Are We Getting Less Sexist? A Ten-Year Gap Comparison Analysis of Sexism in a Portuguese Sample

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Abstract

Widely and slowly, discrimination against women based upon gender has become socially unacceptable. However, less is known about how sexist beliefs have progressed in the last years and if we are responding to this social antagonizing of a sexist discourse. Our goal was to verify the existence of differences in ambivalent sexism and neosexism over a ten-year gap in a Portuguese adult sample and to assess possible modifications in the relationship between the variables. A cross-sectional,

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correlational study was conducted using two independent groups, with measures taken in 2009 and then in 2019. Both groups were invariant in terms of average age and proportion of sexes. Our results show a decrease in hostile and benevolent forms of sexism, while neosexism remains constant. The relationships between variables suggest that sexist beliefs are changing to accommodate subtler and modernized forms of sexism, like neosexism, that deny the existence of discrimination against women, resent discrimination complaints, and maintain a paternalistic view of women. Neosexism also seems to have a stronger correlation with hostile sexism than with benevolent forms of sexism in the male subsample. This relationship is stronger for the 2019 sample. These relationships suggest that sexism is more deeply rooted than we would like to admit and adapts to social discourse. Despite our best efforts, it is yet to be overcome.

Keywords

Sexism, ambivalent sexism, neosexism, contemporary sexism, group comparison

Introduction

> *Sexism has never rendered women powerless.*
> *It has either suppressed their strength or exploited it.*
>
> - Bell Hooks -

Recently, a viral video split the internet. *Be a lady, they said* (McLean, 2020, is a compelling succession of images of women, with common messages they hear from a society that either diminishes their attributes, paternalizes or negatively exploits women. Altogether, the video represents the most accurate forms of sexism against women.

Sexism in general is defined as a negative attitude towards individuals based upon their biological sex and expressed through cognitive, affective and behavioural elements (Expósito et al., 1998; Moya & Expósito, 2008). This conceptualization encompasses two sets of sexist attitudes. The hostile, and more traditional, form refers to prejudice against women that encompasses antipathy, social distancing and negative stereotypes (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The benevolent form refers to "interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles, but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g. helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g. self-disclosure)" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491).

Differently from other traditional power relations of dominance and subordination, in the relations between men and women, members of both groups engage in close and genuine relationships (friendly, romantic and family relationships). Men like and love many women with whom they share a relationship, and that implies the importance of the word ambivalence in sexism. The root of ambivalent sexism resides in close heterosexual relationships in which men are attracted to women by a desire for intimacy; nevertheless, the belief in being dominated by women's sexual appeal is associated with hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001). These heterosexual relationships take place in a societal context of gender relations that develop within gender hierarchy and power and gender differentiation (Lee et al., 2010).

Both hostile and benevolent expressions of sexism have consequences for women. For a long time, men's adherence to traditional masculine roles has been linked to women's oppression, hostility and abuse (Schwartz & Lindley, 2009). The hostile form of sexism seems to be associated with an acceptance of societal unfairness and gender income inequality (Connor & Fiske, 2018), and seems to be correlated with the glass ceiling effect, diminishing the probability of a woman being chosen for a managerial position (Masser & Abrams, 2004). As for the benevolent form, it seems to impair women's cognitive performance through mental intrusions about their sense of competence (Dardenne et al., 2007), affecting the working memory (Dardenne et al., 2013), that arise spontaneously when women engage with a task (Lamarche et al., 2020). Not only do women have negative consequences when they accept the benevolent sexism, but reacting to and opposing it are also harmful. Women who reject patronizing help from men can be perceived as competent; however, they are also categorized as cold and less appropriate for warmth-related jobs. Although women gain the competence and the ability to achieve a higher status, they are judged for not complying with the female stereotype, leading to adverse outcomes (Becker et al., 2011).

However, efforts have been made to change this. Gender and role norms have become less conservative and more egalitarian in recent years (Howard et al., 2020). Also, we have observed in the last years an increased discussion about gender ideology, with an expansion of the lexicality of gender and sex. Concomitantly, a growing number of children and adolescents describe themselves as transgender, gender fluid or non-binary, challenging the proposition that gender divides upon a binary organic sexuality (Diamond, 2020). It is defended that the normalization (or depathologizing) of gender incongruence proceeds social change to accept it as normal (Davies & Davies, 2020). Also, social phenomena cannot be addressed without considering family, since social inequality is maintained across generations. Recent analysis sees family becoming more complex and less linear in the past decade (Smock & Schwartz, 2020), especially given the increase in non-marriage childbearing and same-sex couples. However, it cannot be considered that marriage has become wholly

deinstitutionalized, with heterosexual marriage continuing to represent social normative values, especially among college-educated individuals (Cherlin, 2020). Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize the growing attention paid to sexism, to gender-based inequalities, and to the need for collective action to foster social change (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020; McGarty et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2011).

