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Sex segregation in adolescence and its relationship to ambivalent sexism

Segregación por sexo en la adolescencia y su relación con el sexismo ambivalente

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Abstract

Sex segregation is defined as the tendency to associate with peers of the same sex. This phenomenon seems to be related to the appearance of problematic behaviours, especially in boys. The objective of this work is to analyse the relationship between sex segregation and sexism, for which 900 adolescents between 13 and 18 years old (53.4% girls) completed a sociometric questionnaire and the ISA ambivalent sexism inventory. Contingency tables and a MANOVA were carried out with two factors: sex and segregation, and two dependent variables: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. The main results indicate that a quarter of adolescents, both girls and boys, maintain segregated relationships, and that sexism scores are higher in boys, especially in hostile sexism. The results of the interaction differ depending on sex. Thus, the highest sexism scores in boys appear when their relationships are segregated, while when girls relate to other girls, they obtain the lowest scores. And the opposite happens when they only interact with peers of the other sex, since in this case the girls reach their highest values, and the boys the lowest in sexism. It is also proven that, although there is no segregation and they interact with equals of both sexes,

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sexism is also present, being significantly greater in boys. These results are interpreted based on previous research, and the main practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: sex segregation, ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, gender differences, adolescence.

Resumen

La segregación por sexo se define como la tendencia a relacionarse con iguales del mismo sexo. Este fenómeno parece estar vinculado con la aparición de conductas problemáticas, especialmente en los chicos. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar la relación de la segregación por sexo con el sexismo, para lo que 900 adolescentes de entre 13 y 18 años (53,4% chicas) cumplimentaron un cuestionario sociométrico y el inventario de sexismo ambivalente ISA. Se realizaron tablas de contingencia y un MANOVA con dos factores: sexo y segregación, y dos variables dependientes: sexismo hostil, y sexismo benévolo. Los principales resultados señalan que la cuarta parte de los adolescentes, tanto chicas como chicos, mantiene relaciones segregadas, y que las puntuaciones en sexismo son mayores en los chicos, sobre todo en sexismo hostil. Los resultados de la interacción difieren dependiendo del sexo. Así, las mayores puntuaciones en sexismo en los chicos aparecen cuando sus relaciones son segregadas, mientras que cuando las chicas se relacionan con otras chicas, obtienen las puntuaciones más bajas. Y lo contrario sucede cuando solamente se relacionan con iguales del otro sexo, ya que en este caso las chicas alcanzan sus valores más altos, y los chicos los más bajos en sexismo. También se comprueba que, aunque no exista segregación y se relacionen con iguales de ambos sexos, el sexismo también está presente, siendo significativamente mayor en los chicos. Estos resultados se interpretan en función de la investigación previa, y se comentan las principales implicaciones prácticas.

Palabras clave: segregación por sexo; sexismo ambivalente; sexismo hostil; sexismo benévolo; diferencias de género; adolescencia.

Introduction and objectives

Empirical evidence has shown that the persistence of traditional gender norms, based on inequality between men and women, is behind the problem of gender-based violence (Kearns et al., 2020), which is a serious global public health challenge (Heise and Kotsadam, 2015). The Organic Law 1/2004 of 28 December on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence defines this violence as:

[...] the manifestation of discrimination, inequality and power relations of men over women, which is exercised over women by those who are or have been their spouses or by those who are or have been linked to them by similar relations of affection, even without cohabitation.
(p. 10).

The presence of this problem in adolescence is especially worrying, as this is a vital stage in development, when beliefs and ways of establishing affective-sexual relationships are shaped. A recent review found a high prevalence of intimate partner violence among young people in Europe, with Spain standing out both in the prevalence of the problem and in the number of research studies carried out on this issue (Tomaszewska and Schuster, 2021). In this sense, studies carried out in Spain find percentages of girls who have suffered some type of gender-based violence that vary between 16 and 25%, although in some types of violence, such as online harassment requesting intimate photos, it reaches 40% (Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género, 2020; Díaz-Aguado et al., 2020).

