

CYBER DATING ABUSE IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract

The objective of the research was to study the presence of cyber violence against partners in university students in Spain and Latin America, as well as to analyze its relationship with romantic myths and ambivalent sexism. The research has a cross-sectional design. The sample was made up of 2,798 students from seven Spanish-speaking countries: Spain, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, and Mexico. The results show few differences in means between men and women; However, the differences between countries are considerable, especially in the perpetration of direct attacks and control. The different forms of cyber violence against a partner tend to correlate, in a positive direction, with sexist attitudes and distorted beliefs about romantic love. In conclusion, prevention programs should take into account the new manifestations of violence that are appearing in virtual spaces.

KEY WORDS: *cyber dating abuse, dating violence, sexism, myth of love.*

Resumen

El objetivo de la investigación fue estudiar la presencia de ciber violencia contra la pareja en estudiantes universitarios de España y Latinoamérica, así como como analizar su relación con los mitos románticos y el sexismo ambivalente. La investigación tiene un diseño transversal. La muestra estaba formada por 2.798 estudiantes de siete países hispanohablantes: España, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, Argentina y México. Los resultados muestran pocas diferencias de medias entre hombres y mujeres; sin embargo, las diferencias entre países son considerables, sobre todo en la perpetración de agresiones directas y control. Las distintas formas de ciber violencia contra la pareja tienden a correlacionar, en una dirección positiva, con las actitudes sexistas y las creencias distorsionadas sobre el amor romántico. En conclusión, los programas de prevención deberían tener en cuenta las nuevas manifestaciones de la violencia que están apareciendo en los espacios virtuales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *cyber violencia contra la pareja, violencia en el noviazgo, sexismo, mitos del amor.*

Introduction

Today's information-oriented society promotes the participation of hyper-exposure and disclosure of people's private lives, which can have serious repercussions for personal image and privacy. To be specific, smartphones allow immediate access to the Internet through various social networks and tools that make people more easily controlled as well as susceptible to being victims of interpersonal harassment (Ouytsel et al., 2017). In addition, technologies have gained special importance in interactions within couples, because control behaviors and aggressive behaviors are being detected in the virtual interactions distributed through these media (Linares et al., 2021). Social networks provide a distance that facilitates the dissemination of content that, in a closer social interaction, would be inhibited or susceptible to rejection (Celsi et al., 2021). This is especially important in view of the abuse that can occur in online dating in both affective and sexual relationships, the consequences it has with respect to health problems, and its prevalence in the adolescent and young population. Awareness of this phenomenon is essential to prevent behaviors intended to humiliate and defame, directed mainly toward women, because they are forms of gender violence (Matassoli & Ferreira, 2017). As reported by the same authors, affective–sexual relationships developed through digital social networks can become a breeding ground for new forms of violence within the couple; this is known as cyber dating abuse (Matassoli & Ferreira, 2017).

Cyber violence, or cyber dating abuse, has been defined as controlling, harassing, and abusive behaviors within a couple through technology and social networks (Zweig et al., 2014). It is an emerging form of abuse based on the use of mobile phones and digital social networks to denigrate, defame, threaten, and limit the freedom of a partner (Reed et al., 2016). This includes a set of behaviors aimed at harming the victim in two areas: direct aggression and control. Direct aggression refers to acts intended to cause discomfort to the victim through threats, insults, or harassment as well as the disclosure of negative information about the partner or ex-partner, through the usurpation of their identity. Control involves the invasion of one's privacy by monitoring their social relationships, activities, location, or status on social networks (Borrajó et al., 2015; Cava & Buelga, 2018). Some studies have indicated that control behaviors are more frequent than direct aggression through the use of digital tools (Caridade et al., 2019; Linares et al., 2021), which seems to show that exercised control, apparently of a less explicit nature, seems to be more accepted by the younger population (Ollen et al., 2017). We should note that this type of violence has increased in all regions of the world (Ouytsel et al., 2017). For this reason, it is important to study this phenomenon in young people, young adulthood is often when the first, more serious romantic relationships take place and ICT is a frequent form of communication (Linares et al., 2021). It must be added that, in the digital age, there is constant publicity for the display of people's private lives, transforming behaviors that have occurred in a context of trust and intimacy

into an open book subject to hyper-visibility or public exposure (Matassoli & Ferreira, 2017).

It is estimated that this problem affects between 12% and 56% of young couples worldwide (Cava et al., 2020a). Other studies have revealed that around 50% of university students have participated in episodes of cyber dating abuse (Borrajo et al., 2015). Some investigations of samples of adolescents report that around 44.1% affirmed having engaged in occasional behaviors of cyber dating abuse towards their partners and that 11.7% had done it more frequently (Cava et al., 2020b). However, the data tend to vary depending on whether the topic is approached from the point of view of victimization or perpetration. Charity et al. (2019) found minimum rates (6%) of victimization and perpetration, reaching maximum rates of 92% for victimization and 93.7% for perpetration, in a systematic review of 44 studies with adolescents and university students from various countries, mostly from the United States and Europe. Along the same lines, Brown and Hegarty (2018) found that the range of perpetration varied between 6% and 91%. Likewise, differences based on gender have revealed lower levels of perpetration, both of control behaviors and direct aggression, in the case of women (Deans & Bhogal, 2017), although other investigations did not report statistically significant differences between women and men (Borrajo et al., 2015). Because of the prevalence and consequences of digital violence in couple relationships, it is important to analyze its association with underlying factors involved in the occurrence of this type of violence (Linares et al., 2021; Rivas-Rivero et al., 2023).

