

# Variables Influencing Misogyny

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# VARIABLES INFLUENCING MISOGYNY

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Psychology  
in the College of Sciences  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Misogyny, a hatred against women, is an attitude that causes emotional distress and can negatively affect women's psychological and physical health. It has shown itself in extreme ways and can be crippling to women. Studies have shown that psychological distress is heightened when women are subjected to sexist events (Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, & Stewart, 2009).

Misogyny exists in the classroom, workplace, and politics, and is virtually inescapable from women. It is not uncommon for women in positions of power are often unjustly branded with cruel epithets (Manne, 2016). Despite the modernity of today's culture, misogyny is still a prevalent issue. This study seeks to assess the underlying predictors that are related to misogyny. In order to identify these predictors, factors such as Big Five personality traits, spirituality, and moral reasoning will be examined. Factors such as demographics were also considered.

Participants consisted of university students within a general psychology course who completed an online questionnaire for course credit. The study title was deceptive in order to obtain more accurate results. Results indicate that there is a relationship between misogyny and the predicted variables.

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## INTRODUCTION

Misogyny can often be hard to detect. Benevolent Sexism, a more curbed form of misogyny, views women as a wonderful species, but a weak species. According to benevolent sexists, women need to be protected by men due to fragility (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). Huang, Davies, Sibley, & Osborne (2016) state that Benevolent Sexism even affects role such as motherhood, as a woman's "highest calling" is often considered to be motherhood and 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). Though these may seem like a common and tolerable perception of women, these beliefs are misogynistic nonetheless. Benevolent Sexism is harder to detect rather than the malice of Hostile Sexism, as Benevolent Sexism uses a superficially positive tone to disguise its ill intent (Huang, Davies, Sibley, & Osborne, 2016). The commonality in Benevolent Sexism urges for answers concerning the underlying roots of misogyny. Both a Benevolent Sexism and Hostile Sexism scale will be used in this study.

Although misogyny has a detrimental impact on women, the underlying causes of misogyny are not clearly established. The possible attributes that contribute to misogynistic attitude and behavior have not been thoroughly researched. Studies instead focus on how to change existing sexist attitudes instead of identifying the preliminary causes of misogyny (Becker & Wagner, 2008). Social interventions and suppressing sexist humor are

recommendations by researchers on how to deter misogyny, but little research has been conducted that suggests how to stop the provenance of misogyny (Ford, Woodzicka, Triplett, & Kochersberger, 2013).

To better understand the reasons for misogynistic attitudes, several surveys will be given to participants through 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 will allow us to define misogyny empirically. Participants' responses to views on spirituality, Big Five personality traits, political orientation, Moral Foundations Theory, and Benevolent and Hostile Sexism will be studied. These constructs may possibly identify causes of misogynistic attitude. The general objective of the present research is to examine the different characteristics that may contribute to misogyny, and if there are any possibly underlying causes of it. The variables specifically studied will be spirituality, Big Five personality traits of Compassion, Agreeableness, and Altruism, and the Moral Foundations Theory.

Spirituality and degree of spirituality can directly relate to how women are perceived and the treatment of women. Many religions dictate that women should be considered secondary to men. Religion's influence can directly create misogynistic attitudes. Some research has indicated that Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religiosity are positively related to Benevolent Sexism (Gaunt, 2012). The degree of spirituality is expected to be correlated with misogyny.

Similarly, Big Five personality traits may also dictate misogynistic beliefs. Altruism, Compassion, and Agreeableness are the specific Big Five personality traits that will be assessed. By definition, Altruism, Compassion, and Agreeableness strongly reflect personal beliefs on how other people should be treated. If there is a low score on the Compassion scale, it can be

expected that the participant does not believe people should be highly respected, which in turn could result in a higher susceptibility to misogyny. Research by Akrami, Ekehammar, & Yang-Wallentin (2011) has indicated that sexism, as a form of prejudice, can originate from a combination of personality and social psychology variables. This result suggests that personality traits influencing sexism should be further researched.

Benevolent and Hostile Sexism also will be assessed. These scales will most directly relate to degree of misogyny, as they give an explicit look into intensity of sexism. The terms Benevolent Sexism and Hostile Sexism were coined by Glick and Fiske in 1996, who introduced the Ambivalent Sexism Theory. As stated previously, Benevolent Sexism is a more controlled form of sexism that views women as complementary companions to men, stating that they women are pure creatures that must be protected by men (Glick & Fiske, 2001). They divided 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 favored over Hostile Sexism, as it is seen as chivalrous rather than misogynistic (Chisango, Mayekiso, & Thomae, 2015). Contrarily, Hostile Sexism is the perception that women seek control over men through feminist ideology and/or sexuality. They also divided 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) (Chisango, Mayekiso, & Thomae, 2015). The Benevolent Sexism and Hostile Sexism surveys should clearly suggest variables and attitudes that influence misogyny.



