

Comparative analysis of sexual machismo in Peruvian and Chilean university students

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Introduction: The sexual machismo is a sort of sexism that denigrate women and is associated with several risk factors for mental health. **Objective:** In the present study, we compare machismo levels among university students from Peru and Chile according to their nationality and other sociodemographic variables. **Method:** 303 male students from two private universities located in both countries formed the sample. They were assessed by the 12 items Sexual Machismo Scale designed by Díaz et al. (2010) previously validated for both samples. **Results:** 28% of the students' assessment presents high machismo levels, and Peruvian students have higher levels of machismo compared to the Chilean students. Moreover, the students who frequently consume alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs, obtained higher punctuations on sexual machismo. **Conclusions:** We conclude that Peruvian students are more chauvinist than their Chilean counterparts, and sexual machismo is associated to the consumption of psychoactive substances.

Key words: Machismo, comparative, Peruvian, Chilean.

Introduction

Machismo can be defined as a set of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that imply the superiority of men over women, based on certain stereotypes and prejudices¹. Machismo is present in all scenarios of human coexistence, such as work², family³, school⁴, and society, through various sources such as the media⁵, positions of power and command hierarchies in business, military, and political organizations. Machismo, however, is a social construct that has been developed in the course of history, and in each era, various justifications have been used to argue the superiority of men⁶. As a cultural construct, machismo is a form of sexism, which is opposed to feminism and

not always expressed in the same way⁷. In this sense, the theory of ambivalent sexism explains that machismo can be expressed in both a hostile and benevolent way. However, in each case, women are considered inferior to men⁸. Arciniega, Tovar and Anderson⁹, for example, argue that machismo and chivalry could be analogous to hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, respectively, but not for this reason do they cease to be expressions of machismo, with charges of negative opinion about women.

This conception, which minimizes women, is usually associated with discriminatory treatment that violates the rights of equality and can manifest itself in openly aggressive forms¹⁰. In this sense, various studies have emphasized that sexism is directly associated

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with aggressiveness and angry emotions^{11,12,13}. However, assaults can occur from male to female and vice versa¹⁴, although those committed by men have been more studied.

A theory that explains this aggressiveness in a bidirectional way is the model of Sandra's sexual roles Bem, who points out that masculinity and femininity are located in opposite positions within a continuum, where the most radical positions, be they male-chauvinist or feminist, are unhealthy¹⁵. From the theory of sexual roles, it is assumed that, socially, women must be submissive, sensitive, self-sacrificing, industrious, moralistic, etc., while men must be competitive, aggressive, and successful and even mischievous and womanizer¹⁶. These behavior patterns have been structured throughout history¹⁷ and are more common in conservative societies than liberal societies¹⁸.

Given this, a central position in the continuum of sexual roles would be androgyny¹⁵. Thus, several studies indicate that androgyny is positively related to the adequate adjustment of the couple¹⁹, while machismo and feminism are associated with alterations in mental health, the mismatch being more significant when women assume radical behavior patterns or when their behavior has been masculinized, either expressively or instrumentally²⁰.

Now, with regard to sexual machismo, this construct refers to beliefs and behaviors that imply a conception of submission by women or control by men in the specific field of sexual intimacy, but which is associated with machismo as a sexual role²¹. This implies a series of risks for the sexual and reproductive health of women, because machismo is associated with a negative disposition towards the use of contraceptives and prophylactics that serve to prevent unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections²².

Sexual machismo is also linked to disrespectful, selfish, distrustful, and irresponsible behaviors, such as jealousy and infidelity²³, and, above all, physical and psychological aggressions mediated by the "mentality" of superiority and possession that man has over woman, coming to consider her as an object²⁴. This objectification of women has very adverse effects on their mental health

²⁵. On the other hand, macho men have a negative attitude towards homosexuals, so sexual machismo is positively correlated with homophobia²⁶. However, machistas or male chauvinists tend to have a more favorable attitude towards female than male homosexuality²⁷.

