Correlates of Fear of Victimization Among College Students in Spain: Gender Differences and Similarities

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Abstract
Past studies that have analyzed fear of victimization using samples composed of men and women have most frequently controlled for the effect of gender. This study not only controls for the effect of gender, but also examines how the predictors of fear of victimization may vary across gender. To do so, separate regression models for men and women were estimated and the corresponding z tests were calculated for the purpose of analyzing whether the differences between genders were significant. The results showed that women scored higher on the general fear of crime victimization scale, as well as for fear of becoming victims of each of the specific crimes under study. Religiosity had an equally significant effect on men and women’s fear of victimization. Also, younger participants were more likely to fear being victims in the cases of both men and women, although this effect was even more pronounced among women. In addition, respondents’ fear of victimization differed across gender based on sexual orientation. Finally, the

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results showed a few variables (political orientation and sexual victimization) that were only significant in the case of women, but not of men. The findings of this study confirm that fear of victimization and its predictors vary between women and men.

**Keywords**
media and violence, stalking, cultural contexts, criminology, sexual assault

The area of fear of crime victimization has been heavily researched over the years. Scholars have attempted to identify what behaviors and beliefs are the result of fear of victimization, as well as what variables can predict one’s level of fear. The empirical evidence has concluded that certain demographic characteristics, behaviors, and other social, economic, political, and psychological circumstances are connected with fear of victimization (Chataway et al., 2019). The focus on sociodemographic features is rooted in the hypothesis that people who believe that they are not capable of protecting themselves are at a greater risk of becoming victims. This implies that levels of fear may increase depending on individual sociodemographic characteristics (Sironi & Bonazzi, 2016). Specifically, women have been found to have higher levels of fear than men (Dobbs et al., 2009; Fisher & May, 2009; Fox et al., 2009; Franklin & Franklin, 2009). Unlike the overwhelming support found for the association between gender and fear, there has been mixed evidence as to whether or not prior victimization has an effect on fear (Pryce et al., 2018; Pryor & Hughes, 2013; Sironi & Bonazzi, 2016; Van den Bulck, 2004). Because of these mixed results, the true effect of prior victimization on fear of being victimized remains unresolved. Previous research also suggests that individuals’ media consumption affects fear of victimization as the media displays a distorted view of crime and criminals (Callanan & Rosenberg, 2015; Dowler, 2003; Kohm et al., 2012; Shi, 2018). Finally, scholars have found that college students have higher levels of fear of victimization compared with the general population (Jennings et al., 2007) and to similarly aged noncollege students (Baum & Klaus, 2005; Fisher & Cullen, 2000). In addition, studies have shown that college students are at higher risk of criminal victimization compared with the general population (Fisher & Cullen, 2000; Gover et al., 2008).

Although fear of crime victimization among college students has been widely studied, many of the studies have used samples of only women, thus observing the effects of their sexual victimization solely, or analyzed both men and women in one joint analysis. This study intends to fill the gap in the
existing literature by assessing the impact of prior crime victimization, media consumption, and other personal variables on fear of crime victimization among both men and women college students separately at a prominent public university in Spain. While evidence suggests that fear of victimization varies across cultural contexts, there is a lack of comparative literature on this subject (Kohm et al., 2012). To our knowledge, this is the first study to test the relationship between prior crime victimization and fear of victimization among Spanish college students from a criminological perspective. It is expected that this study will expand the fear of crime literature toward an international context, as well as provide insight into the varying levels of fear of victimization across gender.

Fear of Crime Victimization and its Correlates

A universal definition of fear does not currently exist (Rader, 2017). However, the proposed definitions describe fear as an emotional reaction associated with a threat or expectation of victimization or as an event in which criminality could occur (Lane et al., 2014). Initial studies viewed crime-related fear as a product of demographic characteristics and individual experiences with crime and victimization. However, recent research has determined that individual- and situational-level factors, such as vulnerability and incivility among others, are important for increasing momentary worry about crime and victimization risk (Bachman et al., 2011; Chataway et al., 2019; Snedker, 2015). In addition, the literature shows that some individual factors, including gender, age, exposure to crime, and media consumption, affect fear of victimization (Lab, 2016; Pryce et al., 2018; Sulemana, 2015).

Gender

Research on fear of criminal victimization has found that women express greater overall levels of fear of victimization and even higher levels of fear of sexual crimes in comparison with men (Dobbs et al., 2009; Fetchenhauer & Buunk, 2005; Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Fox et al., 2009). These results are consistent across countries and populations (i.e., college students, general population; Bachman et al., 2011; Fisher & May, 2009; Fox et al., 2009; Gibson et al., 2002; Pryce et al., 2018). This heightened level of fear among women exists despite the fact that women are less often victims of crimes with the exception of sexual assault, stalking, and intimate partner violence (Catalano, 2005; Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Fox et al., 2009; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This phenomenon is known as the fear of crime paradox. This paradox identifies that certain groups report the highest levels of fear of crime while having
Researchers have offered several explanations for this finding including the shadow of sexual assault, references to socialization, the hidden nature of victimization, and the vulnerability hypothesis (Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Rader & Haynes, 2011; Reid & Konrad, 2004).

