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## The role of gender in the perception of different forms of psychological violence in young couples

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Abstract:	<p>The objective of the present study has been to assess the influence that the sex of the aggressor and the sex of participant have on the perception of three types of psychological violence in young couples. A total of 693 young people ranging from ages 17 to 25 were randomly assigned six different scenarios in which situations of psychological violence between young heterosexual couples were described and where the sex of the aggressor and the types of psychological violence varied. The results of our research revealed that differences in the perception of violence are observed based on the sex of the aggressor, the sex of the participant and the type of psychological violence, independently, as well as in the interaction of the three variables. This result is relevant as it points to the need for further in-depth study into situations that could contribute to justifying violence.</p>

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3 FULL TITLE: The role of gender in the perception of different forms of psychological  
4 violence in young couples  
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### 8 **Abstract**

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11 The objective of the present study has been to assess the influence that the sex of the  
12 aggressor and the sex of participant have on the perception of three types of psychological  
13 violence in young couples. A total of 693 young people ranging from ages 17 to 25 were  
14 randomly assigned six different scenarios in which situations of psychological violence  
15 between young heterosexual couples were described and where the sex of the aggressor and  
16 the types of psychological violence varied. The results of our research revealed that  
17 differences in the perception of violence are observed based on the sex of the aggressor, the  
18 sex of the participant and the type of psychological violence, independently, as well as in the  
19 interaction of the three variables. This result is relevant as it points to the need for further in-  
20 depth study into situations that could contribute to justifying violence.  
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### 35 **Key words**

36 Attitudes; psychological violence; young couples; dating violence  
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### 42 **Introduction**

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45 Psychological violence is one of the most common types of abuse occurring in the  
46 relationships of young couples (Fernández-Fuertes & Fuertes, 2010; Ferrer, Bosch, Navarro,  
47 Ramis, & García, 2008; Moreno, Blázquez, García-Bahamonte, Guerrero, & Pozuelo, 2014;  
48 Perles, San Martín & Canto, 2016; Sears, Byers, & Price, 2007; Shook, Jurich, & Segrist,  
49 2000). Williams, Richardson, Hammock, & Janit (2012) refer to psychological violence in  
50 couple relationships as attempts to control one's partner or relationship, wield power, or  
51 damage the victim's sense of self. They have stressed the need to identify psychological  
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3 abuse in young couples as a social problem on par with physical violence (Blázquez, 2010),  
4 because of its very negative effects on the physical and mental well-being of the victims.  
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7 (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2007; Seff, Beaulaurier, &  
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9 Newman, 2008; Stark, 2006). Psychological violence in couples has been highlighted as a  
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11 predictor of physical violence in young couples (O’Leary & Slep, 2003; White, Merrill, &  
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13 Koss, 2001). This type of violence is more difficult to identify by the couple themselves,  
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15 which could lead to some psychological abuse being considered a normal practice in the  
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17 couple’s relationship (Hird, 2000). Several studies reveal that adolescents and young people  
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19 tend to minimize experiences of violence in intimate relationships. (Chung, 2007; Edwards et  
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21 al., 2012). Studies conducted with Spanish adolescents concluded that adolescents perceived  
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23 certain aggressive violent behavior (e.g., pushing, provocations, threats) as a normalized and  
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25 acceptable interactive style of solving conflicts in their relationships (Muñoz-Rivas, Grana, &  
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27 Gonzalez, 2011; Muñoz-Rivas, Grana, O’Leary, & Gonzalez, 2007). In addition, other studies  
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29 found that Spanish adolescents downplayed some indicators of violence such as abuse of  
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31 control, domination, and jealousy/possession (De la Peña, Ramos, Luzon, & Recio, 2011).  
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37 Attitudes of acceptance of violence in couples have been pointed to as a key risk factor  
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39 for couple violence, which can vary throughout different countries and cultures (Kerig, Volz,  
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41 Moeddel, & Cuellar, 2010). The need to modify attitudes justifying violence in couples in  
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43 order to prevent future violent behavior in the couple has been specifically tackled in studies  
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45 regarding intimate partner violence against women (Archer & Graham-Kevan, 2003; Capezza  
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47 & Arriaga, 2008a; Ferrer & Bosch, 2014; Gracia & Lila, 2015). At the same time, they have  
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49 likewise highlighted the importance of intervention in attitudes that justify aggressions in  
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51 violence prevention programs during courtship (Muñoz-Rivas, Gámez, Fernández y  
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53 González, 2011). Simon, Miller, Gorman-Smith, Orpinas, & Sullivan (2010) find a strong link  
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55 between an attitude of acceptance of violence in courtship and its involvement in violent  
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3 behavior towards a new partner. Longitudinal studies have demonstrated that changes in these  
4 attitudes can predict changes in violent behavior toward a partner in the future (Schumacher  
5 & Slep, 2004). Different studies have shown that young people justify couple violence in  
6 certain situations (Fernández-González, Calvete, & Orue, 2017; Foo & Margolin, 1995;  
7 Matthews, 1984; Roscoe & Benaske, 1985;).

