



Dialogic reconstruction of memories of violent sexual-affective relationships via dialogic gatherings of “Radical Love”

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ABSTRACT

When a violent intimate relationship occurs, this experience becomes part of the person's autobiographical memory. Given its prospective functions, the reconstruction of those memories of violent sexual-affective relationships could be an effective tool to prevent future revictimization. The study presented in this article examined the impact of a dialogic gathering of the *Radical Love* book on the reconstruction of memories of violent sexual-affective relationships. A sample of 48 young women, who had experienced at least one violent sexual-affective-relationship were divided into an experimental ($n = 24$) and a control group ($n = 24$); they were asked to recall a violent sexual-affective relationship and write it down. The memory reports were collected in two stages. Between both reports, the experimental group read some chapters of the *Radical Love* book and engaged in a dialogic gathering. Memory quality was measured through the Memory Experiences Questionnaire (MEQ-SF). In the intervention group, the intensity of the emotion associated with the memory recall decreased, and participants became more critical towards the memory of what happened and more aware of the reactions and sensations experienced during the relationship. Dialogic gatherings with *Radical Love* can support the prevention of gender violence revictimization via transformative memory reconstruction.

1. Introduction

1.1. Intimate partner violence: a global public health and social problem

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a form of violence against women (WHO, 2021) which refers to physical, sexual or psychological aggression perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner (Breiding et al., 2015) in any formal or informal union (Unicef, 2014). It is a remarkable global health and social issue with enormous social and economic costs (World Health Organization, 2019). Globally collected prevalence data leaves no room for doubt about the magnitude of the problem. Based on data collected in 87 countries over 2005–2016 of women aged 15–49, the United Nations states prevalence of 1 in 5 women who informed experiencing physical or sexual aggression by an intimate partner (United Nations, 2017). This percentage increases if we focus on younger females. According to data collected by the World Health Organization (2021) among females between the ages of 15 and 19, 1 in 4 have experienced some form of sexual or physical violence by an

intimate partner at least once in their lifetime. At the same time, the UNICEF report (2014) notes that is at this aged when the majority of girls experienced their first incident of sexual violence (Unicef, 2014).

Despite the high prevalence of IPV is undeniable around the globe, there are differences between continents and countries. According to a global and regional analysis conducted by the World Health Organization in 2018 the prevalence estimates of lifetime intimate partner violence range from 20% in the Western Pacific, 22% in high-income countries and Europe, and 25% in the WHO Regions of the Americas to 33% in the WHO African region, 31% in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region, and 33% in the WHO South-East Asia region (WHO, 2021).

IPV, in the most extreme cases, can lead to death (United Nations, 2017). A global study on homicide states that from a total of 87,000 women intentionally killed in 2017, more than a third (30,000) were killed by their intimate partner (UNODC, 2019).

Although the prevalence data collected is high enough to create concern, it must be taken into account that collecting data on violence

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against women becomes a challenge since these data often do not reflect the reality of some groups of women like older women, migrant workers, women with disability or women belonging to ethnic minorities (United Nations, 2017). Furthermore, not all women confess to having suffered IPV. Data points that less than 40% of women who suffered from IPV asked for help or informed about it (United Nations Women, 2020). Additional problems for this low reporting are the high prevalence of unperceived violence (Rodríguez-Campo et al. 2012; López-Cepero et al., 2015) and high rates of tolerance of intimate partner violence among young women (García-Díaz et al., 2020). This informs that critical consciousness about IPV could be an important target to work as a preventive and response measure.

From a health perspective, research data collected over decades have evidenced that the consequences of this type of violence are immense and could affect victims on their physical and psychological health and social well-being. An extensive list of diseases is related to IPV. A review article published in the New England Journal of Medicine (Miller & McCaw, 2019), notes that IPV is associated with increase morbidity and mortality, being the victims of this abuse more susceptible to suffer chronic conditions like arthritis, stroke, cardiovascular diseases, asthma or even autoimmune disorders or cancer in comparison with non-abused women. Moreover, the chronic stress that these victims suffer might trigger telomere shortening, generating poor health outcomes (Miller and McCaw, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2016). As for mental health, the systematic review of 33 papers conducted by Barter and Stanley (2016) analyzed the relationship between IPV and its impact on adolescent mental health and indicated that there is an association between IPV and depressive symptoms, suicidal thinking, eating disorders or substance misuse. Furthermore, an important factor to take into account is that having suffered this type of violence in adolescence increases the possibility of revictimization in adulthood (Exner-Cortens et al., Van Dulmen et al., 2012).

All these consequences are affecting a very large number of women from different contexts. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Smith et al., 2018), about 1 in 4 women (30 million) in the U.S. who suffer IPV reported some form of related impact. However, far from being a localized problem, research has shown that IPV is a globally widespread problem, which is present in diverse countries around the world and in different age groups (United Nations, 2017, World Health Organization, 2021), also in older women (Pathak et al., 2019) and in young and adolescents women (Stöckl et al., 2014; UNICEF, 2014). Even though, the European Union Agency (2014) warns that young women are particularly vulnerable to victimization. Available data confirms that there is important prevalence of IPV in adolescent and young women (Blattner et al., 2015; Blom et al., 2016; Krahe et al., 2015; Peña, Arias & Boll, 2019; Stöckl et al., 2014; Ybarra et al., 2016), being adolescence a developmental stage when frequently first experienced IPV occurs (Black et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2018) and when a significant proportion of sexual violence (SV) incidents happen (Australian Human Right Commission, 2018; Statistique Canada, 2015; UNICEF, 2014). This IPV in adolescence and young age is known as dating violence (CDC 2015); most of the relationships in such developmental stage occur in sporadic relationships, which the literature has well demonstrated that tend to be very violent (Duque et al., 2020). All this data makes clear that interventions addressed to adolescent and young women are central to eliminate dating violence and to mitigate its future effects when already experienced.

1.2. Effective prevention and response: Key to facing violence against women in intimate relationships

Fortunately, violence against women is preventable (World Health Organization, 2019) and this prevention has to be the way where all the efforts have to converge. As Okasako-Schmucker et al. (2019) points up, The Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) proposed some evidenced-based recommendations derived from a rigorous systematic

review, to prevent IPV and SV among youth aged 12–24 years. In those recommendations, they advocated that in addition to informing about the consequences and warning signs of IPV and SV, it is important to develop social norms and healthy environments to protect from violence and to teach healthy relationship skills (Okasako-Schmucker et al., 2019).

