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“One Doesn’t Slap a Girl But...” Social Representations and Conditional Logics in  
Legitimization of Intimate Partner Violence

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### Abstract

The present research, which fits into the conceptual framework of social representations, aims to analyze the impact of gender and legitimizing ideologies on the evaluation of intimate partner violence (IPV) against women. Using an inductive mixed methods approach, two studies were conducted in a French context. In Study 1, 24 participants were asked to express their views about a vignette describing an IPV case during semi-structured interviews. In Study 2, 123 participants completed a questionnaire which was based on the results of Study 1. They were asked to evaluate the severity and justification for this same IPV case in relation to several situations identified in interviews. They also completed two scales measuring adherence to ideologies legitimizing male dominance: the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and the Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale. Results show expressed ambivalence by participants between condemnation of IPV and the use of conditional logics in order to minimize or justify it. The expression of this reasoning was determined by social regulations such as the situations in which the violence occurred and adherence to legitimizing ideologies. Our results are relevant for campaigns raising awareness and educational programs that take into account social representations underlying IPV legitimization.

*Keywords:* domestic violence; social beliefs; gender differences; patriarchy; France.

“One Doesn’t Slap a Girl But...” Social Representations and Conditional Logics in  
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In the French context, intimate partner violence (IPV) is the leading cause of disability and premature death in women (Henrion 2001). The study of the social psychological mechanisms related to the acceptance of IPV is an issue of real importance for public health and prevention policies. International studies showed that women who are victims of IPV face various barriers when they are seeking help. Many of these obstacles are linked to socially shaped beliefs, norms, and values (Liang et al. 2005). Despite its importance for combatting IPV, this issue was relatively underdeveloped in the French context. In order to respond to this shortcoming, we used the conceptual framework of social representations (Moscovici 2008). These representations are a kind of knowledge that is socially developed and shared (Jodelet 1989) with justification and practice guidance roles (Abric 2001). Using an inductive mixed methods approach, we explored the meaning and reasoning logics that are likely to increase acceptance of IPV among the French population. In particular, we examined the impact of gender and legitimizing ideologies on the evaluation of the severity and justification of this violence.

### **Intimate Partner Violence in France**

Developed under the influence of feminist movements in the 1970s, the fight against IPV is the subject of a public health policy of growing significance and is an increasingly pressing issue in the media and in the political sphere around the world. A significant illustration of this development is the historical agreement adopted by the United Nations (1993), which challenged all forms of violence against women and defined a code of conduct to fight against it. This has

led to the emergence of many assistance strategies to strengthen prevention responses and provide survivors with assistance and support (e.g., new laws, protection orders, specialized associations). However, this violence remains common, is rarely denounced, and is rarely prosecuted (Herman 2016). Indeed, IPV affects between 10–71% of women during their lifetime (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006).

In France, awareness of the scope of this phenomenon arose from the first known statistical survey on this topic (Jaspard et al. 2003). It was based on a representative sample of 6,970 women aged 20–59 years-old and aimed to assess the various types of abuse perpetrated against women in their everyday life (i.e., couple relationships, work, public spaces). It revealed that violence is mostly present in the private sphere, concluding that 1 in 10 women is a victim of IPV. Contrary to common belief, all social backgrounds are involved. This study also highlighted the concealment of violence because half the victims were disclosing the aggression to which they were subjected for the first time during the investigation.

More than 10 years later, this situation has not changed in France: two-thirds of IPV victims are still living with their abuser (Bauer and Soullez 2012). Moreover, only 28% have already been to the police, and only 16% have already filed a complaint (Morin et al. 2013). Furthermore, survivors still have trouble recognizing and denouncing this specific violence because IPV is concealed and deeply rooted in habit (Jaspard 2005). Thus, one of the most important scientific issues in this field concerns the understanding of the psychological and social mechanisms underlying the persistence of this violence and the help-seeking barriers faced by survivors. However, whereas many countries have worked to create awareness campaigns and to set up multidisciplinary research centers for domestic violence, French research has invested

very little in this issue (Hamel 2011). Considering IPV as the most severe expression of gender inequalities, the French Government recently reaffirmed the necessity to develop more scientific knowledge in order to fight this social phenomenon.

### **Acceptance of Intimate Partner Violence**

Because survivors of IPV face various barriers when they are seeking help (Liang et al. 2005), international literature has evaluated negative attitudes toward them and the tolerance of this kind of violent behavior against women. There is a belief that violence is a normal behavior (Frias 2013) or an expression of love (Pyles et al. 2012) in a couple relationship. There is also a belief that women instigate the violence they experience, that they want to be abused, that they could escape from violent relationships “if they really wanted to”, or that violence is a “normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration” (Worden and Carlson 2005 p. 1227; also see Carlson and Worden 2005; Policastro and Payne 2013). Several empirical studies have focused on the factors that can help to strengthen negative attitudes against victims of violence. For instance, Capezza and Arriaga (2008a) showed that participants blamed a victim presented as a non-traditional woman (e.g., a career woman) or one who reacted negatively to the abuse (e.g., yelled back) more than they did a traditional one (e.g., a housewife). Other studies revealed that victims are also blamed more if they exhibit provocative behaviors (Esqueda and Harrison 2005), are verbally aggressive before the incident (Witte et al. 2006), or have drunk alcohol (Harrison and Esqueda 2000).

Consequently, extralegal factors such as contextual characteristics related to one’s beliefs, stereotypes and social norms contribute to the non-recognition or acceptance of IPV, and they affect judgments toward survivors (Baldry and Pagliaro 2014). In particular, they affect the

attribution of responsibility to victims (Taylor and Sorenson 2005), help to reduce social support for them, and play a major role in the response to this violence and in the way survivors deal with it (Flood and Pease 2009). Examining these psychosocial determinants is a major issue if we are to better understand how people think of IPV in France, and specifically, if we are to identify beliefs that may help to promote its acceptance in this specific context. Understanding these common sense arguments is all the more important because acceptance of IPV creates a societal climate that encourages this kind of violence (Archer and Graham-Kevan 2003; Capezza and Arriaga 2008b).

### **The Social Representations Approach**

The social representations approach (Moscovici 1984, 2001, 2008) offers a heuristic framework for understanding psychosocial issues of IPV against women. *Social representations* can be defined as a kind of knowledge that is socially developed and shared, having a practical aim and contributing to the construction of a reality that is common to a social group (Jodelet 1989). As content and process, social representations constitute a particular modality of knowledge, generally referred to as everyday communication. They can be considered as lay thinking in contrast to scientific thinking. Among the processes involved in the dynamics of social representations, Moscovici (2008) emphasizes the role of cognitive anchoring. This refers to the integration of the object of representation into categories of pre-existing knowledge, thus making it possible to make familiar what is new. Doise (1990, 1992) relies on the principle of structural homology (Bourdieu 1980) to define this process of anchoring through modalities that place this object within a set of social-symbolic relations. Applied to our issue, this social anchoring would determine the representations of the object “intimate partner violence”

according to the objective social position of individuals as well as their adherence to belief systems or values that underpin gender relationships.

