

Masculinity Ideology and Gender Equality: Considering Neosexism

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Título: Ideología masculina e igualdad de género: valorando el neosexismo

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio es investigar la relación entre la ideología masculina tradicional, el neosexismo y la igualdad de género. De forma más específica, comprobamos el efecto del neosexismo como variable mediadora. Los resultados muestran que los hombres mantienen una mayor ideología tradicional masculina y más creencias neosexistas en comparación con las mujeres. Asimismo la ideología masculina se relaciona negativamente con la igualdad de género en hombres, mientras que en mujeres no aparece dicha relación. Por último, el análisis de mediación confirma que el neosexismo es una variable mediadora entre la ideología masculina y la igualdad de género, pero sólo en hombres. Los resultados se comentan desde la teoría de género considerando el neosexismo como un obstáculo para el logro de la igualdad de género.

Palabras clave: Ideología masculina; neosexismo; igualdad de género; mediación.

Abstract: The aims of this study are to investigate the relationship among traditional masculinity ideology, neosexism, and gender equality. Specifically we tested the effect of neosexism as a mediational variable. As expected, our results showed that men maintain more traditional masculinity ideology and more neosexist beliefs than women. Also masculinity ideology is negatively related to gender equality in men, but in women there is no relationship. The results of the mediation tests confirm that masculinity ideology is a good predictor of gender equality and it is mediated by neosexism, but only for men. The relevance of these findings with reference to neosexism as an obstacle to equality is discussed.

Key words: Masculinity Ideology; neosexism; gender equality; mediation.

Introduction

The concept of masculinity ideology evolved from the theories of social construction (Kimmel, 1987). This concept refers to sets of culturally defined standards of masculinity to which men are expected to adhere (Pleck, 1995), or the “endorsement and internalization of cultural belief systems about masculinity and the male gender, rooted in the structural relationship between the two sexes” (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993, p.88). This notion plays a crucial role in the feminist theory that has helped to create the concept of masculinity (Gardiner, 2005).

Gender research has shown that masculinity ideology is related to gender equality (Holter, 2005, for an exhaustive review). Traditional gender role socialization serves to uphold patriarchal codes by requiring that males adopt dominant behaviors (Levant et al., 2010). Some studies, such as those of Sinn (1997) and Jacobs (1996), have demonstrated that a traditional model of masculinity is related to negative attitudes towards gender equality. On the other hand, research into the predictors of gender awareness (e.g. perceiving discrimination against women) has shown it is associated with the recognition of discrimination and the existence of sexism (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994; Williams & Wittig, 1997).

Currently, covert and subtle measures of sexism have proven more adequate in evaluating the perception of sex-based power inequities (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001). In fact, the concept of neosexism reflects the complexity of current beliefs about the status of women. For example, neosexist people are not necessarily opposed to equality, but they deny the existence of discrimination and sexism against women

(Swim & Cohen, 1997). In this sense neosexism can be a relevant variable in the explanation of the relationships between masculinity ideology and gender equality. Some people can adhere to a traditional masculinity ideology (e.g. men should show physical toughness, emotional stoicism and achieve status and power) but they may or may not exhibit negative attitudes towards gender equality. So the variable that could moderate this connection is neosexism because it enables these people to deny the existence of discrimination. Specifically our hypothesis is that neosexism is a mediator between masculinity ideology and gender equality.

Masculinity Ideology

Masculinity ideology is the extent to which an individual endorses traditional male-role norms (Levant, 1995). Good and Sherrod (2001) consider that one of the most complete descriptions of traditional masculinity ideology is based on toughness, status seeking, aggressiveness and repressing emotions. In spite of recent criticism by Addis, Mansfield and Syzdeck (2010) the construct has been enormously productive, although more context and process oriented approaches are needed.

