The Influence of Spirituality, Moral Reasoning, and Personality Factors on Misogyny

Rachel McPherson
University of Central Florida, rachelmpcherson@knights.ucf.edu

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By: Rachel McPherson

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Doan Modianos

UCF Department of Psychology

ABSTRACT: Sexism, prejudice or discrimination typically against women, is an attitude that causes emotional distress and can negatively affect women's psychological and physical health. Studies have shown that psychological distress heightens when women are subjected to sexist events (Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, & Stewart, 2009). Sexism exists in the classroom, workplace, and politics, and is virtually inescapable for women (Miner-Rubino, 2007). It is common for women who are in positions of power to be unjustly branded with cruel epithets (Manne, 2016). Despite the modernity of today's culture and progression of gender equality, sexism is still a prevalent issue. This study assesses underlying predictors that are related to sexism. In order to identify these predictors, I examined Big Five personality traits, spirituality/religiousness, and moral reasoning, as well as demographic variables. Participants were university students within a general psychology course who completed an online questionnaire for course credit. Results indicate that there is a significant relationship between misogyny and moral foundations theory and a negative correlation between sexism and empathetic personality. These results suggest that there are several personality and religious predictors of sexism.

KEYWORDS: misogyny; sexism; Big Five factors; spirituality; moral foundations theory

INTRODUCTION

Sexism can often be hard to detect. The bullying act of sexism can often be perceived as a moral crusade instead of a persecution (Manne, 2016). Sexist attitudes flourish in patriarchal societies given the gendered hierarchy. Though sexism often includes overt attacks that direct hostility and hatred towards women, it also possesses a more discrete form that portrays itself as a distrust of women (i.e. putting women down) (Manne, 2016). Benevolent sexism, a more curbed form of misogyny, views women as a wonderful but weak species. According to benevolent sexists, women need to be protected by men due to fragility (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). Huang, Davies, Sibley, and Osborne (2016) state that benevolent sexism even affects roles, such as motherhood, referring to it as a woman's "highest calling" and claiming that this role "completes" her as a woman. Due to the confining restraints of benevolent sexism, women are restricted to mere conventional roles (Anderson, Kanner, & Elsayegh, 2009). Women are often subject to psychological barriers of motherhood myths that discourage them from seeking power in the workplace and have difficulty being hired or promoted (Verniers & Vala, 2018; Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Though these attitudes may seem like a common and tolerable perception of women, these beliefs are misogynistic nonetheless. Benevolent sexism is harder to detect compared to hostile sexism (e.g. sexism that consists of aggressive attitudes towards women), as benevolent sexism uses a superficially positive tone to disguise its ill intent (Huang, Davies, Sibley, & Osborne, 2016). Overall, the negative impact of exposure to sexism is ample: psychological distress, lower levels of mental health, physical health, and poor health behavior (e.g. excessive smoking or drinking) are among the detriments associated with sexism (Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, & Stewart, 2009; Fischer & Holz, 2007; Zucker & Landry, 2007; Salomon, Burgess, & Bosson, 2015).

Although sexism has a detrimental impact on women, the underlying causes of sexism are not clearly established. The possible attributes that contribute to misogynistic attitudes and behavior have not been thoroughly researched. Most studies, instead, focus on how to change existing sexist attitudes instead of identifying the preliminary causes and correlates of sexism (Becker & Wagner, 2008; Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, & Kochersberger, 2013).

In this study, by contrast, I assessed benevolent and hostile sexism. The terms benevolent sexism and hostile sexism were coined by Glick and Fiske in 1996, who introduced the "Ambivalent Sexism Theory." Benevolence is a more controlled form of sexism that views women as complementary companions to men, stating that women are pure creatures who must be protected by men (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Glick and Fiske (2001) divide benevolent sexism into three subcategories: protective paternalism (the desire to protect and cherish women), heterosexual intimacy (intense desires for women), and complementary gender differentiation (the differences between men and women). Benevolent sexism is seen as chivalrous rather than misogynistic (Chisango, Mayekiso, & Thomae, 2015). Overall, benevolent sexism can be difficult to detect considering its seemingly harmless guise and evasive patterns of good intentions (Garaigordobil, 2014).