Research has also shown that is not enough to focus on prevention but avoidance of future revictimization of gender violence should be prioritized as well. In the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, where 732 victimized adolescents were compared with 1429 non-victimized participants, found that experiencing IPV in adolescence becomes an important risk factor to be a victim of this type of violence in adulthood and concluded that these first violent relationships may repeat in the future (Exner-Cortens et al., 2017). In this regard, it is important to maintain the positive effects of the interventions over time. Different factors had demonstrated to be effective to promote this sustainability. On one hand, Miller et al. (2015) suggested that promote healthy relationships is as important as focusing on decreasing dating violence. On the other hand, obtaining behavioral changes in relationships, skills, and attitudes seems to be an important factor too (Leen et al., 2013).

To understand how to prevent gender violence is necessary to know what factors may favor its appearance and what mechanisms underlie its consolidation. Research has reported as risk factors, among others, substance abuse, psychological adjustment, peer influence, and attitudes toward violence (Leen et al., 2013). Regarding the last ones, several works carried out in the research line on the preventive socialization of gender violence (Flecha et al., 2013; Gómez, 2015; Valls et al., 2008) evidence that attraction patterns are learned through socialization and have shown that these patterns are strongly influenced by the existence of a *dominant coercive discourse* (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2020), disseminated by peers and other socialization agents, and which presents males with violent attitudes and behaviors as most sexually attractive (Gomez, 2015). This learning can easily affect some young women's sexual-affective preferences, which are also coerced preferences (Puigvert et al., 2019), becoming more probable to choose a violent partner. However, these patterns can be changed. Based in Gómez's (2015) analysis concerning the influence of dialogue (Carrillo et al., 2017) to learn attraction patterns, Puigvert (2016) has shown that, if the persons wants to, these mental models can be changed via dialogue and communicative interaction. These new interactions can weaken the link between violent men and sexual attraction, and favor the development of new affective models where sexual attraction is associated with equity and respect (Gómez, 2015; Racionero-Plaza et al., 2018).

1.3. Autobiographical memory reconstruction as a tool for prevention and response

The first sexual-affective relationships experienced in adolescence and youth are critical as learning foundations for subsequent sexual behavior and decisions (Gómez, 2015; Racionero-Plaza et al., 2018). When a violent intimate relationship occurs, such experience leaves memories in the brain and becomes part of the autobiographical memory (Pascuzzi & Smorti, 2017). Autobiographical memory has a crucial function in our lives. Even if a broader view of the functions of this memory are porpoise by some researchers (Harris et al., 2014), research in cognitive psychology recognizes that this memory helps directing peoples' thinking and behavior in the present or the future, developing an identity and a self-image and enabling social bonding when it is shared (Burnell et al., 2020; Kesinger & Ford, 2020; Vranic et al., 2018). When referring to memories of IPV and dating violence, such memories are not the same for all women, they can vary in their semantic and emotional content and, depending on those, they will have different impact in the present and future life of the individual (Puigvert et al., 2019). For example, given the directive functions of autobiographical memories, research in socioneuroscience indicates that remembering

with certain degree of attraction a violent sexual-affective relationship, raises that woman's risk of revictimization (Puigvert et al., 2019).

Autobiographical memories are malleable, and changes are mostly the consequence of social interaction and emotional states. For instance, emotions and emotional valence and the goals of the individual at the time of the retrieval have a significant influence on how we remember the past experience (Kesinger & Ford, 2020). In this sense, the interaction among emotion regulation and autobiographical memories and narratives becomes relevant because how the individuals construct their lives stories influences their emotions, as well as emotion regulation influences memory retrieval (Pascuzzi & Smorti, 2017).

Memories of traumatic experiences, such as those of IPV, have specific characteristics. These memories have a more negative emotional tone, are richer in detail (Fernández-Lansac & Crespo, 2017), and tend to be stronger than memories of other experiences in daily life (Milon et al., 2018). The consequences of these traumatic memories are diverse. In a study that compared women who experienced sexual violence (SV) in adolescence or young adulthood and women who did not, Milion et al. (2018) found that stressful memories of SV were more intense and vivid and were correlated with post-traumatic cognitions, ruminative thoughts, and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Memories of trauma are linked to higher emotional intensity and are correlated with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms (Rubin et al., 2008; Rubin et al., 2011).

Since autobiographical memories influence prospective thinking, authors (Klein et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2008) have noted the importance of transforming memories that can have a negative impact in thinking and behavior. At the same time, Rasmussen and Berntsen (2009) found that negative memories are highly related by directive functions, so working with these memories would be crucial to influence the present and future behavior of individuals. Here, it is important to note that for the case of memories of sporadic violent sexual-affective experiences, they might be easily remembered as not that traumatic given the coercive dominant discourse which presents sexual relationships with men with violent attitudes and behaviors as exciting and desirable (Puigvert et al., 2019). It is in this sense that these memories can be recalled and shared as "positive" by some young women, as a result of the aforementioned coercive discourse. Positive emotions associated to memories of IPV can be very negative in terms of preventing revictimization (Puigvert et al., 2019).

Yet the malleable nature of autobiographical memories (Cohen & Conway, 2008) memories of IPV to support prevention of future revictimization.

Additionally, social interaction has been indicated in memory studies to play a central role in favoring memory reconstruction (Hirst & Rajaram, 2014), which can happen via modifying the semantic content and/or the emotional content. Also, sharing memories creates and strengthens social bonds (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000) which can help to develop social support to face the negative effects of past experiences. Supportive social interactions that can aid memory reconstruction are particularly central in cases of traumatic experiences (Žukauskienė et al., 2019). Sharing what we remember from our past with others can modulate emotions associated with the experience positively (Pasupati, 2003), making collaborative memory a potential mechanism to regulate emotions (Maswood et al., 2019). Other factors can also affect memory, such as the characteristics of the context, the objectives that drive the recall, with whom the memory is shared (Selwood et al., 2020) and even the gender and acceptance of the listener (Fioretti et al., 2017; Pasupati, 2003).

Based on the need to find effective solutions to address dating violence among young women, and the current evidence on both the influence of memory in mental models of attraction as well as the role of social interaction in fostering memory reconstruction, the study reported in this article explored the impact of engaging in a dialogic gathering (Flecha, 2015) of an academic text about love (*Radical Love. A Revolution for the 21st Century*; Gómez, 2015) in the participant women

revising their memories of IPV.