Perhaps the most popular explanation for women’s fear is the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis proposed by Warr (1984). This hypothesis posits that women are more afraid of victimization than men because many offenses have the potential to escalate into rape (Hirtenlehner & Farral, 2014). Empirical support shows that greater fear of sexual crimes is associated with greater fear of other crimes among women in general, college women, and college women and men combined (Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Hilinski, 2009; Lane et al., 2009; Wilcox et al., 2006). These studies have also found that the effect of gender on fear of nonsexual crimes becomes insignificant or even reverses when fear of rape is controlled for (Cook & Fox, 2012; Dobbs et al., 2009; Hilinski, 2009; Lane & Fox, 2013; Lane & Meeker, 2003). These findings held true regardless of the measurement of crime-related fear used within the study (fear of crime, fear of victimization, or perceived risk of victimization). However, as Ugwu and Britto (2015) pointed out, only a few of these studies have tested for the possibility that other master offenses1 may explain the gender gap better than or equal to fear of rape (e.g., Petitt et al., 2017; Riggs & Cook, 2015).

The socialization explanation refers to the idea that women are socialized to believe that they need protection from others, are more likely to be victimized by strangers, and that public spaces are dangerous for them. As a whole, these socialization messages normalize fear of crime in the daily lives of women (Rader, 2017; Rader & Haynes, 2011). However, socialization also plays a role in men’s relative lack of fear of victimization. Studies on this phenomenon have found that men are socialized to believe that fear is a sign of weakness (Cops & Pleysier, 2011). Thus, while men may very well be afraid of crime victimization, it is rarely expressed (Goodey, 1997; van Eijk, 2017).

Moreover, researchers have used the perspective of the hidden nature of victimization to explain the gender-fear crime paradox. They have argued that women’s victimization rates are severely underreported (Lane et al., 2014). As is known, women are more often victims of intimate partner violence. Unfortunately, intra-family and intimate partner crimes are precisely the offenses that are least likely to be reported in victimization surveys or to the authorities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014; Palermo et al., 2014; Sabina et al., 2012; United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2013). A more recent explanation for women’s higher levels of fear is their differential exposure to harassing or threatening behavior in
public spaces and work spaces in comparison with men (Bastomski & Philip, 2017; Becker & Tinkler, 2015; Kavanaugh, 2013; Madan & Nalla, 2016; Tinkler et al., 2018). The literature shows that, in the context of sexual harassment in public or work spaces, victimization is unavoidable for many women (Madan & Nalla, 2016). As a consequence, if women are more likely to be exposed to sexual harassment in public or work spaces, it seems logical to think that their levels of fear of victimization are higher, especially if the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis is taken into account.

The vulnerability hypothesis refers to an individual’s perceived risk of victimization (Cops & Pleysier, 2011; Riggs & Cook, 2015). According to this hypothesis, increases in the degree of perceived vulnerability create an increase in fear of crime victimization (Dobbs et al., 2009; Rader, 2004; Rader et al., 2007). Age is also an important correlate of fear of victimization, with research revealing older individuals as being more fearful than their younger counterparts because older people are generally more vulnerable to crime (Fox et al., 2009; Herbst, 2011; Jackson & Stafford, 2009; Pryce et al., 2018). However, these results are mixed. Some scholars have argued that younger people are more fearful of becoming victims (Ferraro, 1995; Lane & Meeker, 2003), whereas others have found the association between age and fear sensitive to how fear of victimization is measured (for further discussion, see Greve et al., 2018; Hale, 1996). Thus, testing age as a correlate of fear of crime victimization in the current study is an important contribution to the literature.

**Criminal Victimization**

The role of previous victimization has received much attention, primarily because the relationship between fear and victimization has exhibited mixed results. A number of studies have suggested that prior victimization is associated with fear in the general population and college students (Ferguson & Mindel, 2007; Fox et al., 2009; Pryce et al., 2018; Reid & Konrad, 2004; Sulemana, 2015; Tseloni & Zarafonitou, 2008; Wilcox et al., 2006). For example, Tseloni and Zarafonitou (2008) found that those who had suffered personal and vicarious victimization reported higher levels of fear than those who had not been victimized. However, some studies do not seem to support these findings. For example, a study conducted in the United States with a sample of female undergraduate students showed that previous sexual victimization had only a limited impact on fear of rape (Pryor & Hughes, 2013). It was also found that previous sexual victimization could increase fear of rape for some women and decrease it for others, yielding no significant net effect. Furthermore, another study conducted using a representative sample
from Belgium showed that there was no significant relationship between victimization and fear (Van den Bulck, 2004). It has also been found that fear of crime varies depending on the type of victimization. For instance, in one study, victims of burglary were slightly more fearful of crime than victims of violent offenses (Quann & Hung, 2002).

**Media Consumption**

The media readily provides a distorted view of crime and criminals (Dowler, 2003). Because of this, researchers have been concerned that the media may affect consumers’ fear. Two main perspectives have been developed to explain how media affects fear of victimization: the cultivation hypothesis and the resonance hypothesis (Callanan & Rosenberg, 2015; Kohm et al., 2012). The cultivation hypothesis holds that there will be an increase in fear as one’s media consumption of violent crime stories increases (Jamieson & Romer, 2014; Kohm et al., 2012; Nellis & Savage, 2012). According to this theory, exposure to media crime has cumulative effects over time. For example, a study related to fear and perceived risk of terrorism showed a positive relationship between the number of hours spent watching television news and fear that a family member might become a victim of a terrorist attack (Nellis & Savage, 2012).