Contrarily, hostile sexism is the perception that women seek control over men through feminist ideology or sexuality. Researchers Glick and Fiske (2001) further divide hostile sexism into three subcategories: dominative paternalism (desire to dominate women), hostile heterosexuality (backlash towards women), and competitive gender differentiation (favoring men over women in terms of differences).

Religiousness and degree of spirituality can directly relate to how women are perceived and the treatment of women (Glick, Lamerias, & Rodriguez Castro, 2002). Many religions dictate that women should be considered secondary to men (Daly, 1985). Religion's influence can thus promote misogynistic attitudes (Haggard, Kaelen, Saroglou, Klein, & Rowatt, 2018). Often, religion is associated with patriarchal control over women and control over the sexuality of women (Burn & Busso, 2005; Haggard et al., 2018; Tasdemir & Sakalli-Ugurlu, 2009). Traditionally, religion creates cohesive groups of likeminded people who share similar beliefs (Haidt, 2012). Religiosity is a very significant factor that shapes beliefs and attitudes towards gender and gender issues (Cunningham, Miner, & Benavides-Espinoza, 2012; Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014). Some research has indicated that Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religions are positively related to benevolent sexism (Gaunt, 2012; Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014; Husnu, 2016). In addition to the sexism related to Abrahamic religions, other religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, foster male dominance and patriarchal traditions (Gross, 2014; Tombs, 1991; Franiuk & Shain, 2011). Previous research has indicated that non-religious people are more likely to support gender equality than religious people, regardless

of religious affiliation (Schnabel, 2016). The degree of religiousness was expected to be correlated with hostile sexism and benevolent sexism.

Big Five personality traits may also dictate misogynistic beliefs (Christopher, Zabel, & Miller, 2013). In various literature, the Big Five factor traits of openness and agreeableness have been strongly correlated to prejudice (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007; Ekehammar & Akrami, 2003; Flynn, 2005). The Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) are a group of major aspects of the personality and are considered an extremely robust model. Compared to other personality inventories (e.g. Cattell, Guilford, and the Interpersonal Circle), the Big Five model prevails due to its high reliability, great validity, and its wide array of dimensions that characterize individual differences (Digman, 1990). Although, a possible weakness of the Big Five personality inventory is its difficulty for respondents of lower educations (Hendriks, Hofstee, & De Raad, 1999), this weakness did not pose as a major risk to this study, as all participants had at least some college education. Research by Akrami, Ekehammar, Bergh, Dahlstrand, & Malmsten (2009) indicates that prejudice can originate from a combination of personality and situational variables. Within their study, prejudice scores increase or decrease depending on the situational manipulation (computerized social threat scenario) and on personality variables (Big Five factors openness and agreeableness, social dominance scale, and right wing authoritarianism scale) (Akrami, Ekehammar, Bergh, Dahlstrand, & Malmsten, 2009). This result suggests that personality traits influencing sexism should be further researched.

The moral foundations theory (MFT), a pluralist approach to the study of morality, proposes that several innate and universally available psychological systems are the foundations of "intuitive ethics" and gives an indication of how other people should be treated (Graham et al., 2013). This theory assesses an individual's belief on individuals harming/unfairly treating other individuals and is comprised of five foundations (Graham, et al., 2011). Specifically, the respective dimensions of MFT are as follows: (1) care/harm, (2) fairness, (3) ingroup, (4) authority, and (5) purity (Graham et al., 2013). The care/harm dimension assesses the degree to which someone cherishes or protects others. The extent to which someone may value the trait of caring versus valuing the trait of harm often varies by culture (Graham et al., 2013). Next, the fairness dimension assesses

