

Women's Experience of Sexual Coercion and Reactions to Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

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Abstract

Sexual coercion is one of the most subtle manifestations of gender-based violence and may profoundly affect victims' sexuality. This research analyzed the association of previous experiences of sexual coercion by an intimate partner (intimate partner sexual coercion [IPSC]) with women's reactions and responses to a scenario of sexual violence. Female college undergraduates ($N = 207$) completed a computer task in which they watched a video about a couple that ended in a woman having unwanted sex with her male partner. Participants answered several questions about tolerance (risk recognition, risk response, delays in behavioral response, and probability of leaving the relationship). They also responded about their level of commitment to their current partner, as well as their previous experience of sexual coercion. Results showed no differences between victims and nonvictims on the time they took to perceive the situation of sexual violence as threatening (risk recognition). However, victims of current sexual coercion took more time deciding to leave the abusive situation of the video (risk response), required a greater time lag between risk recognition and risk response, and they would

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be less likely to leave the relationship than victims of past sexual coercion and nonvictims. Finally, commitment predicted later risk recognition and risk response only for victims of past sexual coercion. Overall, the results suggested that previous sexual coercion by an intimate partner and being committed to the relationship may be risk factors associated with the increase of women's tolerance toward situations involving the risk of sexual victimization.

Keywords

sexual coercion, risk recognition, risk response, commitment, intimate relationships

Introduction

Within the wide range of acts considered as sexual violence, one of the most subtle manifestations of male sexual violence against women is sexual coercion (Smith et al., 2017). Sexual coercion has been defined as unwanted vaginal, oral, or anal sex that occurs after a person is pressured, including telling lies, making untrue promises, continually using verbal pressure to have sex, threatening to end the relationship, showing displeasure, or getting angry (Koss et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2017), in the absence of immediate victim incapacitation and the perpetrator's use of physical force (Pugh & Becker, 2018).

Contrary to the widely held stereotype that sexual violence is usually committed by strangers (Krahé, 2016), the truth is that many women are the targets of sexual violence by a partner. Concretely, the prevalence of sexual coercion varies across studies. For instance, the US national survey of sexual violence conducted between 2010 and 2012 found that 13.2% of women had suffered nonphysical sexual coercion at some point in their lifetime, and in 74.7% of the cases, the perpetrator was their current or former intimate partner (Smith et al., 2017). A very similar prevalence was found across 10 European countries (13.3%; Krahé et al., 2015). Regarding Spain, prevalence rates of sexual coercion victimization ranged between 15.7% and 19.1% (Krahé et al., 2015; Santos-Iglesias & Sierra, 2012).

Sexual coercion may profoundly affect victims' sexuality. For example, victims of intimate partner sexual coercion (IPSC) likely modify their sexual scripts based on these negative experiences (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), which might lead them to respond to future sexual encounters incorrectly (e.g., reacting negatively to healthy sexual relationships or normalizing future IPSC experiences; Muzzey, 2017). Specifically, among the multiple consequences that sexual coercion experiences can have on victims' physical and mental health and functioning (e.g., Brown et al., 2009), one of the most

relevant is associated with an increased risk of revictimization. The current research examined women's reactions to male sexual violence in a hypothetical heterosexual encounter. The research specifically analyzed whether women who have suffered IPSC varied in their ability to recognize and respond to a sexual violence situation where the risk of sexual assault increased, compared to women who have not suffered sexual coercion by an intimate partner. Further, it was evaluated whether commitment to the relationship may influence women's responses.

Previous Experience of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV)

Usually, women interpret a situation of sexual violence based on their own experience in dating relationships. Most commonly, sexual violence is perceived negatively, unless a woman has personal reasons to reinterpret or minimize the harmful behavior of the other person (Arriaga et al., 2018). According to Betrayal Trauma Theory (Freyd, 2003), intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) victims remember and process the sexual transgression in a different way, because these transgressions are perpetrated by individuals whom victims trust (their partners), compared to transgressions that do not involve betrayal, perpetrated by individuals with whom victims do not have a close connection (Klest et al., 2019).

In line with this theory, research has shown that victims of gender violence demonstrated a greater acceptance of violence and worse risk recognition when it occurred within their own relationship than in other relationships (Arriaga et al., 2016; Faulkner et al., 2008). However, tolerance toward violence seems to be determined by the amount of connection that women have with their partner, so that a greater connection predicts a greater tolerance (Arriaga, 2007). Due to this, it is important to distinguish between women who have suffered sexual violence in a past relationship and those who are experiencing it in a current relationship.

Regarding victims in a current relationship, previous research has demonstrated that these women mitigated their negative perceptions toward a hypothetical situation depicting nonsexual violence (Arriaga et al., 2016, Study 3) and were more tolerant toward violence than victims in a past relationship and nonvictims (Arriaga, 2007). Moreover, victims of IPSC by a current partner perceived the perpetrator's behavior to be more acceptable and as having less of an adverse impact on the relationship (Garrido-Macías & Arriaga, 2020). Therefore, current experiences of sexual violence may motivate women to be more accepting of sexual violence than victims of past sexual violence, due to their continuing with their relationship and having an interest

in perceptions that are consistent with the maintenance of the relationship (Arriaga & Cappelz, 2011).