Alternatively, the resonance hypothesis states that media consumption increases fear when its content is consistent with experience (Gerbner et al., 1980; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). In other words, if viewers have personal experiences with crime, media representations will “resonate” with their own experiences, thus reinforcing existing opinions and reactions to crime (Gerbner et al., 1980). Chiricos et al. (1997) extended these arguments by suggesting that fear is also elevated when those who are portrayed as victims of crime are demographically similar to the viewers, which has been called the affinity hypothesis. This theory boasts support as numerous studies have documented that women are disproportionately depicted as victims of crime, especially of sexual assault and other violent crimes (Bjornstrom et al., 2010; Paulsen, 2003; Soothill et al., 2004). Therefore, it could be argued that women are more likely to have an affinity with these portrayals of crime which heightens their fear of it.

In addition to the characteristics of the consumers, the type of crime-related media appears to matter. Of the few studies that have examined multiple forms of media consumption, most have found that television news and real crime “docudramas”2 have a greater influence on fear than traditional TV crime dramas do (Callanan, 2012; Callanan & Rosenberg, 2015; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). In this regard, Callanan (2012) found that the viewing of local television news and realistic television content about crime elevated perceptions of
risk and fear for all groups. However, it was detected that the effects of watching conventional crime drama were more variable. Similarly, another study showed that the viewing of television news and “docudramas” resulted in increased fear, but exposure to standard crime dramas did not (Callanan & Rosenberg, 2015). Some studies, conversely, have found a positive relationship between viewing standard crime dramas and fear of crime (Eschholz et al., 2003).

It is also important to consider the impact of internet news on fear of crime given its rapid growth as an information source (Mitchell et al., 2018; Rainie, 2010; Roche et al., 2016). One of the most important characteristics of the internet is that users can be more selective and interactive in the way they use information resources. There is currently a growing body of literature suggesting that people locate and consume internet news differently than that from traditional sources (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Krimsky, 2007; Shi, 2018). Weitzer and Kubrin (2004) examined the impact of all media sources, including the internet, on fear in a sample of the general population in Washington, D.C. Although only 12.3% of the sample reported using the internet as their primary source of crime news, these respondents indicated that they were less fearful than individuals who identified local television news as their primary news source. Similarly, in a cross-national comparison of the impact of media on fear among Canadian and American college students, it was found that local TV news was the strongest and most consistent predictor of increased fear relative to all media and internet-related variables examined (Kohm et al., 2012). Recently, it has been found that internet news consumption was negatively related to perceived risk of victimization (Roche et al., 2016).

**Other Sociodemographic Characteristics**

Although the study of different correlates of fear of victimization is limited, some evidence suggests the possible relevance of other sociodemographic characteristics, such as political ideology, sexual orientation, and religiosity, as predictors of fear of crime victimization. For example, Roche et al. (2016) found evidence of an interactive relationship between political ideology and internet news exposure. Along similar lines, a recent study highlighted the relevance of sexual orientation as a strong and exceptionally consistent predictor of social attitudes (Schnabel, 2018). Finally, the results found by Bolen (2010) emphasized the importance of religiosity in the study of fear of victimization. As there is no universal agreement as to what variables increase and reduce levels of fear of victimization, adding new and less studied dimensions could increase the number of valid variables used to predict fear of victimization.
The Relevance of Studying Fear of Victimization Among College Students

It has been pointed out that college students exhibit higher levels of fear compared with the general population (Fisher et al., 1995; Jennings et al., 2007). Also, as occurs in the general public, there is evidence that college women are significantly more fearful of victimization than college men are (Barberet et al., 2004; Fox et al., 2009; Jennings et al., 2007; Pryce et al., 2018; Tandoğan & Topçu, 2018; Walsh et al., 2001). For example, Barberet and colleagues (2004) found that female college students were more fearful than their male counterparts particularly of physical violence, sexual assault, and stalking by strangers. Similarly, another study identified that 68.0% of college women, but only 4.4% of college men reported that there were places on campus where they felt afraid to walk alone at night (Walsh et al., 2001). Part of the reason that the literature on fear has received considerable attention in college populations is due to the fact that female students appear to be at a greater objective risk for some forms of criminal victimization compared with their noncollege counterparts in the same age group (Baum & Klaus, 2005; Fisher & Cullen, 2000). One potential explanation is that students seem to be a high-risk group for victimization due to their lifestyles (e.g., going out at night, using alcohol and other drugs, frequently partying; Lee & Hilinski-Rosick, 2012; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002). There is limited knowledge about the impact of some variables as predictors of fear of victimization among college samples, mainly because the extant literature has involved general population samples (Fox et al., 2009; Pryce et al., 2018).

Current Study

The study of fear has traditionally generated great interest and, in countries like the United States, this line of research is well established. However, as Kohm et al. (2012) have pointed out, fear of victimization may vary depending on the context (Pryce et al., 2018). In Spain, the study of the fear of being victimized and its correlates have received scant attention. In addition, the little research that has examined fear of victimization among college students has focused mainly on the impact of sexual victimization experiences on levels of fear among female college students. Consequently, the need to conduct more research in this field of study seems evident.

To contribute to this research area, this work has two aims: (a) to examine the fear expressed by women and men of being victims of different crimes and (b) to analyze the effect of media consumption and experiences of victimization on the fear of becoming victims. Unlike other studies that have
included gender as a control variable, this article examines the differential effect that victimization experiences and media consumption have on the fear of becoming victims among both men and women. Based on the literature in this area, the following research questions are addressed:

**Research Question 1:** What is the impact of gender on fear of crime victimization among college students in Spain?

**Research Question 2:** Does previous victimization predict fear of crime victimization?

**Research Question 3:** What is the relationship between media consumption and fear of victimization?

The present study is expected to yield results about predictors of fear of victimization while identifying gender differences in terms of prevalence and covariates of fear. In addition, this research will have important implications for policy on Spanish college students’ safety.