This intervention study is based on previous evidence (Valls et al., 2008; Gómez, 2015; Puigvert, 2016; Puigvert et al., 2019) that relates the dominant coercive discourse with gender violence victimization. Likewise, this study adds to a previous one which consisted of investigating the influence of individual reading of *Radical Love* (Gómez, 2015) on revising memories of IPV (Racionero-Plaza et al., 2018). That prior intervention proved effective in supporting free reconstruction of memories of violent sexual-affective relationships (Racionero-Plaza et al., 2018), as it raised critical memories in the participants and increased negative emotional reactions induced by the recall. Now, the intervention reported in this manuscript includes a dialogic dimension to that prior design, including a dialogic gathering after the individual reading of *Radical Love*.

The dialogic gatherings are a successful educational action (Flecha, 2015). There are different types of Dialogic Gatherings; in our study we implemented Scientific Dialogic Gatherings. In these gatherings, the reader reads the scientific text individually and underlines those sentences that generate interest, doubt or simply contain an idea that he/she wishes to share. Once the individual reading has been completed, the participants meet in a discussion group to share and discuss the underlined ideas, always respecting speaking turns and other people's comments, and often building upon or mentioning them when intervening. This creates the opportunity to relate one's ideas to the experiences and knowledge of each participant and to enrich them with those of others. Dialogic Gatherings have demonstrated to improve academic and socio-emotional learning (Flecha et al., 2013; López de Aguilera, 2019; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018; García et al., 2018). They have also shown their effectiveness in supporting young women's reflections on one's sexual-affective desires and preferences (Puigvert, 2016) and in giving raise to language of desire toward non-violent relationships (López de Aguilera et al., 2020).

It is assumed that the dialogic environment of discussion of the gathering will create conditions for dialogic memory reconstruction (López de Aguilera et al., 2021), that is, reconstructing memories via dialogue if the person freely chooses to do so.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample was originally composed of 71 young females attending different degrees at a public university in northern Spain. 48 of them completed all the tasks and the remaining 23 were removed from the analysis because of not completing the reading of the book or not taking part in the subsequent dialogic gatherings. The participating young women were between 18 and 30 years old. 95.8% of the sample was aged between 18 and 24 years, making up a sample with an average age of 19-year-old ($M = 19.81$, $SD = 2.51$). To recruit participants, researchers went to some undergraduate classes and informed in person on the aim of the study and invited students to take part in it voluntarily. In the advertisements, the researcher clarified that they were looking for girls who wanted to participate in research from a gender perspective that was focused on the analysis of autobiographical memories of violent sexual-affective relationships and explained the inclusion criteria. The criteria were the following: a) participants had to be female, b) not older than 30 years, c) they had to be involved in, at least, one stable or sporadic intimate heterosexual relationships in which they were victims of violence, d) not having any diagnosed memory deficit. These were the same inclusion criteria as in the previous study (Racionero-Plaza et al., 2018).

2.2. Instruments and measures

2.2.1. Checklist

An *ad-hoc* checklist was built to identify the violent behaviors that

occurred in the recalled sexual-affective relationship. 16 items composed the checklist, which contained the behaviors listed in the definition of Dating Violence by the US National Center for Victims of Crime (2021). For every item, participants had to mark “yes” or “no”, this describing whether the specific behavior happened in the relationship or not. Just one check in one time was enough to be part of the study sample.

2.2.2. Memory reports

Taking into consideration that memories of violent sexual-affective relationships are personal and highly emotional, writing them in private gave more intimacy to the participants instead of shared it orally in an interview, gaining in sincerity and mitigating the effect of social desirability. The memories were written in a blank electronic document in a computer, anonymized by the participants with a code that was given to them and deleted immediately by the researcher after saving it in an external storage device. To help the participants to recall the memory, specific instructions were given to them. Data collection was conducted by the same female researcher in all occasions, in order to maintain consistency in the researcher’s approach and because participants might feel more comfortable with a researcher of the same gender. The researcher followed a script previously established by the research team, proceeding as described below. In the instructions, the researchers asked the participants to think about one or more episodes that were particularly meaningful for them in the sexual-affective relationship that they had chosen. The participants were invited to think freely about the event/s and the relationship, and about what has happened since. Around 10 min were given to the participants to think about the event and their reaction in it and to write down whatever came to their mind. Afterwards, the researcher gave them about 20 min to write their memories of the relationship on a blank sheet of paper on a computer, indicating that the more the details (in terms of places, feelings, acts, etc) they could recall and write down, the better. The researcher was present at all times so that she could answer any questions the participants might have during the data collection. The writing of memory reports to collect information about highly emotional autobiographical memories is a common instrument used in memory research about diverse topics in the social and health sciences (Alea, 2010, Company-Fernández et al., 2020, Harris et al., 2010, Tani et al., 2016).

2.2.3. Memory Experiences Questionnaire (MEQ-SF; Luchetti & Suttin, 2015)

The short form of the Memory Experiences Questionnaire (MEQ-SF) (Luchetti & Suttin, 2015) was used to assess memory quality. With similar psychometric properties as the original long-form, the MEQ-SF, composed of 31 self-report items, is a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Among the qualities of the autobiographical memory, the following are evaluated: Vividness, Coherence, Accessibility, Time Perspective, Sensory Details, Visual Perspective, Emotional Intensity, Sharing, Distancing, and Valence are evaluated.

2.2.4. Ad-hoc questions

Two ad-hoc questions were added to measure the attraction that those young women felt towards the boy with whom they maintained the remembered relationship, as well as, the feeling of rejection towards the sexual relations maintained with him. The questions posed were the following: (It. 32) “When I remember that boy I feel attraction” and (It. 33) “When I remember the sexual moments of the relationship I feel disgusted”. The same type of measurement employed in MEQ (a 5-point Likert-type scale from less to more) was used here. These questions had been piloted in the framework of the MEMO4LOVE Project.

2.2.5. Dialogic gatherings

Four dialogic gatherings of 1 h and 45 min each were carried out. For this study, the group participated in a dialogic gathering to collectively

discuss sections from the Radical Love book that the participants had read individually in advance, sharing their emotions, interpretations, and thinking in relation to the content of the book. In this sharing, they could make connections with each other’s experiences and knowledge.

2.3. Procedure

2.3.1. Ethical considerations

All ethical standards for research involving human participants in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association [WMA], 2013) and from Horizon 2020 (European Commission, 2018) were followed in this research study. Written Informed Consent was completed by the participants before their involvement in the study. The researchers fully informed all subjects about the project and gave them time to read the information sheet and the consent form and to ask any questions. When it was required, the researchers offered the appropriate explanations to ensure understanding of the conditions for participation. In the consent form, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the materials and measures to be used, the procedure to collect the data, the voluntary nature of participation, the anonymity and privacy statement and the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time.