This socio-constructivist approach therefore allows us to reconsider individuals and groups as part of a world of objects which are viewed via their relationships to others, that is, at the heart of social inscription and participation processes. Thus applying this approach to our research problem allows us to study: (a) meanings and logics that are specific to different social groups concerned by IPV situations and (b) how those representations guide communication and interpersonal relationships in and between these groups. Constituting social groups which are particularly significant with regard to IPV, men and women each have specific views on the phenomenon. There are differences in the way they understand and react to it. For instance, it has been shown that men are more likely than are women to ignore the situation and to hold the victim responsible for the violence, whereas women are more likely than men are to encourage the survivor to seek help (Sylaska and Walters 2014). It has also been shown that women perceive this violence as more severe (Hamby and Jackson 2010; Koski and Mangold 1988) and more unacceptable (Dennison and Thompson 2011) than men do. The socio-representational approach would explain these differences by referring to the set of beliefs, norms, and roles that define identity issues in social and symbolic relationships between gender groups.

This theoretical framework allows us to establish a link between an operating cognitive system and its social metasytem (Doise 2011) in order to consider the social structure in which this field of interpersonal communication and relationships is embedded. More specifically, this correspondence between the “order of ideas” and the “social order” may allow us to understand meanings associated with IPV against women as ideological manifestations which may

legitimize male dominance. Indeed, the specificity of gender groups is grounded first and foremost in power and dominance relationships between them. According to Bourdieu (2001), masculine domination is a symbolic violence which allows men to maintain or reinforce their power. Applied to our issue, this symbolic violence may consist in failing to recognize IPV against women as such, or even in justifying it. This conceptual view may give us a better understanding of psychosocial processes and issues underlying the IPV phenomenon.

### **The Present Study**

Despite the interest and necessity to design studies regarding violence and gender relationships, little research has been carried out in order to investigate these topics in France. This observation calls for more elaboration concerning this issue in this country. The present study fits into the conceptual framework of social representations, allowing for a multilevel analysis (i.e., intra-individual, inter-individual, positional, and ideological levels, see Doise 2011) and for contextualizing attitudes toward IPV against women as indicative of social and symbolic relations between genders. The specificity of the social representations' framework resides in its double focus on both exploration of representations' cognitive contents taken from discursive materials and examination of the social dynamics at play in their construction (see Jodelet 2015). The inductive, mixed methods approach constitutes a research strategy that is specifically suited for the analysis of IPV when examining this interplay between cognitive contents and social processes. First, we designed a qualitative study (i.e., interviews) in order to explore the cognitive content (i.e., meaning, reasoning logics) of representations associated with a case of IPV. Second, we constructed a quantitative study (i.e., questionnaire) on the basis of the first study to analyze the relationships between these cognitive contents and social processes that

are likely to play a part in IPV legitimization. In order to attain our goal and to develop a relevant, comprehensive strategy fitting the population under study (i.e., French young adults), we chose to work on a salient violent case instead of a general situation.

### **Study 1: Exploration of Cognitive Contents**

Study 1 was designed to explore representations' cognitive contents related to IPV against women, as well as gender effects on the expression of these representations in a context of interpersonal relationships through interviews. Here we consider interviews not only as a research technique, but also as a social situation in which speech is determined by the gender of researchers and participants. Participants were asked to express their opinion concerning a vignette depicting physical violence perpetrated by a man on his girlfriend. This approach approximates a typical situation of daily life, where individuals are likely to discuss an IPV event when it is reported by others. It helps us to understand the social construction of IPV through the relationship to others and with reference to social knowledge which is naturally and spontaneously expressed in everyday life.

### **Method**

**Participants and design.** Because young adults are those who report the most IPV in France (Jaspard et al. 2003), our only inclusion criterion was for participants to be between 18 and 30 years of age. There were no exclusion criteria. Twenty-four participants (12 men and 12 women) between 20 and 30 years of age ( $M = 24.83$ ,  $SD = 3.45$ ) were recruited for Study 1 on a voluntary basis. Eighteen participants (75%) stated that they were engaged in a professional activity whereas 6 participants (25%) were students. Fourteen (58%) were currently in a romantic relationship. Eighteen (75%) said that they had never experienced IPV and 12 (50%)

reported knowing someone in their circle who was a survivor of this type of violence. Men and women participating in our study were randomly assigned to a man or woman interviewer, resulting in a 2 (Gender of Participant: man or woman) x 2 (Gender of Researcher: man or woman) experimental design.

**Procedure.** Participants were recruited in a city in the south of France using snowball sampling. More specifically, researchers had been linked with individuals corresponding to selection criteria through acquaintances. The research was presented as a study on couple relationships. These individuals were not interviewed but instead were asked to put researchers in contact with participants corresponding to inclusion criteria. Once researchers made contact with participants, it was specified that interviews were individual, anonymous, and confidential. Indeed, participants' identity cannot be revealed through the collected data. Also, participants were informed that they could refuse to be recorded and that they could stop at any time without any explanation and without any consequences. Once they had given their consent to participate, they were asked to choose a location for the interview (i.e., at their place, at the researcher's office, or in a public place). Moreover, due to the sensitive nature of the subject, all interviews were conducted by researchers who were also licensed psychologists. At the end of the interviews, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes depending on the participants (45 minutes on average), debriefings were offered by the researchers.

**Data collection.** Individual semi-structured interviews were performed according to Smith's (1995) recommendations. For instance, the author recommends that open questions be used rather than closed ones, that specific questions guided by the issue be asked during a second stage, and that broad questions should be asked at the start which do not impose an a priori view.

Thus, in order to maintain a certain neutrality and not influence the discourse of participants, the terms “domestic violence” and “intimate partner violence” were not introduced by the researcher (which refers to the principle of non-imposition of the research subject, see Demazière and Dubar 1997).

Participants were encouraged to comment on the following vignette: “A 20-year-old man slapped his girlfriend because she flirted with another man at a party.” We used this brief vignette in order to facilitate participants’ identification with the fictional characters (i.e., same generation). Moreover, the ambiguous nature of the flirting, and the trivialized nature of the slap (see Gastineau and Gathier 2012), were intended to encourage the production of a more contrasted discourse which was less subject to social desirability. Participants were asked (a) to report the first five words that came to mind and their meaning to them; (b) whether they had experienced, seen or heard a similar situation; (c) to comment on the severity and justification for the event; (d) to imagine and describe what lead up to the slap; (e) to imagine and describe the couple; and (f) to project their own reactions as both the male and female character. Once the interviews had been concluded, participants were asked to provide information on their socio-demographic status.

**Data analysis.** The interview content was subjected to a thematic content analysis (Flick 2014) in order to identify the representations and reasoning that help us to understand participants’ attitudes toward the violent situation depicted in the vignette. We made a focused and reasoned coding of the corpus in order to isolate and take into account salient units regarding the research issue (Strauss and Corbin 1990). In line with investigators’ triangulation (Denzin 1978), data analysis and interpretation were carried out individually and then discussed

collectively by the first four authors in order to exchange interpretations.

