived risk of suffering dating violence ($b = -0.21, p = .002$). In addition, high beliefs in myths about romantic love predicted a greater justification ($b = 0.15, p = .03$) and a lesser perceived risk of dating violence ($b = -0.25, p < .001$; see Table 1).

Discussion

On the one hand, the present study's aim was to understand the frequency with which young people experience and perceive controlling behaviors in relationships. The results showed that the young women considered the controlling behaviors to frequently occur amongst young couples (84.8%); however, they declared that they had never or hardly ever suffered from these behaviors in their relationship (82.9%). These findings are consistent with the results of Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2016), who found that young people

perceived controlling behaviors amongst other couples of their ages, yet few of them stated that they experienced control struggles in their relationships.

On the other hand, the study 1 aimed to explore the social perception that young people have about controlling behaviors in relationships. Based on Hypothesis 1, we predicted that young women who adopted the role of observer (observer condition) in the described episode would more easily identify violence against the partner, in comparison with women who read the hypothetical episode about her relationship (protagonist condition). The main results indicated that the IV “adopted role on the scene” predicted the perceived subjective risk of dating violence in the expected direction, which supported H1c. The women who were allocated to the observer condition perceived a greater subjective risk of dating violence, in comparison with the women who were allocated to the protagonist condition. However, the adopted role on the scene was not found to predict the perceived severity of the situation and justification of the violent behavior, rejecting H1a and H1b. Again, this result is consistent with the findings of Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2018), given that young women identify a greater risk of suffering from dating violence when they adopt the role of observer. That is, when controlling behaviors occur in couples besides their own relationships, as we observed in the descriptive analyses performed previously. In this way, it seems that a widespread perception exists of the magnitude of controlling behaviors that are exercised within the relationships, but few women identify themselves as victims. Women tend to use a series of personal and social mechanisms to face this experience, such as denial. Denying abuse constitutes a psychological defense mechanism; it does not mean lying or hiding what happens (Expósito, 2011).

According to Hypothesis 2, it was expected that IV “means of control” that was used predicted the perception of controlling behaviors in relationships. Specifically, it was believed that the young women belonging to the WhatsApp condition would identify controlling behaviors in the couple to a lesser extent than the young women belonging to the face-to-face condition would. However, the means of control that was used did not predict any dependent variables (perceived severity of the situation, justification of violent behavior, and perceived risk of suffering dating violence), rejecting H2. These results could be due to the fact that the controlling behaviors were reproduced through new technologies; thus, they were perceived with the same normality as in the traditional context. In addition, the results pointed out the effect of two significant interactions on perceived severity: on the one hand, the interaction between the means of control and the A-IPVAW (see Figure 1); and on the other hand, an interaction between the means of

control and benevolent sexism (see Figure 2). In the face-to-face condition, lower levels (vs. high levels) of A-IPVAW and benevolent sexism predicted a greater perception of severity; however, in the WhatsApp condition, these ideological variables did not predict the perceived severity. The fact that the A-IPVAW and benevolent sexism did not affect the perceived severity of the situation and the justification of abusive behavior when the episode occurs in WhatsApp suggests that women are accepting and normalizing controlling behaviors online. These behaviors can be normalized due to the high frequency with which they occur in the technological context (Flores & Browne, 2017; Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018), with young people considering what is common to be normal. In addition, according to Estébanez and Vázquez (2013), women could consider these behaviors to be signs of worry and love instead of new manifestations of dating violence. In addition, it is important to consider the subjective nature of communication through WhatsApp, where messages between the transmitter and receiver are subject to a high degree of interpretation. For example, a woman could think that her partner is joking or that he is not truly angry. However, the ideological variables predicted the perception of severity and the justification of abusive behavior when the episode occurred face-to-face. Perhaps, this could be due to the fact that control behaviors occur less frequently in the traditional context and, therefore, are more socially rejected. Young people are less accustomed to observe these behaviors face-to-face, so women with low levels of the A-IPVAW and benevolent sexism perceive a greater severity of the situation and justify it to a lesser extent in comparison with women with a high A-IPVAW.

Finally, Study 1 proved the influence of the ideological variables on the social perception of controlling behaviors exercised against the partner, which substantiated Hypothesis 3. According to the initial predictions, high degrees of hostile sexism predicted a greater justification of the violent behavior and a lower perceived risk of dating violence, replicating the findings of Herrera et al. (2012) and Herrero et al. (2017). On the other hand, in agreement with the results of Martín-Fernández et al. (2018) and Waltermaurer (2012) results, high scores for A-IPVAW predicted a greater justification of the violent behaviour a lower perceived severity, as well as a lower perceived risk of suffering dating violence. In addition, consistent with the findings of Redondo et al. (2011), high beliefs in myths about romantic love predicted a greater justification of the violence and a lower perceived risk of dating violence. These findings contribute to previous research studies, as they demonstrate that sexist attitudes and myths about romantic love are situated at the base of these new forms of relationships between young people, legitimating models of

domination based on the patriarchal culture and the distinction by gender (Donoso-Vázquez, et al. 2016; Flores & Browne, 2017).

Once the young women's perceptions of dating violence had been explored, in the second study we aimed to examine the social perceptions of young men, replicating the basic findings of Study 1. At the same time, we added two new variables, the identification of controlling behaviors and the perceived threat due to the loss of power within the relationship, as we considered these variables to be essential when examining men's social perceptions of dating violence. To explain the phenomenon of dating violence, some researchers suggest that the perception of change or the loss of control or power within the relationship could motivate the aggression that a man exercises towards his partner (Dutton, 1988). As result of this perceived loss of power, some men react negatively and with strong resistance, trying to maintain or regain power through the use of violence (Babcock et al., 1993; Dutton, 1988; Herrera et al., 2012).

Study 2

Hypothesis

H1. Young men identify more easily with dating violence when they adopt the role of observer (vs. protagonist), so it can be expected that they:

H1a. express a lower justification of the violent behavior

H1b. perceive a greater severity of the situation

H1c. perceive a greater threat due to the loss of power

H1d. identify the controlling behavior more easily

H2. Young men identify dating violence to a lesser extent when it takes place through WhatsApp (vs. face-to-face). Specifically, it can be expected that they:

H2a. express more justification of the violent behavior

H2b. perceive a lower severity of the situation

H2c. perceive a lower threat due to the loss of power

H2d. identify the controlling behavior to a lesser extent

H3. Ideological variables (ambivalent sexism, the A-IPVAW, and myths about romantic love) affect young men's social perceptions of dating violence, so it is expected that men with high scores for these ideological variables express:

H3a. a greater justification of the violent behavior

H3b. a lower perception of severity

H3c. a greater perception of a threat due to the loss of power

H3d. a lower perception of the controlling behavior

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 120 male undergraduate students at the University of Granada, Spain. The age of the participants ranged from 18–34 years ($M = 20.41$, $SD = 2.62$). In the sample, a total of 95% of participants had Spanish nationality, 4.2% were immigrants and 0.8% did not indicate their nationalities. Regarding their sexual orientations, the majority of the participants were heterosexual (89.2%), 6.7% were homosexual, 2.5% were bisexual, and, 1.7% indicated other sexual orientations. Concerning their relational statuses, 83.3 % were singles, 15.8% were dating and 0.8% did not indicate their civil statuses.

Design and Procedure

The second study closely replicated the procedures and design of Study 1, adapting the scenarios of dating violence to the young men (see SM2.1).

Measures

The participants responded to the following scales:

Manipulation Check. This element was tested through the designed items in Study 1.

Perceived Severity. We administered the item used in Study 1 (based on Garrido-Macías et al., 2017; Milesi et al., 2019; Valor-Segura et al., 2011; Vidal-Fernández and Megías, 2014): “How severe do you consider the described episode?” (1= *nothing severe*, 7 = *very severe*).

Justification of Violent Behavior. Similar to Study 1, this variable was measured through an item based on previous previous works (e.g., Garrido-Macías et al., 2017; Milesi et al., 2019). This item varied as a function of the experimental condition: “How justified do you consider Juan’s behaviour to be” (observer condition) or “How justified do you consider your behaviour to be” (protagonist condition; 1 = *completely unjustified*, 7 = *completely justified*).

Experiences of Controlling Behaviors in Their Own Relationships. As in Study 1, we used an item based on Donoso-Vázquez (2014): “How often have you suffered similar or equal situations in your relationships?” (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*).

Frequency of Controlling Behaviors in Young Couples. We administered the item used in Study 1 (based on Donoso-Vázquez, 2014): “How often do you consider that these situations occur in young couples?” (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*).

Perceived Threat due to the Loss of Power Within the Relationship. This variable was evaluated through one of the following item, according to the experimental condition: “To what extent do you think that Juan feels that his power within the relationship is threatened?” (observer condition) or “To what extent do you think that your power within the relationship is threatened?” (protagonist condition). It was scored on a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = *nothing*, 4 = *a lot*).

Perceived Controlling Behavior. Depending on the experimental condition, one of the following questions was used: “Is Juan controlling his partner?” (observer condition) or “Are you controlling your partner?” (protagonist condition). The response format was a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = *nothing*, 4 = *a lot*).

A-IPVAW. We used de A-IPVAW scale (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018). In this sample, the alpha coefficient for the total scale was .63.

Ambivalent Sexism. We used the ASI (Expósito et al., 1998). The alpha coefficient of the hostile sexism subscale was .94; that of the benevolent sexism subscale was .84.

Myths Towards Love. We administered the Myths Scale Towards Love (Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2013; α = .63).

Sociodemographic Characteristics. As in Study 1, we collected data about the participants’ gender, age, nationality, sexual orientation, and relational status.

Data Analysis

We carried out data analysis using the SPSS program (version 23). Firstly, we conducted a chi-squared test to assess the manipulations’ efficacy. Next, to examine the frequency with which men experience and perceive controlling behaviors in their relationships and amongst others young couples, we performed descriptive analyses of frequencies. Thereafter, we conducted several hierarchical regression analyses to verify the initial predictions about the effect of the adopted role on the scene (Hypothesis 1), the means of control used (Hypothesis 2), and the ideological variables (Hypothesis 3) on the

social perception of controlling behaviors in the couple. We closely replicated the steps of Study 1's hierarchical regression analyses, and we entered the following dependent variables: 1) perceived severity of the situation, 2) justification of the violent behavior, 3) perceived threat due to loss of power within the relationship, and 4) perceived controlling behavior (Table 2).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Manipulation Check. The analysis revealed that all of the experimental manipulations were effective. Regarding the IV “adopted role on the scene”, in MC₁, the results showed that 100% of the participants who were allocated to the observer condition indicated that the episode happened between Juan and María, whereas 48.39% of the participants who were allocated to the protagonist condition indicated that the situation did not happen between Juan and María, so the differences were statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, 120) = 37.42, p < .001$. The analysis showed a Cramer's V coefficient = .56, so a large effect size was obtained. In MC₂, it was found that 46.77% of the men said that the situation was a hypothetical situation about their relationships when they belonged to the protagonist condition, whereas 93.1% of the participants did not consider this to be a hypothetical situation when they belonged to the observer condition, $\chi^2(1, 120) = 23.90, p < .001$. A moderate effect size was obtained (Cramer's V = .45).

Regarding the manipulation of IV “means of control”, in MC₃, it was observed that 98.36% of the participants who were allocated to the WhatsApp condition indicated that the communication occurred via mobile phone, whereas 98.31% of the men who were allowed to the face-to-face condition indicated that the communication did not take place via a mobile phone, so the manipulation check was effective, $\chi^2(1, 120) = 112.13, p < .001$. The analysis pointed out a Cramer's V coefficient = .97, so a large effect size was obtained. In MC₄, the results revealed that 96.61% of the participants who belonged to the face-to-face condition considered that the communication occurred in person, whereas 96.72% of participants who belonged to the WhatsApp condition indicated that the communication did not take place in person, $\chi^2(1, 120) = 104.53, p < .001$. A large effect size was obtained (Cramer's V = .93).

Frequency of Controlling Behaviors in Relationships. The results showed that 92.5% of men ($n = 111$) declared that they have never or hardly ever exercised controlling behaviors in their relationships; however, 79.5% ($n = 95$) considered that these behaviors frequently happen within young couples.

Influence of the Adopted Role on the Scene, the Means of Control Used, and Ideological Variables on the Social Perception of Dating Violence

According to Hypothesis 1, the analyses pointed out that the IV “adopted role on the scene” predicted the perception of threat due to the loss of power within the relationship ($b = 0.31, p < .001$) and the identification of controlling behaviour ($b = 0.18, p = .04$), which supported H1c and H1d. In this way, participants who were allocated to the observer condition predicted a greater perception of threat due to the loss of power and a greater identification of controlling behavior, in comparison with the participants who were allocated to the protagonist condition (see Table 2).

Table 2

Role on the Scene, Means of Control, and Attitudinal Variables as Predictors of Social Perception of Dating Violence

| | Severity | | | Justification | | |
|-------------------|-------------|----------|----------------|---------------|----------|----------------|
| | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | | | |
| IV1 | 0.06 | 0.72 | [-0.17, 0.17] | -0.06 | -0.66 | [-0.22, 0.11] |
| IV2 | 0.03 | 0.29 | [-0.15, 0.20] | -0.07 | -0.82 | [-0.24, 0.10] |
| HS | -0.22* | -1.04 | [-0.43, -0.01] | 0.26* | 2.43 | [0.05, 0.46] |
| BS | -0.21 | -1.90 | [-0.42, 0.01] | 0.24* | 2.25 | [0.03, 0.45] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .15 (.12) | | | .21 (.18) | | |
| A-IPVAW | -0.55*** | -6.93 | [-0.71, -0.39] | 0.25** | 2.75 | [0.07, 0.43] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | 0.30 (0.28) | | | .08 (.05) | | |
| Myths | -0.24** | -2.65 | [-0.42, -0.06] | 0.28** | 3.11 | [0.10, 0.46] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .07 (.04) | | | .09 (.07) | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | | | |
| IV1xVI2 | 0.15 | 1.68 | [0.10, -0.03] | -.11 | -1.31 | [-0.28, 0.06] |
| IV1xHS | 0.004 | 0.04 | [-0.24, 0.25] | 0.14 | 1.15 | [-0.10, 0.37] |
| IV2xHS | 0.13 | 1.11 | [-0.11, 0.37] | -0.11 | -0.93 | [-0.34, 0.12] |
| VI1xBS | 0.09 | 0.76 | [-0.14, 0.32] | -0.23* | -2.07 | [-0.46, -0.01] |
| IV2xBS | -0.12 | -1.07 | [-0.35, 0.11] | -0.05 | -0.46 | [-0.28, 0.17] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .20 (.13) | | | .26 (.20) | | |
| IV1xA-IPVAW | .27 | 2.26 | [0.03, 0.50] | -0.15 | -1.04 | [-0.41, 0.13] |
| IV2xA-IPVAW | 0.01 | 0.05 | [-0.27, 0.28] | 0.23 | 1.14 | [-0.09, 0.55] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .34 (.30) | | | .12 (.07) | | |
| IV1xMyths | 0.14 | 1.51 | [-0.04, 0.33] | -0.13 | -1.35 | [-0.32, 0.59] |
| IV2xMyths | 0.09 | 0.97 | [-0.10, 0.28] | -0.03 | -0.29 | [-0.21, 0.16] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .11 (.06) | | | .11 (.07) | | |

Note. IV1= role on the scene; IV2 = means of control; HS = hostile sexism; BS = benevolent sexism; A-IPVAW = acceptability of intimate partner violence against women; CI = confidence interval.

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

Table 2

Role on the Scene, Means of Control, and Attitudinal Variables as Predictors of Social Perception of Dating Violence (Continued)

| | Perceived control | | | Threat | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------|-----------------|
| | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | | | |
| IV1 | 0.18* | 2.12 | [0.01, 0.35] | 0.31*** | 3.46 | [0.13, 0.17] |
| IV2 | -0.02 | -0.20 | [-0.14, 0.16] | -0.09 | -1.03 | [-0.27, 0.09] |
| HS | -0.22 | -1.98 | [-0.40, 0.001] | 0.11 | 1.01 | [-0.11, 0.33] |
| BS | -0.11 | -1.00 | [-0.33, .11] | -0.06 | -0.53 | [-0.28, 0.16] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .12 (.08) | | | .12 (.09) | | |
| A-IPVAW | -0.40*** | -4.69 | [-0.51, -0.23] | 0.01 | 0.08 | [-0.17, 0.18] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .18 (.16) | | | .11 (.09) | | |
| Myths | 0.03 | 0.32 | [-0.15, 0.21] | 0.09 | 1.02 | [-0.09, 0.27] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .03 (.03) | | | .12 (.09) | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | | | |
| IV1xVI2 | 0.04 | 0.441 | [-0.14, 0.23] | -0.06 | -0.61 | [-0.24, 1.28] |
| IV1xHS | 0.11 | 0.87 | [-0.14, 0.36] | -0.05 | -0.38 | [-0.30, 0.20] |
| IV2xHS | 0.21 | 1.64 | [-0.04, 0.46] | 0.11 | 0.87 | [-0.14, 0.36] |
| VI1xBS | -0.02 | -0.18 | [-0.26, 0.22] | -0.07 | -0.58 | [-0.31, 0.17] |
| IV2xBS | -0.18 | -1.53 | [-0.42, 0.05] | -0.24* | -1.99 | [-0.48, -0.001] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .16 (.09) | | | .16 (.09) | | |
| IV1xA-IPVAW | -0.09 | -0.64 | [-0.34, 0.17] | 0.07 | 0.47 | [-0.23, 0.37] |
| IV2xA-IPVAW | 0.18 | 1.20 | [-0.12, 0.48] | -0.12 | -0.78 | [-0.44, 0.19] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .21 (.16) | | | .13 (.08) | | |
| IV1xMyths | 0.05 | 0.54 | [-0.14, 0.25] | -0.14 | -1.48 | [-0.23, 0.05] |
| IV2xMyths | -0.12 | -1.24 | [-0.32, 0.07] | 0.02 | 0.18 | [-0.17, 0.20] |
| $R^2(\Delta R^2)$ | .04 (.01) | | | .13 (.09) | | |

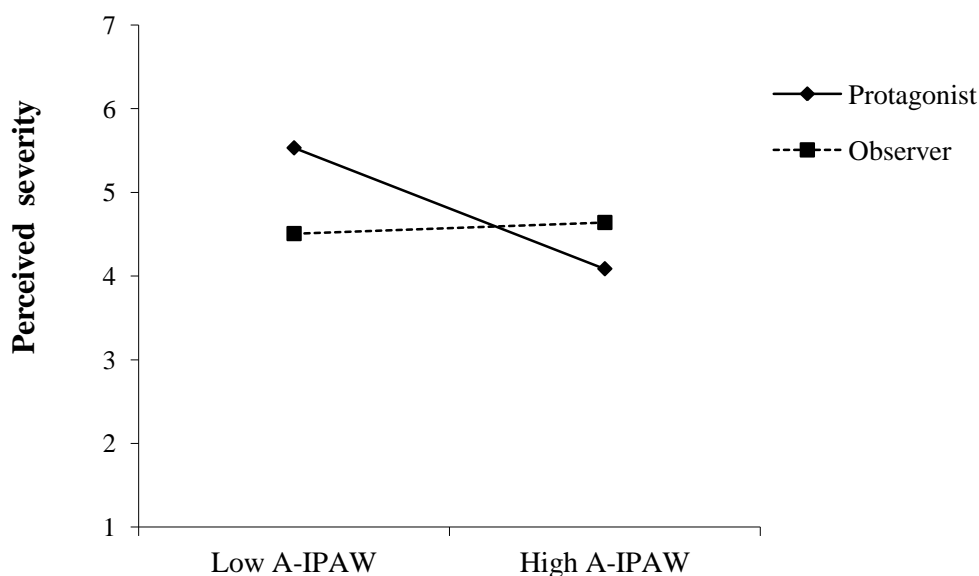
Note. IV1= role on the scene; IV2 = means of control; HS = hostile sexism; BS = benevolent sexism; A-IPVAW = acceptability of intimate partner violence against women; CI = confidence interval.

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

In the second step, the regression analyses revealed the effect of a significant interaction between the adopted role on the scene and the A-IPVAW on the measure of perceived severity ($b = 0.27, p = .03$), so in the protagonist condition, low levels of A-IPVAW predicted a greater perception of severity of the situation in comparison with high levels. However, in the observer condition, the A-IPVAW did not predict the perceived severity (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Interaction Between Adopted Role on the Scene and A-IPVAW on Perceived Severity

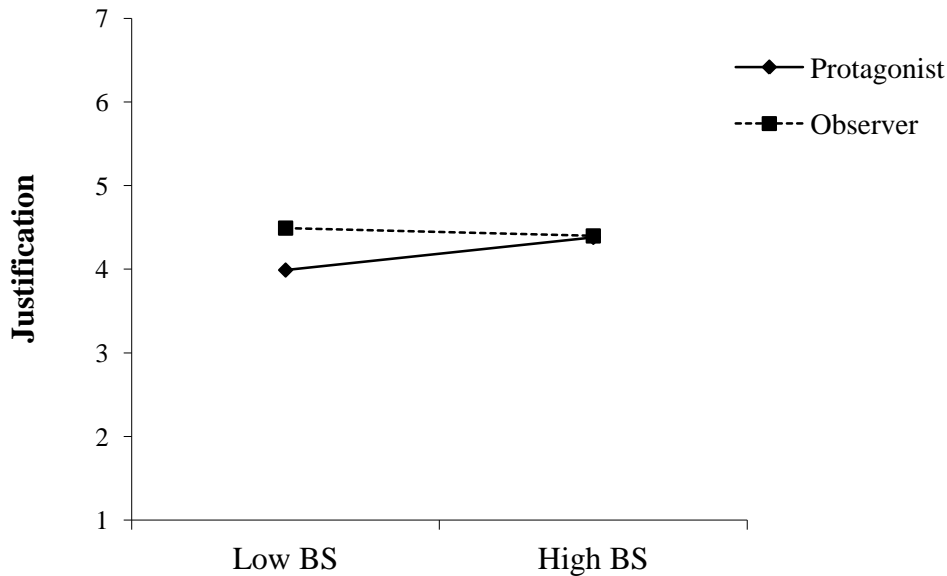


Note. A-IPVAW = acceptability of intimate partner violence against women. A-IPVAW is graphed at $-1 SD$ (low) and $+1 SD$ (high).

In addition, the regression analyses showed the effect of another statistically significant interaction between IV “adopted role on the scene” and benevolent sexism on the measure of the justification of the controlling behaviour ($b = -0.23, p = .04$). In the protagonist condition, low levels of benevolent sexism predicted a lower justification of controlling behavior in comparison to high levels; however, in the observer condition, benevolent sexism did not predict the justification of controlling behavior in the couple (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Interaction Between Adopted Role on the Scene and Benevolent Sexism on Justification of Controlling Behaviour

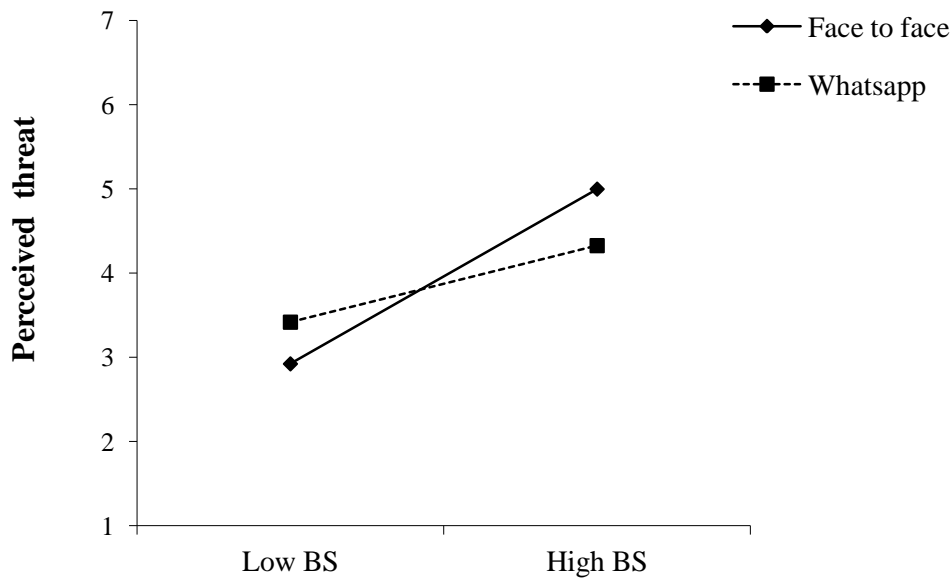


Note. BS = benevolent sexism. BS is graphed at $-1 SD$ (low) and $+1 SD$ (high).

Regarding to the IV “means of control” (face-to-face vs. WhatsApp) the regression analyses did not show a significant simple effect on the dependent variables ($p > .05$; see Table 2), rejecting Hypothesis 2. However, the second step revealed the effect of a significant interaction between the means of control and benevolent sexism on the measure of perceived threat due to the loss of power within the relationship ($b = -0.24, p = .04$), so in the face-to-face condition, high levels of benevolent sexism predicted a greater perception of threat in comparison with low levels. In contrast, in the WhatsApp condition, benevolent sexism did not predict the perceived threat due to the loss of power (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Interaction Between Means of Control and Benevolent Sexism on Perceived Threat due to the Loss of Power Within the Relationship



Note. BS = benevolent sexism. BS is graphed at $-1 SD$ (low) and $+1 SD$ (high).

Lastly, consistent with Hypothesis 3, which sustained that ideological variables would affect young men's social perceptions of dating violence, the regression analyses showed a main effect of sexism, myths about romantic love, and the A-IPVAW on the dependent variables. Specifically, it was found that high levels of hostile sexism predicted a greater justification of the violent behavior ($b = 0.26, p = .02$) and a lower perceived severity of the situation ($b = -0.22, p = .04$). Additionally, high scores for benevolent sexism predicted a greater justification of aggressors' behavior ($b = 0.24, p = .03$). Furthermore, high A-IPVAW predicted a greater justification of violent behavior ($b = 0.25, p = .01$) and a lower perceived severity of the situation ($b = -0.55, p < .001$), as well as a lower identification of controlling behavior in the couple ($b = -0.40, p < .001$). Finally, high scores for myths about romantic love predicted high justification ($b = 0.28, p = .002$) and low perception of severity ($b = -0.24, p = .01$).

Discussion

Study 2 consolidated the results found in Study 1 regarding the frequency with which young people experience and perceive control in relationships. Specifically, the data showed that 92.5% of the men declared that they had never or hardly ever exercised

controlling behaviors in their relationships. However, 79.5% considered that this type of behaviors frequently happen within young couples. Consistent with the findings of Study 1 and providing empirical support for the previous research, this study pointed out that men frequently identify control in other young couples, but few of them recognize to exercise controlling behaviors against their partners (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016, 2018).

As in the Study 1, we predicted that men who adopted the role of observer on the scene (observer condition) would more easily identify violence against the partner compared with men who adopted the role of protagonist (protagonist condition). The main results showed that IV “adopted role on the scene” predicted the perceived threat due to the loss of power and the identification of controlling behavior in the expected direction, which supported H1c. and H1d. The men who were allocated to the observer condition perceived a greater threat and a greater identification of controlling behavior, in comparison with the men who were allocated to the protagonist condition. However, the adopted role on the scene was not found to predict the perceived severity and justification of the violent behavior, rejecting H1a and H1b. Again, these results are consistent with the results found in Study 1, so when controlling behaviors occur in couples outside of their own relationships, men more easily identify these abusive behaviors and recognize to a greater extent that the perpetrator felt that his power within the relationship was threatened. It seems that male perpetrators tend not to identify the violent behaviors exercised against their partners or the threat experienced within the relationship as an adaptive mechanism for reducing their psychological discomfort (Expósito, 2011).

On the other hand, the results pointed out the effect of a statistically significant interaction between the adopted role on the scene and the A-IPVAW on the perceived severity of the situation (see Figure 3). In the protagonist condition, lower scores for A-IPVAW predicted a greater perception of severity in comparison with higher scores; however, in the observer condition, A-IPVAW did not predict the perceived severity. When men adopted the role of observer on the scene, the social norm was active and the situation was perceived as severe, as the participants submitted above-average scores for this. However, when men adopted the role of protagonist, adaptive mechanisms were activated, so the participants with high levels of A-IPVAW perceived the situation as less severe in comparison with participants with low levels of A-IPVAW, who rejected the violence to a greater extent.

In addition, the effect of a significant interaction between the adopted role on the scene and benevolent sexism on the justification of the controlling behavior was found (see

Figure 4). In the protagonist condition, low levels (vs. high levels) of benevolent sexism predicted less justification of controlling behaviour; however, sexism did not predict this in the observer condition. When men adopted the role of observer on the scene, they graded above average, so they tended to justify the controlling behaviors. In contrast, men who adopted the role of protagonist activated adaptive mechanisms, so when they scored low in benevolent sexism, they rejected the situation of violence more and justified the aggressor's behavior less. Meanwhile, men with high levels justified the controlling behaviors to a greater extent.

On the other hand, as the previous data pointed out, men identified to a greater extent the controlling behavior and the perceived threat due to the loss of power within the relationship in other peer couples. However, at the same time, there is an appeared to be no effect of ideology on the social perception of dating violence of men who adopted the role of observer. According to the data, they perceived the severity of the situation, but at the same time justified it. This could indicate that they took on passive attitudes toward dating violence in cases where they were not directly involved, which happened in the situation of Juan and Maria. These results are consistent with the findings of Donoso-Vázquez et al. (2018) in a study with adolescents, where boys adopted more passive behaviors when they observed gender violence, in comparison with girls, who provided more helping behaviors when dealing with the victims.

According to Hypothesis 2, it was expected that the IV “means of control” that was used (face-to-face vs. WhatsApp) predicted the social perception of controlling behaviors in the relationship. Specifically, it was believed men who were allocated to the WhatsApp condition would identify control in the couple to a lesser extent than men who were allocated to the face-to-face condition. In opposition to our predictions, the means of control that was used did not predict any dependent variables (perceived severity of the situation, justification of violent behavior, perception of controlling behavior and threat due to the loss of power), rejecting H2. These findings were consistent with the results obtained in Study 1 and suggested that young men seems to normalize and accept technologies as new ways of exercising controlling behaviors in the couple (Wright, 2017). Therefore, this type of behaviors could be identified alike in both contexts: technological (WhatsApp) and traditional (face-to-face).

Nevertheless, the results pointed out the effect of a significant interaction between the means of control and benevolent sexism on the measure of perceived threat due to the loss of power (see Figure 5). In the face-to-face condition, high levels (vs. low levels) of

benevolent sexism predicted a greater perception of threat; however, in the WhatsApp condition, benevolent sexism did not predict a perceived threat. These results suggest that men experience threat due to the loss of power when an episode of control occurs through WhatsApp, as they submitted above-average scores for this. However, the fact that benevolent sexism did not affect the perception of threat seems to indicate that men have normalized these types of technological situations in their relationships, probably because they happen very frequently (Flores & Browne, 2017; Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018). Conversely, they are less accustomed to experience these situations face-to-face with their partners, so men with high score for benevolent sexism experience a greater threat due to the loss of power, in comparison with those men with low benevolent sexism.

Finally, as in Study 1, the data proved the influence of sexism, myths about romantic love, and the A-IPVAW on the social perception of controlling behaviors against the partner, which supported Hypothesis 3 (a, b and c). Specifically, according to the initial predictions, it was found that high levels of hostile sexism predicted a greater justification of the violent behavior and a lower perceived severity of the situation, replicating the findings of Herrera et al. (2012) and Herrero et al. (2017). Additionally, in agreement with the results of Valor-Segura, et al. (2011), high scores for benevolent sexism predicted a greater justification of aggressors' behavior. Consistent with the findings of Martín-Fernández et al. (2018) and Waltermaurer (2012), a high A-IPVAW predicted a greater justification of violent behavior, as well as a lower perceived severity and a lower identification of controlling behavior in the couple. Finally, in agreement with the results of Redondo et al. (2011), high scores for myths about romantic love predicted a high justification of the violence and low perception of severity. However, the ideological variables did not predict the perceived threat due to the loss of power within the relationship, rejecting the H3d. Even so, these results revealed that high beliefs in ideological variables constitute an important risk factor of dating violence.

General Discussion

The present research aimed to explore the social perception that young people have about controlling behaviors in relationships, analysing the influence of the adopted role on the scene and the means of control, as well as the effect of ideological variables (i.e., ambivalent sexism, A-IPVAW, and myths of romantic love). In an exploratory way, both studies pointed out that both women and men frequently perceived controlling behaviors in

other young couples; however, few of them recognise suffering (women) or exercising (men) control in their relationships.

Regarding the IV “adopted role on the scene”, on the one hand, women (Study 1) perceived a greater risk of dating violence when they adopted the role of observer (vs. protagonist) in the described episode; on the other hand, men (Study 2) identified controlling behavior and threat due to the loss of power within the relationship to a greater extent when they adopt the role of observer (vs. protagonist) on the scene of dating violence. Instead, an effect of the IV “means of control” on the perception of dating violence was not found according to the described episode in either study. Even so, these findings suggest that controlling behaviors are reproduced through new technologies. Thus, due to the high frequency with which controlling behaviors occur in the technological context (Flores & Browne, 2017; Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018), these behaviors seem to be normalized, with young people accepting what is common as normal. Finally, this research provides empirical support to previous studies as it demonstrates the influence of sexism (Gracia et al., 2014; Herrera et al., 2012; Herrero, et al., 2017; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018, Valor-Segura et al., 2011, Vidal-Fernández & Megías, 2014), myths about romantic love (Borrajo et al., 2015, Bosch & Ferrer, 2012; Nardi-Rodríguez, et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2013), and the A-IPVAW (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018; Waltermaurer, 2012) on the perception that both women and men have about dating violence (Study 1 and 2).

It should be noted that this study has several limitations that can most certainly be rectified in the future. An important issue is that it did not ask the participants if they had previously received education or academic training on gender-based violence, which could affect their perception of dating violence in the described episode, so future studies should monitor this variable. Furthermore, the methodology of scenes represents another important limitation. Due to the impossibility of recreating real-life situations about dating violence, the degree of spontaneity, precision, and real experience that the hypothetical situations achieve should be treated with caution. In addition, as all participants are university students from Spain, future studies should try to work with heterogeneous samples that would allow for the possible influence of cultural values, age, and socio-demographics to be analysed. Finally, when we assessed the manipulations’ efficacy, we observed that the questions that were used for checking the manipulation of the IV “role on the scene” (MC₁ and MC₂) generated confusion among participants. Specifically, we observed that some participants who belonged to the protagonist condition failed in MC₁

and MC₂ in both studies. We believe it could be due to the fact that these participants did not identify themselves with the protagonist of the episode, either aggressor or victim. Consequently, although we indicated to them that it was a hypothetical scenario about their relationships, they failed in the experimental manipulation. This could be a way to deny that these situations of violence are manifested in their relationships. Therefore, future studies should consider this limitation and evaluate these denial mechanisms that are used by the participants in situations of dating violence. However, despite these limitations, these studies contribute to the previous literature, providing new information about the role of young people as observers of dating violence.

The present research evidences that when participants adopt the role of protagonist, women perceive the risk of suffering from dating violence to a greater extent, whereas men experience a lesser threat due to the loss of power within the relationship. Additionally, this research underscores the importance of ambivalent sexism and A-IPVAW women as predictive variables in the social perception of dating violence, specifically in the perceived severity and justification of violent behavior. Moreover, it shows that myths about romantic love constitute an important risk factor of dating violence, as these myths predict a low perceived risk of dating violence amongst women and a high justification of controlling behavior amongst men. Likewise, given the fact that both studies demonstrated the influence of ideological variables on the social perception of dating violence online, this research contributes to the previous literature by demonstrating the importance of using ICT as a tool for combating sexism and educating on equality, just as Navarro-Pérez et al. (2019) recently tested in their research. In short, this research reveals the need to develop intervention programs that are based on the risk's perception of dating violence, addressing the problem from a broad gender perspective, which includes the importance of observers as key figures in the confrontation of violence against women.

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Supplementary Material

Controlling Behaviors in Couple Relationships in the Digital Age: Acceptability of Gender
Violence, Sexism, and Myths about Romantic Love

1. Study 1

1. 1. Experimental Manipulation

Protagonist Condition

“Imagine that you have met some friends to go out tonight. Your boyfriend, whom you have been dating for 3 years, is going to stay at home. While you’re getting dressed, your boyfriend comes by to see you. When he arrives, he asks you what time and with whom you will meet (face to face condition) / your boyfriend asks you through WhatsApp what time and with whom you will meet (WhatsApp condition). You answer him: “I already told you I’m going out with classmates and we’re meeting at around ten o’clock.” He keeps asking questions insistently, since he wants to know where you’re going and what time you’re coming home. You answer that you’re going to dinner and after that, you are going to a downtown pub, but you don’t know what time you’re coming home. Later, when you have finished getting dressed and he sees that you’ve put on a tight dress with a low neckline (face to face condition) / you write to tell him that you’re leaving. Quickly, your boyfriend answers and requests you a photo to see how beautiful you look. However, when he receives the picture and sees that you’ve put on a tight dress with a low neckline (WhatsApp condition), he tells you that you look too provocative to meet friends. You feel good about the clothes you’re wearing and you don’t want to change your outfit. Then your boyfriend gets upset and you start to argue. In the end, after a long discussion, you decide to change your clothes and end the discussion as soon as possible.”

Observer Condition

“María has met some friends to go out tonight. Her boyfriend, Juan, whom she has been dating for 3 years, is going to stay at home. While María is getting dressed, Juan goes home to see her. When he arrives, he asks María what time and with whom she will meet (face to face condition) / Juan asks to María through WhatsApp what time and with whom she will meet (WhatsApp condition). María answers him: “I already told you I’m going out with classmates and we’re meeting at around ten o’clock.” Juan keeps asking questions insistently since he wants to know where she’s going and what time she’s coming home. María answers him that she’s going to dinner and after that, she’s going to a downtown pub, but she doesn’t know what time she’s coming home. Later, when María has finished getting dressed and Juan sees that she’s put on a tight dress with a low

neckline (face to face condition) / she writes to Juan to tell him that she's leaving. Quickly, Juan answers and requests that María send him a photo to see how beautiful she looks. However, when Juan receives the picture and sees that she's put on a tight dress with a low neckline (WhatsApp condition), he tells María that she looks too provocative to meet friends. María feels good about the clothes she's wearing and she doesn't want to change her outfit. Then Juan gets upset and they start to argue. In the end, after a long discussion, María decides to change her clothes and end the discussion as soon as possible."

2. Study 2

2. 1. Experimental Manipulation

Protagonist Condition

“Imagine that your girlfriend, whom you have been dating for 3 years, has met some friends to go out tonight and you are going to stay at home. While your girlfriend is getting dressed, you go to her home to see her. When you arrive, you ask her what time and with whom she is meeting (face to face condition) / you ask her through WhatsApp what time and with whom she is meeting (WhatsApp condition). Your girlfriend answers: “I already told you I’m going out with classmates and we’re meeting at around ten o’clock.” You keep asking questions insistently, since you want to know where she’s going and what time she’s coming home. Your girlfriend answers that she’s going to dinner and after that, she’s going to a downtown pub, but she doesn’t know what time she’s coming home. Later, when your girlfriend has finished getting dressed and you see that she’s put on a tight dress with a low neckline (face to face condition) / she writes to tell you that she’s leaving. Quickly, you answer and request that your girlfriend send you a photo so you can see how beautiful she looks. However, when you receive the picture and see that she’s put on a tight dress with a low neckline (WhatsApp condition), you tell her that she looks too provocative to meet friends. She feels good about the clothes she’s wearing and doesn’t want to change her outfit. Then you get upset and you start to argue. In the end, after a long discussion, your girlfriend decides to change her clothes and end the discussion as soon as possible.”

Observer Condition

“María has met some friends to go out tonight. Her boyfriend, Juan, whom she has been dating for 3 years, is going to stay at home. While María is getting dressed, Juan goes to her home to see her. When he arrives, he asks to María what time and with whom she is meeting (face to face condition) / Juan asks to María through WhatsApp what time and with whom she is meeting (WhatsApp condition). María answers him: “I already told you I’m going out with classmates and we’re meeting at around ten o’clock.” Juan keeps asking questions insistently, since he wants to know where she’s going and what time she’s coming home. María answers him that she’s going to dinner and after that, she’s going to a downtown pub, but she doesn’t know what time she’s coming home.

Chapter 2

Later, when María has finished getting dressed and Juan sees that she's put on a tight dress with a low neckline (face to face condition) / she writes to Juan to tell him that she's leaving. Quickly, Juan answers and requests that María send him a photo so he can see how beautiful she looks. However, when Juan receives the picture and sees that she's put on a tight dress with a low neckline (WhatsApp condition), he tells to María that she looks too provocative to meet friends. María feels good about the clothes she's wearing and she doesn't want to change her outfit. Then Juan gets upset and they start to argue. In the end, after a long discussion, María decides to change her clothes and end the discussion as soon as possible."

Perception of Cyberdating Abuse from the Victims' Perspective: Effect of the Type of Suffered Behavior and Gender

María Dolores Sánchez-Hernández

M^a Carmen Herrera Enríquez

Francisca Expósito Jiménez

Mind, Brain, and Behavior Research Center (CIMCYC)

Department of Social Psychology

University of Granada

This article is under review in *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*:

Sánchez-Hernández, M. D., Herrera, M. C., y Expósito, F. (under review). Perception of Cyberdating Abuse from the Victims' Perspective: Effect of the Type of Suffered Behavior and Gender.

Abstract

Direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol, although both are manifestations of cyberdating abuse (CDA), seem to show different intentionality and impact. Furthermore, how young people perceive and experience CDA varies by gender. However, no studies have examined whether the victims' perception of offense and severity in an incident of CDA and the motivations that they attribute to their aggressor's behavior vary by the type of victimization and gender. We implemented a between-groups experimental design ($N = 92$ young adults; 56.5% men) to address this gap in the literature. Participants randomly completed an essay in which the type of CDA victimization (direct cyberaggression or cybercontrol) was experimentally manipulated and then responded to dependent measures. The results showed that (a) direct cyberaggression (vs. cybercontrol) victimization was perceived as more offensive and severe; (b) women (vs. men) perceived greater offense and severity in a CDA victimization incident; (c) direct cyberaggression victimization was more frequently motivated by anger/frustration and online disinhibition (OD), whereas cybercontrol victimization was motivated by personality and jealousy; and (d) a higher percentage of men indicated that their partners had perpetrated CDA against them because of the partners' personality, whereas a higher percentage of women indicated that they had been victims of CDA because their partners experienced OD. We discussed the theoretical and practical contributions of our findings in the CDA field.

Keywords: cybercontrol, direct cyberaggression, victimization, gender, perception

Perception of Cyberdating Abuse from the Victims' Perspective: Effect of the Type of Suffered Behavior and Gender

Cyberdating abuse (CDA), which integrates a wide range of behaviors facilitated by digital media, is a widespread health and social problem in young people's romantic relationships (Fernet et al. 2019). There is no consensus on definitions and concepts to designate intimate partner violence (IPV) using the Internet, but the term CDA has been the most used in literature (for a review, see Caridade et al., 2019). It refers to the "control, harassment, stalking, and abuse of one's dating partner via technology and social media" (Zweig et al., 2014, p. 1306). Such behaviors may be directed at current or ex-partners with whom perpetrators have or have had a bonding characterized by affection, sexual involvement, and/or dating (Hinduja & Patchin, 2011).

CDA prevalence rates vary across studies because of ambiguity around their operationalization, measures, and methodological characteristics employed (e.g., sample size, sampling context, and time interval considered; Brown & Hegarty, 2021; Soto & Ibabe, 2022). However, evidence shows that CDA is increasing alarmingly worldwide (Van Ouytsel et al. 2017), with prevalence ranging from 5.8 to 92% for victimization and from 6% to 93.7 % for perpetration among young people (for a review, see Caridade et al., 2019). The situation is worrying; several researchers suggest young people often do not recognize CDA they have experienced (Belotti et al., 2022; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020), which leads to the risk that, by minimizing, denying or normalizing these behaviors, sensitivity to CDA and the ability to respond to it can be lost.

CDA is a complex phenomenon that needs to be examined within the context in which it takes place. It is not enough to examine the frequency with which it occurs; it is essential to analyze contextual factors such as the meaning that those involved attribute to the CDA experiences, the perceived severity of the cyberabusive behaviors, or the impact CDA has on victims. Although interest in examining the effects of CDA victimization among youth has increased recently, less effort has been devoted to understanding how victims perceive and experience the CDA situations.

Specifically, research has shown that the behaviors most exercised against partners by young people and least identified as manifestations of IPV are cybercontrol behaviors (e.g., Donoso-Vazquez et al., 2018). On the other hand, the literature has revealed that, in comparison with men, women are more likely to identify manifestations of violence within relationships (e.g., Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018; Sylaska & Walters, 2014), perceive

violent incidents as more severe (e.g., Brown et al., 2022), and experience a greater emotional impact from CDA victimization (i.e., offense, anguish, fear; Stonard et al., 2017). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have experimentally examined whether the victims' perception in terms of offense and severity about an incident of CDA vary by the type of behavior experienced and gender. From a gender-sensitive perspective, our study will address this gap in the literature.

CDA Behaviors

According to Borrajo et al. (2015b), the set of online behaviors that make up the CDA phenomenon can be classified into two types of abuse: *cybercontrol*, that is, online abusive behaviors intended to control and surveil the partner/ex-partner via digital media (e.g., checking the partner/ex-partner's mobile phone without permission or sending insidious messages to the partner/ex-partner), and *direct cyberaggression*, that is, deliberate behaviors aimed at harming the partner/ex-partner, such as insulting, threatening, or humiliating them through technology (e.g., sending sexually explicit photos of the partner/ex-partner without their consent via WhatsApp or social network sites). Both direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol behaviors manifest violence within intimate partner relationships and seem to have detrimental effects on the well-being of individuals and relationships (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). However, they present differences in terms of their nature that should be taken into account.

Previous literature has suggested that direct cyberaggression behaviors take on more explicit and recognizable manifestations of IPV, whereas cybercontrol includes indirect abusive behaviors that may go unnoticed (Borrajo et al., 2015b; Stonard et al., 2017). In particular, cybercontrolling behaviors are often perceived as a consequence of digital media use rather than CDA manifestations (Belotti et al., 2022). The features of the digital environment (e.g., easy access to the partner's information, constant connection without temporal or geographical limits, the possibility of carrying out the abusive behavior without being seen by others) could be legitimizing cybercontrol against one's partner by not involving a clear violation of the partner's privacy and, therefore, of moral codes of behavior (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). Moreover, many young people tend to accept and normalize cybercontrol behaviors from their partners by interpreting them as expressions of love and concern (Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018).

Such observed differences in the perception of these CDA behaviors seem, in turn, to be consistent with their prevalence rates. International research has indicated that rates of direct cyberaggression victimization range from 14% (Borrajo et al., 2015b) to 31.7% (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2016), whereas cybercontrol victimization ranges from 65% (Van Ouytsel et al., 2017) to 81% (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2016). Similarly, the prevalence of direct aggression perpetration ranges from 10.6% (Borrajo et al., 2015a) to 14.7% (Caridade et al., 2019), and that of cybercontrol perpetration ranges from 49.6% (Van Ouytsel et al., 2017) to 88.4% (Borrajo et al., 2015b).

Previous literature has suggested that direct cyberaggression behaviors seem to receive greater social sanction (Reed et al., 2021b), which could explain why they show lower prevalence ratios, whereas cybercontrol is more normalized and accepted within romantic relationships. Considering the above, it would be reasonable to think that experiencing direct cyberaggression behaviors perpetrated by a partner is perceived as more offensive and severe than suffering controlling behaviors. We have tested this assumption in our research.

Gender Differences in CDA Perception

The literature has amply demonstrated that the way people perceive IPV varies by gender. Most research indicates that women are more likely to identify IPV than men in offline (e.g., Sylaska & Walters, 2014) and online contexts (e.g., Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018). Also, it has been shown that women, compared to men, show a greater tendency to attribute responsibility for events to the abuser and to view violent incidents as more severe (Brown et al., 2022; Martín-Fernández et al., 2018). In contrast, men tend to minimize IPV as a problem and approve of it as a conflict resolution strategy to a greater extent than women, agreeing with the existence of male privilege (Sylaska & Walters, 2014). For example, Díaz-Aguado (2003) observed, in a sample of adolescents, that a large proportion of the girls interviewed rejected the use of IPV in any circumstances, while most of the boys justified it. Similarly, Valor et al. (2011) observed in a general population sample that, compared to women, men were more likely to blame the female victim and more likely to exonerate the male perpetrator after being exposed to an IPV scenario.

On the other hand, empirical research has shown that women report a significantly more negative impact of CDA on their well-being than men. In particular, women seem to experience more physical and mental health and behavioral problems, such as depressive

symptoms, anxiety, fear, suicidal ideation, substance use, or sexually transmitted diseases, as a result of CDA than men (e.g., Exner-Cortens et al. 2013; Stonard et al., 2017). Moreover, while men often perceive a positive connotation in suffering CDA behaviors (i.e., they feel protected and loved by their partner), women tend to perceive these behaviors as more upsetting and offending and experience greater fear (Stonard et al., 2017). Some findings suggest that, in comparison with women, men perceive it to be easier to stop or escape from their own situation of CDA victimization (Brown et al., 2022).