Finally, the Moral Foundations Theory (MFT), which proposes that several innate and universally available psychological systems are the foundations of “intuitive ethics” obviously gives an indication of how other people should be treated. In a study by Vecina & 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 findings indicate that misogyny is deep rooted in moral foundations. Specifically, the respective dimensions of MFT will be assessed: Care/Harm, Fairness, Ingroup, Authority, And Purity. The Care/Harm dimension assesses the degree to which someone cherishes or protects others. The Fairness dimension assesses beliefs on justice. The Ingroup dimension assesses the feeling of belonging within a group, family, or nation. The Authority dimension assesses the degree to which someone submits to tradition and legitimate authority. The Purity dimension assesses the degree to which someone detests physical or spiritual contamination (Moral Foundations Theory, 2008)

Misogyny is a familiar concept in the workplace, politics, classroom, and even home. The prevalence of misogyny is still at an alarming level despite the modernity of today’s culture. The primary purpose of this study is to determine a relationship between misogyny and spirituality, Big Five personality traits, Moral Foundations Theory, and Benevolent and Hostile Sexism. Several hypotheses will be tested in this study. The following hypotheses were generated:

Hypothesis 1: The traits Agreeableness, Altruism, and Compassion will be negatively correlated with misogynistic attitudes.

Hypothesis 2: Participants who are high on the Benevolent Sexism scale will score high on the Moral Foundations Theory dimensions of Ingroup, Purity, and Authority, but Hostile Sexism will not be related to Moral Foundations Theory dimensions.

## METHOD

### Participants

261 students took part in this study. All participants were over the age of 18. Participants were recruited from University of Central Florida through the Psychology Department's SONA System. Participants received SONA credit for participating in this study, credit that can be applied to course requirements set by respective professors.

### Materials

**Agreeableness Survey.** A 10 item scale that surveys the agreeableness factor of the Big Five personality traits. All items will be 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 reliability of this scale is .82. The survey is provided in Appendix A.

**Altruism Survey.** A 10 item scale that surveys altruism facet of the NEO Personality Inventory Revised. All items will be 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 reliability of this scale is .77. The survey is provided in Appendix B.

**Benevolent Sexism Survey.** An 11 item scale that surveys attitudes towards women and perceptions of sexism. All items will be 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, "Women should be cherished and protected by men." The reliability of this scale is .92. The survey is provided in Appendix C.

**Hostile Sexism Scale.** An 11 item scale that surveys the dominative and threatening aspects of sexism. All items will be 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, “Women seek power by gaining control over men.” The reliability of this scale is .92. The survey is provided in Appendix D.

**Moral Foundations Theory Scale.** A 32 item scale that surveys the social psychological theory of moral reasoning. This survey is 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 will be answered on a five-point scale (0- not at all relevant; 1- not very relevant; 2- slightly relevant; 3- somewhat relevant; 4- very relevant, 5- extremely relevant). An example of an item on the survey is, “Whether or not someone suffered emotionally.” Part 2 of the survey states: “Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement.” These items will be 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, “Respect for author is something all children need to learn.” The survey is provided in Appendix E.

**Spirituality Survey.** A 9 item scale that surveys the degree of possible spiritual conviction. All items will be 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] keep my faith even during hard times.” The reliability of this scale is .91. The survey is provided in Appendix F.

**Compassion Survey.** A 10 item scale that assesses the compassion factor of the Big Five personality traits. All items will be 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] take an interest in other people’s lives.” The reliability of this scale is .84. The survey is provided in Appendix G.

**Demographics Survey.** A 7 item survey that assesses basic demographic information, such as age, ethnicity, marital status, religious preference, and political affiliation. The survey is provided in Appendix H.

## **Procedure**

Participants were informed that they were going to take part in a research study regarding Big Five personality traits. The study was available only online. 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 (deceptive) purpose and procedure of the study and then they were instructed to indicate consent before the experiment begins. Participants were then directed to complete the experiment through Qualtrics. As a manipulation check, participants were instructed to select certain answers in order to ensure data quality. The experiment began with the demographics survey, followed by the Compassion survey, Altruism survey, Agreeableness survey, Moral Foundations Theory survey, Spirituality survey, Hostile Sexism survey, and finally the Benevolent Sexism survey. The students were then 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 used within the study.