Then, a lexicometric analysis was conducted with the help of an IRaMuTeQ (2017) software program in order to explore the way representations occur in terms of gendered dynamics. (For previous cases of using this software as a tool to study social representations, see Fonte et al. 2017; see also Danermark et al. 2013; Guarnaccia et al. 2015.) According to Reinert's (1983, 1986) considerations, a top-down hierarchical classification was conducted with the aim of highlighting the formal structure of the discourse. More specifically, it helps to extract significant similarities and oppositions between words via a Chi-Square test of association and the emergence of lexical classes that represent different discursive contexts, within which words make sense. The Chi-Square test is the coefficient index of a word's or variable's association with a lexical class. It is calculated on a contingency table which cross-tabulates the presence or absence of a word in a sentence and the membership or not of this sentence to the considered class. The higher an index, the more it reflects an association between a word or a variable category with the class of discourse. This statistical approach also offered us the possibility of visualizing meaningful connections between these classes and variable modalities. Here, we use it in order to explore associations between discursive focalizations and the gender of the researcher and the participant. The presented interview extracts underline significant themes and reproduce discourses which underpin our analysis.

## **Results**

**A normative ambivalence in the discourse.** We will focus solely on the results of content analysis that are closely linked to our aim. This analysis shows that the vignette was interpreted by participants through two normative injunctions which structure the majority of the

collected discourses: on the one hand, the inadmissibility of violence, specifically when directed toward a woman; on the other hand, the inadmissibility of flirting when you are in a relationship. Mentioned respectively by 20 (83%) and 17 (71%) participants, these themes spontaneously appear in the first moments of the interview and without introduction by the researcher: “You do not raise your hand to a woman; it’s as simple as that! It goes against all the rules of society” (S7, a man talking to a woman); “It’s wrong to hit on someone when you’re in a committed relationship” (S11, a woman talking to a woman); “What he did was wrong, but then, it was wrong from her too, to flirt with somebody” (S3, a man talking to a man); and “Both parties are at fault. There’s no smoke without fire. If he slapped her there must have been a good reason so both are in the wrong” (S9, a man talking to a woman).

The characters of the vignette both appear as deviant to a social norm and their responsibilities are discussed and negotiated, which results in an ambivalence in discourse. Participants expressed their lack of information for evaluating this responsibility (“The girl, what did she do?”, “Do we have the right to know more or not?”). Dealing with uncertainty, many situations are then imagined by the participants to assign meaning to the violent behavior. These situations are characterized by conditional logics (e.g., “yes, but...”, “if... then”) and causal explanations. They lead most participants to judge the slap as more or less legitimate/severe according to the imagined situations and causes, and thus to make more or less acceptable the deviation from the norm “one doesn’t hit a woman.” The only exceptions were two women with close ties to feminist organizations who exclusively condemned the male character.

These imagined situations may give rise to many conditions that are likely to lead to different judgements for the same individual. The approach we used to study IPV-in-context

refers to the work of Flament (1994) on conditionality in the field of the study of social representations. Thus, in reference to this work, it is considered that the positions and decisions adopted against IPV depend on the context in which they occur. The following quote is a representative example of conditional logic, showing the slap as “less unjustified” if the seduction is sought and intentional rather than accidental.

See, like, you might find yourself talking to someone and chatting them up without really... Sometimes you can feel that you're attractive to somebody and, like, whatever, you're not telling yourself to stop talking to them because you're beginning to hit on him. In that case if someone turns around and slaps me for that, yeah, I would feel like that's totally unjustified, cause... You can't help it, the need to please... If the girl looks you up and down and starts being... seductive, know what I mean? I don't know if it is justified, but as I was saying earlier it's a thing, more like a trend really, and so there are maybe some women who tend to be a bit more flirty than others, and if this is a trend, the guy that starts to know her a bit better might just lose it and slap her because of this, and in this case, I feel like, maybe it's a bit less... less unjustified because maybe it'd get her right back on track and she might say to herself, yeah, alright... See, I'm thinking... it would get her back in shape.” (S23, a woman talking to a woman)

Note that, for Heider (1958), behavioral intention is the primary factor that allows observers to issue an internal causality explanation. In addition, according to Jones and Davis (1965), for the observer to attribute effects of the act to the actor, and not to external factors, requires the identified effects to be desired by the actor and that s/he is able to act in such a way

that s/he may cause these effects. Of these two conditions, people infer the intent and therefore that the act is due to a dispositional factor. Theories of causal attribution help us here to examine and analyze the conditional discourses used by participants.

The results of the thematic content analysis were then examined in greater depth by a lexicometric analysis which aimed to explore the discursive focalization depending on the variables under consideration (i.e., Gender of Researcher and Gender of Participant). This analysis shown that the discourses were composed of 2,882 text segments structured by three different lexical classes: Flirting and the responsibility of the female character (class 1), Reference to the slap and psychologizing of the male character (class 2), and Romanticism and social relationship among genders (class 3). Furthermore, a correspondence analysis showed a contrast between a lexical universe produced in a masculine context (classes 1 and 2) and a lexical universe produced in a female context (class 3).

**Flirting and the responsibility of the female character (Class 1).** Representing 977 text segments (34% of the analyzed corpus), this class was associated with the variables “male participant,”  $\chi^2(1) = 15.02, p < .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .12$ , and “male researcher,”  $\chi^2(1) = 12.11, p < .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .11$ . It was also significantly associated with the variable “male participant talking to male researcher,”  $\chi^2(1) = 26.00, p < .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .16$ . Among the most significant words found in this class (all  $ps < .01$ ), we find: “dude” (in French: “mec”),  $\chi^2(1) = 235.14$ , Cramer’s  $V = .49$ ; “flirt” (“dragner”),  $\chi^2(1) = 179.02$ , Cramer’s  $V = .43$ ; “girl” (“fille”),  $\chi^2(1) = 157.81$ , Cramer’s  $V = .40$ ; “party” (“soirée”),  $\chi^2(1) = 79.12$ , Cramer’s  $V = .28$ ; “kiss” (“embrasser”),  $\chi^2(1) = 27.47$ , Cramer’s  $V = .17$ ; “jealous” (“jaloux”),  $\chi^2(1) = 26.85$ , Cramer’s  $V = .17$ ; “slept” (“coucher”),  $\chi^2(1) = 21.86$ , Cramer’s  $V = .15$ ; “look” (“regard”),  $\chi^2(1) = 19.91$ ,

Cramer's  $V = .14$ ; "attract" ("attiré"),  $\chi^2(1) = 17.98$ , Cramer's  $V = .14$ ; "seduce" ("séduire"),  $\chi^2(1) = 14.12$ , Cramer's  $V = .12$ ; and "appeal" ("plaire"),  $\chi^2(1) = 11.68$ , Cramer's  $V = .11$ . More specifically, it was about the female character's behavior and her possible responsibility for being slapped in the face by a male character who was often depicted as displaying a jealous personality.

In addition to the intentional nature of seduction, the presumed guilt of the female character was reconstructed through other elements which may reduce the severity and the unjustified nature of the slap. Thus, some participants wondered if the female character was not trying to instigate reactions from the male character—for example, to make him jealous. Moreover, others questioned the potentially repetitive nature of the female character's behavior, which would be an aggravating factor for justifying the slap (i.e., the male character would feel helpless and exasperated by the situation). Indeed, according to the covariation model (Kelley 1973), the intentional nature and the consistency of the observed behavior is one of three sources of information that are used by individuals to assign consequences of the situation to its author rather than to situational factors.