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15 Most of the studies carried out to date have focused on the perception of physical  
16 violence while perception of psychological violence has been less studied (Hammock,  
17 Richardson, William & Janit, 2015). However, as we observed earlier, this type of aggression  
18 is very common in young couples' relationships and its effects can be more harmful and  
19 lasting that those produced by physical violence (Basow et al., 2007), which is why it is  
20 important to further explore this area. Some research has compared the differences in the  
21 perception of physical violence and that of psychological violence, finding that in physical  
22 aggression, the physical aggression itself as well as the aggressor were more negatively  
23 valued than in that of psychological violence, observing the same results in heterosexual  
24 couples (Hammock et al., 2015) as in same-sex couples (Hammock, Richardson, Lamm,  
25 Taylor, & Verlaque, 2017). On the other hand, Copezza & Arriaga (2008 a, b) evaluated the  
26 perception of different levels of physical and psychological aggression in heterosexual  
27 couples, finding that, when solely comparing different levels of psychological aggression, the  
28 participants viewed the most serious psychological aggressions as being the most grave and  
29 unacceptable; however, upon introducing physical violence in the assessments, on one hand,  
30 differences were not perceived among the different levels of psychological aggression, and on  
31 the other, lesser cases of physical aggression were perceived more harshly than was any  
32 degree of a psychological aggression. These studies find that the participants perceived  
33 physical aggression as the least acceptable, rating it more aggressive, abusive, and more  
34 negative than psychological aggression. Other studies have also evaluated the perception of  
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3 sexual violence, with physical violence being considered more abusive, followed by sexual  
4 violence, and psychological violence (Dardis, Edwards, Kelley, & Gidycz, 2017).  
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8 Most previous research evaluated the perception of violence in adult couples, but did  
9 not study in depth the perception of young couples regarding psychological violence  
10 occurring in couples of their same age. Our study seeks to assess the perception of different  
11 types of psychological abuse that can be observed in young couples to determine whether  
12 differences exist in the perception of the seriousness of said behavior and in the responsibility  
13 of the aggressor.  
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21 One of the variables studied in relation to the perception of couple violence is the  
22 gender of the aggressor, and different studies, carried out on the general population as well as  
23 with student population, found that couple violence is perceived differently when it is  
24 committed by a male than when it is by a female (Cormier & Woodworth, 2008; Sorenson &  
25 Thomas, 2009). In this sense, greater justification for the violence is found when it is  
26 committed by a woman than when it is committed by a man (Bethke & DeJoy, 1993; Harris,  
27 1991; O'Keefe 1997; Price & Byers, 1999), with the abuse being perceived as less threatening  
28 when the woman is the aggressor (Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Other studies have observed  
29 that physical aggressions committed by men are perceived as less acceptable and more  
30 harmful, more aggressive and more negative than those committed by women on men (Basow  
31 et al., 2007; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Hammock et al., 2015). At the same time, aggressions  
32 in couples when the man is the aggressor and the female the victim generally tend to be  
33 considered criminal actions, with a tendency to recommend longer jail sentences (Poorman,  
34 Seelau & Seelau, 2003; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). The tendency to consider the episodes  
35 more abusive when committed by men rather than women is observed when the abuse is  
36 physical as well as psychological (DeHart, Follingstad, & Fields, 2010; Hammock et al.,  
37 2017). However, in a study carried out by Basow et al. (2007), it was found that men were  
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3 perceived more negatively when they engaged in physical abuse, while women were judged  
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5 more negatively than the males when the abuse was psychological.  
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8 Most previous work has dealt with the differences in the perception of violence in  
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10 heterosexual couples; nevertheless, studies that have included perception of violence in same  
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12 sex couples find that violent episodes are perceived more negatively when the aggressor is  
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14 male and the victim is female than when female-male, male-male, or female-female, being  
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16 taken as extremely serious and advising the victims to press charges. (Harris & Cook, 1994;  
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18 Home, 1994; Poorman et al., 2003; Seelau y Seelau, 2005). Other studies have found that  
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20 when the man is the aggressor, the incident, the aggressor and victim's emotions are all  
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22 scored more negatively (Haammock et al., 2017).  
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26 Studies carried out with adolescents reveal that they perceive a double standard with  
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28 respect to the response of adults to abusive behavior in young men and young women, with  
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30 violent behavior being punished more when it is committed by boys against girls (Sears,  
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32 Byers & Price, 2007). Reeves & Orpinas (2012) find that, in general, high school students  
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34 reject physical violence, but that the few who justified it, did so twice as much in the case of  
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36 girls than that of boys. However, the authors pointed out that this result seems to indicate a  
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38 rejection or persecution of violence committed by boys rather than an acceptance of violence  
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40 in girls.  
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44 This differential perception of violence in accordance with the sex of the aggressor has  
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46 been explained on the basis of gender role stereotypes, where men are viewed as less  
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48 vulnerable than women (Gerber, 1991), which influences in the violence being perceived as  
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50 more serious when it is carried out by a man and the perpetrator is considered more  
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52 aggressive when the victim is a woman (Seelau & Seelau, 2005). These stereotypes are also  
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54 observed in the perception of the victims in intimate couple violence. Women are viewed as  
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56 weaker and having a greater need for protection, especially when the man is the aggressor,  
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3 than when the man is the victim (Basow et al., 2007; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). Some authors  
4 have suggested that the influence of gender stereotypes can create a gendered lens for judging  
5 the behaviors, resulting in different interpretations of the same behavior, depending on the  
6 gender of the person perpetrating it or suffering from it (Hammock et al., 2017). Other studies  
7 have revealed that the differences in physical strength between men and women explain the  
8 different perceptions of aggressions in couples where the man is the aggressor and the woman  
9 the victim (Hamby & Jackson, 2010).