To be specific, both adolescents and young people tend to develop a biased perception of love, normalizing beliefs and attitudes that predict this type of behavior (Galende et al., 2020). Knowledge of the ideas about love can favor the analysis of their impact on the quality of sentimental relationships and their possible link with violent behaviors in couple relationships because such behaviors seem to be more present as the acceptance of the myths of romantic love becomes greater (Gómez-Pérez & Viejo, 2020). Ideas about love can be defined as the set of widely generalized beliefs in a society or culture about the supposed nature of love (Yela, 2003), despite the fact that these beliefs often turn out to be fictitious, misleading, and illusory and thus impossible to fulfill (Ferrer et al., 2010). Some women learn a way of loving that can lead them to devalue themselves as independent people, so that they accept their existence only in a self-sacrificing way to the other (Lameiras et al., 2009; Rivas-Rivero & Bonilla-Algovia, 2020). The wide acceptance of myths of romantic love highlights the need to incorporate educational strategies and develop awareness programs that reach entire populations (Cerro & Vives, 2019).

On the other hand, gender inequality is one of the most frequently discussed issues in many scientific disciplines and related fields (Rivas-Rivero & Bonilla-Algovia, 2021). In this sense, sexism is a multidimensional construct that alludes to discriminatory attitudes against women (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Ambivalent Sexism Theory includes hostile, traditional, and explicit sexism as well as benevolent sexism, which combines attitudes and behaviors in an apparently affective tone but

maintains a stereotyped vision of women. Thus, women are victimized through a system of punishments (hostile sexism) and reinforcements (benevolent sexism) that leads to this ambivalence (Arnosó et al., 2017). Whereas hostile sexism communicates a clear antipathy towards women and entails attitudes that emphasize their supposed inferiority, benevolent sexism projects them into a traditional role that causes prosocial behavior but whose consequences are harmful, because it is based on a stereotypical vision. Women emphasize the protection that men give them (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Rivas-Rivero et al., 2022). Research on sexism towards women has reported that the consequences of the benevolent component can be even more harmful than the attitudes of the hostile component because the former is less recognizable as a form of prejudice and therefore is more complex to eliminate (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005).

For this reason, the objective of this study was to analyze abusive behaviors in online relationships in a sample of young people from different Spanish-speaking countries (Spain, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Mexico). Our aim was to explore the differences between women and men in perpetration and victimization behaviors as well as to learn about the influence of cognitive biases and beliefs based on inequality that could influence these forms of violence in the young population.

Method

Participants

The sample was made up of 2,798 university students from seven Spanish-speaking countries (Spain, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Mexico), with a mean age of 22.62 years ($SD= 6.23$). The participants, who were selected through intentional and nonprobabilistic sampling, were studying different careers related to education, such as psychopedagogy, pedagogy, teaching in primary and early childhood education. They were selected on the basis of the following inclusion criteria: (a) a resident of one of the countries included in the research, (b) enrolled in a university or teacher training centers, and (c) taking official teacher training studies that will enable them to work in education centers. The characteristics of the initial sample are shown in Table 1. The Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire (CDAQ), given its characteristics, was answered by participants who had had a partner in the past 12 months ($n= 2,489$): Spain ($n= 997$), Colombia ($n= 397$), El Salvador ($n= 196$), Argentina ($n= 443$), Nicaragua ($n= 111$), Mexico ($n= 251$) and Chile ($n= 94$).

Table 1
Sample characteristics

Country	<i>n</i>	Man	Woman	Age <i>M (SD)</i>
Spain	1,168	219	949	20.97 (4.46)
El Salvador	211	81	130	22.43 (4.92)
Nicaragua	138	54	84	27.38 (8.77)
Colombia	443	126	317	20.64 (3.91)
Chile	101	40	61	21.03 (2.11)
Argentina	467	84	383	28.12 (8.92)
Mexico	270	63	205	21.77 (3.21)
Total	2,798	667	2129	22.62 (6.23)