In Portugal, informal campaigns in media and advertising commercials are focused on reducing sexism or going against sexual stereotypes. Women are depicted in roles traditionally pertaining associated to men (power positions, working and independent women), and men are seen to adopt more traditionally female roles—i.e. washing clothes independently, taking kids to school or the park, among others. Several policy measures have been adopted since 1990, when the Commission for Equality in Work and Employment was established. Since then, there has been policymaking to prevent discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for women in several social domains. The parity law, for instance, established in 2006, declared a minimum representation of 33 per cent for both sexes in electorship lists for local administrative power, for Public Assembly and for the European Parliament. This law was upgraded recently to 40 per cent representation for both sexes, and determined that no more than two candidates of the same sex can be elected. Stating that women are inferior to men is now harder.

Regardless of these measures, women in Portugal continue to be paid 16.2 per cent less than men for equal work (Eurostat, 2020); as the level of qualification increases, the wage gap widens, especially among senior positions (Comission for Citizenship and Gender Equality [CIG], 2017). The same report states that the employment rate is higher for men; involuntary part-time remains higher for women; and although men spend on average 27 minutes more per day in paid work, women continue to be the ones that have a higher rate of unpaid work, with household chores and care work (CIG, 2017).

Sexism seems to be shifting from overt prejudice towards women to a denial of discrimination against women and antagonism towards women's demands, which Swim et al. (1995) defined as modern sexism. Tougas et al. (1995, p. 843) also considered that sexist beliefs have evolved from less acceptable and direct ideas of women's inferiority to a more covert or disguised sexist belief that manifests in the existing "conflict between egalitarian values and residual negative feelings towards women"—i.e. neosexism. Both studies demonstrated a change in the expression of sexist beliefs based upon arguments concerning the impact of equal measures for gender, less focused on the inferiority of women but still maintaining the status quo for men, and therefore male privileges. These contemporary beliefs enable women to be perceived and referred to as equal, thriving, with several social policies to attain this equilibrium, but permitting gender differentiation at work and family boundaries.

Hence, our goal was to verify the existence of differences in ambivalent sexism and neosexism across a ten-year gap in a Portuguese adult sample. Additionally, we aimed to establish the relationship between variables and to verify possible modifications in correlations across these ten years.

Method

Sample

We gathered 719 participants from the working Portuguese population in two measures taken ten years apart. The sample methodology was non-probabilistic. We collected the first group in 2009: it included 506 participants with an average age of 33.29 years ($SD = 12.95$, $max = 81$), 68.8 per cent of whom were female respondents. The second group, collected in 2019, included 213 participants with an average age of 32.89 years ($SD = 11.92$, $max = 67$), 73.5 per cent of whom were females. Groups did not differ statistically in age ($W = 44831$, p $= 0.756$), or sex ($\chi^2 = 1.38$, $p = 0.240$) and are considered equivalent for comparison purposes. All participants were Portuguese or had Portuguese as their first language.

Materials and procedures

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). The ASI (Glick & Fiske, 1996) assesses hostile and benevolent sexism. It consists of two 11-item subscales that measure attitudes towards women in a hostile dimension (e.g. "Women are too easily offended") and a benevolent dimension (e.g. "Women should be cherished and protected by men"). All items are responded to on a six-point scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 6 – strongly agree. Higher scores in both dimensions reflect greater endorsement of these attitudes and ideologies. We used the Portuguese version (Gonçalves et al., 2015), which retained both dimensions but presented a better fit in a four-dimensional structure (one hostile dimension and three benevolent dimensions): hostile sexism [HS], protective paternalism [PP], heterosexual intimacy [HI] and complementary gender differentiation [CGD], all dimensions of benevolent sexism [BS]. Previous studies presented internal reliability that ranged between 0.71 and 0.93. The Portuguese validation study reported 0.82 for both dimensions. In this study, internal reliability presented values between 0.78 and 0.82 for hostile and benevolent sexism.