We use the term “masculinity ideology”, as introduced by Pleck (1995), to refer to sets of culturally defined standards of masculinity to which men are expected to adhere. According to Thompson and Pleck (1986), masculinity ideology is a particular constellation of dimensions upon which some individuals base their conception of masculinity. These dimensions are defined as the relative norm for toughness (in the physical as well as the mental and emotional sense), the norm related to status and, finally, the antifemininity norm. While the dimension of toughness refers to the expectations of men to be strong, competent and capable of solving their emotional problems in an appropriate way, the status dimension is defined as labor, economic and professional success, and it is generally associated with a high in-

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come. Finally, the antifemininity norm is defined as the belief that men should avoid those behaviors and tasks typically attributed to women. There are other proposals, such as Mahalik et al., (2003), who have identified eleven norms but all of these could be integrated into the above three domains (CMNI, Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory, Spanish version by Cuéllar, Sánchez López & Dresch, 2011).

In general, a person has a traditional masculinity ideology to the extent that she/he believes that men should show physical toughness and emotional stoicism, and achieve status and power (Smiler, 2004). Differences have been found between gender, with men being more traditional in masculinity ideology than women (Levant et al., 1992; Smiler, 2006). A similar result appears in an investigation by Fisher and Good (1998) who find that the most traditional men in masculine ideology, especially those who score high on the antifemininity subscale of MRNS, score very low in attitudes towards gender equality.

Wade and Brittan-Powell (2001) point out that men with traditional masculine ideology maintain negative attitudes towards gender roles and equality with women, while men with non-traditional masculine ideologies have much more positive attitudes towards gender roles and gender equality. In a study by Thompson and Pleck (1986) only the antifemininity scale predicted a traditional attitude towards women. Specifically, we expect men to be more traditional than women in masculinity ideology.

Gender Equality and Neosexism

Social theories of gender and inequality involve more than the recognition of structural gender hierarchy. It is necessary to connect societal and individual levels to understand how people re-create the social system. There is abundant evidence that most people's interests, regardless of gender, would benefit from gender equality (Barnett & Rivers, 2004), nevertheless a lot of people do not hold egalitarian gender beliefs (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

Gender equality is used in this study to refer to the experience of being aware of discrimination against women, which is considered the first step to acquiring a positive feminist identity (Downing & Roush, 1985). Research has found that the recognition of discrimination and sex-based power inequities are related to a feminist attitude (Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997). In fact, Henderson-King and Stewart (1997) point out that sensitivity to sexism is an outstanding predictor of the revelation stage of the pattern put forward by Downing and Roush (1985). However, studies such as those by Cowan et al. (1992) and those by Williams and Wittig (1997) point out that recognition of discrimination, although related, is not an appropriate predictor of a pro-feminist attitude. Possibly, as Liss et al. (2001) indicated, the explanation of these discrepancies in the results is due to the different measures and instruments used in these studies. Williams and Wittig (1997) have recognized that their seven-item scale developed to assess the recognition of discrimina-

tion has items that overlap with their measure of feminist identity. Likewise, Henderson-King and Stewart (1997) affirm that their measurement of sensitivity to sexism may be grounded in the social context. In fact, they measured this construct with visible, unambiguous items: "sometimes I'm not sure if what I'm seeing or hearing is sexist" (item 2); "I'm not always sure how to confront sexism when I encounter it" (item 9). In general, the 10 items measure two aspects: the perception of sexism and the confrontation of sexism. In all of them, the word sexism is present.

When researchers began measuring discrimination and sexism, the items were fairly straightforward. Currently the danger is that, as sexism becomes a less socially desirable trait, people become less likely to admit to their attitudes. The new forms of manifesting discrimination towards women are related to the rejection of changes in the status quo for gender relationships, and opposition to social policy changes that would benefit women. Modern sexist beliefs provide some indication of people's orientation towards gender relations. Neosexism refuses to recognize that women are discriminated against and therefore it denies the existence of sexism. It is for this reason that, as a barrier to the recognition of the existence of discrimination, neosexism can be an explanatory element of gender inequality. Currently, covert and subtle measures of sexism have proven more adequate in evaluating the perception of sex-based power inequities (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001), and how these contribute to the maintenance of gender inequalities (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). In fact, the concept of neosexism reflects the complexity of current beliefs about the status of women. For example, neosexist people are not necessarily opposed to equality and can even maintain non-traditional gender roles, but they deny the existence of current discrimination and sexism against women (Rudman & Glick 2008; Swim & Cohen, 1997).