An important predictor of gender-based violence is sexism, which is configured as a set of beliefs that maintain gender inequalities. According to Marques-Fagundes et al. (2015) it is a construct that refers to beliefs about the roles, characteristics and behaviours that are understood as appropriate for both men and women, as well as the way in which relationships between the two are established. Thus, there is a belief that men and women are essentially different and therefore should have different roles and social norms (Hellmer et al., 2018). It is a construct with a certain degree of complexity, being made up of two different types of sexism, which Glick and Fiske (1996) articulated in their theory of ambivalent sexism. According to this theory, there is hostile sexism, which consists of a set of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards women, based on their supposed inferiority to men. But there is also another, more subtle type of sexism, known as benevolent sexism, which manifests itself in attitudes that, although expressed in a positive affective tone, do not fail to stereotype and limit women to more traditional roles (Goh and Tignor, 2020). Both types of sexism are based on paternalism, although hostile sexism is domineering paternalism and benevolent sexism is protective. But despite these differences, both forms of sexism perpetuate inequality and women's subordination (Marques-Fagundes et al., 2015). Research indicates that men score higher on sexism, especially hostile sexism, which is also more resistant to change than benevolent sexism (Galván et al., 2021; Vinagre-González et al., 2023).

Another relevant variable in this regard is gender segregation, which is defined as the tendency to associate with same-sex peers in their peer groups and casual encounters (Mehta and Strough, 2009). There is sufficient empirical evidence that avoiding segregation and promoting same-sex relationships from an early age has important academic, social and emotional benefits (Andrews et al., 2022; Bukowski et al., 2017; Fabes et al., 2019; Field et al., 2017; Halim et al., 2021; Hanish et al., 2021; Hooijsma et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2022). When relationships are segregated from an early age, girls tend to develop more internalising and boys more externalising problems (Mehta and Strough, 2009), and also develop different forms of emotional expression (Kwon et al., 2022). Thus, boys tend to express more emotions such as anger, while girls are more likely to express emotions such as sadness (Lindsey, 2016). For boys, socialising with girls in adolescence

also prevents the appearance of risky behaviours, such as the consumption of toxic substances (Arndorfer and Stormshak, 2008), or the development of aggressive behaviours, as these relationships help them to improve their sociability and develop empathy (Ciarrochi et al., 2017; Martín et al., 2021). In contrast, in the case of girls, some studies have found positive effects of segregation. Connolly (2004) points out that girls who interact with each other train important skills for school adjustment such as listening and respect for turn-taking. In addition, girls are more likely to ask for help and to give help to other girls with schoolwork (Kwon et al., 2022; Van Rijsewijk et al., 2016). These differences between boys and girls may be due to the characteristics that determine their social reputation, with girls standing out for their sociability, and boys for higher levels of aggressiveness and immaturity (Martín, 2016).

With the onset of adolescence comes more time spent with peers and more freedom to choose with whom to interact, and an increase in the number of relationships with peers of the other sex, although friendships with same-sex peers are maintained (Mehta and Strough, 2009). On the other hand, and in general, having friends of both sexes is related to an earlier onset of romantic relationships (Poulin and Pedersen, 2007; Savickaite et al., 2020).

Sexism and sex-segregated relationships are variables that seem to be clearly related. Some authors suggest that having relationships mostly with people of the same sex influences socialisation into gender stereotypes, which can generate asymmetrical and unequal relationships (Leaper, 1994). Thus, romantic relationships in adolescence may be distorted by interaction styles learned in the same-sex peer group, in which gender stereotypes and roles may have been strengthened, and positive attitudes towards gender-based violence may even appear (de Lemus et al., 2010; Galván et al., 2021; Mehta and Strough, 2009; Ramiro-Sánchez et al., 2018; Underwood and Rosen, 2009). As this stage of adolescence is largely spent in schools, schools cannot be exempted from responsibility for addressing the importance of working on equality between boys and girls. Thus, the European Institute for Gender Equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019) raises the importance of working on gender equality in the educational sphere, proposing recommendations for advancing towards a more equitable education