Neosexism scale. The Neosexism scale (Tougas et al., 1995) consists of an 11-item measure of sexist attitudes regarding men and women in the labour context (e.g. "In a fair employment system, men and women should be considered equal"). Participants answered on a seven-point scale, where 1 indicated total disagreement with the sentence and seven complete agreement. Higher scores indicate sexist attitudes towards women at work. The internal reliability

of the original study varied between 0.76 and 0.78. The study by Gonçalves et al. (2015) presented an internal reliability of 0.83. In our study, the coefficient alpha was 0.68. Although inferior to previous studies, a coefficient alpha over 0.60 is still considered acceptable (Taber, 2018).

Measures were in Portuguese. Data were gathered at two different moments in time: in 2009 and again in 2019. Participants answered the questions in paper-pencil format. They were recruited from classrooms, public libraries and in their workplace, with the permission of those responsible. Participants were informed of the study's objective and gave their informed consent verbally. Samples were independent and measures in time were cross-sectional. We considered all ethical procedures, and participants voluntarily answered the questionnaire.

Results

Correlational analysis

All variables were found to be positively correlated (see Table 1). Moderate correlations were found between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, and between hostile sexism and neosexism. A weak correlation was found between benevolent sexism (general measure and dimensions) and neosexism.

Correlations were differentiated between sexes and according to year of response (see Tables 2 and 3). For the male sample (n = 211), hostile sexism and benevolent sexism were weakly correlated. Hostile sexism and neosexism were moderately correlated, but benevolent sexism and neosexism were

Table 1. Correlational analysis (n=714).

Variable		HS	BS	NS	PP	HI	CGD
1. HS	Pearson's r	—					
	p-value	—					
2. BS	Pearson's r	0.47***	—				
	p-value	<.001	—				
3. NS	Pearson's r	0.52***	0.27 ***	—			
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—			
4. PP	Pearson's r	0.39***	0.84***	0.28***	—		
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—		
5. HI	Pearson's r	0.43***	0.85***	0.21***	0.55***	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	
6. CGD	Pearson's r	0.36***	0.84***	0.20 ***	0.66***	0.50***	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
HS – Hostile sexism; BS – Benevolent sexism: NS – Neosexism; PP – Protective paternalism, HI – Heterosexual intimacy; CGD – Complementary gender differentiation.

Table 2. Correlational analysis differentiated by sex (men, women).

Variable		HS	BS	NS	PP	HI	CGD
1. HS	Pearson's r	—	0.29***	0.52***	0.22***	0.32***	0.17*
	p-value	—	<.001	<.001	.001	<.001	.010
2. BS	Pearson's r	0.54***	—	0.10	0.86***	0.86***	0.81***
	p-value	<.001	—	0.15	<.001	<.001	<.001
3. NS	Pearson's r	0.47***	0.32***	—	0.11	0.12	0.005
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—	.100	.080	0.940
4. PP	Pearson's r	0.45***	0.83***	0.33***	—	.60***	0.64***
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	<.001	<.001
5. HI	Pearson's r	0.45***	0.84***	0.22***	0.52***	—	0.48***
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	<.001
6. CGD	Pearson's r	***	0.86***	0.28***	0.68***	0.52***	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.
HS – Hostile sexism; BS – Benevolent sexism: NS – Neosexism; PP – Protective paternalism,
HI – Heterosexual intimacy; CGD – Complementary gender differentiation.
The table's lower half concerns the correlational analysis for women (n=508). The table's upper half refers to the correlation analysis for men (n=211).

Table 3. Correlational analysis differentiated by year (2009, 2019).

Variable		HS	BS	NS	PP	HI	CGD
1. HS	Pearson's r	—	0.37***	0.47***	0.34***	0.32***	0.27***
	p-value	—	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
2. BS	Pearson's r	0.62 ***	—	0.19***	0.83***	0.83***	0.83***
	p-value	<.001	—	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
3. NS	Pearson's r	0.62***	0.43 ***	—	0.24***	0.12**	0.12**
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—	<.001	.017	.014
4. PP	Pearson's r	0.46 ***	0.86 ***	0.36 ***	—	0.52***	0.63***
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	<.001	<.001
5. HI	Pearson's r	0.59 ***	0.86 ***	0.41***	0.59 ***	—	0.46***
	p-value	<.00***1	<.001	<.001	<.001	—	<.001
6. CGD	Pearson's r	0.52	0.87***	0.3***3	0.70 ***	0.56 ***	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	—

