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INTERNALIZED MISOGYNY: THE PATRIARCHY INSIDE OUR HEADS

Maria Evteeva, M.Sc.
University of the Balearic Islands, Spain

Faculty Sponsors:

Lucrecia Burges, Ph.D.
University of the Balearic Islands, Spain

Tomeu Sales Gelabert, Ph.D.
University of the Balearic Islands, Spain

Abstract

Misogyny refers to the hatred towards women, based on the belief that they are inferior to men. This cultural practice upholds the power of the dominant male group by oppressing and subordinating women (Findlay & Piggott, 2005). Internalized sexism, fueled by misogyny, occurs when women adopt learned sexist behaviors towards themselves and other women (Bearman et al., 2009). It results in perpetuating sexist attitudes among women, reinforcing the male-dominated culture, and sustaining the patriarchal system through the promotion of horizontal oppression against their own gender. This article shows the origins of internalized misogyny as a form of psychological oppression. It provides examples of its various manifestations in women and explores the impact of internalized misogyny on women's mental health and its negative repercussions on society. Additionally, the article proposes potential solutions to address this issue, including a psychological self-awareness approach and the application of the Feminist Therapy framework.

Keywords: misogyny, sexism, internalized misogyny, gender, women, feminist therapy

AUTHOR NOTE: Please address all correspondence to Maria Evteeva, Department of Social Philosophy, University of the Balearic Islands, Carretera de Valldemossa, km 7.5, Nord, 07122 Palma, Mallorca, Spain.
Email: maria.evteeva@uib.cat

INTRODUCTION

The importance of a feminist gender perspective within the field of social sciences has been emphasized by feminist scholars since the 1960s. According to Haraway, science and its methodologies are deeply influenced by patriarchal dominance and have historically been employed to suppress women's liberation, as they merely reflect the sexist realities of our societal framework (Haraway, 1978). Given that the ideas of the ruling group and societal class tend to prevail within a given society (Marx & Engels, 1974), it is only by fostering a comprehensive and conscious understanding of the dualistic bias inherent in existing gender norms that a transformative process can be initiated. Consequently, disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, and psychology, which are rooted in Western modernity, develop theories concerning human nature that not only lend scientific legitimacy to the prevailing hierarchical gender system but also neglect its inherently political nature (Mendez, 2007). Therefore, it becomes imperative to critically examine and deconstruct the gender norms perpetuated by Western colonial disciplines which reinforce existing power structures and hierarchies.

Drawing on the Gramscian notion of self-awareness as a result of historical processes, which enables the cultivation of a critical consciousness (Gramsci, 1971), it is a feminist task and imperative to escape the patriarchy's conceptual prison and develop a feminist framework and approach (Haraway, 1978). A genuine pursuit of a more egalitarian future can only be achieved through the augmentation of feminist awareness and the reconstruction of the foundations of the social sciences. As Audre Lorde asserted in her work from 1984, "The master's tools will never dismantle the Master's House" (Lorde, 2007, p. 112). Consequently, the sciences ought to be reimagined as politically engaged social practices that renounce aspirations of detached knowledge assessment and an "objective" world (Rouse, 1996). Instead, a critical approach should be cultivated in order to advocate for the rights of the oppressed.

Group-level inequalities in society are established and maintained through systems of oppression (Marx & Engels, 1974). Differences between people, especially those related to gender, race, or class, always serve as sufficient justification to divide people into groups and maintain social power coercively (Bearman et al., 2009). Internalized oppression manifests as the acceptance and endorsement of oppressive beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors by members of marginalized groups, effectively transforming the victims of oppression into actual collaborators of the system.

Assigned gender is one of the main dualistic concepts that separate people in society. According to the WHO, sex refers to "the biological and physiological characteristics of people, while gender is defined as the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys" (World Health Organization, n.d., paras. 1-3). Extensive scientific data demonstrates that there is no biological basis for behavioral differences between men and women (Bleier, 1984) and that gender serves as a socially constructed classification system based on the dualistic concept of masculinity and femininity (Kosut,

2012). In the patriarchal social order, masculinity is related to power, superiority, and high status, while femininity is related to a weaker social position, with a lack of political, social, and economic power, resulting in exposure to discrimination and oppression of women (Sakalli-Uğurlu, 2003).

Historically, the gender binary has facilitated oppression by delineating cultural constructs as inherent male and female characteristics, thereby justifying hierarchical relationships as natural and establishing regulations that disapprove of or punish deviations from these socially constructed norms (Bleier, 1984). According to Wittig (1982), the social categories of male and female merely serve to conceal the reality that social differences are always intertwined with political, economic, and ideological structures (Wittig, 1982). It is also crucial to recognize that gender beliefs and stereotypes may vary across cultures and historical periods, but they consistently align with the prevailing cultural norms (Worell & Remer, 1996).

As argued by Bleier (1984), the concept of female nature, encompassing qualities such as nurturing, passivity, dependence, weakness, intuition, lack of intellectual capacity, and obligatory heterosexuality, serves to ensure women's adherence to the roles and functions assigned to them within the patriarchal order. Recent research, exemplified by Cerbara et al. (2022), has provided evidence that gender stereotypes are pervasive and can already be observed among young children. The study, which involved children aged 8-11, demonstrated that even at a young age, children internalize gender roles and develop their gender identity in accordance with societal expectations. They passively accept gender stereotypes that portray women as less competent and independent, while presenting men as lacking sensitivity and expressiveness.