Instruments

- a) An ad hoc questionnaire about sociodemographic characteristics. Information was collected about sex, age, country, and having a partner.
- b) *Cyber Dating Abuse Questionnaire* (CDAQ; Borrajo et al., 2015). The CDAQ is made up of 20 bidirectional items that measure the perpetration and victimization of various forms of cyber abuse in couple relationships (e.g., “My partner or ex-partner has checked my social networks, WhatsApp or email without my permission” and “I have checked my partner’s social networks, WhatsApp or email without his permission”). The 20 items related to perpetration comprise two factors: Direct Aggression (P) and Control (P). The items related to victimization make up the same two factors: Direct Aggression (V) and Control (V). The CDAQ has a 6-point Likert-type response format (1= never; 2= not in the last year, but it happened 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). In this study, the reliability coefficients obtained for each of the countries were generally acceptable (see Appendix).
- c) *Scale of Romantic Love Myths* (SMRL), validated in Spain by Bonilla-Algovia and Rivas-Rivero (2020a). The SMRL is made up of 11 items that measure romantic myths (e.g., “True love can overcome any difficulty or problem”). The acceptance of myths, composed of a single factor, is evaluated through the total score of 55 points, so that the higher the score, the greater the degree of acceptance with the myths. It has a Likert-type response format, with 5 response options (range: 1= totally disagree to 5= totally agree). In this study, the reliability coefficients obtained were the following: Los coeficientes de fiabilidad obtenidos fueron los siguientes: Spain ($\alpha = .80$), El Salvador ($\alpha = .75$), Nicaragua ($\alpha = .75$), Colombia ($\alpha = .82$), Chile ($\alpha = .89$), Argentina ($\alpha = .86$) y Mexico ($\alpha = .85$).
- d) *Myths Scale toward Love* (Bosch et al., 2007). The version validated in the Spanish-speaking countries Spain (Rodríguez et al., 2013), Colombia (Bonilla & Rivas, 2018) and El Salvador (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2021). The scale is

made up of seven items that are grouped into two subscales: Idealization of Love (e.g., "Somewhere there is someone predestined for each person") and Love–Abuse Relationship (e.g., "You can love someone who is mistreated"). It has a Likert-type response format, with five response options (range: 1= totally disagree to 5= totally agree). Despite this two-dimensional structure of the love myths scale, previous studies reveal low reliability indices, obtaining an alpha of $\alpha = .52$ in the first factor and $\alpha = .64$ in the second factor (Rodríguez et al., 2013). In this study, the reliability coefficients were as follows: Spain ($\alpha = .63$), El Salvador ($\alpha = .57$), Nicaragua ($\alpha = .59$), Colombia ($\alpha = .64$), Chile ($\alpha = .77$), Argentina ($\alpha = .73$) y Mexico ($\alpha = .69$).

- e) *Ambivalent Sexism Inventory* (Glick & Fiske, 1996), short version of 12 items adapted to Spanish and validated in Spanish-speaking countries, such as Spain (Rodríguez et al., 2009), Mexico and El Salvador (Bonilla-Algovia & Rivas-Rivero, 2020b). The items of this inventory are distributed into two scales: Hostile Sexism (e.g., "Women seek to gain power by controlling men") and Benevolent Sexism (e.g., "Men should care for and protect women"). It has a Likert-type response format, with six response options (range: 0= totally disagree to 5= totally agree). The validation carried out by (Rodríguez et al., 2009) reports for the Hostile Sexism scale an $\alpha = .81$ and for the Benevolent Sexism scale it was $\alpha = .75$. In this study, the reliability coefficients were as follows: Hostile Sexism (Spain, $\alpha = .84$; Nicaragua, $\alpha = .80$; El Salvador, $\alpha = .86$; Chile, $\alpha = .86$; Colombia, $\alpha = .81$; México, $\alpha = .84$ and Argentina, $\alpha = .81$) and Benevolent Sexism (Spain, $\alpha = .79$; Nicaragua, $\alpha = .73$; El Salvador, $\alpha = .76$; Chile, $\alpha = .76$; Colombia, $\alpha = .81$; Mexico, $\alpha = .80$; and Argentina, $\alpha = .81$).

Procedure

The research is an ex post facto design. The administration of the instruments was self-applied. Access to the participants was possible thanks to the support of the teaching staff of the different universities. The data were collected between 2017 and 2020, a period in which different stays and collaborations were carried out. Before administering the questionnaires, the research team explained the objectives of the research to participants at each of the centers and faculties, and permission to conduct the study was obtained. Participation was strictly voluntary, and all information was collected anonymously. The students provided informed consent and had the option of withdrawing from the research at any time. No compensation was given to the participants. This research has the acceptance of the commission in charge for such purposes and of the Academic Commission for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, which approved the study (D434).

Data analyses

We coded the database with SPSS v. 24.0. The relationships between the different forms of cyber dating abuse were evaluated using Pearson correlations. We calculated the differences between men and women using the Student's *t* statistic for independent samples. Effect sizes between the variables were analyzed using Cohen's *d*, with the relationship being small if $d \leq .20$, moderate if *d* is between .20 and .50, and large if $d \geq .80$. Differences between countries were calculated with an analysis of variance (ANOVA) complemented with a post hoc analysis. Associations between abuse in online relationships, sexism, and romance myths were also tested using Pearson correlations.