I dunno, but I guess you can assume that sometimes... There are some cases, whether you have to deal with several incidents or if things are not working well or you get the feeling that a wee slap might put her back right on track. (S8, a man talking to a woman)

The slap isn't, I mean, it's not... I don't think it's the answer to fix the problem, I mean you need context, how it happened. It always depends on context, like if she was asking for it and maybe it slapped some sense into her, maybe she's happy

with it, I don't know... (S2, a man talking to a man)

Finally, several participants questioned the meaning of the word "flirt," which remained relatively vague in the vignette, in order to evaluate the responsibility of the female character (e.g., "What is flirting?"; "What is actually happening?"; "What's the flirting like?"). Thus, the flirt was sometimes thought to be something less severe compared to other behaviors for which the slap appeared to be more justified.

We don't know what he means by "flirting." If he pointed out that she kissed someone, that would be clearer, you know what I mean? It would be a bit more severe, with something specific that would make the girl appear more guilty. It would still not be a good reason for him to slap her, but it would still give it something a bit more.... because just "flirting," like I said previously, that's too vague, we don't know what it means, it depends on everyone's perception. (S14, a man talking to a man)

That's gonna depend on the level of the girl's guilt, see – if she had done something or not... Myself, I wouldn't have done it, so I'm not okay with it, like if it happened to my baby sister it would seriously piss me off, I'd ask her if she indeed slept with another guy, and in that case I would tell her, hey lass, you've cheated on your boyfriend, so get on with it! And then again if she's been hit on or if she comes to me in tears... telling me "he gave me a slap, just because I was speaking with another guy at a party," that would really piss me off, get it? I dunno if it'd mean I should act on it, but it'd still really get on my tits and I wouldn't find any reason for it. That all depends on the level of guilt of the

chick... if she's hitting on someone or if... What's going on, what has been going on... If she's done something... (S14, a man talking to a man)

**Reference to the slap and the psychologizing of the male character (Class 2).**

Representing 997 text segments (35% of the analyzed corpus), this class was associated with the variables “male researcher,”  $\chi^2(1) = 8.93$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cramer's  $V = .09$ , and “female participant talking to a male researcher,”  $\chi^2(1) = 3.95$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cramer's  $V = .06$ . Among the most significant words present in this class (all  $ps < .01$ ), we find: “slap” (in French: “gifle”),  $\chi^2(1) = 172.03$ , Cramer's  $V = .42$ ; “hand” (“main”),  $\chi^2(1) = 85.67$ , Cramer's  $V = .29$ ; “situation” (“situation”),  $\chi^2(1) = 56.89$ , Cramer's  $V = .24$ ; “act” (“acte”),  $\chi^2(1) = 42.77$ , Cramer's  $V = .21$ ; “justify” (“justifier”),  $\chi^2(1) = 45.74$ , Cramer's  $V = .21$ ; “understand” (“comprendre”),  $\chi^2(1) = 26.42$ , Cramer's  $V = .16$ ; “explain” (“expliquer”),  $\chi^2(1) = 25.03$ , Cramer's  $V = .16$ ; “alcohol” (“alcool”),  $\chi^2(1) = 21.07$ , Cramer's  $V = .15$ ; “impulsive” (“impulsif”),  $\chi^2(1) = 20.77$ , Cramer's  $V = .14$ ; and “youth” (“jeunesse”),  $\chi^2(1) = 17.04$ , Cramer's  $V = .13$ . These discourses therefore focused on the behavior performed by the male character and on explanation seeking.

Some conditional logics related to the type of behavior and took its violence, intensity, and repetition as negotiation criteria. Thus, other types of behavior represented as more violent were invoked to minimize the severity of the slap by comparison (e.g., “beat”; “punch”; “dismantle”; “beaten up”). Note that in the context of categorization, the point of comparison is essential (see Parducci 1983). Indeed, “categorization is not only an act of reference, specifying what the thing in question is, but also an act of sense making, specifying how the category that includes this thing fits into our larger picture of the Shape of Things” (Amsterdam and Bruner 2000, p. 29). Here, we see that the perceived severity of violent behavior depends on other

behaviors with which it is compared. Some participants also questioned the intensity of the slap (e.g., “There are slaps that can really hurt a lot and others less”) and also on its repetitive nature to evaluate the severity of violent behavior (e.g., “It becomes a bit excessive when it gets repeated”). Indeed the repetitive aspect of an event reduces the possible use of external attribution and reinforces the use of an internal attribution as explanatory process (Kelley 1973). “It’s bad, but there’s worse I’d say... It’s only a slap; he could have given her a real beating. Yeah, it’s only a slap, you only feel the pain for what, I don’t know, five minutes? Then it’s gone.” (S9, a man talking to a woman); “A slap is no big deal from my point of view, even though you don’t lay a hand on a woman, it doesn’t seem like... he didn’t break her teeth, did he?” (S14, a man talking to a man).

No, it doesn’t seem to me as bad as all that, it’s just a slap, he didn’t leave a mark, and he took her right there on the spot, he punched her a bit, like, face to face, see? It’s a daft slap, some kind of “back-in-your-place” thing. Doesn’t seem all that severe to me. (S24, a woman talking to a man)

Several causal attributions also helped to make sense of the violent behavior of the male character, revealing it as more or less “understandable” or “forgivable.” Often associated with youth, the most advanced cause of the slap was the loss of self-control (e.g., “skid”; “accident”; “drive”). Participants indeed considered the behavior of young people to be thoughtless (e.g., “immaturity”; “impulsiveness”; “unconsciousness”), especially in a festive and alcoholic context. Conversely, middle-age was associated with a certain maturity (e.g., “experience”; “background”), which suggests acts that are more considered and thus more severe. Finally, psychologizing explanations were advanced, such as a lack of confidence and a need to assert

one's masculinity when one is young (e.g., "between them, men are proud"; "the pride of man takes a hit").

A forty-year-old man that slaps someone, in my mind it would mean that there's more thinking that's gone into it, that means it's somebody with more background and experience, meaning it's either someone that's violent, or somebody that's gone too far emotionally who gave the slap. Whereas a twenty-year-old guy acts more on impulse and it's not someone that's going to do that very often, see? You get the impression that it's more down to alcohol or self-pride... It's true that we think of a twenty-year-old man as a more fragile type of person, someone... Yeah, I picture somebody in my head, like, not a teen, but a young man, next to a nightclub who's going to slap a girl while coming from a grown-up forty-year-old man it would be weirder. That would shock me more." (S5, a woman talking to a man)

**Romanticism and social relationships among genders (Class 3).** Representing 908 text segments (32% of the analyzed corpus), this class was associated with the variables "female participant,"  $\chi^2(1) = 16.55, p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .14$ , and "female researcher,"  $\chi^2(1) = 43.65, p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .22$ . It was also associated with the variable "female participant talking to a female researcher,"  $\chi^2(1) = 42.28, p < .001$ , Cramer's  $V = .22$ . Among the most significant words present in this class (all  $ps < .01$ ), we find: "love" [in French: "amour"],  $\chi^2(1) = 150.69$ , Cramer's  $V = .41$ ; "physical" ["physique"],  $\chi^2(1) = 99.36$ , Cramer's  $V = .33$ ; "relationship" ["relation"],  $\chi^2(1) = 60.05$ , Cramer's  $V = .26$ ; "society" ["société"],  $\chi^2(1) = 58.04$ , Cramer's  $V = .25$ ; "love" ["aimer"],  $\chi^2(1) = 40.41$ , Cramer's  $V = .21$ ; "control" ["contrôler"],  $\chi^2(1) = 37.62$ ,

Cramer's  $V = .20$ ; "psychological" ["psychologique"],  $\chi^2(1) = 34.58$ , Cramer's  $V = .20$ ); "passion" ["passion"],  $\chi^2(1) = 33.04$ , Cramer's  $V = .19$ ; "norm" ["norme"],  $\chi^2(1) = 32.78$ , Cramer's  $V = .19$ ; "hate" ["haine"],  $\chi^2(1) = 26.20$ , Cramer's  $V = .17$ ; and "domination" ["domination"],  $\chi^2(1) = 16.43$ , Cramer's  $V = .13$ . Here, the logical reasoning referred to love and gender relationships in society.