19 Another of the issues examined by the research is the perception of violence in  
20 function of the sex of the perceiver, with different studies revealing a greater tendency for  
21 men to blame women for violence they have suffered, and women attributing greater  
22 responsibility for such acts to the abusers, perceiving violent incidents to be more serious  
23 (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Hamby & Jackson, 2010), and viewing psychological abuse more  
24 seriously than men (Follingstad, Helff, Binford, Runge, & White, 2004). Other studies,  
25 carried out with undergraduates, have observed that women perceive the incidents more  
26 negatively than do men (Hammock et al., 2015; 2017); likewise young women consider  
27 physical, sexual and psychological violence more abusive than men (Dardis et al., 2017).  
28 Regarding opinions in the responses to violent episodes, it was found that women tend to be  
29 more in favor of system interventions than do men when confronting violent situations, such  
30 as calling the police or victim helplines, while men tend to recommend more individual  
31 interventions, such as speaking to the couple or doing nothing (Seelau & Seelau, 2005).  
32 Studies undertaken with adolescents suggest that boys display attitudes involving a greater  
33 acceptance of violence than do girls (Fernández-González et al., 2017; Josephson & Proulx,  
34 2008; Karlsson, Temple, Weston & Le, 2016) and that these attitudes correlate most strongly  
35 with couple violence in the boys (Torres et al., 2012).

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3 It is necessary to examine in depth the situational variables that lead to certain  
4 behavior being perceived as non-violent and even justifying the abuse. The present study's  
5 main objective is to assess the influence of the aggressor's sex and the type of psychological  
6 violence carried out on the perception of the seriousness of the abuse and aggressor's  
7 responsibility, as well as gender differences in the perception of these variables.  
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### 18 **Objectives and Hypothesis**

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21 The aim of our study is to evaluate the perception that young people have on three types of  
22 psychological violence in young heterosexual couples according to the sex of the participant,  
23 the sex of the aggressor and the type of psychological violence carried out.  
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28 We expect to find higher scores in the perception of the seriousness of the event, aggressor  
29 responsibility and the likelihood of the incident happening again in the three different types of  
30 psychological violence (insulting and attempting to impose oneself; controlling or ignoring  
31 one's partner; ridiculing one's partner in the presence of friends) when the aggressor is a man  
32 than when it is a woman (hypothesis 1). We expect to find lower scores in the perception of  
33 the relationship's stability in the three types of psychological violence when the man is the  
34 aggressor than when it is a woman. (Hypothesis 1a).  
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45 We expect to find higher scores in the perception of the seriousness of the episode, the  
46 aggressor's responsibility and the likelihood that the episode will happen again for the female  
47 participants than for the male participants in this study for the three types of psychological  
48 violence (hypothesis 2). We expect to find lower scores in the perception of the relationship's  
49 stability for the three types of psychological violence in the female participants in the study  
50 than for the male participants (hypothesis 2a).  
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3 Finally, we attempt to explore the differences in the perception of the serious nature of the  
4 episode, aggressor's responsibility, likelihood of the incident happening again, and the  
5 perception of the relationship's stability for the different forms of psychological violence  
6 assessed and their interaction with the sex of the aggressor and the sex of the participant.  
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## 16 **Method**

### 17 **Participants**

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20 Six hundred and ninety three young people whose ages ranged from 17 to 25 participated in  
21 this study ( $Med = 20.5$ ,  $SD = 2.2$ ), 57.7% female and 42.38% male. A total of 95.5% were  
22 born in Spain and the remaining 5.4% were of diverse nationalities from Europe, Latin  
23 America, China and the United States. A total of 78.5% of the participants were students,  
24 while 21.5% were working. Among the students, the majority were pursuing university  
25 studies in more than 30 different fields (72.7%), while other educational levels were also  
26 included, such as secondary education (13.8%), graduate studies (8.2%), doctoral degrees  
27 (1.8%) and other studies (2.5%). A total of 57% were in a relationship at the time of the study  
28 while 43% were not in a relationship. Of the foregoing, 85.3% had had been involved in  
29 some type of relationship previously. A total of 90.2% of the participants indicated that their  
30 sexual orientation was heterosexual, 3.2% homosexual, and 4.6% bisexual, while 2%  
31 responded that they did not know.  
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### 50 **Instrument and scenarios**