The Ethics Committee from the Community of Researchers on Excellence for All (CREA) revised and fully approved the study on the 14th of October 2020 (reference number 20201014). Likewise, this study was associated to the research RTD project MEMO4LOVE: *Social interactions and dialogs that transform memories and promote sexual-affective relationships free of violence from secondary education schools*, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (2016–2019, project reference: EDU2016-75370-R). This research study was reviewed and fully approved on the 21st of January 2018 by the Research Ethics Committee of the Virgen de la Macarena and Virgen del Rocío Hospitals (Government of Andalusia, Spain, approval reference eb4d0ea33a6f286ed96b583f094459bb1cb9678e).

2.3.2. Identifying a violent sexual-affective relationship memory

After the conditions of participation were clarified and the consent signed, the researchers employed a written protocol that they followed and read aloud, where the participants were asked to recall a memory of a sexual-affective relationship with a male where they could identify any violent attitude toward them. It was clarified that this memory could be about a sporadic or a stable sexual-affective relationship that happened recently or a long time ago, as long as the memory was accessible. It was also mentioned by the researcher, that having mixed feelings (positive and negative) or, even only positive feelings, about the relationship was not a barrier to report it.

To help participants identifying which kind of sexual-affective relationship was the target of the study, two strategies were used: a) the researcher gave to them different examples of concrete physical, psychological and sexual violent behaviors included in the definition of Dating Violence by the US National Center for Victims of Crime, b) once a relationship was identified by the participants, the checklist recompiling the behaviors listed in the aforementioned definition was given to them. The participants had to indicate those behaviors that occurred to them in the selected relationship. The inclusion criterion was to mark out at least one option.

2.3.3. Recall 1

All the procedure of the study was carefully designed to ensure the intimacy of the participants and to make them feel free to share their memories. Before they started writing the memory, the researchers gave a randomly select anonymity code to each participant. The participant was the only one who knew this code and it was the only identifying data that was collected in the questionnaires and reports. The code had the purpose of ensuring the anonymity of the participants from the beginning of the study.

Once the sexual-affective relationship was identified, the researchers

gave 10 min to the participants to think about the relationship. They were asked to think about one or more episodes that happened in that relationship and were particularly meaningful to them and to write down freely whatever came to their memory. The participants were given approximately 20 min to write. The memories were collected in a computer classroom at the university. The day and time of the first recall was agreed with each participant in order to facilitate involvement. This way, sometimes the data collection meeting of the researcher was only with one participant and, other times, there were between two or eight, all doing the task individually and never surpassing 8 participants in total. The participants were allowed to sit down wherever they wanted, given the opportunity to maintain enough distance once to another to preserve intimacy. When a participant finished writing the memory, the researcher saved the text file in an external storage device and deleted it from the computer, not giving any possibility to the participants to go back and edit the writings.

The participants completed the Memory Experiences Questionnaire (MEQ-SF) (Luchetti & Suttin, 2015) after they finished writing the memory reports, as well as they answered the extra questions on emotions induced by the memory recall that were designed adhoc for this study.

2.3.4. Intervention

The 48 participants were randomly distributed in a control group ($n = 24$) and in an experimental group ($n = 24$), where the intervention was applied.

Experimental group: After finishing the first session of data collection, an electronic copy of selected chapters (1, 3, 4, and 5) of the Spanish version of the book *Radical Love. A Revolution for the 21st Century* (Gómez, 2015) was sent by email to the participants who conformed the experimental group, and a date was agreed with them to hold the discussion group. The instructions to read the material were as follow: a) they had to read it in 10 days time, 2) individually, c) they had to underline all the content that they considered interesting, or which reminded them about something from the relationship, or information that they did not understand, or that they wanted to share with others and d) they had to bring the text to the dialogic gathering.

The reasons for selecting this book were mainly two. First, the book presents scientific evidence on the social roots of love and attraction, stressing the agency of the individual to decide in this sphere and to change own sexual-affective desires and preferences. The review of the research in the book includes the analysis of the dominant coercive discourse which associates attraction and violence in the sexual-affective realm, how it is learned, and how it coerces individuals' preferences. Second, the book includes a section on the voices of young people discussing love and attraction, and their behavior in sexual-affective relationships. This part also analyzes texts of magazines for youth. All this data reveals the strong presence of the dominant coercive discourse in youth's everyday life and interactions.

The dialogic gatherings were held in a university classroom. 6 young women formed each group and the duration of the discussion was approximately 1 h and 45 min. The researchers asked for permission to audio record it and introduced the session. 10 min were given to the participants to review the sentences of paragraphs that they had underlined in it and to remember and select topics to share with the group. Before starting the dialogic gathering, some instructions were given by the researcher who took on the role of moderator: a) the person who wanted to start speaking about a topic had to tell everybody in which page of the book the sentence was localized; b) everybody had to go to that page and the person who proposed it read out loud while the others read silently at the same time; c) the participant who chose the sentence, explained why she selected it, describing her feelings or thoughts about it; d) when the person sharing her thoughts finished, the other participants could share their opinions; e) when everybody finished sharing, the same process started again with a new contribution based on another paragraph that another participant could make. These

are the characteristics of the interactive process that follows in the dialogic gatherings (Flecha, 2015).

Control group: no intervention was applied in this group. Before they left the room in the first session, a second day was scheduled with them to collect the second memory report and to fill again the MEQ-SF and the extra questions.

2.3.5. Recall 2

After the discussion group was finished, the researchers told participants that they will receive an email asking to write again the same autobiographical memory in a new blank digital document. They were said that they had to fill also a blank copy of the MEQ-SF and the extra questions. It was indicated that they had to send all completed documents within the next three days. In the cases of participants who did not send the documents, the researchers sent them reminders asking for it. The option to schedule a date to fill the documents at the university was also given to the participants. The same procedure was carried out with the control group, given them the option to write down their memories and to fill the MEQ-SF and the extra questions at a university classroom the scheduled day or sending the documents by email.

2.4. Analysis

The remembered relationship characteristics were analyzed by calculating the number of violent behaviors marked by each participant in the check-list and analyzing the percentages of the most reported behaviors.