beliefs on justice. Third, ingroup dimension assesses the feeling of belonging within a group, family, or nation and helps individuals facilitate group cohesion. Fourth, the authority dimension assesses the degree to which someone submits to tradition and legitimate authority. This dimension also regulates hierarchies within social groups and social order, which could make the dimension extremely indicative of sexism and gender roles. Social inequality and hierarchies allow for the perpetuation of sexist behavior, making the MFT authority dimension naturally predictive of sexism (Vecina & Piñuela, 2017). Lastly, the purity dimension assesses the degree to which someone detests physical or spiritual contamination (Graham et al., 2013). Specifically, in this study, the purity dimension was assumed to be important because of its assessment of abhorrence of disgusting actions, which could encompass sexism attitudes (Vecina, 2017). In a study by Vecina and Piñuela (2017), benevolent and hostile sexism were positively correlated with moral foundations. Due to the sample population of their study (domestic violence convicts), they suggested that further research should be conducted using a more diverse population. Their correlations indicate that sexism is deeply rooted in moral foundations.

I also assessed traits such as compassion and altruism. Altruism and compassion strongly reflect personal beliefs on how other people should be treated. Altruism occurs when an individual benefits from helping another individual through self-sacrificial actions (Fultz & Schafer, 2013). Similar to altruism, compassion occurs when an individual strives to relieve the pain or misery of another individual out of empathy and is considered a strong, desirable virtue (Rohland, 2015). There has been little research on the relationship between sexism and empathic traits (Garaigordobil, 2014). Some research indicates that compassion can be a predictor of benevolent sexism, as compassion can elicit a response to help women who are seen as vulnerable and in need (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). A high score on the compassion scale could indicate a higher susceptibility to sexist attitudes, as benevolent sexists believe that they should treat women differently based on women's weaker abilities. On the other hand, it can be argued that a low score on the compassion scale can also be a predictor of hostile sexism (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). For example, research by Garaigordobil (2014) has indicated that there is a contradictory difference in the relationship between global capacity for empathy and hostile sexism and global capacity for empathy and benevolent sexism. Their findings indicate that participants who scored high in

hostile sexism scored low on global capacity for empathy, while participants who scored high on benevolent sexism also scored high on global capacity for empathy. These results show an interesting contrast between two forms of sexism and a need for further research of different forms of empathy, such as compassion and altruism. Further research on traits, such as compassion and altruism, and their connection to sexism is necessary.

Sexism is a familiar concept in the workplace, politics, classroom, and even at home (Verniers & Vala, 2018; Romaniuk, 2015; Stevens and Martell, 2016; Eek & Axmon, 2015). The prevalence of sexism is still at an alarming level despite the modernity of today's culture (Ibraeva & Kalizhanova, 2016; Rodino-Colocino, 2018). The primary purpose of this study was to determine a relationship between sexism and religiosity, select personality traits (i.e., openness to experience and agreeableness), moral foundations theory, and forms of sexism. Several hypotheses will be tested in this study. The following hypotheses were evaluated:

H1: Agreeableness will be negatively related to hostile sexism.

H2: Openness will be negatively related to hostile sexism.

H3: Altruism will be negatively related to hostile sexism.

H4: Compassion will be negatively related to hostile sexism.

H5a: High levels of benevolent sexism will be positively related to ingroup.

H5b: High levels of benevolent sexism will be positively related to purity.

H5c: High levels of benevolent sexism will be positively related to authority.

H6: Hostile sexism will not be related to moral foundations theory dimensions.

METHOD

To better understand the reasons for misogynistic attitudes, several surveys were given to participants in undergraduate psychology courses. The purpose of the present research is to identify a pattern of responses on a number of personality and attitude dimensions that allowed us to define sexism empirically. Participants' responses to views on spirituality/religiousness, the Big Five personality traits, political orientation, moral foundations theory, and benevolent and hostile sexism are studied. These constructs may possibly identify patterns associated with misogynistic attitudes. The general objective of the present research is to examine the different characteristics that may contribute to sexism, and to identify correlates. The variables specifically studied were religiousness/spirituality, altruism, compassion, the Big Five personality traits of agreeableness and openness, and what is known in psychology as the moral foundations theory.