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.
HS – Hostile sexism; BS – Benevolent sexism: NS – Neosexism; PP – Protective paternalism,
HI – Heterosexual intimacy; CGD – Complementary gender differentiation.
The table's upper half concerns the correlational analysis for 2009 (n=510). The table's lower half refers to the correlation analysis for 2019 (n=209).

uncorrelated. Women (n=508) did not present the same correlational profile between variables. Women presented a stronger correlation between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism than men, with significant differences between coefficients ($z = 3.709$, $p < 0.001$). They presented a moderate correlation between hostile sexism and neosexism; despite this being inferior to the coefficient observed in the male sample, the difference between groups was not statistically different ($z = -0.804$, $p = 0.211$). For women, benevolent sexism and neosexism were positive and moderately correlated, presenting a significant difference from men's correlation coefficient ($z = 2.808$, $p = 0.002$).

Correlational coefficients between the 2009 and 2019 measures showed positive and significant correlations between all variables. However, there was a significant increase in the correlation coefficient between hostile sexism and neosexism in 2019 ($z = -2.465$, $p = 0.007$). There was also a significant difference between the correlational coefficients of neosexism and heterosexual intimacy ($z = -3.881$, $p < 0.001$), and between neosexism and complementary gender differentiation ($z = -2.669$, $p = 0.004$). Variables went from a weak positive correlation in 2009 to a moderate positive correlation in 2019.

General descriptive measures

As observed in Table 4, all measures showed response means near the scale's midpoint. This could be interpreted as the Portuguese population having mild sexist beliefs. The differentiation of means by sex and response year showed fewer sexist beliefs for women and a decrease in sexist beliefs in 2019.

One-way analysis of variance

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine a statistically significant difference between year (2009 vs. 2019) and sex (men vs. women) in relation to ambivalent sexism and neosexism, controlling for birth year (see Table 5).

There was a significant difference in mean hostile sexism between years [$F_{(1, 709)} = 23.076$, $p < 0.001$] and between sexes [$F_{(1, 709)} = 42.903$, $p < 0.001$], while adjusting for birth year. The partial eta square values indicated a small effect size, suggesting a small percentage of explanation of hostile sexism by sex or year. The adjusted marginal means showed a decrease in hostile sexism in 2019 (2009 $M = 3.55$; 2019 $M = 3.10$) and less hostile sexism among women (men $M = 3.62$; women $M = 3.04$).

Benevolent sexism presented differences according to year: there was a significant difference in mean hostile sexism between years [$F_{(1, 709)} = 16.607$, $p < 0.001$] and between sexes [$F_{(1, 709)} = 5.007$, $p = 0.026$], while adjusting for birth year. There was no interaction between sex and year. Partial eta squares showed a small effect of both variables in the explanation of the variance of benevolent sexism. Estimated marginal means showed a decrease in benevolent

Table 4. General descriptive measures.

	HS		BS		PP		HI		CGD		NS	
Internal reliability (Cronbach's α)	.78		.82		.60		.81		.65		.69	
Mean	3.30		3.24		2.83		3.47		3.42		2.67	
Std. deviation	1.00		1.00		0.98		1.41		1.16		0.78	
Minimum	1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00		1.00	
Maximum	6.00		6.00		6.00		6.50		6.33		5.64	

	HS		BS		PP		HI		CGD		NS	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Mean	3.75	3.11	3.37	3.18	2.99	2.76	3.76	3.34	3.37	3.44	2.92	2.57
Std. deviation	0.99	0.94	0.95	1.01	0.96	0.98	1.36	1.42	1.06	1.20	0.79	0.75
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	6.00	5.36	5.64	6.00	5.50	6.00	6.00	6.50	5.67	6.33	5.64	5.64

	HS		BS		PP		HI		CGD		NS	
	09	19	09	19	09	19	09	19	09	19	09	19
Mean	3.42	3.00	3.35	2.97	2.89	2.68	3.66	3.00	3.50	3.23	2.66	2.69
Std. deviation	0.93	1.11	0.96	1.03	0.96	1.02	1.39	1.38	1.14	1.19	0.71	0.93
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	6.00	5.91	6.00	5.67	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.50	6.00	6.33	5.64	5.64