The statistical analyzes of the data collected through the questionnaires were carried out using the IBM SPSS® version 21 software package for Windows. The normality of the variables was checked by Shapiro-Wilk test, analyzing the p values of variables and using visual methods (histograms and Q-Q plots). As a consequence of a non-normal distribution of the data, a nonparametric paired sample Wilcoxon test was carried out for the analysis of pre and post-test mean differences.

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of the recalled relationships: Relationships manifesting various expressions of gender violence

According to the data collected from the checklist, more than half (60%) of the participating women recalled a sexual-affective relationship in which they identified a high index of violent behaviors, particularly, between 3 and 13 behaviors from the checklist. The rest of the participants (40%) marked between 1 or 2 listed behaviors.

The violent behaviors from the checklist most selected by all participants (more than half of the sample, see Table 1) were items 6 ("Behave jealously") (73.33%) and 13 ("He has touched or kissed you without your wanting") (53.33%).

3.2. A decrease in the emotional intensity induced by memory recall

The changes in emotional intensity induced by memory recall were explored through a dependent sample Wilcoxon analysis test conducted separately for the intervention and the control group. Three items of the MEQ-SF (Luchetti & Suttin, 2015), which compose the dimension of Emotional Intensity, were used in the analysis. Participants were asked: "This memory does not evoke strong emotions in me" (reverse scored); "The emotions I feel about this fact are very intense" and "This memory generates powerful emotions in me". Responses rated items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The results (see Fig. 1) suggest that the participants who read and discussed in the dialogic gathering the content of *Radical Love* experienced a significant decrease in emotional intensity induced by memory recall ($Mpre = 11.17$; $Mpost = 10.13$; $z = -2.41$, $p = 0.016$; $r = -0.49$), while in the control group the decrease was not significant ($Mpre =$

Table 1
Percentages of most selected behaviors by groups.

Item and behavior	All participants (N = 48)
It.6. Behave jealously.	73.33%
It.13. He has touched or kissed you without your wanting.	53.33%
It.7. He looks down on you, pretends you are worthless.	44.44%
It.4. Has to be with you all the time.	31.11%
It.5. Say derogatory things to you, insult you.	31.11%
It.16. After being with him, he has insulted, humiliated, publicly despised you (in person and / or on social networks), for example, calling you "slut", "whore", "ugly".	28.90%
It.2. Call you constantly to find out where with whom and what you are doing.	26.70%
It.14. He has forced you to have sex, or to do anything sexual that you do not want.	24.44%
It. 10. He has pushed or pinched you, or pulled your hair.	22.22%
It. 15. In sexual intercourse, he has prevented you from using condom or pressured you to not to use measures to avoid getting pregnant such the use of condoms, the contraceptive pill or other.	17.78%
It.8. He has threatened to harm you, himself or someone in your family if you don't do what he wants you to do.	11.11%
It.9. He gave you a push or a punch.	8.89%
It.1. He has prevented you from going out with friends.	8.89%
It.11. He has kicked you, or hit you.	6.67%
It.12. He has strangled you (grabbed by the neck tight, maybe almost taking your breath away).	6.67%
It.3. He sometimes told you what clothes you have to wear.	4.45%

11.21; $M_{post} = 10.52$; $z = -0.72$, $p = 0.47$).

3.3. More sensorial details recalled

The sensory information that participants could remember about the memory of the selected relationships was measured by four questions of the MEQ-SF (Luchetti & Suttin, 2015) that composed the Sensorial Details dimension. The specific questions were: "When I think about this fact..." "...I can hear it in my mind"; "...I think the same things I was thinking when that happened"; "...it is difficult for me to remember my physical reaction and the sensations that I had during the experience"; "...there is not much information about sounds, smells, tastes, etc." (last ones reverse scored).

The dependent Wilcoxon test carried out (see Fig. 2) in every group condition showed that, in the intervention group, the Sensory Detail dimension increase significantly ($M_{pre} = 10.42$; $M_{post} = 11.71$; $z =$

-2.12 , $p = 0.03$, $r = -0.43$) while in the control group no change was perceived ($M_{pre} = 12.25$; $M_{post} = 12.25$; $z = -0.38$, $p = 0.97$) maintaining exactly the same average in the pre and post-test results.

3.4. Increased feeling of disgust regarding the sexual episodes in the recalled relationship

An ad-hoc question was created to measure the feeling of disgust that the participants had when remembering the sexual intercourses maintained in the violent relationship that they recalled. Specifically, the following statement was given to them: "When I remember the sexual moments of the relationship I feel disgusted", giving to the response the same 5 point Lickert scale option than in the other questions (1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"). Pre and post-test average were compared by Wilcoxon analysis.

The young women in the intervention group felt more disgust remembering the sexual moments in the relationship after the intervention ($M_{post} = 3.25$) than before it ($M_{pre} = 2.67$) (see Fig. 3). More particularly, the intervention generated a significant increase with a high effect size ($z = -2.56$, $p = 0.01$, $r = -0.52$) in the disgust that participants felt when recalling the sexual moments of the relationship, while the increased in disgust perceived in the control group was not significant ($M_{pre} = 1.71$; $M_{post} = 1.96$; $z = -1.10$, $p = 0.27$) (see Fig. 3).

3.5. Greater decrease in emotional intensity and in attraction toward the violent man, and greater increase in disgust in relation to the sexual episodes of the relationship in participants with a higher index of violent behaviors in the relationship recalled

The intervention had a greater impact -for some memory dimensions- on experimental participants who recalled a memory of a relationship that concentrated a higher index of violent behaviors at once (between 3 and 13 items marked in the checklist) than in participants who recalled a memory of a violent sexual-affective relationship that concentrated between 1 and 2 violent behaviors. For the participants in the high index group, the results of the Wilcoxon analysis indicated a significant decrease in emotional intensity ($z = -2.54$, $p = 0.01$, $r = -0.77$) and in the attraction that they felt to the violent man ($z = -2.12$, $p = 0.03$, $r = -0.61$). Likewise, a significant increase with a large effect size was found in the rejection to the memory.

of the sexual intercourse maintained in the violent relationship ($z = -2.92$, $p = 0.00$, $r = -0.84$). No significant differences were found in any of those items in the participants in the control group with a high index of