However, the effect of experiencing violence in a past relationship is more ambiguous. It is possible that women who have experienced IPSV in a previous relationship may normalize and tolerate it in the future (Arriaga et al., 2016; Waldron et al., 2015); they may, for example, overlook threats in new situations and wait longer than nonvictimized women to end the situation (e.g., Crawford et al., 2008; Franklin, 2013). However, it is also possible that victims of past IPSV may resolve to condemn any such behavior in the future, thus becoming less tolerant and accepting to a lesser extent any form of violence than nonvictims. Last, there may be no differences between past sexual violence victims and nonvictims with respect to tolerance toward future sexual violence (e.g., Garrido-Macías & Arriaga, 2020).

Despite the widespread occurrence of sexual violence in dating relationships, most of the literature has focused on analyzing why survivors of sexual victimization are more vulnerable to future sexual violence, whereas little is known about how the experience of IPSC relates to women's recognition of and responses to sexually risky situations.

Tolerance Toward IPSV: Risk Recognition and Risk Response

One of the best documented consequences of sexual victimization is the increased probability of being victimized again, and the difficulty in recognizing the risk maybe responsible for, in part, this risk of future victimization (Decker & Littleton, 2018). Some experimental studies have evaluated differences between victims of previous IPSV and nonvictims in their ability to perceive the risk of sexual assault using university students and hypothetical scenarios, showing that the effectiveness in recognizing the risk was worse in victims (vs. nonvictims) (Crawford et al., 2008; Yeater et al., 2011).

Despite the fact that there are few existing standardized self-report measures that can be used to assess risk recognition, one of the most used is the response-latency paradigm (Marx & Gross, 1995). Some studies have implemented this paradigm using an audio record about a sexual assault encounter between a couple, and participants were instructed to stop the situation to indicate when the man had gone too far. Although no differences between victims and nonvictims were found in the community sample (Chu et al., 2014), findings among university students showed that women with previous sexual victimization took longer to identify the risk than nonvictims, suggesting that delayed risk recognition puts them at higher risk for sexual assault (e.g., Chu et al., 2014; Soler-Baillo et al., 2005).

Conversely, there is literature focused on differences in responding to the risk rather than in recognizing risk, thus adapting the response-latency paradigm by asking participants to indicate the point at which they would leave the situation if they were the woman in the scene (Anderson & Cahill, 2014; Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura, Krahe et al., 2020). Concretely, Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura, Krahe et al. (2020) analyzed the responses of victims and nonvictims of IPSC to a videotape in which sexual violence between a couple took place, and identified no differences between victims and nonvictims in the time they took to leave the situation.

Finally, Franklin (2013), as well as Messman-Moore and Brown (2006) argued that previous sexual victimization can affect both the risk recognition of a threatening situation and the response given to that risk situation, with victimization being a greater predictor of the risk response than the risk recognition. As a result of this argument, they used written scenarios of sexual assault by an acquaintance, divided by sentences that increased in risk of victimization, and risk recognition, risk response and delayed behavioral response were measured. Results from both studies (Franklin, 2013; Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006) showed no differences between university women victims of sexual violence and nonvictims in risk recognition, but victimized women took more time to indicate that they would leave the situation (risk response) and had more delayed behavioral responses than nonvictims. However, to our knowledge, previous studies have neither analyzed both risk recognition and risk response by women who have suffered IPSC nor used a more realistic simulated situation than a written scenario (such as a film clip).

Another aspect that has been extensively analyzed in the context of abusive relationships is how previous victimization influences the decision to leave the relationship or not. In this regard, deciding to leave the relationship may also be considered as a measure of risk response, even though it is more far-reaching than deciding to leave the situation of sexual violence and implies a greater degree of conscious reflection (Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura, Krahe et al., 2020). Generally, some research suggests that a significant number of women choose not to leave the relationship following sexual violence (e.g., Edwards et al., 2011; Katz et al., 2006), which places these women at increased risk for further assault. Studies analyzing samples of university women who read or visualized hypothetical scenarios of sexual coercion with their own partner, found a lower probability of leaving the relationship for victims of IPSC than for nonvictims (Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura, Krahe et al., 2020; Garrido-Macías & Arriaga, 2020). However, past experiences of IPSC did not predict the probability of leaving the relationship (Garrido-Macías & Arriaga, 2020).

Commitment as a Key Factor in Women's Responses to IPSV

When sexual violence occurs in romantic relationships, it is important to consider specific characteristics that involve these relationships and can be associated with women's reactions and their responses to IPSV, such as commitment to the partner (Metts & Cupach, 2007). According to the cognitive consistency framework (Festinger, 1962), being in a committed relationship may mitigate negative perceptions of sexual violence, because it motivates people to ignore or minimize the threats that occurred in the relationship (Arriaga & Capezza, 2011).