In sum, although both men and women seem to be involved in CDA, the way they perceive and experience such violence is different: young women show a higher level of awareness than young men in identifying situations of IPV and seem to experience greater emotional impact from victimization. Therefore, we have adopted a gender-sensitive approach, assuming that CDA is gender asymmetric.

Overview Research

Building on the reviewed literature, we conducted an experimental study aimed at examining differences in the perception of CDA from the victim's perspective. In particular, we first examined whether there are differences in the perceived offense and severity of a CDA incident as a function of the type of victimization (i.e., direct cyberaggression or cybercontrol) and the participant's gender. Specifically, we expected that participants who were allocated to the direct cyberaggression condition would perceive greater offense (Hypothesis 1a) and severity (Hypothesis 1b) than those belonging to the cybercontrol condition, because of the inherent nature of each type of behavior—cyberaggression involves explicit manifestations of violence, whereas cybercontrol is an indirect form of abuse that is more legitimized in society (Borrajo et al., 2015b). Similarly, in line with research indicating that women are more likely to identify violence and its severity in the online context (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2022) and experience greater distress than men from suffering CDA (Stonard et al., 2017), we hypothesized that female participants would perceive greater offence (Hypothesis 2a) and severity (Hypothesis 2b) compared to male participants. Finally, we expected to find an interaction effect between the type of victimization and gender: women belonging to the cyberaggression condition would identify greater offence (Hypothesis 3a) and greater severity (Hypothesis 3b) than women belonging to the cybercontrol condition, whereas we would not expect to find this effect to be significant in men, because women are more

susceptible to the recognition of IPV, especially when it takes on more explicit manifestations implying the intentionality of harming the partner (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018).

Second, few researchers have paid attention to examining the aggressor's motivations to commit CDA from the victims' perspective. To our knowledge, only one study has addressed this question directly using a quantitative measure with a multiple-choice response format (see Borrajo et al., 2015a). The results showed that the majority of victims (51.4%) indicated that their partners had exercised CDA against them in a context of jealousy, 26.1% reported that it happened in a game or joking context, 23.9% reported a retaliation situation (i.e., reactive violence), and 12.8% reported a manifestation of anger or annoyance as the context. However, in the study in question, results were not examined by gender or each type of victimization (direct cyber aggression vs. cyber control). Moreover, these types of quantitative CDA measures that include "incident-specific follow-up questions" to capture motivations for CDA perpetration have received criticism in the literature (see Hamby, 2016).

In our study, we aimed to address this limitation by employing an open-response format to better understand the context in which violence takes place and examine whether other motivations emerge beyond those contemplated by Borrajo et al. (2015). Furthermore, we extended their work by exploring motivations for CDA as a function of the type of CDA victimization (direct cyberaggression vs. cybercontrol) and the gender of the participants. We consider it essential to investigate whether victims can determine the reasons that lead their partners to exercise CDA behaviors against them, not only to know the context in which each type of CDA arises but also to understand how victims interpret the CDA situation based on gender and how such interpretation could influence, in turn, their perception of severity and offense and their relational dynamics.

Because this was an exploratory objective in our research, we did not hypothesize about the frequency of emergent motivations and their possible differences according to CDA behaviors (direct cyberaggression vs. cybercontrol) and gender. However, we anticipated that we could find differences in the motivations that CDA victims attribute to their aggressors' behavior depending on the type of abuse suffered, given the different nature of each behaviors. In addition, Reed et al. (2021a) observed in a sample of adolescent students that the main motivations for direct cyberaggression against a partner were being upset or angry or being in a situation of conflict and fighting, whereas the main

motivations for cybercontrol were insecurity, normally in situations of jealousy and suspicions of infidelity.

Similarly, because gender differences have been predicted in the perception and motivations of CDA, as well as in the tactics for its perpetration (e.g., Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2021a), we also anticipate that motivations for CDA perpetration according to the victim's perspective might also differ by gender. Although the previous findings were not conclusive, the literature has suggested that the motivations that girls express for exercising CDA are more related to insecurity, jealousy, or the need to save the relationship at all costs (e.g., Baker & Carreño, 2016; Lucero et al., 2016; Stonard, 2017), while the CDA exercised by boys seems to be more severe and is more motivated by anger or a perceived threat to their status within the relationship (e.g., Reed et al., 2021a, Reed et al., 2021b).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Of the 284 people who took the survey, 66 (23.24%) were excluded because they did not complete the full questionnaire, 93 (32.75%) because they did not respond to the experimental manipulation (i.e., they reported not having suffered CDA), 21 (7.39%) because they responded incorrectly to the experimental manipulation or the manipulation check item (i.e., the experimental condition they were in), and 12 (4.23%) because they failed attention check items (e.g., “If you are reading this question, answer with 3”). Thus, the final sample consisted of 92 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.74$, $SD = 3.63$, range 18–32 years; 56.5% men). All of them had a Spanish nationality and a heterosexual orientation. Half of all participants reported being in a dating relationship (55.4%), 34.8% participants were single, 8.7% were cohabiting, and 1.1% was married.

We implemented a between-subjects factorial experimental design manipulating the type of victimization suffered in two levels, direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol, using the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954). Specifically, we designed the experimental conditions based on the operational definition of CDA by Borrajo et al. (2015b) and randomly assigned to participants to one of these conditions (direct cyberaggression: $n = 40$ participants [22 men and 18 women]; cybercontrol [30 men and 22 women]: $n = 52$ participants).

We used the Qualtrics research platform to develop an online survey containing the experimental manipulation and the variable of interest. Following a snowball sampling, we distributed the survey through an open-access link in several online social media (i.e., email and social network sites: Facebook and WhatsApp). The participants had to fulfill the following criteria: (a) having Spanish nationality, (b) being between 18 and 35 years of age¹, (c) having a heterosexual orientation, and (d) having been in a past or current romantic relationship. Before completing the questionnaire, we informed to participants about the study's goal and its anonymous and voluntary nature. First, they had to give their consent to voluntarily collaborate in our research, according to the Declaration of Helsinki, and then fill in a single questionnaire based on their personal opinions and experiences. They were not paid for their participation. Participants took approximately 20 minutes to complete the task. This study was conducted after receiving the approval of Ethics Committee of University of Granada.

Measures

Ambivalent Sexism

The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Expósito et al., 1998) was used to assess the participants' sexist attitudes. This measure is composed of 22 Likert-type items evaluating two dimensions: (a) *hostile sexism* (eleven items, e.g., "Women try to gain power by controlling men") and (b) *benevolent sexism* (eleven items, e.g., "A good woman should be put on a pedestal by her man"). The response format was a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The average scores of hostile and benevolent sexism were independently calculated: high scores showed a high degree of such sexist attitudes. In this sample, we obtained a Cronbach's α coefficient of .93 for hostile sexism and .82 for benevolent sexism.

Cyberdating Abuse Victimization

The cybervictimization subscale of the Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ; Borrajo, et al., 2015b) was first administered to activate possible situations of

¹ We delimited the age range of young adults based on the term *emerging adulthood* coined by Arnett (2000). It refers to the new developmental stage that emerges as a result of environmental factors (i.e., sociocultural and economic) which seem to be delaying the acquisition of the traditional markers of adulthood (e.g., marriage, parenthood, financial independence, and home ownership). Likewise, previous researchers have used this same standard to delimit the stage of emerging adulthood (e.g., Oleszkowicz & Misztela, 2015; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020).

cyberviolence experienced in the context of the couple. This measure was composed of 20 items divided into two dimensions: (a) *direct cyberaggression* (eleven items, e.g., “My partner has created a fake profile about me on a social network to cause me problems”) and (b) *monitoring/cybercontrol* (nine items, e.g., “My partner or ex-partner has used my passwords [phone, social networks, email] to snoop on my messages and/or contacts without my permission”). The response format was a 6-point Likert-type scale with the anchors 1 (*never*), 2 (*not in the last year, but it occurred before*), 3 (*rarely: 1 or 2 times*), 4 (*sometimes: between 3 and 10 times*), 5 (*often: between 10 and 20 times*), and 6 (*always: more than 20 times*). The average score of perpetration and victimization was calculated for both dimensions (i.e., direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol), where high scores indicated a high frequency of victimization. Both factors demonstrated adequate psychometric properties: a Cronbach’s α of .81 for direct cyberaggression victimization and .93 for cybercontrol victimization.

Experimental Manipulation

Based on the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954), participants were instructed to remember and describe in writing a situation in which their partner or ex-partner had exercised one cyberabusive behavior against them, depending on experimental condition (i.e., direct cyberaggression vs. cybercontrol). More specifically, we gave them the following instructions: “Recall and describe a situation in which your current partner or ex-partner used some technological means (social networks, Whatsapp, SMS, etc.) with the intention of,” (for the direct cyberaggression condition), “deliberately harming you (e.g. insulting you, threatening you, humiliating you),” or (for the cybercontrol condition), “controlling you (i.e., monitoring you and invading your privacy).”

After describing the incident, participants who had indicated that they had suffered the situation above answered other short questions about it.

Relationship Described in the Incident

To control whether the participants were referring to their current or past relationship and its possible effect on the perception of the described CDA incident (i.e., recognition bias, see Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020), we designed the following item

with a two-alternative categorical response format: “The situation you have just described refers to your: (a) current relationship or (b) past relationship.”

Frequency of Victimization

Because some studies suggest that young people tend to normalize certain CDA behaviors as a consequence of the high frequency with which they occur in their relationships (e.g., Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018), we controlled for the frequency with which participants had experienced the described situation. Specifically, we designed the following item based on the work of Borrajo et al. (2015b): “How many times has your partner or ex-partner engaged in the described behavior against you?” Participants answered using a 5-point Likert-type scale with the anchors 1 (*not in the last year, but it occurred before*), 2 (*rarely: 1 or 2 times*), 3 (*sometimes: between 3 and 10 times*), 4 (*often: between 10 and 20 times*), and 5 (*always: more than 20 times*).

Offense

We measured the offense experienced in the scenario described using previous research by Valor-Segura et al. (2014) as a basis. Specifically, we used the item, “How offensive did you find the described behavior of your partner/ex-partner towards you?” with a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (*not at all offensive*) to 7 (*extremely offensive*).

Severity

To assess the perceived severity of the incident described, we used the following item based on Milesi et al. (2019) and Sánchez-Hernández et al. (2020): “How severe do you consider the behavior described above?” The format response was Likert-type ranging from 1 (*not severe at all*) to 7 (*extremely severe*).

Motivations for Perpetration

To assess the causes to which participants ascribed cybervictimization by their partners as described in the critical incident, we used the item developed by Borrajo et al. (2015b) for this purpose (“For what reasons do you think your partner or ex-partner was able to carry out that behavior towards you through new technologies [Social networks, Whatsapp, SMS, etc.]?”). Nevertheless, we used an open-ended answer (i.e., “Please

describe briefly”) with the aim of contemplating possible emerging categories beyond those described by Borrajo et al. (2015b) in the development of their scale (i.e., jealousy, game/joke, frustration/anger, discussions, personality, and reactive violence).

Manipulation Check

We designed one item to check whether the experimental manipulation was effective and whether participants had answered to dependent variables according to the incident they had just recalled (i.e., “In the previous situation, you were asked to recall and describe an aggressive act by your partner/ex-partner towards you with the intention of: [a] deliberately harming you, or [b] controlling or monitoring you”).

Sociodemographic Information

Data about participants’ gender (“What is your gender? Male/Female/Other [specify]”), age (“What is your age?”), and relational status (“What is your relational status? Single/Dating/Cohabiting/Married/ Other [specify]”) were collected.²

Statistical Analysis Strategy

To estimate the effect size in our sample, first we carried out a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Version 3.1.9.4) with our sample ($N = 92$; $1-\beta = 80\%$; $\alpha = .05$) to ANCOVA with four groups, one degree of freedom, and five covariates. The design had the ability to detect a medium effect size, $f^2 = .29$.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (Version 23). Prior to performing the main analyses, we checked the assumptions of normality and multilinearity (see Table 1). We also estimated the main descriptive statistics and the associations between the study variables through correlation analyses (Table 1). Moreover, we conducted independent samples t test analyses to estimate gender differences; gender was included as the independent variable (IV; 1 = *man*; 2 = *woman*) and offense, severity, frequency, and hostile and benevolent sexism as dependent variables (DVs). Thereafter, we conducted a chi-square test to check the manipulation efficacy, further using the phi coefficient to

² In our analysis, we controlled for age because some previous research has observed that general aggressiveness appears to decrease with increasing age (e.g., Bongers et al., 2003). Similarly, we controlled for relational status because previous findings have shown that it affects the frequency of CDA victimization in youth: single people seem to report the highest prevalence of CDA victimization (Barroso-Corroto et al., 2022). Sexist attitudes are also known factors decreasing the perception of the severity of CDA incidents and its identification in young people (e.g., Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020), so we controlled for sexist attitudes.

estimate effect sizes ($\geq .02/.15/.35$ indicates small/medium/large effects; Cohen 1988). We then carried out a bifactorial multivariate analysis of variance (MANCOVA) to examine our predictions about the influence of the type of victimization (Hypothesis 1), gender (Hypothesis 2), and their interaction effect (Hypothesis 3) on the perception of the severity and offensiveness of the CDA suffered. The type of victimization (1 = *direct cyberaggression*; 2 = *cybercontrol*) and gender were included as the IVs, and the severity and offensiveness perceived as DVs. Ultimately, we included the relationship described in the critical incident (1 = *current*; 2 = *past*) and hostile sexist as covariables. The covariates age, frequency of CDA, and benevolent sexism were excluded from the analysis because they were not found to be correlated with any of the DVs (see Table 1). When the emerging interactions were significant, we performed simple a slope analyses to facilitate their interpretation.

Finally, we conducted a deductive content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to examine differences in the perceived motivations to CDA from the victims' perspective (see Table 2 and Figures 2 and 3). First, we generated a main document containing the motivations described verbatim by the participants in each experimental condition. Second, the three authors each independently read all the answers to the question, noting down recurring themes. Next, we discussed the themes that emerged in creating and defining the categories, which were collected in a codebook. In particular, we followed Borrajo et al.'s (2015b) categorical classification of motivations for CDA and identified other emergent motives in participants' responses. Following the considerations of Crocker et al. (1988), we then selected two experts—psychologists with research experience in the field of IPV—who were unaware of the objectives of the study (for more information, see Supplementary Material [SM1.1]). Each judge coded the responses and classified them according to our themes indicating which motivations were present. We then tested the inter-rater agreement for each motivation; in accordance with Landis and Koch (1977), the kappa values showed adequate reliability across all motivational codes: 0.72 for jealousy, 0.85 for anger/frustration, 0.80 for arguments/verbal confrontation, 0.76 for personality, 0.75 for re-establishment of control and/or power, and 0.90 for online disinhibition (OD). Thereafter, we calculated the occurrences of motivation codes and conducted several chi-square tests to examine differences depending on the type of CDA victimization (i.e., direct cyberaggression or cybercontrol) and the participants' gender (Table 2). Sankey plots were also drawn using Atlas.ti (version 22) to facilitate the visualization of data (see

Figures 2 and 3, respectively). All research data and scripts are publicly available and can be accessed at the Open Science Framework ([OSF](#)).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

As shown in Table 1, we did not observe the problem of multicollinearity because correlations among variables were less than 0.80 (Shrestha, 2020). Concerning normality, the analysis showed that the skewness and kurtosis values for all measures were within acceptable limits of ± 2 (ranging between -1.15 and 2.02), which indicated a normal distribution (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014).

Regarding correlation analyses, the main results showed that the type of victimization was negatively related to offense and severity: Participants in the direct cyberaggression (vs. cybercontrol) condition scored higher in offense and severity. Similarly, gender was positively associated with offense and severity, with women (vs. men) manifesting higher scores in both variables. Furthermore, the perceived offense was positively related to the perception of severity. Hostile sexism was also negatively associated with the perception of offense and severity and positively related to benevolent sexism. Likewise, hostile sexism and benevolent sexism were negatively related to gender, indicating that men scored higher than women in both dimensions.

Consistent with correlation analyses, the independent *t*-test analysis showed that women reported a greater perception of offense and severity in the described incident than men. Moreover, men (vs. women) manifested greater levels of hostile and benevolent sexism (see Table 1).

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables*

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. |
|--|--------|--------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----|
| 1. Type of victimization (IV) ^a | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Gender ^b | –.03 | – | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Offense | –.28** | .34** | – | | | | | | | |
| 4. Severity | –.32** | .40** | .61** | – | | | | | | |
| 5. Frequency | –.03 | .13 | .15 | .13 | – | | | | | |
| 6. Relationship described ^c | –.19 | –.12 | .20 | .30** | .30** | – | | | | |
| 7. Hostile sexism | .04 | –.46** | –.26* | –.33** | –.21* | –.07 | – | | | |
| 8. Benevolent sexism | –.06 | –.47** | –.12 | –.16 | –.01 | .16 | .46** | – | | |
| 9. Age | .07 | .05 | –.01 | .06 | –.07 | .11 | –.06 | .10 | – | |
| 10. Marital status ^d | .05 | .22* | .19 | .14 | –.02 | –.25* | –.07 | –.22* | .13 | – |
| <i>M (SD)</i> | – | – | 5.82 (0.99) | 5.53 (1.07) | 3.05 (1.30) | – | 2.15 (1.06) | 1.92 (0.76) | 22.74 (3.63) | – |
| <i>Mmen (SD)</i> | – | – | 5.52 (0.92) | 5.15 (1.00) | 2.90 (1.23) | – | 2.58 (1.03) | 2.23 (0.80) | 22.58 (3.85) | – |
| <i>Mwomen (SD)</i> | – | – | 6.20 (0.97) | 6.03 (0.97) | 3.25 (1.37) | – | 1.59 (0.48) | 1.51 (0.48) | 22.95 (3.35) | – |
| Gender difference <i>t</i> | – | – | –3.45*** | –4.20*** | –1.28 | – | 4.94*** | 4.99*** | –0.49 | – |
| Cohen's <i>d</i> | – | – | –0.72 | –0.89 | –0.27 | – | 1.23 | 1.09 | 0.04 | – |
| Skewness/Kurtosis | – | – | –0.37/–0.62 | –0.11/–0.81 | 0.11/–0.15 | – | 0.49/–1.07 | 1.23/2.02 | 0.87/0.06 | – |

Note. $N_{overall} = 92$; $N_{men} = 52$, $N_{women} = 40$. IV = independent variable; CDA = cyberdating abuse. ^a1 = direct cyberaggression, 2 = cybercontrol; ^b1 = man, 2 = woman; ^c1 = current, 2 = past; ^d1 = single, 2 = dating, 3 = cohabiting, 4 = married; 5 = widower.

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

Manipulation Check

The results showed that 88.6% of the participants belonging to the cyberaggression condition responded correctly to the manipulation check item (i.e., they selected the *deliberately harming you* answer option), and 91.4% of the participants allocated to the cybercontrol condition also correctly identified their condition (i.e., they indicated the *controlling or monitoring you* option). The chi-square test yielded statistically significant differences and a large effect size ($\chi^2 [1, 102] = 65.31, p < .001, \phi = 0.80$), which supported the experimental manipulation's effectiveness. We removed those participants ($n = 10$) who failed the experimental control from analysis.

Effect of Type of Victimization and Gender on Offense and Severity Perceived

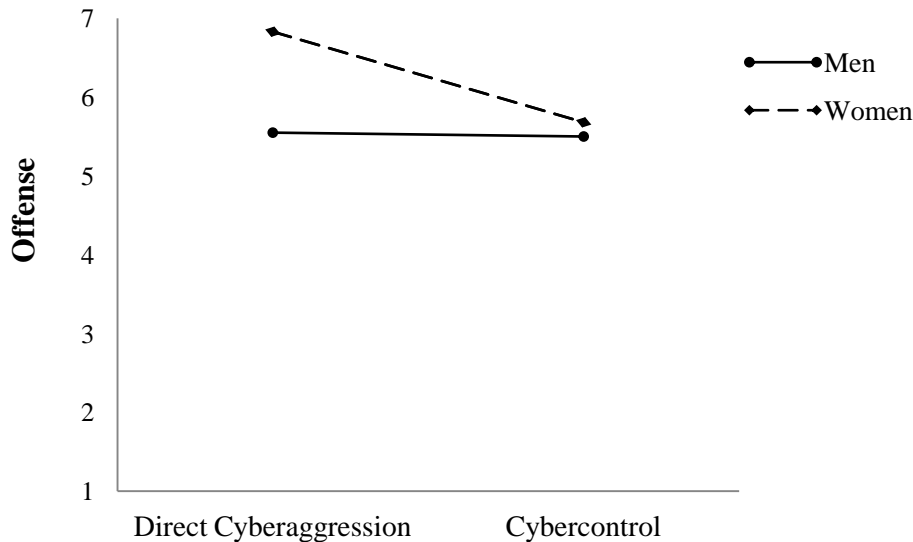
The results of the MANCOVA analysis showed a statistically significant effect of the experimental manipulation (i.e., type of victimization) on participants' perception of offense ($F [1, 92] = 8.16, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = 0.81$) and severity ($F [1, 92] = 8.11, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .80$). Specifically, participants who had described a scenario of direct cyberaggression victimization expressed greater offense ($M_{\text{direct-aggression}} = 6.13, SD = 0.97; M_{\text{control}} = 5.58, SD = 0.96$) and greater severity ($M_{\text{direct-aggression}} = 5.93, SD = 1.02; M_{\text{control}} = 5.23, SD = 1.02$) than participants who had described a scenario of cybercontrol victimization, which supported Hypothesis 1. On the other hand, the results indicated that participants' gender significantly influenced their perception of offense ($F[1, 92] = 10.83, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.90$) and severity ($F[1, 92] = 13.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.96$) in the described incident. That is, women manifested higher levels of offense ($M_{\text{women}} = 6.20, SD = 0.97; M_{\text{men}} = 5.52, SD = 0.92$) and severity ($M_{\text{women}} = 6.03, SD = 0.97; M_{\text{men}} = 5.15, SD = 1.00$) than men. These findings supported Hypothesis 2.

Finally, the results yielded a statistically significant interaction effect between type of victimization and participants' gender on offense ($F [1, 92] = 9.23, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = 0.85$). A simple slopes analysis indicated that the effect was significant for women ($b = -1.11, SE = 0.28, t = -3.97, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.66, -0.55]$), but not for men ($b = 0.05, SE = 0.25, t = 0.20, p = .84, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.44, 0.54]$). Thus, women who described a direct cyberaggression victimization situation manifested greater offense compared to those who described a cybercontrol victimization scenario, supporting Hypothesis 3a (see Figure 1). The interaction effect between type of victimization and participants' gender on severity

was not statistically significant, rejecting Hypothesis 3b ($F [1, 92] = 0.01, p = .92, \eta_p^2 = 0.05$).

Figure 1

Two-Way Interaction Between Type of Victimization and Gender in Offense



In terms of covariates, the results indicated that the relationship described in the critical incident significantly affected perceived severity ($F [1, 92] = 9.96, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = 0.88$). Specifically, participants who recalled a CDA victimization situation that took place in past relationships perceived greater severity in the incident than participants who recalled a CDA victimization situation in their current relationship ($M_{past} = 5.67, SD = 1.02; M_{current} = 4.79, SD = 1.12$). The rest of the covariates were not significant in the DVs ($p > .05$).

Qualitative Analysis of Motivations

Participants reported a total of six main motives for their partners' cybervictimizing them. Following Borrajo et al.'s (2015b) classification, we observed that the motives of *jealousy* (e.g., "Because of unhealthy jealousy"), *anger/frustration* (e.g., "Because of the heat of the moment in that situation, since he was angry"), *arguments/verbal confrontation* (e.g., "Because she wanted to talk about a particular topic and I didn't want to at that moment"), and *personality* (e.g., "She was a distrustful person, probably because of her insecurities and comparing herself to other girls") were present, but not the categories of

playing/joking and *reactivity*. Furthermore, two new motives for CDA emerged in the answers, which we called *reestablishment of control and/or power* and *OD*. According to the works of previous researchers (e.g., Marganski & Fauth, 2013; Sugihara & Warner, 2002), the first refers to those cases in which one partner exercised CDA against the other with the intention of regaining lost power or control within the relationship (e.g., “Because my partner wanted to gain security and control over the relationship,” or, “Because he didn’t see me as a person just like him, and he thought he could treat me however he wanted”). Similarly, according to the definition proposed by Suler (2004), OD motivation manifested itself when one partner felt more liberated and uninhibited to perform certain CDA behaviors, even behaving differently online compared to the offline environment (e.g., “Through digital media, the behavior went more unnoticed by others and, as he was not brave enough to face the problems in a real way, he hid behind a screen” or “Because through a screen it is easier to hurt the other person; you can simply say something hurtful and turn off the mobile and disengage, for example”). Some participants also reported that they had no response to the open-ended question (e.g., “I don’t really know”). These responses were coded as not applicable because they were not relevant to the study purpose.

Frequency of Motivation Codes Based on the Type of Victimization and Gender

As shown in Table 2, over half of the sample indicated that the most frequent motivation for CDA victimization was personality (51.1%), followed by jealousy (43.5%), reestablishment of control and/or power (26.1%), OD and anger/frustration (14.1% for each), and verbal arguments/confrontations (2.2%).

Table 2*CDA Motivation Rates Based on the Type of Victimization and Gender*

| Motivations codes | Overall (<i>N</i> = 92) | Direct cyberaggression (<i>n</i> = 40) | Cybercontrol (<i>n</i> = 52) | χ^2 | Φ | Men (<i>n</i> = 52) | Women (<i>n</i> = 40) | χ^2 | Φ |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--|----------------------------------|----------|--------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------|--------|
| Jealousy | 43.5% (40) | 22.5% (9) | 59.6% (31) | 12.67*** | 0.37 | 48.1% (25) | 37.5% (15) | 1.03 | -0.11 |
| Frustration/Anger | 14.1% (13) | 25% (10) | 5.8% (3) | 6.89** | -0.27 | 17.3% (9) | 10% (4) | 0.99 | -0.10 |
| Arguments/Confrontation | 2.2% (2) | 2.5% (1) | 1.9% (1) | 0.04 | -0.02 | 1.9% (1) | 2.5% (1) | 0.04 | 0.02 |
| Personality | 51.1% (47) | 30% (12) | 67.3% (35) | 12.59*** | 0.37 | 59.6% (31) | 40% (16) | 3.48* | -0.20 |
| Control/ Power | 26.1% (24) | 25% (10) | 26.9% (14) | 0.04 | 0.02 | 19.2% (10) | 35% (14) | 2.92 | 0.18 |
| Online disinhibition | 14.1% (13) | 32.5% (13) | 0% | 19.68*** | -0.46 | 7.7% (4) | 22.5% (9) | 4.09* | 0.21 |
| NA | 3.3% (3) | 5% (2) | 1.9 (1%) | 0.68 | -0.09 | 3.8% (2) | 2.5% (1) | 0.13 | -0.04 |

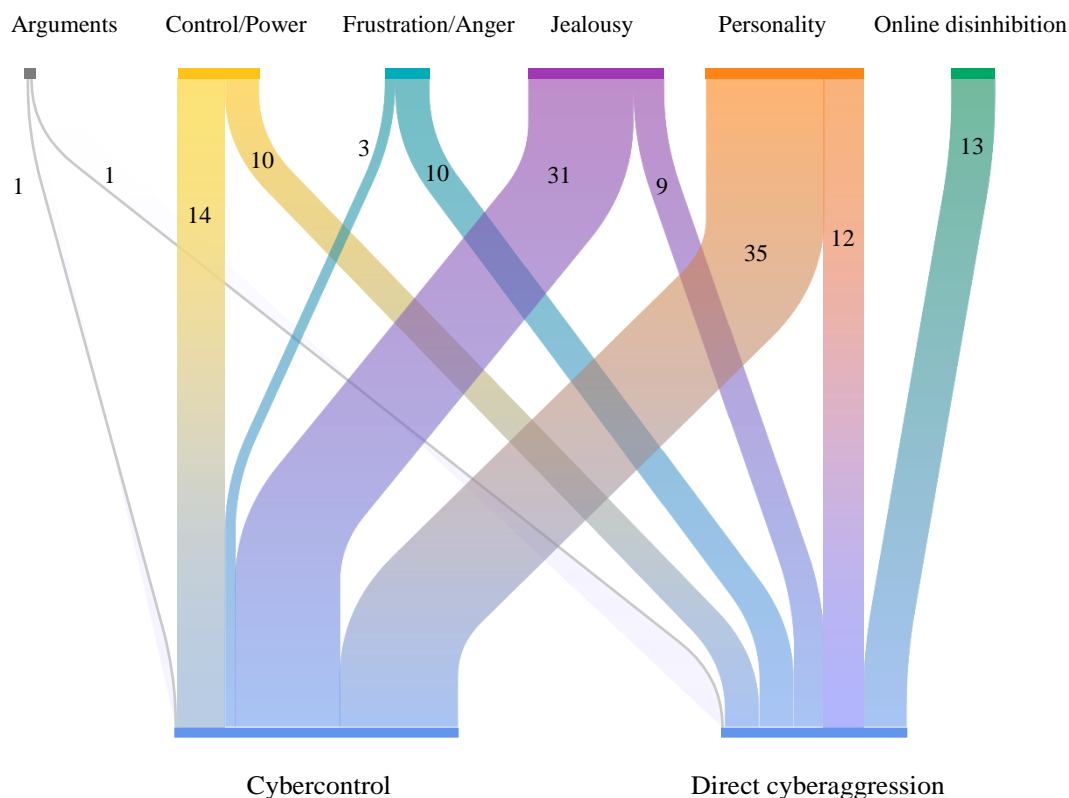
Note. NA = not applicable. Prevalence rates with *n* in parenthesis.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

We also noted significant differences based on the type of victimization in the motives of personality and jealousy (see Table 2 and Figure 2). Specifically, we observed that a higher significantly percentage of participants who described a situation of cybercontrol victimization indicated that they had suffered this type of abuse because of their partner’s personality (67.3%) and jealousy (59.6%) compared to the percentage of participants who experienced direct cyberaggression for the same reasons: personality (30%) and jealousy (22.5%). Similarly, the results highlighted significant differences in the motives of anger/frustration and OD. In this case, a higher percentage of participants belonging to the direct cyberaggression victimization condition indicated that the reasons their partners victimized them were anger/frustration (25%) and ease of disinhibition through digital media (32.5%) compared to the percentage of participants belonging to the cybercontrol victimization condition who also reported these reasons: anger/frustration (5.8%) and OD (0%).

Figure 2

Net Frequency of Motivational Codes Based on the Type of CDA Victimization

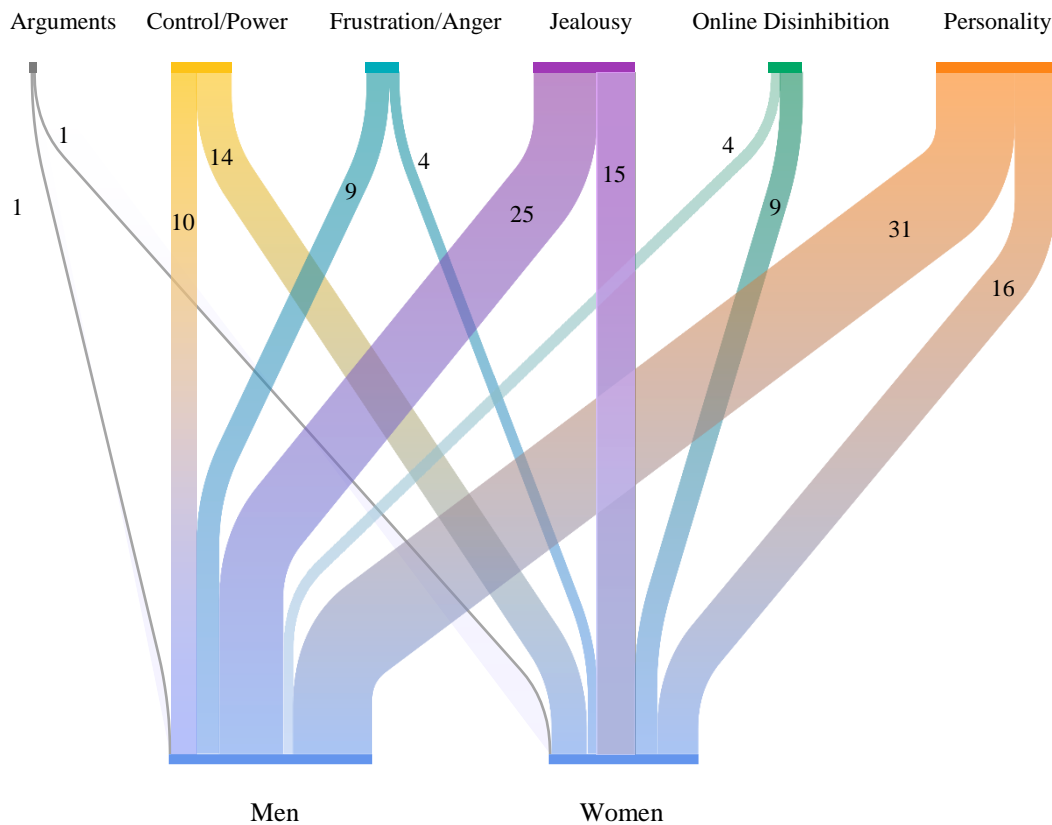


Regarding gender, we also found significant differences in some motivation codes. In particular, a statistically greater percentage of male participants (59.6%) than female

participants (40%) reported that their partners had exercised CDA against them because of their personalities. Likewise, results showed a higher percentage of women (22.5%) than men (7.7%) reported experiencing CDA because their partners felt more uninhibited in behaving differently through digital media compared to a face-to-face context. In addition, a substantially higher percentage of women (35%) than men (19.2%) reported that their partners exercised CDA against them to exert power and/or control in the relationship; however, these differences were not significant. Similarly, a higher percentage of men than women reported that their partners carried out CDA behaviors against them because they were jealous, but this difference was also not significant (see Table 2 and Figure 3).

Figure 3

Net Frequency of Motivational Codes Based on Gender



Auxiliary Analyses

We explored in an auxiliary way whether the motivations that victims attribute to their aggressors' behavior affect their perception of offense and severity in the described scenario (see SM2.1). Thus, we conducted two linear regression analyses including all emergent motivational codes (coded as 0 if the motivation was not present and 1 if it was)

as predictor variables and offense and severity measures as criterion variables. Scores were standardized before analyses were performed.

The results showed no significant effects of motivations on perceived offense ($p > .05$). For perceived severity, our results showed a statistically significant effect of OD motivation ($b = 2.15, p = .035$). Specifically, when the OD motivation was present, participants attributed greater severity to the described incident of cybervictimization. We found no significant effects of the other motivations on the severity measure ($p > .05$).³

Discussion

Although analysis of CDA has attracted a great deal of interest in recent years, less effort has been devoted to understanding the nature and perception of CDA from the victims' perspective. The present research aimed to examine the perceived offense and severity of a CDA incident and the aggressor's motivations depending on the type of victimization and the participant's gender.

First, our results showed an effect of the manipulation on participants' perception of the CDA incident described. Specifically, participants in the condition of victimization by direct cyberaggression perceived more severity and offensiveness than participants in the condition of victimization by cybercontrol. This could be due to the fact that direct aggression is a more explicit and recognizable CDA manifestation and implies intentionality to harm the partner (Borrajó et al., 2015b). Therefore, it makes sense that participants were more sensitive to identifying the seriousness and offensiveness of this type of violence. Moreover, this finding is in line with previous research suggesting that cybercontrolling behaviors seem to be more socially acceptable forms of abuse, as they often do not constitute a clear violation of privacy (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011) and/or are interpreted as expressions of love and/or concern within the relationship (Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018).

Second, our results highlighted that gender also affected the victims' perception of the CDA incident described. In particular, women expressed greater perceived severity and offense of the CDA victimization than men. These findings are consistent with studies noting that women report more severe emotional consequences to CDA than men (e.g., anguish, fear, anxiety, depression; Brown et al., 2022) and perceive greater difficulty in

³ When linear regression analyses were performed controlling for the effects of covariates (included in the first step), the effect of motivations on offending remains non-significant ($p > .05$), and the significant effect of OD motivation on severity disappears ($p > .05$).

stopping or escaping the abusive situation (Stonard et al., 2017). At the same time, these contribute to Brown et al.'s (2022) work suggesting that young men tend not to perceive the severity of the impact of CDA on women.

More specifically, our results showed an interaction effect between the type of victimization and gender on perceived offense, indicating that female participants who described a situation of victimization by direct cyberaggression manifested greater offense than those who related an incident of victimization by cybercontrol; nevertheless, this effect was not observed for male participants. These results are in line with the findings of Donoso-Vazquez et al. (2018), who observed that there are no gender differences in the identification and perception of controlling behaviors against the partner, as these are highly normalized among young people. In contrast, women seem to be more sensitive to perceiving those behaviors aimed at harming the partner (i.e., direct cyberaggression) as offensive, which could be due to the fact that they are in a situation of vulnerability in the social and cultural framework and most frequently experience this type of violence from their partners (Reed et al., 2021b). Moreover, this could be related to the fact that male participants, as other researchers have found (e.g., Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020), manifest significantly higher levels of hostile and benevolent sexism than female participants, which, in turn, has traditionally been associated in the literature with greater justification and normalization of IPV and CDA (e.g., Martín-Fernández et al., 2018; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020). However, more research is required in this field to substantiate the above claims.

Regarding the aggressor's motivations, the results of the content analysis yielded two emerging motivations beyond those assessed by Borrajo et al. (2015b). Specifically, we observed that participants frequently alluded to the factors of the virtual context favoring OD (e.g., the ability to hide behind a screen, accessibility and easy use of technologies, immediacy, or constant contact with the partner; Suler, 2004) to explain why their partners exercised CDA against them. Thus, we called this new motivational category *OD*. These results are in line with previous research suggesting that, although CDA is a form of IPV, it comprises distinctive aspects that highlight the need for a specific approach to the problem (Stonard, 2020; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). Thus, the digital environment could be amplifying the occurrence of abusive behaviors in romantic relationships by favoring a scenario where young people experience a greater sense of freedom and disinhibition, without apparent restrictions (Stonard 2020; Suler, 2004). In this sense, several participants indicated that their partners performed violent behaviors against them

that they would less likely perform in a face-to-face context (e.g., “It is a quick tool accessible to everyone. Plus, face-to-face, he had a different demeanor”).

Likewise, we noted that another of the reasons for which participants suffered victimization was that their partners wanted to exert control and power over them, naming this category *reestablishment of control and/or power*. This result is consistent with previous research showing that exerting control over one's partner is a common underlying motive for perpetrating IPV (Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). In particular, our results suggest that technologies are being used as an instrument of control and power within romantic relationships among young people because of their tools and facilities (e.g., immediacy, invisibility, or elimination of geographic and time barriers). A partner who perceives themselves as less powerful may engage in CDA behaviors as a way to restore power and/or control within the relationship (Álvarez, 2012). As a consequence, the online environment could be generating a false sense of empowerment that, rather than favoring constructive conflict resolution strategies, could be fostering a culture of cyberabuse within the couple.

Moreover, our results also suggest that direct cyberaggression and control behaviors could have a different nature and purpose. On the one hand, we found that direct cyberaggression (vs. cybercontrol) behaviors occur more frequently in situations of anger and/or frustration in the relationship and because of the feeling of disinhibition derived from the use of technological media. A plausible explanation could be that, in moments of anger, the characteristics of the online environment (e.g., invisibility, decreased empathy with the victim or minimization of responsibility and consequences) could be encouraging people to employ direct cyberaggression behaviors against partners to harm them, which would be less likely to be carried out in a face-to-face context (Saunders, 2016).

In contrast, we found that engagement in cybercontrol behaviors seems to be more motivated by romantic jealousy or by the perpetrator's own personality traits, such as insecure attachment, dependence on the partner or distrust. These results are consistent with empirical research showing that such factors (i.e., romantic jealousy, insecure attachment, distrust, emotional dependence) are robust predictors of controlling behaviors against partners in young people (e.g., see Frampton & Fox, 2018; Wright, 2017). In this sense, cybercontrol behaviors—indirect manifestations of aggression toward the partner (Borrajo et al., 2015b)—could be being employed as maladaptive and unhealthy strategies aimed at reducing individual levels of concern and emotional distress about the stability of the relationship (Reed et al., 2015).

Overall, our results with regard to the motivations that victims attribute to their abusers' CDA behavior are consistent with the findings of Reed et al. (2021a). Through a qualitative approach, these authors observed in a sample of adolescent students that there is a distinct pattern in the motivations reported for each CDA dimension from the perspective of the aggressors. For direct cyberaggression, both boys and girls reported primarily negative arousal and conflict motivations, particularly, "Because I was angry," "Because I was upset," and, "Because we were in a fight," whereas, for cybercontrol, participants primarily reported being motivated by insecurity, including situations of jealousy and suspicion of infidelity. Therefore, our work builds on the findings of Reed et al. (2021a) by providing consistent results but from the perspective of the victims and incorporating OD as a new motivation leading to the perpetration of direct cyberaggression.

Regarding gender differences in the perception of the offender's motivations for CDA, our findings yielded a higher percentage of women (vs. men) who acknowledged experiencing CDA because their partners felt more uninhibited in the online context, which is congruent with empirical research showing that men tend to experience greater OD than women (e.g., Wang et al., 2021). Also, our results indicated that men (vs. women) more frequently reported that their partners cybervictimized them because of certain personality traits such as fear, emotional dependence, or insecurity. This finding is also in line with previous works (e.g., Karantzas et al., 2016; Stonard et al., 2017) suggesting that women in general seem to manifest greater concern than men about the care and maintenance of the relationship because of the set of complementary stereotypical, unequal, and sexist roles that have traditionally been assigned to women and men in their romantic and sexual relationships (i.e., the heterosexual script)—men avoid commitment and women prioritize relationships (Seabrook et al., 2016). In this respect, women could be engaging in CDA as a maladaptive strategy to counteract discomfort (i.e., anxiety, worry, and insecurity) and/or maintain the relationship at all costs.

Finally, auxiliary analyses showed that, in general, the motivations that the victims attributed to their aggressors' behavior did not influence the perception of offense and severity in the incident. We only found a significant effect of OD motivation on perceived severity, indicating that, when such motivation was present, participants attributed greater severity to the described situation of cybervictimization. That is, CDA victims may recognize the severity of violence to a greater extent when they perceive that their partner engaged in CDA against them because they feel more uninhibited through technology.

This result could be encouraging in the sense that people might be aware, to some degree, of the severity and impact that misuse of digital media can have in the context of intimate partner relationships. However, given our sample size, we cannot draw firm conclusions from these results. More research is needed to address these issues and to discern whether there is an effect of OD motivation on perceived severity or whether this is a false positive.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This work makes a novel contribution to the literature examining the perception of CDA from the victim's perspective, which is still insufficient. Specifically, through an experimental design, our research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that victims' perceptions about the motivations of their aggressors and the offense and severity of CDA victimization are influenced by both the type of behavior suffered and gender, so far unexplored. Also, following a qualitative approach, our study delves into the reasons or motives that male and female CDA victims ascribed to the behavior their partners engaged in depending on the type of abuse suffered, suggesting that direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol behaviors have a different nature and impact. In addition, the gender differences that permeate our findings are in line with the assumptions that CDA is asymmetrical (e.g., Brown et al., 2022; Reed et al, 2021a, 2021b). Furthermore, besides the motivations observed by other authors in previous research (i.e., jealousy, anger/frustration, arguments/verbal confrontation, and personality; Borrajo et al., 2015b), we noted that two new motives for CDA emerged in the answers: reestablishment of control and/or power and OD.

This study also has some important practical implications for psychology professionals. On the one hand, our findings could encourage clinical psychologists working with CDA victims to focus on understanding the context in which CDA behaviors arise as well as the victims' perception and interpretation of the violent situation and its possible impact, also taking into account the role of the type of CDA suffered and gender. Likewise, our work could serve as a basis for the development of psychoeducational programs aimed at the effective prevention of CDA and the responsible use of digital media to promote healthy and quality relationships from an early age. Finally, data on young people's views about the motivations that constitute CDA and their perception of severity and offense can also be used to inform the design of more effective measurement instruments. Our research derives the need to develop and validate instruments that

contemplate not only the different CDA behaviors experienced by victims but their nature and the disparate impact that those could have according to gender.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has some limitations that should be noted. First, the critical incident technique may capture a limited picture of participants' perceptions of cybervictimization experiences by referring to a specific event (i.e., the recalled abusive incident). Also, although this retrospective technique has been widely used in social psychology, denoting its effectiveness and strong external validity in conflict or past situations (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021), it could trigger recall biases. However, we manipulated the type of victimization, thereby allowing us to apply more control over our findings and, therefore, minimize other causal pathways. We suggest that future studies use different experimental methodologies to gain convergent validity. Second, it should be taken into account that, regarding sensitive topics like CDA, respondents may be less likely to endorse abusive behavior and may be susceptible to social desirability (Lu et al., 2021), which makes it difficult to obtain large samples. Future studies could contribute to research in this area by implementing innovative methods like dyadic research designs, which consider both romantic partners. Third, the sample selection was carried out by nonprobability snowball sampling via several social network sites (SNSs), and we only selected Spanish participants with a heterosexual orientation and between 18 and 35 years old. Thus, we cannot obtain generalized conclusions from our results, because the sample is not representative of the population. Future researchers should corroborate our findings using random sampling to obtain a heterogeneous sample in terms of, for example, age, nationality, sexual orientation, and cultural values. In this respect, previous research has observed that variables such as gender social norms (López-Zafra et al., 2008) and SNS use (Statista, 2020) vary across countries, so it would be also interesting to carry out cross-cultural research. In addition, we encourage other researchers to build on our findings by investigating whether attribution of the causes of CDA and/or the perceived offensiveness and severity of such violence could influence victims' coping and consequences, depending on the type of CDA behavior experienced and gender.

Conclusions

The culture of cyberviolence is taking root in relationships at an early age, with the risk of it becoming normalized. This research provides novel data on perceptions of CDA incidents from the victim's perspective. Specifically, our findings contribute to the understanding of the causal attributions and perceptions that victims of such violence have of their aggressors' behavior. In general, the results show that such interpretation and/or causal attribution, as well as the perception of offense and severity of CDA, varies according to the type of abuse suffered (direct cyberaggression vs. cybercontrol) and gender. Our work could help psychological professionals develop specific interventions in CDA considering the specific characteristics of each type of abuse as well as the role of gender. Moreover, we hope that our findings will encourage other researchers to explore new avenues of work that delve deeper into the psychological mechanisms that influence CDA victims' perception of violent events and how this might shape their coping strategies.

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Supplementary Material

Perception of Cyberdating Abuse from the Victims' Perspective: Effect of the Type of
Suffered Behavior and Gender

1. Procedure and Material

The experts selected for the inter-rater agreement were contacted via email. Once they accepted our proposal, we sent them the following information:

1.1. Information Sheet

A group of researchers from the Mind, Brain, and Behavior Research Center (CIMCYC) of University of Granada intend to investigate the psychosocial factors related to different manifestations of intimate partner cyberviolence. To this end, we first want to examine the motivations for perpetration of cyberabusive behaviors against a partner from the victim's perspective through an open-ended question ("For what reasons do you think your partner or ex-partner was able to carry out that behavior against you through technologies: social network sites, Whatsapp, SMS, etc.? Describe briefly"). Thus, with the purpose of classifying the different answers of the participants of our study into motivational categories, we are contacting you.

In this email, we have attached three documents: one entitled *Task Instructions* that explains in detail the classification task we are asking you to perform; another entitled *Codebook*, where the definitions of the motivations for intimate partner cyberviolence are included; and a third Excel document, *Classification Task*, where you can find the template with the participants' answers and the motivational codes created for their classification.

We thank you in advance for your collaboration.

1. 2. Task Instructions

You have been provided with a list of motivational definitions. Each of these corresponds to possible reasons why people engage in intimate partner cyberviolence. In addition, you have been presented with an Excel file with the participants' answers (see rows) to the question: "For what reasons do you think your partner or ex-partner may have carried out this behavior towards you through new technologies (social network sites, Whatsapp, SMS, etc.)? Describe briefly." In turn, in this Excel file are the codes created for the possible motivations that lead to the cyberabusive behavior against the partner (see columns).

Your task is to read each of the participants' responses and indicate which reasons (codes) were present in the description. To this end, you should write 1 under the columns of the codes that you consider to be present in each response. Otherwise, you should leave

it empty. Note that the codes are not exclusive, which means that a description can have several codes. To perform this task, you must have the list of definitions for each code in front of you. Moreover, a comment column appears after the codes in the Excel file. Please use this space if you feel you need to make any comments. Also, if any missing topics appear recurrently, you can make your own additional codes as columns in the Excel file.

At this point, we encourage you to begin the task. Thank you very much for your collaboration.

