

Both sexism and racism are similar mental processes

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According to researchers at the UPV-EHU, encouraging equality and decreasing prejudices would have a positive effect in preventing violence in general. Credit: LUIS DEMANO / SINC

Prejudiced attitudes are based on generalised suppositions about certain social groups and could well be a personality trait. Researchers at the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) have confirmed the link between two types of discriminatory behaviour: sexism and racism. They also advise of the need for education in encouraging equality.

Maite Garaigordobil, professor of [Psychological Testing](#) at the UPV, is the co-author of this study which explores the link that sexism has with [racism](#) and other variables. She explains that "people who are highly sexist, whether they be hostile (seeing women as the inferior sex) or benevolent (believing that women are the weaker sex and need to be

protected and cared for), also have racist tendencies".

The results of the study show that both processes are closely related and that they are likely to be based on more general beliefs about relationships between different [social groups](#). Garaigordobil states that "the results even suggest that such prejudiced attitudes could be a [personality trait](#)."

"Sexism is linked to authoritarianism and a leaning towards [social dominance](#)," explains the author. "In other words, sexist people accept [hierarchies](#) and [social inequality](#), they believe that different social groups have a status that they deserve and they feel that the social class to which they belong is the best."

During the study it was also confirmed that sexism is related to low intercultural sensitivity. Sexist people show low levels of involvement when it comes to interacting with [immigrants](#). They also present low levels of respect for differences, confidence towards immigrants and desire to interact with them.

The need for education policies

A sample population of 802 participants from the Basque Country between 18 and 65 years of age was used to carry out the study. Its main objective was to determine the relationship between sexism and self-image, racism and intercultural sensitivity. Therefore, Garaigordobil and Jone Aliri, also a researcher at the UPV, proposed different tests, the results of which were later interpreted using correlational methodology.

The authors highlighted the importance and need for psychoeducation during infancy and adolescence as a way of encouraging equality among both sexes and respect for others. Garaigordobil explains that "one of the variables that foretells sexism is prejudice. This implies that

psychological intervention to reduce prejudice in general would help in reducing sexism."

She goes on to add that "sexism is one of the main beliefs that keeps gender inequality alive and if we bear in mind the close connection between sexism and domestic violence, encouraging equality and reducing prejudice will have a positive affect on preventing violence in general."

Low self-esteem is not linked to higher levels of sexism

The study indicates that there is hardly relationship between low self-esteem and sexism, which goes against the authors' initial hypotheses. "Given the important role that self-esteem plays in interpersonal relationships, we were hoping to find a negative correlation, or rather, the lower the self-image, the higher the level of sexism."

It has been confirmed in previous studies that low self-esteem can bring about negative interpersonal relationships such as domination or aggressiveness. Despite this however, Garaigordobil insists that "this new data points to the fact that there is hardly a relationship between these two variables and that when there is, it is found only in men and is not very strong."

However, sexism does indeed have an influence on how people see themselves. "Men with higher levels of hostile sexism describe themselves using adjectives associated with masculinity, i.e. physically strong, brave, sure of themselves, determined, admirable, etc" says Garaigordobil. "Women who display hostile sexism described themselves using characteristics that go against femininity such as not very cooperative, not very tolerant, not very compassionate and not very

sensitive or sentimental."

In addition, men who scored highly in benevolent sexism described themselves using adjectives associated with femininity (warm, friendly, good...). This was also the case for women who displayed benevolent sexism.

With regards to sexism and its link to self-perception, we must bear in mind that it does not affect men and women in the same way.

Garaigordobil states that "whilst [sexism](#) allows men to continue in a position of superiority, it stops women from developing their full potential." This means that the relationship between these two constructs is different for both sexes.

More information: Maite Garaigordobil y Jone Aliri. "Sexismo hostil y benevolente: relaciones con el autoconcepto, el racismo y la sensibilidad intercultural". Revista de Psicodidáctica, 16(2), pp 331-350. 2011.

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