HS – Hostile sexism; BS – Benevolent sexism – BS; PP – Protective paternalism; HI – Heterosexual intimacy; CGD – Complementary gender differentiation; NS – Neosexism; M – Men; W – Women; 09 – 2009 participants; 19 – 2019 participants.

sexism in 2019 (2009 $M = 3.39$; 2019 $M = 2.99$). Women present inferior values in benevolent sexism than men (men $M = 3.29$; women $M = 3.09$). Subdimensions of benevolent sexism presented differences in the ANCOVA. The mean protective paternalism presented small differences between years [$F_{(1, 709)} = 4.598$, $p = .032$] and sexes [$F_{(1, 709)} = 6.361$, $p = 0.012$] while controlling for birth year, but no interaction between independent variables. The magnitude of effects was very small, expressed through a small variation in estimated marginal means, explained by our independent variables. There was less protective paternalism in 2019 (2009 $M = 2.94$; 2019 $M = 2.73$) and among the female respondent group (men $M = 2.95$; women $M = 2.72$). Regarding heterosexual intimacy, there were significant differences by year [$F_{(1, 709)} = 30.807$, $p < 0.001$] and between sexes [$F_{(1, 709)} = 10.204$, $p = 0.026$], while adjusting for birth year, which significantly affected the results. The effect size was considered small. There was no observed interaction between sex and year of participation. Estimated marginal means suggested a decrease in heterosexual intimacy

Table 5. One-way ANCOVA.

Cases	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	η^2
Hostile sexism						
Year	20.508	1	20.508	23.076	<.001	0.030
Sex	38.128	1	38.128	42.903	<.001	0.055
Birth year	0.428	1	0.428	0.481	0.488	$6.198e^{-4}$
Year × Sex	0.877	1	0.877	0.986	0.321	0.001
Residuals	630.093	709	0.889			
Benevolent sexism						
Year	15.972	1	15.972	16.607	<.001	0.023
Sex	4.815	1	4.815	5.007	0.026	0.007
Birth year	3.727	1	3.727	3.875	0.049	0.005
Year × Sex	0.879	1	0.879	0.914	0.339	0.001
Residuals	681.901	709	0.962			
Neosexism						
Year	1.523	1	1.523	2.611	0.107	0.004
Sex	15.081	1	15.081	25.858	<.001	0.035
Birth year	2.571	1	2.571	4.409	0.036	0.006
Year × Sex	0.098	1	0.098	0.169	0.681	$2.275e^{-4}$
Residuals	413.503	709	0.583			
Protective paternalism (benevolent sexism dimension)						
Year	4.354	1	4.354	4.598	0.032	0.006
Sex	6.024	1	6.024	6.361	0.012	0.009
Birth year	0.502	1	0.502	0.530	0.467	$7.352e^{-4}$
Year × Sex	0.120	1	0.120	0.127	0.722	$1.762e^{-4}$
Residuals	671.349	709	0.947			
Heterosexual intimacy (benevolent sexism dimension)						
Year	57.566	1	57.566	30.807	<.001	0.040
Sex	19.067	1	19.067	10.204	0.001	0.013
Birth year	20.454	1	20.454	10.946	<.001	0.014
Year × Sex	0.813	1	0.813	0.435	0.510	$5.718e^{-4}$
Residuals	1324.821	709	1.869			
Complementary gender differentiation (benevolent sexism dimension)						
Year	5.362	1	5.362	4.023	0.045	0.006
Sex	0.057	1	0.057	0.042	0.837	$5.932e^{-5}$
Birth year	0.315	1	0.315	0.236	0.627	$3.300e^{-4}$
Year × Sex	2.445	1	2.445	1.834	0.176	0.003
Residuals	944.991	709	1.333			

dimension in 2019 (2009 $M = 3.76$; 2019 $M = 3.01$) and a decrease in women group (men $M = 3.59$; women $M = 3.18$). For complementary gender differentiation, there was only a significant effect of year [$F_{(1, 709)} = 4.023$, $p = 0.045$], while controlling for birth year. This effect was considered to be of very small

magnitude, accounting for only a small part of the variation of the dependent variable. Nevertheless, 2019 seemed to have fewer sexist beliefs concerning complementary gender differentiation (2009 $M = 3.47$; 2019 $M = 3.24$). Finally, neosexism means were significantly different for sex, but not for year or for the interaction of both independent variables, while controlling for the respondent's birth year [$F_{(1, 709)} = 25.858$, $p < 0.001$]. The magnitude of this effect was considered small. The estimated marginal means suggested that men present more neosexist beliefs that women (men $M = 2.95$; women $M = 2.58$).