**Method**

**Data Collection**

The data were collected between November 7 and November 21, 2017. The survey took approximately 12 minutes to complete (\(SD = 5.33\)) and was administered online. Respondents were eligible if they were enrolled as students at the university at the time of the interview (\(N = 25,121\)). Following approval of the study from the university, eligible participants were contacted by email asking them to participate in an anonymous victimization survey. They were sent initial invitations containing the link to access the online survey and one additional reminder. Respondents completed the survey using the device of their choosing (44.7% using smartphones, 53.2% using PCs, and 2.1% using tablets). No incentives or compensation were offered for participation. Response and cooperation rates were 8.4% and 59.3%, respectively.3

**Participants**

Participants in this study included 2,112 college students (1,344 women and 768 men) at a large university in central-eastern Spain. They were enrolled in the following academic areas: Social Sciences (39.7%), Health (21.9%), Engineering (17.8%), Arts and Humanities (12.9%), and Natural Sciences (7.7%). Participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 64 (\(M = 22.68, SD = 5.63\)) with
the majority (84.9%) being below 25. Most respondents were Spanish nationals (97.3%). The overrepresentation of women in our sample reflects both the higher percentage of women enrolled at the time of data collection (55.2%) and their increased response propensity (Olson & Groves, 2012). In addition, the distribution of the academic areas mimics that of the population.

**Measures**

**Response variable**

*Fear of criminal victimization.* Fear of victimization was measured by asking respondents how fearful they were of becoming victims of seven specific crimes, including (a) having someone break into their house, (b) getting mugged on the street, (c) being victims of terrorist attacks, (d) being sexually assaulted, (e) being beaten up in a fight, (f) being harassed at their workplace, and (g) having their intimate photos or videos shared without their consent. Each item was measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (*not afraid at all*) to 3 (*very afraid*). The wording of the questions and the response options can be found in Appendix A. Responses to these seven items were summed to create a fear of victimization scale ranging from 0 to 21, in which higher scores indicated greater fear of victimization ($M = 11.23, SD = 5.69$). An exploratory factor analysis indicated that the seven items loaded on one single factor, with factor loadings ranging from 0.66 to 0.77. In addition, the scale showed strong internal consistency with an alpha of .88 (more descriptive statistics for this scale are available in Appendix B). This index is used as the outcome variable in the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models.

**Explanatory variables**

*Media consumption.* Similar to prior research (Roche et al., 2016), three forms of media consumption were examined in this study, including exposure to television news, television crime series, and internet news. Specifically, respondents were asked how much time they spent on each of these activities on a typical day. As responses were recorded in hours and minutes, overall times for daily television news, crime series, and internet consumption in minutes were then calculated. The actual question wording of all of the explanatory variables is presented in Appendix A.

*Victimization experiences.* In line with previous research (Catalano, 2012; Villacampa & Pujols, 2017), seven types of victimization experiences were examined, including (a) offensive and/or threatening calls; (b) offensive and/or threatening emails, text messages, or instant messages; (c) offensive comments about oneself posted online; (d) loitering; (e) being followed; (f) having intimate photos or videos shared without consent; and (g) unwanted
sexual experiences. Participants were asked whether, in the past 12 months, these experiences had happened to them. Responses to these questions were grouped in two separate variables: stalking and sexual victimization. Stalking was coded as 1 if respondents indicated that they had experienced at least one of the first five experiences during the last 12 months and 0 otherwise. Sexual victimization was coded as 1 when respondents reported having intimate photos or videos shared without consent and/or unwanted sexual experiences over the last year.

**Sociodemographic variables.** Several sociodemographic variables that might affect our outcome and explanatory variables were incorporated into the models. These included dummy variables for gender (women = 1), nationality (Spanish = 1), sexual orientation (heterosexual = 1), and religiosity (religious = 1). Age was coded continuously (in years) and political orientation was measured using an 11-point left–right scale.

**Analytic Strategy**

The purpose of this study was to analyze whether fear of victimization levels and predictors vary by gender. To do so, we examined differences in fear of victimization levels between men and women using independent *t* tests and calculating effect sizes (Cohen’s *d*). As the individual questions used to measure fear of victimization were Likert-type, results from *t* tests were supplemented by nonparametric tests (Mann–Whitney *U* tests). The consistency between both approaches and the easier interpretation of the first one led us to report *t* tests in the text and provide the nonparametric analyses in Appendix B. To determine whether predictors of fear differ across gender, separate OLS regression models were estimated for men and women. In these models, the outcome variable was the fear of victimization index created by summing the responses to the seven victimization items. The regression coefficients for the variables of interest (media consumption, victimization, and personal characteristics) between the models were compared using *z* tests. Variance inflation factors (VIFs) ranged from 1.03 to 1.25, indicating that multicollinearity was not a problem in the models.

**Findings**

**Sample Characteristics**

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of all variables used in the analyses. On average, respondents were 22.68 years old (*SD* = 5.64), with men being slightly older than women (*M* = 23.17, *SD* = 6.10 vs. *M* = 22.41, *SD* = 5.34). Although
this difference was statistically significant \((t = -2.99, df = 2,110, p = .003)\), the effect size was small (Cohen’s \(d = -0.14\)). More women than men self-identified as religious (52.5% vs. 46.5%), although the difference between the groups was small \((\chi^2 = 7.15, df = 1, p = .004, \text{Cramer’s } V = 0.06)\). In addition, women leaned to the left more than men \((M = 4.11, SD = 2.36 \text{ vs. } M = 4.35, SD = 2.38)\), but this difference represented a small-sized effect \((t = -2.21, df = 2,110, p = .027, \text{Cohen’s } d = -0.10)\). Sexual orientation and nationality were comparable between genders. As shown in Table 1, the majority of men and women students identified themselves as heterosexual (90.1% and 87.6%, respectively) and indicated that they were Spanish nationals (97.0% and 97.4%, respectively).