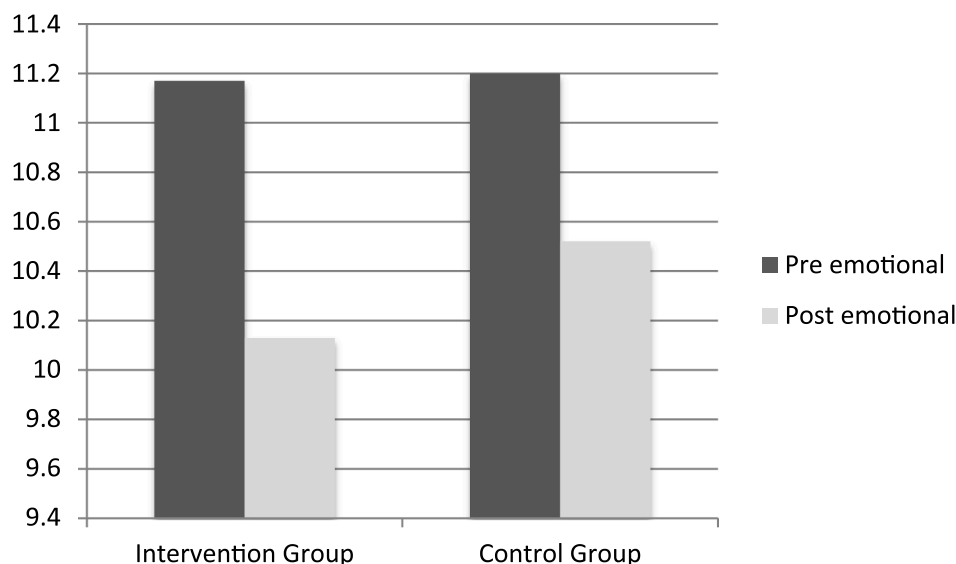


Fig. 1. Pre and post-test mean changes in emotional intensity by condition.

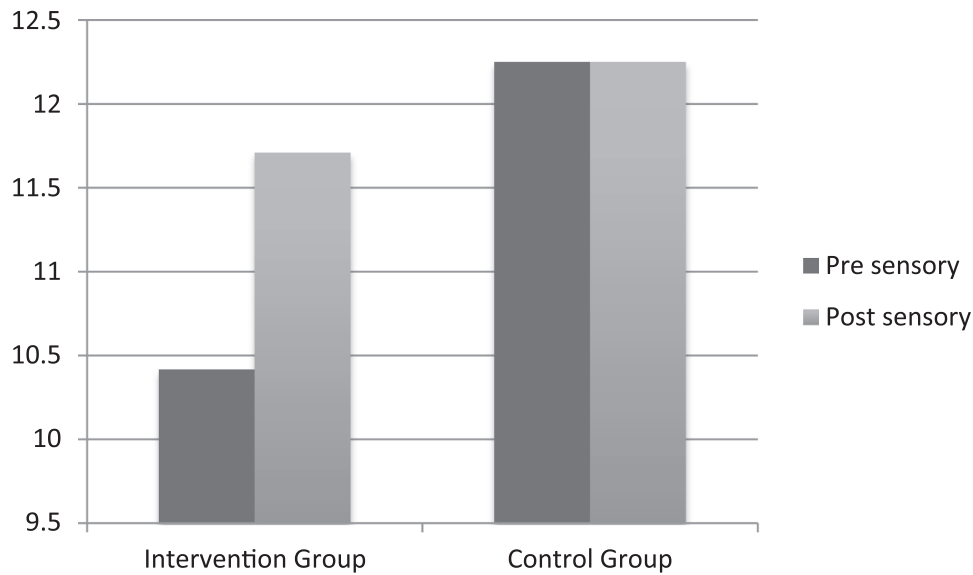


Fig. 2. Pre and post-test mean of sensorial details by condition.

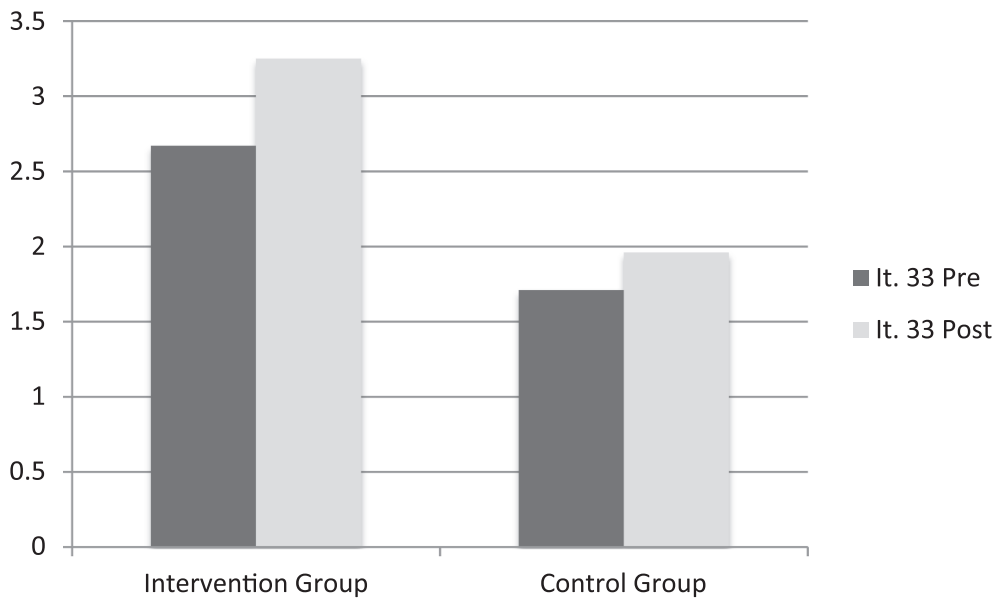


Fig. 3. Pre and post-test mean of feeling of disgust regarding the sexual episodes in the recalled relationship.

violent behaviors marked in the checklist group. Table 2 shows the means and the standard deviations obtained in each group before and after the intervention, comparing high index groups in the intervention and control conditions.

Moreover, the direction of the change was different between the ‘high index intervention group’ and the ‘high index control group’ for some items. While the emotions provoked by the memory in the participants of “high index intervention group” were less intense after the reading and dialogic gathering, the women of the “high index control group” expressed a higher emotional intensity. On the other hand, the women in the intervention group felt less attraction towards the boy with whom they maintained the remembered relationship, and the participants in the control group reported feeling more attraction towards him (see Fig. 4).