Specifically, commitment to the partner is considered as the tendency of a person to maintain a romantic relationship long term and to feel psychologically attracted to it (Rusbult, 1983), thus being associated with a subjective and voluntary desire to continue with the relationship (Tan et al., 2018). In this sense, a meta-analysis across 52 studies concluded that commitment was a significant predictor of women's choice to remain in relationships (Le & Agnew, 2003). Thereby, people committed to their relationship usually adopt positive perceptions of it and have more tolerant attitudes toward violence, relative to people who are less committed (Arriaga et al., 2016, 2018). Further, studies about sexual coercion indicated that highly committed women leave the relationship less frequently in a situation of sexual coercion than less committed women (e.g., Garrido-Macías et al., 2020b; Katz et al., 2006).

The Current Research

Given the absence of previous studies evaluating both risk recognition and risk response to sexual violence in the context of intimate relationships, the current study addressed these limitations by analyzing the relation between women's previous experience of IPSC and their tolerance toward IPSV, as well as the role that commitment has on these responses. The vast majority of studies about sexual victimization experiences have grouped women who experienced physically and verbally coercive sexual strategies (e.g., Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006; Soler-Baillo et al., 2005). However, the current research aimed to analyze experiences of verbal sexual coercion in particular, due to women's tendency to normalize these experiences and to perceive them less negatively than physical forms (Brown et al., 2009; Garrido-Macías et al., 2020a). Furthermore, the current study is focused on college students because they have an age in which their sexual scripts are being created and there is a greater susceptibility to experiencing sexual violence (e.g., Valls et al., 2016). In fact, previous research suggests that the risk

of sexual violence is particularly high for university and college women (e.g., Kimble et al., 2008; Senn et al., 2014).

First, we predicted that previous IPSC influences tolerance toward the sexually violent scenario (*Hypothesis 1*). Specifically, although no differences were expected in *risk recognition* (*Hypothesis 1a*), current IPSC victims were expected to show greater tolerance toward IPSV than nonvictims and past IPSC victims, as indicated by higher delayed *risk response* (*Hypothesis 1b*), higher *delayed behavioral responses* (*Hypothesis 1c*), and lower probability of leaving the relationship (*Hypothesis 1d*). As past research has found different results regarding the influence of past sexual violence on tolerance toward it (e.g., Arriaga et al., 2016; Garrido-Macías & Arriaga, 2020; Waldron et al., 2015), no a priori predictions were advanced establishing differences between past IPSC victims and nonvictims (exploratory).

Finally, we hypothesized that women with a higher commitment to the relationship show more tolerance toward the sexually violent situation of the video, affecting commitment among victims of current sexual coercion to a greater extent than nonvictims (*Hypothesis 2*). As in Hypothesis 1, no a priori hypothesis was established regarding differences between past IPSC victims and nonvictims (exploratory).

Method

Participants and Design

The sample size was determined before data analysis. A priori power analysis (MANOVA special effects and interactions test in G*Power; Faul et al., 2007) suggested that 196 participants were required to achieve 80% power to detect a moderate effect ($F = .06$) with $\alpha = .05$. A total of 207 female Spanish college students enrolled in different university careers participated in the study. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 38 years ($M = 21.58$, $SD = 3.61$), and 82.1% self-identified as heterosexual, 16.4% as bisexual, and 1.5% as homosexual. All women were involved in a relationship at the time of the study (average duration: $M = 36.43$ months, $SD = 73.40$ months). Based on their responses to the Sexual Coercion in Intimate Relationships Scale (SCIRS; Shackelford & Goetz, 2004), 71 women were classified as nonvictims of IPSC, 53 women as victims of IPSC in a past involvement, and 73 as victims of IPSC in a current involvement. Ten women, who reported at least one physical form of sexual violence (regardless of whether they had suffered verbal sexual coercion or not) were excluded, leading to a final sample size of $N = 197$ (see detailed description below).

The study was an ex post facto (simple prospective) design, with previous experience of IPSC as the independent variable (nonvictims vs. current IPSC victims vs. past IPSC victims) and tolerance toward IPSV (risk recognition, risk response, delayed behavioral response, and probability of leaving the relationship; all responses based on perceptions of the video) as dependent variables. Commitment was measured as a predictor variable.

Procedure and Materials

A research assistant requested participants' collaboration online, giving information regarding the estimated study duration (approximately 20 min) and the monetary reward for their participation (€5). Volunteer women were invited to participate in a study about conflict resolution and decision-making within intimate relationships, guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and informing them of their complete freedom to leave the experiment whenever they wanted. After providing consent, participants completed all the measures in the E-prime program under the supervision of a female research assistant (to provide feelings of rapport and trust) in a separate lab room. First, participants watched a video about a couple that ended with the woman having unwanted sex with her male partner. Participants had to imagine that they were the protagonist of the video and the man was their partner, but they did not know what would happen in the film clip nor how it could finish. They simply were asked to press a button when they would feel uncomfortable (risk recognition score) and press it again (stopping the video) when they would leave the situation if they had been the woman in the video (risk response score). At this time, participants did not continue to watch the video and they responded regarding the probability that they would leave the relationship. Then, all women reported their experiences of IPSC, as well as their level of commitment to their current relationship. After that, women had the opportunity to view the full video, just to ensure that they did not stay longer, watching the video out of curiosity to know what happened after the end of the relevant clip. All measures and procedures were approved by the research ethics committee of the first author's university.