#### 51 Sociodemographic variables and information on the couple's relationships

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54 At the beginning of the survey, a series of questions were posed related to the sex, age,  
55 nationality, studies attained, if working, socioeconomic level and other similar items. Also  
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3 included were questions as to whether they were in a relationship or had been so in the past in  
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5 and questions referring to the importance of these relationships and time spent with their  
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7 partner.  
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11 Each participant was randomly assigned one of six scenarios, adapted from Harris and Cook  
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13 (1994), where a situation is described in which a young heterosexual couple argue resulting in  
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15 verbal aggression. In our study, we manipulate the sex of the aggressor and three types of  
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17 aggression. To evaluate different forms of psychological abuse, different behaviors extracted  
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19 from the survey on psychological abuse during courtship were incorporated (PDV-Q, Ureña,  
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21 Romera, A. Casas, Viejo, and Ortega-Ruiz, 2015). In psychological violence 1, abusive  
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23 behaviors were included: insulting and attempting to impose oneself; in psychological  
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25 violence 2: controlling and ignoring one's partner; and in the third type of psychological  
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27 violence: humiliating one's partner in the presence of friends. In the first two types of  
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29 violence, the couple, the argument and the abuse occurred while they were alone, while in the  
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31 third type, it occurred in the presence of others. In each scenario the description of the  
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33 situation is exactly the same, with only the masculine or female name of the aggressor and  
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35 victim and the type of aggression varying. The participants were randomly assigned to each  
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37 condition with the cell size oscillating between 111 and 119 for the interaction between the  
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39 sex of aggressor x by the type of psychological violence. The cell size, upon introducing the  
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41 sex of the participant as a factor oscillated between 42 and 70.  
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49 After having read the scenario, each participant responded to a series of questions, adapted  
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51 from Harris and Cook (1994) and referring to the degree of seriousness and violence of the  
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53 situation, the perception of responsibility and the provocation of the aggressor and the victim,  
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55 the degree of psychological harm suffered by the victim, the likelihood of the incident  
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57 happening again and the perception of the relationship's stability. Each question was  
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59 responded to on a scale from 1 to 7. A principal factor analysis with a Varimax rotation was  
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3 done of all questions about the scenarios. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure for sampling  
4 adequacy is .71, which indicates a sufficient sampling size, with the Bartlett sphericity test  
5 being significant ( $p = .000$ ). A four-factor solution, all with eigenvalues over 1.0, was  
6 produced. Together, the four factors accounted for 71% of the variance. Three items loaded  
7 on Factor 1 (24.18% of the variance) were termed “Incident seriousness”: “What is the  
8 incident’s degree of seriousness?” (.81), “To what degree do you consider the incident  
9 violent?” (.82), “What degree of psychological harm has the victim suffered (name of  
10 victim)” (.75). The coefficient of Cronbach’s alpha for the items of this factor was  $\alpha = .75$ .  
11 Factor 2 (23.33% of the variance), termed “Responsibility of aggressor”, was composed of  
12 four items: “What degree of responsibility does (name of the aggressor) hold for the  
13 incident?” (-.53), “(Name of the aggressor) has provoked the incident” (-.71), “What degree  
14 of responsibility does (name of the victim) have for the incident?” (.78), “(Name of the  
15 victim) has provoked the incident” (.83). The coefficient of Cronbach’s alpha for the items  
16 of the factor was  $\alpha = .70$ . Factor 3 (12.6% of the variance) was composed of the item “To what  
17 degree do you consider it likely that the incident will happen again?” (.96). Factor 4 (11.27%  
18 of the variance) was composed of the item “To what degree do you consider the relationship  
19 between (name of the victim) and (name of the aggressor) to be stable?” (.95).  
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## 45 Results

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48 Table 1 shows the mean scores for the seriousness of the incident variables, aggressor  
49 responsibility, likelihood of the episode happening again, and the stability of the relationship  
50 in the total sample, and according to the sex of the participant, the sex of the aggressor and the  
51 type of psychological violence.  
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Please, insert Table 1

We perform a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) among the subjects with three factors (Sex of aggressor X type of psychological violence X Sex of participant). The principal effect of the sex of aggressor was significant for the seriousness of the incident, with the score being higher when the man was the aggressor than when it was the woman [ $F(1,679) = 19.04, p < .001$ ], with no effect being observed on the rest of the variables. Interaction of a second order for Sex of Aggressor X Type of Psychological Violence was significant for the seriousness of the incident ( $p < .005$ ) (Fig. 1) and for the responsibility of the aggressor ( $p < .005$ ) (Fig. 2). The responsibility of the aggressor was greater when the man was the aggressor in type 1 violence,  $F(2,678) = 6.99, p < .005$ . The seriousness of the incident was greater when the man was the aggressor in type 1 and 2 violence,  $F(2, 679) = 5.95, p < .001$ . These results partially support hypothesis 1, where it was posed that the scores in the degree of seriousness of the incident, the responsibility of the aggressor and the likelihood for the incident to happen again would be higher when the sex of the aggressor was male than when it was female in the three types of psychological violence. No differences were observed according the sex of the aggressor in the perception of the stability of the relationship; thus hypothesis 1a is not supported.