No significant differences were found in any of those items in the participants in the low index groups neither in the intervention or control conditions. The results hardly varied between the pre-test and post-test measures in the low index intervention group in the emotional

intensity dimension ($Mpre = 9.92$; $Mpost = 9.58$; $z = -0.54$, $p = 0.59$), in the attraction ($Mpre = 3.17$; $Mpost = 2.92$; $z = -0.65$, $p = 0.52$), or rejection to the memory of the sexual intercourse maintained ($Mpre = 2.50$; $Mpost = 2.58$; $z = -0.33$, $p = 0.74$). Neither any change was perceived in the low index control group in the emotional intensity dimension ($Mpre = 10.33$; $Mpost = 9.78$; $z = -0.64$, $p = 0.53$), in the attraction ($Mpre = 3.56$; $Mpost = 3.22$; $z = -1.00$, $p = 0.32$) or rejection to the memory of the sexual intercourse maintained ($Mpre = 1.22$; $Mpost = 1.33$; $z = -0.00$, $p = 1.00$).

4. Discussion

Much evidence indicates that IPV is a global problem (UNICEF, 2014; United Nations, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2015) that generates several physical and psychological consequences in the victims (Miller and McCaw, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2016; Sharp & Keyton, 2016). The situation has worsened in present times, as most recent reports published by the United Nations (2020a) are alerting about the

Table 2
Pre and post-test means and standard deviations of participants who choose a high-index violent behavior relationship in the intervention and control group.

Items	High Index Intervention Group (N = 12)		High Index Control Group (N = 15)	
	Pre Mean (SD)	Post Mean (SD)	Pre Mean (SD)	Post Mean (SD)
Emotional Intensity dimension (It. 21, It.22 and It. 23)	12.33(2.19)	10.67(2.67)	11.57(2.38)	11.00(3.11)
It.32. When I remember that boy I feel attraction.	2.33(1.16)	1.75(0.97)	2.33(1.68)	2.47(1.73)
It.33. When I remember the sexual moments of the relationship I feel disgusted.	2.83(1.12)	3.92(1.31)	2.00(1.31)	2.33(1.59)

increasing risk to suffer violence in women and girls because of the global pandemic Covid-19. Despite this type of violence affects women of different conditions (Trygged et al., 2014; Bay-Cheng & Bruns, 2016) and ages (Pathak et al., 2019; Stöckl et al., 2014), the high rates of this kind of violence in young people are especially alarming. Even if young people tend to think that this type of violence does not affect them (García-Díaz et al., 2017), unfortunately, much evidence indicates the contrary (Blattner et al., 2015; Blom et al., 2016; Krahe et al., 2015; Stöckl et al., 2014; Ybarra et al., 2016) and our research confirmed it. The checklist that the participants completed at the beginning of the research showed that IPV was present among the young college women involved in the study, and provided us with information on most common types of violent behaviors that occurred in their relationships, as self-reported by the participants. Behaving jealousy, being touched or kissed without consent, or making them feel worthless were common behaviors that a great percentage of the participants identified in the memory recalled. Additionally, it should be noted that more than half of the participants (60%) identified a high index of violent behaviors in the recalled relationship, between 3 and 13 from the list of 16 IPV behaviors possible.

The search for evidence-based interventions that can prevent (Okasako-Schmucker et al., 2019) not only the perpetuation of violence in intimate relationships but also future re-victimization in young women who have already experienced sexual-affective violence is a priority objective (Exner-Cortens et al., 2017), and the research reported in this manuscript is a contribution in that regard. While a prior study (Racionero-Plaza et al., 2018; Racionero-Plaza, 2020) had shown the power of reading individually *Radical Love: a revolution for the 21st century* (Gómez, 2015) to recall and freely reconstruct memories of violent sexual-affective relationships in transformative ways, the new tested intervention, which incorporated group dialogue around *Radical Love* (Gómez, 2015) via a dialogic gathering, indicates that this particular combination of memory recall, individual reading of *Radical Love*, subsequent dialogic gathering of sections of the book, and again recall of the same memory, produced other positive results. Concretely, this intervention produced a significant decrease in emotional intensity and increase in sensory detail associated with memory recall, and this is a direction in memory reconstruction that can support prevention of future revictimization.

4.1. Conclusions

Firstly, our results demonstrate that the young women who read *Radical Love* and then discussed it in a dialogic gathering, reported a decrease in the intensity of the associated emotion, and the more the number of violent behaviors of the man in the relationship, the greater the decrease. This informs about participants gaining more agency upon their memories and their impact; this is of high importance given the negative impact of the emotional intensity of stressful memories on health (Rubin, 2010).

Second, participants in the intervention experienced better remembering the physical reactions and sensations they had in the violent relationship and decreased the feeling of attraction toward the violent man, as well as showing greater disgust when remembering the sexual intercourses in the relationship. These results are relevant in several ways. On the one hand, we know that there is a fairly high percentage of unperceived relationship abuse (López-Cepero et al., 2015; Rodríguez-Campo et al., 2012) and, what is more, that violence is assumed to be characteristic of sporadic sexual-affective relationships (Puigvert et al., 2019). This implies greater tolerance towards this type of behavior and maintenance of the relationship (García-Díaz et al., 2017). Not compromising with these types of acts is essential to prevent IPV. The

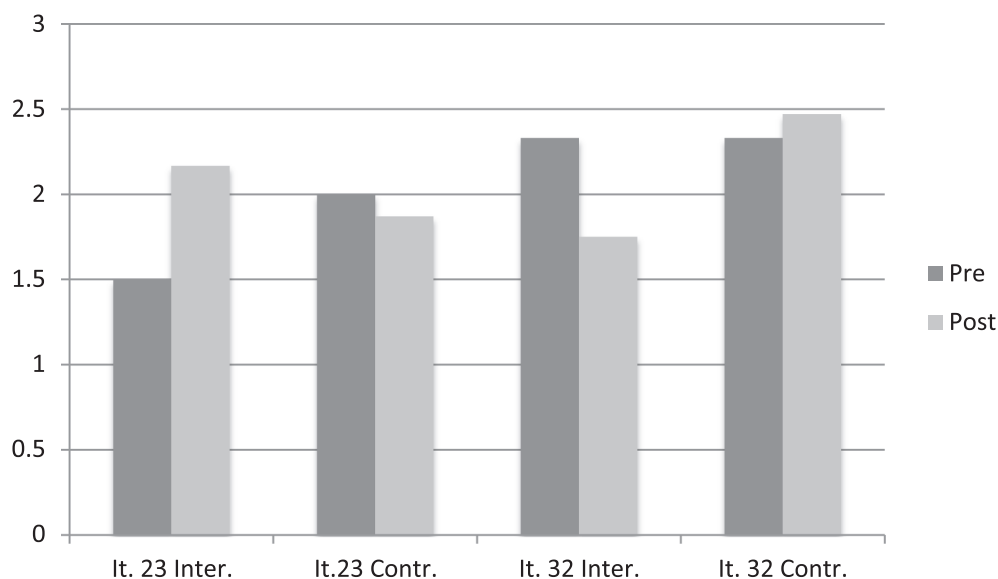


Fig. 4. Pre and post-test mean differences in accessibility, emotional intensity, and attraction in high index intervention and control group.