### Table 1. Descriptive Statistics by Gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Full Sample ((N = 2,112))</th>
<th>Women ((n = 1,344))</th>
<th>Men ((n = 768))</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(M (SD))</td>
<td>(M (SD))</td>
<td>(M (SD))</td>
<td>(t) Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>22.68 (5.64)</td>
<td>22.41 (5.34)</td>
<td>23.17 (6.10)</td>
<td>(-2.99^{**})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>50.3% (1,063)</td>
<td>52.5% (706)</td>
<td>46.5% (357)</td>
<td>(7.15^{**})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political orientation</td>
<td>4.20 (2.37)</td>
<td>4.11 (2.36)</td>
<td>4.35 (2.38)</td>
<td>(-2.21^*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>88.5 (1,869)</td>
<td>87.6 (1,177)</td>
<td>90.1 (692)</td>
<td>(3.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish nationality</td>
<td>97.3 (2,054)</td>
<td>97.4 (1,309)</td>
<td>97.0 (745)</td>
<td>(0.28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news</td>
<td>59.25 (51.26)</td>
<td>60.08 (52.44)</td>
<td>57.79 (49.17)</td>
<td>(0.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television crime series</td>
<td>33.00 (51.53)</td>
<td>40.74 (56.43)</td>
<td>20.18 (38.95)</td>
<td>(9.48^{***})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet news</td>
<td>85.47 (83.87)</td>
<td>86.38 (85.58)</td>
<td>83.92 (80.91)</td>
<td>(0.62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalking</td>
<td>28.7 (606)</td>
<td>32.7 (439)</td>
<td>21.7 (167)</td>
<td>(28.48^{***})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual victimization</td>
<td>13.8 (292)</td>
<td>17.2 (231)</td>
<td>7.9 (61)</td>
<td>(35.06^{***})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Chi-square tests were used with categorical variables, whereas \(t\) tests were calculated for continuous outcome variables.

\(^*p < .05. \,**p < .01. \,**\,\,**p < .001.\)
Regarding the three forms of media consumption, respondents indicated spending the most time following current issues on the internet, with an average of nearly 1.5 hr a day \((M = 85.47, SD = 83.87)\). Television news was ranked next, with students spending approximately 1 hr a day watching the news \((M = 59.25, SD = 51.26)\). Television crime series was the least consumed type of media and the only one for which differences between men and women were significant \((t = 9.48, df = 1,943, p < .001)\). Women reported twice as much time watching crime series than men \((M = 40.74 vs. M = 20.18)\), resulting in a small to medium effect size (Cohen’s \(d = 0.41\)).

In terms of victimization, more than one quarter of the sample (28.7%) reported at least one form of stalking in the previous year, with women indicating more exposure to these experiences when compared with men (32.7% vs. 21.7%; \( \chi^2 = 28.48, df = 1, p < .001\), Cramer’s \(V = 0.12\) ). The greatest difference, however, was found for sexual victimization \((\chi^2 = 35.06, df = 1, p < .001\), Cramer’s \(V = 0.13\) ), with women reporting significantly higher rates of sexual victimization experiences than men (17.2% vs. 7.9%). In addition, women victims more often reported exposure to both experiences (stalking and sexual victimization) during the last year when compared with men victims (23.4% vs. 14.6%; \( \chi^2 = 6.82, df = 1, p < .001\), Cramer’s \(V = 0.10\) ).

**Fear of Victimization Among Male and Female College Students**

In response to the first research question, the results showed that, on average, women scored higher on the fear of victimization index \((M = 12.96, SD = 5.21)\) than men \((M = 8.21, SD = 5.21)\). This difference was significant \((t = 20.15, df = 2,110, p < .001)\) and represented a large-sized effect (Cohen’s \(d = 0.91\)). Women not only scored higher in the composite scale, but they also reported higher levels of fear for each single victimization experience (see Table 2). The greatest difference was found for sexual assault (Cohen’s \(d = 1.62\)); the most feared offense for women students and the least for their men counterparts. Both groups placed terrorism and mugging among the three offenses they were most fearful of, although women’s levels of fear were significantly higher \((t = 12.73, df = 2,110, p < .001\) and \(t = 14.04, df = 2,110, p < .001\), respectively). The smallest, although significant, difference was found for physical assault (Cohen’s \(d = 0.28\)). This offense was ranked lowest in terms of fear of victimization for women students while it occupied an intermediate position for men (four out of seven). These findings are fully consistent with the nonparametric results presented in Appendix B.
Table 2. Differences Between Men and Women in Fear of Victimization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Women $(n = 1,344)$</th>
<th>Men $(n = 768)$</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
<td>$t$ Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall scale</td>
<td>12.96 (5.21)</td>
<td>8.21 (5.21)</td>
<td>20.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home burglary</td>
<td>1.90 (0.93)</td>
<td>1.46 (0.95)</td>
<td>10.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugging</td>
<td>1.85 (0.87)</td>
<td>1.31 (0.85)</td>
<td>14.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist attack</td>
<td>2.09 (1.02)</td>
<td>1.46 (1.11)</td>
<td>12.73***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>2.43 (0.86)</td>
<td>0.88 (1.11)</td>
<td>33.36***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>1.42 (0.96)</td>
<td>1.16 (0.86)</td>
<td>6.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace harassment</td>
<td>1.65 (1.06)</td>
<td>0.90 (0.97)</td>
<td>16.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo/Video leaking</td>
<td>1.62 (1.19)</td>
<td>1.04 (1.08)</td>
<td>11.34***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***$p < .001$. 