Because gender is socially constructed and not related to biological function, both cisgender and transgender women experience its oppression. Moreover, the intersectionality of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991) means that gender, class, and sexual orientation can exacerbate its severity. Jan Morris, in her autobiography discussing her transition from male to female, eloquently captures this experience: "The more I was treated as a woman, the more woman I became… I discovered that even now men prefer women to be less able, less talkative, and certainly less self-centered than they are themselves; so I generally obliged them" (Morris, 1974). The animosity towards trans women in society is rooted in the perception of masculinity as "strong and natural" and femininity as "weak and artificial" (Serano, 2019, as cited in Brogaard, 2020, p. 94). Internalized misogyny can be experienced by cisgender and transgender women alike due to the fact that all women are survivors under the patriarchy, as they have faced specific challenges as a result of being women in a society that devalues everything related to their gender (Worell & Remer, 1996).

Misogyny, defined as the deep-seated aversion or hostility towards women, operates as a cultural practice deeply entrenched within societal structures. It serves as a powerful tool for the maintenance and reinforcement of patriarchal power dynamics. As

highlighted by Findlay and Piggott (2005), misogyny plays a crucial role in upholding the power of the dominant male group by perpetuating the oppression and subordination of women. This systemic devaluation of women within society enables the hegemonic patriarchal system to not only maintain its existing power but also to continuously expand and strengthen its influence (Worell & Remer, 1996). Through various mechanisms misogyny reinforces the notion of male superiority while marginalizing and disempowering women. Consequently, women are often relegated to subordinate roles and denied access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes, thereby perpetuating a hierarchical social order that privileges the interests and perspectives of men.

It is crucial to recognize that misogyny is not simply an incidental outcome of patriarchal systems. Instead, it functions as a core mechanism that maintains and strengthens patriarchal power structures. Misogyny achieves this through the imposition of gender roles, the legitimization of male privilege, the justification of gender-based violence, the restriction of women's agency, and the perpetuation of systemic discrimination and inequality. Consequently, misogyny serves to perpetuate the subjugation and oppression of women within society.

Internalized misogyny occurs when women apply learned sexist behaviors to themselves and other women (Bearman et al., 2009). This results in the reproduction of misogynistic attitudes by women toward other women, reinforcing the central male culture through the horizontal oppression of their own gender.

Because internalized misogyny contributes to maintaining an unequal society where women are oppressed, it is important to understand, address, and confront its existence.

Oppression and Misogyny

Oppression occurs when one group has greater access to power and privileges than another and uses it to maintain a status quo via the dominance over the other group (David, 2014). It is marked by unequal power dynamics that involve the dominance of one group over another, leading to subordination and/or resistance. Dominant groups wield their power by restricting access to resources and fostering fear or feelings of inferiority among those who are subordinate (Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996). This unequal distribution of power and resources creates systemic barriers that limit the opportunities and life chances of the oppressed group while reinforcing the advantages and privileges of the dominant group. Oppression can be related to various social factors and intersecting axes of privilege and disadvantage, such as race and ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, or ability. This intersection amplifies the marginalization encountered by individuals who belong to multiple oppressed groups as they experience oppression differently based on the intersection of their identities.

Misogyny is defined as the negative attitudes, contempt, and hostility directed towards women and it can manifest itself verbally, socially, and culturally, and is deeply rooted in a binary understanding of masculinity and femininity (Gargam & Lançon, 2020). The history of misogyny can be traced back to ancient Greece. For instance, in Greek mythology, female characters such as the Harpies, the Furies, the Gorgons, or the Sirens embody the evil nature of women. They are depicted as ferocious and lethal beings who lure men to their perilous demise (Gargam & Lançon, 2020). Greek philosophers also depicted women as weaker, less intelligent, and less virtuous than men. This is exemplified by Aristotle's assertion that "The male is inherently superior and the female is inferior, with the male being the ruler and the female being the subject" (Aristotle, 1944, 1.1254b).

During the Medieval period, there was a consolidation of misogynistic rhetoric that portrayed women negatively. Most of the medieval texts, in line with the Western tradition, perpetuated the notion of a connection between women and "Evil," darkness, imperfection, filth, lust, deceit, sickness, and the destruction of men (Caballé, 2019). The Bible also employs the myth of Eve's Original Sin to equate all women with the devil and hold them responsible for the suffering experienced by men. The significant influence of the Bible throughout the Medieval Ages played a pivotal role in firmly establishing misogynistic beliefs within society (Bosch et al., 1999). Throughout Western history, from Aristotle to Freud, the belief that women are inferior to men in all aspects has been a generally accepted standard (Bosch et al., 1999), serving as a justification for the control and oppression that women have endured at the hands of men. Moreover, these ideas have become deeply ingrained in the development of modern sciences and have been presented as natural, thus rationalizing the subordinate status of women in society.

Manne (2019) argues that misogyny can be best understood as a political phenomenon. More specifically, misogyny is a pervasive system that operates within the patriarchal social order, serving to monitor and reinforce the subordination of women while upholding the dominance of males (Manne, 2019). It is, therefore, both a state and a process and it entails both a psychological and a political dimension of oppression.