Nowadays neosexism scales measure whether respondents tend to (a) deny the existence of discrimination against women, (b) resent complaints about discrimination, and (c) maintain a paternalistic view for women; three aspects that are an obstacle to gender equality. For example, the rejection of programs of affirmative action (Konrad & Hartmann, 2002; Tougas et al., 1995), the women's movement (Campbell, Schellenberg & Senn, 1997), and the difficulties in women's careers (Glick et al., 2005) have their origins in neosexism.

Since gender equality implies the recognition of discrimination, with a questioning of gender relations, and new sexism seems to involve both perceptions of discrimination and orientations towards gender relationships (Cameron, 2001), it is probable that new sexism mediates the relationships between masculinity and gender equality.

Although social theories have proposed a perspective of structural inequality and its relationship to male dominance, the link between the two is not well known in current research. We propose a more specific mechanism of how masculinity, in men and women, prevents gender equality. In

light of the literature reviewed above, we put forth the following hypotheses: (a) men will have more traditional views of masculinity than women, (b) men will be more neosexist than women, and (c) neosexism will have a mediational effect between masculinity ideology and gender equality.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 261 undergraduate students. Of these, 121 were male and 140 female. Ninety percent were between the ages of 18 and 32. The mean age range was 24.78, ($SD = 8.92$). The students were of different nationalities with the following distribution: 63.2 % Swiss, 11.1% members of the UE, 3.8 % non-UE members, 21.5 % dual nationality (17.6% Swiss and UE, and 3.8% Swiss and non-UE).

Instruments

Materials for this study were translated from English to French and afterwards from French to English once more to ensure that the translation was correct.

Neosexism: The Neosexism Scale (Tougas et al., 1995; Spanish version by Moya & Expósito, 2001) was used to assess modern sexist beliefs. Neosexism is defined as the “manifestation of a conflict between egalitarian values and residual negative feelings toward women” (Tougas et al., 1995, p.842). This measure is covert because it evaluates attitudes toward feminist changes in society and not direct attitudes toward women. This scale has been used in several European samples with good results (Masser and Abrams 1999; Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003). The Neosexism Scale consists of 11 items scored on a 7 point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* and 7= *strongly agree*). Example items include, “It is difficult to work for a female boss” and “Women should not hold jobs ranking higher than men.” The Neosexism scale has demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach’s α) of .80 (Cameron, 2001), and .79 (Park & Robertson 2004). Higher scores on the scale indicate sexist attitudes towards women. The reliability of the scale in this study was acceptable ($\alpha = .71$).

Masculinity Ideology: Masculinity Ideology was measured using the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS; Thompson & Pleck, 1986), a 26-item self-report scale consisting of statements about male role norms and behaviors. The MRNS was derived from Thompson and Pleck’s factor analysis of the inter-correlations among 57 items originating from the short form of Brannon and Juni’s (1984) Brannon Masculinity Scale (BMS). Thompson and Pleck’s factor analysis yielded three factors comprising 26 BMS items with salient loadings. Based on their 3-factor solution, Thompson and Pleck developed three corresponding MRNS subscales: Status, reflecting the need to gain status and respect, and

composed of 11 items (“Success in his work has to be a man’s central goal in life”, “It is essential for a man to always have the respect and admiration of everyone who knows him.”); Toughness, reflecting the expectation of men to be independent and strong mentally, emotionally and physically, and composed of 8 items (“A real man enjoys a bit of danger now and then”, “When a man is feeling a little pain he should try not to let it show very much”); and Antifemininity, reflecting the expectation of men to avoid behaviors and activities that are perceived as stereotypically feminine, and composed of 7 items; (“It bothers me when a man does something that I consider feminine”; “It is a bit embarrassing for a man to have a job that is usually filled by a woman”). All items were scored on a 7 point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* and 7= *strongly agree*). High scores denoted traditional masculinity ideology. The construct validity of the MRNS is supported by evidence that scores were positively significantly related to both men’s and women’s attitudes towards men and negatively significantly related to individuals’ attitudes towards gender egalitarianism (Sinn, 1993; as cited by Thompson & Pleck, 1995, 143). Thompson and Pleck (1986) found appropriate values of reliability: Status scale (.81), Toughness (.74) and Antifemininity (.76). In this study, the reliability was acceptable: Status scale ($\alpha = .82$), Toughness scale ($\alpha = .77$) and Antifemininity scale ($\alpha = .82$).