Predictors of Fear of Victimization for Men and Women

Table 3 displays bivariate correlations between fear of victimization and the variables entered into the regression models for the full and the disaggregated samples. Age and religiosity were negatively associated with fear. In contrast, media consumption and victimization showed weak positive associations with fear. These findings shed light on the third research question, showing a positive but weak relationship between media consumption and fear of victimization.

Table 3. Bivariate Associations of Fear of Victimization with Predictors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Full Sample $(N = 2,112)$</th>
<th>Women $(n = 1,344)$</th>
<th>Men $(n = 768)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>$.20^{***}$</td>
<td>$.23^{***}$</td>
<td>$.14^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>$.19^{***}$</td>
<td>$.18^{***}$</td>
<td>$.19^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political orientation</td>
<td>$.09^{***}$</td>
<td>$.14^{***}$</td>
<td>$.09^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>$.01$</td>
<td>$.08^{**}$</td>
<td>$.07^{*}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish nationality</td>
<td>$.00$</td>
<td>$.00$</td>
<td>$.01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news</td>
<td>$.09^{***}$</td>
<td>$.05^{†}$</td>
<td>$.14^{***}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television crime series</td>
<td>$.13^{***}$</td>
<td>$.03$</td>
<td>$.12^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet news</td>
<td>$.05^{*}$</td>
<td>$.04$</td>
<td>$.04$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalking</td>
<td>$.08^{***}$</td>
<td>$.03$</td>
<td>$.06^{†}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual victimization</td>
<td>$.08^{***}$</td>
<td>$.03$</td>
<td>$.03$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{†}p < .10$. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. 
To examine whether predictors of fear differed across genders, separate regression models were estimated for men and women. Because regression coefficients from separate models are not directly comparable, z tests were computed to determine whether the regression coefficients significantly differed across gender. The results of these models and the corresponding z tests indicating whether the differences across genders were significant (Paternoster et al., 1998) are presented in Table 4. These findings suggested that predictors of fear of victimization varied slightly by gender. Among women, respondents who were younger (\(b = -0.23, p < .001\)), conservative (\(b = 0.15, p < .05\)), and identified themselves as religious (\(b = -1.76, p < .001\)) were significantly more fearful than their older, less conservative, and nonreligious counterparts. Women reporting sexual victimization scored higher on the fear of victimization scale when compared with those not reporting this form of victimization (\(b = 0.80, p < .05\)). Online and TV news consumption and sexual orientation were marginally significant in this model. Women who reported greater online and TV news consumption scored higher on the fear of victimization scale (\(b = 0.01, p = .05\) and \(b = 0.00, p = .10\), respectively). In addition, women who self-identified as heterosexual had higher levels of fear when compared with nonheterosexual women (\(b = 0.82, p = .08\)).

Table 4. Predictors of Fear of Victimization for Men and Women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Women (n = 1,344)</th>
<th>Men (n = 768)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b (RSE)</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>16.67 (1.36)</td>
<td>[14.00, 19.34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.23*** (0.03)</td>
<td>[-.029, -0.18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonreligious (ref. religious)</td>
<td>-1.76*** (0.34)</td>
<td>[-2.41, -1.10]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political orientation</td>
<td>0.15* (0.07)</td>
<td>[0.02, 0.029]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual (ref. nonheterosexual)</td>
<td>0.82† (0.45)</td>
<td>[-0.07, 1.70]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish nationality</td>
<td>0.24 (0.96)</td>
<td>[-1.65, 2.13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media consumption</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television news</td>
<td>0.01† (0.00)</td>
<td>[-0.00, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television crime series</td>
<td>-0.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.00]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet news</td>
<td>0.00† (0.00)</td>
<td>[0.00, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalking (ref. no stalking victimization)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.32)</td>
<td>[-0.55, 0.72]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual victimization (ref. no sexual victimization)</td>
<td>0.80* (0.39)</td>
<td>[0.03, 1.56]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted (R^2)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(F (df))</td>
<td>14.58 (10, 1125)**</td>
<td>6.82 (10, 667)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>1,136</td>
<td>678</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \(b = \) unstandardized regression coefficients; RSE = robust standard errors; CI = confidence intervals.  
†\(p < .10\). *\(p < .05\). **\(p < .01\). ***\(p < .001\).
The results for men indicated that respondents who were younger \((b = -0.13, p < .001)\), identified themselves as religious \((b = -1.45, p < .01)\), and spent more time watching TV news \((b = 0.01, p < .01)\) were significantly more fearful than older, nonreligious respondents who spent less time watching TV news. In contrast, self-identified heterosexual men had significantly lower fear when compared with nonheterosexuals \((b = -1.54, p < .05)\).