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between sex segregation in adolescent relationships and sexism, both hostile and benevolent. To this end, the following objectives are set out:

1. To find out the prevalence of gender segregation in relationships among adolescents
2. To test whether there are differences between boys and girls in ambivalent sexism scores.
3. To explore the relationship between sex segregation and ambivalent sexism, analysing whether this relationship differs between boys and girls.

Method

Sample

A non-probability sampling procedure was used, with a convenience sample that initially consisted of 911 students in Compulsory Secondary Education and Baccaulaureate from various public schools, aged 13-17 years ($M = 15.2$; $SD = 1.4$). 53.4% were girls, 45.4% boys, and 1.2% were of non-binary gender or identified with other options. Due to the objectives of this work, the final sample is composed of only female and male sexes ($N = 900$). There is no difference in age between girls ($M = 15.2$; $SD = 1.4$) and boys ($M = 15.2$; $SD = 1.5$) ($t(898) = 0.482$; $p = .63$; $d = 0.032$; 95% CI [-0.99, 0.16]).

Instruments

Sociometric questionnaire. To measure gender segregation in relationships between adolescents, an adaptation of the sociometric questionnaires was used, since personal nominations were not requested, but rather gender nominations; a strategy that has been shown to be useful for measuring gender segregation (Martín et al., 2021). The sociometric index used was that of the choices made (Rodríguez and Morera, 2001). Thus, the questionnaire was configured by the following question:

1. When you are going to do any group activity, who do you prefer to do it with?

Response options: With no one, only with girls, mostly with girls, with girls and boys equally, mostly with boys, only with boys.

Due to the low percentage responding to the options Yes, and they are all boys, and Yes, and they are mostly all boys, both options were combined, leaving the following alternatives for analysis: no one, same-sex partners, same-sex partners, and opposite-sex partners, after recoding the values in the case of boys.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory ISA (De Lemus et al., 2008). This inventory was created specifically for use with adolescents, based on the *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory*, by Glick and Fiske (1996). This inventory consists of 20 items, and is composed of two scales, Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism, of 10 items each. The response scale used is Likert-type, with the ordinal scale used by recent studies (Galván et al., 2021; Mastari et al., 2019) of 5 points, where 1 means strongly disagree, and 5 means strongly agree. Regarding reliability coefficients, both scales have acceptable values. Hostile sexism: $\alpha = .84$ and Benevolent sexism: $\alpha = .77$ (De Lemus et al., 2008). Similar results are obtained in this study: Hostile sexism: $\alpha = .87$ and Benevolent sexism: $\alpha = .76$.

Data collection and analysis procedure

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee of the University of La Laguna (code: CEIBA 2021-3108).

Several public secondary schools in Tenerife and Gran Canaria were contacted to explain the objectives of the study and to ask for their collaboration. In the end, seven schools agreed to participate, requesting that the tests be passed during tutoring hours. One of them requested that the test pass be done on paper, as he had a zero mobile phone policy. The rest preferred to do it in online format, so the test battery was also elaborated in a *Google Forms* questionnaire. Verbal informed consent was requested from the students, informing them that their participation would be voluntary, and assuring them of the anonymity of their responses. Once data collection and data cleaning had been completed, the information was dumped into a file for subsequent analysis using the statistical packages R version 4.1 and Jamovi 2.3.28. First, a contingency table was calculated to check whether there were differences in gender segregation between boys and girls. Chi-square was used as the contrast statistic. Secondly, the influence of the variables sex and sex segregation on the dependent variables hostile sexism and benevolent sexism was examined by carrying out a multivariate analysis (MANOVA) controlling for age (MANCOVA). The Pillai's *P-trace* criterion and the Type II method (unbalanced) were used, which revealed a significant effect of the interaction between sex and sex segregation. In order to verify the hypotheses related to the interactions between the variables, a separate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied for each of the sexism DVs, with the aim of carrying out post hoc multiple comparisons to identify significant differences between the means of the factors. Effect size was estimated using partial eta squared (η^2) and Cohen's δ . For η^2 values below .01 indicate a very small effect, values between .01 and .05 small, between .06 and .13 moderate, and values equal to or above .14 indicate a large effect size. In the case of Cohen's δ , values below .20 mean a very small size, between .20 and .49 small, between .50 and .79 moderate, and equal to or greater than .80 large (López-Martín and Ardura, 2023).