1. 3. Codebook

Jealousy

Cyberabusive behavior is exercised as a consequence of experiencing romantic jealousy (Frampton & Fox, 2018). This code applies to all those situations in which the perpetrator feels jealousy due to a perceived threat in the relationship, such as the feeling of loss of a partner they consider their own, suspicions of infidelity, perception that one's partner feels love or affection for another person, or the belief that the partner prefers to be with other persons rather than with them (Perles et al., 2019; van Ouytsel et al., 2016).

Frustration/Anger

Cyberabusive behavior is exercised in a context of frustration and/or anger (Harris & Darby, 2010). The code is present in situations where the perpetrator fails to achieve their desires or satisfy their needs. It also applies to cases where the perpetrator perceives that a negative outcome has occurred or will occur with respect to their interests or those of the relationship (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015).

Arguments/Verbal Confrontation

The cyberviolent behavior against the partner is exercised in a context of destructive discussion. The partners are in disagreement and fail to negotiate favorable solutions to problems. They are focused on looking for blame and defending their respective positions. Cyberviolence is exercised as an attempt to win over the other, not respecting or listening to the point of view or needs of the partner (Rusbult et al., 1986).

Personality

This applies to those cases in which individuals make allusions to the perpetrator's personality traits (characteristics, emotions, ways of thinking, and behavioral aspects) as the reason they have been victimized. These traits are what define the perpetrator, determine their ability to adapt to situations, and, therefore, lead to cyberviolent behavior in the context of romantic relationships (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001).

Re-establishment of control and/or power

Cyberviolent behavior against one's partner is exercised as an unhealthy strategy to restore lost control or power within the relationship (Sugihara & Warner, 2002). It occurs in situations where perpetrators perceive themselves as having superiority and power over their partners. It also applies to those cases in which the perpetrator attempts to violently dominate the partner to make them conform to their expectations, desires, and needs within the relationship without respecting those of the other (Marganski & Fauth, 2013).

Online Disinhibition

It is manifested in those situations in which the perpetrator feels more liberated, uninhibited, and predisposed to exercise violence against the partner in the online context (Cheung et al., 2020). Thus, the perpetrator performs behaviors in the online context that they less likely would perform in a face-to-face context (Longden, 2014). This code applies to all those cases in which individuals mention the characteristics of digital interactions, such as the ability to hide behind a screen, accessibility and easy use of technologies, immediacy, or constant contact with the partner (Suler, 2004).

Not Applicable (NA)

The person indicates that they do not know why their partner did it or does not answer the question correctly.

2. Supplemental Analysis

2.1. Effect of the Motivations Attributed to the Aggressor's Behavior on the Perception of Offense and Severity

Table 1S

Motivational Codes as Predictors of Perceived Offense and Severity

| | Offense | | | | Severity | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|-------|---------------|--------------------------------------|----------|-------|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .11 (.05) | | | | .14 (.08)* |
| Jealousy | -0.10 | -0.82 | [-0.32, 0.13] | | 0.01 | 0.06 | [-0.22, 0.23] | |
| Frustration/ Anger | -0.10 | -0.89 | [-0.33, 0.13] | | -0.03 | -0.22 | [-0.25, 0.20] | |
| Arguments/ Confrontation | -0.01 | -0.12 | [-0.22, 0.20] | | -0.20 | -1.88 | [-0.40, 0.01] | |
| Personality | -0.14 | -1.05 | [-0.39, 0.12] | | -1.15 | -1.15 | [-0.40, 0.11] | |
| Control/ Power | -0.10 | -0.85 | [-0.32, 0.13] | | -0.09 | -0.77 | [-0.31, 0.14] | |
| Online disinhibition | 0.20 | 1.60 | [-0.05, 0.45] | | 0.26 | -2.15 | [0.02, 0.51] | |

Note. $N = 92$. CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$

Chapter 3

Exploring Antecedents of Cyberdating Abuse

**Does the Digital Environment Evoke Anxiety Cycles in Romantic Relationships? The
Roles of Social–Interpersonal and Individual Factors in Cyberdating Abuse
Perpetration**

María Dolores Sánchez-Hernández

M^a Carmen Herrera Enríquez

Francisca Expósito Jiménez

Mind, Brain, and Behavior Research Center (CIMCYC)

Department of Social Psychology

University of Granada

This article has been published:

Sánchez-Hernández, M. D., Herrera, M. C., & Expósito, F. (2023). Does the Digital Environment Evoke Anxiety Cycles in Romantic Relationships? The Roles of Social–Interpersonal and Individual Factors in Cyberdating Abuse Perpetration. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 1–18.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2023.2204275>

Abstract

Cyberdating abuse (CDA) is a complex phenomenon with detrimental consequences for well-being. Previous literature has shown that romantic anxious attachment schemes lead to perpetration of CDA behaviors. However, less attention has been paid to examining factors moderating and mediating the effect of anxious attachment on CDA perpetration. Our research is pioneering in examining (a) the moderating role of gender and the heterosexual script (HS; i.e., gender roles in heterosexual relationships) in the positive association between anxious attachment and CDA perpetration and (b) whether romantic anxious attachment indirectly influences CDA perpetration via electronic partner surveillance (EPS) and online jealousy. Across two cross-sectional studies ($N = 698$ young adults), we observed that high levels of anxious attachment predicted more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner in men with high HS adherence (vs. low HS), whereas this effect was not found among women. Additionally, we found that the positive association between anxious attachment and cybercontrol perpetration can be mediated through increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy. Our research contributes to a better understanding of some factors leading to CDA perpetration and may favor the development of CDA intervention programs based on the violence's characteristics and gender norms.

Keywords: anxious attachment, gender, digital media, jealousy, cybercontrol, direct cyberaggression

Does the Digital Environment Evoke Anxiety Cycles in Romantic Relationships? The Roles of Social–Interpersonal and Individual Factors in Cyberdating Abuse Perpetration

Digital media has changed how young people experience romantic relationships (van Ouytsel et al., 2019). The features of the virtual environment—immediacy, easy access to information, and the elimination of geographical and time boundaries (Tokunaga, 2011)—generate a sense of permanent bonding that may favor the development and strengthening of romantic relationships (Vaterlaus et al., 2018), but also provide opportunities for people to engage in intimate partner violence (IPV; van Ouytsel et al., 2016).

Multiple terms exist to capture harmful behaviors against a romantic partner via technology and the Internet. However, cyberdating abuse (CDA) has been the most widely used concept in empirical research (for a review, see Caridade et al., 2019). It is a multidimensional construct that integrates several online abusive behaviors such as cybercontrol, cyberharassment, and psychological and verbal cyberaggression toward one's dating partner (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018; Zweig et al., 2014). Following the classification of Borrajo et al. (2015), CDA behaviors can be classified into two dimensions: *cybercontrol*, meaning online abusive behaviors intended to control and monitor the partner (e.g., using digital media to determine the whereabouts of the partner and whom he or she is with or invading a partner's privacy by checking his or her cell phone without consent); and *direct cyberaggression*, meaning deliberate online behaviors aimed at harming the partner (e.g., sending/posting offensive, humiliating, or threatening online comments, photos, or videos to/of the partner).

There is a lack of consensus about CDA terms, its operationalization, CDA measures, and methodological characteristics of studies (e.g., sampling context, sample size, and time interval considered) that makes it difficult to conclude the real prevalence of CDA (Brown & Hegarty, 2021; Soto & Ibabe, 2022). Nevertheless, numerous international research yields alarming levels of CDA among young people, with prevalence ranging from 6% to 93.7 % for perpetration and from 5.8 to 92% for victimization (for a review, see Caridade et al., 2019). A recent study with a sample of young students (i.e., Soriano-Ayala et al., 2023) showed that 53.3% of them reported having exercised CDA against their partners in the past year and 62.1% recognized having suffered it.

Given the impact of this problem, interest in studying the risk factors of CDA has increased in recent years. However, there are significant gaps in the existing literature that

need to be addressed. First, some studies conducted in the context of IPV have paid attention to how cognitive and behavioral systems comprising romantic attachment schemas and gender norms may interact in the determination of IPV behaviors (e.g., Brassard et al. 2007; Mauricio & Gormley, 2001). However, no studies have examined how these two domains may interact to predict CDA perpetration; this is one of the main contributions of our study. Second, attending to the social network site (SNS) context, psychological research have estimated that anxious attachment is a significant predictor of electronic partner surveillance (EPS; i.e., tendency to check on their partner's online activities), romantic online jealousy, and CDA perpetration (Perles et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2015). Moreover, Villora et al., (2021) have recently suggested that SNSs may act as an evocative environment for anxiety cycles leading to CDA perpetration. However, the underlying mechanism that could explain such anxiety cycles and unhealthy dynamics in the online environment is unknown, so this is a fundamental aim of our research.

In sum, the previous literature has described a positive relationship between anxious attachment to a partner and the perpetration of CDA behaviors. However, little research has examined the factors moderating and mediating this association while differentiating between direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol. Through two cross-sectional survey studies, we explored for the first time whether (a) anxious attachment influences the perpetration of these CDA behaviors as a function of gender and heterosexual script (HS) adherence (i.e., gender roles in heterosexual romantic relationships) and (b) whether anxious attachment indirectly influences CDA perpetration (direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol) via increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy.

Anxious Attachment and CDA

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1988), humans have a cognitive system based on the experiences of availability, capacity, and the quality of support they receive when they feel threatened or stressed. These mental schemas guide individuals' behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses, causing them to suppress or elicit the need for interpersonal support (Fraley et al., 2000). Individual variations in attachment styles occur on the basis of two dimensions: anxious attachment, the degree to which individuals are dependent on the support of others and fear abandonment; and avoidant attachment, the degree to which individuals avoid dependence and view the support they receive from others as unreliable (Simpson & Rholes, 2012). In contrast, individuals with the secure attachment

style show low levels of the above dimensions; that is, they are comfortable with proximity and intimacy, and they do not worry about being abandoned (Simpson & Rholes, 2012).

A large body of literature has examined how romantic attachment affects relationship dynamics and well-being (Li & Chan, 2012; Simpson & Rholes, 2012). In particular, anxious attachment has traditionally been recognized as a consistent factor leading to unhealthy and unsatisfying relationships (Wright, 2015, 2017). In terms of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), individuals with anxious romantic attachment are characterized by high insecurity and preoccupation with relationship problems, a constant need for reciprocity, and a lack of belief that their partner loves them. Due to these mental schemas, people with an anxious attachment to their partners often engage in IPV perpetration, both offline (Barbaro & Shackelford, 2019; Sommer et al., 2017) and in an online context (i.e.; CDA; Bui & Pasalich, 2021; Wright, 2015, 2017). Specifically, Villorra et al.'s (2021) study is one of the few works developed to analyze the role of anxious attachment in CDA perpetration differentiating between direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol. In a sample of university students, they observed that anxious attachment was positively associated with frequent perpetration of both types of CDA behaviors.

The possibilities afforded by digital communication (e.g., immediacy, the elimination of geographical and time boundaries, and access to a partner's information) allow anxiously attached people to quickly and easily engage in cybercontrol behaviors to reassure themselves of their partners' continuing love and fidelity (Sullivan, 2021). An example is using digital media to seek evidence that the partner loves them, pressure the partner to maintain constant contact, or check the partner's whereabouts (Bui & Pasalich, 2021; Reed et al., 2015). Moreover, the information contained in the online context is contingent on a high degree of subjectivity (Bevan, 2017). Consequently, people with anxious attachment often ruminate on the worst-case scenario for the future of their relationship by negatively interpreting their partners' ambiguous signals in the online context (Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2022). Such situations can further exacerbate the distress of individuals with anxious attachment and trigger the perpetration of CDA behaviors as a coping strategy.

Gender as Moderator

The variable of gender has received the most attention in the CDA field; however, results are inconclusive (see Caridade et al., 2019). International research has noted that both men and women exercise CDA within their relationships; however, the intentions underlying

CDA and how it is exercised seem to vary by gender (Reed et al., 2021a, 2021b). For example, in a sample of middle and high school students, 94.3% of whom reported a heterosexual orientation, Zweig et al. (2013) found that boys were significantly more likely to report perpetrating sexual cyberdating abuse against their partner (40.1%, compared to 11.9% for girls). In contrast, they observed that girls were nearly twice as likely as boys to suffer sexual cyberabuse by their partner (15%, compared to 7% for men). Moreover, Barter et al. (2017) observed in a European cross-cultural study (Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy, and Norway) that women from Cyprus, England, and Norway perpetrated cybercontrol with more frequency than men from those same countries did. More recently, Reed et al. (2021b) found that men engaged in significantly more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression behaviors such as digital sexual coercion, whereas women more often tended to engage in indirect acts, such as cybercontrol.

Following the social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2004), sex role socialization and differences in normative expectations of what is considered to be appropriate behavior for men and women can explain behavioral differences between the sexes (Wood & Eagly, 2002). Masculinity has traditionally been associated with traits of *agency* (i.e., control, security, and task-resolution skills), whereas femininity has been associated with traits of *communion* (i.e., sensitivity and skills at looking after and taking care of others; Diekmann & Eagly, 2008). Thus, men are raised to be masculine—competitive and physically aggressive—and women are encouraged to be feminine—emotional people who prioritize others (Díaz-Aguado, 2003). Therefore, it would make sense that, as a result of gender socialization, men employ more explicit and direct manifestations of violence and women exercise more covert relational aggression as an alternative strategy.

Based on this theory, research has traditionally shown that aggression and violence are significantly influenced by gender (White, 2001). Thus, although the cognitive schemas of anxious attachment predict abuse within couple relationships, men and women attached anxiously to their partners might exert such violence differently. This viewpoint is supported in the IPV context by psychological research (see Karantzas et al., 2016). Anxious attachment has been related to the more frequent perpetration of sexual coercion against one's partner in men but not in women (Brassard et al., 2007). In contrast, anxious attachment to a partner seems to be predictive of more frequent use of psychological abuse strategies such as control of the partner in women but not in men (Gormley & López, 2003).

However, to the best of our knowledge, the moderating role of gender in the effect of anxious attachment on CDA perpetration has not received attention. Therefore, we pose the following research question:

RQ1. Does high anxious attachment predict more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression in men and cybercontrol in women?

HS Adherence as Moderator

Cultural beliefs about how men and women should relate to one another in romantic relationships (i.e., HS) also influence and guide partners' attitudes and behaviors (Kim et al., 2007; Seabrook et al., 2016). According to the feminist approach of Kim et al. (2007), HS refers to the set of complementary stereotypical, unequal, and sexist gender roles that have traditionally been assigned to women and men in their romantic and sexual relationships. HS reflects an active/passive and powerful/empowered gender dichotomy: Men actively participate in their relationships by seeking and initiating sex, avoiding commitment, and demonstrating physical and material power to attract women, whereas women are passive participants who must keep their sexuality under control by setting sexual boundaries and prioritize in seeking resources from men in their relationships (Seabrook et al., 2016).

According to the feminist research, cognitive and behavioral schemas associated with the anxious attachment systems do not operate independently, but rather are tied to cultural beliefs about the HS (Hammond & Overall, 2017). This theoretical perspective is supported in the IPV context by the work of Mauricio and Gormley (2001), who observed in a sample of battering men that both an anxious attachment system and adherence to a masculine norm were necessary to predict IPV risk. Specifically, they found that anxious attachment orientation by battering men and their need to dominate the partner interacted to predict explicit and severe manifestations of IPV. Anxiously attached men seem to be more vulnerable to the negative aspects of gender socialization, which makes them more likely to express negative affect with aggression and violence toward a partner (Stosny, 1995).

Therefore, we believe that HS adherence may also modulate the anxious attachment effect in CDA perpetration by men and women. For instance, HS assumptions (e.g., "men want sex and avoid commitment") may feed the anxiously attached women's concerns and increase their likelihood of exercising cybercontrol behaviors against their partners. In this respect, in a mixed-gender focus group ($N = 52$; 22 men and 30 women) Stonard et al. (2017) found that woman adolescents were more likely to exert cybercontrolling behaviors toward a

partner than man adolescents, presumably because they were more concerned with keeping the relationship safe and ensuring partner fidelity. Likewise, the high adherence to stereotypical beliefs has been associated with high frequency of cybercontrol perpetration by girls and high frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration by boys, who may be using this violence to re-establish control and power in the relationship (Reed et al., 2021b).

However, to the extent of our knowledge, there are no studies examining the interactive role of gender and HS in the positive relationship between anxious attachment and the perpetration of CDA behaviors. In view of the above, we formulate this research question:

RQ2. Does high anxious attachment predict more frequent perpetration of cybercontrol in women with high (vs. low) HS adherence and more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression perpetration in men with high (vs. low) HS adherence?

SNSs Environments: EPS and Online Jealousy as Mediators

SNSs have become an important tool to meet the needs for intimacy and closeness with a partner, primarily for those with anxious romantic attachment (Sullivan, 2021). The fear of rejection and abandonment experienced by individuals with anxious attachment makes them insecure and distrustful in their relationships, which often evokes a desire to review partner information on SNSs to reduce anxiety levels (Loinaz & Echeburúa, 2012). This information-seeking behavior with regard to the partner's activity on SNSs has traditionally been referred to as EPS (Schokkenbroe et al., 2022) and includes activities such as checking the partner's social profiles, photos, wall comments, and statuses (Ruggieri et al., 2021).⁴ In this sense, research has consistently observed that elevated levels of romantic anxious

⁴ EPS through SNSs and cybercontrol are technological behaviors that have been observed to be positively related in the literature (e.g., Frampton & Fox, 2018; van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Although there is some similarity between the two concepts, they have relevant nuances that differentiate them. On the one hand, EPS captures the behaviors of checking the partner's activity exclusively in the SNS context, whereas cybercontrol captures all behaviors via various digital media (e.g., SNSs, email, phone calls, instant messenger applications) that are exercised to control the partner. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the information posted on SNSs is made public and does not involve a clear violation of the partner's privacy or trust (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011). People may engage in EPS with other purposes besides controlling the partner (e.g., getting to know the partner, sharing experiences and interests, and providing support to the partner; Hand et al., 2013). Thus, our EPS measure assesses several behaviors related to checking the partner's activity in SNSs without paying attention to the underlying motivations (e.g., "I often spend time looking through my partner's SNS pictures" or "I notice when my partner updates his/her SNS page"). In contrast, the cybercontrol measure includes EPS behaviors but with an explicit intention of exercising control over the partner (see Borrajo et al., 2015; e.g., "I have controlled my partner's or ex-partner's SNS wall status updates" or "I have controlled my partner's or ex-partner's friendships on SNSs").

attachment are associated with greater use of EPS among men and women (e.g., Reed et al., 2015, Schokkenbroe et al., 2022).

Although the use of SNSs to obtain information about the partner could provide relationship benefits (e.g., to facilitate partners getting to know each other, sharing experiences and interests, and providing mutual care and support), EPS has traditionally had a negative connotation. Specifically, excessive SNS use for engaging in EPS activities has been found to be a major precipitant of romantic jealousy (e.g., Muise et al., 2013; Perles et al., 2019) and abuse within relationships (e.g., Doucette et al., 2021; Frampton & Fox, 2018; van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Indeed, jealousy seems to be one of the most negative effects derived from the use of SNSs—individuals mainly experienced jealousy when their partners commented on or liked updates and images of people of the opposite sex, and when their partners appeared in photos next to a person of the opposite sex (van Ouytsel et al., 2016). In turn, online jealousy has been positively associated with CDA perpetration in young people (e.g., Frampton & Fox, 2018; Muise et al., 2013).

In view of the above, we consider it essential to deepen our understanding of how anxious attachment patterns may affect the processing of information contained in SNSs and lead to deviant online behaviors such as CDA. The two-stage model of attachment styles and threats (Harris & Darby, 2010) is one of the main models that have explained the association between anxious romantic attachment and IPV. It proposes that, in the first stage, individuals with romantic anxious attachment become aware of a possible threatening rival, whether real or imagined, to their relationships. As a consequence of their information processing schemes, the individuals manifest negative emotions (jealousy, mistrust, anger). In the second stage, these emotions promote the implementation of poor and ineffective coping strategies to restore arousal levels, in turn increasing the likelihood of IPV (Lawson & Malnar, 2011).

Simultaneously to how it occurs in the traditional context, the two-stage model of attachment styles and threats (Harris & Darby, 2010) could help with understanding how romantic anxious attachment is positively associated with frequent perpetration of CDA via increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy. In the first stage, rather than alleviating the distress of those fearful and worried about their relationships, greater EPS use might elicit high frequency of online jealousy and further exacerbates anxiety as a consequence of negatively interpreting the partner's ambiguous online content (i.e., to perceive threats to the relationship; Sullivan et al., 2021). As a result, in the second stage, romantic jealousy could lead to unhealthy coping strategies like CDA (Frampton & Fox, 2018).

However, there are no known studies that have applied the two-stage model of attachment styles and threats (Harris & Darby, 2010) to deepen the understanding of these correlates. In view of the above, we have formulated the following research question:

RQ3. Does high anxious attachment indirectly predict high frequency of CDA perpetration through increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy?

Overview Research

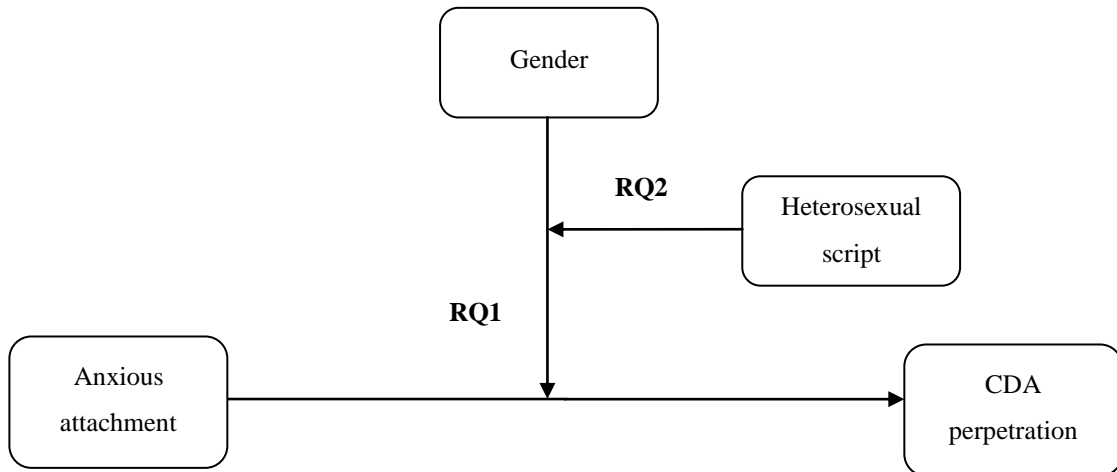
Altogether, we constructed two research models concerning the relationship between anxious attachment and CDA perpetration. Regarding our first model (Panel A of Figure 1), we bring the attachment framework (Bowlby, 1969) into dialogue with the social role (Eagly, 1987) and HS (Kim et al., 2007) theories to understand how gender and HS adherence modulate the influence of anxious attachment on CDA perpetration. Concerning our second model (Panel B of Figure 1), we used the two-stage model of attachment styles and threats (Harris & Darby, 2010) as the basis to test whether anxious attachment may indirectly influence CDA perpetration through increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy.

We conducted two cross-sectional survey studies to examine our research goals. Study 1 tested the effect of anxious attachment on CDA perpetration based on gender (RQ1). Study 2 replicated Study 1 and extended it by incorporating new variables that provided additional information about factors moderating and mediating the relationship between anxious attachment and CDA. In particular, Study 2 examined whether (a) the degree of HS adherence also interacts with gender to modulate the anxious attachment effect in CDA perpetration (RQ2) and (b) the positive association between anxious attachment and CDA perpetration could be mediated via increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy (RQ3). All research data and codes are available at [OSF](#).

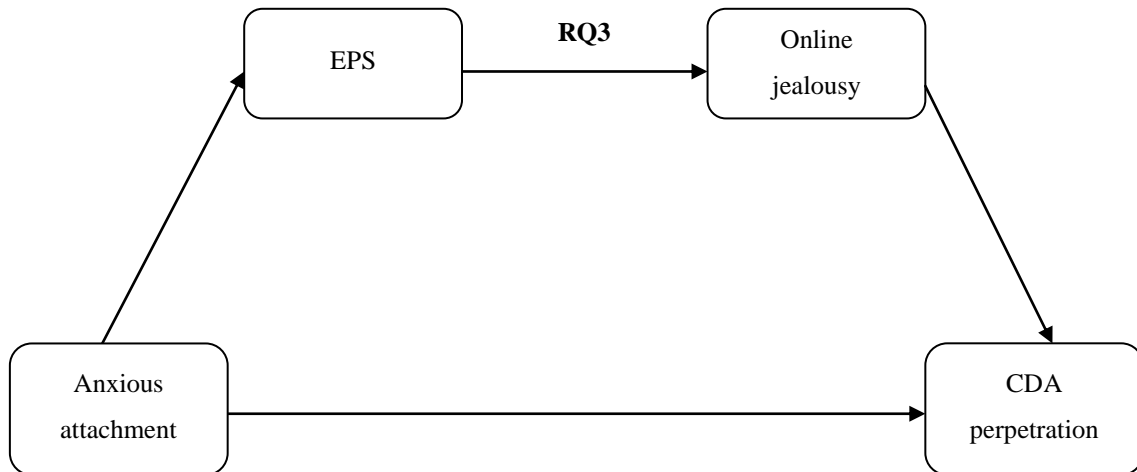
Figure 1

Panel A: Anxious Attachment Influences CDA as a Function of Gender (a moderation model; RQ1) and Gender and Heterosexual Script (a moderate moderation model; RQ2); Panel B: Anxious Attachment Indirectly Influences CDA via EPS and online jealousy (a serial mediation model; RQ3)

Panel A



Panel B



Note. CDA = cyberdating abuse; EPS = electronic partner surveillance.

Study 1

In Study 1, we analyzed the predictive role of anxious attachment, gender, and their interaction effects in CDA perpetration. Based on the reviewed literature, we hypothesized that higher levels of anxious attachment would predict more frequent perpetration of direct

cyberaggression (Hypothesis 1a) and cybercontrol (Hypothesis 1b). We also expected men to engage in direct cyberaggression more frequently (Hypothesis 2b) and women to engage in cybercontrol more frequently (Hypothesis 2b). Finally, we hypothesized high anxious attachment to predict higher frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration among men (Hypothesis 3a), whereas, in the case of women, we expected high anxious attachment to predict more frequent perpetration of cybercontrol.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The initial sample consisted of 523 (47.03%, $n = 246$ men; 52.39%, $n = 274$ women; and 0.57%, $n = 3$ other gender) Spanish participants who volunteered to participate. Data from 153 participants were excluded from the analysis because they did not complete the full questionnaire, and 12 additional participants were excluded because they were over 35 years old.⁵ We also removed the three participants who identified their gender as “other” from our analysis because our research is focused on the binary gender role (i.e., man vs. woman). Thus, the final sample was 355 Spanish participants (43.7%, $n = 155$ men and 56.3%, $n = 200$ women) whose ages ranged between 18 and 35 years old ($M_{age} = 25.43$, $SD = 4.80$). All of them had a heterosexual orientation. Moreover, 82.3% ($n = 292$) of participants were in a relationship at the time of data collection (42.5%, $n = 124$ men and 57.5%, $n = 168$ women), establishing the average duration of the relationship in 47.49 months ($SD = 42.08$), whereas 17.7% ($n = 63$) of participants were single (49.2% men, $n = 31$ and 50.8%, $n = 32$ women). Moreover, of the total sample, 22.5% ($n = 80$) participants reported having suffered IPV (33.75%, $n = 27$ men and 66.25%, $n = 53$ women); and 6.2% ($n = 22$) of participants indicated having exercised IPV (31.8%, $n = 7$ men and 68.2%, $n = 15$ women).

We used the LimeSurvey research platform to develop an online questionnaire to assess the study variables. Following a snowball sampling process, the questionnaire was disseminated through an open access link via various online media (i.e., email and SNSs: Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp). We collected the data during March and April 2021, with

⁵ In order to delimit the age range of young adults, we used the term “emerging adulthood” coined by Arnett (2000). Arnett’s term refers to the new developmental stage that has emerged as a result of environmental factors (i.e., sociocultural and economic factors) that seem to be delaying the acquisition of traditional markers of adulthood (e.g., marriage, parenthood, financial independence, home ownership). Likewise, previous studies have used the same standard (e.g., Lowe et al., 2013; Oleszkowicz & Misztela, 2015; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020).

the survey remaining open for two months. We finalized the data collection when the sample size was moderate ($N = 355$) according to the psychological research (Wolins, 1995) and a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Version 3.1.9.4) to perform a linear multiple regression with two predictors ($\alpha = .05$; $1 - \beta = 95\%$) could detect a small effect size ($f^2 \geq .044$) with the collected sample.

As inclusion criteria, participants had to be between 18 and 35 years of age, had to be of Spanish nationality, had to have a heterosexual orientation, and had to have maintained a romantic relationship in the past or currently. Such inclusion criteria were confirmed through a set of checking questions at the end of the survey. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, its voluntary nature, and the anonymity of their responses. After participants gave their consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, they were instructed to answer the measures of interest, embedded into a single questionnaire. When we set up the online survey, we forced participants to answer all the questions to progress through the survey. They could leave the study at any time if they wished. The time taken to complete the study was approximately 20 min. No monetary compensation was provided for participation. This study was carried out with the approval of the Ethics Committee of University of Granada for studies involving human participants.

*Measures*⁶

Adult Attachment. We administered the anxious attachment subscale of the Close Relationships-Revised measure (Fuertes et al., 2011). It consisted of nine items (e.g., “I worry that my partner does not care as much about me as I care about him/her”) on a Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Scores were calculated using average values. Higher scores indicated high romantic anxious attachment. This subscale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties in this study ($\alpha = .86$). The CFA results showed a good fit: normed fit index (NFI) = 0.949, relative fit index (RFI) = 0.916, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.964, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.94, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.964, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.079 [0.06, 0.10].

Cyberdating Abuse. We used the Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ; Borrajo et al., 2015), which consisted of 20 items subdivided into two parallel items each:

⁶ We performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for all measures using the AMOS 26 program. All information about the CFA results in Study 1 and Study 2 is available in the Supplementary Material (see SM1.1 and SM2.1, respectively).

one for the victimization subscale and one for the perpetration subscale. Moreover, each subscale was composed of two dimensions: (a) *direct cyberaggression* (11 items: e.g., “My partner or former partner made a comment on a wall of SNSs to insult or humiliate me”; “I wrote a comment on the wall of SNSs to insult or humiliate my partner or former partner”), and (b) *cybercontrol* (nine items: e.g., “My partner or ex-partner has controlled the time of my last connection to mobile applications”; “I have controlled the time at which my partner or ex-partner could last connect to mobile applications”). Participants answered using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *never*; 2 = *not in the last year, but it has occurred before*; 3 = *rarely: 1 or 2 times*; 4 = *sometimes: between 3 and 10 times*; 5 = *often: between 10 and 20 times*; 6 = *always: more than 20 times*). We calculated the average scores for direct aggression and control dimensions. Higher scores indicated more frequent CDA behaviors. The CDAQ also assessed the context in which these behaviors occurred through a multiple-choice response format (i.e., jealousy, game/joke, anger/frustration, discussions, personality [he/she is], reactivity [I did/did it first or otherwise]).

We observed good reliability rates for each factor: direct aggression perpetration, $\alpha = .86$; cybercontrol perpetration, $\alpha = .83$; direct cyberaggression victimization, $\alpha = .87$; and cybercontrol victimization, $\alpha = .91$, similar to the values obtained during questionnaire development (Borrajó et al., 2015). The CFA results showed a good fit for each factor: direct cyberaggression perpetration (root mean square residual [RMR] = 0.004, goodness-of-fit index [GFI] = 0.994, adjusted goodness-of-fit index [AGFI] = 0.991, NFI = 0.987, RFI = 0.984); cybercontrol perpetration (RMR = 0.10, GFI = 0.958, AGFI = 0.93, NFI = 0.918, RFI = 0.891); direct cyberaggression victimization (RMR = 0.015, GFI = 0.988, AGFI = 0.982, NFI = 0.978, RFI = 0.972); and cybercontrol victimization (RMR = 0.082, GFI = 0.987, AGFI = 0.978, NFI = 0.98, RFI = 0.974).

Sociodemographic Characteristics. We collected data about participants’ gender (“What is your gender? Man/Woman/Other”), age (“What is your age?”), and whether they were in a relationship at that time (“Are you currently in a couple relationship? Yes/No”). Moreover, we assessed the participants’ previous IPV experiences. First, we provided participants with the definition of IPV according to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), which is “behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors.” Second, we asked participants through single items whether they had ever suffered (“Have you ever suffered IPV in your relationships? Yes/No”) and/or exercised IPV (“Have you ever exercised IPV in your relationships? Yes/No”) in their relationships.

Statistical Analysis

We conducted data analysis using SPSS (Version 25). First, we performed two hierarchical regression analyses to test our initial predictions about the effects of anxious attachment (Hypothesis 1), gender (Hypothesis 2), and their interaction (Hypothesis 3) on direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol (Table 1). Prior to conducting the analyses, we standardized all the scores. In the first step, we included the sociodemographic variables mentioned in the previous section except for gender as control variables, and the dimensions of direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization.⁷ In the second step, we measured the effect of the predictor variables anxious attachment and gender (1 = *man*; 2 = *woman*). In the third step, we assessed the interaction between the predictor variables. We included the different types of cyberabusive behaviors—control and direct aggression—in all analyses as criterion variables. Next, we performed a simple slopes analysis to interpret the emerging interaction effect. Likewise, we estimated the standardized effect size f^2 for the interaction between anxious attachment and gender to provide information on the magnitude of interaction ($\geq .02/.15/.35$ indicate small/medium/large effects; Cohen, 1988) on the basis of the change in R^2 (Δf^2).

Results

Effects of Anxious Attachment and Gender on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration and Cybercontrol Perpetration

As shown in Table 1, our results showed that anxious attachment positively predicted the perpetration of direct cyberaggression ($b = 0.10, p < .01$) and cybercontrol ($b = 0.28, p < .001$). That is, participants with high levels of anxious attachment manifested to perpetrate direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol in their relationships with high frequency, supporting Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Gender did not predict direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = -0.05, p > .05$), causing us to reject Hypothesis 2a, but predicted cybercontrol perpetration ($b = 0.15, p < .001$). Specifically, women manifested to exercise cybercontrol toward their partners more frequently than men, which supported Hypothesis 2b.

⁷ Previous literature has observed that CDA victimization strongly predicts CDA perpetration (e.g., Felmlee & Faris, 2016; Smith et al., 2018). That is, having previously suffered CDA increases the risk of perpetrating such violence (Fernández-González et al., 2020). In line with Smith et al. (2018), in the virtual context, victims of CDA may easily engage in online reactive violence and take on the role of perpetrators. Likewise, Villorra et al. (2021) found that CDA perpetration and victimization were highly and positively associated in both dimensions, direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol. Therefore, we controlled in our analyses for both direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization.

Table 1*Anxious Attachment and Gender as Predictors of CDA Behaviors*

| | Direct cyberaggression perpetration | | | | | Cybercontrol perpetration | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-------|---------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | ΔR^2 | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | ΔR^2 |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .55 (.54) | .55*** | | | | .29 (.28) | .29*** |
| Age | 0.03 | 0.82 | [-0.04, 0.10] | | | 0.02 | 0.42 | [-0.07, 0.11] | | |
| Current relationship ^a | -0.12** | -3.03 | [-0.19, -.04] | | | -0.05 | -0.93 | [-0.14, 0.05] | | |
| Suffered IPV ^b | -0.01 | -0.16 | [-0.09, .08] | | | -0.07 | -1.34 | [-0.17, 0.03] | | |
| Exercised IPV ^c | 0.01 | 0.16 | [-0.07, 0.09] | | | -0.08 | -1.50 | [-0.18, 0.02] | | |
| DCAV | 0.83*** | 17.04 | [0.73, 0.92] | | | 0.06 | 1.01 | [-0.06, 0.18] | | |
| CCV | -0.11* | 2.22 | [-0.20, -0.01] | | | 0.49*** | 8.18 | [0.38, 0.61] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .56 (.55) | .01* | | | | .38 (.37) | .09*** |
| Anxious attachment | 0.10** | 2.46 | [0.02, 0.18] | | | 0.28*** | 6.00 | [0.19, 0.38] | | |
| Gender ^d | -0.05 | -1.22 | [-0.12, 0.03] | | | 0.15*** | 3.29 | [0.06, 0.23] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .57 (.56) | .01** | | | | .38 (.37) | .001 |
| Anxious attachment X Gender | -0.10** | -2.83 | [-0.18, -0.03] | | | 0.04 | 0.86 | [-0.05, 0.12] | | |

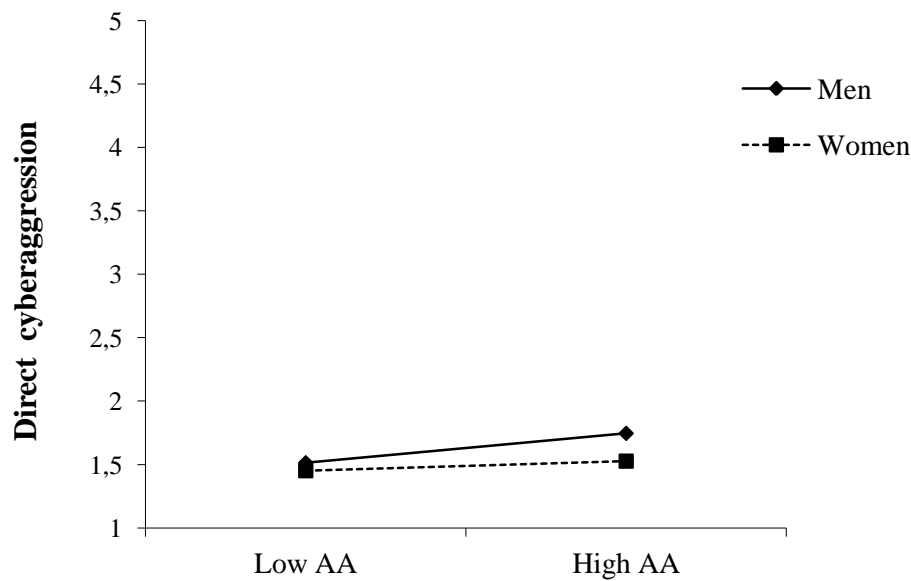
Note. $N = 355$. IPV = intimate partner violence; DCAV= direct cyberaggression victimization; CCV = cybercontrol victimization; ^a1 = yes, 2 = no; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no; ^c1 = yes, 2 = no; ^d1 = man, 2 = woman.

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

Furthermore, we found a statistically significant interaction effect between anxious attachment and gender in direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = -0.10, p < .01, \Delta f^2 = .01$). The simple slopes analysis showed that high levels of anxious attachment predicted higher frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration among men ($b = 0.03, SE = 0.01, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.05]$); but not among women ($b = 0.003, SE = 0.01, p > .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.01, 0.02]$); see Figure 2). This result supported Hypothesis 3a.

Figure 2

Two-Way Interaction between Anxious Attachment and Gender on Direct Cyberaggression



Note. AA = Anxious Attachment

Our results did not show a significant interaction effect between anxious attachment and gender on cybercontrol perpetration ($b = 0.04, p > .05$), rejecting Hypothesis 3b.

Auxiliary Analyses

To explore gender differences in the study variables, we carried out different t -tests for independent samples. Participants' gender was included as an independent variable (IV), and anxious attachment and the different online abusive behaviors that make up the perpetration and victimization dimensions—direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol—were used as dependent variables (DVs). The results only yielded statistically significant differences based on gender for cybercontrol in the victimization and perpetration dimensions. That is, men scored higher on cybercontrol victimization than women, and women scored higher than men on cybercontrol perpetration (see Table 2).

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics and Tests of Mean Differences by Gender, Study Variables*

| | Rangue | | Skewness/Kurtosis | Overall | Men | Women | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | <i>d</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| | Potencial | Real | | (<i>N</i> = 355) | (<i>n</i> = 155) | (<i>n</i> = 200) | | | |
| | | | | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | | | |
| Anxious attachment | 1–7 | 1–7 | 0.38/–0.66 | 3.14 (1.35) | 3.04 (1.23) | 3.22 (1.43) | –1.24 | [–0.45, 0.10] | 0.13 |
| Direct cyberaggression victimization | 1–6 | 1–4.27 | 6.23/47.92 | 1.09 (0.32) | 1.12 (0.37) | 1.07 (0.27) | 1.41 | [–0.02, 0.12] | 0.15 |
| Cybercontrol victimization | 1–6 | 1–5.67 | 2.59/7.36 | 1.52 (0.84) | 1.64 (0.93) | 1.43 (0.75) | 2.33* | [0.03, 0.39] | 0.25 |
| Direct cyberaggression perpetration | 1–6 | 1–4.18 | 13.77/25.96 | 1.04 (0.19) | 1.05 (0.27) | 1.02 (0.07) | 1.40 | [–0.01, 0.08] | 0.15 |
| Cybercontrol perpetration | 1–6 | 1–5.11 | 2.34/6.96 | 1.47 (0.66) | 1.39 (0.59) | 1.53 (0.72) | –2.02* | [–0.27, –0.004] | 0.21 |

Note. CI = confidence interval. **p* < .05

Similarly, to examine the context in which CDA behaviors occur and possible gender differences, we performed various chi-square tests. The results showed that the most frequent reason for CDA perpetration was jealousy (30.7%), followed by anger/frustration (20.8%) and arguments/verbal confrontation (14.9%). We also noted significant differences based on gender in the context of playing/joking: a statistically higher percentage of men (14.2%) than women (4.5%) manifested to exercise CDA in situations of joking or playing within the couple (see Table 3).

Table 3*Motivation Rates for CDA Perpetration*

| | Overall (<i>N</i> = 355) | Men (<i>n</i> = 155) | Women (<i>n</i> = 200) | χ^2 | Φ |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------|---------|
| Jealousy | 30.7% (109) | 27.7% (43) | 33% (66) | 1.14 | -0.06 |
| Arguments/Verbal confrontation | 14.9 (53) | 12.9% (20) | 16.5% (33) | 0.89 | -0.05 |
| Anger/Frustration | 20.8% (74) | 18.1% (28) | 23% (46) | 1.29 | -0.06 |
| Personality | 5.9% (21) | 5.8% (9) | 6% (12) | 0.01 | -0.004 |
| Playing/Joking | 8.7% (31) | 14.2% (22) | 4.5% (9) | 10.30** | 0.17*** |
| Reactivity | 5.4% (19) | 6% (12) | 4.5% (7) | 0.38 | -0.3 |

Note. CDA = cyberdating abuse. Prevalence rates with *n* in parenthesis.

p* < .01, *p* < .001

Brief Discussion

In sum, our findings support prior evidence (i.e., Villorra et al., 2021) showing that anxious attachment positively predicts the frequency of direct cyberaggression and cyber control perpetration. Our results also revealed a gender effect on the cybercontrol dimension, indicating that women perpetrated cybercontrol more frequently than men, in agreement with previous studies (e.g., Stonard et al. 2017; Villorra et al., 2021). Likewise, we found that anxious attachment was positively associated with direct cyberaggression in men, but not in woman. Following feminist research (Marganski & Fauth, 2013; see also Karantzas et al., 2016), cultural beliefs around gender and adherence to unequal heteronormative scripts (i.e., HS) may help to understand why men who are anxiously attached to their partners exercise direct cyberaggression to maintain power within couple relationships.

Study 2

In Study 2, we retested Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 to check whether Study 1's results were replicated. Moreover, in Study 2, we extended Study 1's findings by examining whether the degree of HS adherence interacts with gender to modulate the anxious attachment effect in CDA perpetration. In this respect, we expected that higher levels of HS would predict more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression (Hypothesis 4a) and cybercontrol (Hypothesis 4b). Also, we expected to find a third-order interaction among anxious attachment, gender, and HS. In particular, we hypothesized that high levels of anxious attachment would predict higher frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration in men with high (vs. low) HS adherence (Hypothesis 5a), but not in women. Similarly, we hypothesized that high levels of anxious attachment would predict more frequent perpetration of cybercontrol in women with high (vs. low) HS adherence (Hypothesis 5b), but not in men.

Finally, Study 2 was aimed at examining whether the positive association between anxious attachment and CDA perpetration could be explained via EPS and online jealousy. We expected high levels of anxious attachment to be associated with higher EPS use, which, in turn, is related to higher frequency of online jealousy, and this, consequently, to more frequent direct cyberaggression perpetration (Hypothesis 6a) and cybercontrol perpetration (Hypothesis 6b).

Method

Participants and Procedure

From the initial sample collected ($N = 383$; 62.14 %, $n = 238$ men and 37.86 %, $n = 145$ women), 31 participants were removed from the dataset because they did not complete the full questionnaire, and nine participants were removed because they failed attention check items. Thus, the final sample consisted of 343 Spanish participants (61.8%, $n = 212$ men and 38.2%, $n = 131$ women) whose ages ranged between 18 and 35 years old ($M_{age} = 24.24$, $SD = 4.05$). All of them had a heterosexual orientation. Of the total sample, 32.9% ($n = 113$) participants were single (69.9%, $n = 79$ men and 30.1%, $n = 34$ women); 50.4% ($n = 173$) were in a dating relationship (57.2%, $n = 99$ men and 42.8%, $n = 74$ women); 13.4% ($n = 46$) were cohabiting (56.5%, $n = 26$ men and 43.5%, $n = 20$ women); and 3.2% ($n = 11$) were married (72.7%, $n = 8$ men and 27.3%, $n = 3$ women). The average relationship duration in months for the set of participants who acknowledged being in a relationship (67.1%; $n = 270$)

at the time of data collection was 41.43 ($SD = 50.22$). Moreover, 17.8% ($n = 61$) of participants reported having suffered IPV (39.3%, $n = 24$ men and 60.7%, $n = 37$ women), and 5.5% ($n = 19$) of participants indicated having exercised IPV against partners (47.37%, $n = 9$ men and 52.63%, $n = 10$ women).

We used the Qualtrics research platform to develop a single online questionnaire with the study variables. As in Study 1, the questionnaire was disseminated through an open access link via various online media (Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp). We collected the data during June and July 2021. We finalized the data collection when a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power ($\alpha = .05$; $1 - \beta = 95\%$) to perform a multiple linear regression with three predictors could detect a small effect size ($f^2 \geq .051$) with the collected sample ($N = 343$).

Participants had to meet the same inclusion criteria as in Study 1, which were checked through checking questions in the questionnaire. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, its voluntary nature, and the anonymity of their responses. After participants gave their consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, they were instructed to answer the measures of interest, which took them approximately 25 minutes. No monetary compensation was provided for participation. This study had the approval of the Ethics Committee of the University of Granada for studies involving human participants.

Measures

Adult Attachment. We administered the Close Relationships-Revised measure (Fuertes et al., 2011) used in Study 1. In Study 2, we obtained an internal consistency of .88. The CFA results showed a good fit (NFI = 0.966, RFI = 0.944, IFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.97, CFI = 0.981, RMSEA = 0.057 [0.034, 0.08]).

Electronic Partner Surveillance. An adaptation of the Interpersonal Electronic Surveillance scale (Tokunaga, 2011) was used to measure EPS use on SNSs. It was composed of 13 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). In our adaptation, we replaced the word "Facebook" with "SNSs" in each item (e.g., "I notice when my partner updates his/her SNSs"). Scale scores were calculated using average values, where higher scores indicated greater EPS use. The general internal consistency obtained in this study was $\alpha = .90$. The CFA results showed a good fit (NFI = 0.939, RFI = 0.907, IFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.938, CFI = 0.959, RMSEA = 0.073 [0.059, 0.087]).

Online Jealousy. We used the online jealousy subscale of the Cyberdating Q_A questionnaire (Sánchez et al., 2015) to assess the frequency with which young people experienced jealousy in their relationships as a result of seeing specific partner activities on SNSs. This measure consisted of four items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). Example items include “I get jealous when my partner posts provocative photos on their SNSs profile” or “I get jealous after reading the messages my partner receives to his/her account.” We calculated scores for this scale using average values; higher scores indicated more frequent feeling of online jealousy. Our α value for this dimension was .72). The CFA results showed a good fit (NFI = 0.985, RFI = 0.955, IFI = 0.991, TLI = 0.972, CFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.068 [0.001, 0.143]).

Cyberdating Abuse. As in Study 1, we administered the CDAQ (Borrajó et al., 2015): direct cyberaggression perpetration, $\alpha = .85$; cybercontrol perpetration, $\alpha = .85$; direct cyberaggression victimization, $\alpha = .90$; and cybercontrol victimization, $\alpha = .93$. The CFA results showed a good fit: direct cyberaggression perpetration (RMR = 0.01, GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.956, NFI = 0.94, RFI = 0.925); cybercontrol perpetration (RMR = 0.068, GFI = 0.977, AGFI = 0.962, NFI = 0.957, RFI = 0.943); direct cyberaggression victimization (RMR = 0.033, GFI = 0.986, AGFI = 0.979, NFI = 0.979, RFI = 0.973); and cybercontrol victimization (NFI = 0.988, RFI = 0.973, IFI = 0.955, TLI = 0.988, CFI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.084 [0.037, 0.004]).