To further examine the differences in the predictors of fear of victimization among men and women, the values of the \(z\) tests were analyzed. Significant gender differences were found regarding the impact of age and sexual orientation. Both men and women who were younger were significantly more fearful, but the impact of age was stronger for women \((z = 2.48, p = .01)\). In the case of sexual orientation, self-identified heterosexual women had higher levels of fear, whereas self-identified heterosexual men had lower levels of fear when compared with their nonheterosexual counterparts \((z = 2.82, p < .01)\). Although the difference between the regression coefficients was not significant, political orientation was a predictor of fear among women, but did not predict fear among men. Similarly, sexual victimization was significant predictor of fear among women, but it was not significant for men. Despite both models explaining a small percentage of variation in respondents’ fear of victimization, the model appears to explain more variation in fear for the female sample \((\text{adjusted } R^2 = .11)\) compared with the male sample \((\text{adjusted } R^2 = .08)\).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study sheds light on the fear of victimization among two highly victimized groups: college students and women. College students do not only fear crime victimization at higher rates than similarly aged noncollege students, but they are also at a higher risk of victimization (Baum & Klaus, 2005; Fisher & Cullen, 2000; Gover et al., 2008; Lee & Hilinski-Rosick, 2012). In addition, female victims are known to report more exposure to both stalking and sexual victimization in comparison with male victims (Baum et al., 2009; Feltes et al., 2012; Jordan et al., 2007). Therefore, this study explored this phenomenon through the following research questions: What is the impact of gender on fear of crime victimization among college students in Spain? (Research Question 1); Does previous victimization predict fear of crime victimization across gender? (Research Question 2); What is the relationship between media consumption and fear of crime victimization for males and females? (Research Question 3).

According to the first research question, this study found that women were more fearful of crime victimization than men. This was found true for
each of the crimes analyzed in this study. These results are supported by previous research showing that women score higher than men in their perception of victimization risk (Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Fox et al., 2009; Pryce et al., 2018). Different theories provide explanations for these results, including the vulnerability hypothesis, the shadow of sexual assault, gender socialization, and the hidden nature of victimization theories. However, stalking victimization was not a significant predictor of fear within this sample (Research Question 2). One reason to explain this finding is because some of the victimization experiences examined might not be severe enough (e.g., threatening phone calls, offensive messages). For that reason, it is recommended that future studies will analyze the impact of not only stalking victimization, but also additional and more severe victimization experiences. Also, the frequency of these experiences was not assessed; it might be that they only contribute to fear when they occur for long periods of time. Conversely, sexual victimization was found to be a significant predictor of fear of victimization, but only among females (Research Question 2). This finding provides partial support for those of previous studies that suggest prior victimization is associated with fear of crime victimization among the general population and graduate students (Ferguson & Mindel, 2007; Fox et al., 2009; Pryce et al., 2018; Sulemana, 2015; Tseloni & Zarafonitou, 2008; Wilcox et al., 2006). Moreover, this finding is consistent with the shadow of sexual assault hypothesis (Warr, 1984).

Through separate regression analyses, this study found that both men and women who are young and religious are more fearful of crime victimization compared with their counterparts. Regarding age, the findings of this study are in line with other studies that have measured fear of specific, rather than general, offenses and have found that younger people tend to be more afraid (e.g., Ferraro, 1995; LaGrange & Ferraro, 1987; Rountree & Land, 1996). This finding seems logical because younger people are more likely to be exposed to crime because of their lifestyles (e.g., going out at night, using alcohol, frequently partying; Lee & Hilinski-Rosick, 2012; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2002). The importance of studying religiosity on the fear of crime victimization research was highlighted by Bolen (2010). As the author pointed out, religiosity had to be included in the analysis of fear of crime victimization because (p. 43)

if a person’s religiosity can alter the way an individual responds to stress and strain as Jang and Johnson (2005) suggest, it can be argued that it should also have some influence on the strain a person feels in response to his/her fear of crime.
As the author suggested, while researchers are unable to come up with a concise and universal agreement as to what causes increases and reductions in levels of fear, adding new dimensions to this debate could increase the number of valid elements and variables used to assess fear of crime victimization, resulting in enhanced explanations.

Through comparison of z tests, men and women were found to vary significantly based on age. More specifically, age was found to impact women’s fear of victimization more than men’s fear of crime victimization. In addition, respondents’ fear of victimization differed across gender based on sexuality. While heterosexual women had higher levels of fear compared with homosexual women, heterosexual men had lower levels of fear compared with homosexual men. In the case of men, this result can be explained because students who identify themselves as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) are significantly more likely to experience interpersonal violence than their heterosexual counterparts (Snyder et al., 2017). Therefore, if they are particularly vulnerable to potential victimization, it is logical that their fear is based on their actual perception of risk (Otis, 2007). These findings are consistent with those by Meyer and Grollman (2014), in which sexual minorities were significantly more likely to report fear at night than their heterosexual counterparts, and women were more likely to report such fear than men. They also found that sexual orientation and gender differences were due to sexual-minority men being more likely to report fear than heterosexual men. This suggests that fear of victimization among heterosexual women and homosexual men might stem from their interactions with men. Future research should consider including sexuality as an important predictor of fear.

TV news consumption was also found to have a small significant effect on men’s fear of victimization, but not women’s fear of victimization. In addition, political orientation was a predictor of fear among women, but did not predict fear among men. This gives researchers reasons to believe that gender has a moderating effect between certain explanatory variables such as sexuality, media consumption, and political orientation and fear of victimization.