Discussion

It was our goal to compare differences in sexism in the Portuguese population across a ten year-gap. Overall results suggest that 2019 respondents (n=211) are less likely to hold sexist attitudes towards women. We observed a decrease in scores for hostile sexism, protective paternalism and heterosexual intimacy, and a marginal decrease in complementary gender differentiation. Neosexism did not vary over time.

In the ten years between 2009 and 2019, several social and political changes altered the way we perceive gender, biological sex differentiation, family, and family roles (Howard et al., 2020), and collective action measures have been discussed and implemented to foster social change (Estevan-Reina et al., 2020; McGarty et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2011). Portugal made a breakthrough in 1974, recognizing the need for gender equality; since then, several changes have been observed. Wall et al. (2017), referring to a study comparing the attitudes and practices of men and women of working age, observed that men are increasing their contribution to household work, with greater equilibrium in the conjugal division of chores and a clear and observable change in gender roles. Hence, the small yet significant drop in scores was expected, since gender and role norms are becoming more fluid (Howard et al., 2020), with other countries showing similar patterns in modifying ambivalent sexism scores (Hammond et al., 2018). The growing attention to sexism and the non-binary lexicality of gender may be weakening the boundaries of sexism that focus upon heterosexual relations between men and women (Diamond, 2020; Estevan-Reina et al., 2020), diminishing sexist values.

It is interesting, however, that complementary gender differentiation is the dimension of benevolent sexism that showed negligible alteration over time and was similar between sexes. Gender differentiation was defined by Glick and Fiske (1996) as the dyadic dependency of men on women that fosters women's positive traits while complementing men's traits. For example, women have traits that compensate for what men stereotypically lack (e.g. women are more emotional while men are more rational). Jost and Kay (2005) observed that complementary gender stereotypes served to increase system justification—i.e. to maintain the status quo for men and contribute to

an image of society where both groups benefit from a balanced dispersion of those benefits. Therefore, we might suggest that we still rely on complementary gender differentiation to support sexist beliefs, since they imply a positive and beneficial perspective for both sexes.

Neosexism also failed to reduce significantly over time. Considering the concept definition, neosexism is "a manifestation of a conflict between egalitarian values and residual negative feelings toward women" (Tougas, 1995, p. 843). The maintenance of this conflict suggests that despite the reduction in more ambivalent sexism, individuals in general tend to possess sexist beliefs towards women, manifested through an opposition to progressive social measures for women.

It is also observable that men, independently of the group year, continue to have higher scores in sexist measures (hostile sexism, protective paternalism, heterosexual intimacy, and neosexism). Sexism beliefs are prompt to justify the gender-based system (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and these results suggest that, despite decreasing tendency in ambivalent sexism, men continue to hold more prejudice towards women.

Although all sexism measures were positively correlated. Glick and Fiske (1996), across five studies, determined that hostile and benevolent sexism were positively correlated, with small to moderate associations. Also, subdimensions of benevolent sexism were positively correlated between them. Our study replicates these findings. Also, hostile and benevolent sexism, and its subdimensions, were found to be positively correlated with neosexism, although not as strongly as described by Masser and Abrams (1999). This association was stronger for women than for men. The moderate to strong relationship between hostile sexism and neosexism was invariant for both sexes—i.e. correlational coefficients were statistically similar; however, the correlation between neosexism and benevolent sexism was only present among women. These results were also identified in Masser and Abrams' (1999) study and, more recently, in the study by Gonçalves et al. (2015). According to Glick and Fiske (2001), hostile sexism is a justification of men's power supported by a sexist antipathy, whilst benevolent sexism attributes legitimation to men through a more caring and protective (yet paternalizing) perspective. Since women might perceive an advantage in conforming with the stereotypical view to enable this protection, they might be prone to maintain neosexist beliefs that allow them to sustain this system. Men, on the other hand, only endorse neosexist beliefs if they have an antagonistic view of women, since egalitarian beliefs should disengage them from paternalistic protectionism. Also, women may fail to detect sexism in situations where men seem to protect their own interest (although diminishing their abilities and independency). The prototype of sexism is understood as hostility, with harmful behaviour, rather than benevolence, yet also with

harmful behaviours (Barreto & Ellemers, 2013). It is therefore acceptable that women that endorse benevolent sexism also endorse neosexist beliefs that threaten the 'advantage' benevolent sexism allows them to have.