Heterosexual Script. We used the Heterosexual Script Scale (Seabrook et al., 2016) to examine participants’ endorsement of various sexist issues of gender-based traditional scripts for man–woman relationships and courtship. The Heterosexual Script Scale was composed of 22 items measuring: (a) *courtship and commitment* (eight items: e.g., “Guys like to play the field and shouldn’t be expected to stay with one partner for too long”); (b) *men as powerful initiators* (four items: e.g., “Men should be the ones to ask women out and initiate physical contact”); (c) *men valuing women’s appearance* (five items: e.g., “Being with an attractive partner gives a guy prestige”); and (d) *sex defines masculinity and women set sexual limits* (five items: e.g., “It is up to women to keep things from moving too fast sexually”). Participants answered using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*). For the purposes of our study, we calculated overall average scale scores. Higher scores indicated stronger acceptance of the HS. We obtained adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$), similar to that revealed by the authors when developing and validating their scale ($\alpha = .87$; Seabrook et al., 2016). The CFA results showed a good fit (NFI = 0.856, RFI = 0.824, IFI = 0.917, TLI = 0.897, CFI = 0.916, RMSEA = 0.58 [0.05, 0.066]).

Sociodemographic Characteristics. Similar to Study 1, we collected data about participants' gender, age, and relational status ("What is your relational status? single/dating/cohabiting/married/widower"). Likewise, we assessed participants' previous IPV experiences (i.e., whether they had ever suffered or exercised IPV) after providing them with the IPV definition by WHO (2021).

Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Version 25). We performed two hierarchical regression analyses to test our predictions about the effect of the HS adherence (Hypothesis 4) and its interaction with anxious attachment and gender (Hypothesis 5) in the perpetration of direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol (see Table 4). We standardized all scores. In the first step, we included all sociodemographic variables mentioned in the previous section except for gender as control variables, and the dimensions of direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization. In the second step, we included the predictor variables: anxious attachment, gender (1 = *man*; 2 = *woman*), and HS. In the third step, we included the second-order interactions; and in the fourth step, we included the third-order interactions. The different dimensions of perpetration—control and direct aggression—were included in the analysis as criterion variables. When the interaction effects were significant, we performed simple slope analyses to facilitate their interpretation. Low and high values for HS are plotted at 1 *SD* below and above the mean, respectively. We also estimated the standardized effect size f^2 for those statistically significant interactions.

Finally, we conducted two multiple serial mediation analyses using Model 6 of the PROCESS program (Version 4.1) to examine whether high levels of anxious attachment are associated with high direct cyberaggression (Hypothesis 6a) or cybercontrol (Hypothesis 6b) via EPS use and online jealousy. We included anxious attachment as the predictor (X), direct cyberaggression perpetration and cybercontrol perpetration as the criterion variables (Y), and EPS (M1) and online jealousy (M2) as mediating variables. Following Hayes' (2018) procedures for assessing indirect effects with serial mediators, we estimated bias-corrected CIs based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. Note that sociodemographic characteristics, HS, and both dimensions of CDA victimization—direct aggression and control—were also included as covariates in this model. Following Schoemann et al. (2017), we used Monte Carlo simulations (5,000 replications and 20,000 draws) to run a post hoc power analysis for two

serial mediators and test the indirect effects in our sample ($N = 343$). We took the standardized coefficients into consideration.

Results

Effects of Anxious Attachment, Gender, and HS on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration and Cybercontrol Perpetration

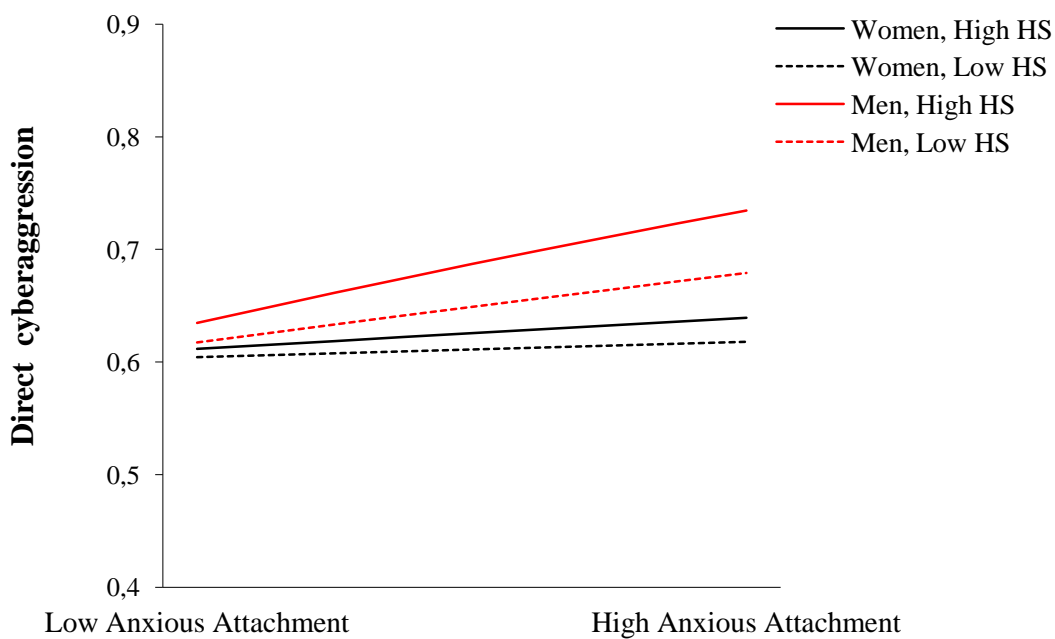
As shown in Table 4, we noted that anxious attachment significantly affected cybercontrol perpetration ($b = 0.18, p < .001$), indicating that high levels of anxious attachment were predictive of frequent perpetration of cybercontrol against the partner. This supported Hypothesis 1b. However, we observed no effect of anxious attachment on direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = -0.02, p > .05$), rejecting Hypothesis 1a. Furthermore, gender significantly predicted cybercontrol perpetration ($b = 0.20, p < .001$): women seemed to exercise cybercontrol against their partners more frequently than men, confirming Hypothesis 2b. In contrast, gender did not predict direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = 0.01, p > .05$), causing us to reject Hypothesis 2a. No significant interaction effects between anxious attachment and gender were found in any dimension of CDA perpetration, so we rejected our Hypothesis 3 ($p > .05$). Our results also showed that HS positively affected the perpetration of direct cyberaggression ($b = 0.26, p < .001$) and cybercontrol ($b = 0.28, p < .001$). High HS adherence was predictive of more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol against the partner, which supported Hypotheses 4a and 4b, respectively.

On the other hand, our results revealed a second-order interaction effect between anxious attachment and HS on direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = -0.22, p < .001, \Delta f^2 = .03$). A simple slopes analysis showed that high levels of anxious attachment predicted more frequent direct cyberaggression perpetration in participants with high HS adherence (+1 SD ; $b = -0.02, SE = 0.01, p = .01, 95\% CI [-0.05, -0.01]$) as well as participants with low HS adherence (-1 SD ; $b = 0.02, SE = 0.01, p = .04, 95\% CI [0.001, 0.05]$). However, the effect was stronger in participants with high HS scores. Similarly, results manifested another second-order interaction effect between HS and gender on direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = -0.16, p < .01, \Delta f^2 = .02$). High scores in HS were predictive of more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression among men ($b = 0.09, SE = 0.02, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.06, 0.13]$). This effect was not significant among women ($b = 0.01, SE = 0.02, p > .05, 95\% CI [-0.03, 0.06]$).

We also found a statistically significant three-way interaction effect among anxious attachment, gender, and HS ($b = 0.19$, $p < .01$, $\Delta f^2 = .02$). Simple slopes analyses showed that high anxious attachment was predictive of more frequent direct cyberaggression perpetration for men (vs. women) with both high HS adherence (+1 SD ; $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.9]) and low HS adherence (-1 SD ; $b = -.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [-.06, -.01]). However, the effects were stronger among men with high HS adherence, which supported Hypothesis 5a (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Three-Way Interaction Effect among Anxious Attachment, Gender, and Heterosexual Script on Direct Cyberaggression



Note. HS = heterosexual script. HS is graphed at -1 SD (low) and + 1 SD (high).

Our results pointed to no significant second- or third-order interaction effects between the predictor variables in the cybercontrol perpetration dimension ($p > .05$), rejecting Hypothesis 5b.

Table 4*Anxious Attachment, Gender, and Heterosexual Script as Predictors of CDA Behaviors*

| | Direct cyberaggression perpetration | | | | | Cybercontrol perpetration | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .07 (.06) | .07*** | | | | .19 (.17) | .19*** |
| Age | -0.10 | -1.75 | [-.21, 0.01] | | | -0.02 | -0.41 | [-0.13, 0.08] | | |
| Status marital ^a | 0.04 | 0.67 | [-0.07, 0.15] | | | .10 | 1.87 | [-0.01, .20] | | |
| Suffered IPV ^b | 0.06 | 1.03 | [-0.06, 0.19] | | | 0.004 | 0.07 | [-0.11, 0.12] | | |
| Exercised IPV ^c | -.017** | -2.95 | [-0.29, -0.06] | | | -0.18*** | -3.34 | [-0.29, -0.08] | | |
| DCAV | 0.21*** | 3.30 | [0.09, 0.34] | | | -0.08 | -1.29 | [-0.20, 0.04] | | |
| CCV | -0.05 | -0.78 | [-0.17, 0.8] | | | 0.38*** | 6.43 | [0.26, 0.50] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .13 (.11) | .06*** | | | | .31 (.29) | .12*** |
| Anxious attachment | -0.02 | -0.45 | [-0.13, 0.08] | | | 0.18*** | 3.81 | [0.09, 0.28] | | |
| Gender ^d | 0.01 | 0.11 | [-0.10, 0.12] | | | 0.20*** | 4.04 | [0.10, 0.30] | | |
| HS | 0.26*** | 4.57 | [0.15, 0.37] | | | 0.28*** | 5.62 | [0.18, 0.38] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .19 (.16) | .06*** | | | | .31 (.28) | .002 |
| Anxious attachment \times Gender | -0.06 | -1.14 | [-0.17, 0.05] | | | 0.007 | 0.14 | [-0.09, 0.11] | | |
| Anxious attachment \times HS | -0.22*** | -4.02 | [-0.31, -0.11] | | | 0.02 | 0.46 | [-0.07, 0.12] | | |
| Gender \times HS | -0.16** | -2.99 | [-0.28, -0.06] | | | -0.03 | -0.68 | [-0.14, 0.07] | | |
| <i>Step 4</i> | | | | .21 (.18) | .02** | | | | .31 (.28) | .01 |
| Anxious attachment \times Gender \times HS | 0.19** | 3.07 | [0.07, 0.31] | | | 0.09 | 1.57 | [-0.02, 0.20] | | |

Note. *N* = 343. DCAV= direct cyberaggression victimization; CCV = cybercontrol victimization; IPV = intimate partner violence; HS = heterosexual script. ^a1 = single, 2 = dating, 3 = cohabiting, 4 = married, 5 = divorced, 6 = widower; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no; ^c1 = yes, 2 = no; ^d1 = man, 2 = woman.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

Indirect Effect of Anxious Attachment on CDA Perpetration based on Rates of EPS and Online Jealousy

Our results did not prove an indirect effect of anxious attachment on direct cyberaggression based on rates of EPS or online jealousy ($b = 0.002$, $SE = 0.002$, 95% CI [-0.0004, 0.01]; see Supplementary Material [SM 2.3]). Therefore, we rejected Hypothesis 6a. Conversely, as shown in Table 5 and Figure 4, the results highlighted a statistically significant indirect effect of anxious attachment on cybercontrol perpetration through EPS and online jealousy ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.12]). Thus, high anxious attachment was indirectly linked to more frequent cybercontrol perpetration via their effects on increased EPS use and frequency of online jealousy. In other words, high levels of anxious attachment were associated with greater EPS use on SNSs, which, in turn, seemed to be associated with a higher frequency of romantic online jealousy and thus, consequently, with a higher frequency of cybercontrol perpetration against the partner (see Figure 4). Post hoc power analysis showed that our sample ($N = 343$) had the ability to detect the first indirect effect (anxious attachment \rightarrow EPS \rightarrow cybercontrol) and the third indirect effect (anxious attachment \rightarrow EPS \rightarrow online jealousy \rightarrow cybercontrol) with 89% power, and the second indirect effect (anxious attachment \rightarrow online jealousy \rightarrow cybercontrol) with 100% power.

The variables included in the model predicted 50.93% of the variance of the inclination to cybercontrol one's partner. The total effect of anxious attachment on cybercontrol was significant ($b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.13]). This finding supported Hypothesis 6b.

Table 5

Multiple Mediation Analysis of Anxious Attachment, Electronic Partner Surveillance, and Online Jealousy on Cybercontrol

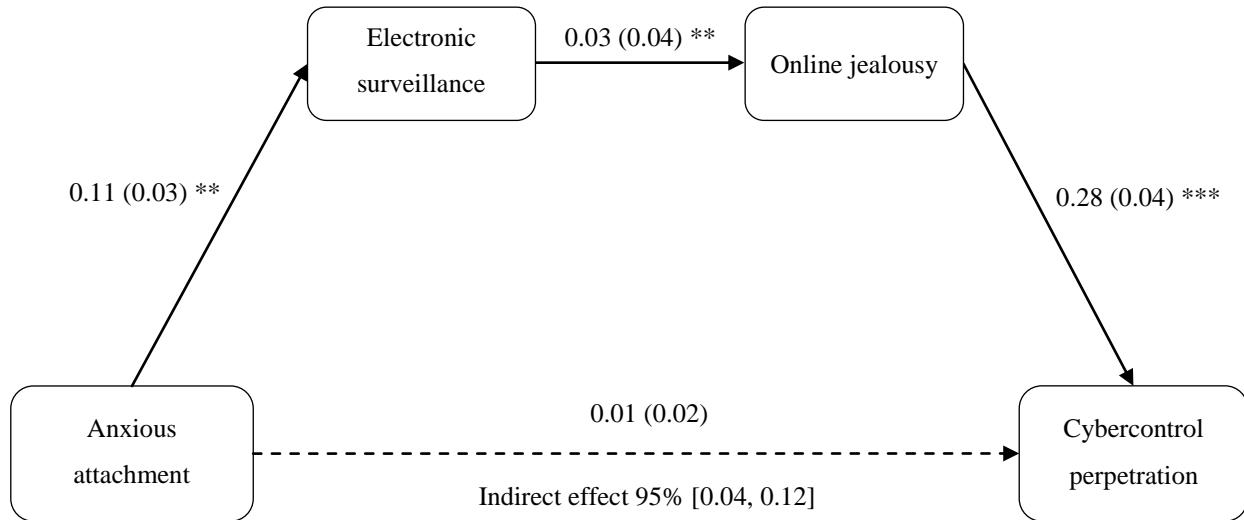
| | Partner Electronic Surveillance | | | Online Jealousy | | | Cybercontrol Perpetration | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | Symmetric BCI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | Symmetric BCI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | Symmetric BCI |
| Constant | 1.41* | 0.59 | [0.25, 2.58] | -1.01* | 0.46 | [-1.91, -0.10] | 0.86* | 0.35 | [0.17, 1.55] |
| Anxious attachment | 0.11** | 0.03 | [0.4, 0.17] | 0.17*** | 0.03 | [0.12, 0.22] | 0.01 | 0.02 | [-0.03, 0.05] |
| Electronic partner surveillance | | | | 0.32*** | 0.04 | [0.23, 0.40] | 0.22*** | 0.03 | [0.15, 0.28] |
| Online jealousy | | | | | | | 0.28*** | 0.04 | [0.20, 0.36] |
| Gender ^a | 0.18 | 0.09 | [-0.01, 0.36] | 0.21** | 0.07 | [0.07, 0.35] | 0.15** | 0.06 | [0.04, 0.26] |
| Age | -0.02* | 0.01 | [-0.05, -0.002] | 0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.02] | 0.002 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.02] |
| Marital status ^b | -0.08 | 0.06 | [-0.19, 0.04] | 0.05 | 0.05 | [-0.04, 0.14] | 0.11** | 0.04 | [0.05, 0.18] |
| IPV suffered ^c | 0.14 | 0.13 | [-0.11, 0.40] | 0.21* | 0.10 | [0.01, 0.41] | -0.09 | 0.08 | [-0.24, 0.06] |
| IPV exercised ^d | -0.11 | 0.20 | [-0.51, 0.29] | 0.01 | 0.16 | [-0.29, 0.32] | -0.49*** | 0.12 | [-0.72, -0.25] |
| Heterosexual script | 0.27*** | 0.06 | [0.16, 0.38] | 0.16*** | 0.05 | [0.07, 0.25] | 0.09** | 0.03 | [0.03, 0.16] |
| DCV | -0.05 | 0.11 | [-0.26, 0.16] | -0.07 | 0.08 | [-0.24, 0.09] | -0.11 | 0.06 | [-0.23, 0.01] |
| CV | 0.13* | 0.05 | [0.03, 0.22] | 0.14*** | 0.04 | [0.06, 0.21] | 0.12*** | 0.03 | [0.06, 0.18] |
| | | $R^2 = .17$ | | | $R^2 = .40$ | | | $R^2 = .51$ | |
| | | $F(9, 333) = 7.62, p < .001$ | | | $F(10, 332) = 21.74, p < .001$ | | | $F(11, 331) = 31.23, p < .001$ | |
| Indirect effects | | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | | | Symmetric BCI | |
| Total | | 0.08 | | | 0.02 | | | [0.04, 0.12] | |
| I1 | | 0.02 | | | 0.01 | | | [0.01, 0.05] | |
| I2 | | 0.05 | | | 0.01 | | | [0.02, 0.08] | |
| I3 | | 0.01 | | | 0.004 | | | [0.002, 0.02] | |

Note. $N = 343$. DCV = direct cyberaggression victimization, CV = cybercontrol victimization. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = single, 2 = dating, 3 = cohabiting, 4 = married; ^c1 = yes, 2 = no; ^d1 = yes, 2 = no. I1 = anxious attachment → electronic partner surveillance → cybercontrol; I2 = anxious attachment → online jealousy → cybercontrol; I3 = anxious attachment → electronic partner surveillance → online jealousy → cybercontrol; symmetric BCI = symmetric bootstrapping confidence interval. Indirect effects are significant where the BCI does not include the value 0.

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

Figure 4

Indirect Effects of Anxious Attachment and Cybercontrol via Electronic Partner Surveillance and Online Jealousy



Note. Unstandardized β coefficients reported, SE in parentheses.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Auxiliary Analyses

We conducted various t -tests for independent samples to examine possible gender differences among the study variables. Participants' gender was included as an IV. Anxious attachment, EPS, online jealousy, HS, and the different online abusive behaviors type that made up the perpetration and victimization dimensions—direct cyberaggression and control—were used as DVs. Our results only showed statistically significant differences based on gender on HS attitudes. Men manifested stronger HS adherence than women. Descriptive statistics and the full results of the t -tests are shown in Table 6.

Table 6*Descriptive Statistics and Tests of Mean Differences by Gender for Study Variables*

| | Rangue | | Skewness/Kurtosis | Overall | Men | Women | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | <i>d</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------|----------|
| | Potencial | Real | | (<i>n</i> = 343) | (<i>n</i> = 212) | (<i>n</i> = 131) | | | |
| | | | | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) | | | |
| Anxious attachment | 1–7 | 1–6.78 | 0.28/–0.75 | 3.36 (1.32) | 3.45 (1.32) | 3.21 (1.30) | 1.63 | [–0.05, 0.53] | 0.18 |
| Electronic partner surveillance | 1–5 | 1–5 | 1.11/1.39 | 2.09 (0.83) | 2.10 (0.76) | 2.08 (0.94) | 0.19 | [–0.17, 0.21] | 0.02 |
| Online jealousy | 1–5 | 1–5 | 1.65/3.19 | 1.68 (0.75) | 1.67 (0.75) | 1.69 (0.75) | –0.34 | [–0.19, 0.13] | –0.04 |
| Direct cyberaggression victimization | 1–6 | 1–4.64 | 4/18.66 | 1.19 (0.48) | 1.19 (0.44) | 1.19 (0.53) | –0.14 | [–0.11, 0.10] | 0 |
| Cybercontrol victimization | 1–6 | 1–5.89 | 1.54/1.91 | 1.78 (1.03) | 1.81 (1.03) | 1.74 (1.03) | 0.58 | [–0.16, 0.29] | 0.09 |
| Direct cyberaggression perpetration | 1–6 | 1–4.09 | 10.60/43.65 | 1.05 (0.21) | 1.05 (0.24) | 1.03 (0.13) | 1.00 | [–0.02, 0.07] | 0.07 |
| Cybercontrol perpetration | 1–6 | 1–5.44 | 2.52/8.85 | 1.47 (0.63) | 1.42 (0.57) | 1.55 (0.71) | –1.80 | [–0.28, 0.01] | –0.20 |
| Heterosexual script | 1–6 | 1–5.59 | 0.73/0.58 | 2.19 (0.80) | 2.41 (0.78) | 1.84 (0.72) | 6.73*** | [0.40, 0.73] | 0.76 |

Note. CI = confidence interval. *** $p < .001$

General Discussion

Cognitive and behavioral schemes associated with attachment systems are linked to cultural beliefs about how men and women should relate to each other in romantic relationships (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Hammond & Overall, 2017). Although the empirical literature shows that high anxious attachment is consistently associated with increased CDA perpetration, to date, the moderating role of gender and HS adherence in such relationship has not been explored.

Across two studies, we found that high levels of anxious attachment were associated with increases in frequency of cybercontrol perpetration against partners, in line with the findings of Villorra et al. (2021). The fear of rejection and abandonment experienced by individuals with anxious attachment makes them insecure and distrustful in their relationships. Consequently, this state often evokes technological behaviors aimed at controlling one's partner as a strategy to reassure themselves of their partners' continuing love and fidelity (Bui & Pasalich, 2021; Sullivan, 2021). Similarly, in Study 1, we observed that participants with anxious attachment manifested high frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration against partners, which is congruent with the findings of Villorra et al. (2021). Moreover, when we examined the moderating role of gender in such relationships we observed that it was significant for men, but not for women. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that men perpetrate more explicit, direct, and severe manifestations of CDA against their partners (e.g., Reed et al., 2021b).

These effects of anxious attachment and gender in direct cyberaggression perpetration were not replicated in Study 2. Nevertheless, one of our most noteworthy findings in Study 2 was that HS seemed to interact with anxious attachment and gender in predicting the perpetration of direct cyberaggression in romantic relationships. Our results suggest that anxious attachment is associated with high frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration in men (but not in women), mainly in those with high HS assumption (vs. low HS assumption). This finding reinforces the work of Zweig et al. (2013), who observed that a significantly higher percentage of men than women reported perpetrating sexual cyberabuse (i.e., direct cyberaggression) against their partner. Likewise, our result is in line with the findings of Reed et al. (2021b), who observed that the high adherence of gender stereotypical beliefs was associated with a higher incidence of direct cyberaggression by adolescent men.

According to empirical research that has examined the power hierarchy in heterosexual relationships, a man's aggression toward his partner may be motivated by the

perceived loss of control or power within the relationship in situations where men feel that they culturally and legitimately should maintain control in their romantic relationships (Jaffe, 1989). Thus, men's violence toward women can be deemed a response to the perceived threat of subordination and the loss of power and/or control over the partner (Sugihara & Warner, 2002). In this respect, men with anxious attachment and high HS adherence may employ direct cyberaggression against their partners as a strategy for re-establishing power and control in the face of the concern, insecurity, and/or perceived threat in the relationship (Marganski & Fauth, 2013).

Reinforcing the postulates of feminist research, the results of Study 1 and Study 2 suggest that there is a power imbalance derived from a patriarchal society in heterosexual relationships and that CDA is gender asymmetrical (Walby & Towers, 2018). Gender-based power imbalances that exist in the offline context are reproduced in the online environment, where couples interact both with platforms and with each other while defining norms and usage practices that are often violent and unhealthy for the relationship (Álvarez, 2012). However, more research is needed in CDA area to substantiate such assumptions.

On the other hand, our data indicated that women manifested a higher frequency of cybercontrol perpetration against their partners compared to men (Studies 1 and 2). This finding is consistent with the previous works indicating that women are more likely to exercise indirect cyberabusive behaviors like cybercontrol than men (e.g., Barter et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2021b). This, in turn, could be explained by the fact that women seem to be more concerned than men with safeguarding and protecting the relationship (Reed et al., 2021b; Stonard et al., 2017). However, contrary to our predictions, gender seems to have no moderating effect on the relationship between anxious attachment and cybercontrol perpetration toward the partner, as we observed in Study 1 and 2. In this sense, men and women with high anxious attachment similarly seem to exercise cybercontrol behaviors as a strategy for alleviating distress and worry about the relationship (Sullivan, 2021; Reed et al., 2015). Furthermore, we found no interaction effects of HS with anxious attachment and gender on the cybercontrol dimension in Study 2.

Thus, although gender and/or HS adherence appear to be predictors of cybercontrol perpetration against the partner, they do not moderate the positive relationship between romantic anxious attachment and this type of cyberabuse. This could be related to the fact that, regardless of cultural beliefs about gender norms and HS, cybercontrol behaviors are considered more socially legitimate or acceptable behaviors for relationship maintenance (Stonard et al., 2017). That is, a consequence derived more from the characteristics of digital

means (e.g., easy access to information, permanent linkage, invisibility—the possibility of carrying out the abusive behavior without being seen by others) than a manifestation of IPV (Tokunaga, 2011). However, the fact that the behaviors are prevalent and commonly perceived as normative does not exempt them from causing potential risk: it does lead to unhealthy dynamics within relationships that affect the well-being and satisfaction of the relationship (Doucette et al., 2021).

In this respect, another significant finding of our research was that the positive association between anxious attachment and cybercontrol perpetration seems to be mediated by increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy (Study 2). Specifically, our results showed that high levels of anxious attachment were related to greater EPS use on SNSs. This heavy engagement in EPS, in turn, seemed to be associated with high frequency of online jealousy and, consequently, with more frequent perpetration of cybercontrol against partners.

SNSs are an important tool for meeting and fulfilling needs for intimacy and closeness with partners especially for individuals with anxious romantic attachment (Sullivan, 2021), whose mental schemas are characterized by a high preoccupation with relationship problems and a constant need for reciprocity (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). However, following the two-stage model of attachment styles and threat (Harris & Darby, 2010), individuals with anxious attachment tend to interpret ambiguous information related to their partners negatively (i.e., as threatening to the relationship), which happens very often in the online context (Bevan, 2017). This viewpoint would explain why heavy use of EPS in the relationship would be associated with a higher frequency of romantic online jealousy and, consequently, with more frequent perpetration of cybercontrol.

Whereas research on the nature and consequences of EPS is scarce and inconclusive, our findings provide evidence supporting previous works' claims that heavy EPS use may indicate relational dysfunction and lead to violence within relationships (Doucette et al., 2021). Therefore, cybercontrol perpetration by individuals with anxious attachment may be considered a maladaptive coping strategy to reduce anxiety about romantic relationships when they supervise their partner in SNSs and perceive threats in the online environment.

Practical Implications

First, given the influence that anxious attachment style has on the processing of information related to the partner and to affective responses, as well as on CDA perpetration, psychology professionals should devote themselves to facilitating CDA prevention and

intervention to favor romantic secure attachment styles, thus improving the wellbeing and quality of relationships.

Second, our study helps to understand psychosocial processes that could be driving cycles of anxiety and CDA within couples' relationships. With a special emphasis on adolescence and young adulthood, psychoeducational intervention programs could also use our findings to provide anxiously attached partners with skills that enable them to recognize and modify the heavy EPS use on SNSs and cybercontrol perpetration against the partner. They can replace these behaviors with habits that are healthier for the individual and the relationship and promote the responsible use of SNSs.

Third, it should be noted that from our research, we derive the need to include the gender perspective in the intervention and analysis of CDA. This is necessary to dismantle implicit and unhealthy gendered beliefs and expectations with respect to partners and/or relationships that may maintain and justify different CDA behaviors in women and men. For example, the belief that men want sex and avoid commitment could increase the distress and insecurities of woman partners with anxious attachment, which may lead to engagement in heavy EPS and cybercontrol behaviors. Meanwhile, beliefs that women prioritize relationships could lead to more frequent direct cyberaggression perpetration by men who feel threatened when their partners do not adhere to their expectations. It is essential to combine efforts in both research and practice to detect and confront the cognitive and behavioral schemes that contribute to the normalization and justification of CDA behaviors within romantic relationships, approaching the problem from a gender perspective.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although our research expands knowledge in this area, some limitations should be pointed out. First, because our sample size is moderate and larger samples are needed to test moderation analyses, the sizes of some effects observed in our research are small. Moreover, our study sample consisted exclusively of the general youth population. Future studies should use larger samples from the general population to select representative participants from each age group and examine possible differences because previous findings highlight that older people appear to employ healthier and more proactive strategies in resolving couple conflicts (Neubauer et al., 2019). Similarly, future research could replicate our findings by examining the potential influence of variables such as cultural values, as SNS usage (Statista, 2020c) and stereotypes and gender roles vary across countries (López-Zafra et al., 2008). Furthermore,

our work contemplates only individuals with cisgender identity and heterosexual orientation. Future work on CDA should use diverse samples because recent researchers have found that CDA experiences may differ between partner categories defined by gender identity (i.e., cisgender vs. non-cisgender) and sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. non-heterosexual; i.e., Butler et al., 2023).

On the other hand, because we used an observational study of the cross-sectional design in our research, we could not establish causal relationships between the variables. Future research could contribute to research in this area by implementing longitudinal or experimental designs that allow more control over the results and facilitate interpretations of causality. Likewise, we used self-report measures to assess all constructs, so participants' responses could also be susceptible to recall bias or social desirability. Due to the sensitivity and social stigma surrounding this problem (Deans & Bhogal, 2019), future research should consider other methods, such as dyadic research designs involving both romantic partners.

On the other hand, during capture of CDA, respondents could think about all of their dating relationships. Therefore, we were unable to assess whether the CDA occurred with the current romantic partner or ex-partners. Also, we assumed that the respondents were in a monogamous relationship, but we did not control for this in the analyses, which could affect our results. Moreover, we assessed the frequency of CDA in the last year according to the instructions of the original scale used (see Borrajo et al., 2015). However, we could not capture CDA experiences before the last year, which could affect our results. We also asked participants to self-identify as IPV perpetrators and victims based on an IPV definition; this method may be subject to recognition and self-report bias and does not provide a measure with adequate validity and reliability for estimating IPV experiences. For instance, we could not control whether all participants considered the same types of IPV behaviors. Likewise, we asked respondents whether they had ever suffered or perpetrated IPV in their lifetime but without assessing when or in what relationship it had occurred. Hence, results and conclusions derived from our work need to be taken with caution. Future research should replicate our results while addressing these limitations.

Conclusion

It is ironic that romantic relationships are one of humans' main sources of love and well-being, yet also one of the affective bonds in which more destructive behaviors emerge. Our results suggest that while direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol behaviors may denote

abuse and violence within relationships, the psychosocial mechanisms that trigger each type of violence may differ. On the one hand, this work shows that the effect of anxious attachment on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression is moderated by gender and HS adherence: men anxiously attached to their partners, mainly those with high HS adherence (vs. low HS), seem to exert direct cyberaggression against their partners with greater frequency. This behavior could be considered a type of instrumental violence used by anxiously attached men to reestablish power/control over the partner when they feel insecure and worried about the relationship. On the other hand, our findings show that the positive relationship between anxious attachment and cybercontrol is mediated through increases in EPS use and frequency of online jealousy. In this sense, cybercontrol perpetration by individuals with anxious attachment may be considered a maladaptive coping strategy to reduce anxiety about romantic relationships when they supervise their partners' activity in SNSs and feel romantic jealousy. In sum, these findings contribute to the understanding of and interventions for CDA perpetration.

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Supplementary Material

Does the Digital Environment Evoke Anxiety Cycles in Romantic Relationships? The Role of
Social–Interpersonal and Individual Factors in Cyberdating Abuse Perpetration

1. Study 1

1.1. Confirmatory Factor Analyses

We performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for all instruments using the AMOS 26 program to check the goodness-of-fit measures and, therefore, assess the validity of the inferences made in our research. For those variables showing a normal distribution of data (i.e., skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable limit of ± 2 ; George & Mallery, 2010; see Tables 2 and 6 of the main text), we conducted the CFA using the maximum likelihood (ML) estimator, as suggested in the previous literature (e.g., Wang & Ahmed, 2004; Wolins, 1995). Given that X^2 is a sample size-sensitive index and large samples are needed for it to assume adequate values ($p > .05$; Bentler, 1990), we have limited ourselves in not indicating the X^2 index in our manuscript. In fact, in all the CFAs conducted, a p value $< .001$ was obtained. Therefore, to evaluate the measures' goodness of fit with the ML method, we used the following set of indices (Byrne, 2001): normed fit index (NFI), relative fit index (RFI), incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The fit indices were considered acceptable for NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI values above 0.90 and RMSEA values between 0.05 and 0.08.

In contrast, when variables showed non-normal distribution, we used a robust estimator available in the AMOS program, unweighted least squares (ULS), which makes it possible to control for violations of normality assumptions. The ULS method leads to good estimates for moderate sample sizes (i.e., around 300 participants; Wolins, 1995). In these cases, we reported the following fit indices: The root mean square residual (RMR), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), NFI, and RFI. The CFAs showed that the items of one scale revealed a good fit when the RMR value was below 0.05 (values between 0.05 and 0.1 are considered acceptable) and GFI, AGFI, NFI, and RFI values were above 0.90 (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003).

As is shown in Table 2 (main text), for the anxious attachment measure, the skewness and kurtosis values were within the acceptable limit of ± 2 (0.38 and -0.66 , respectively), indicating a normal distribution. Therefore, we used the maximum likelihood (ML) estimator to conduct a unidimensional confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measure, which showed a good fit (NFI = 0.949, RFI = 0.916, IFI = 0.964, TLI = 0.94, CFI = 0.964, RMSEA = 0.079 [0.06, 0.10]).

In all subdimensions of the Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ), the data showed a non-normal distribution; specifically, a floor effect (a skewness/kurtosis of 13.77/25.96 for direct cyberaggression perpetration, 2.34/6.96 for cybercontrol perpetration, 6.23/47.92 for direct cyberaggression victimization and 2.59/7.36 for cybercontrol perpetration). In line with Wolins (1995), we used the ULS robust estimator to control for violations of normality assumptions. Thus, we conducted a unidimensional CFA for each subscale of cyberdating abuse (CDA) perpetration and victimization using the ULS estimator. CFAs indicated an appropriate fit for direct cyberaggression perpetration (RMR = 0.004, GFI = 0.994, AGFI = 0.991, NFI = 0.987, RFI = 0.984), cybercontrol perpetration (RMR = 0.10, GFI = 0.958, AGFI = 0.93, NFI = 0.918, RFI = 0.891), direct cyberaggression victimization (RMR = 0.015, GFI = 0.988, AGFI = 0.982, NFI = 0.978, RFI = 0.972), and cybercontrol victimization (RMR = 0.082, GFI = 0.987, AGFI = 0.978, NFI = 0.98, RFI = 0.974).

1.2. Bivariate Correlations

Table 1S

Matrix Correlations; Study Variables

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-----|-------|-----|
| 1. Direct cyberaggression perpetration | -- | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Cybercontrol perpetration | .47** | -- | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Direct cyberaggression victimization | .73** | .38** | -- | | | | | | | |
| 4. Cybercontrol victimization | .40** | .52** | .65** | -- | | | | | | |
| 5. Anxious attachment | .21** | .38** | .25** | .29** | -- | | | | | |
| 6. Gender ^a | -.08 | .10 | -.08 | -.13* | .06 | -- | | | | |
| 7. Age | .01 | .02 | -.06 | -.05 | -.12* | -.17** | -- | | | |
| 8. Current relationship ^b | .07 | .09 | .26** | .26* | .37** | -.05 | -.17** | -- | | |
| 9. Suffered IPV ^c | -.10 | -.13* | -.12* | -.03 | -.05 | -.11* | -.18** | .02 | -- | |
| 10. Exercised IPV ^d | -.01 | -.08 | .03 | .07 | .004 | -.06 | -.15** | .06 | .45** | -- |

Note. $N_{overall} = 355$; $N_{men} = 155$, $N_{women} = 200$. IPV = intimate partner violence. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no; ^c1 = yes, 2 = no; ^d1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

2. Study 2

2.1. Confirmatory Factor Analyses

As in Study 1, we performed a CFA for all instruments using the AMOS 26 program. As shown in Table 6 (main text), for the anxious attachment measure, the data showed a normal distribution (skewness/kurtosis = 0.28/ -0.75). We carried out a CFA for a one-dimensional structure of the measure using the ML estimator. The CFA for the items of the scale showed a good fit (NFI = 0.966, RFI = 0.944, IFI = 0.982, TLI = 0.97, CFI = 0.981, RMSEA = 0.057 [0.034, 0.08]).

Similarly, for the electronic partner surveillance scale, the skewness and kurtosis values also showed a normal distribution (1.11 and 1.39, respectively). We used the ML estimator and a first-order model. The CFA's results showed a good fit (NFI = 0.939, RFI = 0.907, IFI = 0.960, TLI = 0.938, CFI = 0.959, RMSEA = 0.073 [0.059, 0.087]).

Regarding the online jealousy measure, we obtained skewness and kurtosis values of 1.65 and 3.19. Because previous research has shown that the ML estimation method can be used for data with minor deviations from normality (Raykov & Widaman, 1995), we conducted a CFA for a first-order structure using the ML estimator, and the results indicated an appropriate fit (NFI = 0.985, RFI = 0.955, IFI = 0.991, TLI = 0.972, CFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.068 [0.001, 0.143]).

For the Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ), we observed that the data showed a non-normal distribution in the subscales of direct cyberaggression perpetration (skewness/kurtosis = 10.60/43.65), cybercontrol perpetration (skewness/kurtosis = 2.52/8.85), and direct cyberaggression victimization (skewness/kurtosis = 4/18.66). For these cases, we used the ULS robust estimator, in accordance with the recommendations of Wolins (1995). CFAs showed a good fit to the first-order model for direct cyberaggression perpetration (RMR = 0.01, GFI = 0.97, AGFI = 0.956, NFI = 0.94, RFI = 0.925), cybercontrol perpetration (RMR = 0.068, GFI = 0.977, AGFI = 0.962, NFI = 0.957, RFI = 0.943), and direct cyberaggression victimization (RMR = 0.033, GFI = 0.986, AGFI = 0.979, NFI = 0.979, RFI = 0.973). In contrast, data in the cybercontrol victimization subscale showed a normal distribution (skewness/kurtosis = 1.54/1.91). The CFA using the ML estimator indicated a good fit for a first-order structure (NFI = 0.988, RFI = 0.973, IFI = 0.955, TLI = 0.988, CFI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.084 [0.037, 0.004]).

Finally, the data showed a normal distribution (skewness/kurtosis = 0.73/0.58) for the measure of heterosexual script adherence. We used a first-order model and conducted a CFA

Chapter 3

using the ML estimator. Results indicated that the items of this scale showed a good fit (NFI = 0.856, RFI = 0.824, IFI = 0.917, TLI = 0.897, CFI = 0.916, RMSEA = 0.58 [0.05, 0.066]).

2.2. Bivariate Correlations

Table 2S

Matrix Correlations; Study Variables

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. | 11. | 12. | 13. |
|---|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|------|-------|------|-------|-----|
| 1. Direct cyberaggression perpetration | -- | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Cybercontrol perpetration | .40** | -- | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Direct cyberaggression victimization | .20** | .15** | -- | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Cybercontrol victimization | .08 | .38** | .52** | -- | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Anxious attachment | .03 | .23** | .15** | .18** | -- | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Electronic partner surveillance | .26** | .50** | .12* | .21** | .25** | -- | | | | | | | |
| 7. Online jealousy | .27** | .56** | .11* | .28** | .42** | .49** | -- | | | | | | |
| 8. Gender ^a | -.05 | .10 | .01 | -.03 | -.09 | -.01 | .02 | -- | | | | | |
| 9. HS | .25** | .29** | .15** | .19** | .18** | .28** | .31** | -.34** | -- | | | | |
| 10. Age | -.09 | .03 | -.07 | -.01 | -.08 | -.14** | -.02 | -.10 | .08 | -- | | | |
| 11. Relational status ^b | -.02 | .07 | -.15** | -.11* | -.21** | -.16** | -.07 | .07 | -.06 | .33** | -- | | |
| 12. Suffered IPV ^c | -.07 | -.18** | -.38** | -.34** | -.01 | .003 | .03 | -.22** | .04 | -.04 | -.02 | -- | |
| 13. Exercised IPV ^d | -.17 | -.27** | -.21** | -.26** | .001 | -.03 | -.02 | -.07 | -.02 | -.09 | -.04 | .42** | -- |

Note. $N_{overall} = 343$; $N_{men} = 212$, $N_{women} = 131$. HS = heterosexual script; IPV = intimate partner violence. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = single, 2 = dating, 3 = cohabiting, 4 = married, 5 = divorced, 6 = widower; ^c1 = yes, 2 = no; ^d1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

2.3. Indirect Effect of Anxious Attachment on CDA Perpetration based on Rates of EPS and Online Jealousy

Table 3S

Multiple Mediation Analysis of Anxious Attachment, Electronic Partner Surveillance, and Online Jealousy on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration

| | Electronic partner surveillance (EPS) | | | Online jealousy (OJ) | | | Direct cyberaggression (DC) | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 1.41* | 0.59 | [0.25, 2.58] | -1.01* | 0.46 | [-1.91, -0.10] | 1.24*** | 0.15 | [0.95, 1.53] |
| Anxious attachment (AA) | 0.11** | 0.03 | [0.04, 0.17] | 0.17*** | 0.03 | [0.12, 0.22] | -0.02* | 0.01 | [-0.04, -0.003] |
| EPS | | | | 0.32*** | 0.04 | [0.23, 0.40] | 0.03* | 0.01 | [0.003, 0.06] |
| Online jealousy | | | | | | | 0.06*** | 0.02 | [0.03, 0.10] |
| Gender ^a | 0.18 | 0.09 | [-0.01, 0.36] | 0.21** | 0.07 | [0.07, 0.35] | -0.02 | 0.02 | [-0.07, 0.03] |
| Age | -0.02* | 0.01 | [-0.05, -0.002] | 0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.02] | -0.01* | 0.002 | [-0.01, -0.0002] |
| Relational status ^b | -0.08 | 0.06 | [-0.19, 0.04] | 0.05 | 0.05 | [-0.04, 0.14] | 0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.04] |
| IPV suffered ^c | 0.14 | 0.13 | [-0.11, 0.40] | 0.21* | 0.10 | [0.01, 0.41] | -0.004 | 0.03 | [-0.07, 0.06] |
| IPV exercised ^d | -0.11 | 0.20 | [-0.51, 0.29] | 0.01 | 0.16 | [-0.29, 0.32] | -0.15** | 0.05 | [-0.25, -0.05] |
| HS | 0.27*** | 0.06 | [0.16, 0.38] | 0.16*** | 0.05 | [0.07, 0.25] | 0.04** | 0.01 | [0.01, 0.07] |
| DCAV | -0.05 | 0.11 | [-0.26, 0.16] | -0.07 | 0.08 | [-0.24, 0.09] | 0.09*** | 0.03 | [0.04, 0.14] |
| CCV | 0.13* | 0.05 | [0.03, 0.22] | 0.14*** | 0.04 | [0.06, 0.21] | -0.03** | 0.03 | [-0.06, -0.01] |
| | | $R^2 = .17$ | | | $R^2 = .40$ | | | $R^2 = .20$ | |
| | | $F(9, 333) = 7.62, p < .001$ | | | $F(10, 332) = 21.74, p < .001$ | | | $F(11, 331) = 7.48, p < .001$ | |
| Indirect effects | | Effects | | | SE | | | Symmetric BCI | |
| Total | | 0.02 | | | 0.01 | | | [-0.002, 0.04] | |
| I1 | | 0.003 | | | 0.002 | | | [0.0001, 0.01] | |
| I2 | | 0.01 | | | 0.008 | | | [-0.002, 0.03] | |
| I3 | | 0.002 | | | 0.002 | | | [-0.0004, 0.01] | |

Note. $N = 343$. IPV = intimate partner violence; HS = heterosexual script; DCAV = direct cyberaggression victimization; CCV = cybercontrol victimization. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = single, 2 = dating, 3 = cohabiting, 4 = married; ^c1 = yes, 2 = no; ^d1 = yes, 2 = no. I1 = AA → EPS → DC; I2 = AA → OJ → DC; I3 = AA → EPS → OJ → DC; CI = confidence interval. Indirect effects are significant where the CI does not include the value 0. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

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Is Online Disinhibition Related to Cyberdating Abuse Perpetration by Moral Disengagement? The Moderating Role of Gender, Sexism, and Cybervictimization

María Dolores Sánchez-Hernández

M^a Carmen Herrera Enríquez

Francisca Expósito Jiménez

Mind, Brain, and Behavior Research Center (CIMCYC)

Department of Social Psychology

University of Granada

This article is under review in the *Sex Roles* journal:

Sánchez-Hernández, M. D., Herrera, M. C., y Expósito, F. (under review). Is Online Disinhibition Related to Cyberdating Abuse Perpetration by Moral Disengagement? The Moderating Role of Gender, Sexism, and Cybervictimization

Abstract

Research notes that online disinhibition (OD) and moral disengagement (MD) are factors related to cyberbullying perpetration. The literature has also suggested that these disinhibiting mechanisms do not homogeneously increase cyberbullying perpetration, but rather that there are factors moderating such relationship. However, the influence of these psychological mechanisms has not been addressed in the analysis of cyberdating abuse (CDA). Through a cross-sectional survey, ($N = 362$ young adults; 45.9% men), we examined whether (a) OD is positively associated with direct cyberaggression perpetration via increases in MD, and (b) this effect was moderated by gender, sexism and CDA victimization. Our results showed that OD was predictive of increases in MD mainly in men with high sexism (vs. women). MD and OD were also associated with higher frequency of direct cyberaggression against partners in participants with high frequency of CDA (vs. low frequency). In addition, high OD was related to increases in MD mainly in men, which, in turn, was associated with higher direct cyberaggression against partners in participants who also suffered highly from CDA. This research is the introduction of the psychological mechanisms of OD and MD as factors related to direct cyberaggression against partners, as well as an understanding of the circumstances determining its occurrence.

Keywords: online disinhibition, moral disengagement, gender, sexism, cybercontrol, direct cyberaggression

Is Online Disinhibition Related to Cyberdating Abuse Perpetration by Moral Disengagement? The Moderating Role of Gender, Sexism, and Cybervictimization

Intimate partner violence (IPV) has been transferred to the virtual context, adopting new pathways, forms, and strategies (Flores & Browne, 2017). The specific features of the virtual context (e.g., anonymity, accessibility to information, and immediacy) provide people with tools and opportunities to continue exercising IPV through the Internet (Jaishankar, 2011); this phenomenon is commonly called cyberdating abuse (CDA). The usual harms suffered by IPV victims are also aggravated by the uncontrollable effects of digital communication, such as the existence of an online audience, rapid dissemination of information, or constant contact with the aggressor; Stonard, 2020). Given the impact of this problem, interest in examining CDA has increased exponentially in recent years. However, the literature is still insufficient, and some significant questions need to be addressed.

CDA is a multidimensional construct that incorporates various types of behaviors against partners through digital media (cybercontrol, cyberharassment, and cyberpsychological and verbal aggression; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2018). According to Borrajo et al. (2015), these can be classified into *direct cyberaggression*—deliberate behaviors intended to harm the partner (e.g., sending insulting and/or humiliating messages to the partner through digital media or sending intimate photos, images and/or videos of the partner to other people without his or her permission)—and *cybercontrol*—online behaviors aimed at controlling the partner (e.g., checking a partner’s SNS, WhatsApp, or mail accounts without his or her permission or calling excessively to determine the whereabouts of the partner and whom they are with).

Both types of behaviors denote cyberviolence within romantic relationships with detrimental effects for the individuals and the relationship (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). However, these seem to have a different nature and intentionality. Direct cyberaggression tends to be more explicit and easier to identify as an IPV manifestation that involves an intention to harm the partner, whereas cybercontrol is an indirect form of cyberabuse that is more accepted and normalized among young people (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2018; Stonard et al., 2017). However, to date, no known studies have examined whether the psychosocial factors related to each CDA behavior are different.