More specifically, participants discussed different aspects of the characters' intimate relationship in order to evaluate severity or justify the slap. The latter appeared more justified if the protagonists were in a long-term relationship or if they were in love. From this perspective, the slap was sometimes represented as a mark of attachment from the male character, that is to say, as a proof of love or desire which may legitimate the violent behavior. Revealing the difficulties of communication in the couple, the slap was then thought to be a means of physical expression of his feelings. "If they haven't been together for very long I think that explains the slapping even less 'cause when you've been with someone for a long time you get the right to get angry." (S11, a woman talking to a woman); "A man who decides to lash out and act violently in the heat of the moment, shows right off to what extent he's at the mercy of this woman, and, like, it proves how much he loves her." (S12, a woman talking to a woman)

Furthermore, some participants spoke about norms and values shaped by society (e.g., "male dominance"; "patriarchal society"; "education") to give meaning to the violent behavior. Specifically, it was thought as being the result of social inequalities between genders which are the bases of other types of violence perpetrated against women (e.g., "psychological violence"; "symbolic violence"; "possession"; "control"). Thus, according to these participants, slapping was spontaneously thought to be a less severe and less unjustified behavior if the gender of

characters in the vignette were reversed: “a 20-year-old woman slaps her boyfriend because he flirted with another woman at a party.”

## **Discussion**

Study 1 was designed to explore the attitudes of young French participants toward IPV against women. Content analysis showed an ambivalence in their discourses between the condemnation of violence and the expression of conditional logics that tended to minimize or justify this same violence. In other words, participants set out rules and principles that they are always likely to consider as legitimate to break, depending on the context in which the violence is perpetrated. These conditional logics constitute a symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2001) in the sense that they contribute to the non-recognition of physical violence in a context of social domination. Lexicometric analysis then showed that gender plays an important part in the expression of conditional logics which are associated with violence. To evaluate the severity and justification of violence, a discourse on the accountability of the female character and the non-accountability of the male character (e.g., the instinctual nature of men’s reactions) was expressed more between and toward men. However, a discourse on love, which is another form of legitimization of IPV (see Dziegielewski et al. 2005), was expressed more between women.

These results highlight the fact that attitudes toward violence are co-constructed dynamically in interaction with gender identities—that is, from a wide range of meaning networks at stake in the definition of male and female roles (i.e., stereotypes, social norms, values). They illustrate the role of social representations as reception systems for the appropriation of new information—in our study, when individuals are confronted with a case of IPV (for experimental studies of this socio-cognitive process, see Abric 1987; Flament 1984). In

other words, cognitive contents expressed during the interviews can be interpreted as already there frames of thinking (Jodelet 1989) which are likely to include conditional logics in a structuring system of social and symbolic relationships between genders (see Goffman, 1977). Whereas the principle of conditionality within social representations theory is regulated by socio-cognitive logics (Flament 1994), it is relevant to explore the relationships between cognitive contents updated in Study 1 and social processes such as legitimization of IPV likely to occur through adherence to male dominance ideology (see Bourdieu 2001). Thus, Study 2 was conducted to reveal the deeper effects of gender and legitimizing ideologies on the expression of conditional logics toward IPV, with the help of reference situations that were spontaneously mobilized during the interviews of Study 1.

### **Study 2: Articulation Content–Process**

Study 2 aims to examine in further depth the ambivalence between the condemnation of violence against women and the expression of naive psychologies that tend to legitimize it. The principle of conditionality (Flament, 1994) proposed in the structural approach of social representations (Rateau et al. 2011; Rateau and Lo Monaco 2016) is a useful concept for exploring this question. This is a socio-cognitive process involved in negotiating the prescriptive elements of a representation (i.e., “one doesn’t hit a woman”) based on conditional elements which allow individuals to incorporate the possibility of deviating from social norms (e.g., “if she is unfaithful...”; “if her boyfriend is immature...”; “if he is in love...”). The cognitive contents analyzed in Study 1 show that “talking” about a situation of violence against women is a real social situation which taps into schemes which define gender relations. Specifically, these results suggest a similarity between subjects’ narrative focus on conditional logics (order of ideas) and

the embodiment of gender roles, which fit with ideologies legitimizing male domination (social order). The analysis and understanding of socio-cognitive dynamics involved in the social construction of attitudes toward IPV is therefore an important issue. In this perspective of relationship between cognitive contents and social processes, two socio-cognitive constructs seemed particularly relevant for identifying ideologies that may be involved in the social structuring of conditional logics: ambivalent sexism and the acceptance of domestic violence myths.

The first construct is made up of two types of coexisting sexism (Glick and Fiske 2001) that may reinforce women's gender role and legitimize inequalities between men and women. On the one hand, benevolent sexism is defined as a set of attitudes which lead to the stereotypical representation of women in limited roles but ones that are subjectively positive in tone. On the other hand, hostile sexism is a well-known sexism based on masculine domination supported by ideology and on a form of hostile sexuality. Several studies have evaluated the effect of ambivalent sexism on violence against women. For instance, it has been shown that benevolent sexism predicts the blame of a rape victim who has displayed inappropriate gender-role behavior (Abrams et al. 2003). Hostile sexism, moreover, predicts the justification of IPV (Expósito et al. 2004), specifically if the perpetrator felt betrayed (Forbers et al. 2005).

The second construct regards myths surrounding IPV. They can be defined as “stereotypical beliefs about domestic violence that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and which serve to minimize, deny, or justify physical aggression against intimate partners” (Peters 2008, p. 5). They serve to support patriarchy because they are positively correlated with negative attitudes toward women and some restrictive views on

women's roles (Peters 2008). Multiple contributions have shown that these myths were significant predictors of abusive behavior justification in couples' relationships because they are linked to attribution of victim's responsibility and to non-recognition of IPV (see Yamawaki et al. 2012, for a review).

Our Study 2 aims to demonstrate that conditional logics concerning IPV against women constitute socio-cognitive logics, meaning that they are likely to vary depending on the social context (i.e., gender of interlocutors and adherence to certain ideologies). We used cognitive contents that were expressed by participants in Study 1 in order to highlight social regulation of conditional logics. We have two objectives. The first explores the expression of conditional logics and adherence to legitimizing ideologies according to gender. Because of their dominant social position, we hypothesize that men will evaluate violence in a more tolerant manner and adhere more to ambivalent sexism and the myths surrounding IPV. The second objective tests the effects of gender and legitimizing ideologies on the expression of conditional logics. Because social representations actualize ideology (Doise 1992; Jodelet 1992), we hypothesize that a strong adhesion to ambivalent sexism and myths surrounding IPV is associated with violence being evaluated in a more tolerant manner.