Please, insert Fig.1 and Fig. 2

The results of MANOVA revealed a significant principal effect of the sex of the participant on the seriousness of the incident,  $p < .001$ , and on the likelihood of the incident happening again,  $p < .001$ . The female participants perceived a greater degree of seriousness of the incident than did the males,  $F(1,679) = 21.32, p < .001$ , as well as a higher likelihood of

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3 the incident happening again,  $F(1.680) = 15.8, p < .001$ . This partially supports hypothesis 2,  
4 as higher scores were found for female participants than for male participants in perceived  
5 seriousness of the incident and the likelihood of the incident happening again, but not finding  
6 differences in the perception of the responsibility of the aggressor. No differences were  
7 observed according to the sex of the participant in the perceived stability of the relationship;  
8 thus hypothesis 2a is not supported.  
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19 The principal effect of the type of psychological violence has been significant for  
20 responsibility of aggressor,  $p < .001$  and for the likelihood of the incident happening again.  
21 After multiple comparisons with the Scheffé procedure, it was observed that the differences in  
22 the responsibility of aggressor occurred between violence 1 (insulting/pressuring) and 3  
23 (ridiculing) and violence 2 (control) and 3 but not between types of violence 1 and 2, with the  
24 mean scores being lower in type 1 violence in comparison with 3, and in 2 in comparison with  
25 3. As for the likelihood of the incident happening again, differences were found in the three  
26 types of violence, with the score highest for violence 3, followed by violence 1, with the  
27 lowest score for violence 2. The second- order interaction of Type of violence X Sex of the  
28 participant was only significant for the perception of the stability of the relationship (Fig.3).  
29 Further analysis revealed that the scores were higher for type 1 violence for women than for  
30 men, with no significant differences observed in types 2 and 3 violence. The three-way  
31 interaction of Sex of the aggressor X Type of psychological violence X Sex of the participant  
32 was significant for the perceived seriousness of the incident  $F(2.676) = 3.81, p < .05$  (Fig. 4).  
33 Further analysis demonstrated that the male participants rated the seriousness of the incident  
34 higher when the aggressor was a man than when it was a woman in type 1 violence. The  
35 female participants rated the perceived seriousness of the incident higher when the aggressor  
36 was a man than when it was a woman in types 1 and 2 violence.  
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Please, insert Fig. 3 and Fig. 4

## Discussion

The main objective of the present study has been to assess the perception of young people regarding different types of psychological violence in young couples. The results of our study reflect that, in general, incidents of psychological violence are perceived negatively, observing differences in these perceptions according to the sex of the aggressor, the type of psychological violence employed and the sex of the participant.

A first objective was to assess differences in the perception of violence according to the sex of the aggressor in three types of psychological violence. We found higher scores in the seriousness of the incident when the male is the aggressor and the victim is a woman as opposed to situations where the woman is the aggressor and the man is the victim; no differences were found in the rest of the variables assessed. Regarding the three types of psychological violence evaluated, we find that the responsibility of the aggressor is perceived to be higher when the man is the aggressor only in violence type 1 (insulting or attempting to impose oneself), and the seriousness of the incident is considered greater when the aggressor is a man than when it is a woman in types 1 and in 2 violence (controlling or ignoring a partner) but not in type 3 (ridiculing a partner in front of friends). This result indicates that the perception of young people regarding the responsibility of the aggressor and the seriousness of the incident when the man is the aggressor varies according to the type of psychological violence employed. Previous research has shown that violent incidents as well as the aggressors are perceived more negatively when the man is the aggressor (Basow et al., 2007; Hammock et al., 2015; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005), in physical as well as psychological aggressions (DeHart, Follingstad, & Fields, 2010; Hammock et al., 2017). Our results reflect