On the other hand, the literature examining predictors of cyberbullying perpetration has noted that online disinhibition (OD), that is, a state of liberation and predisposition to

perform certain behaviors in the online environment (Suler, 2004), is a relevant factor associated with its frequent perpetration (e.g., Falla et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Moreover, drawing on Bandura's (1986, 1989) social cognitive theory, prior research demonstrates that the positive association between OD and cyberbullying perpetration is mediated through the activation of moral disengagement (MD) mechanisms (Wang & Ngai, 2020), which have traditionally been considered one of the main psychological processes contributing to the maintenance and justification of violent behaviors in different contexts (e.g., Bussey et al., 2015; Caprara et al., 2014). However, to date there have been no studies that examined how these disinhibitory mechanisms (i.e., OD and MD) are associated with each CDA behavior. Thus, in order to address this gap in the literature, our study examined whether OD is indirectly associated with more frequent perpetration of CDA (differentiating between cybercontrol and direct cyberaggression) via increases in DM. Furthermore, based on previous findings suggesting that OD and MD seem not to homogeneously lead to the perpetration of cyberbullying (Moore, 2015), we further examined the possible moderating role of individual (gender and sexist attitudes—attitudes of prejudice or discriminatory behavior based on the supposed inferiority of women as a group with respect to men; Cameron, 1977) and relational (CDA victimization) variables on the effect of OD and MD on CDA perpetration.

In sum, with this work, we are advancing the knowledge of the psychosocial and interpersonal factors related to CDA with the goal of providing findings that enable the development and improvement of CDA prevention and intervention programs.

OD and CDA Perpetration

Researchers have coined the term OD to refer to the psychological state in which individuals feel more liberated, uninhibited, and predisposed to perform certain behaviors in the online environment (Cheung et al., 2020). This mechanism operating in digital interactions contributes to the understanding of why people express themselves and behave differently online compared to the offline environment (Longden, 2014). In his work, Suler (2004) distinguished six factors associated with the virtual environment that interact with each other and cause the phenomenon of OD: (a) *dissociative anonymity* (the degree to which a person believes that they can change or hide their true identity in the online environment), (b) *invisibility* (the tendency to perceive that one cannot be physically seen by others in the online environment), (c) *asynchrony* (the perception that digital communication allows for

delayed responses in interpersonal interactions), (d) *solipsistic introjections* (the tendency to interpret ambiguous online messages based on one's own expectations or beliefs), (e) *dissociative imagination* (the degree to which a person views the online environment as an imaginary world that has no link to reality), and (f) *authority minimization* (the belief that the influence of authority figures in real life is diminished or absent in the online environment).

OD has been observed a relevant predictor of positive and negative behaviors in online environments (Cheung et al., 2020). According to Suler (2004), OD is considered *benign* when individuals feel more relaxed and willing to reveal their emotions, fears, likes, dislikes, preferences, or kindness to others in the online environment, whereas it is defined as *toxic* when individuals manifest inappropriate behaviors in the online environment (e.g., anger, insults, threats, criticism) in which they would not engage in a face-to-face context. This toxic OD is precisely what becomes a relevant precipitant of inappropriate online behaviors among adolescents and young adults, such as cyberbullying perpetration (Sanfilippo et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2021). However, the influence of this variable has not been evaluated in the context of CDA. We believe that these factors, which are unique to the online environment, could be positively related to the perpetration of CDA behaviors, mainly those that involve an intentionality to inflict harm against a partner (i.e., direct cyberaggression).

MD as Mediator

The online environment constitutes a setting in which individuals engage in social situations and interactions without clear boundaries and codes of behavior (Paciello et al., 2020). In this context, people are more likely to feel liberated from moral principles because of the increased psychological distance between the actor and the potential victim and between inappropriate actions and their harmful consequences (Naquin et al., 2010). Furthermore, Bandura (2016) also argues that the Internet favors the detachment of moral self-sanctions from transgressive behavior. As evidence of this, the literature has observed that OD factors are positively associated with the activation of MD mechanisms (Runions & Bak, 2015; Wang & Ngai, 2020). However, rather than demonizing the online environment, it is necessary to understand the sociocognitive processes that deactivate moral codes during digital interactions to prevent their potential negative effects.

MD mechanisms refer to the cognitive processes of internal self-regulation by which individuals disengage from their own moral responsibilities in order to maintain and justify

violent behaviors without experiencing feelings of guilt or condemnation (Bandura, 1986, 1999). Empirical research has identified MD as one of the most relevant disinhibitory processes that explains a variety of transgressive and violent behaviors, both in the traditional context (e.g., Caprara et al., 2014) and the virtual context (e.g., Wang & Ngai, 2020). Regarding the online environment, it has been observed that MD is a factor associated with the acceptance and normalization of cyberbullying from the perspective of both the perpetrator and the victim, as well as that of bystanders (Pornari & Wood, 2010). According to Bandura's (1986, 1989) social cognitive theory, to understand human development and behavior, it is essential to examine how personal and environmental factors operate with each other, that is, who we are when we are in a given context and how that context affects us (Runions & Bak, 2015). Following this theoretical framework, we considered how features of the online context that lead to OD could be operating with personal factors such as MD to predict CDA perpetration.

In this respect, MD has been considered a mediator of the effects of personal-level predictors in morally problematic behavior (e.g., Caprara et al., 2014; Paciello et al., 2013). More specifically, Wang and Ngai (2020) recently examined, in a sample of adolescents, whether the positive relationship between the psychological tendency toward OD and cyberbullying perpetration was mediated by MD. Their findings highlighted that certain OD factors (i.e., anonymity and asynchrony) indirectly were related to cyberbullying via increases in MD. That is, the disinhibiting factors of anonymity and asynchrony were related to greater MD, which, in turn, may be associated with greater engagement in cyberbullying. However, no one has paid attention to how these psychological and cognitive processes are associated with CDA perpetration. Could OD be positively related to the perpetration of CDA via MD in a similar way to cyberbullying? Deepening our understanding of this issue will guide a large part of our research.

Gender, Sexism, and CDA Victimization as Moderators

The disinhibitory mechanisms of OD and MD seem not to homogeneously relate to the perpetration of cyberviolence (Moore, 2015); they may be moderated by other individual and interpersonal factors. Hence, using Bandura's (1986, 1989) social cognitive theory as a basis, it is necessary to understand under what circumstances these psychological processes operate to broadly examine the context in which CDA takes place.

Gender is one of the moderating variables that have received a great attention when examining factors associated with CDA. Prior research has indicated that young men experience greater toxic OD than young women (e.g., Wang et al., 2021). In addition, the association between MD and gender has been demonstrated among adolescents and young adults, concluding that men tend to experience higher MD than women (e.g., Erdem & Bakioglu, 2020; Wang et al., 2016). According to the social role theory (Eagly et al., 2004), these results could be explained by widespread social and cultural norms about the attributes and social roles that are considered appropriate for men (i.e., control, security, aggressiveness, problem and task-solving skills) and women (i.e., sensitivity, ability to care and attend to others), which favor gender-differentiated behaviors. Building on this theory, psychological research has traditionally shown that gender has a significant role in aggression and violence (White, 2001). In view of the aforementioned, it would be reasonable to think that, given that men are socialized to be competitive and aggressive, OD is related to greater levels of MD in men (vs. women).

However, it is essential to go beyond the mere analysis of the role of gender and to analyze other sociocultural factors linked to the occurrence of such differences between men and women. In particular, sexism has been recognized as a significant factor in the processes of justification and normalization of CDA (e.g., Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020). Sexism refers to attitudes of prejudice or discriminatory behavior based on the supposed inferiority of women as a group compared to men that maintains the status quo of male domination; Cameron, 1977). According to ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001), sexist attitudes are ambivalent, consisting of both hostile and benevolent feelings and behaviors. Hostile sexism consists of an antagonistic attitude toward women, primarily those who challenge male supremacy and thus do not adhere to normative roles of femininity. In contrast, benevolent sexism adopts a positive view of respect and adoration towards women who assume pre-established roles, considering them as beings in need of male affection and protection. However, these interrelated attitudes toward women, although seemingly positive, remain sexist, as they have a stereotypical and restricted view of women that perpetuates gender hierarchies (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

Previous literature has traditionally shown that both hostile and benevolent sexism are implicated in the justification and acceptability of IPV, mainly among men (e.g., Martín-Fernández et al., 2018), and they are strongly associated with CDA perpetration (e.g., Linares et al., 2021; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020). Moreover, Erdem and Bakioglu (2020) have

recently found that there is a positive association between gender stereotypical beliefs and MD: people with high MD could more easily conform to the moral norms accepted by themselves and their environment and maintain their traditional gender role beliefs. Considering the above, it would be reasonable to think that, OD is related to higher levels of MD mainly in men with high sexist attitudes. This research tests this assumption.

On the other hand, it is necessary to consider the fact that CDA often shows an overlapping nature. That is, having previously been involved as a victim or a perpetrator of CDA increases the risk of perpetrating or suffering this type of violence, regardless of the participant's gender (Fernández-González et al., 2020). Specifically, Villorra et al. (2019a, 2019b, 2021) found, in samples of university students, that CDA perpetration and victimization were highly and positively associated in both types of behaviors, direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol. Thus, in the online environment, victims can easily engage in online reactive violence and take on the role of aggressors (Smith et al., 2018). Given the above, we considered the possibility that experiences of cybervictimization moderate the relationship between these psychological disinhibitory mechanisms (i.e., MD and OD) and the perpetration of CDA. In this respect, recent research has found that MD is positively associated with victimization and reciprocal violence in the IPV context (e.g., Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernández-Antelo, 2019). Likewise, it has been observed that factors associated with OD may increase the likelihood that victims of cyberbullying may become cyberperpetrators, regardless of gender (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014). Therefore, it would be reasonable to expect that experiences of cybervictimization within relationships may exacerbate the relationship between these psychological disinhibitory mechanisms (i.e., MD and OD) and CDA.

Research Overview

Building on the reviewed literature, we conducted a cross-sectional study aimed at examining whether OD is positively associated with CDA behaviors via increases in MD, while also analyzing influence of individual variables such as gender and ambivalent sexism, and relational factors like CDA victimization. According to our theoretical model, we expected that OD would positively predict MD (Hypothesis 1a). Considering the differential nature of CDA behaviors according to Borrajo et al. (2015), we also hypothesized that MD would positively predict direct cyberaggression (i.e., explicit and intentional CDA manifestations), but not cybercontrol (Hypothesis 1b). Likewise, building on the work of

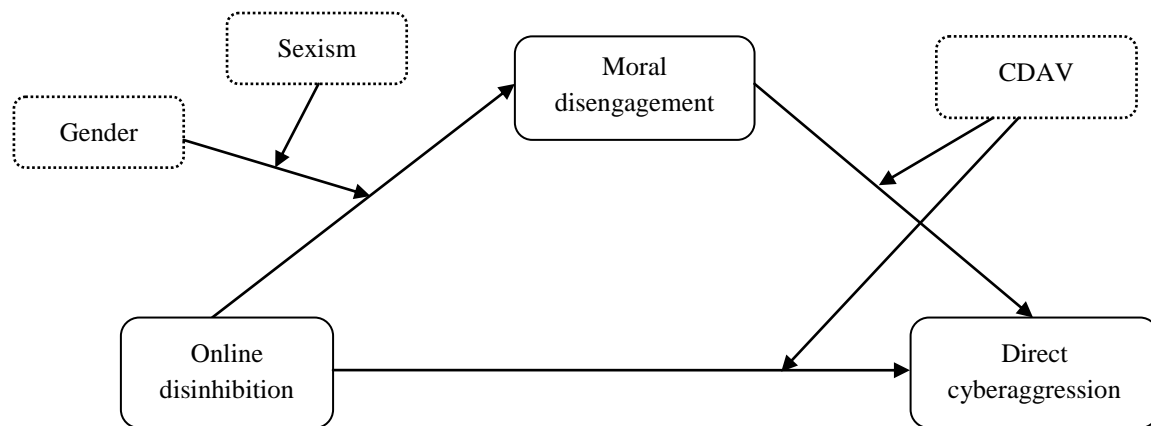
Wang and Ngai (2020), we also expected an indirect effect of OD on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression via MD. That is, higher levels of OD would be associated with higher levels of MD, which, in turn, would be related to more frequent direct cyberaggression, but not cybercontrol (Hypothesis 1c).

Although OD may be indirectly associated with perpetration of direct cyberaggression by MD mechanisms, it could be possible that all participants are not equally influenced by these factors. Following the literature reviewed, we predicted high OD would be associated with greater levels of MD mainly in men with high levels (vs. low levels) of sexism (Hypothesis 2). We also considered CDA victimization as another relevant variable influencing the effect of MD and OD on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression. We expected that elevated levels of MD would be related to more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression mainly in participants manifesting higher frequency of victimization by CDA behaviors (vs. lower frequency of CDA victimization; Hypothesis 3). Likewise, we hypothesized that high OD would be associated with more frequent direct cyberaggression perpetration in people who had a high frequency of victimization (vs. a low frequency of victimization) by CDA behaviors (Hypothesis 4).

Considering the hypotheses described above, we also expected that gender and sexism and CDA victimization moderate the indirect effect of OD on direct cyberaggression perpetration in a similar way. First, we hypothesized that high OD would be associated with higher MD mainly in male participants with high sexism (vs. low sexism), which, in turn, would be related to a higher frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration (Hypothesis 5). Second, we hypothesized that CDA victimization would exacerbate both the indirect effect of OD on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression via MD and its direct effect: (a) OD would be associated with higher MD, which, in turn, would be related to a higher frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration mainly in highly victimized (vs. less victimized) individuals, and (b) OD would be predictive of increases in the frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration mainly in highly victimized (vs. less victimized) participants (Hypothesis 6; see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Proposed Conceptual Model: Mediating and Moderating Factors in the Relationship Between OD and Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration



Note. CDA = cyberdating abuse victimization.

Method

Participants and Procedure

From the initial sample collected ($N = 605$; 43.31%, $n = 262$ men and 56.36%, $n = 341$ women, and 0.33%, $n = 2$ other gender), 227 (37.52%) respondents were removed because they did not complete the full questionnaire and 14 (2.31%) because they failed attention check items. Moreover, we excluded the two participants who identified their gender as “other” from our analyses.⁸ Thus, the final sample consisted of 362 participants of Spanish nationality ($M_{age} = 25.10$, $SD = 4.45$, range 18–35 years; 45.9%, $n = 166$ men). All of them had a heterosexual orientation, of which 84 (23.2%) reported being single (52.4%; $n = 44$ men, and 47.6%; $n = 40$ women) and 278 (76.8%) were in a romantic relationship (43.9%; $n = 122$ men, and 56.1%; $n = 156$ women) at the time of data collection.

We implemented an across-sectional survey design. Specifically, we used the LimeSurvey research platform to develop an online survey containing variables of interest. Following a snowball sampling, we distributed the survey through an open-access link in several online social media (i.e., email and social network sites: Facebook, Twitter, and

¹ We made this decision because our work is focused on examining differences in binary gender, and recent researchers have found that CDA experiences may differ between partner categories defined by gender identity (i.e., cisgender vs. non-cisgender; Butler et al., 2023).

WhatsApp). Data were collected during May and June 2021. To participate in our study, respondents had to fulfill the following criteria: (a) having Spanish nationality, (b) being between 18 and 35 years of age, (c) having a heterosexual orientation, and (d) having been in a past or current romantic relationship.⁹ Before completing the questionnaire, we informed to participants about the study's goal and its anonymous and voluntary nature. First, they had to give their consent to voluntarily collaborate in our research, according to the Declaration of Helsinki, and then fill in a single questionnaire based on their personal opinions and experiences. They were not paid for their participation. Participants took approximately 20 minutes to complete the task. This study was conducted after receiving the approval of Ethics Committee of University of Granada.

Measures

OD

We used the Online Disinhibition Scale (ODS; Cheung et al., 2020), which is focused on evaluating different factors associated with the virtual environment, according to Suler's (2004) work, that jointly induces OD. The ODS consisted of 23 items divided into six dimensions: (a) *dissociative anonymity* (four items, e.g., "I feel that I can hide my identity online"), (b) *invisibility* (five items, e.g., "I feel like I am invisible in the online environment"), (c) *asynchronicity* (three items, e.g., "I can postpone replying to others in the online environment"), (d) *solipsistic introjections* (three items, e.g., "I perceive how that person's intended to talk about in the online environment"); (e) *dissociative imagination* (four items, e.g., "The online environment has no connection to reality"), and (f) *minimization of authority* (four items e.g., "I am away from real life authorities in the online environment"). Participants used a 7-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). We computed the items' average as a global OD score: high scores indicated

²We delimited the age range of young adults based on the term *emerging adulthood* coined by Arnett (2000). It refers to the new developmental stage that emerges as a result of environmental factors (i.e., sociocultural and economic) which seem to be delaying the acquisition of the traditional markers of adulthood (e.g., marriage, parenthood, financial independence, and home ownership). Likewise, previous researchers have used this same standard to delimit the stage of emerging adulthood. (e.g., Oleszkowicz & Misztela, 2015; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020).

All inclusion criteria were confirmed by a set of checking questions at the end of the survey.

a high level of OD. This measure showed adequate psychometric properties, with a Cronbach's α coefficient of .85.

MD

We administered the MD scale (MMDS-S; Bandura et al., 1996; Spanish version of Rubio-Garay et al., 2017) to assess the extent to which people engage in MD processes. Specifically, the MMDS-S was composed of 32 Likert-type items measuring eight different mechanisms, described in Bandura's (1990) work: (a) *moral justification* (four items, e.g., "It is all right to fight to protect your friends"), (b) *euphemistic labeling* (four items, e.g., "To hit obnoxious classmates is just giving them 'a lesson'"), (c) *advantageous comparison* (four items, e.g., "Damaging some property is no big deal when you consider that others do worse"), (d) *displacement of responsibility* (four items, e.g., "If people are living in poor conditions, they are not responsible for attacking"), (e) *diffusion of responsibility* (four items, e.g., "If a group decides together to do something harmful, the responsibility lies with the entire group"), (f) *distortion of consequences* (four items, e.g., "Telling small lies doesn't really do any harm"), (g) *dehumanization* (four items, e.g., "Some people are like animals"), and (h) *attribution of blame* (four items, e.g., "Some people deserve to be mistreated because of their actions"). The response format was a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For the purposes of our study, we calculated a global MD score from the average, where high scores indicated a high MD. In this sample, we obtained a Cronbach's α coefficient of .83.

CDA

The Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ; Borrajo et al., 2015) was administered to evaluate CDA behaviors. The measure consisted of 20 items divided into two subscales—perpetration and victimization—with parallel items for each: one for the cyberperpetration subscale (e.g., "I have created a fake profile about my partner or ex-partner on a social network to cause trouble for them") and one for the cybervictimization subscale ("My partner has created a fake profile about me on a social network to cause me problems"). In addition, each subscale consisted of two factors: (a) *direct cyberaggression* (11 items, e.g., "My partner or former partner made a comment on a wall of SNSs to insult or humiliate me") and (b) *monitoring/cybercontrol* (nine items, e.g., "My partner or ex-partner has used my passwords [phone, social networks, email] to snoop on my messages and/or contacts without

my permission”). The response format was a 6-point Likert-type scale with the anchors 1 (*never*), 2 (*not in the last year, but it occurred before*), 3 (*rarely: 1 or 2 times*), 4 (*sometimes: between 3 and 10 times*), 5 (*often: between 10 and 20 times*), and 6 (*always: more than 20 times*). The average score of perpetration and victimization was calculated for both dimensions (i.e., direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol), where high scores indicated a high frequency of behavior. The questionnaire demonstrated adequate psychometric properties, with the following Cronbach’s α coefficients for each factor: .89 for direct aggression-perpetration, .83 for control-perpetration, .87 for direct aggression-victimization, and .91 for control-victimization. The global dimensions of the perpetration and victimization subscales also obtained adequate reliability ($\alpha = .87$ and $\alpha = .92$, respectively).

Ambivalent Sexism

We used the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Spanish version of Expósito et al., 1998) to assess the participants’ sexist attitudes. It is composed of 22 Likert-type items subdivided into two dimensions: (a) *hostile sexism* (11 items, e.g., “Women exaggerate the problems they have at work”) and (b) *benevolent sexism* (11 items, e.g., “Women should be loved and protected by men”). Participants responded using a 6-point Likert-type response format ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For the purposes of our study, we calculated a global ASI score from the average, where high scores indicated a high degree of ambivalent sexism. This measure showed a Cronbach’s α coefficient of .93.

Acceptance of IPV

We used an adaptation of the Acceptance of Dating Violence Scale (Foshee, 1996) by Temple et al. (2016). This measure consisted of five items with a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Example items include “There are times when violence between dating partners is okay,” or “Sometimes violence is the only way to express your feelings”. We calculated the average score of the scale; high scores indicated a high acceptance of dating violence. It showed adequate psychometric properties ($\alpha = .91$).

Sociodemographic Information

Data about participants' gender ("What is your gender? Man/Woman/Other") and age ("What is your age?"), and whether they were in a relationship at the time of data collection ("Are you currently in a relationship? Yes/No") were collected.

Statistical Analysis Strategy

We conducted data analysis using SPSS (Version 25). To analyze the indirect effects of OD on direct cyberaggression perpetration via MD (Hypothesis 1), we performed a mediation analysis using Model 4 of the PROCESS program (Version 4.1; Hayes, 2018). We included OD as the predictor (X), direct cyberaggression perpetration as the criterion variable (Y), and MD as a mediating variable (M1). Participants' gender and age, current relationship, sexism, acceptance of IPV, and CDA victimization were also included as covariates¹⁰ in this model (see Table 1). We used the nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 replicates to estimate the 95% confidence interval (CI) both in this and the following analyses performed with the PROCESS program. In accordance with Schoemann et al. (2017), we also conducted a post hoc power analysis for simple mediation using Monte Carlo simulations (5,000 replications and 20,000 draws) to test indirect effects. Our sample ($N = 362$) had the ability to detect the indirect effect with 82% power for direct cyberaggression perpetration.

Thereafter, we performed a hierarchical regression analysis to test the interactive effect of OD, gender, and sexism on MD (Hypothesis 2). All the scores were standardized prior to conducting the analysis. In the first step, we included the covariates (participants' age, current relationship, acceptance of IPV, and CDA victimization). In the second step, we tested the effect of the predictor variables OD, gender (1 = *man*; 2 = *woman*), and sexism. In the third step, we assessed the second-order interaction between the predictor variables; and in the fourth step, we assessed the three-order interactions. We included MD as a criterion variable. We carried out simple slope analyses to interpret the emerging interaction effects. Low and high scores for sexism are plotted at 1 *SD* below and above the mean, respectively

¹⁰ We controlled for age because the role of age in CDA is not clear, and some studies have shown that general aggression tends to decrease as age increases (e.g., Bongers et al., 2003). Moreover, some studies suggest a significant and negative relationship between age and MD in adult samples (e.g., Reynolds et al., 2014). Furthermore, given that people tend to normalize and justify certain CDA behaviors in their romantic relationships (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020), we believed that whether participants were in a romantic relationship at the time of data collection might have an impact on their responses (e.g., a recognition bias). Therefore, we controlled for this variable. Likewise, attitudes of tolerance and acceptability of IPV are known risk factors linked to its perpetration (e.g., Bryant & Spencer, 2003), so we also controlled for this variable. In addition, given that bivariate correlation analyses showed that both control cybervictimization and direct aggression victimization are strongly and positively associated with the direct cyberaggression perpetration (see Supplementary Material [SM1]), we included the global dimension of the scale that contemplates both types of behaviors to examine the role of CDA victimization in our subsequent analyses.

(Figure 2). We also conducted a sensitivity power analysis using the linear multiple regression R^2 increase tested in G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) to estimate our ability to detect the contribution of interactions between OD, gender, and sexism. Our sample ($N = 362$, $\alpha = .05$) could detect small effect sizes ($f^2 \geq 0.048$) with a power level of .95.

Similarly, we performed two hierarchical regression analyses to test the moderating role of CDA victimization in the effects of MD and OD on direct cyberaggression perpetration (Hypotheses 3 and 4, respectively). All the scores were standardized. In both analyses, in the first step, we included participants' gender and age, current relationship, sexism, and acceptance of IPV as covariables. In the second step, we assessed the effect of the predictor variables MD or OD (in separate analyses) and CDA victimization, and in the third step, we assessed the second-order interaction between the predictor variables. We included direct cyberaggression perpetration as a criterion variable in both analyses. When the expected interactions were demonstrated, we performed a simple slope analysis to interpret the effects among participants with a high frequency of CDA victimization (+1 *SD*) and a low frequency (−1 *SD*; Figures 3 and 4). A sensitivity power analysis using the linear multiple regression R^2 increase with two predictors ($\alpha = .05$; $1 - \beta = 95\%$) showed that with our sample ($N = 362$, $\alpha = .05$), we had the ability to detect small effect sizes ($f^2 \geq 0.043$).

Next, to test whether both gender and sexism act as moderating factors in the indirect effect of OD on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression via MD (Hypothesis 5), we conducted a moderated moderated mediation analysis using Model 11 of the PROCESS program. The OD was included as a predictor variable (X), direct cyberaggression perpetration as a criterion variable (Y), MD as a mediating variable, and gender (W) and sexism (Z) as moderating variables. Similarly, we performed a moderated moderated mediation analysis using Model 15 (PROCESS program) to test whether CDA victimization acts as a moderating variable exacerbating both the indirect effect of OD on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression via MD and its direct effect (Hypothesis 6; Table 2). OD was included as a predictor variable (X), direct cyberaggression as a criterion variable (Y), MD as a mediating variable, and CDA victimization (W) as moderating variable. Note that we controlled for the aforementioned covariates in these analyses. All research data and scripts are available on [OSF](#).

Results

Mediating Effect of MD Between OD And Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration

As illustrated in Table 1, the results showed that OD positively predicted MD, supporting our Hypothesis 1a. Similarly, MD positively predicted direct cyberaggression perpetration, which supported our Hypothesis 1b. Moreover, the results highlighted a statistically significant indirect effect of OD on direct cyberaggression perpetration via MD ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.003$, 95% CI [0.002, 0.02]). Specifically, high OD was associated with higher levels of MD, which, in turn, was related to increases in the frequency of direct cyberaggression against a partner. This finding supported our Hypothesis 1c.¹¹

The variables included in the model predicted 77.80% of the variance of the inclination to exercise direct cyberaggression against a partner. The total effect of OD on direct cyberaggression was also significant ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.003, 0.04]).

Table 1

Effect of OD on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration Mediated by MD

| | Moral disengagement (MD) | | | Direct cyberaggression | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 2.02*** | 0.19 | [1.64, 2.39] | -0.42*** | 0.08 | [-0.57, -0.27] |
| Online disinhibition (OD) | 0.13*** | 0.02 | [0.08, 0.18] | 0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.03] |
| MD | | | | 0.06** | 0.02 | [0.03, 0.10] |
| Gender ^a | -0.12** | 0.04 | [-0.19, -0.04] | -0.01 | -0.01 | [-0.04, 0.02] |
| Age | -0.01** | 0.004 | [-0.02, -0.01] | -0.002 | 0.002 | [-0.005, 0.001] |
| Current relationship ^b | 0.02 | 0.05 | [-0.07, 0.11] | -0.03 | 0.02 | [-0.06, 0.01] |
| Ambivalent sexism | 0.10*** | 0.02 | [0.05, 0.15] | -0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.01] |
| Acceptance of IPV | -0.04 | 0.11 | [-0.26, 0.17] | 1.22*** | 0.04 | [1.14, 1.29] |
| CDAV | 0.01 | 0.03 | [-0.06, 0.08] | 0.10*** | 0.01 | [0.08, 0.12] |
| | $R^2 = .21$ | | | $R^2 = .78$ | | |
| | $F(7, 354) = 13.5, p < .001$ | | | $F(8, 353) = 154.66, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | | |
| Total Effect | 0.02 | | 0.01 | [0.003, 0.04] | | |
| Indirect Effect | 0.01 | | 0.003 | [0.002, 0.02] | | |

Note. $N = 362$. IPV = intimate partner violence; CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

¹¹ The indirect effect of OD on cybercontrol via MD was not statistically significant ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.04]; see Supplementary Material [SM2]).

Effect of OD, Gender, and Sexism on MD

The contribution of covariates entered into the first step of the regression model was significant ($F_{[4, 357]} = 5.40, p < .001$). The effect of current relationship, acceptance of IPV, and CDA victimization were found not to be significant ($p > .05$), whereas, participants' age negatively influenced MD ($b = -0.21, t = -4.12, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.31, -0.11]$): younger participants reported higher MD scores than older participants ($M_{\text{younger}} = 2.05, SD = 0.40; M_{\text{older}} = 1.90; SD = 0.37$). All covariates explained 6% of the total variance in MD.

In the second step, the contribution of all the variables entered into the model was found to be significant ($F_{[3, 354]} = 22.97, p < .001$) and provided an increase of 15% in the R^2 . OD significantly predicted MD ($b = 0.26, t = 5.33, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.16, 0.35]$), indicating that high levels of OD were related to increased levels of MD. Gender also showed a statistically significant effect on MD ($b = -0.15, t = -2.93, p = .004, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.24, -0.05]$): Men scored higher on MD than women ($M_{\text{men}} = 2.09, SD = 0.43; M_{\text{women}} = 1.90, SD = 0.34$). Likewise, sexism significantly affected MD ($b = 0.21, t = 4.06, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.31]$), suggesting that high sexism scores were related to increases in MD.

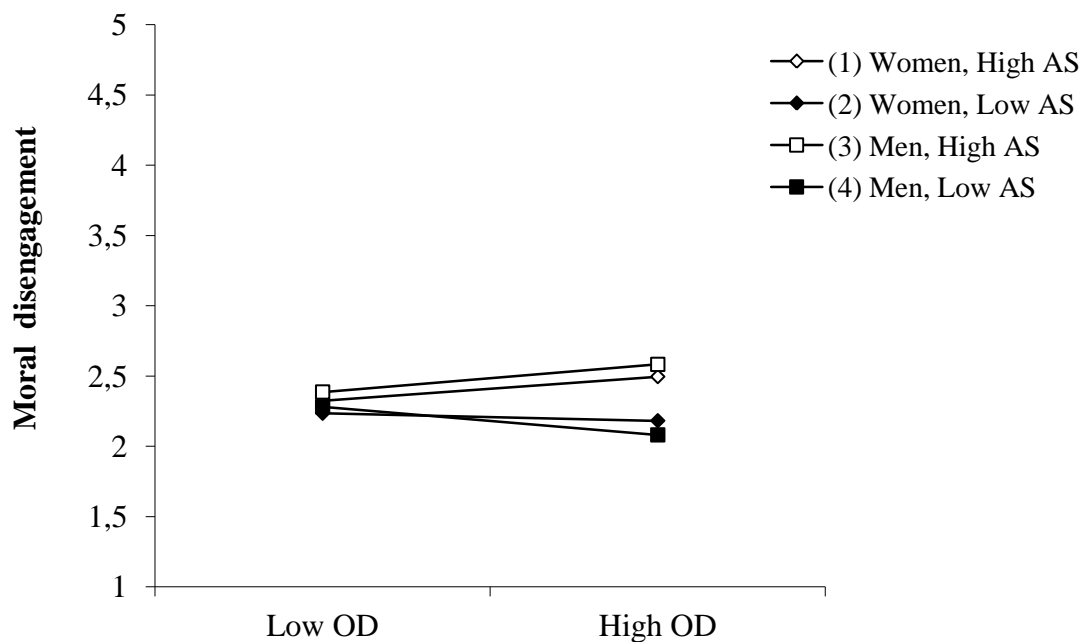
The third step of testing second-order interactions between predictor variables showed a significant contribution on the model ($F_{[3, 351]} = 4.42, p = .005$). The interaction effects between OD and gender ($b = -0.51, t = -0.98, p = 0.33, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.16, 0.05]$) and between gender and sexism ($b = -0.09, t = -1.75, p = .08, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.19, 0.01]$) were not significant. In contrast, we found a significant interaction effect between OD and sexism on MD ($b = 0.12, t = 2.12, p = .028, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.17]$). Simple slope analyses indicated that high OD predicted increases in MD in both participants with high sexism ($+1 \text{ SD}; b = 0.18, SE = 0.03, t = 6.08, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.12, 0.23]$) and participants with low sexism ($-1 \text{ SD}; b = 0.07, SE = 0.03, t = 2.10, p = 0.04, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.004, 0.13]$). However, the effects were stronger among participants with high sexism. The variables entered into the third step of the model explained 3% of the total variance in MD.

Last, the fourth step of testing a third-order interaction between predictor variables showed a significant contribution on the model ($F_{[1, 350]} = 3.93, p = .05$). Specifically, we found that the interaction effect between OD, gender, and sexism was statistically significant ($b = -0.12, t = -1.98, p = .048, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.18, -0.001]$; see Figure 2) and explained 1% of the total variance in MD. A simple slope analysis indicated that OD was predictive of increases in MD in men with high sexism scores ($b = 0.20, SE = 0.04, t = 5.66, p < .001, 95\%$

CI [0.13, 0.27]), but this was not true in men with low scores ($b = 0.7, SE = 0.05, t = 1.19, p = .23, 95\% CI [-0.04, 0.17]$). Among women, OD was predictive of higher MD in those with low levels of sexism ($-1 SD; b = 0.9, SE = 0.04, t = 2.40, p = .02, 95\% CI [0.02, 0.17]$), but not in those with high levels ($-1 SD; b = 0.06, SE = 0.06, t = 0.98, p = .33, 95\% CI [-0.06, 0.18]$). The effect was stronger among men with high sexism, which supported our Hypothesis 2.

Figure 2

Three-Way Interaction Between OD, Gender, and Ambivalent Sexism in MD



Note. OD = online disinhibition; MD = moral disengagement; AS = ambivalent sexism. OD and AS is graphed at $-1 SD$ (low) and $+1 SD$ (high).

Effect of MD and CDA Victimization on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration

The contribution of the covariates entered into the first step of the regression model was significant ($F_{[5, 356]} = 184.30, p < .001$). Participants' age negatively influenced direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = -0.06, t = -2.03, p = .04, 95\% CI [-0.11, -0.002]$): younger participants reported higher frequency of direct cyberaggression against the partners than older participants ($M_{younger} = 1.08, SD = 0.29; M_{older} = 1.04; SD = 0.23$). Acceptance of IPV also positively affected direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = 0.84, t = 28.75, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.78, 0.89]$). The effect of participants' gender, sexism, and current relationship were

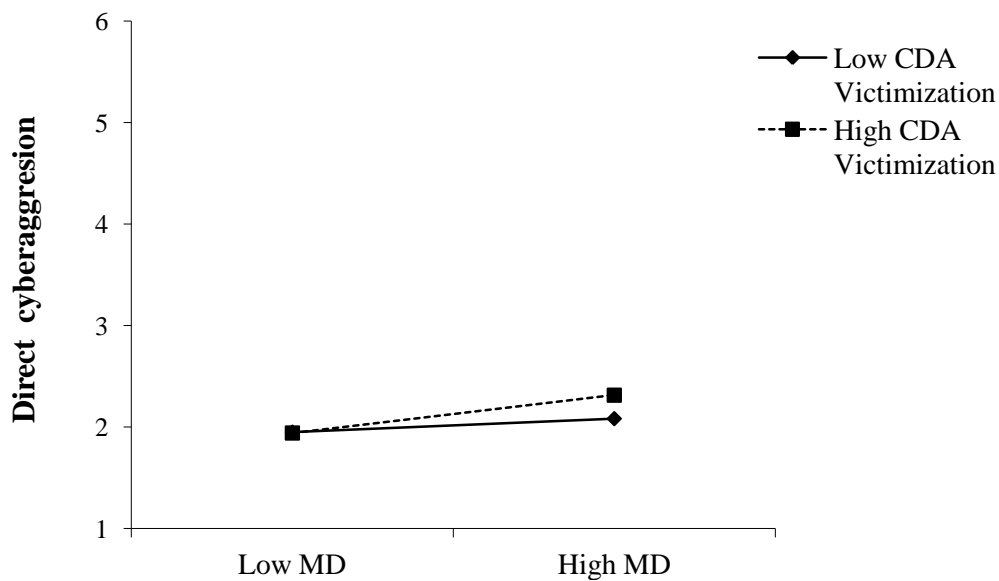
found not to be significant ($p > .05$). All control variables explained 72.1% of the total variance in direct cyberaggression perpetration.

In the second step, the contribution of all the variables was found to be significant ($F_{[2, 354]} = 44.12, p < .001$). We found that MD significantly predicted direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = 0.11, t = 3.88, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.05, 0.16]$), that is, high MD scores were related to more frequent direct cyberaggression against partners. CDA victimization also showed a significant main effect on direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = 0.22, t = 8.43, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.17, 0.27]$): High frequency of CDA victimization seemed to predict an increase in the frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration. The variables entered into the second step of the model explained 5.6% of the total variance in direct cyberaggression perpetration.

The third step of testing second-order interactions between MD and CDA victimization showed a significant contribution on the model ($F_{[1, 353]} = 79.47, p < .001$). Specifically, the variables entered into the third step of the model explained 4.1% of the total variance in direct cyberaggression perpetration. The analysis yielded the interaction effect between predictor variable was statically significant ($b = 0.22, t = 8.91, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.18, 0.28]$). A simple slope analysis indicated that, for participants with high frequency of CDA victimization (+1 *SD*), high OD was associated with more frequent direct cyberaggression perpetration against a partner ($b = 0.15, SE = 0.02, t = 7.96, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.19]$), but this was not true in participants with low frequency of CDA victimization (-1 *SD*; $b = -0.02, SE = 0.02, t = -0.92, p = .36, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.06, 0.02]$, see Figure 3). This result supported Hypothesis 3.

Figure 3

Two-Way Interaction Between MD and CDA Victimization in Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration



Note. MD = moral disengagement; CDA = cyberdating abuse. MD and CDA victimization are graphed at -1 *SD* (low) and $+1$ *SD* (high).

Effect of OD and CDA Victimization on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration

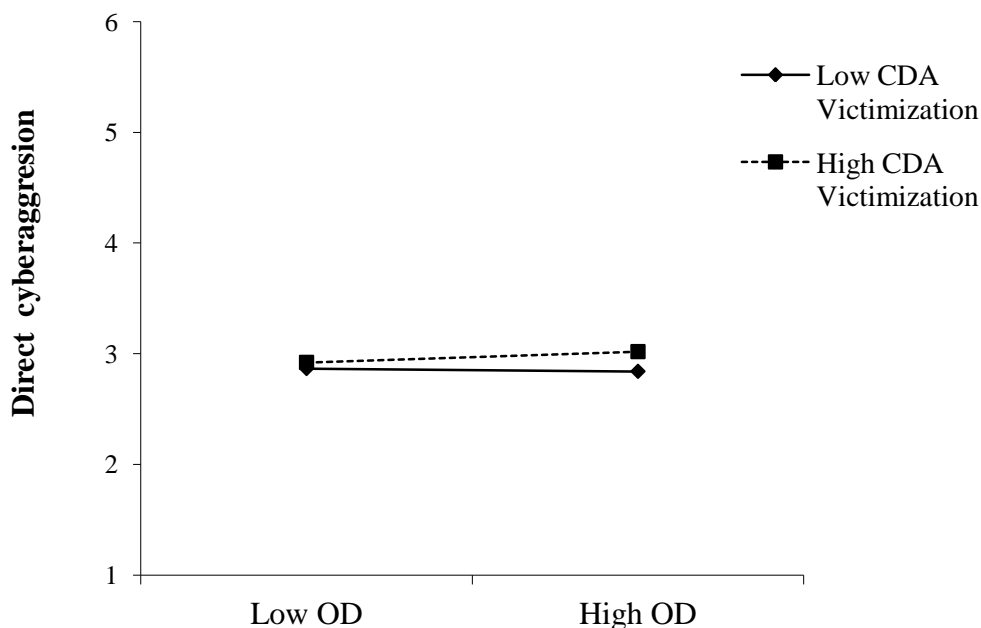
As in the previous section, the contribution of the covariates entered into the first step of the regression model was significant ($F_{[5, 356]} = 184.30, p < .001$). The effect of participants' gender, sexism, and current relationship were found not to be significant in direct cyberaggression perpetration ($p > .05$), whereas participants' age ($b = -0.06, t = -2.03, p = .04, 95\% \text{ CI} [-0.11, -0.002]$) and acceptance of IPV ($b = 0.84, t = 28.75, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.78, 0.89]$) were significant. All control variables explained 72.1% of the total variance in direct cyberaggression perpetration.

In the second step, the contribution of all the variables was also found to be significant ($F_{[2, 354]} = 38.25, p < .001$). OD significantly affected direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = 0.06, t = 2.30, p = .02, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.01, 0.11]$), indicating that higher levels of OD were predictive of frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner. CDA victimization also positively predicted direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = 0.22, t = 8.29, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI} [0.17, 0.28]$). The variables entered into the second step explained 5% of the total variance in direct cyberaggression perpetration.

Finally, in the third step, the variables showed a significant contribution on the model ($F_{[1, 353]} = 12.16, p = .001$). The analysis yielded a significant second-order interaction effect between OD and CDA victimization in direct cyberaggression perpetration ($b = 0.09, t = 3.49, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.05, 0.16]$; see Figure 4). A simple slope analysis indicated that high OD was associated with an increase in direct cyberaggression perpetration for participants with high frequency of CDA victimization (+1 *SD*; $b = 0.04, SE = 0.01, t = 3.88, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.06]$), but this was not significant in participants with low frequency of CDA victimization (-1 *SD*; $b = 0.002, SE = 0.01, t = 0.14, p = .89, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.02, 0.02]$). This supported Hypothesis 4. The variables entered into the third step of the model explained 1% of the total variance in direct cyberaggression perpetration.

Figure 4

Two-Way Interaction Between OD and CDA Victimization in Direct Cyberaggression



Note. OD = online disinhibition; CDA = cyberdating abuse. OD and CDA victimization are graphed at -1 *SD* (low) and +1 *SD* (high).

MD as a Mediator in the Effect of OD, Gender, and Sexism on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration

The analysis testing the effect of OD, gender, and sexism on direct cyberaggression, based on MD indices highlighted the moderated mediation index was not statistically

significant ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.02, 0.003]$). These results rejected our Hypothesis 5 (see SM3).

Mediating Effect of MD Between OD and Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration, Moderated by CDA Victimization

As shown in Table 2, the results showed a significant indirect effect of OD on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression by MD, moderated by CDA victimization. Specifically, high levels of OD were associated with greater MD, which, in turn, was related to increases in direct cyberaggression perpetration in participants with high levels of CDA victimization (+1 *SD*), but this was not significant in those with low levels (-1 *SD*). Moreover, results yielded that CDA victimization moderated the direct effect of OD on direct cyberaggression: OD was associated with an increase in direct cyberaggression perpetrations for participants with high CDA victimization (+1 *SD*), but this was not significant in participants with low CDA victimization (-1 *SD*).

The variables included in the model predicted 82.61% of the variance in the perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner. The moderated-moderated mediation index was statistically significant ($b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.06]$), supporting our Hypothesis 6.

Table 2

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Summary Information for the Moderated–Moderated Mediation Model 15 ("Direct Cyberaggression")

| | Moral disengagement (MD) | | | Direct cyberaggression | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 2.02*** | 0.19 | [1.65, 2.39] | 0.58*** | 0.13 | [0.33, 0.84] |
| OD | 0.13*** | 0.02 | [0.08, 0.18] | −0.05* | 0.02 | [−0.10, −0.01] |
| MD | | | | −0.27*** | 0.04 | [−0.36, −0.19] |
| CDAV | | | | −0.59*** | 0.08 | [−0.74, −0.45] |
| OD X CDAV | | | | 0.05*** | 0.02 | [0.03, 0.09] |
| MD X CDAV | | | | 0.25*** | 0.03 | [0.20, 0.31] |
| Gender ^a | −0.12** | 0.04 | [−0.19, −0.04] | −0.01 | 0.01 | [−0.03, 0.02] |
| Age | −0.01** | 0.004 | [−0.02, −0.01] | −0.001 | 0.001 | [−0.004, 0.002] |
| Current relationship ^b | 0.03 | 0.04 | [−0.06, 0.11] | −0.005 | 0.01 | [−0.03, 0.02] |
| Ambivalent sexism | 0.10*** | 0.02 | [0.05, 0.15] | −0.01 | 0.01 | [−0.02, 0.01] |
| Acceptance of IPV | −0.04 | 0.11 | [−0.25, 0.17] | 1.09*** | 0.04 | [1.02, 1.17] |
| | | $R^2 = .21$ | | | $R^2 = .83$ | |
| | | $F(6, 355) = 15.78, p < .001$ | | | $F(10, 351) = 166.76, p < .001$ | |
| | Effect | | | <i>SE</i> | | 95% CI |
| <i>Conditional direct effect</i> | | | | | | |
| Low CDAV | −0.0004 | | | 0.01 | | [−0.02, 0.02] |
| High CDAV | 0.03 | | | 0.01 | | [0.02, 0.05] |
| <i>Conditional indirect effect</i> | | | | | | |
| Low CDAV | −0.003 | | | 0.003 | | [−0.01, 0.003] |
| High CDAV | 0.02 | | | 0.01 | | [0.01, 0.03] |
| <i>Moderate mediation index</i> | 0.03 | | | 0.01 | | [0.01, 0.06] |

Note. $N = 362$. OD = online disinhibition; CDAV = CDA victimization; IPV = intimate partner violence; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Auxiliary Analyses

Our main results did not yield a predictor effect of OD, gender, and sexism on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner via MD. This could be due to the fact that the observed third-order interaction between the predictors did not show a sufficient effect size, and larger samples are needed to test this full model (Model 11; Hayes, 2018). We then conducted separate analyses to explore the indirect effect of OD and gender and OD and sexism on direct cyberaggression perpetration, moderated by CDA victimization. Specifically, we performed two moderated moderated mediation analyses using Model 28 of the PROCESS. OD was included as a predictor variable (X), direct cyberaggression perpetration as a criterion variable (Y), MD as a mediating variable (M), and gender or sexism (separately, W) and CDA victimization (Z) as moderating variables. We controlled for the same covariates as in the main analyses.

The first analysis showed a statistically significant effect of OD and gender on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression via MD, moderated by CDA victimization. Specifically, high levels of OD were associated with greater MD mainly in men (vs. women) participants, which, in turn, was related to increases in direct cyberaggression perpetration in those with high frequency of CDA victimization (+1 SD), but this was not significant in those with low frequency (-1 SD). The variables included in the model predicted 82.60% of the variance in the perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner. The moderated-moderated mediation index was statistically significant ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.06, -0.0002]; see SM4).

The second analysis testing the effect of OD and sexism on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression via MD, moderated by CDA victimization yielded the moderated-moderated mediation index was not statistically significant ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.003, 0.03]; see SM5).

Discussion

The present research aimed to deepen the understanding of the psychosocial factors associated with the perpetration of CDA behaviors. The positive influence of disinhibitory mechanisms such as OD and MD has been tested in cyberbullying perpetration (e.g., Stonard, 2020; Wang & Ngai, 2020). Nevertheless, the relevance of these factors in CDA has gone unnoticed.

Building on Wang and Ngai's (2020) work, our results first showed that OD was associated with increases in MD. We also found MD was predictive of increases in direct

cyberaggression perpetration, but not in cybercontrol. Moreover, we noted OD was related to higher direct cyberaggression through increases in MD. Similar to what Wang and Ngai (2020) observed in cyberbullying behavior, high OD was related to greater MD, which, in turn, was associated with a more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression, but this was not true for the cybercontrol dimension. Both direct cyberaggression and controlling behaviors are manifestations of CDA; nevertheless, the underlying motivations and mechanisms associated with each type of abuse seem to be different. Cybercontrolling behaviors are often considered manifestations of love and concern towards the partner (Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018) and/or a consequence of the use of digital media rather than as an expression of IPV (Belotti et al., 2022). This social perception about cybercontrol may help to understand why MD mechanisms are not related to its perpetration: Cybercontrolling behaviors might not require the activation of these disinhibitory mechanisms to take place because they seem not to imply a clear violation of moral standards. Therefore, cybercontrol perpetration could be triggered by other psychological processes.

In contrast, the OD and MD factors seem to associate with a more frequent perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner. This type of abuse tends to be more easily perceived as a manifestation of violence within a couple's relationship and occurs less frequently than cybercontrol behaviors (Caridade et al., 2019; Villorra et al., 2021). In this respect, Suler (2004) stated that online disinhibition increases the likelihood of engaging in behaviors that would be less likely in a traditional context, such as deliberate direct aggression. Factors such as invisibility and dissociative anonymity may reduce empathy for the victim and hinder the assessment of the harm that aggressive behavior causes them (Heirman & Walrave, 2008), which, in turn, seem to be related to MD processes to detach from self-sanctions of direct cyberaggression behavior (Runions & Bak, 2015). This is in line with previous findings suggesting that the perpetrator cognitively may self-regulate and release feelings of guilt to maintain and justify violence against others (Bandura, 1986, 1999).

In addition, building on Bandura's (1986, 1989) social cognitive theory, we testified some personal factors and circumstances modulating the influence of OD and MD in direct cyberaggression perpetration against a partner. In this respect, our results showed that gender and sexism jointly moderated the relationship between OD and MD: OD predicted greater MD in men with high sexism. This finding is congruent with research noting that men (vs. women) traditionally display higher levels of sexism (e.g., Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020) and that adherence to these stereotypical beliefs positively influences MD (Erdem &

Bakioglu, 2020). According to social role theory (Eagly et al., 2004), competitive/aggressive behavior has been encouraged in men, which could help to understand why a state of high OD is related to a greater MD in men highly sexist. The use of violence is a behavior congruent with the masculine social role; therefore, sexist men may cognitively adapt their moral norms more easily than sexist women to justify any transgressive behavior. However, our auxiliary results did not yield a predictor effect of OD, gender, and sexism on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner via MD. This could be due to the fact that the observed third-order interaction between the predictors did not show a sufficient effect size, and larger samples are needed to test this model.