Brogaard (2020) differentiates two categories of misogyny: hate-based and contempt-based. She argues that misogyny is not inherently directed towards all women, but rather towards women who defy the norms of the patriarchy. Therefore, women who do not conform to the historical ideal of femininity and who step out of the traditional caretaking, nurturing, submissive role will be victims of hate-based misogyny (Brogaard, 2020). Contempt-based misogyny can be observed in the general view of women through gender stereotypes that regard them as inherently inferior, morally corrupt, incompetent, or ignorant (Brogaard, 2020).

In our contemporary postmodern neoliberal society, misogyny may be less overtly apparent than in the past, yet its existence remains prevalent. A clear illustration of this is the considerable opposition to the feminist movement in recent years, after the emergence of the #MeToo phenomenon in 2017. A vigorous counteroffensive launched by the

prevailing patriarchal order has led to the devaluation of feminism and a resurgence of traditional conservative norms and legislation. It has been argued that apprehension towards the feminist movement, as well as other progressive values pursued in the pursuit of a democratic and equitable society, has reignited the hegemonic neoliberal forces in their struggle for dominance (Riutort, 2021). The anti-feminist backlash, as argued by Faludi (1991), has been triggered not by the actual achievement of equality by women, but rather by the potential for them to attain it.

Far-right and conservative groups have bolstered their discourses and practices by articulating and promoting ideas surrounding order and authority, security and morality, and the significance of the patriarchal family and order in response to what they perceive as a "dangerous progressive new culture" (Riutort, 2021, p. 68). This is deeply troubling as it presents a direct threat to democratic values and human rights within our society. The promotion of patriarchal family structures serves to reinforce existing gender norms, where men are expected to assume the role of primary breadwinners and hold positions of power, while women are confined to domestic responsibilities and are expected to prioritize caregiving and homemaking. Consequently, this perpetuates gender inequality by limiting women's access to education, employment opportunities, and decision-making power both within the household and in society as a whole. The perpetuation of traditional gender roles not only restricts women's autonomy but also reinforces the societal hierarchy that places men in positions of power and privilege. Additionally, conservative groups often advocate for policies and legislation that curtail women's reproductive rights, such as limiting access to contraception, abortion, and comprehensive sexual education. This encroaches upon women's autonomy and bodily integrity, denying them the right to make choices regarding their own bodies and reproductive health. The reinforcement of traditional gender roles and patriarchal family structures also contributes to the normalization of gender-based violence, as these ideologies justify male authority and control within the family and condone or excuse such violence, perpetuating a culture of impunity and silencing survivors. Ultimately, far-right rhetoric frequently excludes LGBTQ+ individuals and families due to their "non-traditional" nature, thereby perpetuating their discrimination and marginalization within society. Authoritarian and conservative groups have a long history of opposing LGBTQ+ rights initiatives, such as marriage equality and anti-discrimination laws, and denying them the same rights and protections afforded to heterosexual and cisgender individuals.

Misogyny permeates various aspects of human life, exhibiting itself as a pervasive force underpinning the patriarchal social order and the existing power dynamics. The extent of its manifestation may vary across cultures, religions, as well as intersect with other forms of oppression tied to class, race, sexual orientation, or identity. Its omnipresence is evident across multiple dimensions of society, including art, common beliefs, education, politics, science, and general values. Without misogyny, the power of the hegemonic patriarchy would be weakened, and therefore the ruling system must systematically perpetrate this

oppression to maintain control over one part of the population. This is the reason why the forces maintaining the patriarchy are extremely violent and belligerent against the feminist movement. Feminism poses a real threat to the patriarchal system as it questions and condemns its structures by highlighting the inherent inequalities and injustices that have long been overlooked. It also empowers women, making them aware of their oppression and giving them tools to resist it as a group. According to Dworkin (1983), feminism is a hated political philosophy because it represents the liberation movement of women, and anti-feminism is a direct expression of misogyny. In other words, "Feminism is hated because women are hated" (Dworkin, 1983, p. 195).

Misogyny and Sexism

The terms misogyny and sexism are often used interchangeably, although some scholars distinguish between them, while others argue that they are two sides of the same coin. According to Manne (2019), misogyny can be understood as the enforcement arm of a patriarchal system, responsible for regulating and upholding its prevailing norms and expectations. On the other hand, sexism can be seen as the ideological component of patriarchy, serving to rationalize and justify social norms and relationships based on male dominance (Manne, 2019). In essence, misogyny represents the fundamental belief that women are inferior to men and should be treated accordingly, whereas sexism denotes the observable manifestations of this belief.

Notwithstanding, Brogaard (2020) argues that while Manne's framework and definition are applicable to hateful misogyny, they do not adequately encompass contempt-based misogyny. As such, she suggests that misogyny and sexism are overlapping categories (Brogaard, 2020). It is worth noting that the term "misogyny" was initially coined in the 17th century (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), whereas "sexism," which refers to disrespectful attitudes towards women, was created by Pauline M. Leet, a college student at Franklin and Marshall College, in 1965 (Shapiro, 1985). Consequently, Brogaard argues that sexism and misogyny are not diametrically opposed, but rather share similarities, with misogyny being a specific form of sexism characterized by hatred or contempt towards women (Brogaard, 2020).