## **Method**

**Participants and design.** Our selection criteria were the same as in Study 1. There were no exclusion criteria. Fully 123 participants (63 men and 60 women), aged between 18 and 30 ( $M = 20.55$ ,  $SD = 2.77$ ), were recruited in Study 2. Most participants (89, 72%) were students whereas 14 participants (11%) were engaged in a professional activity. A minority (45, 37%) were currently in a romantic relationship. Most (102, 83%) said that they had never experienced

IPV but 66 (54%) reported knowing someone in their circle who was a survivor of this type of violence. Men and women participating in our study were randomly assigned to a male or female interviewer, resulting in a 2 (Gender of Participant: man or woman) x 2 (Gender of Researcher: man or woman) experimental design.

**Procedure and measures.** Participants were randomly recruited in the same city as in Study 1 (south of France). It took place in various public places such as university libraries, train and bus stations, and main streets of the city. The research was presented as a questionnaire on couple relationships. It was specified that the questionnaire was individual, anonymous, and confidential. Thus, participants' identities could not be revealed through the collected data. Participants were also informed that they could refuse to participate and that they could stop at any time without any explanation and without any consequences. Questionnaires were given to participants only after receiving their consent. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, questionnaires were self-administered in the presence of researchers who were also licensed psychologists. If needed, a debriefing was offered to participants after completion. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the perceived severity and justification of violence according to the context in which it occurs, as well as the role of ideologies (i.e., ambivalent sexism and acceptance of domestic violence myths) which could legitimate the violence.

***The vignette and Conditional Script Questionnaire.*** This questionnaire is based on the work of Gaymard (2014) for studying the conditional logics of pro/counter normative behaviors. First, participants were asked to read the same vignette as in Study 1: "A 20-year-old man slaps his girlfriend because she flirted with another man at a party." Then they were asked to rate the severity and justification of the slap depending on 18 situations where violence is likely to be

expressed (e.g., “According to you, if the girlfriend was used to seducing other men, the slap would seem ...” ; “According to you, if this were the first time the boyfriend slapped his girlfriend, the slap would seem...”, see Table 1). Drawing on qualitative results, this contextualized and natural socio-representational material was constructed based on situations spontaneously discussed by participants during interviews when evaluating violence. Perceived Severity was measured on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (*Totally severe*) to 4 (*Not severe at all*). Items were reversed scored so that higher averaged overall scores would indicate greater perceived severity ( $\alpha = .97$ ). Perceived Justification was measured on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (*Totally unjustified*) to 4 (*Not unjustified at all*). Higher averaged overall scores indicated greater perceived justification ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

***The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory.*** The ASI is a 22-item questionnaire which measures ambivalent sexism (Dardenne et al. 2006; Glick and Fiske 1996). This scale is composed of two subscales: hostile sexism, which associates negative feelings toward women (e.g., “Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash”), and benevolent sexism, which reflects a chivalrous ideology of being sympathetic and protective toward women who agree with conventional gender roles (e.g., “Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess”). Responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) and averaged such that higher overall scores represent stronger endorsement of ambivalent sexism. Internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ) in the present study was similar to those reported by Glick and Fiske (2001;  $\alpha = .81$  in Study 1;  $\alpha = .83$  in Study 2).

***The Domestic Violence Myth Acceptance Scale.*** This scale is an 18-item questionnaire (Peters 2008) which measures stereotypical attitudes and beliefs contributing to the minimizing,

denial, and even justification of IPV (e.g., “A lot of domestic violence occurs because women keep on arguing about things with their partners”). Responses are given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) and averaged, with higher scores representing greater endorsement of myths surrounding IPV acceptance. Internal consistency ( $\alpha = .86$ ) in the present study was similar to those reported by Peters (2008;  $\alpha = .81$  in Study 1;  $\alpha = .88$  in Study 2).

## Results

Table 1 shows the mean of perceived severity and justification of the violence of the vignette across each context presented. In order to check the associations between conditional logics and gender, two 2 (Gender of Participant: man or woman) x 2 (Gender of Researcher: man or woman) ANOVAs were performed. As regards Perceived Severity, there were significant main effects of Gender of Researcher,  $F(1, 119) = 4.11, p = .045, \eta^2 = .03$ , and Gender of Participant,  $F(1, 119) = 9.29, p = .003, \eta^2 = .07$ , but a nonsignificant interaction,  $F(1, 119) = 1.01, p = .316$ . Female participants ( $M = 3.43, SD = 0.65$ ) perceived violence as more severe than did male participants ( $M = 3.03, SD = 0.79$ ). Participants also perceived violence as more severe when they were interacting with male researcher ( $M = 3.36, SD = 0.71$ ) than with a female researcher ( $M = 3.09, SD = 0.76$ ). For Perceived Justification, there was a significant main effect of Gender of Researcher,  $F(1, 119) = 5.01, p = .027, \eta^2 = .04$ , but the main effect for Gender of Participant,  $F(1, 119) = 1.28, p = .260$ , and the interaction ( $F(1, 119) = 0.60, p = .439$ ), were not significant. Participants perceived violence as more justified when interacting with a woman ( $M = 2.29, SD = 0.84$ ) than with a man ( $M = 1.94, SD = 0.86$ ).

In order to evaluate the associations between gender and legitimizing ideologies, two 2

(Gender of Participant: man or woman) x 2 (Gender of Researcher: man or woman) ANOVAs were performed. As regards Domestic Violence Myths, there were significant effects of Gender of Researcher,  $F(1, 119) = 4.48, p = .036, \eta^2 = .04$ , and Gender of Participant,  $F(1, 119) = 6.90, p = .010, \eta^2 = .06$ , but the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 119) = 0.61, p = .438$ . Men ( $M = 3.32, SD = 1.09$ ) more strongly endorsed Domestic Violence Myths than did women ( $M = 2.82, SD = 1.04$ ). Participants also adhered more to Domestic Violence Myths when they were interacting with a female ( $M = 3.27, SD = 1.04$ ) than with a male ( $M = 2.87, SD = 1.12$ ) researcher. As regards Ambivalent Sexism, there were significant main effects of Gender of Researcher,  $F(1, 119) = 4.56, p = .035, \eta^2 = .04$ , and Gender of Participant,  $F(1, 119) = 14.27, p = .001, \eta^2 = .11$ , but the interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 119) = 0.20, p = .374$ . Men displayed Ambivalent Sexism ( $M = 2.82, SD = 0.78$ ) more than did women ( $M = 2.32, SD = 0.69$ ). Participants also displayed Ambivalent Sexism more when they interacted with a female ( $M = 2.72, SD = 0.75$ ) rather than with male ( $M = 2.43, SD = 0.77$ ) researcher. Because the Gender of Participant x Gender of Researcher interaction was not significant for both Perceived Severity and Perceived Justification, this interaction effect was not considered in the following analyses.

Finally, in order to examine the weight of each variable in the expression of conditional logics, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was performed. We first focused on the predictors of Perceived Severity (see Table 2). The first step included Gender of Participant and Gender of Researcher in the model and explained an adequate amount of variance,  $R^2 = .10, p = .002$ . Gender of Participant and Gender of Researcher were significant predictors of Perceived Severity. Domestic Violence Myths and Ambivalent Sexism were added in the second step. The

new model significantly increased the predicted variance for Perceived Severity,  $R^2 = .27, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .17, \Delta F(2, 118) = 13.67, p < .001$ . Domestic Violence Myths and Ambivalent Sexism were significant predictors of Perceived Severity. However, Gender of Participants and Gender of Researcher became nonsignificant.