Gender Equality: The revelation subscale of the Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS; Bargard & Hyde, 1991) was used to assess gender equality. This subscale evaluates the perception of the oppression of women and the beginning of consciousness of this situation as well as the crisis in which the traditional role is questioned. Different instruments based on the Downing and Roush model were developed by Rickard (1989) and Bargard and Hyde (1991). While Rickard limited her FIS (Feminist Identity Scale) to affective and cognitive components of attitudes towards the self, Bargard and Hyde’s Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS) is more suitable for male participants. Several research studies have proved the reliability and validity of the scale (Fischer & Good, 1994; Gerstmann & Kramer, 1997). The FIDS was also tested by Ng, Dunne, and Cataldo (1995) to determine its cross-cultural validity.

The revelation subscale is composed of seven items scored on a 7 point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* and 7= *strongly agree*). Example items are “When I see the way most men treat women, it makes me so angry” and “It only recently occurred to me that I think that it is unfair that men have the privileges they have in this society simply because they are men”. In the item, “I am angry that I have let men take advantage of me”, the last word was changed for women in the men’s questionnaire. Responses were coded so that high scores represented higher gender awareness. In this study the reliability of the subscale was acceptable ($\alpha = .70$).

In addition, participants indicated their gender, age, qualifications and nationality.

Procedure

The surveys were administered to groups of students in class time and were submitted anonymously. The questionnaire took roughly 25 minutes to complete.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for the scales are presented in Table 1. As expected, there was a main effect for gender on masculine ideology. The women's scores on the MNRS subscales were lower than the men's, except on the status subscale, where both scored equally ($M = 3.5$). Women's values were lower for toughness ($M = 1.8$) than men ($M = 2.44$), $t = 5.22, p < .000$; and women also scored less in antifemininity ($M = 2.07$), than men ($M = 2.65$), $t = 3.98, p < .000$. In relation to neosexism, women were less neosexist ($M = 2.33$) than men ($M = 3$), $t = 5.43, p < .000$. Finally, women showed more gender equality ($M = 5.35$) than men ($M = 4.73$), $t = -2.61, p < .01$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Men and Women.

Variable	M	SD	12	3	4	5	6
Men (n= 121)							
1.M. Ideology (global)	2.8	1	.84*	.85*	.84*	.40*	-.38*
2. Status	3.5	1.09		.64*	.54*	.25*	-.23*
3. Toughness	2.44	1.19		-	.54*	.25*	-.25*
4. Antifemininity	2.65	1.35			-	.50*	-.43*
5. Neosexism.	3	1.02				-	-.52*
6. Gender Equality	4.73	1.06					-
Women (n= 140)							
1. M. Ideology (global)	2.4	.71	.78*	.80*	.82*	.26*	-.07
2. Status	3.5	.95		.45*	.37*	.16	.04
3. Toughness	1.8	.74		-	.57*	.28*	-.07
4. Antifemininity	2.07	.94			-	.26*	-.14
5. Neosexism	2.33	.90				-	-.32*
6. Gender Equality	5.35	1.08					-

* $p < .001$

A correlation analysis was performed to examine whether the constructs are related. The Pearson product moment correlation matrix for the variables (Table I) showed that, for men, masculinity ideology correlates negatively with gender equality, but this is not the case for women. The correlation between status and toughness is positive in men ($r = .64, p < .001$) and also in women ($r = .45, p < .001$) but with different statistical significance ($\chi = 2.16, p < .001$). In addition, the correlation between status and antifemininity is positive in men ($r = .54, p < .001$) and in women ($r = .37, p < .001$; $\chi = 2.32, p < .001$). A positive correlation can be seen between masculine ideology and neosexism, in both men and women, with the exception of the status subscale in women. Specifically, antifemininity is related to neosexism in men ($r = .50, p < .001$) and in women ($r = .26, p < .001$; $\chi = 2.32, p < .001$). To sum up, there are significant differences in the model of correlation between men and women.