Measures

Video.

A scene of 165 sec from the Spanish film *No estás sola, Sara* [You are not alone, Sara] (Villalba & Sedes, 2009) was used. This film represents gender violence between young couples (facilitating the identification of the college participants with the protagonist of it), and it is a benchmark in Spain in terms

of social awareness of sexual, physical and psychological violence within romantic relationships. Concretely, the selected clip shows a situation of IPSV which finishes in sexual assault. In the scene, the young couple is in the woman's bedroom, studying for a university exam, when the man attempts to persuade his girlfriend to have sexual intercourse. As the scene progresses, the man engages in an increasingly serious sequence of verbally coercive behaviors (e.g., verbal pressure, emotional blackmail), followed by the use of physical force (holding her arms and legs, throwing her to the floor, and blocking her body). At the end of the scene, the man sexually assaults his partner. Throughout the interaction, the woman responds with resistance and verbal refusal, and at the end of the scene, she stops resisting and remains immobile (as a trauma response). To assess the extent to which women participants were immersed in the experimental task, all participants were asked to rate (right after stopping the video indicating that they would leave the situation) how realistic the portrayed interaction was. Further, women rated how frequently they thought these kinds of situations occur in young couples, to what extent they considered that the man was using sexual violence to have sex, and how serious they adjusted the situation shown in the video to be. All responses were recorded using a scale from 1 (*nothing*) to 7 (*a lot*).

Tolerance of intimate partner sexual violence.

Four measures assessed tolerance of IPSV. The first three measures (*risk recognition*, *risk response*, and *delayed behavioral response*) were response-latency measures adapted from the Risk Perception Survey (RPS; Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006). The original RPS is a written scenario depicting a heterosexual encounter with 26 numbered statements that increase in risk of sexual assault, and participants identified when they first felt uncomfortable (risk recognition score), and when they would leave the scenario (risk response score). The delayed behavioral response captured the time lag between when the participant appraised the situation as risky by signifying feelings of discomfort and when they responded to the risk by signifying a leave response. In the present study, the procedure of RPS was employed using a videotape instead of a scenario, where the risk of sexual assault was defined by the increasing severity of the tactics used by the perpetrator, who used at the beginning of the scene subtle forms of sexual coercion (such as telling lies, making untrue promises, or showing displeasure) followed with more serious forms of sexual coercion (i.e., threats to end the relationship) and the use of physical force. Specifically, women had to press a button when they felt uncomfortable (risk recognition, measured in seconds), and then press the button again (in this case, stopping the video) when they would leave the situation if

they were the woman in the scene (risk response). The delayed behavioral response measure was created by calculating the mathematical difference between the risk recognition score and the risk response score. Longer response time on any of the three measures is conceptualized as indicating greater tolerance of IPSV. The fourth measure was rated after participants stopped the video, and it was participants' ratings of the probability that they would leave the relationship ("to what extent would you be willing to leave the relationship if the situation happened to you?"). Responses were recorded on a 7-point scale from 1 (*I would definitely not leave the relationship*) to 7 (*I would definitely leave the relationship*).

Previous sexual coercion by an intimate partner

The Sexual Coercion in Intimate Relationship Scale (SCIRS; Shackelford & Goetz, 2004) was used. This scale is composed of three subscales: *commitment manipulation* (10 items; e.g., "my partner hinted that if I loved him, I would have sex with him"), *defection threat* (9 items; e.g., "my partner hinted that he would have sex with another woman if I did not have sex with him"), and *resource manipulation/violence* (15 items, of which 4 included threat or use of physical force; e.g., "my partner threatened to use violence against me if I did not have sex with him"). Each question allowed participants to indicate whether this occurred at some point in their life, using a 4-point response scale: 0 (*never has occurred*), 1 (*has occurred in my current relationship*), 2 (*has occurred in a past relationship*), 3 (*has occurred both in my current and in a past relationship*). Women who scored 0 across all items were categorized as *nonvictims*; women who scored 2 on at least one of the 30 nonphysical coercion items were categorized into the *victim of past sexual coercion* group (comprising women who reported some form of IPSC), and women who scored 1 or 3 on at least one of the nonphysical coercion items (comprising women who reported some form of IPSC, regardless of whether they also experienced past sexual coercion) were categorized into the *victim of current sexual coercion* group. As current research is focused exclusively on women with experiences of verbal sexual coercion, the data of 10 women who scored above 0 on the physical force items were excluded from the analyses. This procedure resulted in 71 nonvictims, 53 past IPSC victims, and 73 current IPSC victims.

Commitment

A subscale of the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) was used. Participants responded to seven items (e.g., "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner") using a 7-point response scale from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 7 (*agree completely*). Responses were averaged such that higher numbers indicated greater commitment ($\alpha = .74$).

Demographic characteristics

Self-identified gender, relationship status, and duration were assessed with standard demographic questions.