Materials

Demographics Survey. The survey asked for basic demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnicity (e.g. White, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, Native American/American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, or other) marital status, and religious preference (e.g. Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Agnostic, Atheist, or other). The answer choices for ethnicity reflect the ethnic classifications that the University of Central Florida uses for institutional data purposes.

Agreeableness Survey. A 10-item scale that surveyed the agreeableness factor of the Big Five personality traits was used. All items were answered on a five-point scale (1 - strongly disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 - neutral; 4 - agree; 5 - strongly agree). An example of an item on the test is, "[I] sympathize with others' feelings." The Cronbach's alpha of this subscale is .82 ("International Personality Item Pool", n.d.).

Altruism Survey. A 10-item scale that surveys the altruism facet of the NEO Personality Inventory Revised was used ("Altruism", n.d.). All items were answered on a five-point scale (1 - strongly disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 - neutral; 4 - agree; 5 - strongly agree). An example of an item on the survey is, "[I] love to help others." The Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .77 ("Altruism", n.d.).

Benevolent Sexism Survey. Glick and Fiske's (2001) 11-item scale was used to measure benevolent sexism. Items were answered on a five-point scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"; α=.92). An example of an

item on the survey is "Women should be cherished and protected by men."

Hostile Sexism Scale. Glick and Fiske's (2001) 11-item scale surveys the dominative and threatening aspects of sexism was used, with items answered on a five-point scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"; α =.92). An example of an item on the survey is "Women seek power by gaining control over men." (Glick & Fiske, 2001).

Moral Foundations Subscales. This instrument is a 32-item scale that surveys the social psychological theory of moral reasoning, developed by Haidt and colleagues. This survey was split into two parts. Part 1 of the survey states: "When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?". These items were answered on a six-point scale ("not at all relevant" to "extremely relevant"). An example item is "Whether or not someone suffered emotionally" (Graham, 2008).

Part 2 of the survey states: "Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement." These items were answered on a five-point scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). An example of an item on the survey is "Respect for authority is something all children need to learn" (Graham, 2008). The subscales within this survey are care/harm, fairness, ingroup, authority, and purity.

Religiousness/Spirituality Survey. This instrument is a 9-item scale that surveys the degree of possible spiritual conviction ("Spirituality/Religousness", n.d.). All items were answered on a five-point scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree). An example of an item on the survey is "[I] keep my faith even during hard times." The Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .91 ("Spirituality/ Religiousness", n.d.).

Compassion Survey. This instrument is 10-item scale that assesses compassion, and items were answered on a five-point scale (1 - strongly disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 - neutral; 4 - agree; 5 - strongly agree) ("Compassion", n.d.). An example of an item on the survey is, "[I] take an interest in other people's lives." The Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .84 ("Compassion", n.d.).

Procedure

Participants were informed that they were going to take part in an online research study regarding Big Five personality traits. Participants were able to complete the study from any computer with internet access during the time the study was available. The participants were first instructed of the general purpose and procedure of the study and then they were instructed to indicate consent before the experiment begins. The survey was delivered through Qualtrics, and the survey began with the demographics survey, followed by the compassion survey, altruism survey, agreeableness survey, moral foundations theory survey, spirituality/religiousness survey, hostile sexism survey, and finally the benevolent sexism survey. As a manipulation check, participants were instructed to select certain answers in order to ensure data quality (e.g., "Select 'agree' to this item." The students were granted credit for completing the study. Following the completion of the study, the participants were redirected to a page that debriefed them in the deception procedures used in the study.

RESULTS

Participants

Two-hundred and sixty-one students took part in this study. Sixty-one percent of participants were female and 39% of participants were male. The participant ethnicity was comprised of 57% Caucasians, 19% Hispanics/ Latinos, 11% African Americans, 9% Asian/Island Pacifiers, 4% other ethnicity, and less than 1% Native Americans/American Indians. All participants were over the age of 18. Participants were recruited from University of Central Florida through the Psychology Department's SONA System, a cloud-based research and participant recruitment system. Participants received SONA credit (course credits) for participating in this study.