Results

Figure 1 shows the percentages of boys and girls in the different response categories in the sociometric test. In general, it can be seen that both boys and girls tend mostly to choose peers of both sexes, although about a quarter do tend to segregate themselves by choosing peers of the same gender. Although it seems that a higher percentage of girls report that they relate equally to both sexes, the chi-square test shows that this difference is not significant between boys and girls [$\chi^2(3) = 5.239; p > .05$].

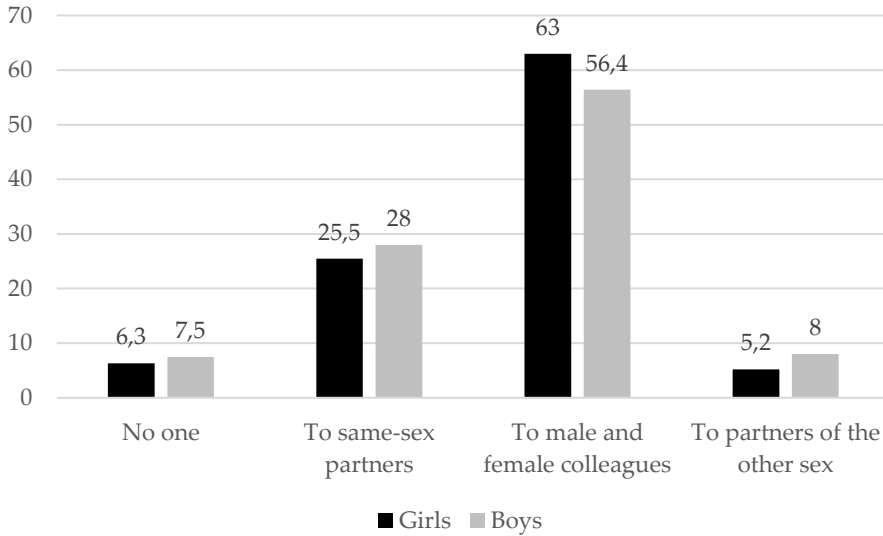


Figure 1. Percentages of girls and boys according to the choices they have made according to gender

The correlation between the dependent variables hostile sexism and benevolent sexism was significant ($r = .552; p < .001$), so performing individual ANOVAs would have been biased because they do not control for DV correlations as a MANOVA does.

First, the ambivalent sexism scores were subjected to a MANCOVA where the effect of the covariate age was not significant ($F(2,834) = 0.703; p = .495$). The Box's test indicates that there is heterogeneity between the variance-covariance matrices of the groups, so we chose to use Pillai's trace. The MANOVA with scores on the two related dependent variables (hostile sexism and benevolent sexism) yielded the following results when measuring the effect of the two main factors and the interaction between them. The effect of the sex variable was found to be significant and with a large effect size (Pillai's trace = .2426, $F(2,835) = 133.72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .24$). The effect of the sex segregation variable is also significant, although in this case the effect size is small (Pillai trace = .0216, $F(6,1672) = 3.04, p = .0058, \eta^2 = .022$). The interaction effect between the two variables was also significant, and with a small effect size (Pillai trace = .0477, $F(6,1672) = 6.8, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$).