Sexism can affect both men and women, manifesting itself in various ways such as gender stereotypes. These stereotypes are characterized by erroneous beliefs and prejudiced attitudes that influence the expected behavior of individuals based on their gender. Consequently, deviating from these norms may lead to social repercussions. However, misogyny exclusively targets women, as it is rooted in a profound hostility towards femininity and females. Richardson-Self (2018) argues that sexism encompasses a "justificatory component" wherein it offers rationales for the belief that men inherently possess superiority over women, thus idealizing and endorsing a patriarchal gender hierarchy. Conversely, misogyny is characterized by its "hostility component" (Richardson-Self, 2018). It is due to this rationale that sexism can be categorized into two

forms: "benevolent" and "hostile." Benevolent sexism represents a seemingly well-intentioned and positive manifestation of misogyny, whereas hostile sexism denotes an aggressive and negative expression (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Internalized Misogyny and Self-Hatred

Internalized misogyny in women refers to the internalized feelings of self-hatred that perpetuate the belief in their own inferiority to men and the unjust denial of their entitlement to equal rights (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014). This phenomenon is fueled by contempt or animosity towards women who deviate from societal expectations associated with femininity, as well as a general disdain for women based on the unfounded notion of their inherent inferiority and "filthy nature" (Brogaard, 2020). The psychological phenomenon of self-hatred has been extensively researched in various marginalized communities, including Jews and African Americans. For instance, during the Second World War, there was a notable prevalence of self-hatred among Jews, with many leaving their community and some even forming a Jewish group to support the Nazi regime in Germany (Lewin, 1948). Similarly, studies have examined in-group self-hatred within the black community. Jost and Banaji (1994) emphasize the significance of recognizing the role of stereotyping as a mechanism for justifying existing power structures. By internalizing stereotypes that validate the prevailing power dynamics through false consciousness, oppressed groups have been found to exhibit self-hatred and discrimination toward their own group, thereby rationalizing the system and obeying the hegemonic rules.

Self-hatred is therefore a psychological phenomenon that emerges in marginalized groups as they internalize and conform to the oppressive norms imposed upon them by society. According to Lewin (1948), individuals in underprivileged groups are compelled to remain within their social group, which fosters animosity and shame. These individuals view the dominant privileged group as too powerful to confront, leading them to redirect their aggression towards their own group or themselves. Cowan et al. (1998) argue that members of oppressed groups often attribute the source of their problems to their own perceived shortcomings, which can result in a transfer of dissatisfaction from themselves to their group. Similarly, when women experience dissatisfaction with themselves due to negative stereotypes associated with femininity in society, this discontent may extend to other women (Cowan et al., 1998).

Women are considered a "majority-minority" due to their marginalized position and subjugation within the patriarchal system, despite being a numerical majority in the population. According to Wirth, a minority group is defined as: "Any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination" (Wirth, 1945, as cited in Hacker, 1951, p. 60). Consequently, women experience internalized misogyny because they belong to an oppressed group and express it as a tendency to denigrate other members of the group

through acceptance of the dominant group's stereotypical perception of them. The repeated exposure to societal messages and daily interactions that emphasize their inferiority ultimately leads to their acceptance of this belief as a factual reality (Hacker, 1951). As a result, women undermine their own self-worth (Cowan et al., 1998) and perpetuate a cycle of self-deprecation that further reinforces the systemic oppression they encounter.

In the hegemonic patriarchal system, women are perceived as the "weaker gender" and lack genuine power. As a result, they often embrace male values in order to attain significance and purpose (Dworkin, 1983). To protect themselves, many women choose to either overlook their oppressed status in society or rationalize it. These coping mechanisms allow them to avoid confronting the harsh reality and justify the injustices that they suffer. Dworkin (1983) argues that women frequently conform to the dictates of patriarchy and choose to internalize its values as a means of self-preservation, rather than challenging the system, as "the powerless need the powerful" (Dworkin, 1983). By adapting their behavior to align with male expectations and the patriarchal hierarchy, women may experience psychological relief in the present moment, but they ultimately perpetuate their own oppression and maintain the status quo. This is why numerous women resort to internalized misogyny as a psychological defense mechanism, which helps them navigate a world characterized by oppression. They internalize the belief in their own inferiority, and while some women question this disturbing feeling, others simply ignore or deny it (Millett, 2000).

Women's animosity against each other based on misogyny is also an impediment to their collective struggle because it promotes competition rather than shared cooperative goals and sustains myths that justify and disregard violence against women (Cowan et al., 1998). This can be clearly observed in the so-called "victim-blaming" behavior often seen on social media, where victims of rape or murder are criticized and accused by other women of "provoking" aggressive male behavior towards them, deserving punishment. Studies have also discovered a significant correlation between sexist beliefs and the acceptance of rape myths in both men and women (Angelone et al., 2021).

Ultimately, misogyny operates as a control system over women within the patriarchy, and those who disobey its laws are punished. This control mechanism is deeply ingrained in societal structures, perpetuating harmful gender norms and limiting women's autonomy. The fear of repercussions for defying these norms often keeps women compliant with oppressive standards, further reinforcing the cycle of misogyny. By supporting sexism and misogyny, women maintain their own low-status position (Becker, 2010) and perpetuate the status quo. As such, it is essential to understand how internalized misogyny operates and define the obstacles that prevent women from collaborating while continuing to support their own oppression. By acknowledging and addressing these barriers, women can build stronger alliances, amplify their voices, and collectively challenge the systems that perpetuate their oppression.