Results were analyzed using SPSS version 24. The analyses began with multiple regression models and used backward regression: non-significant variables were systematically eliminated until the most efficient model was obtained. Variables were eliminated as long as the resulting F-ratio for the overall model continued to increase. Modeling stopped when the overall F-ratio no longer increased. Correlation and multiple regression analyses examined the relationship between hostile sexism and the potential predictors and benevolent sexism and the potential predictors.

The results of the regression analysis for hostile sexism indicate that 10 predictors (harm, ingroup, fairness, authority, purity, agreeableness, compassion, spirqualty,

altruism, and openness) produced a significant model (F(10, 257) =14.21, p < .001, R^2 = .356,. When hostile sexism was predicted, it found that the harm dimension, ingroup dimension, authority dimension, agreeableness, and spiritualty were significant predictors. The MFT fairness dimension, MFT purity dimension, compassion, altruism, and openness were not significant predictors of hostile sexism.

I found that agreeableness (β = -0.33, p < .01) and MFT harm (β = -0.21, p < .01) had a significant negative association with hostile sexism, such that the participants who were more agreeable expressed less hostile sexism.

Variable	t	p	β	F	df	p	adj. R^2
Hostile Sexism				14.21	10,	.001	.33
					257		
MFT Harm	-2.54	.01	−0.21				
MFT Ingroup	2.85	.01	0.22				
MFT Authority	3.75	.01	0.29				
Agreeableness	-3.00	.01	−0.33				
Spirituality	2.48	.01	0.16				

Table 1. Results of the Multiple Regression Analyses

Only Christian, agnostic, and atheist participants were included in the results because the size of other groups (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and other) were too small. An analysis of variance showed that the effect of religious identification on benevolent sexism was significant (F(2, 205) = 20.83, p < .01). Likewise, an analysis of variance showed that the effect of religious identification (as measured by the demographic question) on hostile sexism was also significant (F(2, 205) = 10.56, p < .01). Participants who identify as Christian have a higher level of hostile sexism (M= 2.78) than participants who identify as agnostic (M= 2.31), participants who identified as atheists (M= 2.13), and participants who identify as another religion not listed (M= 2.53). Additionally, a main effect of Christian identification with MFT ingroup (F(2, 205) = 7.45, p < .01), a main effect of Christian identification with MFT authority (F(2, 205) = 5.66, p < .01), and a main effect of Christian identification with MFT purity (F(2, 205) = 21.11, p < .01). Religious identification is related a higher rating of sexist attitudes and binding MFT dimensions.

Bivariate correlations were computed among all pairs of variables. I found a significant positive correlation between hostile sexism and spirituality/religiousness, between hostile sexism and MFT ingroup dimension, between hostile sexism and MFT purity dimension, and between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. I also found significant negative correlations between hostile sexism and altruism, between hostile sexism and compassion, between hostile sexism and MFT harm dimension, between hostile sexism and MFT fairness dimension, between hostile sexism and openness, and between hostile sexism and agreeableness. Refer to Table 2 in Appendix A for a full correlation matrix.

DISCUSSION

Pervasiveness and detrimental impact of sexism are potential predictors of sexism (Miner-Rubino & Cortino, 2007; Fischer & Holz, 2007; Zucker & Landry, 2007; Ibraeva & Kalizhanova, 2016). Based on previous literature, several variables posed as possible predictors, including MFT dimensions, Big Five personality traits, and spirituality/religiousness (Vecina, 2017; Flynn, 2005; Schnabel, 2016; Gross, 2014; Gaunt, 2012).