Figure 2 plots the canonical function of the MANOVA discriminant analysis for the sex factor. Boys tend to obtain positive scores in the discriminant function of hostile sexism ($M_{\text{boys}} = 0.62$) while girls tend to obtain negative scores ($M_{\text{girls}} = -0.53$), so that an increase in hostile sexism ($\beta_{\text{hostile}} = 1.04$) will make it more likely that the adolescent will obtain a positive score and with them fit the pattern of boys, and, on the contrary, a hostile sexism

below the mean will be characteristic of a girl. As for benevolent sexism, a value above the mean will decrease the discriminant score ($\beta_{\text{benevolent}} = -0.087$) and will be more characteristic of girls, and vice versa, a benevolent sexism score below the mean will increase the likelihood that the adolescent will be classified as a boy.

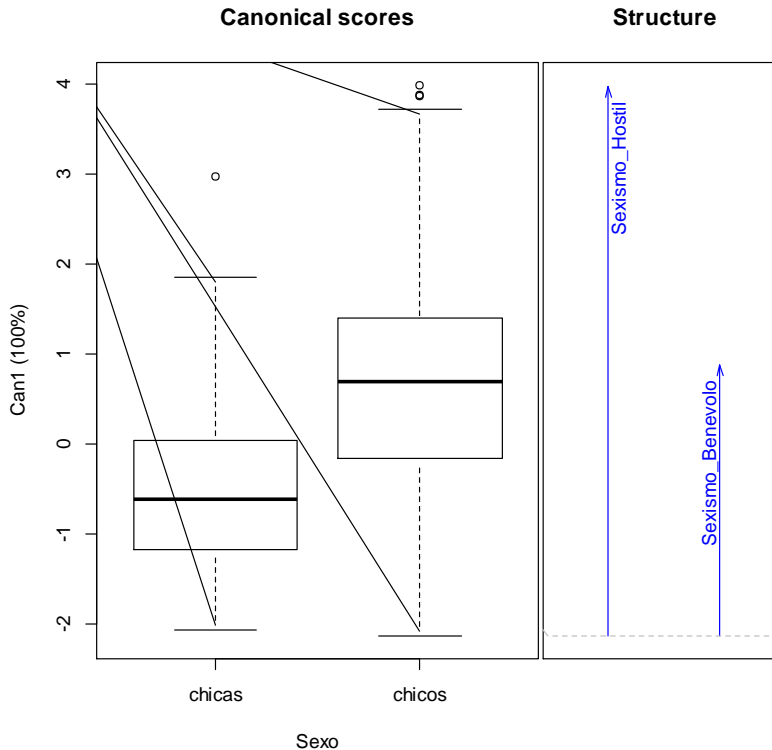


Figure 2. Canonical function of the MANOVA discriminant analysis for the sex factor.

After checking for joint significance using MANOVA, the standard analytical protocol was followed, so an ANOVA is performed for each of the two dependent variables. The results for both variables showed statistical significance, except for the sex segregation factor for benevolent sexism. On the hostile sexism dimension, there is a small interaction effect ($F(3,836) = 622.65; p < .001; \eta^2 = .0465$) and a large significant effect size on the gender factor ($F(1,836) = 274.75; p < .001; \eta^2 = .2474$), where almost a quarter of the variance is attributable to being a girl or a boy. However, in benevolent sexism there is only significant effect on the gender factor; the result on this factor was smaller than on the hostile dimension ($F(1,836) = 51.66; p < .001; \eta^2 = .0582$), with 5.8% of the variance attributable to being a girl or a boy.

Finally, post hoc contrasts based on the estimated marginal means were carried out using the Bonferroni correction for the mean difference adjustment criterion. Table 1 shows the results on the two dimensions of sexism in the gender factor. In hostile sexism the mean difference between adolescents ($M_{Girls} = 21.3$ and $DT_{Girls} = 0.49$ vs. $M_{Boys} = 27.6$ and $DT_{Boys} = 0.48$) was significantly larger than in benevolent sexism ($M_{Girls} = 24.9$ and $DT_{Girls} = 0.48$ vs. $M_{Boys} = 27.4$ and $DT_{Boys} = 0.45$) with large and small effect sizes respectively.