On the other hand, our results showed that CDA victimization moderated the effects of OD on direct cyberaggression: elevated levels of OD were predictive of increases in direct cyberaggression in participants who manifested higher CDA victimization, but not in those with lower victimization. These findings are in line with Wong-Lo and Bullock (2014), who observed that OD increases the likelihood that cyber victims will assume the role of cyberaggressors, regardless of gender. Moreover, our results support the statements of Moore (2015), who suggested that OD does not homogeneously lead to higher levels of cyberbullying, but may under specific circumstances. In the online context, individuals have tools at their disposal that increase the likelihood of engaging in reactive IPV. For example, the feeling of being protected behind a screen or the physical distance between the offender and the victim may encourage victims to adopt maladaptive coping strategies such as the perpetration of reactive cyberaggression (Stonard et al., 2017). In this way, technologies may be creating a false sense of empowerment for victims that, rather than empowering them to seek solutions to the violent situation, could lead to unhealthy strategies that further perpetuate and normalize CDA among partners (Alvarez, 2012).

Similarly, our results showed elevated levels of MD were predictive of increases in direct cyberaggression in participants who manifested higher CDA victimization, but not in those with lower victimization. Moreover, our data showed that CDA moderated the indirect effect of OD on direct cyberaggression through MD, that is, high levels of OD were associated with greater MD, which, in turn, was related to increases in direct cyberaggression perpetration in participants with high levels of CDA victimization, but not in those with low levels. These results are in line with Cuadrado-Gordillo and Fernández-Antelo (2019) work showing that being highly victimized is related to greater levels of MD. Specifically, our findings seem to suggest that MD's self-regulatory mechanisms may play a relevant role in

the people's acceptance and justification of direct cyberaggression perpetration when one is also a victim of CDA. That is, they may approve of such violence against themselves and perceive it as a problem-solving tool within their romantic relationships, which, in turn, could favor a culture of shared cyberabuse between partners (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014).

Finally, the auxiliary results indicated that gender and CDA victimization jointly modulated the indirect effect of OD on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression. That is, high OD is associated with higher MD mainly in men (vs. women) participants, which, in turn, would be related to a higher frequency of direct cyberaggression perpetration against a partner in highly victimized individuals. Although OD and MD seem to associate with the perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner in a similar way as in the field of cyberbullying, it is important to note that CDA is also influenced by gender social norms. In heterosexual romantic relationships, there is often a complex power dynamic derived from the patriarchal structure that is relevant when examining CDA. Our findings therefore are in line with empirical work supporting the assertion that CDA is gender asymmetric: Direct cyberaggression behaviors used as a tool of control and power in the relationship occur to a greater extent in men (Reed et al., 2021), and not because they are biologically men but because of gender socialization and their identity with the meaning of masculinity (Stosny, 1995). In a patriarchal society, women have a lower status than men and, consequently, some men may consider that women deserve violent treatment in certain situations (Expósito et al., 1998). For example, when CDA is reciprocal and women question men's power in the relationship by employing the same strategies they do (i.e., CDA) to manage couple conflicts. In this sense, men could easily conform and adapt their judgment to their moral norms cognitively to justify direct cyberaggression against a partner, and even more so when the transgressive behavior is encouraged by online disinhibiting factors blurring moral boundaries (Bandura, 2002). However, more research is required to test such assumptions.

Practical Contributions

Our findings provide evidence that OD and MD are factors associated with direct cyberaggression against partners. Psychology professionals could use our work to develop psychoeducational programs of CDA prevention and intervention aimed at respectively preventing and mitigating the negative effects of these psychological mechanisms in romantic relationships. Moreover, our results highlight the need to lead practical efforts towards the responsible use of technological media in order to promote healthy and quality relationships,

especially at a very early age when the first romantic relationships take place. Such urgency lies in the fact that, as a consequence of the misuse of digital media and the disinhibition that young people experience in exercising CDA, they may be assuming toxic and violent relational dynamics that affect their well-being and normal development (Borrajo & Gámez-Guadix, 2015).

In addition, from our research we derive the need to include the gender perspective in the analysis of CDA behaviors. The social perception that CDA is gender symmetrical has been increasing in recent years, partially because empirical research has noted a certain bidirectionality between partners (e.g., Villora et al., 2021). IPV is evolving and adapting to new times by taking on subtle and almost unidentifiable forms and camouflages itself under a veil of gender neutrality. However, the power dynamics that are established within violent relationships are not outside gendered social norms (i.e., beliefs and attitudes about gender stereotypes and gender roles). Therefore, it is essential for professionals working on CDA intervention and research to join forces, approaching the problem from a gender perspective.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our research contributes to the knowledge of CDA; nevertheless, it has some limitations that should be noted. First, we used an observational study with a cross-sectional design, so we cannot establish causal relationships between the study variables. Future researchers could implement longitudinal methods or experimental design to achieve more controllability over the results and obtain interpretations of causality with regard to the effects of OD and MD on direct cyberaggression. Second, we assessed all constructs using self-report measures. As is typically the case in surveys on sensitive topics and undesirable behaviors, responses may have been subject to social desirability and recall bias (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). Future researchers should use other innovative approaches, such as dyadic research designs involving both couple partners. Third, the sizes of some effects observed are small, which might be due to our sample being small; substantially larger samples are needed to replicate our findings. Fourth, we selected the participants by nonprobability snowball sampling; therefore, our results are not generalizable to the entire population. Other researchers should corroborate our findings using random sampling and collecting heterogeneous samples to examine the potential influence of variables such as age, cultural values, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Fifth, respondents could think about all of their romantic relationships when we addressed CDA; we were unable to test whether the CDA

took place with the same partner or a different one. Moreover, we did not control whether or not people were in a monogamous relationship. Therefore, conclusions derived from our work need to be taken with caution.

Finally, we encourage future gender-sensitive researchers to delve into the analysis of the individual and relational consequences of suffering CDA, as well as victims' coping strategies. This could help to understand why the impact of CDA is different in men and women (Brown et al., 2022), and why being a victim appears to increase the likelihood of becoming a perpetrator and vice versa—how reciprocal violence is triggered within relationships (Smith et al., 2018).

Conclusions

CDA is increasingly becoming established in romantic relationships, and there is a risk of such abusive behaviors becoming normalized. A key contribution of this research is the introduction of the psychological mechanisms of OD and MD as factors associated with direct cyberaggression among young heterosexual couples, as well as an understanding of the circumstances that intensify its occurrence. Specifically, gender, sexist attitudes, and the degree of cybervictimization suffered may be essential factors in comprehending how psychological states of OD and MD activation operate in the perpetration of direct cyberaggression against partners. Our research may help researchers develop specific interventions in violent heterosexual relationships that consider the influence of these factors and best adapt to the characteristics and dynamics of their relationships, that is, depending on whether there is gendered power inequality or reciprocity of CDA. Likewise, we hope that our findings will prompt researchers to explore new avenues of work that delve deeper into the psychosocial mechanisms that arise from cyberviolent relationships and the coping strategies that could constructively confront CDA.

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Supplementary Material

Is Online Disinhibition Related to Cyberdating Abuse Perpetration by Moral Disengagement?

The Moderating Role of Gender, Sexism, and Cybervictimization

1. Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1S

Matrix Correlations and Tests of Mean Differences Based on Gender, Study Variables

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. | 11. |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|-------|---------|-----|
| 1. Direct cyberaggression perpetration | -- | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Cybercontrol perpetration | .50** | -- | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Direct cyberaggression victimization | .44** | .32** | -- | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Cybercontrol victimization | .22** | .53** | .67** | -- | | | | | | | |
| 5. Online disinhibition | .06 | .04 | .12** | .06 | -- | | | | | | |
| 6. Moral disengagement | .16** | .09 | .10 | .07 | .31** | -- | | | | | |
| 7. Ambivalent sexism | .26** | .20** | .18** | .13* | .12* | .29** | -- | | | | |
| 8. Acceptance of IPV | .85** | .38** | .25** | .04 | -.03 | .04 | .26** | -- | | | |
| 9. Gender ^a | -.11* | .06 | -.02 | -.04 | -.03 | -.24** | -.29** | -.08 | -- | | |
| 10. Age | -.06 | .09 | -.05 | -.03 | -.14** | -.22** | -.03 | .004 | .15** | -- | |
| 11. Current relationship ^b | -.02 | .12* | .21** | .24** | .07 | .08 | .06 | -.06 | -.07 | -.06 | -- |
| <i>Moverall</i> | 1.06 | 1.51 | 1.14 | 1.61 | 3.33 | 1.99 | 0.80 | 1.03 | -- | 25.10 | -- |
| (SD) | (0.27) | (0.65) | (0.41) | (0.92) | (0.78) | (0.40) | (0.83) | (0.18) | | (4.45) | |
| <i>Mmen</i> | 1.09 | 1.47 | 1.14 | 1.65 | 3.35 | 2.09 | 1.06 | 1.04 | -- | 24.40 | -- |
| (SD) | (0.37) | (0.61) | (0.36) | (0.91) | (0.78) | (0.43) | (0.92) | (0.26) | | (4.31) | |
| <i>Mwomen</i> | 1.03 | 1.54 | 1.13 | 1.58 | 3.30 | 1.90 | 0.59 | 1.01 | -- | 25.69 | -- |
| (SD) | (1.12) | (0.67) | (0.45) | (0.94) | (0.78) | (0.34) | (0.67) | (0.06) | | (4.49) | |
| Gender difference t | 2.13* | -1.10 | 0.32 | 0.75 | 0.62 | 4.64*** | 5.67*** | 1.53 | -- | -2.78** | -- |
| Cohen's d | 0.07 | -0.11 | 0.02 | 0.08 | 0.06 | 0.49 | 0.58 | 0.16 | -- | -0.29 | -- |

Note. $N_{overall} = 362$; $N_{men} = 166$, $N_{women} = 196$. IPV = intimate partner violence. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

2. Indirect Effect of OD on Cybercontrol Perpetration Based on Rates of MD

Table 2S

Effect of OD on Cybercontrol Perpetration Mediated by MD

| | Moral disengagement (MD) | | | Cybercontrol | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|---------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 2.02*** | 0.19 | [1.64, 2.39] | -1.17*** | 0.32 | [-1.80, -0.54] |
| Online disinhibition (OD) | 0.13*** | 0.02 | [0.08, 0.18] | -0.01 | 0.04 | [-0.08, 0.07] |
| MD | | | | 0.12 | 0.08 | [-0.04, 0.27] |
| Gender ^a | -0.12** | 0.04 | [-0.19, -0.04] | 0.16** | 0.06 | [0.04, 0.27] |
| Age | -0.01** | 0.00 | [-0.02, -0.01] | 0.01* | 0.01 | [0.002, 0.03] |
| Current relationship ^b | 0.02 | 0.05 | [-0.07, 0.11] | 0.05 | 0.07 | [-0.08, 0.18] |
| Ambivalent sexism | 0.10*** | 0.02 | [0.05, 0.15] | 0.05 | 0.04 | [-0.02, 0.12] |
| Acceptance of IPV | -0.04 | 0.11 | [-0.26, 0.17] | 1.13*** | 0.16 | [0.81, 1.44] |
| CDAV | 0.01 | 0.03 | [-0.06, 0.08] | 0.48*** | 0.05 | [0.39, 0.58] |
| | | | $R^2 = .21$ | | | $R^2 = .37$ |
| | | | $F(7, 354) = 13.5, p < .001$ | | | $F(8, 353) = 26.13, p < .001$ |
| | | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | | 95% CI |
| Total effect | | 0.01 | | 0.04 | | [-0.06, 0.08] |
| Indirect effect | | 0.02 | | 0.01 | | [-0.002, 0.04] |

Note. $N = 362$. IPV = intimate partner violence; CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

3. MD as a Mediator in the Effect of OD, Gender, and Sexism on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration

Table 3S

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Summary Information for the Moderated–Moderated Mediation Model 11 ("Direct Cyberaggression")

| | Moral disengagement (MD) | | | Direct cyberaggression | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 2.26 *** | 0.42 | [1.43, 3.09] | −0.42*** | 0.07 | [−0.57, −0.28] |
| OD | 0.02 | 0.12 | [−0.22, 0.26] | 0.01 | 0.01 | [−0.01, 0.03] |
| Gender ^a | −0.15 | 0.23 | [−0.61, 0.30] | | | |
| OD X Gender | 0.04 | 0.07 | [−0.10, 0.18] | | | |
| AS | −0.41 | 0.25 | [−0.90, 0.08] | | | |
| OD X AS | 0.20** | 0.08 | [0.05, 0.35] | | | |
| Gender X AS | 0.27 | 0.19 | [−0.10, 0.63] | | | |
| OD X Gender X AS | −0.11* | 0.06 | [−0.22, −0.001] | | | |
| MD | | | | 0.06*** | 0.02 | [0.03, 0.10] |
| Age | −0.02*** | 0.004 | [−0.02, −0.01] | −0.002 | 0.002 | [−0.005, 0.001] |
| Current relationship ^b | 0.01 | 0.05 | [−0.08, 0.10] | −0.02 | 0.02 | [−0.06, 0.01] |
| Acceptance of IPV | −0.03 | 0.11 | [−0.25, 0.18] | 1.21*** | 0.04 | [1.14, 1.29] |
| CDAV | 0.02 | 0.03 | [−0.05, 0.08] | 0.10*** | 0.01 | [0.08, 0.12] |
| | | $R^2 = .25$ | | | $R^2 = .78$ | |
| | | $F(11, 350) = 10.19, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 355) = 206.74, p < .001$ | |
| | Effect | | | Boot <i>SE</i> | | 95% CI |
| <i>Conditional indirect effects</i> | | | | | | |
| | Men–Low CDAV | 0.004 | | 0.005 | | [−0.003, 0.02] |
| | Men–High CDAV | 0.01 | | 0.006 | | [0.003, 0.02] |
| | Women–Low CDAV | 0.006 | | 0.003 | | [0.001, 0.01] |
| | Women–High CDAV | 0.004 | | 0.006 | | [−0.01, 0.02] |
| | <i>Moderated–moderated mediation index</i> | −0.01 | | 0.01 | | [−0.02, 0.003] |

Note. $N = 362$. OD = online disinhibition; AS = ambivalent sexism; IPV = intimate partner violence; CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

4. MD as a Mediator in the Effect of OD and Gender on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration, Moderated by CDA Victimization

Table 4S

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Summary Information for the Moderated–Moderated Mediation Model 28 ("Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration")

| | Moral disengagement (MD) | | | Direct cyberaggression | | |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 1.44 *** | 0.31 | [0.83, 2.04] | 0.57*** | 0.13 | [0.32, 0.82] |
| OD | 0.31*** | 0.08 | [0.15, 0.46] | −0.05* | 0.02 | [−0.10, −0.01] |
| Gender ^a | 0.27 | 0.17 | [−0.06, 0.59] | | | |
| OD X Gender | −0.11** | 0.05 | [−0.21, −0.02] | | | |
| MD | | | | −0.27*** | 0.04 | [−0.36, −0.19] |
| CDAV | | | | −0.59*** | 0.08 | [−0.74, −0.45] |
| OD X CDAV | | | | 0.05*** | 0.02 | [0.02, 0.08] |
| MD X CDAV | | | | 0.25*** | 0.03 | [0.20, 0.31] |
| Age | −0.01*** | 0.004 | [−0.02, −0.01] | −0.001 | 0.001 | [−0.004, 0.002] |
| Current relationship ^b | 0.03 | 0.04 | [−0.06, 0.12] | −0.005 | 0.01 | [−0.03, 0.02] |
| AS | 0.10*** | 0.02 | [0.05, 0.15] | −0.01 | 0.01 | [−0.02, 0.01] |
| Acceptance of IPV | −0.03 | 0.11 | [−0.24, 0.18] | 1.09*** | 0.04 | [1.02, 1.17] |
| | | $R^2 = .22$ | | | $R^2 = .83$ | |
| | | $F(7, 354) = 14.51, p < .001$ | | | $F(9, 352) = 185.67, p < .001$ | |
| | Effect | | Boot <i>SE</i> | | 95% CI | |
| <i>Conditional direct effect</i> | | | | | | |
| Low CDA | −0.001 | | 0.01 | | [−0.02, 0.02] | |
| High CDA | 0.04 | | 0.01 | | [0.02, 0.05] | |
| <i>Conditional indirect effects</i> | | | | | | |
| Men–Low CDAV | −0.004 | | 0.004 | | [−0.01, 0.004] | |
| Men–High CDAV | 0.03 | | 0.01 | | [0.01, 0.05] | |
| Women–Low CDAV | −0.002 | | 0.002 | | [−0.01, 0.002] | |
| Women–High CDAV | 0.01 | | 0.005 | | [0.002, 0.02] | |
| <i>Moderated–moderated mediation index</i> | −0.03 | | 0.02 | | [−0.06, −0.0002] | |

Note. $N = 362$. OD = online disinhibition; CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; AS = ambivalent sexism; IPV = intimate partner violence; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

5. MD as a Mediator in the Effect of OD and Sexism on Direct Cyberaggression Perpetration, Moderated by CDA Victimization

Table 5S

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Summary Information for the Moderated–Moderated Mediation Model 28 ("Direct Cyberaggression")

| | Moral disengagement (MD) | | | Direct cyberaggression | | |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 2.20*** | 0.20 | [1.81, 2.58] | 0.59*** | 0.13 | [0.34, 0.85] |
| OD | 0.07* | 0.03 | [0.001, 0.13] | –0.05* | 0.02 | [–0.10, –0.01] |
| AS | –0.11 | 0.08 | [–0.26, 0.04] | | | |
| OD X AS | 0.07** | 0.02 | [0.02, 0.11] | | | |
| MD | | | | –0.28*** | 0.04 | [–0.36, –0.19] |
| CDAV | | | | –0.59*** | 0.08 | [–0.74, –0.45] |
| OD X CDAV | | | | 0.05*** | 0.02 | [0.02, 0.09] |
| MD X CDAV | | | | 0.25*** | 0.03 | [0.20, 0.31] |
| Gender ^a | –0.11** | 0.04 | [–0.19, –0.03] | –0.003 | 0.01 | [–0.03, 0.02] |
| Age | –0.01*** | 0.004 | [–0.02, –0.01] | –0.001 | 0.001 | [–0.004, 0.002] |
| Current relationship ^b | 0.01 | 0.04 | [–0.07, 0.10] | –0.01 | 0.01 | [–0.03, 0.02] |
| Acceptance of IPV | –0.002 | 0.11 | [–0.21, 0.21] | 1.08*** | 0.04 | [1.01, 1.16] |
| | | $R^2 = .23$ | | | $R^2 = .83$ | |
| | | $F(7, 354) = 15.06, p < .001$ | | | $F(9, 352) = 185.10, p < .001$ | |
| | Effect | | Boot <i>SE</i> | | 95% CI | |
| <i>Conditional direct effect</i> | | | | | | |
| Low CDAV | –0.001 | | 0.01 | | [–0.02, 0.02] | |
| High CDAV | 0.03 | | 0.01 | | [0.02, 0.05] | |
| <i>Conditional indirect effects</i> | | | | | | |
| Low AS–Low CDAV | –0.002 | | 0.002 | | [–0.01, 0.001] | |
| Low AS–High CDAV | 0.01 | | 0.005 | | [0.001, 0.02] | |
| High AS–Low CDAV | –0.004 | | 0.004 | | [–0.01, 0.003] | |
| High AS–High CDAV | 0.02 | | 0.01 | | [0.01, 0.04] | |
| <i>Moderated–moderated mediation index</i> | 0.02 | | 0.01 | | [–0.003, 0.03] | |

Note. $N = 362$. OD = online disinhibition; AS = ambivalent sexism; CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; IPV = intimate partner violence. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Chapter 4

*Exploring Coping Strategies to Manage
Cyberdating Abuse*

**Impact of Cyberdating Abuse Victimization on Individual Well-Being: The Role of
Destructive Responses, Relational Power, and Relationship Inclusiveness**

María Dolores Sánchez-Hernández

M^a Carmen Herrera Enríquez

Francisca Expósito Jiménez

Mind, Brain, and Behavior Research Center (CIMCYC)

Department of Social Psychology

University of Granada

This article is under review in the *Computers in Human Behavior* journal:

Sánchez-Hernández, M. D., Herrera, M. C., y Expósito, F. (under review). Impact of Cyberdating Abuse Victimization on Individual Well-Being: The Role of Destructive Responses, Relational Power, and Relationship Inclusiveness

Abstract

Qualitative research suggests that young people suffering from cyberdating abuse (CDA) often display unhealthy coping styles. However, the research conducted on this issue is scarce and inconclusive. Identifying the factors that promote detrimental conflict-resolution strategies is a major gap that needs to be addressed to help youth build healthier and happier relationships. Our research is pioneering this field by examining whether (a) high frequency of CDA victimization is associated with lower psychological well-being (PWB) and low relationship satisfaction due to unhealthy conflict-resolution strategies (e.g., exit, loyalty, neglect), (b) low relational power could explain the correlation between the frequency of CDA victimization and the use of destructive conflict-resolution strategies (e.g., exit, neglect), and (c) the degree of inclusion of the other in the self (IOS) moderates the effect of relationship's power on exit responses. Across two cross-sectional studies (total $N = 618$), our results showed that high frequency of CDA victimization was associated with increased use of destructive responses, which lead to lower PWB and relationship satisfaction (Study 1 and 2). Moreover, our findings indicate that CDA victimization predicts greater use of destructive responses by decreasing relational power (Study 2). Likewise, low relational power derived from frequent CDA victimization was associated with more exit responses exclusively in those who reported low IOS (Study 2). This research provides novel data for clinical intervention and development of prevention programs aimed at equipping youth with healthier conflict-resolution skills in cyberviolent relationships.

Keywords: cyberdating abuse, conflict resolution, relational power, inclusion of the other in the self

Impact of Cyberdating Abuse Victimization on Individual Well-Being: The Role of Destructive Responses, Relational Power, and Relationship Inclusiveness

Cyberdating abuse (CDA) is a phenomenon that has aroused great interest in recent years due to its high rate of incidence and negative impact on young populations (for review, see Caridade et al., 2019). It is defined as intimate partner violence (IPV) that is exercised through the Internet and digital media and includes several behaviors, such as cybercontrol, cyberharassment, cyberstalking, and cyberabuse of one's dating partner (Zweig et al., 2014). Borrajo et al. (2015b) classified this set of online behaviors in two dimensions of abuse based on their nature: *cybercontrol*, which involves integrating technological behaviors aimed at controlling the partner or expartner (e.g., accessing the partner's/ex-partner's social networks without their consent or insidiously calling the partner/expartner), and *direct cyberaggression*, which refers to online behaviors intended to harm the partner/expartner deliberately (e.g., insulting, threatening, or humiliating the partner/expartner via digital media).

CDA usually appears during adolescence and youth, which are periods of vulnerability when romantic relationships constitute a central element for social and affective development. Frequent episodes of CDA victimization severely affect the physical, psychological, and relational well-being of young people (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). The consequences associated with CDA victimization seem to be more detrimental for women due to their psychological vulnerability in the relational and social framework, among other reasons (Borrajo et al., 2015a; Stonard, 2020). Women who suffer from CDA experience more symptoms of anxiety, stress, depression, fear, and psychological distress than men (Álvarez, 2012). Furthermore, women perceive these CDA behaviors as more annoying, offensive, and harmful than men, who tend to minimize their severity (Stonard et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, the consequences and severity of victimization seem to depend greatly on the individual resources that victims have to cope with the abusive experience (Löbmann et al., 2003). Surprisingly, little theoretical or empirical work published in the CDA field has focused on studying coping strategies and their consequences; most of the studies adopted a qualitative approach and focused on multiple experiences of cybervictimization. In the present research, we contribute to this area by examining how young people suffering from CDA cope this abuse, and whether such management determines the impact of CDA on individual well-being.

Conflict-Resolution Strategies and the Associated Consequences

Although various categorizations of coping style have been established throughout the literature, the classification of conflict-resolution strategies proposed by Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983)—later updated by Overall and McNulty (2017)—has been one of the most recognized and used in romantic relationship contexts. These authors identified four types of couple conflict-resolution responses or strategies: expression, loyalty, flight, and neglect. These were differentiated from each other based on two dimensions: *direction* (active/passive) and *valence* (constructive/destructive). Active strategies refer to responses aimed at addressing or coping with the problem, whereas passive strategies refer to responses that do not directly address the problem. Constructive strategies are aimed at maintaining a relationship, whereas destructive strategies occur when people end a relationship or allow it to deteriorate through hostile behaviors that inflict harm and generate competitiveness and negativity between partners. By combining these dimensions, the authors identified the following conflict-resolution strategies: (a) *voice* (active and constructive responses that involve searching for solutions through negotiation); (b) *loyalty* (passive and constructive responses where a person passively expects problems to get better on their own); (c) *exit* (active and destructive responses used to threaten or destroy a relationship); and (d) *neglect* (passive and destructive responses that gradually deteriorate a relationship).

The ways people handle relational conflicts have a strong impact on the well-being of the person and their relationship. For instance, individuals who recurrently assume destructive responses (i.e., exit and neglect) cause damage to the relationship that is often irreparable, such as generating resistance and resentment between partners, which reduces mutually supportive responses and increases dissatisfaction with the relationship (Overall et al., 2009; Overall & Simpson, 2013). People who utilize constructive responses have active or passive natures that seem to determine the strategy's efficiency. For example, constructive-active responses (*voice*) are associated with better functioning and satisfaction with the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1986), whereas passive-constructive responses (*loyalty*) can be detrimental because relationship problems are sustained over time and not addressed (Overall, 2010). Previous findings suggest that loyalty, exit, and neglect strategies lead to a worse conflict resolution, whereas voice response seems to be the most effective strategy (Overall et al., 2010; Valor-Segura et al., 2020).

Coping Strategies to Manage CDA

Only a few studies have attempted to examine possible strategies to cope with CDA using a qualitative methodology. Through an interview design ($N = 56$ young adults; 41 females and 15 males), Draucker and Martsof (2010) observed that CDA victims established boundaries in interactions with their partners to distance themselves, such as not responding to text messages or calls or putting their phone on silent mode. Some participants also stated that they ignored their partner when they were together by texting others or taking phone calls, which made the partner angry. In contrast, some individuals reported that they tried to stop the violence by ending the relationship, particularly through technological means (e.g., phone calls, messages).

Other researchers who focused on samples with women have observed that one of the main strategies employed by victims is to limit and self-censor their own activity in digital environments (e.g., reducing Internet use, limiting content posted on social networks, deleting social network accounts), which could be considered a loyalty strategy that gradually leads to greater isolation, feelings of loneliness, and deterioration of well-being (e.g., LeFebvre et al., 2015; Vitak et al., 2017). Recently, Alsawalq (2021) observed a sample of female victims of multiple forms of CDA and noticed that coping responses varied depending on the nature of the abuse. Specifically, in situations of direct and explicit CDA when there was an intention to harm the partner (e.g., threats involving sexual images or videos), some victims utilized neglectful styles (e.g., blocking their partner or responding to threats by enlisting the help of male colleagues), others used exit responses (e.g., threatening to leave a partner or ending the relationship), and the remainder sought help from professionals (e.g., police officers, computer experts, and/or university professors). In contrast, participants generally showed loyalty responses when faced with cybercontrol victimization by their partners, including minimizing the severity of this violence and/or justifying the partner's behavior, which may increase their tolerance to this type of abuse.

In sum, researchers have suggested that people who suffer from CDA mainly employ passive coping responses (loyalty and neglect) and active destructive strategies (exit) that are aimed at ending the relationship. Curiously, the psychological literature on conflict management in intimate relationships has estimated that these types of responses reflect poorer conflict resolution and have detrimental effects on the partner's well-being (Valor-Segura et al., 2020). In our research, we first applied Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) model to understand how young people cope with CDA victimization and how the used strategies influence individual well-being. Moreover, empirical research has denoted that coping style plays a significant role in mediating the effects of IPV on mental health. For instance, coping

strategies based on denial or self-blame increase the likelihood of developing depressive symptoms and posttraumatic stress disorder (Flicker et al., 2012). Similarly, passive coping styles (self-distraction strategies) seem to increase negative mental health outcomes in women suffering from IPV, whereas problem-focused coping strategies (active coping, instrumental support, and planning) decrease them (Wong et al., 2015). Therefore, our research also aimed to examine the mediating role of couple conflict-resolution strategies in the effects of CDA victimization on individual well-being. In particular, we pose the following research question:

RQ1. Does the frequency of CDA victimization predict lower psychological well-being (PWB) and relationship satisfaction by using detrimental conflict-resolution strategies (exit, neglect, and loyalty)?

Study 1

Building on the Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) model, Study 1 aimed to determine whether the frequency of CDA victimization indirectly affects PWB and relationship satisfaction by using detrimental conflict-resolution strategies (exit, neglect, and loyalty). According to the reviewed literature, we expected high frequency of global CDA¹² victimization (both direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol behaviors) to be associated with more frequent use of exit, neglect, and loyalty responses (Hypothesis 1). In turn, frequent use of exit, neglect, and loyalty strategies is expected to be associated with low PWB (Hypothesis 2a) and low relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2b). Moreover, we hypothesized that high frequency of CDA victimization would relate to lower PWB (Hypothesis 3a) and lower relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 3b), mainly in women (vs. men; Hypothesis 4a and b, respectively). Finally, we expected high frequency of CDA victimization to be associated with lower PWB (Hypothesis 5a) and lower relational satisfaction (Hypothesis 5b) due to increased use of destructive strategies (exit and neglect) and loyalty responses.

¹² Our research is pioneering by examining the conflict-resolution strategies proposed by Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) that are associated with the frequency of CDA victimization. Since findings on CDA coping are scarce and inconclusive, we established the hypotheses in our research based on the general CDA victimization rate. In other words, we conducted our main analyses using the global CDA dimension, which includes both types of direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol behaviors, and complementarily performed separate analyses for each of the subdimensions (victimization by direct cyberaggression and victimization by cybercontrol).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Out of the 609 participants who accessed our study, 263 were removed because they did not complete the full questionnaire and eight were excluded because they failed the attention check items (e.g., “If you are reading the question, check the answer Option 3”). We also removed 18 participants who indicated being over 35 years old¹³ and four participants who noted a nonheterosexual orientation. The final sample was composed of 313 participants of Spanish nationality ($M_{\text{age}} = 24.14$, $SD = 4.99$, range: 18–35 years; 61% [$n = 191$] women) who all identified as heterosexual and were in a couple’s relationship at the time of data collection. Specifically, 29.7% ($n = 93$) indicated that they were cohabiting with their partner, whereas 70.3% ($n = 220$) reported that they were not. The average relationship duration in months was 37.55 ($SD = 38.58$).

We implemented a cross-sectional study design after receiving the approval of Ethics Committee of University of Granada. Through the Qualtrics research platform, we developed an online survey containing the relevant variables of interest. Afterwards, we used a snowball sampling method and distributed the online survey through an open-access link via email and social networks sites (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp). We collected the data throughout February and March of 2022, with the survey remaining open for the entirety of the two months. The inclusion criteria to collaborate in our study included the following: (a) between 18 and 35 years of age, (b) Spanish nationality, (c) heterosexual orientation, and (d) a current romantic relationship. We confirmed these inclusion criteria through a set of checking questions at the end of the online survey. Participants were informed about the general study’s goal and anonymous and voluntary nature before completing the online survey. Following the Declaration of Helsinki, they were then asked to give their consent to participate in our study. Participants filled in a single survey based on their individual experiences and opinions, which took approximately 15 min to complete. They did not receive economic compensation for their collaboration.

Measures

¹³ We utilized the term “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000) to delimit the age range of the young adults in this study. This suggests that the acquisition of the traditional markers of adulthood (e.g., parenthood, home ownership, economic independence) has been delayed as a consequence of the sociocultural and economic factors. This same standard was used in previous research (e.g., Oleszkowicz & Misztela, 2015; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020).

Psychological Well-Being. We used the Scale of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB; Díaz et al., 2006), consisting of 29 items with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), which were divided into six dimensions: *self-acceptance* (four items; e.g., “In general, I feel confident and positive about myself”), *positive relations with others* (five items; e.g., “I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me”), *autonomy* (six items; e.g., “I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus”), *environmental mastery* (five items; e.g., “I have been able to build a living environment and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking”), *purpose in life* (five items; e.g., “I feel good when I think about what I have done in the past and what I hope to do in the future”), and *personal growth* (four items; e.g., “I have a sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time”). We considered all of the scale’s dimensions to assess the general PWB and computed the items’ average as a global rate, where high scores indicate a high PWB. We obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of .89 for this sample.

Relational Satisfaction. We implemented the satisfaction with the relationship subscale of the Investment Model Scale (IMS; Vander Drift et al., 2014), which consists of five items (e.g., “I feel satisfied with our relationship,” “My relationship is close to the ideal”) with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). We calculated the average score of scale, with high scores indicating high satisfaction with the relationship. We obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of .87 for this sample.

Conflict-Resolution Strategies. We used the Accommodation Among Romantic Couples Scale (ARCS; Valor-Segura et al., 2020) to assess the coping strategies used by participants during relational conflicts. This measure consisted of 27 items, with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*I never do that*) to 9 (*I always do that*), that examined four types of conflict-resolution strategies: *exit* (seven items; e.g., “When I get angry with my partner, I suggest breaking up”), *voice* (seven items; e.g., “When we have an argument, I solve it immediately with my partner”), *loyalty* (six items; e.g., “When we have problems in our relationship, I wait patiently for things to get better”), and *neglect* (seven items; e.g., “When I am really angry, I mistreat my partner”). We calculated the average score of each dimension, with high scores indicating high use of the strategy. In this sample, we obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of .87 for exit, .75 for voice, .68 for loyalty, and .81 for neglect.

CDA Victimization. To evaluate the participants’ cybervictimization frequency, we implemented the cybervictimization subscale of the Cyberdating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ; Borrajo et al., 2015b). This subscale consists of 20 items divided into two subscales: *direct cyberaggression* (11 items; e.g., “My partner has sent and/or posted intimate or

sexually explicit photos, images, and/or videos of me to others without my permission”), and *monitoring/cybercontrol* (nine items; e.g., “My partner has called me excessively to check where I was and whom I was with”). The CDAQ has a 6-point Likert-type response format: 1 (*never*), 2 (*not in the last year, but it has occurred before*), 3 (*rarely: 1 or 2 times*), 4 (*sometimes: between 3 and 10 times*), 5 (*often: between 10 and 20 times*), and 6 (*always: more than 20 times*). We calculated the average score for each subscale and for the global scale, with high scores indicating a high frequency of victimization. In this sample, we obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of .85 for direct cyberaggression, .90 for cybercontrol, and .90 for the global scale.

Sociodemographic Information. We collected data about participants’ gender (“What is your gender? Man/Woman/Other”), age (“What is your age?”), relationship duration (“How long have you been with your current partner?”), and cohabitation status (“Do you cohabit with your current partner? Yes/No”).

Statistical Analysis Strategy

We performed data analysis using SPSS (Version 25). First, we carried out a bivariate correlation analysis to test the associations among the study variables (Table 1). Second, we performed two hierarchical regression analyses to test the effects of CDA victimization and gender, and their interaction on PWB and relational satisfaction (Table 2). In the first step of both regression analyses, we included the participants’ age, whether they were cohabiting, and the duration of their relationship as control variables.¹⁴ In the second step, we tested the effect of the predictor variables CDA victimization and gender (1 = *man*; 2 = *woman*). In the third step, we measured the interactions between the predictor variables. We included PWB and relational satisfaction as criterion variables, and conducted simple slopes analyses when interaction effects emerged as significant. We standardized all scores before performing the analysis. Additionally, we calculated the standardized effect size f^2 had on the change in R^2

¹⁴ In our analyses, we controlled for gender because other authors observed that men tend to use destructive conflict-resolution strategies more often compared to women (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019). We also controlled for age because research has shown that older people tend to use more proactive and healthier strategies to resolve couple conflicts (Neubauer et al., 2019). Furthermore, we controlled for relationship duration because the standard deviation in this variable is large, suggesting extensive variation across punctuations. Moreover, we controlled for cohabitation in our analyses because the role of cohabitation in conflict management and its consequences for relationships is unclear. Some studies indicate that cohabitation generates a positive impact on individual and relationship development (e.g., Belloush-Kleinman & Sharlin, 1999), whereas others point out that cohabiting partners exhibit less positive problem-solving behaviors, less mutual support, and lower relationship satisfaction than noncohabiting partners (e.g., Kulik & Havusha-Morgenstern, 2011).

(Δf^2) to provide information on the magnitude of the interactions ($\geq .02/.15/.35$ indicate small/medium/large effects; Cohen, 1988).

Finally, we conducted six mediation analyses using Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) of the PROCESS program (Version 4.1) to assess the indirect effect of CDA victimization on PWB and relational satisfaction utilizing coping strategies (exit, neglect, and loyalty). We identified CDA victimization as the predictor (X), PWB and relational satisfaction as the criterion variables (Y), and each coping strategy as a separate mediating variable (M1, M2, etc.). We estimated bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) based on 10,000 bootstrap samples and controlled for all sociodemographic variables mentioned in the previous section. Note that throughout our work, we perform the same set of analyses in a complementary manner, but include the subdimensions of direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol as separate predictors, instead of the global dimension of CDA. Study 1's data and scripts are publicly available and can be accessed at [OSF](#).

Results

Association Between CDA Victimization, Conflict-Resolution Strategies, and PWB and Relational Satisfaction

As shown in Table 1, the global dimension of CDA victimization, along with the direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization subscales, were positively associated with strategies of exit, loyalty, and neglect, which supports Hypothesis 1. In addition, global CDA victimization, direct cyberaggression victimization, and cybercontrol victimization were negatively related to voice responses. Our results also show that strategies of exit and neglect were negatively associated with PWB and relational satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported because loyalty responses were negatively related to PWB, but not to relational satisfaction. In contrast, voice strategy was positively related to PWB and relational satisfaction. Finally, global CDA victimization, as well as the direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization subscales, were negatively related to PWB and relational satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 3. All descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables*

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. | 11. | 12. | 13. |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------|-----------------|------------------|-----|
| 1. CDA victimization | – | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. DCAV | .75** | – | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. CCV | .96** | .54** | – | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Exit | .26** | .20** | .25** | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Loyalty | .15** | .15* | .13* | .08 | – | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Neglect | .24** | .19* | .23** | .55** | .35** | – | | | | | | | |
| 7. Voice | –.27** | –.22** | –.25** | –.23** | –.31** | –.42** | – | | | | | | |
| 8. PWB | –.14* | –.14* | –.12* | –.27** | –.14* | –.39** | .23** | – | | | | | |
| 9. Relational satisfaction | –.37** | –.23** | –.38** | –.46** | –.10 | –.37** | .33** | .32** | – | | | | |
| 10. Gender ^a | –.19** | –.10 | –.19** | .03 | –.24** | .06 | .19** | –.08 | –.07 | – | | | |
| 11. Age | –.07 | –.08 | –.06 | .16** | –.11 | .08 | –.11 | .03 | –.13* | –.08 | – | | |
| 12. Relationship duration | –.05 | –.05 | –.04 | –.11 | –.08 | –.05 | –.03 | .11 | –.02 | .09 | .43** | – | |
| 13. Cohabiting ^b | –.03 | .04 | –.05 | –.01 | –.05 | –.04 | .09 | –.06 | .07 | .03 | –.45** | –.39** | – |
| <i>M (SD)</i> | 1.19 (0.41) | 1.05 (0.24) | 1.35 (.71) | 2.31 (1.47) | 4.04 (1.41) | 2.77 (1.47) | 7.15 (1.25) | 4.52 (0.65) | 7.24 (1.51) | – | 24.14 (4.99) | 37.55 (38.58) | – |
| <i>M_{men} (SD)</i> | 1.28 (0.46) | 1.09 (0.34) | 1.52 (0.77) | 2.26 (1.40) | 4.46 (1.38) | 2.66 (1.43) | 6.85 (1.33) | 4.58 (0.59) | 7.37 (1.43) | – | 24.65 (4.99) | 33.11 (32.68) | – |
| <i>M_{women} (SD)</i> | 1.13 (0.36) | 1.03 (0.15) | 1.24 (0.64) | 2.35 (1.52) | 3.76 (1.36) | 2.85 (1.49) | 7.34 (1.17) | 4.47 (0.69) | 7.16 (1.55) | – | 23.82 (4.98) | 40.41 (41.78) | – |
| Gender difference <i>t</i> | 3.33*** | 1.85 | 3.47*** | –0.56 | 4.38*** | –1.13 | –3.44*** | 1.47 | 1.18 | – | 1.43 | –1.63 | – |
| Cohen's <i>d</i> | 0.36 | 0.23 | 0.40 | –0.06 | 0.51 | –0.13 | –0.39 | 0.17 | 0.14 | – | 0.17 | –0.19 | – |

Note. $N_{overall} = 313$; $N_{men} = 122$, $N_{women} = 191$. CDA = cyberdating abuse; DCAV = direct cyberaggression victimization; CCV = cybercontrol victimization; PWB = psychological well-being. ^a1 = men, 2 = women; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Effects of CDA Victimization and Gender on PWB and Relational Satisfaction

As shown in Table 2, high frequency of global CDA victimization predicted decreases in PWB and relational satisfaction. Similarly, gender significantly predicted PWB and relational satisfaction, with men reporting higher PWB ($M_{men} = 4.58$, $SD = 0.59$; $M_{women} = 4.47$, $SD = 0.69$) and relationship satisfaction ($M_{men} = 7.37$, $SD = 1.43$; $M_{women} = 7.16$, $SD = 1.55$) than women did. However, we did not find significant interaction effects between CDA victimization and gender, which caused us to reject Hypothesis 4.

We complementarily conducted the same regression analyses using direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol as the predictors. For both types of behaviors, the results showed that high frequency of victimization predicted lower PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.14$, $p = .01$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.15$, $p = .012$) and lower relationship satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.27$, $p < .001$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.44$, $p < .001$). Similarly, we found a significant interaction effect between direct cyberaggression victimization and gender on relationship satisfaction ($b = -0.20$, $p = .009$, $\Delta f^2 = .02$). The simple slopes analysis showed that high frequency of direct cyberaggression victimizations was related to lower relational satisfaction in men ($-1 SD$; $b = -1.20$, $SE = 0.38$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [-1.96, -0.45]) and women ($+1 SD$; $b = -3.44$, $SE = 0.76$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-4.93, -1.96]). However, the effect was stronger among women (see Supplementary Material [SM1.1]).

Table 2*CDA Victimization and Gender as Predictors of PWB and Relational Satisfaction*

| | Psychological well-being | | | | | Relational satisfaction | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .01 (.003) | .01 | | | | .02 (.01) | .02 |
| Age | -0.04 | -0.58 | [-0.17, 0.09] | | | -0.12 | -1.79 | [-0.25, 0.01] | | |
| Relationship duration | 0.11 | 1.69 | [-0.02, 0.24] | | | 0.05 | 0.78 | [-0.08, 0.18] | | |
| Cohabiting ^a | -0.03 | -0.49 | [-0.16, 0.10] | | | 0.04 | 0.60 | [-0.09, 0.17] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .05 (.03) | .04** | | | | .20 (.19) | .19 |
| CDAV | -0.16** | -2.85 | [-0.28, -0.05] | | | -0.43*** | -8.28 | [-0.54, -0.33] | | |
| Gender ^b | -0.13* | -2.26 | [-0.25, -0.02] | | | -0.17*** | -3.23 | [-0.27, -0.07] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .05 (.03) | .000 | | | | .20 (.19) | .000 |
| CDAV \times Gender | -0.01 | -0.25 | [-0.13, 0.10] | | | -0.01 | -0.23 | [-0.11, 0.09] | | |

Note. $N = 313$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = yes, 2 = no; ^b1 = men, 2 = women.

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

Indirect Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relationship Satisfaction via Conflict-Resolution Strategies

As shown in Table 3, our results showed a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on PWB ($b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.19, -0.04]$) and relationship satisfaction ($b = -0.39$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI $[-0.64, -0.19]$) through the strategy of *exit*. Thus, high frequency of CDA victimization was related to greater use of exit responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with relationship. The variables included in the model predicted 4.71% of the variance of the inclination to PWB and 31.62% of the variance of the inclination to relational satisfaction. The total effects of CDA victimization on PWB ($b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.45, -0.08]$) and relational satisfaction ($b = -0.61$, $SE = 0.20$, 95% CI $[-2.91, -1.23]$) were significant.

Similarly, our results showed a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on PWB ($b = -0.17$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.27, -0.10]$) and relationship satisfaction ($b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI $[-0.45, -0.13]$) through the strategy of *neglect*. Specifically, high frequency of CDA victimization was related to greater use of neglect responses, which, in turn, was associated with lower PWB and satisfaction with relationship (see Table 4). The variables included in the model predicted 4.71% of the variance of the inclination to PWB and 25.91% of the variance of the inclination to relational satisfaction. The total effects of CDA victimization on PWB ($b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.45, -0.08]$) and relational satisfaction ($b = -1.62$, $SE = 0.20$, 95% CI $[-2.01, -1.23]$) were significant (see Table 4).

Our results did not prove an indirect effect of CDA victimization on PWB ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI $[-0.12, 0.02]$) and relational satisfaction ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.12, 0.02]$) via the *loyalty* strategy. This set of analyses partially supported Hypothesis 5.¹⁵

¹⁵ Exploratory analyses showed a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on PWB ($b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.35, -0.02]$) and relationship satisfaction ($b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI $[-0.47, -0.07]$) by the *voice* strategy, indicating that the high frequency of CDA victimization was related to lower use of voice responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with relationship (see SM 1.2). Furthermore, we complementarily conducted the same mediation analyses but used the CDA subdimensions cyberaggression direct victimization and cybercontrol victimization as predictors. We found that the victimization of both CDA behaviors indirectly affected PWB and relationship satisfaction through exit strategies, neglect, and voice but not through loyalty responses. Specifically, high frequency of direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol victimization was associated with greater use of the exit and neglect responses, which, in turn, was related to decreases in PWB and relationship satisfaction. Conversely, the high frequency of victimization by direct cyberaggression and by cybercontrol was also predictive of lower PWB and relational satisfaction through decreases in the use of voice responses (for more information, see SM. 1.3).