Results

Table 2 shows the prevalence of cyber dating abuse perpetration and victimization. The percentages of prevalence vary greatly among the different items of the CDAQ; however, the most frequently used forms of abuse—either exercised or suffered—are those that are part of the Monitoring/Control dimension, such as checking the partner's mobile phone without permission, controlling status updates on social networks, using personal passwords to browse messages, and checking the last connection and controlling friends on social networks, among others. On the contrary, the least used forms of abuse in online relationships among students were those belonging to the Direct Aggression dimension, such as making threats; humiliation; insults; divulging secrets; creating false profiles to cause problems; and sending photographs, images, or videos with intimate content, among others.

Table 3 shows the relationship between perpetration and victimization of cyber dating abuse. Pearson correlations were direct and statistically significant in all countries ($p \leq .05$), so perpetration seems to be related to victimization. Students who reported having used some form of partner abuse (direct assault or control) also tended to report that they had been victims of direct assault or control by a partner. Aggressions and online control are complementary forms of violence that can be exercised simultaneously.

The mean differences on the CDAQ according to gender are shown in Table 4. In general, the results show that there are few differences between men and women in the perpetration and victimization of the different forms of cyber dating abuse. Of the 28 coefficients obtained through Student's *t* tests, only six were significant ($p \leq .05$) or marginally significant ($p \leq .10$), and they were concentrated in the Central American countries (El Salvador and Nicaragua). It should be added that a moderate effect size was found in these countries, especially in Nicaragua. Men, compared with women, had higher scores on perpetration and victimization of direct assaults in El Salvador, while at the same time they had higher scores on perpetration and victimization of direct assaults and control in Nicaragua. In the other countries in the

Table 2
Prevalence of cyber dating abuse

Items	Rol	S	ES	N	C	Ch	A	M
1. Control status updates on social networks	P	45.2%	44%	41.7%	21.8%	36.6%	59%	20.6%
	V	41.5%	49%	38%	23.2%	40.4%	48.6%	26.3%
2. Make threats through new technologies to physically harm	P	.8%	7.7%	9%	1.5%	5.4%	2.7%	4.9%
	V	5.2%	11%	15.9%	4.6%	11.8%	8.2%	12.1%
3. Create a fake profile on a social network to cause trouble	P	.5%	8.2%	6.3%	3.8%	5.4%	3%	5.3%
	V	1%	12.9%	11.8%	4.9%	8.7%	3.2%	12.6%
4. Write a comment on the wall of a social network to insult or humiliate	P	2.1%	11.9%	12.6%	6.6%	6.5%	5.5%	5.6%
	V	6.3%	12.4%	10.9%	8.9%	16.1%	8.4%	10.5%
5. Use passwords (phone, social networks, email) to browse messages and/or contacts without permission	P	19.7%	29.4%	30%	37.4%	41.3%	43.2%	27.8%
	V	20.1%	29.4%	35.1%	35.6%	48.4%	35.6%	30.2%
6. Disseminate secrets and/or compromised information using new technologies	P	2.1%	11.3%	18.9%	6.1%	6.5%	3.7%	5.6%
	V	7.9%	15.5%	15.5%	10.4%	18.5%	8%	12.9%
7. Check the last connection in mobile applications	P	51.9%	50%	30.6%	41.9%	39.8%	59%	21.4%
	V	48.2%	47.4%	33.3%	37.9%	46.2%	54.6%	22.2%
8. Threaten to spread secrets or embarrassing information using new technology	P	.8%	9.4%	11.7%	1.3%	6.5%	2.7%	3.2%
	V	5%	11.3%	13.6%	4.1%	10.8%	5.7%	6%
9. Use new technologies to impersonate me/my (former) partner and create trouble	P	.2%	11.9%	18%	2%	5.4%	1.8%	3.2%
	V	1.5%	11.5%	15.3%	5.6%	4.3%	2.5%	6.9%
10. Send insulting and/or denigrating messages using new technologies	P	8.3%	17.7%	15.3%	18.1%	22.6%	20.1%	14.2%
	V	15.1%	21.8%	22.9%	23.6%	32.3%	26.3%	19.8%
11. Check social networks, WhatsApp, or email without permission	P	23.3%	29.5%	35.5%	41.5%	44.6%	49%	31.6%
	V	25.7%	32.1%	32.4%	41.2%	48.9%	39%	35.2%
12. Send and/or upload photos, images, and/or videos with intimate or sexual content without permission	P	.2%	8.3%	9.1%	1.8%	4.3%	1.1%	4.9%
	V	1.3%	8.3%	11.7%	2.3%	5.4%	3.2%	5.7%
13. Use new technologies to control where you are/ am and with whom	P	26.7%	23.4%	23.6%	19.5%	32.3%	26.3%	17.1%
	V	30.4%	27.2%	21.6%	23.6%	37.4%	29.2%	21.1%
14. Threaten to answer calls or messages immediately using new technologies	P	4.5%	12.4%	13.6%	6.3%	20.4%	11.7%	8.5%
	V	11.7%	17.6%	18%	12%	21.7%	17%	17%
15. Pretend to be someone else using new technology to test a partner	P	2.7%	12%	21.6%	6.9%	4.3%	4.6%	6.1%
	V	4.1%	16.7%	27.3%	8.4%	10.8%	7.1%	10.9%
16. Post music, poems, phrases on a social networking site with the intent to insult or humiliate	P	9%	16.1%	18.9%	17.5%	19.6%	11.8%	11%
	V	14.6%	20.8%	19.8%	18.6%	22.6%	12.4%	10.9%
17. Go through a classmate's cell phone without permission	P	24.2%	29.7%	35.5%	40.8%	47.3%	50.8%	33.7%
	V	26.7%	27.6%	43.2%	40.7%	47.8%	43.4%	34.1%
18. Spread rumors, gossip, and/or jokes through new technologies with the intention of ridiculing	P	1.5%	13%	16.4%	4.8%	7.5%	2.8%	3.6%
	V	6.4%	13%	13.6%	7.9%	18.3%	9.2%	11.7%
19. Make excessive calls to check where you are/ am and with whom	P	8.7%	20.7%	28.2%	14.1%	20.7%	18.4%	17.5%
	V	17.9%	26.6%	28.4%	21.9%	29%	28%	27.2%
20. Control friends on social networks	P	28.6%	33.2%	24.8%	24.4%	35.5%	42.9%	23.2%
	V	32.7%	36.3%	28.4%	29.3%	41.9%	38.2%	26.4%