Table 1

Differences between girls and boys in hostile and benevolent sexism

Comparison		95% Confidence Interval							
Sexism	Sex	diff. averages	US A	gl	t	p Bonferroni	δ Cohen	Min.	Max.
Hostile	girls-guys	-6.32	0.69	857	-9.17	< .001	-0.932	-1.14	-0.73
Benevolent	girls-guys	-2.56	0.66	854	-3.89	< .001	-0.396	-0.597	-0.196

Note.

Comparisons are based on estimated marginal means.

With respect to the interaction on hostile sexism, Table 2 shows that for any response option in the sociometric test question, boys show higher levels of sexism than girls, with a large effect size, except when choosing peers of the other sex, a response option in which the differences are not significant. Moreover, when they tend to segregate by choosing peers of the same sex, the standardised differences in hostile sexism between girls and boys are much more pronounced ($\delta = -1.75$; 95% CI [-2, -1.5]). For benevolent sexism, a similar pattern of behaviour is observed with smaller differences in sexism and medium effect sizes, except when they say they do not choose anyone, or choose peers of the other sex, where no significant differences are found.

Table 2

Post hoc comparisons of sex interaction with sex segregation in Sexism (hostile and benevolent)

Comparison									95% Confidence Interval		
Sexism	sex	segregation	diff. averages	USA	gl	t	<i>P</i> Bonferroni	δ Cohen	Min.	Max.	
Hostile	girl	boy	nobody	-5.55	1.74	857	-3.2	.04	-0.82	-1.3	-0.31
			same sex	-11.86	0.89	857	-13.3	<.001	-1.75	-2.02	-1.48
			both sexes	-6.52	0.59	857	-10.9	<.001	-0.96	-1.14	-0.78
			other sex	-2.43	1.43	857	-1.7	1	0.36	-0.05	0.77
Benevolent	girl	boy	nobody	-2.6	1.68	854	-1.6	1	-0.4	-0.91	0.1
			same sex	-4.82	0.85	854	-5.7	<.001	-0.75	-1	-0.49
			both sexes	-3	0.57	854	-5.23	<.001	-0.46	-0.64	-0.23
			other sex	0.19	1.7	854	0.11	1	0.03	-0.49	0.56

Note. Comparisons are based on estimated marginal means.

Figures 3 and 4 show that in both hostile and benevolent sexism, boys have the highest level of sexism when choosing same-sex peers ($M_{\text{hostile}} = 31.1$; $D_{\text{hostile}} = 0.64$ and $M_{\text{benevolente}} = 28.56$; $D_{\text{benevolente}} = 0.61$), while for girls it is the lowest level ($M_{\text{hostile}} = 19.2$; $D_{\text{hostile}} = 0.62$ and $M_{\text{benevolente}} = 23.7$; $D_{\text{benevolente}} = 0.59$), and they tend to have the highest level of sexism when choosing boys ($M_{\text{hostile}} = 24$; $D_{\text{hostile}} = 1.4$ and $M_{\text{benevolente}} = 26.4$; $D_{\text{benevolente}} = 1.3$). In contrast, when boys choose girls they show the lowest levels of sexism ($M_{\text{hostil}} = 25.4$; $D_{\text{hostil}} = 1.3$ and $M_{\text{benevolente}} = 26.2$; $D_{\text{benevolente}} = 1.1$).