Results

Initial analyses examined the ecological validity of the video. Participants reported that the interaction between the man and the woman showed in the video was quite realistic ($M = 5.48, SD = 1.42$) and that these kinds of situations are quite frequent between young couples ($M = 5.42, SD = 1.17$), reflecting the participant’s perception that this situation could perfectly occur within a couple relationship. Further, women considered the man to be using sexual violence to have sex with his partner ($M = 5.88, SD = 1.26$), and they rated the situation of the video as very serious ($M = 6.34, SD = 0.95$). No differences were found between nonvictims, current IPSC victims, and past IPSC victims in any of the variables [realistic, $F(2, 194) = 0.71, p = .491, \eta_p^2 = .01$; frequency, $F(2, 204) = 0.13, p = .875, \eta_p^2 = .00$; use of sexual violence, $F(2, 194) = 0.10, p = .901, \eta_p^2 = .00$; and severity, $F(2, 194) = 0.38, p = .688, \eta_p^2 = .00$].

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all dependent variables. The average score in risk recognition ($M = 61.26, SD = 21.61$) indicates the moment in which the man first says something that makes the woman feel uncomfortable. For its part, the average score in risk response ($M = 91.13, SD = 22.93$) reflects the moment in which the man engages in more serious verbally coercive behaviors and uses physical force for the first time. Both risk recognition and risk response were positively correlated with commitment. However, the probability of leaving the relationship was uncorrelated with any of the other variables.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Variables.

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Risk recognition	61.26 (21.61)	–	.688***	–.331***	.051	.185**
2. Risk response	91.13 (22.93)		–	.457***	–.008	.196**
3. Delayed behavioral R.	29.87 (17.62)			–	–.072	.028
4. Probability of leaving	5.52 (1.54)				–	–.014
5. Commitment	3.55 (1.13)					–

Notes. Scores for Risk Recognition, Risk Response, and Delayed Behavioral Response are presented in seconds.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Previous Sexual Coercion and Tolerance toward IPSV

To examine the hypothesized relation between previous IPSC and tolerance toward IPSV (*Hypothesis 1*), a between-subjects MANOVA analysis was conducted, with previous sexual coercion (nonvictims vs. past IPSC victims vs. current IPSC victims) as the independent variable, and risk recognition, risk response, delayed behavioral response, and probability of leaving the relationship as dependent variables (see Table 2).

Results showed a significant multivariate effect of previous IPSC on tolerance, Wilks's $\lambda = .91$, $F(6, 384) = 3.17$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Consistent with Hypothesis 1a, no differences were found between nonvictims, past IPSC victims, and current IPSC victims on the time (in seconds) women took to feel uncomfortable (risk recognition score), $F(2, 194) = 0.98$, $p = .920$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$ (see Table 2). However, women differed in their risk response score, $F(2, 194) = 3.66$, $p = .027$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, so that, consistent with Hypothesis 1b, current IPSC victims ($M = 96.81$, $SD = 21.57$) took more time deciding to leave the abusive situation of the video than nonvictims ($M = 87.57$; $SD = 19.09$, $p = .015$) and past IPSC victims ($M = 88.07$, $SD = 27.84$, $p = .034$). No differences were found between past IPSC victims and nonvictims ($p = .903$) in risk response. Regarding delayed behavioral responses (Hypothesis 1c), previous sexual coercion had a significant effect on the time lag between the risk recognition score and the risk response score, $F(2, 194) = 4.89$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, being greater for current IPSC victims ($M = 34.89$, $SD = 19.19$) than

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Hypothesized Contrasts.

	Nonvictims M (SD)	Past IPSC Victims M (SD)	Current IPSC Victims M (SD)	F
Risk recognition	60.46 (17.10)	61.41 (24.03)	61.93 (23.85)	0.98
Risk response	87.57 (19.09) ^a	88.07 (27.84) ^a	96.81 (21.57) ^b	3.66*
Delayed behavioral R.	27.11 (15.78) ^a	26.67 (16.40) ^a	34.89 (19.19) ^b	4.89**
Probability of leaving	5.62 (1.43) ^{ab}	5.89 (1.25) ^a	5.15 (1.76) ^b	3.86*

Notes. Table values are means and standard deviations (in parenthesis, italicized) presented to reflect hypothesized contrasts (*Hypothesis 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d*) and to explore differences across all conditions. Means with different superscript letters indicate differences ($p < .05$) based on exploratory post hoc comparisons, whereas inclusion of the same superscript letter indicates no difference. Risk Recognition, Risk Response, and Delayed Behavioral Response measures are presented in seconds. For probability of leaving the relationship, the scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

nonvictims ($M = 27.11$, $SD = 15.78$, $p = .008$), and greater for current IPSC victims than past IPSC victims ($M = 26.67$, $SD = 16.40$, $p = .009$), but no differences were found between past IPSC victims and nonvictims ($p = .887$). Moreover, there was a significant effect of previous sexual coercion on the probability of leaving the relationship (Hypothesis 1d), $F(2, 194) = 3.86$, $p = .023$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. In this case, current IPSC victims ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.76$) would be less willing to leave the relationship than past IPSC victims ($M = 5.89$, $SD = 1.25$, $p = .008$), but differences were found neither between nonvictims and current IPSC victims ($p = .081$), nor between nonvictims and past IPSC victims ($p = .271$; see Table 2).