How Does Internalized Misogyny Operate?

Chesler (2001) argues that to understand how internalized misogyny functions, it is important to admit that women are not less sexist than men and to not idealize them, but rather accept them as human beings who "are capable of both compassion and cruelty, cooperation and competition, selfishness and altruism" (Chesler, 2001, p. 21). This acknowledgment is essential in addressing the complexities of internalized misogyny and dismantling its pervasive influence. By recognizing the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, women can begin to challenge the ingrained biases and harmful beliefs that have been internalized over time.

Internalized misogyny can be observed in different types of behaviors in women. Bearman and Amrhein (2014) define six kinds of its expression:

Powerlessness — whereby women believe themselves to be more limited and less capable than they actually are.
Objectification — whereby women come to think of themselves as bodies seen from the outside.
Loss of self — whereby women fail to recognize or sacrifice their own needs and desires.
Invalidation — whereby women discount their own feelings and thoughts, specifically when they don't match male standards.
Derogation — whereby women use criticism as a form of gender role policing.·
Competition between women — whereby other women take the blame for the limited resources and hardships imposed by sexism (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014).

Another point that can be added to this list is the passive acceptance of gender roles (Dehlin, 2019).

Internalized powerlessness can be linked to the psychological phenomenon of "learned helplessness" (Rosellini & Seligman, 1976) when individuals, after repeated exposure to negative events, experience passive resignation even in cases when a solution is possible. Women who experience learned helplessness often perceive themselves as weaker than they truly are, resulting in a reduced inclination to engage in activities that require acquiring new skills or pursuing more influential roles. This behavior can be directly linked to invalidation, that is, the tendency of women to discredit their own thoughts or achievements within a patriarchal system. While this phenomenon does not solely account for the underrepresentation of women in the field of science and positions of power, it can contribute to the occurrence of "imposter syndrome" among women who feel undeserving of recognition for their academic or professional accomplishments (Edwards, 2019).

Objectification was first articulated by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex as the phenomenon whereby women perceive themselves primarily from the perspective of

men, adopting what is commonly referred to as the male gaze (De Beauvoir, 1949). This process revolves around a heightened consciousness of how one's physical body is perceived by others, while simultaneously disregarding one's internal bodily experiences. Consequently, women who engage in self-objectification tend to define their self-value solely in terms of their outward appearance (Breines et al., 2008).

Self-sexualization is a phenomenon that is closely linked to self-objectification, wherein a woman's sense of self is contingent upon her perceived sexual desirability. This practice fosters a disconnection from the self as it reinforces the notion that the body exists solely for the purpose of being observed rather than experienced internally (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014). In the age of social media, self-objectification and sexualization have become increasingly prevalent in the lives of young girls who engage in self-objectifying behaviors through posting pictures and videos on these platforms, thereby associating their self-worth exclusively with their physical appearance. It is important to note that within a neoliberal capitalist system, such behavior is often portrayed as a form of empowerment for women, despite its perpetuation of sexist gender roles and reinforcement of oppressive structures.

The phenomenon referred to as "Loss of Self" manifests when women prioritize the needs of others over their own. This behavior is particularly prevalent among mothers, who often willingly leave their jobs or reduce their working hours to attend to their children. According to the findings of Deloitte's 2023 Women @ Work Survey, it is evident that women still bear the responsibility for 46% of childcare tasks at home, compared to just 34% for men (Parmelee & Codd, 2023). Furthermore, one-third of the survey respondents expressed the belief that they must prioritize their partner's career over their own. These circumstances contribute to women being confined to lower-paying, precarious jobs, typically in the care sector, resulting in diminished retirement pensions and perpetuating the ongoing phenomenon known as the "feminization of poverty."

Derogation and competition against other women are the most visible aspects of internalized misogyny because they are behaviors directed towards others. It is, therefore, the most analyzed expression of internalized misogyny in academia and literature, with numerous books written on the topic, such as Woman's Inhumanity to Woman (Phyllis Chesler), Right-Wing Women and Woman Hating (Andrea Dworkin), and Down Girl (Kate Manne). These publications contribute to the general public's understanding of internalized misogyny by illustrating its various forms, manifestations, and consequences. By examining how women participate in and perpetuate sexist practices, these works challenge prevailing narratives about gender and power, and call attention to the need for greater awareness, empathy, and solidarity among women in the fight against misogyny.

Hostile sexism encompasses various manifestations, including the utilization of aggressive language, sexist slurs, passive-aggressive conduct, victim-blaming, and denial. This type of behavior finds a receptive environment within women who have internalized misogynistic beliefs and values that are deeply ingrained due to societal and cultural

influences. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is observed in older women who have endured a lifetime of sexist mistreatment, as they frequently tend to criticize and stigmatize younger women who strive to advocate for gender equality and combat violence against women (Chesler, 2001). The misogyny ingrained in their behavior is a result of their internalization and justification of certain behaviors over the course of their lives.

It has also been argued that, from an evolutionary standpoint, women have developed more indirect forms of aggression, adopting a low-risk approach. This includes utilizing gossiping or shunning instead of direct physical aggression to regulate behavior, as well as displaying a higher degree of verbal aggression compared to men (Chesler, 2001). These behaviors are fueled by the internalized misogyny that exists within the beliefs of many women. Consequently, they can be damaging and hurtful, creating a toxic environment for women who challenge traditional gender roles or speak out against sexism. In summary, it is evident that women's aggression manifests in subtler ways, influenced by underlying societal factors and contributing to a detrimental atmosphere for gender equality.