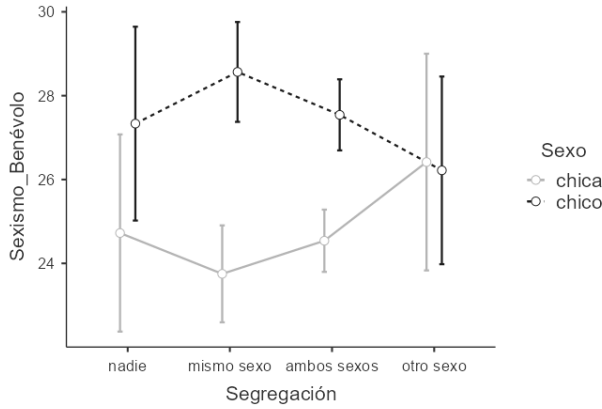


Figure 3. Interaction effect between the factors sex and sex segregation on the variable hostile sexism.

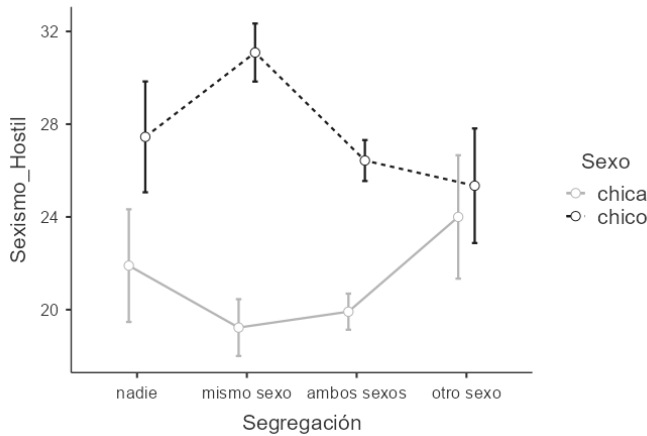


Figure 4. Interaction effect between the factors sex and sex segregation on the variable benevolent sexism.

Discussion and conclusions

The first objective of this study was to find out the prevalence of gender segregation in the relationships that adolescents maintain. The results found that approximately a quarter of adolescents maintain segregated relationships with their peers. According to previous research, it can be stated that one in four boys is at risk, since, in their case, segregation is associated with the development of relationship patterns based on immature and aggressive behaviours (Ciarrochi et al., 2017; Kwon et al., 2022; Martín, 2016; Martín et al., 2021; Mehta and Strough, 2009;), leading to risky behaviours that can even lead to substance use (Arndorfer and Stormshak, 2008). In contrast, in the case of girls, segregation may even have a protective effect, as they train skills useful for school adjustment such as listening, respecting turn-taking, or helping (Connolly, 2004; Kwon et al., 2022; Van Rijsewijk et al., 2016). The results also show that more than half of the adolescents maintain relationships with peers of both sexes, which in principle is interpreted as a factor promoting academic, social and emotional adjustment (Halim et al., 2021; Hanish et al., 2021; Hooijsma et al., 2020; Martín et al., 2021). This also has an impact on an earlier onset of romantic relationships (Savickaite et al., 2020), so it is particularly relevant to analyse the presence of sexism in this population, which directly connects us to the second objective of this paper. The results found when analysing the ambivalent sexism scores between girls and boys show that the latter obtain higher scores, especially in hostile sexism, corroborating what previous studies have already pointed out (Galván et al., 2021; Vinagre-González et al., 2023). Although both types of sexism are closely related, they have specific characteristics that deserve to be commented on. The presence of hostile sexism in adolescent boys is particularly worrying, as it is a phase of life development in which stereotypes are entrenched, and sexist attitudes materialise at the beginning of relationships, and may even generate positive attitudes towards gender-based violence (de Lemus et al., 2010; Galván et al., 2021; Mehta and Strough, 2009; Underwood and Rosen, 2009). In benevolent sexism, which also perpetuates inequality and discrimination against women, the differences between boys and girls are smaller, possibly due to its supposedly protective nature, which makes some girls feel flattered and protected, even perceiving relationships as egalitarian, equal and satisfying (Goh and Tignor, 2020; Hammond and Sibley, 2011), although in reality it is also a risk factor for the occurrence of gender-based violence (Marques-Fagundes et al., 2015).