Commitment and Tolerance Toward IPSV

To evaluate whether commitment predicts higher levels of tolerance toward IPSV, especially in victims of current IPSC, compares to nonvictims (Hypothesis 2), a series of regression models were done. Specifically, four moderation analyses were carried out, using the SPSS PROCESS macro (Model 1; Hayes, 2017), to test the interaction effect of previous IPSC (moderator variable) and commitment (predictor variable) on each criterion variable (risk recognition, risk response, delayed behavioral response, and the probability of leaving the relationship). Due to previous sexual coercion operating as a multicategorical variable (nonvictims, current and past IPSC victims), all moderation analyses were run using an indicator coding system, with the nonvictims condition as the reference, D_1 coding the past IPSC condition (which generates regression coefficients by quantifying the difference between past IPSC victims and nonvictims), and D_2 coding the current IPSC condition (quantifying the difference between current IPSC victims and nonvictims). Following procedures recommended by Hayes (2017), interaction terms were computed using mean centering, and bias-corrected confidence intervals of 95% for indirect associations were estimated based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. The conditional indirect effect is significant when the confidence interval does not include zero.

Results showed an interaction effect of Commitment \times Previous IPSC on risk recognition. Specifically, as show in Table 3, this interaction was significant for past IPSC victims condition (D_1), $b = 7805.51$, $t = 2.40$, $p = .017$, 95% CI [1384.88, 14226.14], whereas the interaction was nonsignificant for current IPSC victims condition (D_2), $b = 4798.96$, $t = 1.79$, $p = .138$, 95% CI [-1561.25, 11159.18]. Therefore, among victims of past IPSC, higher levels of commitment predict later risk recognition scores, compared to lower levels of commitment (see Figure 1).

Second, results about risk response demonstrated an interaction effect of Commitment \times Previous IPSC (see Table 3). Concretely, the interaction was again significant for past IPSC victims condition (D_1), $b = 10961.04$, $t = 3.13$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [4044.58, 17877.50], but not for current IPSC victims condition (D_2), $b = 2366.28$, $t = 0.76$, $p = .449$, 95% CI [-3379.90, 8512.45]. As can be seen in Figure 2, victims of past IPSC with higher levels of commitment took more time deciding to leave the abusive situation of the video than victims of past IPSC with lower levels of commitment, whereas commitment did not predict risk response for nonvictims and victims of current IPSC.

Finally, as Table 3 shows, no interaction effects of Commitment \times Previous IPSC were found on delayed behavioral response and probability of leaving the relationship.

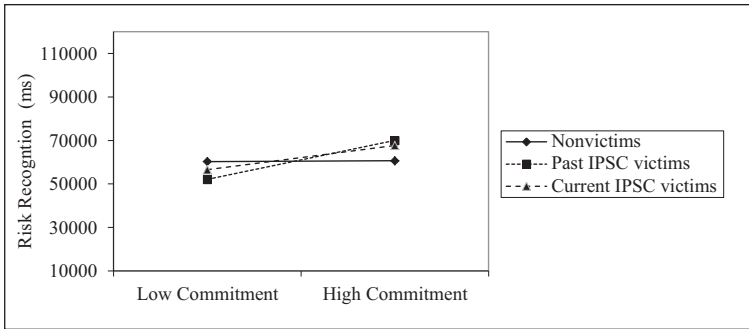


Figure 1. Interaction Between Commitment and Previous IPSC on Risk Recognition.

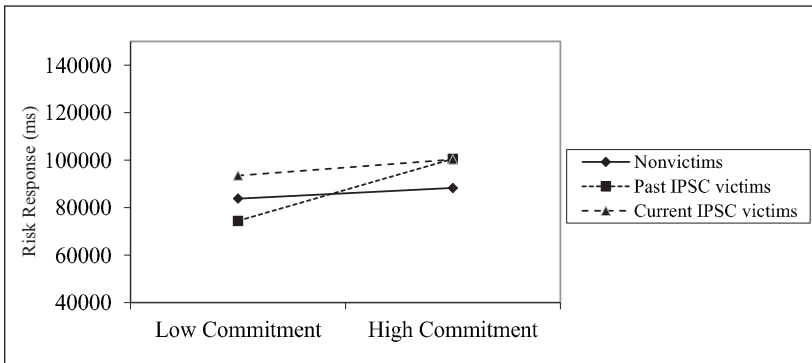


Figure 2. Interaction Between Commitment and Previous IPSC on Risk Response.

Table 3. Multiple Moderation Analyses of Commitment and Previous SC on Tolerance (Risk Recognition, Risk Response, Risk Response, Delayed Behavioral Response and Probability of Leaving (Model 1)).