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3 that the type of psychological violence engaged in can influence this perception. This work  
4 has found results consistent with previous research in regard to the most negative perception  
5 of couple violence occurring when it is carried out by the man against the woman, but it has  
6 also been shown that certain forms of psychological abuse are perceived as equally important  
7 independent of the gender of the partner engaging in the violence and the partner suffering  
8 from it. In this sense, it is possible that certain types of abuse are more related to gender  
9 stereotypes. This issue must be explored in future research in order to further examine gender  
10 differences when perceiving different types of psychological abuse and the variables which  
11 explain these attitudinal differences  
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24 Another of the variables examined in our study relating to the perception of  
25 psychological violence in young couples was the sex of the participant, finding that women  
26 perceived psychological violence as being more serious than did the men. At the same time,  
27 the women perceived a greater likelihood of the incident happening again than did the men.  
28 This result partially supports our predictions, since we also expected to find higher scores in  
29 the responsibility of the aggressor and lower scores in the stability of the relationship.  
30 Previous studies have found that women tend to blame the aggressors more and consider the  
31 violent episodes to be more serious (Follingstadet al., 2004; Hamby & Jackson, 2010). The  
32 results of our study corroborate those found in previous research showing that women score  
33 higher in the perception of the seriousness of the violence, which is relevant and indicates that  
34 women reject couple violence more than men (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008a; Prospero & Vohra-  
35 Gupta, 2007). Our results indicate that women recognize better than do men the seriousness of  
36 the three types of psychological abuse evaluated and furthermore view such incidents as  
37 likely to happen again. These differences in the perception of the degree of seriousness of  
38 psychological abuse could lead to situations in which certain abusive behavior is downplayed  
39 along with the reactions to assist the victim of such abuse. It is of essence to incorporate  
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3 educational and awareness-raising programs targeting adolescents and young people that  
4 enhance sensitivity to such behavior and the serious nature of the same, and which contribute  
5 to a proper perception of the presence of abusive behavior in intimate relationships.  
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10 Lastly, the main objective of our work has been to explore the influence of the  
11 interaction between the sex of the aggressor, the sex of the participant, and the three types of  
12 psychological violence on the perception of violent episodes. We have found a significant  
13 interaction of these three variables in the perception of the seriousness of the incident.  
14 Accordingly, the men in our sample consider the act of insulting to be more serious when  
15 engaged in by a man toward a woman, while no differences in the seriousness of the incident  
16 is perceived according to the sex of the aggressor in violence involving controlling and  
17 ridiculing. Female participants, on one hand, consider violence involving insulting and  
18 controlling to be more serious when carried out by a man, whereas they do not perceive  
19 differences in the seriousness of the episode according to the sex of the aggressor when the  
20 violence involved is that of ridiculing one's partner. These results reflect differences in the  
21 perception of the seriousness of the incident between men and women, with the latter tending  
22 to consider the different forms of psychological abuse more serious, especially when the male  
23 is the aggressor.  
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45 It is possible that the perception of the different types of psychological violence  
46 assessed in this study is influenced by the perception of gender violence and the degree of  
47 awareness about this issue. Along these lines, some authors assert that the results of several  
48 studies point to a gender bias and recognition that violence against women in intimate  
49 relationships is a much more significant social problem. (Hamel, Desmarais & Nicholls,  
50 2007; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2010). In the last few decades, Spanish society has developed  
51 a process of visualization and incorporation of violence against women programs in the public  
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3 agenda (De Miguel, 2005; Ferrer & Bosch, 2006; Medina-Ariza & Barberet, 2003). This has  
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5 influenced the attitude of the Spanish population, which mostly regards partner violence  
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7 against women as a social problem and clearly rejects it, as has been shown by population  
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9 survey data (Sociological Research Centre, 2012). These results are similar to those found in  
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11 surveys conducted with people from the European Union (European Commission, 2010). The  
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13 foregoing could influence certain types of psychological abuse related to gender violence,  
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15 such as domination and control, being perceived as more serious, especially when carried out  
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17 by a man against a woman.  
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22 Our study's results reveal the existence of differences between young women and men  
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24 in the perception of different forms of psychological violence. Attitudes of acceptance toward  
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26 violent behavior are considered a risk factor for engaging in violent behavior in intimate  
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28 relationships (Kerig, Volz, Moeddel, & Cuellar, 2010) and could be related to a greater  
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30 tolerance when witnessing violence being engaged in couple relationships, as well as  
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32 influencing the behavior for direct or indirect intervention when confronting these violent  
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34 episodes.  
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38 Among the study's limitations, we cite the characteristics of our sample, which,  
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40 although heterogeneous, contains a higher proportion of college students. In this sense, it is  
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42 necessary to delve into the perceptions of other groups within the young population.  
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44 Secondly, our work has focused on the perception of violence in heterosexual couples, and as  
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46 such it would be necessary to include in future work perception of violence in couples of  
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48 different sexual orientations. As for the different types of psychological violence evaluated,  
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50 future studies should include other types of psychological violence; which could very useful  
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52 for determining the differences in the perception of the seriousness of different types of  
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54 psychological abuse and the design of intervention programs that are geared to modifying  
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56 attitudes that minimize violence.  
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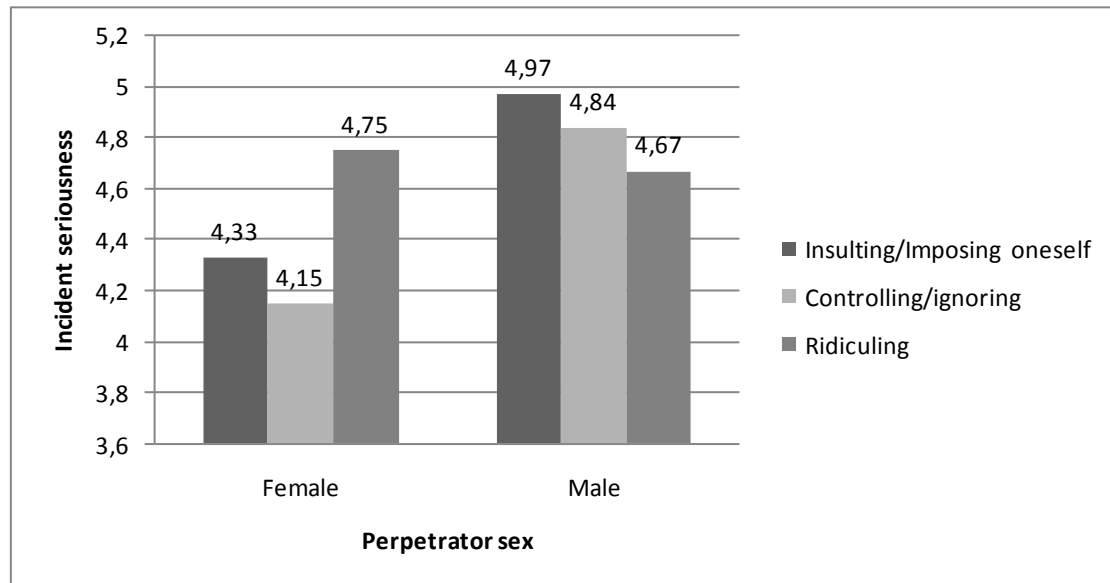
**Table 1.** Means (and standard deviations) for the scenario variables for total sample, according to the participant sex, perpetrator sex and type of psychological violence.