Another manifestation of internalized misogyny can be observed in the paradoxical tendency for women to exhibit greater distrust towards other women than men. This phenomenon can be attributed to the historical dismissal of women's grievances and concerns as being "delusional, confusing, and dishonest" (Solnit, 2014). The preference for men over women and the attribution of more value to male occupations, values, or societal norms is a typical result of internalized misogyny. This preference stems from the fact that our society is organized in a way that inherently favors males, while women's needs are often considered secondary and supplementary (Han et al., 2023).

Animosity and distrust towards other women undermine female solidarity and perpetuate the status quo. When women mistrust other women, the potential for solidarity and group action is weakened, and feminist action and sisterhood, which are crucial for advancing gender equality and addressing issues such as sexism, discrimination, and violence against women, cannot take place. When distrust exists, it can fracture relationships and impede efforts to support and uplift one another. It also perpetuates the existing power imbalances between men and women. By doubting the validity of other women's experiences and perspectives, women may inadvertently reinforce patriarchal structures that marginalize and silence women's voices, thus perpetuating gender inequality and undermining women's ability to challenge and confront systems of oppression. Moreover, the consequences of women distrusting other women extend beyond interpersonal relationships to broader societal implications. For example, when women hesitate to support or advocate for one another, it can hinder progress towards achieving gender equality in various domains, including politics, economics, and social justice.

Studies have also shown that there is a greater tendency for aggression towards women who violate societal norms, such as feminists, career women, or sexually explicit women, because they are perceived as more threatening to patriarchal society and its

established roles and norms. In contrast, traditional women are seen as reinforcing these norms (Becker, 2010). Individuals who deviate from these sub-categories may experience internalized misogyny to a greater extent because they do not conform to the sexist societal norms and are therefore subject to punishment.

Brogaard (2020) categorizes female misogyny into four groups: "the Puritan, the Self-Hater, the Self-Contemner, and the She-Devil." Puritans hold animosity towards women who distance themselves from conventional feminine roles, while self-haters and self-contemners internalize self-hate and experience cognitive dissonance. She-Devils, on the other hand, view themselves as superior to other women and more akin to males (Brogaard, 2020).

In summary, internalized misogyny, characterized by the internalization of patriarchal beliefs and attitudes by women themselves, manifests as a diverse array of external manifestations and internalized emotions and behaviors that serve to reinforce and perpetuate the hegemony of male dominance within societal structures, thereby sustaining the systemic oppression of women within the patriarchal framework.

Methods: Internalized Misogyny and Mental Health

Various studies have demonstrated the dangers of internalized misogyny on women's mental health. For instance, Szymanski et al. (2009) have uncovered a positive correlation between internalized misogyny and psychological distress when combined with external sexism. Through an online survey utilizing the Daily Sexist Events Scale (Swim et al., 2001), the researchers examined the interplay between internalized misogyny, self-objectification, passive acceptance of traditional gender roles, and psychological distress in a sample of 274 heterosexual women. The study's findings align with the principles of Feminist Therapy Theory (Worell & Remer, 1996) by indicating that sexist events and internalized misogyny contribute to psychological distress among women (Szymanski et al., 2009).

In another study analyzing the psychological impact of self-objectification in women, McKinley and Hyde (1996) administered a survey consisting of the three OBC Scales (Surveillance, Body Shame, Appearance Control Beliefs) as well as eating attitude questionnaires to assess the correlation between body esteem and eating disorders. The findings of this study validated the hypothesis that body control beliefs rooted in sexism and misogyny exhibited a positive association with restricted disordered eating among young and middle-aged women (Moradi et al., 2005). This indicates that women who internalize societal standards of beauty and objectify themselves, often under the influence of sexist and misogynistic beliefs, are more likely to engage in restrictive disordered eating behaviors. In essence, the undue pressure to adhere to unattainable and idealized body standards, driven by societal sexism and misogyny, can contribute to the formation of unhealthy eating habits and negative body perceptions in women. The consequences of such behavior are extremely harmful not only to physical health but also to mental well-

being, social relationships, and overall quality of life. They also perpetuate societal norms that prioritize appearance over holistic and mental health and self-acceptance.

Women who engage in self-objectification also exhibit elevated levels of self-conscious body monitoring. This behavior intensifies their preoccupation with their external physical appearance and "disrupts the focus required to engage fully and effectively in an activity" (Breines et al., 2008, p. 583). As a result of dedicating time and effort to controlling their outward image, women may experience diminished concentration on other tasks and become attuned to perceiving themselves through a male gaze.

Self-objectification has been found to lead to feelings of shame and anxiety, reduced opportunities for experiencing high levels of motivation, and decreased awareness of internal body sensations (Breines et al., 2008). In a study by Moradi et al. (2005) that explored the link between self-objectification in women and symptoms of eating disorders based on the Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), the results were consistent with the predictions. The study revealed that women who internalize societal standards of beauty as sexual objects experience higher levels of body shame and are more prone to developing eating disorders (Moradi et al., 2005).