In sexual terms, male chauvinists want to highlight their heterosexual and phallic capacity, so that the more sexual partners they have, the larger their virile member is, and the more sexual power they have, the more "man" they are. Likewise, it will also highlight its power over women; therefore, it will be more aggressive, being able to exercise control over its partner through physical and psychological violence²⁸.

Likewise, sexual machismo is associated with the socioeconomic level, since male chauvinists tend to have a lower level of education, lower economic income and are located in disadvantaged social strata, around a "subculture" of poverty and marginality²⁹. On the contrary, men from high socioeconomic backgrounds have behavior patterns that could be considered at odds with machismo, or even considered effeminate, by machistas. This is because men of higher economic strata go to the gym, cultivate their body, and take care of their body image; they go to spas and styling salons³⁰. In this sense, it has been reported that, in men, the prevalence of eating disorders has increased, disorders that were traditionally considered female³¹.

In other words, the patterns of expression of machismo in general and of sexual machismo could be changing due to the liberation of sexuality, the advance of feminism, the insertion of women in the labor market, and their consequent economic independence²⁹. For example, in Mexico, personality traits that were considered typically feminine some 50 years ago, such as self-denial, obedience, and virginity, have changed³². Although sexism is present in Mexican society, women are changing their behavior patterns, which could also have an impact on male behavior³³. In Peru, it has been reported, in a similar way to that reported in Mexico, that women are abandoning certain beliefs or patterns of behavior and are assuming more masculine behaviors³⁴.

In Chile, for example, women are opting for

selective single parenthood, that is, they prefer to have children without the presence of a father or without the need to form a nuclear family, since this implies, for many of them, a notable reduction of their freedom and independence³⁵. On the other hand, the economic and social empowerment of women also translates into certain criteria for choosing the partner, because while until a few years ago, women were looking for a partner with social status and a favorable economic position, today, given that women enjoy greater economic autonomy and assume positions of leadership and power in society, it is based more on attractiveness male physique³⁶. This also occurs in the opposite direction in men, who now choose women, not because of their physical attractiveness but because of their social position^{7, 37}.

In Peru, the study of machismo has been scarcely addressed, despite the fact that, according to certain reports, it is ranked as the most macho country in Latin America³⁸. On the other hand, studies in various Latin American countries have a common denominator, pointing out that males who are machistas have grown up in homes where their father was also machista, used to drink alcohol, and beat their mother, denigrating and being jealous of her^{39, 40}. Studies on sexism in Arequipa are also scarce^{41, 42}; therefore, in this research work, the intention is to comparatively analyze sexual machismo in university students from Peru and Chile. It is, therefore, a comparative associative study⁴³.

Materials and method

Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 303 male university students with an average age of 21.19 years, with a standard deviation of ± 2.31 within a range of 18 to 27 years. Of the sample, 49.5% were Peruvian students (N= 150) from a private university in Arequipa, and 50.5% were Chilean students (N= 153) from a private university in Iquique. Regarding marital status, 95.4% were single, 1% were married and 3.6% were cohabiting. Likewise, 94.1% did not have children, in contrast to 5.9% who did. Regarding the semester of studies, 21.5% were in their first year, 13.5% in their second, 29.4% in their

third year, 22.8% in their fourth, and 12.9% in their fifth year of university training. Regarding religion, 60.7% were Catholic, 10.2% agnostic, 9.2% atheist, 4.6% evangelical, 1.7% Mormon, and 13.5% professed other religions. Data were also collected about the consumption of psychoactive substances; 35.3% consumed alcohol, 3.3% tobacco, 2.3% illegal drugs, 34% did not consume any of them, 11.6% consumed alcohol and tobacco, and 13.5% consumed alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. According to the frequency of consumption, 33.3% had never used psychoactive substances, 60.4% consumed them sporadically, and 5.9% consumed them frequently. The sample was selected under non-probabilistic methods using the quota sampling technique.