Variables	Total (n =692)	Participant		Aggressor		Psychological violence		
		Female (n=399)	Male (n=293)	Female (n=345)	Male (n=347)	Type 1 (n=233)	Type 2 (n=226)	Type 3 (n=233)
Seriousness of incident	4.62 (1.3)	4.8(1.2)	4.37(1.3)**	4.41 (1.2)	4.83 (1.3) **	4.64(1.2)	4.5(1.3)	4.72(1.3)
Responsibility of aggressor	5.47 (1.1)	5.49(1.1)	5.43(1.2)	5.4 (1.1)	5.54 (1.1)	5.34(1.1)	5.19(1.1)	5.87(1.1) **
Likelihood to occur again	5.9 (1.2)	6.1(1.1)	5.7 (1.3)**	5.9(1.1)	6(1.3)	5.9 (1.1)	6.3(1)	5.5(1.4) **
Stability of relationship	3.2(1.4)	3.1(1.4)	3.2(1.3)	3.2(1.3)	3.1(1.4)	3.2(1.3)	3.2(1.4)	3.1(1.3)

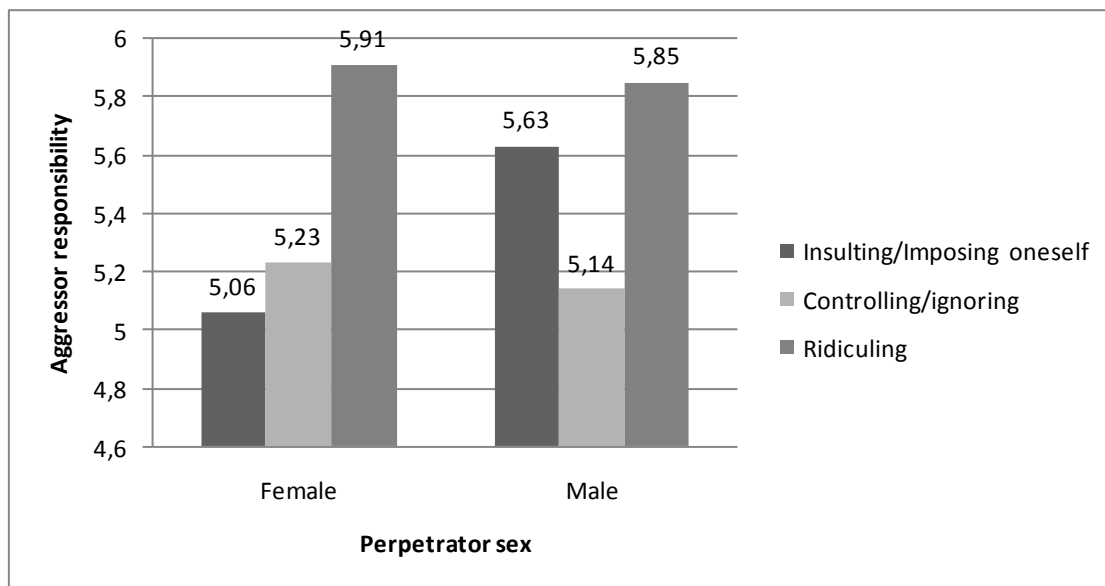
\*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. All measures were assessed on 7-point scales.

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**Figure1.** Interaction of perpetrator sex and type of psychological violence on the seriousness of incident