Through the process of self-objectification, women internalize societal beauty standards that are perpetuated by patriarchal norms and expectations. These standards dictate that a woman's value is contingent upon her physical appearance, leading women to constantly monitor and scrutinize their bodies in order to conform to these unrealistic ideals. This preoccupation with external appearance not only diverts women's attention away from other aspects of their lives but also reinforces the belief that their worth is inherently tied to their appearance. Consequently, this perpetuates a cycle of self-objectification and internalized misogyny.

Living under the constant scrutiny of the male gaze, women internalize feelings of shame and anxiety regarding their bodies, perceiving themselves through the lens of societal expectations and judgments. By devoting significant amounts of time to self-objectification and self-control, women allocate fewer resources to activities that could contribute to their personal freedom and independence. It is worth noting that self-care for women is frequently defined by beauty-related practices such as visits to salons or gyms, rather than activities that promote intellectual or professional empowerment. This narrow definition further perpetuates societal expectations that women should prioritize their appearance over their personal growth and development. By exclusively focusing on physical appearance, women are often discouraged from engaging in activities that could enhance their skills, knowledge, and overall well-being. It is crucial to encourage women to prioritize self-care that nurtures their intellect and professional growth, as this challenges limiting stereotypes, promotes feminist empowerment, and contributes to better mental health and a stronger societal position for women.

Findlay and Piggott (2005) originally developed the Internalized Misogyny Scale two decades ago, and it has subsequently been utilized in various studies with the objective

of examining this phenomenon in women. The scale was primarily employed in the initial study with lesbian women. It provides a better comprehension of the correlation between internalized misogyny and low self-esteem, feelings of depressed inadequacy, and psychological distress. To construct the online survey, items were adapted from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) and the Modern Sexism (Swim et al., 1995), and it was subsequently distributed within the lesbian community. The study presented evidence to support the notion that women who exhibit elevated levels of internalized misogyny experience increased rates of depression, decreased self-esteem, and heightened psychosexual challenges (Findlay & Piggott, 2005).

These findings imply that internalized misogyny has an impact not only on women's self-perceptions but also contributes to significant emotional and psychological challenges. Furthermore, Findlay and Piggott's research on the lesbian community underscores the intersectional aspect of internalized misogyny, as it affects women across diverse identities and lived experiences. Lesbian women, who already encounter marginalization and discrimination based on their sexual orientation, may be particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of internalized misogyny due to societal norms and expectations surrounding gender and sexuality.

Internalized misogyny has also been linked to higher emotional dependence on men and lower general life satisfaction, as women who look up to men for their own social identity may devalue other women because they see them as competitors (Cowan et al., 1998). Cowan et al. (1998) conducted three studies investigating women's hostility toward women and its association with personal and collective self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional dependence on men, intimacy, life satisfaction, and acceptance of interpersonal (gender) violence. The studies were conducted among a total of 447 college women using the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the Hostility Toward Women Scale (Check et al., 1985), and the Hostility Toward Men Scale (Check et al., 1985).

This study's findings indicated that internalized misogyny in women is negatively related to indices of positive psychological functioning and life satisfaction, as well as personal and collective self-esteem and self-efficacy. It is also positively related to acceptance of interpersonal violence and emotional dependence on men (Cowan et al., 1998). The study furthermore established that women with higher levels of self-esteem perceive themselves as more similar to other women, whereas women with lower levels of self-esteem perceive themselves as more dissimilar. This finding supports the theory that women, despite their reluctance to identify with other women in a patriarchal society, develop self-esteem issues due to their internalized misogynistic beliefs. In a society that upholds patriarchal norms, women internalize messages that undermine their own value, so it is not surprising that some women hold negative attitudes towards other women and exhibit hostility towards women as a whole (Cowan et al., 1998). It is without doubt that

the most powerful psychological weapon of the patriarchy is its universal character (Millett, 2000).

Bozkur (2020) also developed a tool, known as the Internalized Misogyny Scale for Women, to assess internalized sexism driven by misogyny. This scale is composed of five sub-dimensions: Self-Objectification, Derogation, Loss of Self/Internalized Powerlessness, Competition/Self-Separation, and Male Prioritization (Bozkur, 2020). Through validity and reliability analyses, the scale has been demonstrated to be a valid and reliable measurement tool. Consequently, it has been utilized in studies examining the impact of internalized sexism in women alongside other variables (Bozkur, 2020).

Further on, Bozkur and Cig (2022) designed a descriptive and relational study aiming to examine the feeling of guilt experienced by working mothers of young children and the relationship of this feeling with internalized misogyny. The study was designed as an online survey using the Maternal Employment Guilt Scale (Yüce-Selvi & Kantaş, 2019), the Internalized Sexism Scale (Bozkur, 2020), and a Demographic Information Form as data collection tools. It was carried out on a sample of 209 working mothers. The findings of the study revealed that maternal employment guilt was indeed positively related to the sub-dimensions of internalized sexism: loss of self and internalized powerlessness, self-objectification, derogation, and prioritizing men over women (Bozkur & Cig, 2022). This finding provides support for the notion that internalized misogyny is intricately linked to deeply entrenched traditional patriarchal gender roles, and functions as a mechanism of self-regulation in women when they perceive their behavior as deviating from the patriarchal norms of society.