## RESULTS

Results were analyzed using SPSS version 24. The analyses began with full models and then systematically eliminated non-significant variables until the model was interpretable. Correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between Hostile Sexism and the potential predictors and Benevolent Sexism and the potential predictors.

Multiple regression was used to test if the various scales significantly predicted ratings of Hostile Sexism. The results of the regression indicated that 10 predictors (MFT Harm Dimension, MFT Ingroup Dimension, MFT Fairness Dimension, MFT Authority Dimension, MFT Purity Dimension, Agreeableness, Compassion, Spirituality, Altruism, and Openness) produced an overall model fit of  $R^2 = .356$ ,  $F(10, 257) = 14.21$ ,  $p < .000$ . When Hostile Sexism was predicted, it found that MFT Harm Dimension ( $\beta = -0.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), MFT Ingroup Dimension ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ), MFT Authority Dimension ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < .05$ ), Agreeableness ( $\beta = -0.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and Spirituality ( $\beta = 0.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant predictors.

MFT Fairness Dimension ( $\beta = -0.06$ , n. s.), MFT Purity Dimension ( $\beta = -0.07$ , n. s.), Compassion ( $\beta = 0.16$ , n. s.), Altruism ( $\beta = -0.02$ , n. s.), and Openness ( $\beta = -0.12$ , n. s.) were not significant predictors.

An analysis of variance showed that the effect of Benevolent Sexism on Religion was significant ( $F(2, 205) = 20.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Likewise, an analysis of variance showed that the effect of Hostile Sexism on Religion was also significant ( $F(2, 205) = 10.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

A bivariate correlation was performed between all variables. There was a significant positive correlation between Hostile Sexism and Spirituality ( $r(266) = .221, p < .01$ ), between Hostile Sexism and MFT Ingroup Dimension ( $r(266) = .136, p < .05$ ), between Hostile Sexism and MFT Purity Dimension ( $r(266) = .124, p < .05$ ), and between Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism ( $r(266) = .355, p < .01$ )

The results indicated that there were significant negative correlations between Hostile Sexism and Altruism ( $r(266) = -.194, p < .01$ ), between Hostile Sexism and Compassion ( $r(266) = -.217, p < .01$ ), between Hostile Sexism and MFT Harm Dimension ( $r(266) = -.247, p < .01$ ), between Hostile Sexism and MFT Fairness Dimension ( $r(266) = -.279, p < .01$ ), between Hostile Sexism and Openness ( $r(266) = -.386, p < .01$ ), and between Hostile Sexism and Agreeableness ( $r(266) = -.269, p < .01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

We hypothesized that Agreeableness, Altruism, and Compassion would be negatively correlated with misogynistic attitudes (Hypothesis 1). This hypothesis was supported, as these variables were significantly negatively correlated with Hostile Sexism. This finding is consistent with the essence of misogyny: that misogynistic attitudes are dehumanizing and therefore do not coincide with humanitarian traits such as Agreeableness, Altruism, and Compassion. It is understandable that someone who is misogynistic will not be agreeable, altruistic, or compassionate.

Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. Participants who scored high on the Benevolent Sexism scale also scored significantly high on all MFT Dimensions except for the MFT Harm and MFT Fairness Dimensions. This finding reflects previous research that sexist attitudes are strongly related to the dimensions of MFT. It is understandable that the MFT Dimensions are related to misogyny considering that MFT assesses human moral reasoning. Though we correctly hypothesized that Benevolent Sexism would correlate with MFT Purity, MFT Authority, and MFT Ingroup, we incorrectly hypothesized 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.

Based on the results, misogyny 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. The significance of the results shows how misogyny is deeply rooted to MFT and Spirituality.

The study was limited to a sample size of 261 people. Future research could be improved by surveying a larger and more diverse community in order to better study misogynistic attitudes. For this study to be more accurate, we would need to sample a larger group of students, across differentiating majors, grade level, and campus involvement. Though an attempt was made to evade bias, another limitation may have been the participants' awareness of the misogyny 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.

Overall, the results are surprising. Misogyny has many predictors and correlators that indicate its embedment with ideologies such as religion and moral foundations and its embedment with personable qualities such as Big Five personality traits. Concerning the prevalence of misogyny in today's culture, it is extremely important to understand the variables that influence misogyny in order to combat it. Examining the potential predictors of misogyny could aid in preventing misogyny altogether. In future research, more precise methodologies could further examine the extent of the relationship between misogyny and these variables. Further studying the MFT Dimensions, Big Five personality traits, and Spirituality that correlated with Hostile Sexism could lead to a breakthrough concerning the understanding of misogyny.