H1, H2, H3, and H4 were all supported based on the correlations test. Agreeableness, openness, altruism, and compassion were all significantly negatively correlated with hostile sexism. These findings are consistent with the essence of sexism: that sexist and misogynistic attitudes are dehumanizing and therefore do not coincide with humanitarian traits such as agreeableness, altruism, and compassion (Manne, 2017; Vecina, 2017). It is understandable that someone who is misogynistic will not be agreeable, altruistic, or compassionate (Hideg & Ferris, 2016; Hellmer, Stenson, & Jylhä, 2018). Previous research on compassion has shown that it is a predictor of benevolent sexism (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). Because my results indicate that agreeableness is a significant predictor, my study corroborates previous literature that indicates humanistic, compassionate traits can be predictors of misogyny.

H5a, H5b, and H5c were all supported. Participants who scored high on the benevolent sexism scale also were high on the morality dimensions of ingroup, purity, and authority. These findings reflect previous research that sexist attitudes are related to the dimensions of MFT (Vecina & Piñuela, 2017). It is understandable that the MFT dimensions are related to sexism, considering that MFT assesses human moral reasoning (Vecina, 2018).

H6 was not supported. Our results did not support that hostile sexism would be unrelated to any MFT dimensions. The results showed that hostile sexism was

significantly negatively correlated with MFT harm and negatively correlated with MFT fairness. Considering that both of these dimensions' focus on virtues of kindness, civility, and justice, it is not surprising that they are negatively correlated with hostile sexism. Again, our results agree with previous research that has indicated a positive correlation between MFT and hostile and benevolent sexism (Vecina, 2018; Vecina & Piñuela, 2017). Unlike previous studies, in which small and unrepresentative sample sizes (i.e. prisons) were used when studying the effects of MFT dimensions on sexism to possibly gain significant results, the results from our study are based on a larger and more diverse population (Vecina & Piñuela, 2017).

In summary, sexism has clear ties to religion and moral foundation ideologies. Previous research has indicated that monotheistic religions and benevolent sexism are positively related, so it is not surprising that this study has found a relationship between hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and spirituality/religiousness. My results show how sexism is deeply rooted to MFT and spirituality/religiousness. Sexism has many predictors and correlates with ideologies, such as religion and moral foundations, and with personable qualities, such as agreeableness and openness. Concerning the prevalence of sexism and misogyny in today's culture, it is extremely important to understand the variables that influence this prejudice in order to combat it (Ibraeva & Kalizhanova, 2016). Examining the potential predictors of sexism and misogyny could aid in reducing this prejudice altogether.

The study was limited to a sample size of 261 undergraduates. Future research could be improved by surveying a more diverse community, representative of older demographics, in order to better study misogynistic attitudes. Though an attempt was made to evade bias, another limitation may have been the participants' awareness of the sexism scale being examined. The study was deceptively titled and described to be about Big Five personality traits, but participants may have deduced the true meaning for the research and attempt to alter their answers in an attempt to not identify as sexist.

Ideally, future research should include a broader population of wider age ranges could further examine the extent of the relationship between sexism and the MFT dimensions, Big Five personality traits, and spirituality/religiousness. While several results were significantly correlated within this study, a broader demographic of a wider range of ages could lead to more insight about sexism predictors.

APPENDIX A

Table 2. Correlations of model variables

Variable	Hostile Sexism	Spirituality	MFT Ingroup	MFT Purity	MFT Harm	MFT Fairness	Altruism	Compassion	Openness	Agreeableness	MFT Authority
Hostile Sexism	-	.221**	.136*	.124*	-.247**	-.279**	-.194**	-.217**	-.386**	-.269**	.055
Spirituality		-	.301**	.574**	.046	.044	.279**	.216**	-.082	.206**	.234**
MFT Ingroup			-	.568**	.399**	.379**	.319**	.276**	.020	.326**	.673**
MFT Purity				-	.292**	.217**	.180**	.130*	-.023	.180**	.600**
MFT Harm					-	.712**	.480**	.489**	.408**	.485**	.282**
MFT Fairness						-	.505**	.440**	.442**	.502**	.311**
Altruism					.		-	.817**	.423**	.783**	.197**
Compassion								-	.438**	.868**	.154*
Openness									-	.471**	.034
Agreeableness										-	.249**
MFT Authority											-

Note. * = correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) and ** = correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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