Nota: P= Perpetration; V= Victimization; S= Spain; ES=El Salvador; N= Nicaragua; C= Colombia; Ch= Chile; A= Argentina; M= Mexico.

sample (Spain, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, and Mexico) there were no mean differences between men and women.

Table 3
Correlations between the different forms of cyber dating abuse

Country / Form of cyber dating abuse	Direct Aggression (P)	Control (P)	Direct Aggression (V)
Spain			
Direct Aggression (P)	-		
Control (P)	.37***	-	
Direct Aggression (V)	.63***	.24***	-
Control (V)	.39***	.63***	.59***
El Salvador			
Direct Aggression (P)	-		
Control (P)	.56***	-	
Direct Aggression (V)	.85***	.56***	-
Control (V)	.49***	.66***	.69***
Nicaragua			
Direct Aggression (P)	-		
Control (P)	.75***	-	
Direct Aggression (V)	.96***	.77***	-
Control (V)	.62***	.81***	.69***
Colombia			
Direct Aggression (P)	-		
Control (P)	.45***	-	
Direct Aggression (V)	.47***	.22***	-
Control (V)	.27***	.50***	.63***
Chile			
Direct Aggression (P)	-		
Control (P)	.46***	-	
Direct Aggression (V)	.47***	.23*	-
Control (V)	.34***	.63***	.61***
Argentina			
Direct Aggression (P)	-		
Control (P)	.47***	-	
Direct Aggression (V)	.53***	.25***	-
Control (V)	.39***	.63***	.57***
Mexico			
Direct Aggression (P)	-		
Control (P)	.59***	-	
Direct Aggression (V)	.66***	.48***	-
Control (V)	.47***	.71***	.70***

Notes: P= perpetration; V= victimization. * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

The differences in means on the different CDAQ subscales according to the country were studied by means of a one-way ANOVA (Table 5). The analysis revealed statistically significant differences in both the perpetration and victimization of cyber

Table 4
Perpetration and victimization of cyber dating abuse according to gender

Country / Sex	Direct Aggression (P)		Control (P)		Direct Aggression (V)		Control (V)	
	M (SD)	t	M (SD)	t	M (SD)	t	M (SD)	t
Spain								
M (n= 219)	1.05 (.15)		1.52 (.68)		1.12 (.33)		1.72 (.94)	
W (n= 949)	1.05 (.16)	-.03	1.62 (.73)	-1.61	1.15 (.38)	-1.14	1.74 (1.01)	-.17
El Salvador								
M (n= 81)	1.35 (.71)		1.70 (.85)		1.47 (.79)		1.90 (1.07)	
W (n= 130)	1.18 (.42)	1.85†	1.73 (.84)	-.25	1.24 (.48)	2.24*	1.80 (.96)	.72
Nicaragua								
M (n= 54)	1.56 (.77)		1.92 (.93)		1.61 (.81)		1.98 (.99)	
W (n= 84)	1.17 (.66)	2.80**	1.45 (.68)	2.94**	1.21 (.68)	2.75**	1.54 (.78)	2.52*
Colombia								
M (n= 126)	1.14 (.32)		1.59 (.79)		1.25 (.61)		1.74 (.88)	
W (n= 317)	1.10 (.19)	.91	1.63 (.74)	-.50	1.16 (.35)	1.42	1.66 (.88)	.74
Chile								
M (n= 40)	1.14 (.24)		1.65 (.80)		1.23 (.31)		1.81 (1.01)	
W (n= 61)	1.13 (.26)	.11	1.75 (.85)	-.56	1.29 (.56)	-.55	1.90 (1.09)	-.39
Argentina								
M (n= 84)	1.13 (.40)		1.87 (.92)		1.18 (.38)		1.96 (.92)	
W (n= 383)	1.10 (.21)	.78	1.93 (.84)	-.52	1.17 (.37)	.20	1.86 (.98)	.86
Mexico								
M (n= 63)	1.17 (.48)		1.43 (.70)		1.29 (.55)		1.71 (.82)	
W (n= 205)	1.12 (.32)	.93	1.47 (.69)	-.37	1.20 (.50)	1.13	1.56 (.91)	1.11