Instruments

To assess sexual machismo, the Castañeda Scale of Sexual Machismo (ESM Sexismo-12) was used, which was validated by Díaz et al.²¹ in a sample of university students. The scale consists of 12 items and a Likert-type scale with five response alternatives from Totally Disagree to Totally Agree. The scale can be applied collectively or individually, both to men and women, but who have reached the age of majority. The test has a one-dimensional structure obtained through confirmatory factor analysis and adequate fit indices, as well as reliability indices that exceed⁷, obtained through the internal consistency method with Cronbach's alpha test and McDonald's Omega test.⁴⁴.

A sociodemographic card was also applied to provide data on their age, year of studies, marital status, number of children, religion, frequency, and consumption of psychoactive substances.

Procedure

The instruments were applied in the facilities of the two private universities, located in Peru and Chile. The students signed the informed consent and agreed to participate voluntarily. The application of the instrument took approximately two minutes per person in hours of the day. The data from the samples from both universities were collected between the months of March and July 2019.

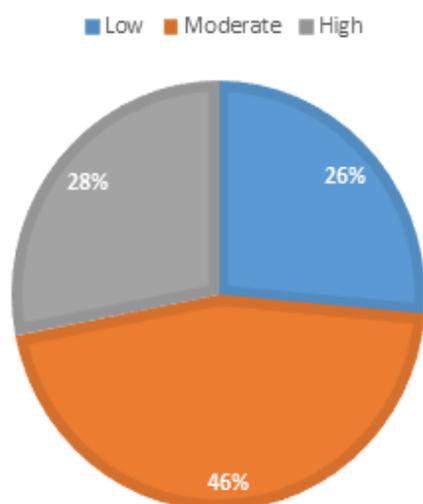
Data analysis

The information collected was coded and processed using the SPSS version 21 statistical program, according to the level of measurement of the variables and the normality of the data. In this sense, parametric and non-parametric statistical tests, such as Mann Whitney U and analysis of variance, were applied in order to make comparisons. Meanwhile, to assess the normality of the data and considering the size of the sample, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied. Post hoc analyses were performed using the Scheffé test.

Results

Firstly, sexual machismo had an average score of 19.48, with a standard deviation of ± 6.99 within a range of 10 to 50. Likewise, 26% of the participants were at a low level, 46% at a moderate level, and 28% at a high level (see Figure 1). Regarding the levels of machismo according to the nationality of the university students, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded significant values ($p = .028$), which suggests that the distribution of the data of this variable is not normal. Consequently, the Mann Whitney U test was applied to compare sexual machismo between Peruvians and Chileans, finding that Peruvians have a mean of 20.96 and Chileans a mean of 18.03. These differences, being highly significant ($p = .001$), indicated that the

Figure 1. Levels of sexual machismo in university students from Peru and Chile



Peruvians are more machistas than Chileans.

Considering marital status as a criterion for comparison, no significant results were obtained ($p = .434$), nor did it occur with respect to whether they had children or not ($p = .189$), religion ($p = .149$) or year of studies ($p = .139$). However, with respect to substance use, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test yielded a non-significant value, which suggests that the data distribution is normal ($p = .530$). Therefore, the analysis of variance was applied, finding highly significant differences in machismo taking psychoactive substance use as a comparison criterion ($p = .001$). The analysis of homogeneity of variance was significant ($p = .010$); therefore the Scheffé test was applied post hoc. Table 1 shows that significant differences were recorded between those who do not consume PAS versus those who consume alcohol and tobacco, or alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. Thus, students who do not consume any PAS are less sexist compared to those who do use alcohol and tobacco, who, in turn, obtained lower levels of machismo compared to those who consume alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs. In other words, the greater the consumption of PAS, the greater the machismo.