young women who participated in the reading and subsequent dialogic gathering of *Radical Love* recalled more sensations experienced during the violent relationship. In particular, after the intervention the participants reported to better remember their physical reactions and the sensations they had during the relationship, including better remembering sounds, smells, tastes, etc. This is important for these young women to be more aware about the violent character of the relationship they experienced and to demystify it. We can point out this direction as the intervention also produced a decrease in emotional intensity. The participants recalled more sensory details while the emotional intensity decreased. This direction is also supported by the findings indicating that the participants reported a decrease in the attraction they felt towards the violent man, which is aligned with the result of an increase of disgust when recalling the sexual episodes of the relationship. These findings are crucial. Research has shown the existence of a dominant coercive discourse (Puigvert & Flecha, 2018), which is socially constructed and that unites attraction and violence (Gómez, 2015), so that men with violent attitudes and behaviors are presented as more sexually desirable. This discourse is internalized by young women through socialization with friends, the media, etc. The line of research on preventive socialization of gender violence states that in order to overcome gender violence against young women is essential to dismantle the association between attraction and violence. Our results are promising in this regard, as after the intervention the participants felt less attracted to the violent man in the recalled relationship and, crucially, they felt more disgusted when recalling the sexual episodes in the relationship. These two results evidence that the intervention aided questioning the dominant coercive discourse, what can protect these women from revictimization because of feeling more rejection instead of attraction when recalling the violent relationship. The modification of these attraction partners and providing young people with tools that help them to be more critical about violence (Aiello et al., 2018) is crucial to work against IPV and the reading and subsequent discussion in dialogic gathering around *Radical Love* shows to be efficient aiding these changes.

Also, in terms of implications for practice, our results evidenced a greater effect of the intervention in the young women who indicated a high index of violent behaviors in the recalled relationship. The changes identified in this group are especially relevant. Those participants, after the intervention, showed a significant decrease in the accessibility of memory, the emotional intensity induced by the memory recall was lower after the reading and dialogic gathering, as well as it was the attraction to the violent man, while experiencing an increase in disgust when remembering sexual intercourses in the relationship. All these findings indicate that for these women, the autobiographical memory of the violent sexual relationship was reconstructed becoming more emotionally negative and less intense. This is significant from a preventive perspective, as negative valence of memory is highly related to directive functions (Rassmusen & Berntsen, 2009), so these memories are crucial to shape individuals' present and future behavior, in our case, this might mean rejecting violent sexual-affective relationships. Changes along the lines reported before inform that those memory reconstructions make the directive function of memory to be adaptive and not maladaptive (Burnell et al., 2020), in the sense that they could protect these women from future revictimization, something vital for the problem examined. Our research shows that autobiographical memories of violent sexual-affective relationships, in addition to being a valid tool to examine (Oliver & Valls, 2004) and externalize (Pascuzzi & Smorti, 2017) sexual-affective socialization processes, are also an effective tool for the individual, if she decides to do so, to transform such socialization.

In addition, our findings are consistent with the "social turn in memory research" (Hirst & Rajaram, 2014), reiterating the importance of taking into consideration the social aspects of memory and showing that dialogic gatherings of scientific texts (in the case reported here, *Radical Love*) that dismantle the dominant coercive discourse could create the necessary interactive context for the transformative

reconstruction of autobiographical memories of violent sexual-affective relationships. Previous memory research has pointed out that when one person shares memories with others, a process of reconstruction takes place and an edited memory is then stored (Hirst & Rajaram, 2014). Our study advances this finding in showing that autobiographical memories can be socially reconstructed by the individual not only by means of sharing them with others, but also via an individual reading that tackles the content and emotions associated with the memory which is then followed by sharing the reading with others in the context of dialogic gatherings that do not necessarily imply recalling memories and sharing them with the participants in the gathering but through deep dialogic reflections about topics that directly appeal to the memory.

Additionally, prior research has shown that social support is necessary to overcome the traumatic experiences of IPV (Žukauskienė et al., 2019). Likewise, the evidence-based recommendations proposed by the Community Preventive Services Task Force (CPSTF) (Okasako-Schmucker et al., 2019), include the importance of providing young women with a healthy and safe environment where they can discuss the warning signs of violent sexual affective behaviors and raise awareness about them. The characteristics of the dialogic gatherings, which include egalitarian dialogue, free interpretation of the text, confidentiality, and respect for differences can constitute such context of social support.

In the light of these findings, the reading of *Radical Love* and the subsequent dialogic gathering about the it proves to be an effective memory intervention for the prevention of IPV (re)victimization which can be applied with victimized college women.

5. Limitations

This research has certain limitations. The lack of data that allows us to verify the permanence of the changes detected over time is one of them. Post-test data were collected immediately after the reading and subsequent focus group. Therefore, although the collected data showed that the intervention generated changes in the young women's memory, we cannot guarantee the stability of these changes over time. A second limitation would be the difficulty to guarantee the permanence of participants during all the intervention process, which has affected the size of the sample. The intervention implied, in addition to having to dig into difficult intimate memories, a continuity in time to be able to carry out all the phases of the intervention research. The women who participated in the intervention group had to meet with the researchers on three occasions, write the memory of the violent relationship, filling out the questionnaires, committing to doing the reading in a certain period of time, participating in the dialogic gathering and, finally, filling again the questionnaires. Committing to all these activities was challenging considering time constraints, access to participants, etc. and some women abandoned in mid of the process. A final limitation would be related to the self-reported nature of the study. There may be differences between what the young women really felt in the IPV relationship and what they confess feeling in the research. These discrepancies can be modulated by two factors, the social desirability and the individual motivation on recall (MacDonald & Hirt, 1997). However, previous research on autobiographical memory states that what really matters in human memory is how it is told to oneself, as well as to others (Stone et al., 2010).

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Leire Ugalde: Investigation, Formal analysis, Resources. **Sandra Racionero-Plaza:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Ariadna Munté:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing. **Itxaso Tellado:** Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – review & editing.

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