Notes: M= Men; W= Women; P= perpetration; V= victimization. †p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

dating abuse, so the average scores among the countries in the sample varied considerably. The greatest differences occurred in direct aggressions exerted against the partner ($F= 22.91, p= .000$), and the smallest differences occur in the control suffered by the partner ($F= 3.25, p= .003$).

On the basis of the significant differences revealed by the ANOVA, we performed a post hoc multiple comparison analysis with the objective of studying the differences by pairs of countries. The variance homogeneity test yielded a p value $< .05$, so the post hoc analyses were performed using the Games–Howell method. Multiple comparisons allowed us to locate where, exactly, the differences are in each of the CDAQ subscales, and the results reaffirmed the existence of mean differences between students from the different countries in the sample, especially in the perpetration of cyber dating abuse.

In the results obtained with the post hoc test, through Games–Howell, significant differences were observed in the direct aggression-perpetration variable between Spain compared with all the countries analyzed: El Salvador ($t= -.19, p= .000$), Nicaragua ($t= -.28, p= .002$), Colombia ($t= -.06, p= .000$), Chile, ($t= -.08, p= .043$) Argentina ($t= -.05, p= .002$), and Mexico ($t= -.08, p= .010$). These countries showed higher means in terms of direct aggression. In addition, El Salvador presented a significantly higher mean compared with Colombia ($t= .13, p= .021$) and Argentina ($t= .14, p= .011$), and Nicaragua showed a higher and significant mean in direct aggressions compared with Spain ($t= .28, p= .002$), Colombia ($t= .22, p= .029$), and Argentina ($t= .23, p= .021$). Regarding the control-perpetration variable, statistical differences were found between Argentina and Spain ($t= .31, p= .000$), as well as among Nicaragua ($t= .26, p= .042$), Colombia ($t= .29, p= .000$), and Mexico ($t= .46, p= .000$), with Argentina being the country with the highest mean in control. No significant differences were found between El Salvador, Chile, and the other countries in this variable. On the other hand, Mexico showed differences with Spain ($t= -.14, p= .047$), El Salvador ($t= -.26, p= .007$), and Argentina ($t= -.46, p= .000$), being the countries mentioned those that presented a higher average in said variable.

Regarding direct aggression-victimization, differences were observed between El Salvador and Spain ($t= -.17, p= .003$) and El Salvador and Argentina ($t= .15, p= .028$), with El Salvador being the country with the highest average. Nicaragua also presented a higher and significant mean in direct aggressions compared with Spain ($t= .23, p= .027$). Finally, in the control-victimization variable, differences were found between Colombia and Argentina, the latter being the one with the lowest average control-victimization scores. Mexico also showed differences with Argentina ($t= .46, p= .000$), with Mexico being the country with the lowest mean in said variable.

Table 5
Perpetration and victimization of cyber dating abuse by country

Rol / Country	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Quadratic <i>M</i> (intergroups)	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Direct Aggression (P)					
Spain	1.05	.16	2.15	22.91	.000
El Salvador	1.25	.55			
Nicaragua	1.34	.73			
Colombia	1.11	.23			
Chile	1.13	.25			
Argentina	1.10	.25			
Mexico	1.13	.36			
Control (P)					
Spain	1.60	.72	7.37	12.56	.000
El Salvador	1.72	.84			
Nicaragua	1.65	.82			
Colombia	1.62	.75			
Chile	1.71	.83			
Argentina	1.92	.86			
Mexico	1.46	.69			
Direct Aggression (V)					
Spain	1.15	.37	1.74	8.66	.000
El Salvador	1.32	.63			
Nicaragua	1.38	.76			
Colombia	1.19	.44			
Chile	1.27	.47			
Argentina	1.17	.37			
Mexico	1.22	.51			
Control (V)					
Spain	1.74	1.00	3.00	3.25	.003
El Salvador	1.84	1.00			
Nicaragua	1.73	.90			
Colombia	1.68	.88			
Chile	1.87	1.05			
Argentina	1.87	.96			
Mexico	1.59	.89			

Note: P= perpetration; V= victimization.