We then focused on the predictors of Perceived Justification (see Table 3). The first step included Gender of Participant and Gender of Researcher in the model and explained an adequate amount of variance,  $R^2 = .05, p = .043$ . Only Gender of Researcher was a significant predictor of Perceived Justification. Domestic Violence Myths and Ambivalent Sexism were added at the second step. The new model significantly increased the predicted variance for Perceived Severity,  $R^2 = .25, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .20, \Delta F(2, 118) = 15.82, p < .001$ . Domestic Violence Myths and Ambivalent Sexism were significant predictors of Perceived Severity. However, Gender of Researcher became nonsignificant.

The results of the hierarchical linear regression analysis suggest that the endorsement of Ambivalent Sexism and Domestic Violence Myths may be mediators of the effect of gender on Perceived Severity and Perceived Justification. Consequently, the indirect mediated effect of gender via the adherence to legitimizing ideologies on conditional logics was tested using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro (5000 resamples with bias-corrected 95% CI). After controlling for Ambivalent Sexism, the analyses revealed a significant indirect effect for the following relations: Gender of Researcher and Perceived Severity,  $B = .12, SE(B) = .06, 95\% CI [0.01, 0.26]$ , Gender of Researcher and Perceived Justification,  $B = .13, SE(B) = .07, 95\% CI [0.11, 0.30]$ , and Gender of Participant and Perceived Severity,  $B = -.20, SE(B) = .06, 95\% CI [-0.35, -0.09]$ . After controlling for Domestic Violence Myths, the analyses revealed a significant indirect effect for

the following relations: Gender of Researcher and Perceived Severity,  $B = .11$ ,  $SE(B) = .06$ , 95% CI [0.12, 0.24], Gender of Researcher and Perceived Justification,  $B = .12$ ,  $SE(B) = .07$ , 95% CI [0.01, 0.28], and Gender of Participant and Perceived Severity,  $B = -.14$ ,  $SE(B) = .06$ , 95% CI [-0.28, -0.04]. Even though the first step of the hierarchical linear regression analysis showed a nonsignificant effect of Gender of Participant for predicting Perceived Justification (see Table 3), the indirect mediated effect of this relation was significant when controlling for Ambivalent Sexism,  $B = -.26$ ,  $SE(B) = .08$ , 95% CI [-0.44, -0.13], or when controlling for Domestic Violence Myths,  $B = -.16$ ,  $SE(B) = .07$ , 95% CI [-0.31, -0.05]. In other words, adherence to legitimizing ideologies mediated the effect of gender on conditional logics.

## **Discussion**

Study 2 aimed to further extend the results of Study 1. Statistical analyses showed that the violence of the male character was evaluated as less severe when participants were men and as less severe and more justified when researchers were women. This greater tolerance of men could be explained by the fact that the behavior of the female character (i.e., flirting with a man other than her boyfriend) threatened male identity, something which we observed further in the discourses of Study 1. Indeed, according to Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. (2016), a threat to masculinity could trigger compensatory mechanisms that lead men to manifest more traditional attitudes, such as endorsing stereotypical gender roles and showing less support for gender equality.

Concerning the greater tolerance expressed in the presence of female researchers, we speculate that participants do not try to call into question the dominance of the male character and seek to justify it in front of a non-dominant outgroup member. These findings also echo the

literature on the experimenter effect, showing that even during minimal interactions, investigators' characteristics have an influence on participants' responses (see Anderson et al. 1988; Campbell 1981; Gilbert and Hixon 1991; Piermattéo et al. 2014; Stangor et al. 2002). However, we have seen that the effects of researchers' gender disappear when dominance-based ideologies are taken into account in predicting evaluation. This pattern suggests that, behind gender relations and objective social positions, the expression of conditional logics is likely to be determined by the internalization of ideologies defining gender-symbolic roles and legitimizing the social order (see Bourdieu 2001).

### **General Discussion**

Our results show that participants' attitude concerning IPV against women is governed by a principle of conditionality (Flament 1994). Although this form of violence is absolutely prohibited in its formulation, there are many conditional parameters likely to legitimize more or less the deviation from this social norm (e.g., situations in which the violence occurs, gender relations from which violence is discussed, adherence to ideologies legitimizing male domination). These logics are therefore not individualistic in nature and constitute real socio-cognitive logics in the sense that they are subject to social regulation. Our results eventually led us to conduct an ideological and macro-social (Doise 1986) level analysis in order to question social expectations and needs inherent in the social functions of these conditional logics. Specifically, this could help us to understand why ambivalent sexism and legitimizing myths help to facilitate the negotiation of social norms outlawing IPV against women.

The sociological approach of Bourdieu (2001) appears relevant here to highlight the socio-cognitive aspect of conditional logics, in which dominance and power relationships

between men and women play a part. Specifically, these conditional logics are likely to allow men to maintain a symbolic capital that, in turn, helps to legitimize their dominance. The concepts of honor and manhood are at the heart of this masculine capital because they impose an obligation of “being so” (Bourdieu 1991) on men, in line with imaginary expectations shared by both sexes: “male privilege is also a trap, and it has its negative side in the permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances” (Bourdieu 2001, p. 50). It has been shown, for instance, that in cultures where male honor is valued, a man’s reputation is considered to be soiled if he is cheated on by his wife, and the use of violence will restore his honor and his manhood (Vandello and Cohen 2003). Likewise reflected in our interviews (e.g., “man’s pride takes a beating”, “the slap is a way to regain control”, “it is a way to re-inflate his ego”), this notion is particularly operative for conceptualizing IPV in societies that are historically marked by patriarchal ideology. The work of Mernissi (1983) shows that this type of society leads men to consider their honor as being based on the moral and virtuous behavior of women. Violence would be justified if this honor is defiled because the prestige of men depends on the ability of women to remain in a position that is socially defined by men. This social functioning is thus likely to lead to the attribution of accountability to female victims of violence and the legitimation of these assaults (which refers, for instance, to a long-standing concern in the literature on the responsibility of the rape victim; see Burt 1980; Check and Malamuth 1985).

Finally, while the literature on IPV is marked by an individualistic approach (Koss et al. 1994; Liang et al. 2005), the socio-representational approach (Moscovici 2008) provided fertile ground for taking a contextual and comprehensive look at the legitimization of IPV. Putting the

issues of violence in a dynamic and relational perspective of this kind is still an issue today. Indeed, we have seen that a case of physical violence against a woman led participants to draw on broader representational systems which are involved in the definition of social roles associated with male and female identities. Our attitudes thus provide information not only about the relationship we have with this type of violence, but on relationships that, through these attitudes, we express to others and in regards to the social order. This framework is a part of a return to the sociology of Goffman (1977), which puts forward the study of representations of men, women, and sexuality in order to analyze violence occurring during social and symbolic interactions between men and women.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This work has three main limitations that should be considered. Concerning the first, we did not manipulate the gender of the characters of the vignette. To better understand the representations and legitimization of IPV, it would have been relevant to compare our results with a reverse situation where the woman slaps the man for flirting. The second limitation regards the specificity of the violent behavior studied. Although for several reasons we focused on a slap, this is not representative of all cases that may involve IPV. The third limitation concerns the lack of diversity of our samples, and the specific context of our study. Our socio-representational material is indicative of young people (mostly students) living in the French context. However, although the cognitive contents are dependent on the case presented and the target-population, we think that the conditional logics discussed here constitute a socio-cognitive process which is entirely transferable to other cases of IPV and/or cultural contexts marked by similar ideological issues.