Background	Risk Recognition		Risk Response		Delayed Behavioral Response		Probability of Leaving	
	Coefficient	Symmetric BCI	Coefficient	Symmetric BCI	Coefficient	Symmetric BCI	Coefficient	Symmetric BCI
Constant	60462.00***	[5634.89, 64549.11]	87572.24***	[83018.96, 92125.52]	27110.24***	[23350.45, 30870.02]	5.42***	[4.43, 6.40]
Commitment	162.07	[-3084.64, 3408.78]	653.47	[-2814.65, 4121.60]	491.41	[-2172.76, 3155.57]	-0.01	[-0.25, 0.23]
Past IPSC DI	556.35	[-6815.27, 7927.96]	-69.22	[-8270.97, 8122.53]	-625.57	[-6421.16, 5170.03]	0.27	[-0.22, 0.76]
Current IPSC D2	1638.84	[-5236.87, 8514.54]	9347.32**	[2495.88, 16198.76]	7708.48*	[1767.44, 13649.52]	-0.49	[-1.04, 0.06]
Commitment x past IPSC DI	7805.51*	[1384.88, 14226.14]	10961.04***	[4044.58, 17877.50]	3155.54	[-1427.31, 7738.38]	-0.03	[-0.44, 0.39]
Commitment x current IPSC D2	4798.96	[-1561.25, 11159.18]	2366.28	[-3379.90, 8512.45]	-2432.68	[-8372.93, 3507.56]	-0.06	[-0.57, 0.46]
		$R^2 = .064$		$R^2 = .124$		$R^2 = .067$		$R^2 = .040$
		$F(5, 191) = 2.42, p = .038$		$F(5, 191) = 5.22, p < .001$		$F(5, 191) = 3.23, p = .008$		$F(6, 190) = 1.27, p = .275$

(continued)

Table 3. continued

Previous SC	Risk Recognition		Risk Response		Delayed Behavioral Response		Probability of Leaving	
	Effects	Symmetric BCI	Effects	Symmetric BCI	Effects	Symmetric BCI	Effects	Symmetric BCI
Nonvictims	162.07	[-3084.64, 3408.78]	653.47	[-2814.65, 4121.60]	491.41	[-2172.76, 3155.57]	-0.01	[-0.25, 0.23]
Past IPSC victims	7967.57**	[2428.32, 13506.83]	11614.51***	[5630.41, 17598.62]	3646.94	[-81.96, 7375.86]	-0.04	[-0.39, 0.31]
Current IPSC victims	4961.03	[-508.08, 10430.14]	3019.75	[-2054.45, 8093.96]	-1941.28	[-7250.79, 3368.03]	-0.07	[-0.53, 0.38]

Notes. IPSC: intimate partner sexual coercion; DI: comparison between nonvictims and past IPSC victims; D2: comparison between nonvictims and current IPSC victims; Coefficient: nonstandardized coefficient of regression; Symmetric BCI: confidence interval of 95% based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. The conditional indirect effect is significant when the confidence interval does not include 0. Because the amount of video visualized varied between participants, threat response was included as a control variable analyzing the effect of Commitment x Previous IPSC on Probability of leaving.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Discussion

The focus of the present work was to examine whether women's previous experience of nonphysical IPSC was related to their ability to recognize and respond to a situation of IPSV in which the risk of sexual assault increased, as well as the role of commitment in these responses.

The first main aim of this study was to explore whether previous IPSC related to how women evaluate sexual violence situations exerted by an intimate partner. The RPS (Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006) was adapted to a commonly used risk-detection paradigm (the response-latency measure) to examine women's hypothetical risk recognition, risk response, and delayed behavioral response. As expected, consistent with previous research (Franklin, 2013; Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006) and *Hypothesis 1a*, results did not show differences between victims and nonvictims in the time women took to feel uncomfortable (risk recognition). However, having experienced IPSC was associated with later risk responses (*Hypothesis 1b*), delayed behavioral responses (*Hypothesis 1c*), and lower probability of leaving the relationship (*Hypothesis 1d*). These findings support previous research showing that victims of intimate partner violence in general and partner sexual coercion in particular may diminish negative reactions to new events of sexual violence to justify their current partner's behavior (e.g., Arriaga et al., 2016; Garrido-Macías & Arriaga, 2020). Moreover, results are consistent with research about risk perception, demonstrating that previous sexual victimization is not related to later risk recognition, but is related to later risk responses and delayed behavioral responses (Franklin, 2013; Messman-Moore & Brown, 2006), and to lower probability of leaving the relationship (Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura, Krahé et al., 2020).

Focusing on differences between the three groups (nonvictims, current IPSC victims and past IPSC victims), results showed that current IPSC victims took more time deciding to leave the abusive situation of the video (risk response, *Hypothesis 1b*), and displayed more time lag between risk recognition score and risk response score than past IPSC victims and nonvictims (*Hypothesis 1c*). Further, consistent with *Hypothesis 1d*, women with current IPSC experiences said they would be less likely to leave the relationship after the situation compared to past IPSC victims, but no differences were found between current IPSC victims and nonvictims. These results support the assertion that being involved in a current relationship predicts more interest in perceptions that are consistent with the maintenance of the relationship, increasing the tolerance of IPSV and decreasing the probability of leaving the relationship (Arriaga, 2007; Arriaga & Capezza, 2011; Garrido-Macías & Arriaga, 2020). However, past IPSC victims did not differ in their level of tolerance, relative to nonvictims, so it seems that having experienced IPSC in

a past relationship may increase the level of alertness to new situations of sexual coercion, acting as a possible protection factor. If so, victims of past IPSC may be less tolerant and less accepting of any form of sexual coercion (like nonvictims) than victims of current IPSC.