Table 6 shows the correlations between the different forms of cyber dating abuse and other scales that assess constructs such as romantic myths, the idealization of love, the link between love and abuse, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism. The results show a trend of direct, though not always statistically significant, correlations. A general analysis of the findings in the different countries indicated that the perpetration and victimization of the different forms of cyber dating abuse are usually associated with more sexist attitudes and more distorted imaginings about love.

Table 6
Correlations among cyber dating abuse, romantic myths, and sexism

Country / Variables	Direct Aggression (P)	Control (P)	Direct Aggression (V)	Control (V)
Spain				
Myths of romantic love	.08*	.20***	-.02	.10**
Idealization of love	.10**	.23***	.06 [†]	.18***
Love–abuse relationship	.08*	.10**	.02	.08*
Hostile sexism	.13***	.24***	.03	.14***
Benevolent sexism	.10***	.19***	.04	.11***
El Salvador				
Myths of romantic love	.04	.04	.03	-.01
Idealization of love	-.03	.08	-.05	.04
Love–abuse relationship	.34***	.09	.27***	.09
Hostile sexism	.15*	.05	.23***	.07
Benevolent sexism	-.04	-.07	-.03	-.08
Nicaragua				
Myths of romantic love	.14	.20*	.19*	.13
Idealization of love	.17 [†]	.25**	.20*	.25**
Love–abuse relationship	.24*	.15	.19*	.13
Hostile sexism	.11	.19*	.13	.23*
Benevolent sexism	.14	.13	.17 [†]	.15
Colombia				
Myths of romantic love	.14**	.24***	.02	.06
Idealization of love	.07	.24***	.02	.09 [†]
Love–abuse relationship	.14**	.16**	.20***	.12*
Hostile sexism	.16***	.18***	.16***	.17***
Benevolent sexism	.12*	.21***	-.02	.10*
Chile				
Myths of romantic love	.26*	.09	.02	-.03
Idealization of love	.15	.03	.10	-.01
Love–abuse relationship	.34***	.08	.18 [†]	.07
Hostile sexism	.20 [†]	.21*	.06	.03
Benevolent sexism	.20 [†]	.00	.07	-.04
Argentina				
Myths of romantic love	.08 [†]	.20***	-.01	.16***
Idealization of love	.08	.23***	.02	.19***
Love–abuse relationship	.16***	.15***	.03	.14**
Hostile sexism	.08 [†]	.16***	.01	.09*
Benevolent sexism	.16***	.22***	.06	.13**
Mexico				
Myths of romantic love	.12 [†]	.16*	.09	.11 [†]
Idealization of love	.08	.21***	.06	.14*
Love–abuse relationship	.07	.11 [†]	-.01	-.02
Hostile sexism	.14*	.12 [†]	.07	.09
Benevolent sexism	.09	.07	.07	.13*

Notes: P= perpetration; V= victimization. [†] $p \leq .10$; * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Discussion

In the present study, we analyzed cyber dating abuse behaviors in a sample of university students enrolled in branches of social sciences and education sciences from Spain, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, and Mexico, to discover more about the prevalence of perpetration and victimization and their relationship with various cognitive biases, among which are the myths of romantic love and sexism in its hostile and benevolent components, these being risk factors for the occurrence and normalization of this type of behavior (Galende et al., 2020; Linares et al., 2021).

To begin, percentages among the different items of the CDAQ varied greatly, although the forms of abuse that had the highest prevalence—exerted or suffered—were those related to the Control dimension, such as checking the partner’s mobile phone without permission, controlling status updates on social networks, using personal passwords to browse messages, and checking the last connection and controlling friends on social networks. The forms of cyber dating abuse with the least prevalence were those linked to the dimension of Direct Aggression (making threats, humiliation, insults, disclosing secrets, creating false profiles to cause problems; and sending photos, images, or videos with intimate content). The results, therefore, are in line with those of other previous investigations that have analyzed the differences between direct aggression and control (Caridade et al., 2019), an aspect that could be attributed to the fact that control has a more implicit nature and is, to a greater extent, accepted among young people (Ollen et al., 2017), and thus it can be confused with manifestations of love and ways of showing concern for the partner rather than as ways of exercising violence through digital media.

Regarding the relationship between perpetration and victimization, direct and statistically significant correlations were found in all countries ($p \leq .05$), such that perpetration and victimization seem to be related to each other. The participants reported having exercised some form of abuse against their partner (direct aggression or control) and having also been victims of direct aggression or control. We should note that direct aggression and online control seem to be forms of violence that can be exercised in parallel. In this sense, as Reed et al. (2016) stated, cyber violence appears to be a widespread and emerging form of intimate partner violence. The concern about this phenomenon resides in the fact that digital devices favor the creation of physical distancing (Celsi et al., 2021) and allow this type of dysfunctional and highly harmful interactions to be exercised in young people’s couple relationships. In addition, this problem is very worrying in young university students, more so than students in other stages of schooling, because research indicates that they are more likely to get involved in these types of dynamics because of their greater access to technology and more experience regarding how to use it, both positively and negatively (Redondo-Pacheco et al., 2018).