It was also surprising to observe that correlational coefficients decreased in strength in 2019. Although the two groups have similar profiles regarding age and sex distribution, they have different birth years. The 2009 group has a modal birth year of 1987 and the 2019 group has a modal birth year of 1996. Also, the first group saw greater dispersion of birth years (1928–1992 vs. 1952–1999). The implication is that the groups might have cultural differences despite having similar ages at the time of response. These might be a good indication that values are indeed changing, or that we tend to express sexist beliefs mildly. For instance, the general Portuguese population, and men particularly, presented low scores for neosexism and did not seem to perceive measures that ensure equality as unfavourable; however, explicit sexism measures are susceptible to social desirability (Swim et al., 2005), which might show a more positive view than reality.

According to Tougas et al. (1995), the expression of sexist attitudes towards women is not socially accepted, which leads to a shift in the form of expressing these attitudes. Social and political policies all over the industrialized world, where women compete in education and the work market, have pushed through the resistance to accepting women as having the same social role as men. Laws, policies and campaigns ensure that women and men have equal rights and opportunities, and no differentiation is to be made based on sex or gender. Furthering this analysis, Tougas et al. (1995) suggested that neosexism encompasses prejudice not directly against women but against those policies used to ensure equal opportunities that seem to privilege women while affecting the men's rights. While these policy measures are increasing in Portugal, women continue to suffer from a negative pay gap, more instability at work, and fewer career opportunities (CIG, 2017). More concerning are the numbers on domestic violence and violence towards women that have risen systematically, with a considerable increase since 2018 in signalization, participation in domestic violence, and number of deaths, for example (CIG, 2020). We should keep in mind that sexist ideologies affect the cultural beliefs that shape conventional gender roles, and the differentiated adoption of these beliefs implies different perceptions and actions towards members of each sex (Glick & Fiske, 2001), including towards in-group members. Wall et al. (2017) summarized, for instance, that almost 91.3 per cent of the Portuguese population agrees with measures ensuring equal pay for men and women, but, regardless of age, men are less keen than women on quotas for women in positions of power and decision-making.

Neosexism scales address mainly three sexist trends: denying the existence of discrimination against women, resenting discrimination complaints, and

maintaining a paternalistic view of women (Martínez & Paterna-Bleda, 2013, p. 559). Neosexism is explained by hostile sexism rather than by benevolent sexism (Masser & Abrams, 2004). Hostile sexism is usually associated with more ostensible negative behaviour towards women, such as oppression, hostility and abuse (Schwartz & Lindley, 2009), societal unfairness, and gender income inequality (Connor & Fiske, 2018), which is a gap that we are still struggling to close. Thus, although we observe a decrease in the values of sexism in the ten-year interval, this seems to relate more to a cultural change in relation to what is understood as sexism and what is acceptable to understand as sexism than to actual change in behaviours that discriminate against women.

Sexism has been shown to be unacceptable (Berkowitz, 2003). The prescriptive aspect of the stereotypes that are at the base of sexist beliefs continues to harm women, who continue to have difficulty finding profession situations of equality (Barreto & Ellemers, 2013). Huang et al. (2018) observed a change in sexist beliefs regarding hostile and benevolent sexism over several measurements in consecutive years (2009–2016) in New Zealand, a country with a more egalitarian tradition than Portugal. While this study observed what seems to be a change of men's attitude towards a more progressive view of women, we did not find an interaction of the year with sex in our study. Response patterns regarding sexism remained identical between men and women, suggesting, once again, that they are responding to the influence of societal norms rather than expressing themselves in egalitarian behaviour.

In future studies, it would be relevant to study the mechanisms that promote this descriptive, not prescriptive, change in sexism, since the indicators favourable to equal opportunities discontinue to improve and are even expected to worsen in a pandemic period. Women are 24 per cent more likely to permanently lose their job than men because of the outbreak. Women also expect their labour income to fall by 50 per cent when compare to the fall men experience (Dang & Nguyen, 2021), and the pandemic has increased the unpaid work and family workload for women (Power, 2020).

Compliance With Ethical Standards

All procedures performed in these studies were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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