Last, the hypothesis that commitment to the relationship may be associated with tolerance toward the sexually violent situation for victims of current IPSC (*Hypothesis 2*) was not supported. Instead, the results revealed that victims of past IPSC with higher levels of commitment (vs. lower levels) took longer to feel uncomfortable (risk recognition) and to decide to leave the abusive situation (risk response). This is consistent with the existing literature showing that commitment is associated with greater tolerance for IPSV and IPSC (Arriaga et al. 2016, 2018; Garrido-Macías et al., 2020b; Katz et al., 2006; Young & Furman, 2013), capturing a motivation to continue the relationship (Tan et al., 2018). Although this effect was significant only for victims of past IPSC, results reflected a general tendency of current IPSC victims to increase their tolerance toward IPSV when they were more committed to their relationship (compared to nonvictims), characterizing commitment as a key predictor variable of certain coping behaviors in women who have suffered IPSC (Metts & Cupach, 2007). Despite the complete necessity of future research to clarify the meaning of the significant effect of commitment only on victims of past IPSC, a possible explanation is that victims of past IPSC (who have already left an abusive relationship) may assign more importance to their level of commitment to their current relationship when deciding to be more tolerant of a new situation of sexual violence than victims of current IPSC. Moreover, it is possible that victims of past IPSC have a greater difficulty in trusting men and, therefore, in committing to a new partner. In this sense, perhaps commitment might act as a protective factor since our results reflect that past IPSC victims with low commitment showed lower levels of tolerance toward IPSV.

Limitations

Although the findings of this study provide relevant contributions to understanding how women who have suffered IPSC react to a realistic film clip depicting a sexual violence situation, several limitations should be noted. Despite the fact that the responses in the laboratory, using a film clip, are very similar to responses given in real life (e.g., Gidycz et al., 2008), it is necessary to acknowledge that the reports of women reflected their intentions rather than their real-time responses. Further, participants were cued to heighten their attention to threat-related stimuli and then make a response, an advantage that people in natural contexts do not have. Consequently, we cannot say that women's reports predict their behavior in an actual situation.

A second noteworthy limitation is that women were assigned to the victims and nonvictims groups based on self-reported IPSC victimization, which means that some women may not have recognized their experience as sexual coercion (because IPSC is a highly stigmatized experience), likely resulting in a lack of self-identification and underestimates of IPSC. Another problem with this categorization is that it might be influenced by potential third variables inherent in any quasi-experimental comparison. Along the same lines, we did not assess victimization experiences outside intimate relationships and the domain of sexuality (e.g., child abuse), so that differences among participants in the three groups, beyond their experience of sexual coercion, may have been related to the dependent variables of our study in ways that we were unable to control. Prospective longitudinal designs are necessary to come closer to a causal analysis of the impact of victimization on future processing of information about a sexual violence situation.

Last, another limitation that should be considered is that the interpretation of the findings from this study cannot be generalized to the entire population. In terms of diversity, the current research is focused on CIS gendered, heterosexual relationships, involving college women with homogeneous characteristics (e.g., language, nationality, age, culture). The selection of college women was appropriate for this study, since that previous research suggest a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence as a college student (e.g., Senn et al., 2014; Valls et al., 2016), and the context represented in the video shows a situation that can occur between young couples. However, future research should include samples with a broader range of educational levels and a greater representation of gender and sexual minorities, as well as participants with different nationalities and culture, to be able to test the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusions

The current study emphasizes the importance of assessing multiple aspects of tolerance of IPSV, including risk perception and behavioral responses to risky situations. It is relevant to note that this research is the first of its kind in the risk perception literature to investigate the time lag between risk recognition and risk response to a sexual violence situation (committed by an intimate partner) among college women who had suffered IPSC by their current or former partner. Further, this study focused on why some women recognize the risk and feel discomfort but wait to leave a sexual violence situation, by investigating the role of commitment in these responses. The findings presented here highlight the need for further research into women's responses to risk in the field of sexual coercion in intimate relationships. Along the same lines, future studies should address how women with previous experience of sexual coercion react and

respond to situations of sexual violence in which the victim shows refusal in ways that are not consistent with the widely recognized “appropriate responses” (see Marcantonio & Jozkowski, 2020). Also, the results of this study may contribute significantly to the prevention of future experiences of sexual coercion. In this sense, our findings support previous studies (Senn et al., 2011) by suggesting the necessity to expand risk reduction and sexual assault resistance programs to include sexual assertiveness education with the aim to enhance not only women’s capacity to perceive the risk of sexual assault but also their ability to initiate or refuse the sexual activity with their partner. Thereby, research designs as the current one could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs, as well as to help women (both with and without prior sexual victimization experiences) to know the limits from which a healthy sexual relationship turns into sexual violence. This matter is relevant because we must not forget that IPSV occurs within an intimate relationship, so women have more difficulty in identifying an experience of sexual coercion as sexual violence and usually show reluctance to tell others and seeking support.

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