## **Appendix A: Agreeableness Survey**

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

1. Am interested in people.
2. Sympathize with others’ feelings.
3. Have a soft heart.
4. Take time out for others.
5. Feel others’ emotions.
6. Make people feel at ease.
7. Am not really interested in others. (R)
8. Insult people. (R)
9. Am not interested in other people’s problems. (R)
10. Feel little concern for others. (R)

## **Appendix B: Altruism Survey**

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

1. Make people feel welcome.
2. Anticipate the needs of others.
3. Love to help others.
4. Am concerned about others
5. Have a good word for everyone.
6. Look down on others. (R)
7. Am indifferent to the feelings of others. (R)
8. Make people feel uncomfortable. (R)
9. Turn my back on others. (R)
10. Take no time for others. (R)

## **Appendix C: Benevolent Sexism Scale**

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

1. A good woman should be set on a pedestal.
2. Women should be cherished and protected by men.
3. Men should sacrifice to provide for women.
4. In a disaster, women need to be rescued first. (R)
5. Women has a superior moral sensibility.
6. Women have a quality of purity few men possess.
7. Women have a more refined sense of culture and taste.
8. Every man ought to have a woman he adores.
9. Men are complete without women. (R)
10. Despite accomplishment, men are incomplete without women.
11. People are often happy without a heterosexual romance. (R)

## **Appendix D: Hostile Sexism Survey**



Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

1. Women exaggerate problems at work.
2. Women are too easily offended.
3. Most women interpret innocent remarks as sexist.
4. When women lose fairly, they claim discrimination.
5. Women seek special favors under the guise of equality.
6. Feminists are making reasonable demands. (R)
7. Feminists are not seeking more power than men. (R)
8. Women seek power by gaining control over men.
9. Few women tease men sexually. (R)
10. Once a man commits, she puts him on a tight leash.
11. Women fail to appreciate all men do for them.

## **Appendix E: Moral Foundations Theory Survey**

Directions: Part 1. When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? Please rate each statement using this scale:

[0] = not at all relevant (This consideration has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong)

[1] = not very relevant

[2] = slightly relevant

[3] = somewhat relevant

[4] = very relevant

[5] = extremely relevant (This is one of the most important factors when judge right and wrong)

1. Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
2. Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
3. Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country
4. Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority
5. Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
6. Whether or not someone was good at math
7. Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
8. Whether or not someone acted unfairly
9. Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group
10. Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society
11. Whether or not someone did something disgusting

12. Whether or not someone was cruel
13. Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
14. Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
15. Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder
16. Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

Directions: Part 2. Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement.

1. Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.
2. When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.
3. I am proud of my country's history.
4. Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.
5. People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.
6. It is better to do good than to do bad.
7. One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.
8. Justice is the most important requirement for a society.
9. People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.
10. Men and women each have different roles to play in society.
11. I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.
12. It can never be right to kill a human being.

13. I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.
14. It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.
31. If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.
32. Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.

## **Appendix F: Spirituality Survey**

Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

1. Believe in a universal power of God.
2. Am a spiritual person.
3. Keep my faith even during hard times.
4. Have spent at least 30 minutes in the last 24 hours in prayer.
5. Am who I am because of my faith.
6. Believe that each person has a purpose in life.
7. Know that my beliefs make my life important.
8. Do not practice any religion. (R)
9. Do not believe in a universal power or a God. (R)

## **Appendix G: Compassion Survey**



Directions: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

1. Feel others' emotions.
2. Inquire about others' well-being.
3. Sympathize with others' feelings.
4. Take an interest in other people's lives.
5. Like to do things for others.
6. Am not interested in other people's problems. (R)
7. Can't be bothered with other's needs. (R)
8. Am indifferent to the feelings of others. (R)
9. Take no time for others. (R)
10. Don't have a soft side. (R)

## **Appendix H: Demographics Survey**

Directions: Please select one (or more) of the corresponding responses to each question.

1. Please specify your gender.

- Male
- Female

2. Please specify your ethnicity.

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- African American or Black
- Hispanic or Latino
- White
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-35
- 35-49
- 50+

4. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?

- Some college
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree

- Professional degree
  - Doctorate degree
5. What is your marital status?
- Single, never married
  - Married or domestic partnership
  - Widowed
  - Divorced
  - Separated
6. What is your religious preference?
- Christian
  - Islamic
  - Jewish
  - Buddhist
  - Hindu
  - Atheist
  - None
7. What is your political affiliation?
- Republican
  - Democrat
  - Conservative
  - Independent
  - Other

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