From this perspective, the inductive mixed-method approach that we used within the framework of social representations constitute an original research strategy. It allows for considering subjects' pre-existing theories in the first place, in order to consequentially study their role as reception systems in decoding and interpreting incoming information from social reality (Jodelet 2015). Implementing this theoretical-methodological approach would allow us to better understand the role of cultural gender models in the socio-genesis of social representations related to IPV. Also, it gives us a better grasp on the role of these shared ways of reasoning in the maintenance or evolution of these societal models which contribute to legitimize violence against women. Future research should finally use experimental procedures in order to deepen our knowledge of IPV related reasoning logics through this dynamic relationship between cognitive content and social process, and could give rise to cross-cultural studies.

### **Practice Implications**

Identifying psychosocial determinants involved in the legitimation of IPV against women provides several recommendations for action. Specifically, our results provide interesting information for professionals involved in conceptualizing and implementing public awareness campaigns in France. Instead of trying to change individual's attitudes and behaviors directly, these campaigns could be directed toward the deconstruction of beliefs and norms legitimizing violence against women. For example, rather than only focusing on the consequences of violence on the victims' bodies, these campaigns should also work to deconstruct gender stereotypes and naive psychologies that help to legitimize this type of violence. This communication strategy would thus make it possible to take better account of the structural dimension of IPV, which is still absent from awareness-raising campaigns (Hernandez [Orellana and Kunert](#) 2014). This work

aims not only to influence judgments by the French that are involved in accountability and the blaming of victims, but also to help the latter to better recognize violence and report it.

However, these awareness-raising measures should not only be directed toward the general public, since professionals likely to support victims are also influenced by the cultural context in which they are embedded. For example, psychologists can hold a victim more responsible for the violence if she reported having experienced a violent relationship in the past (Wandrei and Rupert 2000). Moreover, police officers consider a victim who drank alcohol to be more accountable than one who did not (Stewart and Madden 1997). Setting up specific professional training on these issues pose a real challenge in the French context. Indeed, they would ensure that more appropriate assistance was given to victims.

Finally, our results remind us of the value of delivering, from early an age, crucial education on gender roles and associated social inequalities. In 2013, the French National Education Board initiated an action plan to address such issues. An initial educational tool was tried out in 275 schools to make children aware of prejudices and gender stereotypes, and thus to promote a culture of equality. However, this program triggered wide public controversy and many opponents complained about the State's willingness to "deny natural differences between men and women" and to "destroy the traditional family model". Although the development of critical thinking about these social imageries is a major issue in counteracting violence against women, many French people seem willing to preserve, whether consciously or unconsciously, these patterns of dominance. Thus political actions on the social world must be supported by the representations that social agents have concerning this world. As stated by Bourdieu (1991), "political subversion presupposes cognitive subversion, a conversion of the vision of the world"

(p. 127-128).

### **Conclusion**

The inductive mixed-method approach that we used is an original approach in the field of IPV research. It allowed to combine measures that are traditionally disjointed in the literature: socio-representational material *ad hoc* to the context of target-population and general socio-cognitive constructs. Results from this approach offer an important contribution to the understanding of ambivalence expressed by participants, that is between the condemnation of IPV against women and the expression of conditional logics that tend to minimize or justify it. These attitudes are “natural” in the sense that individuals exist amidst this ambivalence and regularly tap into a kind of knowledge on gender roles that is socially developed and shared. Besides, the use of one or the other of the attitudes is likely to depend on the social context, namely situations in which the violence occurs, gender symbolic positions from which violence is discussed and adherence to ideologies legitimizing male domination. These results finally highlight the value of studying social representations related to IPV through a socio-cognitive approach which articulates both socially situated content of thinking and a regulatory process of socio-symbolic relationships (Jodelet 2015).

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Table 1

*Evaluating the Violence of the Vignette across Each Context Presented*

Contexts	Severity <i>M (SD)</i>	Justification <i>M (SD)</i>
1. If the girlfriend's flirting was deliberate	3.46 (0.73)	1.88 (1.00)
2. If the girlfriend was used to seducing other men	3.32 (0.89)	2.00 (1.07)
3. If the girlfriend had seduced that other man in front of her boyfriend	3.18 (0.98)	2.27 (1.15)
4. If the girlfriend had seduced that other man to make her boyfriend jealous	3.37 (0.85)	2.00 (1.05)
5. If the girlfriend had kissed that other man	3.10 (1.01)	2.54 (1.21)
6. If the girlfriend had sexual intercourse with that other man	2.90 (1.21)	2.76 (1.27)
7. If the boyfriend had insulted his girlfriend instead of slapping her	2.34 (0.95)	2.83 (0.94)
8. If it was the first time the boyfriend had slapped his girlfriend	3.25 (0.91)	2.04 (1.07)
9. If the boyfriend didn't use force	2.89 (1.13)	2.18 (1.21)
10. If the boyfriend's reaction was due to a loss of control	3.20 (0.95)	1.98 (1.10)
11. If the boyfriend was drunk when he slapped her	3.46 (0.83)	1.80 (0.98)
12. If the boyfriend was particularly jealous	3.45 (0.79)	1.89 (0.98)
13. If the boyfriend was 20 instead of 40	3.43 (0.82)	1.81 (0.99)
14. If the boyfriend had trouble communicating his feelings	3.42 (0.81)	1.76 (0.93)
15. If the boyfriend was raised in a violent family	3.39 (0.83)	2.23 (1.05)
16. If the boyfriend was madly in love with his girlfriend	3.30 (0.94)	1.98 (1.14)
17. If the boyfriend and his girlfriend were in a long term relationship	3.29 (1.02)	2.04 (1.21)
18. If the boyfriend and his girlfriend had a child	3.34 (1.21)	2.09 (1.21)

*Note.* Both severity and justification were rated on 4-point scales. Items are numbered in the order presented to respondents.

Table 2

*Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived Severity*

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	$\beta$	b	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	b	<i>t</i>
Gender of Participant	.26	.39	3.06**	.13	.18	1.53
Gender of Researcher	-.18	-.27	-2.05*	-.09	-.13	-1.10
DVMAS				-.22	-.15	2.20*
ASI				-.27	-.26	2.61**
<i>F</i>		6.82**			10.97***	
<i>df</i>		2			4	
<i>df</i> <sub>error</sub>		120			118	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.10**			.27***	
$\Delta R^2$					.17***	

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

Table 3

*Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Perceived Justification*

Variables	Step 1			Step 2		
	$\beta$	b	<i>t</i>	$\beta$	b	<i>t</i>
Gender of Participant	-.10	-.18	-1.14	.05	.09	0.61
Gender of Researcher	.20	.35	2.26*	.10	.18	1.28
DVMAS				.20	.16	1.98*
ASI				.33	.37	3.16**
<i>F</i>		3.23*			9.92***	
<i>df</i>		2			4	
<i>df</i> <sub>error</sub>		120			118	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.05*			.25***	
$\Delta R^2$					.20***	

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