Neosexism as Mediator

The mediational analysis ascribed a mediating function to the third variable that represented the “generating mechanism” through which the independent variable can influence the dependent variable. We used Baron and Kenny’s (1986) three-step regression approach to test the hypothesis that neosexism would mediate the effect of masculinity ideology towards gender awareness. First, a relationship must be established between the explanatory variable and the outcome variable. In fact, there was a solid negative association between gender equality and masculinity ideology (see Table I). In testing a hypothesized mediated pathway, the requirements are as follows: (1) after controlling for the explanatory variable, the relationships between mediator and outcome should differ from zero; (2) after controlling for the mediator, the relationship between the explanatory variable and the outcome should not differ from zero (complete mediation) or should be at least reduced (partial mediation); and (3) the indirect effect of the explanatory variable on the outcome should be significant.

The first regression analysis taking masculinity ideology as the independent variable and neosexism as the dependent variable confirms the relationship both in men ($\beta = .66, p < .001$) and women ($\beta = .55, p < .001$). The second equation shows the effect of the independent variable (masculinity ideology) on the dependent variable (gender equality) in men ($\beta = -.38, p < .001$) but not in women ($\beta = .07, n.s.$). The third equation introduces the independent variable (masculinity ideology) and the mediator (neosexism) as predictors. The results of the mediation tests for men are presented in Figure 1.

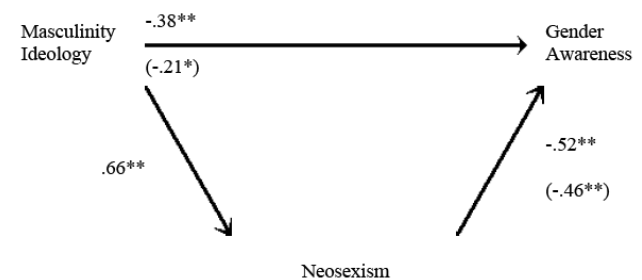


Figure 1. Unstandardized regression weights for variables in the men model. The two beta weights in parentheses report the beta weights computed after the mediator has been included in the regression equation. * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

We used Baron and Kenny’s modification of Sobel’s (1982) test to assess the significance of the reduction in the regression coefficient. In men the difference between the unmediated effect of masculinity ideology, $B = -.38$, and the mediated effect of masculinity ideology, $B = -.21$, was significant, for gender equality ($\chi = -3.43, p < .001$). In women, there is no relationship between masculinity ideology and gender equality. The results of the mediation tests for women are presented in Figure 2. Thus, it was concluded that the

effect of masculinity ideology on gender equality was mediated by neosexism only in men.

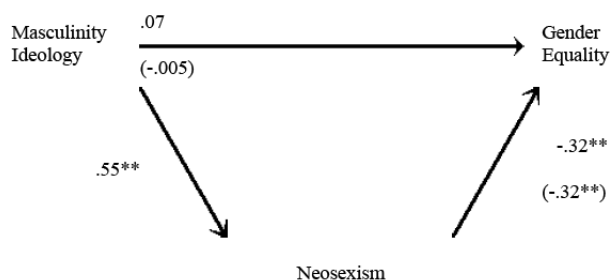


Figure 2. Unstandardized regression weights for variables in the men model. The two beta weights in parentheses report the beta weights computed after the mediator has been included in the regression equation. ** $p < .001$

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between masculinity ideology, neosexism, and gender equality. Firstly, in relation to masculine ideology, our findings show that in antifemininity and toughness, men had more traditional beliefs than women, were more neosexist, and in relation to gender equality, they scored less than women. Similar results were found by others authors (Burn, Aboud & Moyles, 2000; Glick et al., 2005; Levant et al., 1992; Twenge, 1999). Therefore, progress towards equality is a hard road because gender is deeply embedded as an organizing principle of social interaction (Ridgeway, 2006).