Table 3*Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relational Satisfaction by Exit Strategy*

| | Psychological well-being (PWB) | | | | | | Relational satisfaction (RS) | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | Exit | | | PWB | | | Exit | | | RS | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | -1.56* | 0.79 | [-3.11, -0.003] | 5.19*** | 0.37 | [4.48, 5.91] | -1.56* | 0.79 | [-3.11, -0.003] | 10.59*** | 0.73 | [9.15, 12.02] |
| CDAV | 1.03*** | 0.20 | [0.65, 1.42] | -0.15 | 0.09 | [-0.34, 0.03] | 1.03*** | 0.20 | [0.65, 1.42] | -1.23*** | 0.19 | [-1.60, -0.86] |
| Exit | | | | -0.11*** | 0.03 | [-0.16, -0.06] | | | | -0.37*** | 0.05 | [-0.48, -0.27] |
| Gender ^a | 0.37* | 0.16 | [0.05, 0.70] | -0.13 | 0.08 | [-0.28, 0.02] | 0.37* | 0.16 | [0.05, 0.70] | -0.39* | 0.15 | [-0.68, -0.09] |
| Age | 0.09*** | 0.02 | [0.05, 0.13] | 0.0003 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.02] | 0.09*** | 0.02 | [0.05, 0.70] | -0.02 | 0.02 | [-0.06, 0.01] |
| Relationship duration | 0.01*** | 0.002 | [-0.01, -0.004] | 0.001 | 0.001 | [-0.001, 0.003] | -0.01*** | 0.002 | [0.05, 0.13] | -0.001 | 0.002 | [-0.01, 0.003] |
| Cohabiting ^b | 0.11 | 0.20 | [-0.27, 0.50] | -0.05 | 0.09 | [-0.23, 0.13] | 0.11 | 0.20 | [-0.01, -0.004] | -0.07 | 0.18 | [-0.29, 0.42] |
| | $R^2 = .15$ | | | $R^2 = .10$ | | | $R^2 = .15$ | | | $R^2 = .32$ | | |
| | $F(5, 305) = 10.50, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 304) = 5.42, p < .001$ | | | $F(5, 305) = 10.50, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 304) = 23.43, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | 95% IC | | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | 95% IC | |
| Total effect | | | -0.27 | 0.09 | [-0.45, -0.08] | | | | -1.61 | 0.20 | [-2.01, -1.23] | |
| Indirect effect | | | -0.11 | 0.04 | [-0.19, -0.04] | | | | -0.39 | 0.11 | [-0.64, -0.19] | |

Note. $N = 313$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Table 4*Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relational Satisfaction by Neglect Strategy*

| | Psychological well-being (PWB) | | | | | | Relational satisfaction (RS) | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| | Neglect | | | PWB | | | Neglect | | | RS | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% IC | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 0.13 | 0.82 | [-1.48, 1.73] | 5.38*** | 0.35 | [4.70, 6.06] | 0.13 | 0.82 | [-1.48, 1.73] | 11.20*** | 0.75 | [9.72, 12.69] |
| CDAV | 1.03*** | 0.20 | [0.63, 1.43] | -0.10 | 0.09 | [-0.27, 0.08] | 1.03*** | 0.20 | [0.63, 1.43] | -1.35*** | 0.20 | [-1.74, -0.97] |
| Neglect | | | | -0.16*** | 0.02 | [-0.21, -0.12] | | | | -0.26*** | 0.05 | [-0.36, -0.15] |
| Gender ^a | 0.43* | 0.17 | [0.10, 0.76] | -0.10 | 0.07 | [-0.24, 0.04] | 0.43* | 0.17 | [0.10, 0.76] | -0.42** | 0.16 | [-0.73, -0.10] |
| Age | 0.04* | 0.02 | [0.004, 0.08] | -0.002 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.01] | 0.04* | 0.02 | [0.004, 0.08] | -0.04* | 0.02 | [-0.08, -0.01] |
| Relationship duration | -0.005 | 0.002 | [-0.01, 0.01] | 0.001 | 0.001 | [-0.001, 0.003] | -0.005 | 0.002 | [-0.01, 0.01] | 0.001 | 0.002 | [-0.003, -0.01] |
| Cohabiting ^b | -0.07 | 0.20 | [-0.46, 0.33] | -0.07 | 0.09 | [-0.24, 0.10] | -0.07 | 0.20 | [-0.46, 0.33] | 0.01 | 0.19 | [-0.36, 0.38] |
| | $R^2 = .10$ | | | $R^2 = .17$ | | | $R^2 = .10$ | | | $R^2 = .26$ | | |
| | $F(5, 305) = 6.62, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 304) = 6.62, p < .001$ | | | $F(5, 305) = 154.66, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 304) = 1.71, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | | | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | | |
| Total effect | -0.27 | | | 0.09 | | | -1.62 | | | 0.20 | | |
| Indirect effect | -0.17 | | | 0.04 | | | -0.26 | | | 0.08 | | |

Note. $N = 313$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Auxiliary Analyses

We explored in an auxiliary way the role of participants' gender in the effect of CDA victimization on conflict-resolution strategies. Thus, we conducted 12 linear regression analyses. In the first step, we included covariates mentioned in the previous section. In the second step, we included a dimension of the CDA victimization scale (global CDA, direct cyberaggression, or cybercontrol, independently) and gender (1 = *man*; 2 = *woman*) as predictors. In the third step, we included the second-order interactions. Exit, neglect, loyalty, and voice strategies were included in the analyses as criterion variables. We standardized all scores.

When we included the global dimension of CDA victimization, the results showed that high CDA victimization significantly predicted greater exit ($b = 0.28, p < .001$) and neglect ($b = 0.28, p < .001$) responses and a lower voice strategy ($b = -0.25, p < .001$). CDA victimization did not influence loyalty responses ($b = 0.08, p = .17$). Gender also significantly influenced all coping strategies: exit ($b = 0.13, p = .023$), neglect ($b = 0.14, p = .012$), loyalty ($b = -0.24, p < .001$), and voice ($b = 0.13, p = .018$). In comparison with men, women reported using exit ($M_{men} = 2.26, SD = 1.40$; $M_{women} = 2.35, SD = 1.52$), neglect ($M_{men} = 2.66, SD = 1.43$; $M_{women} = 2.85, SD = 1.49$), and voice ($M_{men} = 6.85, SD = 1.33$; $M_{women} = 7.34, SD = 1.17$) responses to a greater extent, whereas men indicated employing the loyalty strategy with more frequency than women did ($M_{men} = 4.46, SD = 1.38$; $M_{women} = 3.76, SD = 1.36$). We did not find significant interaction effects between CDA victimization and gender ($p > .05$).

When we included the victimization by direct cyberaggression and by cybercontrol, independently, we observed that both behaviors significantly influenced exit, neglect, and voice strategies in the same directions than CDA victimization. The effects of gender on coping strategies also remained significant. Furthermore, we found a significant interaction effect between cybercontrol victimization and gender on the exit strategy ($b = -0.11, p = .04, \Delta f^2 = .01$). A simple slopes analysis showed that high frequency of cybercontrol victimizations was related to greater use of exit responses in men ($-1 SD; b = 0.81, SE = 0.16, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.49, 1.12]$) and women ($+1 SD; b = 0.35, SE = 0.16, p = .03, 95\% CI [0.04, 0.66]$); however, the effect was stronger among men. No interaction effects between direct cyberaggression victimization and gender were observed ($p > .05$).

Brief Discussion

In sum, our results confirm that conflict-resolution strategies may mediate the impact of CDA on PWB and relationship satisfaction, similar to what has been observed in the IPV field (e.g., Wong et al., 2015). In particular, Study 1's results preliminarily provided evidence that individuals who experience CDA victimization with high frequency are more likely to use destructive responses (exit and neglect) in the face of relational conflicts, which, in turn, is associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with the relationship. A plausible explanation would be that, as a consequence of frequent CDA victimization, individuals may be experiencing a lack of control and power within the relationship (Filson et al., 2010; Minieri et al., 2014), and this is even more apparent if we take into account the distinctive characteristics of such violence (e.g., permanent contact with the aggressor without temporal or physical boundaries, the existence of an extensive repertoire of digital means to exert violence) that increase the sense of vulnerability and uncontrollability in the victims (Garaigordobil, 2011). This power imbalance perceived by victims could be triggering the use of destructive responses (exit and neglect) to assert and restore control and power within the relationship, similar to what other authors have previously suggested in the context of romantic relationships (e.g., Bugental, 2010; Cross et al., 2019; Overall et al., 2016).

Study 2

Empirical research has shown that relational power dynamics are essential during couple conflict resolution (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021; Pietromonaco et al., 2021). Relational power, evaluated as a psychological state, refers to a person's perception of their ability or capacity to influence a partner's ideas (Alonso-Ferrer et al., 2021). In line with the principle of least interest (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), people who experience a low sense of relational power are strongly involved in the relationship, and their goals and happiness depend on their partner to a greater extent. Likewise, they are less able to influence their partner and have less control over important relationship decisions (Farrell et al., 2015). Therefore, powerless individuals have more difficulty fulfilling their own needs and desires within their relationship (Overall et al., 2016). While research analyzing power differences in relationships and their influence on conflict management is inconclusive, some studies have suggested that the perception of low relational power leads to destructive behaviors (e.g., aggression, hostility) as a means to correct perceived power imbalances (e.g., Cross et al., 2019; Overall et al., 2016). Based on these works and literature indicating that IPV victims

report a sense of low relational power (e.g., Filson et al., 2010; Minieri et al., 2014), we formulate this research question:

RQ2. Does the frequency of CDA victimization predict higher use of destructive conflict-resolution strategies (exit and neglect) by decreases in the sense of relational power?

At this point, we further asked under what conditions this sense of low relational power might increase the likelihood that CDA victims manifest responses aimed at leaving the abusive relationship or causing its breakup (i.e., exit strategy use). Why do we consider it essential to delve into this issue? Although it has been shown that the prolonged use of exit responses can generate damage to the relationship and well-being of individuals, when conflict-resolution responses are analyzed in the context of CDA, this strategy could encourage an individual to make efforts to escape from the violent relationship. In other words, the use of exit responses by people who frequently suffer from CDA could be considered an adaptive strategy to end an abusive relationship. In particular, we proposed the degree to which people perceive their partner as a central part of their self-concept and, therefore, ensure inclusion of the other in the self (IOS; Aron et al., 1992) as a key factor determining exit responses. According to the self-expansion model (Aron et al., 2013), when people manifest a high degree of IOS, they experience a cognitive overlap between their own identity and that of their partner; that is, they tend to see themselves less as separate entities and more as a couple. Consequently, they are more concerned about the relationship, engage in a wide variety of actions aimed at strengthening the relationship even if it means putting one's interests on the back burner (Scholl et al., 2018), and are more willing to make extreme sacrifices to overcome problems (Joo & Park, 2017). In contrast, people who manifest low IOS tend to activate their personal identity to a greater extent and act based on their own goals and interests. Thus, these individuals may be less likely to make efforts to protect the relationship in situations of conflict and threat, even leading them to behave in destructive ways (Keltner et al., 2003). Based on the premises of this theory, we pose the following research question:

RQ3. Does the low perceived relational power experienced by people who frequently suffer from CDA predict higher use of the exit strategy mainly when they experience low (vs. high) IOS?

In sum, we conducted Study 2 to (a) check whether the results of Study 1 are replicable in testing Hypotheses 1–5; (b) test our assumptions about the possible mediating effect of perceived power on the relationship between CDA victimization and the use of relationally destructive strategies (exit and neglect); and (c) examine whether the degree of IOS might interact with perceived power to determine exit responses. We hypothesized that high CDA victimization would be associated with lower perceived power within the relationship, which, in turn, would be related to increased use of exit strategies (Hypothesis 6a) and neglect responses (Hypothesis 6b). Moreover, we expected the degree of IOS to moderate the relationship between perceived power and the use of exit responses. That is, high CDA victimization would be associated with lower perceived power within the relationship, which, in turn, would be related to greater use of exit responses only in those with low levels of IOS (Hypothesis 7).

Method

Participants and Procedure

Of all the participants who accessed our study ($N = 538$), 214 were removed because they did not complete the full questionnaire and seven because they failed attention check items. We also removed nine participants who indicated being over 35 years old and three participants who showed a nonheterosexual orientation. The final sample was composed of 305 participants of Spanish nationality ($M_{\text{age}} = 25.45$, $SD = 4.68$, range 18–35 years; 54.1% [$n = 165$] women). All of them had a heterosexual orientation and were in a couple's relationship at the time of data collection. Specifically, 46.6% ($n = 142$) indicated that they were cohabiting with their partner, whereas 53.4% ($n = 163$) reported they were not. The average relationship duration in months was 38.38 ($SD = 30.54$).

We implemented a cross-sectional study design. Through the Qualtrics research platform, we developed an online survey containing the variables of interest. We then rigorously followed the same procedure as Study 1 and used the same inclusion criteria. The Study 2's data were collected between June and September 2022. Participants took approximately 20 min to complete the online survey, and they did not receive economic retribution.

Measures

Psychological Well-Being. We administered the SPWB (Díaz et al., 2006) used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .90$).

Relational Satisfaction. As in Study 1, we used the subscale of satisfaction with the relationship of the IMS (Vander Drift et al., 2014; $\alpha = .88$).

Conflict-Resolution Strategies. We used the ARCS (Valor-Segura et al., 2020) administered in Study 1 (exit: $\alpha = .86$; neglect: $\alpha = .81$; loyalty: $\alpha = .75$; and voice: $\alpha = .76$).

Sense of Relational Power. We used the subscale of soft power of the sense of relational power scale (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021) to assess the participants' power in their romantic relationships. It was composed of five items (e.g., "I can make my partner listen to me"). Participants answered using a 7-point Likert-type response scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). We calculated the average score of scale where high scores indicated a high sense of relational power ($\alpha = .80$).

Inclusion of the Other in the Self. We used an adaptation of the IOS scale following the procedure used by Alonso-Ferres et al. (2021) to assess the participants' experiences about their relationship closeness. It is a pictorial measure including seven sets of two circles where one of the circles represents the participant's self and the other represents the participant's partner. Each pair of circles then represents the self and the partner with different degrees of overlap ranging from 1 (*totally independent*) to 7 (*almost totally overlapping*). Participants had to indicate which model best represented their relationship.

CDA Victimization. As in Study 1, we used the CDAQ (Borrajo et al., 2015b; global CDA victimization: $\alpha = .92$; direct cyberaggression victimization: $\alpha = .94$; cybercontrol victimization: $\alpha = .90$).

Heterosexual Script Adherence. We used the courtship and commitment subscale of the heterosexual script scale (Seabrook et al., 2016) to examine participants' endorsement of the gender-based traditional relationship and commitment strategies. This subscale was composed of eight items (e.g., "Guys like to play the field and shouldn't be expected to stay with one partner for too long") with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). We calculated the average subscale scores, where higher scores indicated stronger heterosexual script adherence (HSA; $\alpha = .79$).

Sociodemographic Information. We collected the same sociodemographic information as in Study 1.

Statistical Analysis Strategy

First, we conducted the same analyses as in Study 1 to check whether our results were replicated (Hypotheses 1–5). Second, we conducted two mediation analyses using Model 4 of the PROCESS program to assess the indirect effect of CDA victimization in exit and neglect strategies through relational power (Hypothesis 6). We included CDA victimization as the predictor (X), the strategies of exit and neglect as criterion variables (Y), and the sense of relational power as the mediating variable (M). Third, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using Model 14 (Hayes, 2018) of the PROCESS program to assess the indirect effect of CDA victimization in the exit strategy through relational power, moderated by IOS (Hypothesis 7). We included CDA victimization as the predictor (X), the exit strategy as the criterion variable (Y), the sense of relational power as the mediating variable (M), and IOS as the moderator (W). We controlled for all sociodemographic variables and the HSA¹⁶ in the previous analyses. Note that Study 2's data and scripts are also publicly available on [OSF](#).

Results

Association Between CDA Victimization, Conflict-Resolution Strategies, and PWB and Relational Satisfaction

As shown in Table 5, the global dimension of CDA victimization—and both direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization subscales—were positively associated with strategies of exit, loyalty, and neglect. These results supported Hypothesis 1. Likewise, global CDA victimization and cybercontrol victimization were negatively related to voice responses, but this association was not observed for the direct cyberaggression subscale. Results also showed that strategies of exit and neglect were negatively associated with PWB and relational satisfaction. Loyalty strategy was negatively related to PWB but not to relational satisfaction, so Hypothesis 2 was supported partially. Voice strategy was positively related to PWB and relational satisfaction. Finally, the global CDA victimization and cybercontrol victimization subscales were negatively related to relational satisfaction but not to PWB. The direct cyberaggression victimization subscale was not associated with PWB and relational satisfaction. These results partially supported Hypothesis 3 (see Table 5).

¹⁶ We controlled for HSA because previous research has suggested that cultural norms about how men and women should behave in romantic relationships affect the meaning and impact of CDA (Lucero et al., 2014). More specifically, adherence to gender norms hinders the identification of CDA, increases its justification (e.g., Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2020), and hinders the ability to respond effectively (Alsawalq, 2021).

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables*

| | 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. | 11. | 12. | 13. | 14. | 15. | 16. |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------|-----------------|------------------|-----|
| 1. CDA victimization | – | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. DCAV | .80** | – | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. CCV | .93** | .52** | – | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Exit | .41** | .39** | .35** | – | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Voice | -.14* | .004 | -.19* | -.09 | – | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Loyalty | .23** | .19** | .21** | .19** | -.31** | – | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Neglect | .37** | .31** | .33** | .44** | -.43** | .38** | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 8. PWB | -.01 | -.08 | .04 | -.19** | -.26** | -.17** | -.23** | – | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Relational satisfaction | -.12* | -.02 | -.15** | -.46** | -.39** | .07 | -.34** | .32** | – | | | | | | | |
| 10. Relational power | -.39** | -.32** | -.36** | -.44** | -.30** | -.19* | -.45** | .29** | .57** | – | | | | | | |
| 11. IOS | .13* | .14* | .10 | -.10 | .11 | -.003 | -.05 | .16** | .26** | .16** | – | | | | | |
| 12. HSA | .34** | .34** | .28** | .25** | -.16** | .25** | .33** | -.02 | -.05 | -.24** | .03 | – | | | | |
| 13. Gender ^a | -.25** | -.11* | -.28** | -.02 | -.27** | -.29** | -.13** | -.09 | -.002 | .13* | -.16** | -.36** | – | | | |
| 14. Age | -.14* | -.06 | .17** | .24** | -.23** | .15* | .30** | -.005 | -.24** | -.28** | -.08 | .12* | -.14* | – | | |
| 15. Relational duration | -.02 | -.01 | -.03 | -.001 | -.14* | .07 | .03 | .03 | -.10 | -.10 | .001 | -.07 | .07 | .35** | – | |
| 16. Cohabiting ^b | -.07 | -.04 | -.07 | -.08 | .17** | -.08 | -.11 | -.16** | .09 | .15* | -.16** | -.07 | .09 | -.47** | -.36** | – |
| <i>M (SD)</i> | 1.18 (0.43) | 1.05 (0.33) | 1.33 (0.68) | 2.04 (1.20) | 6.98 (1.25) | 4.22 (1.49) | 2.89 (1.42) | 4.56 (0.66) | 7.26 (1.41) | 6.05 (1.03) | 4.69 (1.35) | 1.67 (0.70) | – | 25.45 (4.68) | 38.38 (30.54) | – |
| <i>M_{men} (SD)</i> | 1.29 (0.58) | 1.09 (0.48) | 1.54 (0.88) | 2.07 (1.28) | 6.61 (1.34) | 4.69 (1.48) | 3.09 (1.43) | 4.62 (0.61) | 7.27 (1.25) | 5.91 (1.08) | 4.93 (1.36) | 1.94 (0.82) | – | 26.16 (4.80) | 36.20 (31.85) | – |
| <i>M_{women} (SD)</i> | 1.08 (0.19) | 1.01 (0.07) | 1.16 (0.64) | 2.02 (1.14) | 7.29 (1.07) | 3.82 (1.38) | 2.72 (1.39) | 4.50 (0.70) | 7.26 (1.53) | 6.18 (0.96) | 4.48 (1.31) | 1.43 (0.46) | – | 24.84 (4.49) | 40.22 (29.36) | – |
| Gender Difference <i>t</i> | 3.46*** | 2.04* | 5.09*** | 0.39 | -4.94*** | 5.30*** | 2.29* | 1.58 | 0.04 | -2.34* | 2.90** | 6.79*** | – | 2.48* | -1.15 | – |
| Cohen's <i>d</i> | 0.49 | 0.23 | 0.49 | 0.04 | -0.56 | 0.61 | 0.26 | 0.18 | 0.01 | -0.26 | 0.34 | 0.77 | – | 0.28 | -0.13 | – |

Note. $N_{overall} = 305$; $N_{men} = 140$, $N_{women} = 165$. CDA = cyberdating abuse; DCAV = direct cyberaggression victimization; CCV = cybercontrol victimization; PWB = psychological well-being; IOS = inclusion of the other in the self-concept; HAS = heterosexual script adherence. ^a1 = men, 2 = women; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Effects of CDA Victimization and Gender on PWB and Relational Satisfaction

The results showed that high frequency of global CDA victimization predicted decreases in relational satisfaction ($b = -0.24, p < .001$) but not in PWB ($p > .001$). Gender did not significantly predict PWB and relational satisfaction ($p > .001$). We did not find significant interaction effects between CDA victimization and gender ($p > .001$), which caused us to reject Hypothesis 4 (see SM 2.1).

We then complementarily conducted the same regression analyses but using direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol as predictors. The results showed that high frequency of victimization for both types of behaviors also predicted decreases in relationship satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.17, p = .003$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.22, p < .001$) but not in PWB ($p > .001$). Likewise, we found a significant interaction effect between direct cyberaggression victimization and gender on satisfaction with the relationship ($b = -0.35, p = .001, \Delta f^2 = .02$). The simple slopes analysis showed that high frequency of direct cyberaggression victimizations was related to lower relational satisfaction in women (+1 *SD*; $b = -6.48, SE = 1.56, p < .001, 95\% CI [9.55, -3.42]$); however, this effect was not significant in men (-1 *SD*; $b = 0.10, SE = 0.24, p = .68, 95\% CI [-0.37, 0.56]$; see SM 2.1).

Indirect Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relationship Satisfaction via Coping Strategies

In sum, our results replicated the results of Study 1. That is, CDA victimization (global CDA, by direct cyberaggression, and by cybercontrol) indirectly affected PWB and relationship satisfaction through the exit and neglect strategies but not via the loyalty strategy. Specifically, high frequency of CDA victimization (global, by direct cyberaggression, and by cybercontrol) was associated with greater use of exit and neglect responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with the relationship. These results partially supported Hypothesis 5. Furthermore, as in Study 1, we additionally found that high frequency of CDA predicted lower levels of PWB and relational satisfaction via decreases in the use of the voice strategy (for more information, see SM. 2.2).

Indirect Effect of CDA Victimization on Destructive Coping Strategies via Relational Power

Table 6*Effect of CDA Victimization on Destructive Coping Strategies by Relational Power*

| | Exit | | | | | | Neglect | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| | RP | | | Exit | | | RP | | | Neglect | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 8.36*** | 0.49 | [7.38, 9.33] | 1.55* | 0.76 | [0.06, 3.04] | 8.36*** | 0.49 | [7.38, 9.33] | 3.74*** | 0.92 | [1.94, 5.55] |
| CDAV | -0.96*** | 0.17 | [-1.29, -0.62] | 0.66*** | 0.19 | [0.27, 1.04] | -0.96*** | 0.17 | [-1.29, -0.62] | 0.56* | 0.23 | [0.09, 1.02] |
| RP | | | | -0.34*** | 0.06 | [-0.46, -0.21] | | | | -0.44*** | 0.08 | [-0.59, -0.29] |
| Gender ^a | -0.05 | 0.12 | [-0.27, 0.18] | 0.35** | 0.13 | [0.10, 0.60] | -0.05 | 0.12 | [-0.27, 0.18] | 0.07 | 0.15 | [-0.23, 0.376] |
| Age | -0.03** | 0.01 | [-0.04, -0.01] | 0.03*** | 0.01 | [0.01, 0.05] | -0.03** | 0.01 | [-0.04, -0.01] | 0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.03] |
| Relationship duration | 0.0004 | 0.001 | [-0.002, 0.002] | -0.003** | 0.001 | [-0.01, -0.001] | 0.0004 | 0.001 | [-0.002, 0.002] | 0.001 | 0.001 | [-0.002, 0.003] |
| Cohabiting ^b | -0.01 | 0.12 | [-0.26, -0.23] | 0.06 | 0.14 | [-0.21, 0.34] | -0.01 | 0.12 | [-0.26, -0.23] | 0.05 | 0.17 | [-0.28, 0.38] |
| HSA | -0.19* | 0.08 | [-0.36, -0.03] | 0.22* | 0.09 | [0.04, 0.41] | -0.19* | 0.08 | [-0.36, -0.03] | 0.40*** | 0.11 | [0.17, 0.62] |
| | $R^2 = .18$ | | | $R^2 = .23$ | | | $R^2 = .18$ | | | $R^2 = .24$ | | |
| | $F(6, 297) = 11.16, p < .001$ | | | $F(7, 296) = 12.90, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 297) = 11.16, p < .001$ | | | $F(7, 296) = 13.51, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | 95% IC | | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | 95% IC | | | |
| Total effect | 0.98 | | 0.19 | [0.60, 1.36] | | 0.98 | | 0.23 | [0.52, 1.44] | | | |
| Indirect effect | 0.33 | | 0.09 | [0.17, 0.53] | | 0.42 | | 0.12 | [0.22, 0.70] | | | |

Note. $N_{overall} = 305$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; RP = relationship power; HSA = heterosexual script adherence; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = men, 2 = women; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

As shown in Table 6, our results showed a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on exit ($b = 0.33$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.53]) and neglect strategies ($b = 0.42$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.70]) via relational power. Thus, high frequency of CDA victimization was related to decreases in the sense of relational power, which, in turn, was associated with greater use of exit and neglect responses. The variables included in the model predicted 23.38% of the variance of the inclination to exit and 24.21% of the variance to neglect. The total effect of CDA victimization on the exit strategy ($b = 0.98$, $SE = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.60, 1.36]) and neglect responses ($b = 0.98$, $SE = 0.23$, 95% CI [0.52, 1.44]) was also significant. These results supported Hypothesis 6.¹⁷

Indirect Effect of CDA Victimization on the Exit Strategy via Relational Power, Moderated by IOS

As shown in Table 7, IOS moderated the relationship between relational power and the exit strategy. Specifically, lower sense of relational power was predictive of greater use of exit responses in participants with low levels of IOS (-1 SD), but this was not significant in those with high levels ($+1$ SD). Similarly, the analysis showed that the indirect effect of CDA victimization on the exit strategy via relational power, moderated by IOS, was statistically significant. That is, participants who suffered high CDA reported a low sense of relational power, which led to a more frequent use of exit responses only in participants with low IOS (vs. high IOS).

The variables included in the model predicted 25.01% of the variance in the perpetration of direct cyberaggression against a partner. The moderated mediation index was statistically significant ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.20, -0.004]), supporting Hypothesis 7.

¹⁷ Additionally, in an exploratory way, we found a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on the *voice* strategy by relational power ($b = -0.250$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI [-0.51, -0.07]), indicating that high frequency of CDA victimization was related to decreases in the sense of relational power, which, in turn, was associated with lower use of voice responses (see SM 2.3). Furthermore, we complementarily conducted the same mediation analyses but using the CDA subdimensions cyberaggression direct victimization and cybercontrol victimization as predictors, independently. The results showed that the victimization of both CDA behaviors, separately, also indirectly affected the strategies of exit, neglect, and voice via relational power (see SM 2.3). Specifically, high frequency of direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol victimization was associated with a lower sense of relational power, which, in turn, was related to increases in the use of exit and neglect responses and decreases in the use of the voice strategy. For more detailed information, see SM 2.4.

Table 7

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Summary Information for the Moderated–Moderated Mediation Model 14 ("Exit")

| | Relational power (RP) | | | Exit | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 8.36 | 0.49 | [7.38, 9.33] | 3.77 | 1.20 | [1.41, 6.12] |
| CDAV | −0.96 | 0.17 | [−1.29, −0.63] | 0.80*** | 0.20 | [0.40, 1.19] |
| RP | | | | −0.67*** | 0.18 | [−1.03, −0.32] |
| IOS | | | | −0.57* | 0.24 | [−1.05, −0.09] |
| RP X IOS | | | | 0.08* | 0.04 | [0.01, 0.16] |
| Gender ^a | −0.05 | 0.12 | [−0.27, 0.18] | 0.35** | 0.13 | [0.10, 0.60] |
| Age | −0.03** | 0.01 | [−0.04, −0.01] | 0.03*** | 0.01 | [0.01, 0.05] |
| Relationship duration | 0.0004 | 0.001 | [−0.002, 0.002] | −0.003** | 0.001 | [−0.01, −0.001] |
| Cohabiting ^b | −0.01 | 0.13 | [−0.26, 0.23] | 0.02 | 0.14 | [−0.25, 0.30] |
| HSA | −0.19 | 0.08 | [−0.36, 0.03] | 0.22* | 0.09 | [0.04, 0.40] |
| | | $R^2 = .18$ | | | $R^2 = .25$ | |
| | | $F(6, 297) = 11.16, p < .001$ | | | $F(0, 294) = 10.90, p < .001$ | |
| | Effect | | <i>SE</i> | | | 95% CI |
| <i>Conditional indirect effect</i> | | | | | | |
| | Low IOS | 0.40 | | 0.13 | | [0.21, 0.70] |
| | High IOS | 0.16 | | 0.11 | | [−0.05, 0.38] |
| <i>Moderate mediation index</i> | | | | | | |
| | | −0.08 | | 0.05 | | [−0.20, −0.004] |

Note. $N_{overall} = 305$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; IOS = inclusion of the other in the self-concept; HAS = heterosexual script adherence; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = men, 2 = women; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Auxiliary Analyses

We conducted 12 linear regression analyses to explore in an auxiliary way whether participants' gender moderated the relationship between frequency of CDA victimization and the coping strategies used. In the first step, we controlled for the same variables as in the

main analyses. In the second step, we included the dimensions of CDA victimization (global CDA, direct cyberaggression, and cybercontrol, independently) and gender (1 = *man*, 2 = *woman*) as predictors. In the third step, we included the second-order interactions. Exit, neglect, loyalty, and voice strategies were included in the analyses as criterion variables. We used the standardized scores.

When we included the global dimension of CDA victimization, the results showed that high CDA victimization significantly predicted greater exit ($b = 0.29, p < .001$) and neglect ($b = 0.23, p < .001$) responses and a lower voice strategy ($b = -0.18, p = .001$). CDA victimization did not influence loyalty responses ($b = 0.06, p = .33$). Gender also significantly influenced the conflict-resolution strategies of exit ($b = 0.16, p = .006$), loyalty ($b = -0.24, p < .001$), and voice ($b = 0.19, p = .001$) but not the neglect strategy ($b = 0.03, p = .59$). In particular, men reported using responses of exit ($M_{men} = 2.07, SD = 1.28; M_{women} = 2.02, SD = 1.14$) and loyalty ($M_{men} = 4.69, SD = 1.48; M_{women} = 3.82, SD = 1.38$) more frequently than women did. In contrast, women indicated employing voice responses with more frequency than men ($M_{men} = 6.61, SD = 1.34; M_{women} = 7.29, SD = 1.07$). Moreover, we observed a significant interaction effect of this with the global CDA victimization on the exit strategy ($b = 0.18, p = .015, \Delta f^2 = .02$). A simple slope analysis showed that high CDA victimization predicted higher exit strategy use in men ($-1 SD; b = 1.05, SE = 0.161, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.75, 1.36]$) and women ($+1 SD; b = 1.85, SE = 0.45, p < .001, 95\% CI [0.96, 2.73]$). However, the effect was stronger among women. This interaction effect with gender remained significant, showing effects in the same direction, when we ran the analyses using both subdimensions of direct aggression victimization ($b = 0.28, p = .009, \Delta f^2 = .02$) and cybercontrol victimization ($b = 0.17, p = .021, \Delta f^2 = .02$), independently, as predictors.

General Discussion

Existing studies have suggested that the way in which victims respond to abusive acts has effects on their ability of adjustment and adaptation (Wong et al., 2015). However, empirical research examining coping strategies in the CDA setting is scarce and inconclusive. This research aimed at contributing to this gap by examining the conflict-resolution strategies associated with CDA victimization and their effects on PWB and relational satisfaction.

Across two studies, the primary findings of this work showed that high frequency of CDA victimization (regardless of whether the global dimension of CDA or both types of behaviors direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol were separately taken into account) was

positively associated with the use of exit, neglect, and loyalty strategies and negatively associated with the use of voice responses. These results are in line with previous findings obtained through qualitative methodology, which indicated that CDA victims often employ neglectful strategies such as threats, harmful behaviors against the partner, ignoring their partner, and limiting interactions to spend less time with them (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010). Likewise, exit responses aimed at leaving the relationship or provoking the breakup has also been mentioned by the youth as one of the most used strategies against the CDA (Alsawalq, 2021; Draucker & Martsolf, 2010), as well as loyalty responses, expressed in behaviors such as limiting and self-censoring their own activity and needs to avoid conflicts (e.g., reducing content posted on social networks, deleting their social network accounts) or minimizing the severity and/or justifying the violent episodes (e.g., LeFebvre et al., 2015; Vitak et al., 2017).

Second, we observed consistently across our two studies that (a) high use of responses of exit, neglect, and loyalty was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction and exit and that (b) neglect strategies were negatively associated with BPW. In contrast, voice strategies were positively associated with BPW and relational satisfaction. Bolstering work on Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) model, results have suggested that recurrent use of destructive responses (i.e., leaving and abandonment) may cause damage to the relationship, often irreparable (e.g., resentment, lack of communication and mutual support [Overall & Simpson, 2013]), which could deteriorate PWB and relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, our results support notions about the detrimental effects of continued use of loyalty strategies (Overall, 2010); PWB and relationship satisfaction could be impaired as a consequence of not directly addressing problems by letting them linger. Therefore, these findings extend previous research showing the detriments of exit, neglect, and loyalty conflict-resolution strategies for interpersonal relationships, whereas voice response seems to be the healthiest strategy, being associated with better PWB and satisfaction with the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1986; Valor-Segura et al., 2020).

One of the most significant results of our work, observed in both Studies 1 and 2, was that frequent CDA victimization (by direct cyberaggression, cybercontrol, and both types jointly) negatively influenced PWB and relationship satisfaction through an increase in destructive strategies (exit and neglect) but not by the loyalty strategy. Complementarily, we found that this indirect effect was also explained by decreases in voice responses. These findings extend previous works suggesting that the way in which victims cope with stressful situations of abuse within their relationships largely determines the impact it has on their mental health (e.g., Straighth et al., 2003; Wong et al., 2015). In particular, our results suggest

that young people who frequently suffer from CDA tend to adopt destructive conflict-resolution strategies, which is pernicious due to the association with the deterioration of PWB and low relational satisfaction. But why does this happen?

In response to the question above, results from Study 2 demonstrated that high frequency of CDA victimization predicts frequent use of destructive strategies (exit and neglect) through low perception of power within the relationship. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that people who are victimized by their partners experience a low sense of relational power (e.g., Filson et al., 2010; Minieri et al., 2014) and that perceived relational power influences how people manage couple conflicts (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021; Pietromonaco et al., 2021). According to the principle of least interest (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), as a consequence of the lack of power, CDA victims are perceived as less able to influence their partners and with less control over the relationship. This psychological state may lead them to employ destructive strategies as a way to restore their position within the relationship, in line with the classic literature on power (Galinsky et al., 2006). For example, engaging in neglectful behaviors such as ignoring the partner, insulting or threatening to harm the partner in an attempt to gain control over the partner, and directly provoking the breakdown of the relationship to end the abusive situation and restore lost power. Our findings support previous research suggesting that difficulties associated with perceived low power in relationships and the need to correct power imbalances stimulate destructive responses such as aggression in powerless individuals as a means of restoring power (Bugental, 2010; Bugental & Lin, 2001).

At this point, it is important to highlight that, in comparison with IPV, CDA victimization may trigger more emotional and immediate responses than rational responses (e.g., not answering their calls or text messages, blocking their contact on social networks, insulting them or threatening to harm them through digital media). That is, digital media offer opportunities and quick and easy-to-use tools that could enhance relationship-destructive responses (Draucker & Martsof, 2010). According to Alvarez (2012), the use of technology could level the playing field, as the weaker or more vulnerable (less powerful) person, such as CDA victims, could adopt destructive responses (e.g., reactive violence or abandonment of the relationship) through the Internet to gain power and cope with intimate partner conflicts. However, this method of managing problems through the virtual context may often generate a false sense of empowerment that, instead of efficiently restoring relational power, could be contributing to a culture of shared cyberviolence within couple relationships. In our research, we assessed general conflict-resolution strategies without controlling for whether they took

place face to face or through technological means, so specialized empirical research on coping responses to CDA through digital media is needed to corroborate our assumptions.

Another of the most significant findings of our research was that IOS moderated the effect of perceived power on exit responses. That is, people who frequently suffered from CDA manifested low levels of perceived power in the relationship, which, in turn, led to the elevated use of exit strategy responses, only in those individuals who manifested low (vs. high) IOS. Reinforcing the work on the self-concept expansion model (Aron et al., 1992), people with low IOS include the partner in the self to a lesser extent and prioritize the satisfaction of individual needs and goals over those of the couple (Keltner et al., 2003). Thus, they might dedicate less effort in maintaining the relationship when it becomes unhealthy, and they often suffer from CDA. In particular, our results suggest that they may be more likely to use exit responses to end the abusive relationship and restore the low sense of relational control and power. Conversely, individuals experiencing high IOS might make extreme sacrifices to maintain the relationship (Joo & Park, 2017) even when they may be subjected to cyberabusive acts by their partner. Our findings suggest that elevated IOS may be a risk factor in violent intimate partner relationships by hindering relationship exit responses. This strategy, in turn, could be functional from a clinical approach because it would end the violence and encourage the powerless individual to achieve their own needs, goals, or interests (Overall, 2020).

Finally, we consistently observed in both studies that gender did not moderate the effect of CDA victimization on PWB and relational satisfaction when we considered the global dimension of the scale, including both direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol behaviors. However, when the effect of these behaviors was analyzed independently, we found that victimization by direct cyberaggression, but not by cybercontrol, positively affected relationship satisfaction, mainly among women (vs. men). Specifically, in Study 1 we found that the effect was stronger among women than among men, whereas in Study 2 we found that the effect was significant only for women. These results extend previous research showing that the impact of violence is more negative for women (vs. men; e.g., Stonard, 2020). It makes sense that direct cyberaggression victimization is precisely influenced by gender because, on the one hand, it is an explicit manifestation of violence that implies an intention to harm one's partner (Borrajo et al., 2015b), and, on the other hand, it is a type of violence that is primarily perpetrated by men and more often experienced by women (Reed et al., 2021; Zweig et al., 2013). Our results suggest that women are more susceptible and vulnerable to this type of violence, which could be due to the social and cultural frameworks

that determine asymmetrical intimate relationships that give greater power to men in the couple's context (Lucero et al., 2014).

Practical Contributions

From developmental psychology, young adults are still learning to deal with conflicts in their romantic partner relationships (Laursen et al. 2001). Thus, scientists and therapists need to understand under what conditions young people who suffer from CDA can carry out (or not) efficient responses to actively address the conflicts and relationship problems. Clinical psychologists working with CDA victims and practicing couple therapy could use our findings to provide tools and abilities concerning behavioral patterns that will be more adaptative and healthy (vs. detrimental) in resolving the relationship conflicts and dating violence. For instance, actions could be aimed at empowering less powerful individuals to better manage relationship problems. Likewise, these could promote that individuals analyze, on the one hand, targeting issues related to the perception of threat to individual needs and goals and, on the other hand, the possible disconnection between oneself and one's partner when the relationship is violent and ending the abusive relationship could be considered an adaptive and healthy strategy. Our findings also support the need to develop and implement prevention programs before youth begin dating. We advocate prevention programming that addresses violence in the couple context early because research suggests that dating violence at an early age, which is considered a destructive conflict resolution strategy, is a predictor of IPV at later stages (Greenman & Matsuda, 2016). Likewise, based on our findings and previous research, we encourage intervention programs promoting healthy dating relationships to emphasize conflict management because the method through which couples resolve problems is an essential element of relationship functioning (Marigold & Anderson, 2016).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This work has some limitations that should be considered. First, we implemented two observational studies of the cross-sectional design, so we cannot draw interpretations of causality. We suggest that future researchers use longitudinal or experimental designs that allow greater controllability over the results. Second, we used self-report instruments to assess our constructs, so participants' responses could have been subject to recall bias or social desirability (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). Third, we drew our study sample from the youth

population using nonprobability snowball sampling and setting certain inclusion criteria; therefore, our results are not generalizable to the entire population. Other researchers should use random sampling to collect larger and more heterogeneous samples to corroborate our results and examine the possible influence of variables such as age, nationality, cultural values, or sexual orientation. Fourth, we assessed the relational power of the CDA victims but did not consider the power of the perpetrators. Future researchers could use other more innovative approaches, such as dyadic studies, to assess both partners. Furthermore, we encourage other researchers to complement our findings by analyzing whether individual differences, such as attachment styles or emotional dependence and partner's responsiveness, could also shape how individuals victimized by CDA respond to relationship conflicts. Despite these limitations, it should be noted that the use of samples of young adults involved in established couple relationships and the replication of results across studies are strengths of this work.

Conclusion

Although coping style plays an essential role in understanding how CDA victims manage relationship adversity and its consequences, little work has been done in this area. Our research shows for the first time that frequent CDA victimization is associated with greater use of destructive responses that, in turn, lead to lower PWB and relationship satisfaction. Another relevant contribution of our work is that we introduce low relational power sense as the factor mediating the relationship between CDA victimization and the use of destructive strategies. Likewise, we deepen the understanding of the circumstances that determine relationship exit responses, specifically the role played by IOS. In sum, our findings will help researchers in couple intervention and CDA victimization to understand relational characteristics and dynamics and to develop specific intervention strategies aimed at promoting healthy and happy relationships. In addition, we hope that our research will encourage future researchers to further explore strategies that may be effective for resolving relationship problems, especially when the relationship becomes violent.

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Chapter 4

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Supplementary Material

Impact of the Cyberdating Abuse Victimization on Individual Well-being: The Role of
Destructive Responses, Relational Power, and the Relationship's Inclusiveness

1. Study 1

1.1. Victimization of CDA Behaviors (Direct Cyberaggression and Cybercontrol) and Gender on PWB and Relational Satisfaction

Table 1S

CDA Victimization and Gender as Predictors of PWB and Relational Satisfaction

| DCAV | Psychological well-being | | | | | Relational satisfaction | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | ΔR^2 | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | ΔR^2 |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .01 (.003) | .01 | | | | .02 (.01) | .02 |
| Age | -0.04 | -0.58 | [-0.17, 0.09] | | | -0.12 | -1.79 | [-0.25, 0.01] | | |
| Relationship duration | 0.11 | 1.69 | [-0.02, 0.24] | | | 0.05 | 0.78 | [-0.08, 0.18] | | |
| Cohabiting ^a | -0.03 | -0.49 | [-0.16, 0.10] | | | 0.04 | 0.60 | [-0.09, 0.17] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .04 (.03) | .03** | | | | .09 (.08) | .08*** |
| DCAV | -0.14* | -2.55 | [-0.26, -0.03] | | | -0.27*** | -4.82 | [-0.38, -0.16] | | |
| Gender ^b | -0.11* | -2.01 | [-0.23, -0.003] | | | -0.12* | -2.09 | [-0.23, -0.001] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .04 (.03) | .001 | | | | .11 (.10) | .02** |
| DCAV × Gender | -0.05 | -0.62 | [-0.18, 0.09] | | | -0.20** | -2.65 | [-0.31, -0.05] | | |
| CCV | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | ΔR^2 | β | t | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | ΔR^2 |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .01 (.003) | .01 | | | | .02 (.01) | .02 |
| Age | -0.04 | -0.58 | [-0.17, 0.09] | | | -0.12 | -1.79 | [-0.25, 0.01] | | |
| Relationship duration | 0.11 | 1.69 | [-0.02, 0.24] | | | 0.05 | 0.78 | [-0.08, 0.18] | | |
| Cohabiting ^a | -0.03 | -0.49 | [-0.16, 0.10] | | | 0.04 | 0.60 | [-0.09, 0.17] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .04 (.03) | .03* | | | | .21 (.19) | .19*** |
| CCV | -0.15 | -2.54* | [-0.26, -0.03] | | | -0.44*** | -8.37 | [-0.54, -0.34] | | |
| Gender ^b | -0.13 | -2.20* | [-0.24, -0.01] | | | -0.17*** | -3.29 | [-0.28, -0.07] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .04 (.02) | .001 | | | | .21 (.19) | .000 |
| CCV × Gender | -0.03 | -0.47 | [-0.14, 0.08] | | | 0.01 | 0.20 | [-0.09, 0.11] | | |

Note. $N = 305$. DCAV = direct cyberaggression victimization; CCV = cybercontrol victimization; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = yes, 2 = no; ^b1 = men, 2 = women. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

1.2. Indirect Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relationship Satisfaction via Voice Strategy

Table 2S

Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relational Satisfaction by Voice Strategy

| | Psychological well-being (PWB) | | | | | | Relational satisfaction (RS) | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| | Voice | | | PWB | | | Voice | | | RS | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% IC | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 7.92*** | 0.69 | [6.55, 9.28] | 4.39*** | 0.43 | [3.53, 5.24] | 7.92*** | 0.69 | [6.55, 9.28] | 8.76*** | 0.90 | [6.99, 10.54] |
| CDAV | -0.78*** | 0.17 | [-1.12, -0.44] | -0.17 | 0.09 | [-0.35, 0.02] | -0.78*** | 0.17 | [-1.12, -0.44] | -1.38*** | 0.19 | [-1.76, -1.00] |
| Voice | | | | 0.12*** | 0.03 | [0.06, 0.18] | | | | 0.30*** | 0.06 | [0.18, 0.42] |
| Gender ^a | 0.34* | 0.14 | [-0.06, 0.63] | -0.22** | 0.08 | [-0.37, -0.07] | 0.34* | 0.14 | [-0.06, 0.63] | -0.63*** | 0.16 | [-0.94, -0.32] |
| Age | -0.02 | 0.02 | [-0.06, 0.01] | -0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.01] | -0.02 | 0.02 | [-0.06, 0.01] | -0.05** | 0.02 | [-0.08, -0.01] |
| Relationship duration | 0.0002 | 0.002 | [-0.004, 0.004] | 0.002* | 0.001 | [0.001, 0.004] | 0.0002 | 0.002 | [-0.004, 0.004] | 0.002 | 0.002 | [-0.002, 0.01] |
| Cohabiting ^b | 0.10 | 0.17 | [-0.23, 0.44] | -0.07 | 0.09 | [-0.25, 0.10] | 0.10 | 0.17 | [-0.23, 0.44] | -0.01 | 0.19 | [-0.38, 0.36] |
| | $R^2 = .11$ | | | $R^2 = .05$ | | | $R^2 = .11$ | | | $R^2 = .26$ | | |
| | $F(5, 305) = 7.26, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 304) = 5.46, p < .001$ | | | $F(5, 305) = 7.26, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 304) = 17.81, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | | | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | | |
| Total effect | -0.27 | | | 0.09 | | | -1.62 | | | 0.20 | | |
| Indirect effect | -0.10 | | | 0.04 | | | -0.24 | | | 0.11 | | |

Note. $N = 313$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

1.3. Indirect Effect of Direct Cyberaggression Victimization and Cybercontrol Victimization on PWB and Relationship Satisfaction via Conflict Resolution-Strategies

We conducted 12 mediation analyses using Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) of the PROCESS program (Version 4.1) to assess the indirect effect of direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization on PWB and relational satisfaction via conflict resolution-strategies (exit, neglect, and loyalty). We included direct cyberaggression victimization or cybercontrol victimization as the predictor (X), PWB and relational satisfaction as the criterion variables (Y), and each coping strategy, separately, as the mediating variable (M1). We controlled for the same variables as in the main analyses.

First, the results showed a statistically significant indirect effect of both direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization on PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI $[-0.33, -0.05]$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.11, -0.02]$) and relational satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.55$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.08, -0.30]$; and cybercontrol: $b = -0.21$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.36, -0.10]$) via *exit* strategy use. That is, high frequency of victimization of both CDA behaviors separately was related to greater use of exit responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with relationship. Second, we also found a statistically significant indirect effect of both direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization on PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.22$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.48, -0.13]$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.14, -0.05]$) and relationship satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.42$, $SE = 0.162$, 95% CI $[-0.88, -0.024]$; and cybercontrol: $b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.25, -0.07]$) via the *neglect* strategy. Thus, high frequency of victimization of both CDA behaviors was related to greater use of neglect responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with relationship. Third, similar to what is observed in the main analyses, results showed no significant indirect effects of direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol on PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.17, 0.0001]$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.03, 0.01]$) and relational satisfaction via *loyalty* strategy (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI $[-0.31, 0.06]$; and cybercontrol: $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.07, 0.02]$). Finally, we also found a statistically significant indirect effect of both direct cyberaggression victimization and

cybercontrol victimization on PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.30, -0.04]$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.10, -0.01]$) and relationship satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.41$, $SE = 0.20$, 95% CI $[-0.91, -0.13]$; and cybercontrol: $b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI $[-0.26, -0.03]$) via the *voice* strategy use. Thus, high frequency of victimization of both CDA behaviors was related to lower use of voice responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with relationship.