The third and last objective of this study was to explore the relationship between sex segregation and ambivalent sexism, analysing whether this relationship differs between boys and girls. The results confirm that both variables are related, and that the relationship is different for boys and girls. The pattern of relationship is the same for both types of sexism, although the relationship is clearer in the case of hostile sexism. The largest differences in sexism scores occur when there is segregation, i.e. when adolescents relate to peers of the same sex. It is in these cases that boys achieve the highest scores, and girls

the lowest. Previous work has shown that, while for boys, segregation can influence socialisation based on gender stereotypes, and thus the emergence of sexist attitudes and behaviours (de Lemus et al., 2010; Galván et al., 2021; Mehta and Strough, 2009; Ramiro-Sánchez et al., 2018; Underwood and Rosen, 2009), for girls it can be a protective factor, as they develop socioemotional skills such as empathy, listening and helping, which are difficult to match with anti-equality attitudes (Kwon et al., 2022; Van Rijsewijk et al., 2016).

When relationships tend to be mostly with peers of the other sex, sexism scores are the opposite. Thus, while girls obtain the highest sexism scores, the opposite happens in the case of boys: it is when they have the lowest sexism scores. Boys who tend to relate mostly to girls show high levels of sociability and empathy (Martín et al., 2021), which hinders the development of attitudes favourable to inequality and sexism. In contrast, girls who associate mostly with boys may be socialised in stereotypes and gender roles based on inequality, as well as being more frequently exposed to risky behaviours, both sexual and consumer (Mehta and Strough, 2009; Ramiro-Sánchez et al., 2018). In this regard, early interventions from preschool age designed to foster relationships with male and female peers have been shown to have positive effects on the development of prosocial behaviour (Hanish et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2022). The proposal for these interventions is supported by the current Law on Education (LOMLOE) Organic Law 3/2022 of 29 December, in which there is a clear commitment to education for equality, which is also included in a cross-cutting manner in education in values. An interesting proposal in this sense is the one made by Prendes-Espinosa and García-Tudela (2020) through their theoretical review on gender equality and the use of ICT to conclude on the need to co-educate through projects. On the other hand, the involvement of families together with teachers in multidisciplinary prevention and intervention programmes is necessary to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence among adolescents (Monreal-Gimeno et al., 2014).

These efforts to combat segregation should also be made in out-of-school and community contexts, such as in the field of sport, where from a certain age onwards practice is segregated.

Although maintaining relationships with male and female peers has multiple benefits at all levels (Andrews et al., 2022; Bukowski et al., 2017; Fabes et al., 2019; Field et al., 2017; Halim et al., 2021; Hanish et al., 2021; Hooijsma et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2021), this study has found that it is not enough to end sexist attitudes, especially in the case of boys, as they have significantly higher sexism scores than girls. If we take into account that relating to peers of both sexes is the most common, as it is done by more than half of the sample, and that it is related to an early onset of romantic relationships (Poulin and Pedersen, 2007; Savickaite et al., 2020), this result should be interpreted as a warning about the need to develop interventions in the field of equality and affective-sexual education.

In view of the above, it is concluded that segregation in relationships in adolescence is clearly related to sexism, and that this relationship differs according to sex, being positive for girls in some cases, and negative for boys. This fact underlines the importance of

analysing the differences between men and women, disaggregating the results by sex, in order to avoid gender bias, as recommended by entities such as the APA (2007) or the European Commission (European Commission, 2011).

We do not want to finish without commenting on the limitations of this study. The main one refers to the design used, which, being cross-sectional, does not allow us to establish causal relationships between variables. In this sense, it would be advisable in future studies to go deeper in this sense, to check whether it is sexism that is behind segregation, or vice versa, including other variables that could be modulating the results, such as sexual orientation, the type of task or activity in which the adolescents are involved, or the equality policies developed by the centres, among others.

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