We should note that few differences were found based on gender in perpetration and victimization, with some differences reaching significance in

Central American countries (El Salvador and Nicaragua). However, we observed in the participants from El Salvador that men, in relation to women, obtained higher scores in regard to the perpetration and victimization of direct aggressions. Higher scores were found for Nicaraguan men in perpetration and in victimization of direct and control aggressions than for women. In the rest of the countries in the sample there were no differences between men and women. Therefore, the results seem to confirm what has been found in other research (Borrajo & Gámez-Guadix, 2016), although previous studies have also reported a greater probability of women being control victims (Linares et al., 2021).

The comparison of means according to the country revealed statistically significant differences both in the perpetration and the victimization of cyber dating abuse, so the mean scores varied among the different countries of the sample. The greatest differences were found in direct aggressions exerted against a couple. Post hoc multiple comparison analyses allowed us to specify these differences among the seven countries. The greatest differences were found in the perpetration of direct aggressions between Spain and the Central American countries (El Salvador and Nicaragua) and between Mexico and Argentina in the perpetration of control behaviors. With regard to victimization, the greatest differences occurred between the Spanish sample compared with the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan ones in direct aggressions, as well as between the Argentine and Mexican samples in control behaviors. Sánchez-Jiménez et al.'s (2017) cross-cultural study, which focused on Spanish and Mexican adolescents, found differences between the two countries regarding control behaviors, with them being higher in Mexico than in Spain. However, we should note that cross-cultural studies are not abundant and recommend that more studies in this line be developed. Our results highlight the disparities depending on the country and provide key information, especially given the scarcity of studies that include samples from different regions in the analysis of a problem that largely affects adolescents and young people across the globe (Matassoli & Ferreira, 2017; Ouytsel et al., 2017).

Finally, we found correlations between the different forms of online abuse and other scales that assess cognitive biases, such as romantic myths, the idealization of love, the relationship between love and abuse, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism. In general, the perpetration and victimization of the different forms of cyber dating abuse are usually related to more sexist attitudes (Rodríguez-Domínguez et al., 2018) and more distorted imaginaries about love (Borrajo et al., 2015; Galende et al., 2020; Lykens et al., 2019). These data are in line with what other research indicates is the mediating role of cognitive biases in cyberbullying, mainly in men (Martínez-Pecino & Durán, 2019). However, the results indicate a direct association, although this was not significant in all countries. The highest correlations occurred in El Salvador and Chile in the perpetration of direct aggression and the relationship between love and abuse. Likewise, higher correlations were found in Nicaragua regarding the perpetration of control behaviors and the idealization-of-love dimension.

We should note a series of limitations of this study. To begin, the sample was of an incidental type, and no probabilistic sampling was carried out in order to make the results more generalizable, although the very large sample size allowed us to gain a global vision of the problem in various countries. We must also point out the different sample sizes obtained in each of the country subsamples, which could have affected the correlations we found, so that, as future lines of research, the sample sizes should be equated in terms of number of participants. We should note that, although some of the subsamples could be grouped in order to increase the size of the various comparisons, to strengthen the correlations, cultural characteristics and the different Human Development Indices would make the problem invisible in these countries. However, it adds relevant information about the problem and other factors related to cyber dating abuse and can be a reference for each of the countries in the study of the problem. We should note that the age variable was not taken into account in our analyses, so whether there are differences between those who are considered to be the millennial generation with respect to the so-called Generation Z remains unknown. We should add as a limitation the possibility of a social desirability response set, because our topic dealt with variables that analyze morally reprehensible attitudes and behaviors that could have resulted in an underrepresentation of this type of behavior among the youngest participants. Therefore, with a view to future work, it would be interesting to incorporate variables that make it possible to better identify victimization and control profiles as well as to analyze situational factors that represent a risk for the incidence of this type of behavior (e.g., problematic use of electronic devices, violence in the immediate environment). In the same way, it would be appropriate to incorporate the possible consequences for well-being that may have originated in young people from both a psychosocial and clinical perspective.

Despite the limitations we have noted, and future lines of research that may arise, the present work allows us to know the phenomenon of cyber dating abuse from a transcultural perspective and provides another approach so that information regarding the mediating role of social cognition processes and the role that these biases play in the legitimization of violence within the couple can continue to be provided. This is important given cyber dating abuse is adapted through technology to behaviors that are more subtle but equally detrimental to well-being in the affective and social spheres as well as fundamental to a young person's development.

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Appendix

Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of the "Cyber Violence Against Intimate Partner Questionnaire" (CDAQ) in each country

Country	Direct Aggression (P)	Control (P)	Direct Aggression (V)	Control (V)
Spain	.63	.84	.81	.91
El Salvador	.90	.85	.88	.88
Nicaragua	.88	.84	.92	.86
Colombia	.59	.85	.85	.89
Chile	.74	.90	.84	.94
Argentina	.76	.86	.81	.89
Mexico	.84	.89	.89	.92

Note: P= perpetration; V= victimization.