This study and its findings will contribute to the existing literature on fear of victimization. Past studies on the fear of victimization have focused on victimization among women, but have failed to compare the results to fear of victimization among men (Fisher & Sloan, 2003; Pryor & Hughes, 2013; Wilcox et al., 2006). The additional analysis of z scores has confirmed that men and women’s fear of victimization differs in their predictors. Therefore, future studies should provide analyses that compare coefficients within and across gender.
These findings have important theoretical implications. First, although the cultivation and the resonance hypotheses suggest that increased media consumption will result in increased fear, there was no substantive support found for this notion. The lack of support for these hypotheses could be because this study used a sample from Spain. Being that the studies that have tested the hypotheses and found support have been primarily tested in the United States, there could be unknown or unmeasured cultural differences of the portrayal of crime in the media (McAuslan et al., 2018). Second, women were found to fear victimization more than men. Although they reported higher rates of victimization than their male counterparts (which is consistent with the hidden nature of victimization hypothesis), prior victimization did not consistently explain the differences in fear between men and women.

Although this study provides an expansion on the existing literature, limitations of our research should be noted. The first limitation is the narrow generalizability of this sample. As previously stated, the sample was collected on a single university. Despite this, it should be noted that the university sampled is one of the largest universities in Spain and has campuses in four provinces. The second limitation that should be addressed is the low response rate of the survey, which may lead to response bias. A low response rate is expected when using online surveys and foreseeable when the contact method is the institutional email addresses (which are not always the main addresses). Although our response rate was low, recent studies have shown that low response rates for college students do not necessarily lead to nonresponse bias (Fosnacht et al., 2017). The third limitation that should be addressed is that the types of victimization people experience do not always coincide with the variables available in the questionnaire. Therefore, the underreporting of victimization experiences is possible. Future studies should expand on the types of victimization experiences to see the impact of being the victim of additional offenses.

Policy discussions related to the topic of fear often include discussions on how to reduce fear of crime victimization. The conclusions drawn from this research can influence different strategies aimed at reducing the fear of crime victimization among college students. Based on our findings, policies that target young, heterosexual women, and homosexual men should reduce the fear of crime victimization among college students. Perhaps programs that are focused on reducing crime on college campuses should prioritize incoming college freshman or members of the LGBTQ community. In addition, as college women were found to fear crime victimization more than college men, programs should focus on empowering women using fear-reducing methods like self-defense.
Appendix A

Question Wording

Fear of victimization

Below you will find a series of crimes. This time we would like you to indicate how fearful you are of suffering each of them (response options: Not afraid at all, a little afraid, quite afraid, very afraid).

a. Being burglarized at home
b. Getting mugged on the street
c. Being a victim of a terrorist attack
d. Being sexually assaulted
e. Being attacked in a fight
f. Being harassed at your school or place of work
g. Being a victim of leaked photos/videos containing sexual content

Media consumption

On a typical day, how much time do you spend watching the news on TV? (Provide an estimate that is as accurate as possible.)

________ hours, _______ minutes

On a typical day, how much time do you spend watching detective programs on television such as CSI, Criminal Minds, Castle, Bones . . .? (Provide an estimate that is as accurate as possible.)

________ hours, _______ minutes

And how much time do you spend following current issues or issues of public interest on the internet in a normal day? Keep in mind that this may include social networks, blogs, and so on. (Provide an estimate that is as accurate as possible.)

________ hours, _______ minutes

Victimization experiences

a. In the past 12 months, have you received offensive, threatening, or silent phone calls?
b. In the past 12 months, have you been sent emails, text messages (SMS), or instant messages containing offensive or threatening content?
c. In the past 12 months, have offensive comments about you been posted on the internet?
d. In the past 12 months, have people loitered or waited outside of your home, workplace, or school without a legitimate reason to do so?
e. In the past 12 months, have you been followed?
f. In the past 12 months, have intimate photos or videos of yours been shared via the internet or mobile phone without your consent?
g. In the past 12 months, have you suffered an unwanted sexual experience, such as forced kissing or groping?

Appendix B

Additional Information and Analyses

Table B1. Descriptive Statistics of the Fear of Victimization Scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Mdn</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear of victimization</td>
<td>11.23 (5.69)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B2. Differences Between Men and Women in Fear of Victimization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Women Mdn</th>
<th>Men Mdn</th>
<th>Mann–Whitney U</th>
<th>r²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home burglary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>386,194.00***</td>
<td>−.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>343,769.50***</td>
<td>−.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist attack</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>356,963.50***</td>
<td>−.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual assault</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>169,189.00***</td>
<td>−.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>437,896.00***</td>
<td>−.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace harassment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>316,813.00***</td>
<td>−.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo/Video leaking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>377,537.50***</td>
<td>−.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aEffect sizes are calculated as follows: \( z/\sqrt{N} \), where \( N \) is total number of observations and \( z \) is the standardized value.

***p < .001.

Author’s Note

Leah Fikre Butler is now affiliated with Datadipity Digital, Austin, Texas.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Notes
1. In this body of research, any crime that activates fear of another one in a particular group is said to be a master offense.
2. Docudramas are fictionalized versions of actual events (e.g., COPS, America’s Most Wanted, Justice Files).
3. The response rate refers to the number of complete surveys divided by the number of eligible respondents. The cooperation rate refers to the proportion of complete surveys of all that were started.
4. To assess whether the number of victimizations and not the presence/absence of these experiences yielded different findings, the analyses were replicated using the number of sexual victimizations and stalking victimizations as predictors. The results were highly consistent, suggesting the robustness of the findings.

References


**Author Biographies**

**Carmen M. León** is a PhD, candidate in Criminal Law at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain). Her current research interests include intimate partner violence against women, with particular emphasis on public perceptions and attitudes, criminal victimization, and survey research methods.

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