Regarding the frequency of PAS consumption, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test yielded a non-significant value, which suggests that the distribution of the data is normal ($p = .169$), which implied the application of the analysis test variance, finding highly significant differences ($p = .000$). The analysis of homogeneity of variance was significant ($p = .000$), so the Scheffé test was also applied post hoc. Table 2 shows that those who never consume PAS had the lowest averages in sexual machismo, compared to those who consume them sporadically and those who consume them frequently. In other words, the levels of machismo increase with a higher frequency of PAS consumption

It can be concluded, therefore, that Peruvian university students are more macho than Chilean university students, and that machismo is associated with the use of psychoactive substances and the frequency of consumption of these.

Table 1. Analysis of variance of machismo according to the consumption of psychoactive substances

Consumption of PAS	Mean	DE	p	F	p
None	16.48	4.22	.041	4.230	.001
Alcohol and tobacco	18.68	6.48	.005		
Alcohol, tobacco, and drugs	23.0	8.98	.005		

Table 2. Analysis of variance of machismo according to the frequency of PAS consumption

Consumption frequency	Mean	DE	p	F	p
Never	18.46	6.43	.001	6.331	.000
Sporadically	19.39	6.48	.011		
Frequently	26.05	11.13	.001		

Discussion

The objective of this study was to comparatively analyze sexual machismo in a sample of Peruvian and Chilean university students, finding that Peruvian students are more macho than their Chilean counterparts. These data are consistent with reports that indicate that Peru is one of the Latin American countries with the highest rates of machismo³⁸. They could also find support with the fact that machismo is more acute in conservative countries than in liberal countries¹⁸. On the other hand, the results obtained should be a sign of alarm, because a recent report of an investigation carried out in Peruvian university students showed that those who present higher levels of neuroticism and sexual insecurity also present higher levels of anxiety as a trait⁴⁵. The latter is important since machismo is considered a manifestation of emotional instability and insecurity towards the opposite sex^{28, 29}.

This presumes that machista students could present some emotional imbalance that places them at risk of suffering in the medium or long term, from some mental disorder, as has been reported in various studies on masculinity and femininity, when they are polarized as radical perceptions of sexual roles^{15, 16, 19, 20, 21}. In that sense, as already mentioned, sexism has been related to problems with anger control¹¹ and

openly violent behaviors that affect the partner and the closest environment of machistas^{10,12}.

Another interesting finding was the association of sexual machismo with the consumption of psychoactive substances, as university students who presented higher scores on machismo were those who consumed more psychoactive substances (alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs) and more frequently. This is relevant because machismo and alcohol consumption have been identified as powerful predictors of domestic violence in Peru¹³. Similarly, it is known that these patterns of violent behavior against women begin in adolescence and youth, becoming more recurrent and severe in later life, or in relationships⁴⁵, even more so when emotional dependence is present, and an inability to resolve conflicts adequately is evidenced⁴⁸.

In this sense, machismo in general and sexual machismo, as well as other forms of sexism, are accompanied by mental rigidity that makes it very difficult for sexist people to be tolerant of opinions, ideas, or actions that differ or are opposed to their own; even this leads to frustration and aggression, be it physical or verbal²⁹. Considering also that it is a young population, in which just under a third (28%) shows high levels of sexual machismo, it is essential to introduce these issues in school and higher education⁴, exposing the risks of sexism as an extreme manifestation of intolerance, rigidity,

insecurity and mental maladjustment⁴⁸.

Thus, the present work has implications that transcend the clinical and educational sphere, as well as the family and social sphere. Although there are different limitations, such as the inability to generalize the results to other samples or regions of each of the countries from which the samples come, the data reported analyzing a relevant but rarely approached issue through empirical studies and in a cross-cultural way. In this sense, the role of cultural differences is a variable that deserves to be explored through new research on sexual machismo, as well as its relationships with other related constructs such as partner violence, substance use disorders and addictions to substances, or others with less direct ties, such as relationship adjustment, jealousy, infidelity, love styles, etc.

The conclusion we reached is that sexual machismo can register cultural differences between Peruvian and Chilean university students and that the consumption of psychoactive substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and drugs are associated with its incidence.

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