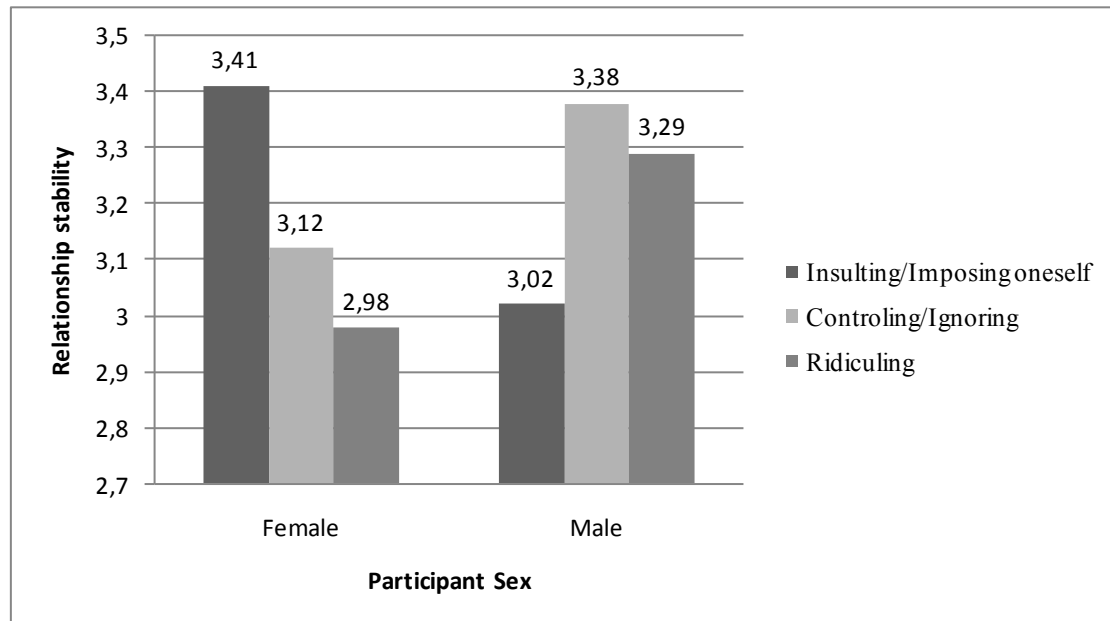


**Figure 2.** Interaction of perpetrator sex and type of psychological violence on the aggressor responsibility

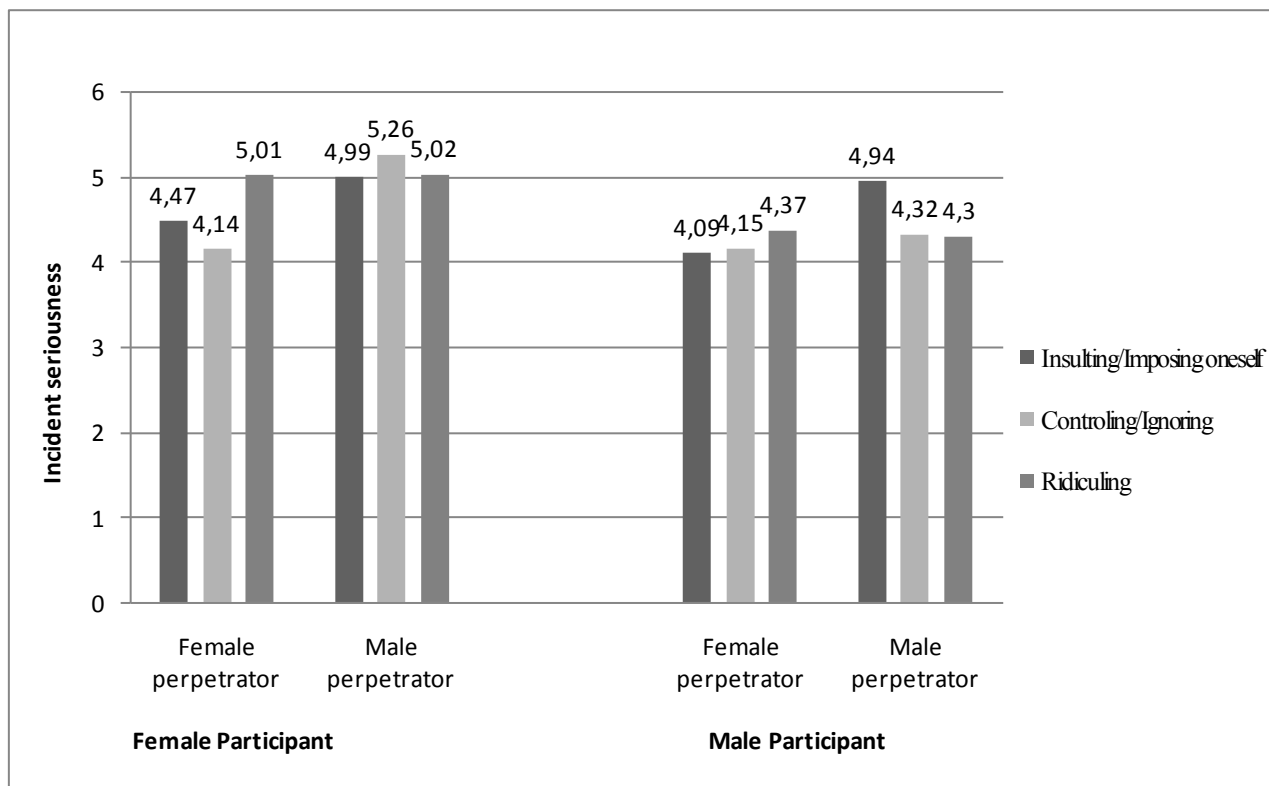


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**Figure 3.** Interaction of participant sex and type of psychological violence on the stability of the relationship



**Figure 4.** Interaction of perpetrator sex, type of psychological violence and participant sex on the incident seriousness



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