A different model of correlation has been found between men and women. The results show that in men masculinity ideology is negatively related to gender equality and positively related to neosexism, but this is not true for women. This relationship between gender equality and masculine ideology is an element of great importance and it endorses the utility of introducing masculinity ideology in the study of gender equality. These findings constitute an empirical confirmation of how the discrimination of women depends, in men, on a model of traditional masculinity. In women, masculinity is related to neosexism but not to gender equality. This means that men perceived equality as a form of losing power, or even identity.

The interest structures of women and men are expected to be different based upon the hegemonic gender beliefs that reify the notion of polarized gender differences (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This explains why women have more egalitarian gender ideologies than do men, as men are less likely to believe, based on cultural explanations, that gender equality will benefit them. From a practical point of view, it could be interesting to show men the advantages of other forms of masculinity and even the benefits of assuming gender equality. For women the focus is on powerful social forces that continue to preserve inequality and even to show more subtle forms of ambivalent/paternalist sexism.

The way in which we construct gender is still closely related to two categories that continue to be defined in opposition and their meaning depends one upon the other. Whether men and women are represented as two separate epistemic communities, being a man is synonymous with not being a woman and other forms of gender are precluded.

One of the commonplaces of current social liberal discourse is the adherence to the values of equality. This factor allows the admission of feminist goals and the appearance of gender equality. What neosexism does is to show evidence of the conflict between adhering to the abstract and general values of equality in theory and rejecting its application in practice. At the centre of this controversy is the fear of changing the status quo.

The present study suggests empirical evidence of the fact that neosexism, understood as resistance to the modification of gender relationships, plays an important role in gender equality. Neosexism, built on sex differences, is a basic factor in the legitimizing, justification and maintenance of inequality (Glick, 2006). The importance of this study lies in determining how neosexist beliefs, maintained by men and women, are related to social gender status. As Cecilia Ridgeway (1997) affirms, the persistence of gender hierarchy lies in the mediation of gender inequality by interactional processes which are taken for granted. Sex categorization, stereotypes and, in this case, masculinity ideology and neosexism contribute to maintain gender inequality. Neosexism is useful in that it permits denial of the existence of discrimination and it also upholds the belief that inequality is no longer a problem. In this sense it works as a factor in maintaining the traditional gender relationship and therefore as an instrument of masculine dominance that impedes gender awareness.

Neosexism could prove to be another variable that helps to explain the difficulties that men experience with feminism. From a qualitative paradigm, Pleasants (2011) has described several forms of resistance to feminism that men endorse and that serve to reinforce male privileges despite their stated willingness to learn feminism. One of them is very relevant to our study. Specifically when participants spoke of progress and attributed gendered inequality to the past: gender equality has been achieved and now gender relations are more equal than feminists claim. "Viewing gendered oppression as inevitable effectively precluded the possibility of working to end inequality and left participants' privileges intact" (Pleasants 2011, 240). We can consider the discourse of progress and inevitability as another form of expressing neosexism. In fact, in Europe gender inequality exists at home and work, even in countries that have a smaller gender gap and promote gender equality (e.g. Hearn & Pringle, 2006).

Finally, as Miller (2009) says, masculinity can be understood as an activity and also as a system. Performance of masculinity implies reaching status, and men and women agree on this aspect. Future research could investigate what and how specific behaviors in different contexts reproduce

inequality or preclude equality. What conduct and actions have the twofold function of maintaining masculinity ideology and gender inequality? What behaviors do women not perceive as sexist?

The correlational nature and characteristics of the participants (undergraduate students) limit the conclusions of this study. Our results are only relevant to occidental and white people, and it will be necessary to evaluate these relationships among other populations. Similarly there are other instruments to measure masculinity and neosexism. Future

research should examine, in other social contexts, the relationship between gender equality and other forms of masculinity. In addition, a qualitative investigation into the different models of masculinity and their relationship with feminist consciousness could also be considered. Finally, we believe that an analysis of sexist beliefs, and individual meritocratic principles, studying the relationship between neosexism and gender in greater detail, would be of great value to feminism.

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