2. Study 2

2.1. Effects of CDA Victimization (Global, Direct Cyberaggression, and Cybercontrol) and Gender on PWB and Relational Satisfaction

Table 3S

CDA Victimization and Gender as Predictors of PWB and Relational Satisfaction

| CDA | Psychological well-being | | | | | Relational satisfaction | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .03 (.02) | .03* | | | | .05 (.04) | .05** |
| Age | -0.03 | -0.39 | [-0.21, 0.14] | | | -0.23** | -2.66 | [-0.41, -0.06] | | |
| Relationship duration | 0.03 | 0.32 | [-0.14, 0.20] | | | 0.001 | 0.01 | [-0.16, 0.16] | | |
| Cohabiting ^a | -0.17* | -2.44 | [-0.30, -0.03] | | | -0.03 | 0.49 | [-0.16, 0.10] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .04 (.02) | .01** | | | | .10 (.09) | .05*** |
| CDAV | 0.001 | -0.02 | [-0.15, 0.15] | | | -0.24*** | -4.19 | [-0.46, -0.17] | | |
| Gender ^b | -0.09 | -1.56 | [-0.21, 0.03] | | | -0.09 | -1.58 | [-0.20, 0.02] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .04 (.02) | .000 | | | | .11 (.09) | .004 |
| CDAV \times Gender | -0.003 | -0.04 | [-0.20, 0.19] | | | -0.09 | -1.16 | [-0.30, 0.08] | | |

Note. *N* = 305. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization. ^a1 = yes, 2 = no; ^b1 = men, 2 = women.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

Table 3S*CDA Victimization and Gender as Predictors of PWB and Relational Satisfaction (Continued)*

| DCAV | Psychological well-being | | | | | Relational satisfaction | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .03 (.02) | .03* | | | | .05 (.04) | .05** |
| Age | -0.03 | -0.39 | [-0.21, 0.14] | | | -0.23** | -2.66 | [-0.41, -0.06] | | |
| Relationship duration | 0.03 | 0.32 | [-0.14, 0.20] | | | 0.001 | 0.01 | [-0.16, 0.16] | | |
| Cohabiting ^a | -0.17* | -2.44 | [-0.30, -0.03] | | | -0.03 | 0.49 | [-0.17, 0.10] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .04 (.03) | .02 | | | | .08 (.06) | .03* |
| DCAV | -0.08 | -1.43 | [-0.38, 0.06] | | | -0.17** | -2.96 | [-0.54, -0.11] | | |
| Gender ^b | -0.10 | -1.78 | [-0.22, 0.01] | | | -0.04 | -0.77 | [-0.16, 0.07] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .04 (.02) | .000 | | | | .11 (.09) | .03*** |
| DCAV \times Gender | -0.02 | -0.20 | [-0.44, 0.35] | | | -0.35*** | -3.32 | [-1.02, -0.26] | | |
| CCV | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² | β | <i>t</i> | 95% CI | R ² (adj R ²) | Δ R ² |
| <i>Step 1</i> | | | | .03 (.02) | .03* | | | | .05 (.04) | .05** |
| Age | -0.03 | -0.39 | [-0.21, 0.14] | | | -0.23** | -2.66 | [-0.41, -0.06] | | |
| Relationship duration | 0.03 | 0.32 | [-0.14, 0.20] | | | 0.001 | 0.01 | [-0.16, 0.16] | | |
| Cohabiting ^a | -0.17* | -2.44 | [-0.30, -0.03] | | | -0.03 | 0.49 | [-0.17, 0.10] | | |
| <i>Step 2</i> | | | | .04 (.02) | .01** | | | | .09 (.08) | .05*** |
| CCV | 0.03 | 0.52 | [-0.09, 0.16] | | | -0.22*** | -3.87 | [-0.37, -0.12] | | |
| Gender ^b | -0.08 | -1.41 | [-0.20, 0.03] | | | -0.09 | -1.52 | [-0.20, 0.03] | | |
| <i>Step 3</i> | | | | .04 (.02) | .000 | | | | .10 (.08) | .002 |
| CCV \times Gender | -0.01 | -0.13 | [-0.17, 0.15] | | | -0.05 | -0.70 | [-0.21, 0.10] | | |

Note. *N* = 305. DCAV = direct cyberaggression victimization; CCV = cybercontrol victimization. ^a1 = yes, 2 = no; ^b1 = men, 2 = women.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

2.2. Indirect Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relationship Satisfaction via Conflict-Resolution Strategies

Table 4S

Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relational Satisfaction by Exit Strategy

| | Psychological well-being (PWB) | | | | | | Relational satisfaction (RS) | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Exit | | | PWB | | | Exit | | | RS | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | -0.65* | 0.53 | [-1.69, 0.40] | 5.06*** | 0.32 | [4.42, 5.70] | -0.65* | 0.53 | [-1.69, 0.40] | 9.67*** | 0.60 | [8.50, 10.84] |
| CDAV | 1.06*** | 0.19 | [0.68, 1.44] | 0.14 | 0.12 | [-0.11, 0.38] | 1.06*** | 0.19 | [0.68, 1.44] | -0.40 | 0.23 | [-0.84, 0.05] |
| Exit | | | | -0.13*** | 0.04 | [-0.19, -0.06] | | | | -0.59*** | 0.06 | [-0.72, -0.46] |
| Gender ^a | 0.24 | 0.13 | [0.01, 0.49] | -0.09 | 0.08 | [-0.24, 0.06] | 0.24 | 0.13 | [0.01, 0.49] | -0.11 | 0.14 | [-0.39, 0.17] |
| Age | 0.04*** | 0.01 | [0.02, 0.06] | 0.002 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.01] | 0.04*** | 0.01 | [0.02, 0.06] | -0.01 | 0.01 | [-0.04, 0.01] |
| Relationship duration | -0.003** | 0.001 | [-0.01, -0.001] | -0.0001 | 0.001 | [-0.001, 0.001] | -0.003** | 0.001 | [-0.01, -0.001] | -0.002 | 0.001 | [-0.004, 0.001] |
| Cohabiting ^b | 0.06 | 0.15 | [-0.23, 0.34] | -0.21* | 0.09 | [-0.38, -0.03] | 0.06 | 0.15 | [-0.23, 0.34] | -0.08 | 0.16 | [-0.40, 0.25] |
| | | $R^2 = .13$ | | | $R^2 = .07$ | | | $R^2 = .13$ | | | $R^2 = .30$ | |
| | | $F(5, 298) = 9.30, p < .001$ | | | $F(5, 298) = 9.30, p < .001$ | | | $F(5, 298) = 9.30, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 297) = 20.96, p < .001$ | |
| | | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | | 95% CI | | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | | 95% CI |
| Total effect | | 0.002 | | 0.12 | | [-0.23, 0.23] | | -1.03 | | 0.24 | | [-1.51, -0.54] |
| Indirect effect | | -0.13 | | 0.05 | | [-0.24, -0.05] | | -0.63 | | 0.16 | | [-0.97, -0.32] |

Note. $N = 305$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Table 5S*Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relational Satisfaction by Neglect Strategy*

| | Psychological Well-being (PWB) | | | | | | Relational Satisfaction (RS) | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| | Neglect | | | PWB | | | Neglect | | | RS | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 1.09 | 0.65 | [-1.19, 2.38] | 5.29*** | 0.32 | [4.66, 5.92] | 1.09 | 0.65 | [-1.19, 2.38] | 11.40*** | 0.64 | [9.13, 11.67] |
| CDAV | 1.11*** | 0.24 | [0.64, 1.58] | 0.16 | 0.12 | [-0.08, 0.39] | 1.11*** | 0.24 | [0.64, 1.58] | -0.67** | 0.24 | [-1.15, -0.207] |
| Neglect | | | | -0.14*** | 0.03 | [-0.19, -0.08] | | | | -0.32*** | 0.06 | [-0.43, -0.21] |
| Gender ^a | -0.12 | 0.16 | [-0.43, 0.18] | -0.14 | 0.08 | [-0.29, 0.01] | -0.12 | 0.16 | [-0.43, 0.18] | -0.29 | 0.15 | [-0.59, 0.008] |
| Age | 0.02 | 0.01 | [-0.004, 0.04] | -0.0003 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.01] | 0.02 | 0.01 | [-0.004, 0.04] | -0.03* | 0.01 | [-0.05, -0.01] |
| Relationship duration | 0.001 | 0.001 | [-0.002, 0.0041] | 0.0004 | 0.001 | [-0.001, 0.001] | 0.001 | 0.001 | [-0.002, 0.0041] | 0.001 | 0.001 | [-0.002, -0.003] |
| Cohabiting ^b | 0.03 | 0.18 | [-0.33, 0.39] | -0.21* | 0.09 | [-0.38, -0.04] | 0.03 | 0.18 | [-0.33, 0.39] | 0.10 | 0.18 | [-0.45, 0.25] |
| | $R^2 = .11$ | | | $R^2 = .11$ | | | $R^2 = .11$ | | | $R^2 = .19$ | | |
| | $F(5, 298) = 7.38, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 297) = 5.99, p < .001$ | | | $F(5, 298) = 7.38, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 297) = 11.36, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | | Effects | | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | | | |
| Total effect | 0.002 | | 0.12 | [-0.23, 0.24] | | -1.03 | | 0.24 | [-1.51, -0.54] | | | |
| Indirect effect | -0.15 | | 0.05 | [-0.26, -0.07] | | -0.36 | | 0.11 | [-0.60, -0.16] | | | |

Note. $N = 305$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

Table 6S*Effect of CDA Victimization on PWB and Relational Satisfaction by Voice Strategy*

| | Psychological well-being (PWB) | | | | | | Relational satisfaction (RS) | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | Voice | | | PWB | | | Voice | | | RS | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 7.31*** | 0.56 | [6.20, 8.42] | 3.61*** | 0.38 | [2.85, 4.36] | 7.31*** | 0.56 | [6.20, 8.42] | 7.01*** | 0.79 | [5.46, 8.57] |
| CDAV | -0.73*** | 0.21 | [-1.14, -0.33] | 0.16 | 0.11 | [-0.07, 0.38] | -0.73*** | 0.21 | [-1.14, -0.33] | -0.72** | 0.23 | [-1.18, -0.26] |
| Voice | | | | 0.21*** | 0.03 | [0.14, 0.27] | | | | 0.42*** | 0.06 | [0.29, 0.54] |
| Gender ^a | 0.53*** | 0.13 | [0.27, 0.79] | -0.23** | 0.08 | [-0.38, -0.09] | 0.53*** | 0.13 | [0.27, 0.79] | -0.47** | 0.15 | [-0.78, -0.17] |
| Age | -0.003 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.02] | -0.002 | 0.01 | [-0.01, 0.01] | -0.003 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.02] | -0.04** | 0.01 | [-0.06, -0.01] |
| Relationship duration | -0.004*** | 0.001 | [-0.006, -0.002] | 0.001 | 0.001 | [-0.002, 0.002] | -0.004*** | 0.001 | [-0.006, -0.002] | 0.002 | 0.001 | [-0.001, 0.005] |
| Cohabiting ^b | 0.03 | 0.16 | [-0.28, 0.34] | -0.22* | 0.09 | [-0.39, -0.05] | 0.03 | 0.16 | [-0.28, 0.34] | -0.12 | 0.17 | [-0.46, 0.22] |
| | $R^2 = .19$ | | | $R^2 = .16$ | | | $R^2 = .19$ | | | $R^2 = .21$ | | |
| | $F(5, 298) = 13.93, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 297) = 9.40, p < .001$ | | | $F(5, 298) = 13.93, p < .001$ | | | $F(6, 297) = 13.16, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | |
| Total effect | 0.002 | | | 0.12 | [-0.23, 0.24] | | -1.03 | | | 0.24 | [-1.51, -0.54] | |
| Indirect effect | -0.15 | | | 0.05 | [-0.25, -0.06] | | -0.30 | | | 0.11 | [-0.52, -0.11] | |

Note. $N = 305$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = man, 2 = woman; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

As shown in Table 4S, our results showed a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on PWB and relationship satisfaction through the strategy of *exit*. Thus, high frequency of CDA victimization was related to greater use of exit responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with relationship. The variables included in the model predicted 7.47% of the variance of the inclination to PWB and 29.75% of the variance of the inclination to relational satisfaction. The total effect of CDA victimization on relational satisfaction was significant, but it was not significant on PWB. When we carried out exploratory mediation analyses using direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization as predictors, we observed that the high frequency of victimization of both behaviors was also related to lower PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI [-0.64, -0.04]; cybercontrol: $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.11, -0.02]) and relational satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.86$, $SE = 0.66$, 95% CI [-2.94, -0.43]; and cybercontrol: $b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.13, -0.02]) via their increases in exit strategy use.

As can be observed in Table 5S, our results showed a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on PWB and relationship satisfaction through the strategy of *neglect*. Specifically, high frequency of CDA victimization was related to greater use of neglect responses, which, in turn, was associated with lower PWB and satisfaction with relationship. The variables included in the model predicted 10.79% of the variance of the inclination to PWB and 18.66% of the variance of the inclination to relational satisfaction. The total effects of CDA victimization on PWB and relational satisfaction were significant. Exploratory analyses showed that high direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization also predicted lower PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.19$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [-0.59, -0.10]; cybercontrol: $b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.13, -0.03]) and relationship satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.52$, $SE = 0.33$, 95% CI [-1.51, -0.27]; and cybercontrol: $b = -0.18$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [-0.31, -0.07]) via increases in neglect responses.

Our results did not prove an indirect effect of CDA victimization on PWB ($b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.09, 0.02]) and relational satisfaction ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.06]) via *loyalty* strategy use. Similarly, this indirect effect was not statistically significant when the dimensions of direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization were included as predictors in exploratory analyses ($p > .05$). This set of analyses partially supported Hypothesis 5.

In addition, in an exploratory way, we observed a statistically significant indirect effect of global CDA victimization on PWB and relationship satisfaction via the *voice* strategy use (Table 6S). That is, the high frequency of CDA victimization was related to lower use of voice responses, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in PWB and satisfaction with relationship. The variables included in the model predicted 15.96% of the variance of the inclination to PWB and 21% of the variance of the inclination to relational satisfaction. The total effects of CDA victimization on PWB and relational satisfaction were significant. Exploratory analyses showed high direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization also predicted lower PWB (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.19$, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI $[-0.63, -0.09]$; cybercontrol: $b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI $[-0.13, -0.03]$) and relational satisfaction (direct cyberaggression: $b = -0.42$, $SE = 0.30$, 95% CI $[-1.36, -0.17]$; and cybercontrol: $b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI $[-0.27, -0.05]$) via its decreases in the use of voice responses.

2.3. Indirect Effect of CDA Victimization on Voice Strategy via Relational Power

Table 7S

Effect of CDA Victimization on Voice Strategy by Relational Power

| | Voice | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| | RP | | | Voice | | |
| | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>Coeff.</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Constant | 8.36*** | 0.49 | [7.38, 9.33] | 5.46*** | 0.83 | [3.82, 7.10] |
| CDAV | -0.96*** | 0.17 | [-1.29, -0.62] | -0.43* | 0.21 | [-0.85, -0.01] |
| RP | | | | 0.26*** | 0.07 | [0.13, 0.40] |
| Gender ^a | -0.05 | 0.12 | [-0.27, 0.18] | 0.47*** | 0.14 | [0.20, 0.74] |
| Age | -0.03** | 0.01 | [-0.04, -0.01] | 0.003 | 0.01 | [-0.02, 0.02] |
| Relationship duration | 0.0004 | 0.001 | [-0.002, 0.002] | -0.004*** | 0.001 | [-0.006, -0.002] |
| Cohabiting ^b | -0.01 | 0.12 | [-0.26, -0.23] | 0.02 | 0.15 | [-0.28, 0.32] |
| HSA | -0.19* | 0.08 | [-0.36, -0.03] | -0.11 | 0.10 | [-0.31, 0.09] |
| | $R^2 = .18$ | | | $R^2 = .23$ | | |
| | $F(6, 297) = 11.16, p < .001$ | | | $F(7, 296) = 12.86, p < .001$ | | |
| | Effects | | | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | |
| Total effect | -0.69 | | | 0.21 | [-1.10, -0.28] | |
| Indirect effect | -0.25 | | | 0.11 | [-0.51, -0.07] | |

Note. $N_{overall} = 305$. CDAV = cyberdating abuse victimization; RP = relationship power, HSA = heterosexual script adherence; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. ^a1 = men, 2 = women; ^b1 = yes, 2 = no.

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

2.4. Indirect Effect of Direct Cyberaggression Victimization and Cybercontrol Victimization on Conflict Resolution-Strategy (Exit, Neglect, and Voice) via Relational Power

We conducted six mediation analyses using Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) of the PROCESS program (Version 4.1) to assess the indirect effect of direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization on coping strategies (exit, neglect, and voice) via relational power. We included direct cyberaggression victimization or cybercontrol victimization as the predictor (X), exit or neglect strategies as criterion variables (Y), and relational power as the mediating variable (M1). We controlled for the same variables as in the main analyses.

First, the results showed a statistically significant indirect effect of both direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization on the *exit* strategy (direct cyberaggression victimization: $b = 0.52$, $SE = 0.47$, 95% CI [0.25, 1.89]; and cybercontrol victimization: $b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.27]) via relational power. That is, high frequency of victimization of both CDA behaviors separately was related to a lower sense of relational power, which, in turn, was associated with increases in the use of exit responses. Second, we also found a statistically significant indirect effect of both direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization on the *neglect* strategy (direct cyberaggression victimization: $b = 0.66$, $SE = 0.64$, 95% CI [0.32, 2.57]; and cybercontrol victimization: $b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.35]) via relational power. Thus, high frequency of victimization of both CDA behaviors separately was related to lower perceived relational power, which, in turn, was associated with increases in the use of neglect responses.

Third, we also found a statistically significant indirect effect of both direct cyberaggression victimization and cybercontrol victimization on the *voice* strategy (direct cyberaggression victimization: $b = -0.40$, $SE = 0.43$, 95% CI [-1.74, -0.14]; and cybercontrol victimization: $b = -0.013$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [-0.26, -0.03]) via relational power. That is, high frequency of victimization of both CDA behaviors separately was related to a lower sense of relational power, which, in turn, was associated with decreases in the use of voice responses.

Chapter 5: General Discussion

Discusión General

Relationship, information, and communication technologies (RICT) generate an interconnectedness between partners that can promote the development and strengthening of the relationship, for example, through communication, sharing of experiences, mutual support, and maintenance of intimacy (e.g., Sanchez et al., 2015; Vaterlaus et al., 2018). However, the peculiarities of RICT may also amplify the risk of suffering and/or exercising cyberviolent behaviors within the couple, as well as the possible consequences (Camerini et al., 2020). Although numerous investigations have aimed at examining the incidence of this phenomenon, as well as its associated variables, less attention has been paid to delve into the differential way in which men and women perceive, experience, and cope with cyberdating abuse. Therefore, the general purpose of this doctoral thesis has been to clarify the implicit gender asymmetry in this violence, focusing attention on the context in which it takes place (online environment) and on the influence of gender socialization. Specifically, we focused on analyzing three key questions: (a) what factors determine how young people perceive and experience cyberdating abuse; (b) how certain variables (cultural, relational, and individual) interact with each other to explain the perpetration of cyberdating abuse; and (c) what strategies victims use to cope with this abuse and how this affects their well-being.

Next, we will discuss the most relevant results and contributions of this doctoral thesis. Although the findings obtained have been grouped independently into specific articles and objectives, to clarify the information presented in this section, we include three large blocks, corresponding to the general goals of this thesis. That is, (a) the social perception of cyberdating abuse (Chapter 2); (b) the antecedents of the perpetration of cyberdating abuse (Chapter 3); and (c) the coping strategies of cyberdating abuse and its consequences (Chapter 4). Subsequently, we will discuss the general limitations of the work developed and point out possible future lines of research. Finally, the possible practical implications and the main conclusions drawn from this doctoral thesis will be addressed.

Social Perception of Cyberdating Abuse

As presented in the literature review (Chapter 1), recent studies on social perception of intimate partner violence (IPV) against women have observed that cybercontrol of the partner is the most common form of violence in young couples; however, this type of abuse tends not to be perceived as a manifestation of gender-based

violence (Díaz-Aguado, 2013). Furthermore, despite the fact that young people report more gender-based violence in the online context (vs. offline), they show some difficulty in self-identifying themselves as victims or aggressors of this type of abuse (Donoso-Vázquez et al., 2016, 2018). Therefore, our first objective was to answer the following question: What factors may influence the way in which cyberviolence behaviors are perceived and experienced in couples? To do so, we conducted three studies (Studies 1–3), which are collected in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Particularly, in Studies 1 and 2, we aimed to analyze the influence of some variables that could affect the perception of an incident of IPV against women (specifically, of partner control), such as the role adopted in the scene (protagonist vs. observer) and the means used (face-to-face vs. WhatsApp), while also considering the effect of certain attitudinal variables (acceptability of intimate partner violence against women [A-IPVAW], ambivalent sexism, and romantic love myths). Overall, the exploratory results of both studies corroborated previous findings (Díaz-Aguado, 2013; Donoso et al., 2016) by demonstrating that a high percentage of women (84.8%; Study 1) and men (79.5%; Study 2) perceived controlling behaviors in other young partners. In contrast, few women (17.1%) recognized suffering from these behaviors in their relationships and few men (7.5%) recognized exercising them. Young people may be aware that partner control is a common practice, but they tend to underestimate and not recognize this behavior in their relationships.

Along this line, we also found that in conditions in which women (Study 1) were observers (vs. victims) of a situation of abusive control, they tended to perceive a greater risk of IPV. For their part, we observed that when they are observers (vs. perpetrators) of such a situation, men (Study 2) identify abusive control behaviors to a greater extent and tend to identify the threat to power as underlying the violent behavior. These results provide empirical evidence to previous research (e.g., Belotti et al., 2022; Donoso et al., 2018) demonstrating that, in general, there is an inclination not to identify and conceptualize controlling behaviors as manifestations of IPV against women when one is directly involved in this type of violence. At this point, the question becomes, are there individual differences in the way of perceiving IPV against women?

One of the most significant results of Study 2 showed that in conditions in which men assumed the role of perpetrators (vs. observers) in a controlling situation toward a partner, (a) high (vs. low) A-IPVAW led to a lower perception of seriousness, and (b) high (vs. low) benevolent sexism determined a greater justification of the behavior. These associations were not observed when men adopted the role of observers in such a situation, which could suggest

that when men are perpetrators of this type of violence, sexist ideology and A-IPVAW operate to justify and perpetuate IPV situations in their relationships. Likewise, in line with previous research, our results evidence that benevolent sexism (Herrera et al., 2012; Herrero et al., 2017; Valor-Segura et al., 2011), A-IPVAW (Martín-Fernández et al., 2018; Waltermaurer, 2012), and romantic love myths (Flores & Browne, 2017; Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018) are factors that increase the justification of this type of violence and decrease the perceived severity of it.

On the other hand, the results of Study 1 showed that in conditions in which the abusive control situation toward the partner took place face-to-face (vs. via WhatsApp), women with high A-IPVAW and high benevolent sexism attributed less severity to the events than those with low levels in both variables. These attitudes appear to modulate women's perceived severity of partner control in the face-to-face context. In contrast, regardless of individual levels of sexism and A-IPVAW against women, the results seem to indicate that women accept and normalize controlling behaviors in the technological context. In line with previous authors, such behaviors could become normalized as a result of the high frequency with which these occur in relationships (Díaz-Aguado, 2013; Donoso et al., 2018). In addition, it is important to consider the subjective nature of online communication, given that messages between the sender and receptor are subject to a high degree of interpretation. In this sense, young women might conceptualize a partner's cybercontrolling behaviors as expressions of love and concern (Flores and Browne, 2017; Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018) or a possible function of RICT use rather than a form of IPV (Belotti et al., 2022).

In conjunction, Studies 1 and 2 in Chapter 2 provide evidence that supports the vulnerable situation of young women due, fundamentally, to the difficulty they show in recognizing their partner's controlling behaviors as an indicator of IPV. Likewise, these studies provide indications of how sociocultural gender norms that determine sexist attitudes, romantic love myths, and A-IPVAW could be interacting with the characteristics and dynamics of the online context to generate behavioral norms that justify and normalize certain manifestations of cyberviolence against women, such as cybercontrol. Therefore, from the above findings we derive the need to deepen the analysis of certain contextual factors (cyberabuse experiences and perceived severity or motivation attributed to the behavior of their aggressor) to understand cyberviolence in couples and its complex dynamics.

Given the above, in Study 3 we aimed to examine how men and women differentially perceive the cyberabusive behaviors they suffer in their relationships, in

terms of offense and severity, and what motivations they attribute to the abuse they are subjected to, depending on whether it is cybercontrol or direct cyberaggression. In line with previous research (Borrajo et al., 2015b; Reed et al., 2021a), the results suggested that cybercontrol and direct cyberaggression behaviors have different nature and intentionality. As we expected, individuals who recalled a direct cyberaggression victimization situation expressed greater perceived offense and severity than individuals who recalled a cybercontrol victimization situation. This is congruent with previous findings indicating that cybercontrol is a manifestation of IPV, “subtle” and indirect, that tends to be justified and minimized within relationships, whereas direct cyberaggression acquires more explicit and recognizable manifestations of violence (e.g., Donoso et al., 2018; Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2018). Likewise, we observed that, according to the victims’ perspectives, cybercontrol behaviors (vs. direct cyberaggression) are motivated more by jealousy and certain personality traits of the aggressor defining the anxious attachment system to the partner (insecurity, emotional dependence, distrust, etc.). Direct cyberaggression behaviors, on the other hand, are motivated more by the sense of online disinhibition and situations of conflict between partners. Overall, these results provide evidence for the findings obtained by Reed et al. (2021a), who found the same motivational patterns for engaging in each type of violence (direct cyberaggression vs. cybercontrol) from the perspective of the aggressor. However, in our study, we observed for the first time that online disinhibition emerges as a cause of direct cyberaggression victimization, but not cybercontrol. Furthermore, although the differences were nonsignificant, victims who recall a situation of direct cyberaggression (vs. cybercontrol) more frequently indicate that the abuse was due to their partner wanting to exert control/power over them.

On the other hand, while a growing body of literature considers cyberdating abuse to be gender symmetrical, our results provide evidence that contradicts this position. First, the results of Study 3 corroborate previous findings (Brown et al., 2022; Stonard et al., 2017) by showing that women perceive partner cyberabusive behaviors as more severe and offensive than men. Particularly, in this study, we found that women consider direct cyberaggression behaviors as more offensive than cybercontrol behaviors, whereas this effect is not observed in men. Women seem to be more sensitive to those direct cyberaggression behaviors that involve clear intentionality to inflict harm (e.g., defamation, public humiliation, sexual coercion, threats, etc.; Reed et al., 2016, 2017), which could be due, in part, to the fact that they are in a situation of vulnerability in the social and cultural framework and more frequently experience this type of violence by

their partners (Reed et al., 2021b). Second, the results of Study 3 showed some gender differences in the motivations that men and women attributed to a partner's behavior. Female (vs. male) victims acknowledge to a greater extent having experienced cyberviolence because their partners felt more disinhibited in the online context, which is consistent with empirical research indicating that men, in general, experience greater online disinhibition (e.g., Wang et al., 2021; Wang & Ngai, 2020). In contrast, men (vs. women) more frequently reported experiencing cyberviolence because their partners were insecure and emotionally dependent. These observed gender differences in how cyberabusive behaviors are perceived and experienced in relationships align with assumptions that cyberdating abuse is gender asymmetric (Walby & Towers, 2018). In line with social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012) and the heterosexual script theory (Kim et al., 2007), women are socialized to prioritize caring for the relationship, whereas men are raised to be confident, aggressive, and use power as a weapon of seduction. In this sense, women could exercise a more indirect cyberviolence based on the cybercontrol of the partner as maladaptive strategies to protect the relationship at all costs, especially when they show anxious attachment patterns. In contrast, adherence to the traditional male role may encourage men to display uninhibited behavior in the online environment involving explicit and direct cyberviolence aggression toward the partner.

In sum, the results of Study 3 add evidence to previous research by demonstrating that the causal attributions and perceptions that victims have of their aggressors' behaviors vary depending on the type of abuse suffered (direct cyberaggression vs. cybercontrol) and gender. Therefore, they reveal the need to delve deeper into the psychosocial mechanisms that trigger each type of violence (direct cyberaggression and cybercontrol), paying special attention to the possible existing gender patterns.

Antecedents of Cyberdating Abuse

Although numerous investigations have examined the variables associated with the perpetration of cyberdating abuse (for a review, see Caridade et al., 2019), to the best of our knowledge, no known works delve into the psychosocial mechanisms that, differentially, could explain each type of abuse (direct cyberaggression vs. cybercontrol). Therefore, the second objective of the thesis focused on exploring the antecedents of cyberdating abuse, differentiating between cybercontrol and direct cyberaggression and incorporating a gender

approach. To this end, we conducted three empirical studies (Studies 4–6), which are collected in Chapter 3.

Based on the results observed in Study 3 and previous literature indicating that anxious attachment to a partner is a robust predictor of IPV in both offline (e.g., Barbaro & Shackelford, 2019; Sommer et al., 2017) and online contexts (e.g., Bui & Pasalich, 2021; Villorra et al., 2021), Studies 4 and 5 focused on examining how anxious attachment schemas may operate with certain individual (heterosexual script adherence) and relational (electronic partner tracking and online jealousy) factors to explain different patterns of cyberdating abuse in men and women.

As we expected, the results of Study 4 showed that anxious attachment to a partner is positively associated with the perpetration of direct cyberaggression in men, but not in women. In the same line, when we included the analysis of heterosexual script adherence in Study 5, the data showed that anxious attachment predicted a higher frequency of direct cyberaggression mainly in men with high (vs. low) acceptance of the heterosexual script. Consistent with the literature on offline IPV (e.g., Brassard et al. 2007; Hammond & Overall, 2017), our findings corroborate that cognitive and behavioral schemas of anxious attachment do not operate independently but rather are closely linked to the gender norms determined by the heterosexual script. Specifically, the results prove for the first time that the effect of anxious attachment on the perpetration of direct cyberaggression is moderated by gender and adherence to the heterosexual script. According to classic research examining power hierarchies in heterosexual relationships (e.g., Glick & Fiske, 1996; Seabrook et al., 2016), a man's aggression toward his partner may be motivated by the perceived loss of control/power within the relationship in situations in which men feel that, culturally and legitimately, they must maintain control in their romantic relationships. Therefore, from the above findings, we infer that the existing power imbalance in heterosexual relationships, derived from differential gender socialization, is transferred to the online environment, where it perpetuates patterns of abuse similar to those observed in offline IPV (Walby & Towers, 2018).

In contrast, contrary to our expectations, the results of Studies 4 and 5 showed that, although anxious attachment predicted the perpetration of partner cybercontrol, this effect was not moderated by gender or the degree of adherence to the heterosexual script. This could be related to the fact that regardless of gender and cultural beliefs about the heterosexual script, controlling behaviors exercised through an online environment are more socially accepted, and young people often consider them legitimate, and even

necessary, for relationship maintenance (Stonard et al., 2017). Thus, both women and men who are anxiously attached to a partner seem to exercise cybercontrol behaviors in their intimate relationships (Sullivan, 2021; Reed et al., 2015), with no different gender patterns observed around this type of abuse.

In line with the previous result, in Study 5, we anticipated the need to further study psychosocial mechanisms that could explain how anxious attachment systems drive cybercontrol perpetration. In this respect, previous literature has shown that anxious attachment to a partner is positively associated with the partner's electronic surveillance (e.g., Reed et al., 2015, Schokkenbroe et al., 2022). In turn, this practice in social networks has been found to increase the likelihood of experiencing online jealousy (e.g., Muise et al., 2013; Perles et al., 2019), as well as of exercising cybercontrol in relationships (e.g., Doucette et al., 2021; Frampton & Fox, 2018; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019). Therefore, we asked whether electronic monitoring and online jealousy might sequentially mediate the relationship between anxious attachment and the perpetration of cyberviolence in couples.

As expected, the results showed that people with high anxious attachment use, to a greater extent, social networks to monitor their partners, which leads to higher levels of online jealousy and, consequently, leads them to exercise more frequent cybercontrol (but not direct cyberaggression) toward their partners. Many people use social networks as a tool to satisfy their needs for intimacy and closeness with a partner, especially those with anxious attachment (Sullivan, 2021), whose mental schemas are characterized by a high preoccupation with relationship problems and a constant need for reciprocity. However, similar to the offline context, the two-stage model of attachment styles and threats (Harris & Darby, 2010) can help to understand how anxious attachment patterns negatively affect the processing of information contained in social networks and lead to cybercontrolling the partner. In the first stage, partner electronic surveillance in social networks, rather than alleviating insecurity about the relationship status, may evoke online jealousy and further exacerbate anxiety as a result of perceiving that the relationship is being threatened (e.g., the presence of potential rivals or signs of infidelity; Sullivan et al., 2021). Consequently, in the second stage, romantic jealousy may lead to the use of dysfunctional and unhealthy coping strategies to alleviate distress, such as, for example, cybercontrolling the partner.

The results of Study 5 suggest for the first time that electronic partner surveillance and jealousy in the social networking environment could explain the relationship between anxious attachment and a partner's cybercontrolling. Furthermore, our work makes an important theoretical contribution by applying the two-stage model of attachment styles

and threats (Harris & Darby, 2010) to understanding how anxious attachment schemas to partners are associated with dysfunctional dynamics in the online context (electronic partner surveillance) that precipitate dysregulated emotions, such as jealousy and partner cybercontrol. Likewise, our findings are consistent with the arguments of Villora et al. (2021), who suggested that the inappropriate use of social networks can evoke cycles of anxiety and lead to the perpetration of cyberdating abuse. However, it should be taken into consideration that our data are correlational in nature, so more research is needed in this area to substantiate these assumptions.

Once the individual, relational, and social factors associated with the perpetration of cybercontrol were examined, we then aimed at examining the antecedents of the direct cyberaggression perpetration in the couple. Based on Study 3's results (Chapter 2), which indicated that the main motivation driving direct cyberaggression (but not cybercontrol) is online disinhibition, as well as previous results demonstrating that online disinhibition results in cyberbullying perpetration via moral disengagement (e.g., Wang & Ngai, 2020), in Study 6 (Chapter 3), we asked: Can online disinhibition positively predict direct cyberaggression perpetration against the partner through moral disengagement?

As expected, the results revealed that people who experienced high disinhibition online tended to activate moral disengagement to a greater extent, which led them to perpetrate direct cyberaggression (but not cybercontrol) more frequently. These results converge with the theoretical foundations of reference (Bandura, 1990, 2002, 2016; Suler, 2004) by suggesting that the idiosyncrasies of the online context (anonymity, invisibility, minimization of authority, etc.), provide an ideal setting for young people to dissociate themselves from their responsibilities and moral self-sanctions and, consequently, engage in immoral behaviors, such as direct cyberaggression towards their partners. In the virtual environment, people navigate relationships and social situations without clear interpersonal boundaries or codes of behavior, which facilitates the inactivation of internal moral control and, therefore, the justification and perpetuation of transgressive behaviors in their relationships, without experiencing feelings of guilt (Paciello et al., 2020). Therefore, in line with the findings of Wang and Nagai (2020), we can deduce that online disinhibition can lead to the perpetration of direct cyberaggression through moral disengagement.

Nevertheless, Bandura (1986, 1989) suggested that to understand human behavior, it is essential to examine how personal and environmental factors interact with each other, that is, who we are when we are in a given context and how that context affects us

(Runions & Bak, 2015). In this way, Study 6 also examined the circumstances under which the psychological processes of online disinhibition and moral disengagement operate to examine the context in which direct cyberaggression against a partner takes place. In general, the results showed that high online disinhibition was associated with greater moral disconnection, mainly in men (vs. women), which, in turn, was related to a greater frequency of perpetration of direct cyberaggression only when they, in turn, frequently suffered cyberdating abuse from their partner. According to social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012), in a patriarchal society, some men may consider that women deserve violent treatment in certain situations (Expósito et al., 1998), for example, when they question the power of men in the relationship using the same strategies as them (i.e., cyberdating abuse) to manage relational conflicts. Thus, men (vs. women) can easily conform and cognitively adapt their judgment to their moral norms to justify direct cyberaggression against their partners when they defy the pre-established order, even more so if the violence takes place in the virtual context where the moral limits are blurred and greater disinhibition is experienced (Bandura, 2002). However, our work is pioneering in examining these associations, and more research in this field is needed to test and replicate our assumptions.

On the other hand, the results of Study 6 showed that the direct effect of online disinhibition on direct cyberaggression was moderated by experiences of cybervictimization in the couple. Specifically, people with high online disinhibition seem to use frequent direct cyberaggression against their partner only when they, in parallel, suffered frequent cyberdating abuse in their relationships. Similar to Moore's (2015) study, online disinhibition does not lead homogeneously to cyberviolence, but specific circumstances determine it. Frequently suffering cyberdating abuse seems to be a necessary condition for the feeling of online disinhibition leads to a high level of direct cyberaggression perpetration toward the partner.

In sum, the results of Study 6 constitute the first empirical evidence that proves how the psychological mechanisms of online disinhibition and moral disengagement work together to lead to direct cyberaggression against a partner. Furthermore, they reveal the need to consider other individual or relational factors when explaining this type of violence.

Coping Strategies to Manage Cyberdating Abuse and its Consequences

Although the coping style is crucial to understanding how victims cope with violent situations in their relationships and, thus, being able to adapt the type of intervention, the work conducted in this area is limited. Surprisingly little effort has gone into examining the responses or strategies used by victims and their effectiveness in dealing with cyberdating abuse. Most existing studies have adopted a qualitative approach and focused on examining multiple cybervictimization experiences, yielding inconclusive results (e.g., Alsawalq, 2021; Draucker & Martsof, 2010; Vitak et al., 2017). Therefore, the third objective of the thesis aimed at exploring the coping strategies associated with the victimization of cyberdating abuse and its consequences on well-being. Two studies (Studies 7–8) address this in Chapter 4.

As shown in the literature on offline IPV (e.g., Flicker et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2016), the results of Studies 7 and 8 corroborated that coping strategies mediate the impact of cyberviolence on the well-being of victims. More specifically, according to the Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) model, we observed that people who experience cyberdating abuse with high frequency (either cybercontrol, direct cyberaggression, or both) are more likely to use destructive responses (exit and neglect) to manage relationship problems, which is associated with lower psychological well-being and lower satisfaction with the relationship. A plausible explanation would be that, as a consequence of suffering frequent cybervictimization, people may experience a low sense of control and power within the relationship (Filson et al., 2010; Minieri et al., 2014; Pulerwitz et al., 2018), which could be further enhanced, as a result of the uncontrollable effects of using RICT (permanent contact with the aggressor, lack of temporary or physical limits, a wide repertoire of routes and strategies for abuse, etc.; Garaigordobil, 2011). This perceived power imbalance could encourage victims to use destructive responses (exit and neglect) as strategies to restore control/power within the relationship, similar to what other authors have observed in the context of intimate relationships (e.g., Bugental, 2010; Cross et al., 2019; Overall et al., 2016). Based on this premise, as well as on the theoretical and empirical work that supports it, in Study 8, we asked the following question: Does cybervictimization predict the use of destructive strategies (exit and neglect) due to a low perception of power in the relationship?

As we predicted, the results of Study 8 showed that people who frequently suffered cyberdating abuse reported a low sense of power in the relationship, which led to greater use of exit and neglect responses. These results corroborate previous work indicating that IPV victims generally report low perceived power in their relationships (Filson et al., 2010; Minieri et al.,

2014; Pulerwitz et al., 2018). Likewise, our findings contribute to previous literature evidencing that low relational power may lead to destructive behaviors (e.g., aggression, hostility) as a means to correct perceived power imbalances (Cross et al., 2019; Overall et al., 2016).

In relation to the above, it was of interest to examine under what conditions people who have a perception of low power in the relationship could adopt responses aimed at ending the abusive relationship (exit strategies). In this regard, the results of Study 8 indicated that people who frequently suffer cyberdating abuse showed a low sense of relational power, which led to a greater use of exit responses, only when they showed a low inclusion of the partner in self-concept (vs. high). According to the self-concept expansion model (Aron et al., 1992), people who include their partner to a lesser extent in their own identity tend to prioritize the satisfaction of their individual needs and goals over those of the partner or relationship (Keltner et al., 2003). Therefore, it makes sense that these people spend less effort to maintain the relationship when it becomes unhealthy and they perceive that their well-being and interests are being threatened. In contrast, people with high partner inclusion in the self could make extreme sacrifices to maintain the relationship (Joo & Park, 2017), even when they are subjected to cyberabusive acts by their partner. Our findings suggest that the degree of inclusion of the couple in the self-concept may be a determining relational factor in the use of active-destructive responses (exit). This strategy could be adaptive to the extent that it ends the relationship and, therefore, the cyberabuse by the partner. Nevertheless, cyberabuse by the (ex)partner often continues even after the relationship has dissolved (Torres-Albero et al., 2014). Therefore, this coping style may not be effective because it does not solve the problem, and the well-being of the victims could be at risk. Future work should address this issue and examine under what conditions perceived low power in the relationship could activate support-seeking responses. These strategies are essential in coping with IPV, mainly in women, because they can guarantee the safety and well-being of the victims (Caridade, 2018; Weathers et al., 2019), as well as promote effective coping skills that stop the abuse even if the relationship has been dissolved.

Finally, the results of Studies 7 and 8 showed that direct cyberaggression perpetration was associated with lower relationship satisfaction, mainly in women. These results are consistent with previous research showing that the impact of cyberdating abuse is more negative for women (vs. men; e.g., Stonard, 2020). As the results of Study 3 indicated, women (but not men) tend to perceive direct cyberaggression behaviors as more offensive than cybercontrolling behaviors. Therefore, it makes sense that women report less relationship satisfaction than men when they frequently experience this type of abuse in their relationships. Likewise, as previous literature indicates, direct cyberaggression is a type of violence mainly

perpetrated by men and suffered more frequently by women (Reed et al., 2021b; Zweig et al., 2013). These results are in line with the assumptions that cyberdating abuse is asymmetric to gender, and that, therefore, it must be examined within its social and cultural framework (Lucero et al., 2014).

In sum, the results presented in Chapter 4 constitute the first empirical evidence supporting that people who suffer cyberdating abuse (cybercontrol, direct cyberaggression, or both) use destructive response strategies that imply lower psychological well-being and lower satisfaction with the relationship, regardless of gender. Also, the results provide a theoretical explanation for this fact, demonstrating that the use of this type of response may be due to the low perception of power experienced by victims in their relationships. Finally, the results highlight the need to consider other relational or contextual factors when exploring coping responses to cyberdating abuse.

Limitations

The empirical work described in the previous chapters is not exempt from limitations. First, regarding the sample collection, non-probabilistic sample types were used in all the studies. In addition, most of the samples comprise young adults (18–35 years old), who are Spanish, heterosexual, and in a relationship at some point, so the results obtained cannot be generalized to the entire population. Future research should corroborate our research using more heterogeneous samples in terms of, for example, age, nationality, sexual orientation, and cultural values.

Second, the size of some effects obtained across the studies is small (Studies 4–8), possibly because we conducted statistical analyses that require larger samples to obtain a medium-large effect size. However, when sensitive topics such as cyberdating abuse are addressed, the people surveyed may show a lower predisposition to collaborate in research on this topic and recognize abusive behaviors (Lu et al., 2021), which undoubtedly makes it difficult to obtain adequate samples. Future work should replicate our results using larger samples of participants.

Third, regarding the evaluation instruments used, all the studies incorporated self-report measures based on participants' subjective perceptions, so their responses may be susceptible to recall and social desirability biases (Deans & Bhogal, 2019). However, when highly personal or emotionally charged issues are evaluated (e.g., IPV), people tend to respond more honestly using anonymous self-report surveys than using other

techniques, such as personal interviews (Del Valle & Zamora, 2022; Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2010). For this reason mainly, we applied self-report measures in all the studies presented. Despite this, future research should contrast the results obtained in this thesis, using more objective evaluation measures to address this limitation and provide greater solidity to our findings.

Finally, regarding the methodology used, several of our investigations (Studies 4–8) have a correlational nature, so we cannot draw solid causal conclusions. However, future research could use our research as a basis for the design of experimental or longitudinal studies that allow greater control of the results and facilitate interpretations of causality. Likewise, it would be advisable to use innovative research designs that can provide more precise and complete information on relationship dynamics, such as dyadic research designs, which take into account both members of the couple (e.g., Visserman et al., 2020). On the other hand, the experimental techniques used in Chapter 2 have certain limitations that must be considered. The use of hypothetical scenarios (Studies 1–2) to simulate an incident of IPV against a woman cannot achieve the precision, spontaneity, and experience of a real situation. However, numerous investigations developed in the psychology field have used this technique to devise social interactions and situations of violence, demonstrating its validity (e.g., Hammock et al., 2015; Tamborra et al., 2014; for a review, see Erfanian et al., 2020). In addition, the scenario methodology shows certain advantages such as the desensitization of difficult-to-study topics and the collection of socially undesirable behaviors (Erfanian et al., 2020). Through this technique, people generally perceive to a lesser extent that they are being evaluated, which makes them feel less threatened and more comfortable talking about their opinions and personal experiences. The critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) is also not without criticism, as it may be subject to recall and recognition biases. In addition, this technique, used in Study 3, captures a limited picture of participants' perceptions of cybervictimization experiences by referring to a single and specific event (i.e., the recorded abusive incident). Nevertheless, this retrospective technique has been widely used in social psychology, denoting its effectiveness and strong external validity in past conflictive situations (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021). Furthermore, in Study 3, we used this technique to manipulate the type of victimization, which helped us apply more control over our search and therefore minimize other causal pathways. However, we encourage future research to use different experimental methodologies that allow us to contrast our results and estimate convergent validity.

Future Lines of Research

As mentioned in the previous section, future research can take into consideration the work presented in this doctoral thesis to clarify, complement, and extend the findings. First, in addition to the antecedents of cyberdating abuse examined in this doctoral thesis, future research could contemplate other factors such as the lack of emotional regulation and/or distress tolerance (i.e., ability to bear psychological discomfort), which have been positively associated with different manifestations of IPV, both in offline (e.g., physical violence, sexual coercion, and control; Kline et al., 2017) and online (e.g., McMillan et al., 2023) contexts. Deficits in skills such as emotional regulation, anger management, and problem-solving have traditionally been recognized as risk factors for IPV. Also, similar to what we observed in Study 3, anger appears to be an antecedent of explicit and direct forms of cyberdating abuse (Reed et al., 2021a; Wright, 2017). However, little attention has been paid to examining the influence of these factors on the tendency to exercise direct cyberaggression towards a partner, as well as on the types of strategies used to manage their victimization. More specifically, we believe that emotional regulation and distress tolerance could play a relevant role in reactive cyberviolence, a dysfunctional coping strategy that seems to be gaining strength in young couples. Likewise, these factors could interact with other psychological processes (online disinhibition and moral disengagement) to promote and perpetuate abusive behavioral norms in relationships. Therefore, we believe that these issues could be a source of interest for future research.

Second, deepening the study of coping strategies, future research could focus on exploring the influence of the perceived severity on the reactions of the victims in the face of cyberabuse. In this respect, previous works have suggested that people do not always react in the same way to relationship conflicts, but this will depend on the severity attributed to them (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021; Garrido-Macías et al., 2020). For example, McNulty and Russell (2010) found that severe conflicts pose a threat to personal goals and interests, provoking hostile reactions or direct opposition. In this sense, delving into the perception that individuals have about the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of others and, specifically, their partners, is essential to determine how they react in interpersonal contexts. We believe that the identification and perception of the abuse severity could be a necessary condition for victims of cyberdating abuse to adopt active and effective coping responses that allow them to stop the violence.

Finally, although Studies 7 and 8 (Chapter 4) showed that cyberdating abuse victimization is not associated with different response patterns in men and women, we encourage future researchers to continue investigating this issue. Consistent with social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012), previous studies have shown that women more widely adopt constructive conflict resolution strategies based on cooperation, active solution-seeking, and compromise (e.g., Dildar & Yasin, 2012; Holt & DeVore, 2005). Specifically, in Chapter 4, we observed that women used the voice strategy to a greater extent, whereas men used more negligence responses, in line with what was found by other authors (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2019; for a review, see Dildar & Amjad, 2017). However, contrary to what the literature indicates, our results showed that men use more loyalty responses than women, which is striking. In general, the empirical evidence on conflict resolution strategies shows mixed results around gender (Dildar & Amjad, 2017). Therefore, although our studies have taken an initial step in exploring the coping strategies associated with cyberdating abuse and its consequences, more research is needed in this area to clarify the role of gender socialization in patterns of response from men and women.

Conclusions and Practical Implications

Although in recent years, there has been an evolution in terms of equality in Spain (López-Zafra & García-Retamero, 2021; Moya & Moya-Garófano, 2021), IPV against women continues to prevail and is perpetuated in society as a way to maintain power imbalances between men and women. This doctoral thesis provides empirical evidence that makes visible the imperceptible gender asymmetry in cyberdating abuse, highlighting the need to approach this problem from a gender perspective. Specifically, the results obtained in the thesis have a great practical implication by providing information on the variables (individual, relational, and contextual) that influence the conceptualization, perception, and commission of cyberviolence toward a partner and its consequences. Given the repercussion of this phenomenon, below, we point out some keys that may be useful to professionals in social intervention and/or clinical care.

First, our work can serve as a basis for initiatives for the dissemination, advice, prevention, and intervention of cyberdating abuse. It is essential that these initiatives go beyond the definition of this type of violence, encouraging the identification of all types of behaviors and possible victimization experiences, thus contributing to greater awareness of this problem. Psychoeducational programs for the prevention and intervention of

cyberdating abuse should advocate for the early detection of IPV and the responsible use of RICT, including pedagogical guidelines on education in values and equality, which make it possible to dismantle the gender beliefs and expectations implicit in heterosexual relationships.

Second, the results of this thesis may be of great interest for clinical intervention. Given that the anxious attachment style influences the couple's online information processing and leads to disruptive relational behavior, it is essential that professionals in psychological intervention promote secure attachment styles that allow for maintaining healthy relationships and quality. Furthermore, our findings encourage clinical psychologists who work with victims of cyberdating abuse to focus on understanding the context in which abusive incidents arise and the perception and interpretation victims make of violent situations. Likewise, because the coping style has a decisive impact on the psychological adaptation of the victims and the functioning of the relationship, these professionals should lead their intervention to empower the victims and provide them with effective tools to manage the cyberabuse, guaranteeing their well-being and security.

We, therefore, deem it essential to join efforts in research and practice to detect and dismantle the cognitive and behavioral processes that contribute to the normalization and justification of cyberdating abuse, considering the peculiarities of this type of violence, as well as the personal characteristics and relationship dynamics. Overall, we hope that this thesis can account, at least minimally, for the need to continue researching the variables that affect the perception, victimization, and perpetration of cyberdating abuse from a gender perspective to promote social policies and specific resources for the prevention and effective intervention of this problem.

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