Szymanski et al. (2009) also examined the relationship between internalized misogyny and two other forms of internalized sexism: self-objectification and passive acceptance of gender roles. An online survey was carried out on a sample of 274 self-identified heterosexual women using the Daily Sexist Events Scale (Swim et al., 2001), the Internalized Misogyny Scale (Findlay & Piggott, 2005), the Self-Objectification Questionnaire (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998), and the Feminist Identity Development Scale (Bargad & Hyde, 1991). Psychological distress was assessed using the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (Rosenberg, 2004). Conforming with the Feminist Therapy Theory (Worell & Remer, 1996), the findings of the study corroborated the fact that internalized misogyny exacerbates the relationship between sexist events and psychological suffering and distress among women (Szymanski et al., 2009). Henceforth, Szymanski and Henrichs-Beck (2014) have also approached the issue of internalized misogyny through a multiple oppression perspective by examining the correlation of external heterosexism, internalized heterosexism, and internalized sexism in sexual minority women via coping strategies. The study confirmed the relationship between the intersection of oppression and the more suppressive and reactive coping styles of behavior that women use due to internalized misogyny. Consequently, these coping styles have a detrimental impact on their psychological well-being (Szymanski & Henrichs-Beck, 2014).

Ultimately, Erenoğlu et al. (2023) conducted a study measuring the relationship between internalized misogyny and premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and dysmenorrhea. The study applied a descriptive and relational design to evaluate the variables. The study was based on previous literature that reported that most of the symptoms of PMS and dysmenorrhea arise from psychological and psychosomatic symptoms as well as negative attitudes toward women and menstruation (Erenoğlu et al., 2023). Using the Internalized Misogyny Scale (Findlay & Piggott, 2005) and Likert-style scales developed to measure dysmenorrhea and PMS syndrome, the study was carried out on 487 women. The study presented findings indicating a robust and significant correlation between premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and internalized misogyny. Specifically, heightened levels of internalized misogyny were found to be associated with an increase in PMS symptoms (Erenoğlu et al., 2023).

Based on the aforementioned studies, it is evident that internalized misogyny has a significantly negative impact on the mental health of women. These effects permeate various aspects of women's lives, affecting their self-perception, emotional well-being, and overall psychological functioning. Women who internalize misogynistic beliefs often struggle with low self-esteem, harboring feelings of worthlessness and self-deprecation as they internalize patriarchal beauty standards and measures of feminine self-worth.

Furthermore, internalized misogyny contributes to heightened levels of psychological distress and emotional turbulence among women. The pressure to conform to patriarchal expectations and gender norms can result in anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders as women navigate the conflicting demands and expectations imposed upon them by society. Internalized misogyny can also erode women's sense of agency and autonomy, constraining their ability to assert themselves, pursue their goals, and advocate for their needs and interests. Overall, the effects of internalized misogyny on women's mental health are profound and multifaceted, exerting a pervasive influence on women's self-concept, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships.

Results: Sisterhood and Breaking the Pattern

Is it possible to eradicate misogyny? The phenomenon is so widespread and deeply entrenched in patriarchal culture that it doesn't seem like an easy task. The status quo supported by misogyny is promoted and perpetuated by the hegemonic patriarchal neoliberal system, which permeates all facets of our existence. This system deceives women into believing that they are adversaries, fostering a lack of trust among women and portraying feminism as a movement that will bring unhappiness and rejection from men. Nevertheless, we can aspire to the notion of sisterhood and feminist theory can help implement gradual changes in society in order to decrease this feeling of self-hatred and lead us towards a more egalitarian future. Bearman and Amrhein (2014) contend that adopting a feminist approach to empower women and cultivate their awareness of this behavior would serve as an advantageous initial step. It is imperative to encourage women

to have faith in their own thoughts as a means to overcome internalized sexism (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014). This approach can be effectively implemented within the education system to bolster girls' self-assurance in expressing their viewpoints and increase their self-esteem.

Another crucial aspect of reducing internalized misogyny is the cultivation of solidarity and sisterhood among all women. According to Bearman and Amrhein (2014), fostering solidarity among women serves as a remedy for internalized sexism, which on the contrary fosters a sense of competition among them. Solidarity entails recognizing how sexism and misogyny impact all women and enables them to collectively address its consequences. This stands in contrast to the competitive mindset that suggests that not all women can fulfill their needs. Establishing solidarity and sisterhood requires acknowledging the harmful effects of internalized sexism and committing to mutual understanding and collaboration in order to pursue women's liberation and empowerment (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014).

Sisterhood helps women understand that their experiences are not unique and individual, but that all women suffer from oppression under the patriarchy. Understanding this can help develop a stronger feeling of solidarity, where women would be able to support each other instead of seeing each other as competitors fighting for limited resources. Refusing to consider other women as "hysterical," "crazy," or "bitches" and seeing them as allies instead of enemies can reinforce the feminist movement and help women unite to fight the hegemonic patriarchy.

Naturally, this will only be possible if women are able to understand what internalized misogyny is and how it operates. This does not imply that they should appreciate all women equally and approve of any sort of behavior from them. Nevertheless, by understanding why they have a deep-rooted hate towards their own gender, women can accept it and work through this feeling to decrease it through rationalization. Breaking the pattern by encouraging and supporting other women instead of criticizing them, for example, would allow women to decrease their levels of internalized misogyny and reduce this negative behavior.

In order to combat internalized misogyny effectively, Bearman and Amrhein (2014) propose some of the following approaches:

- Holding high standards for women
- Supporting women to find and express their anger about sexism
- Encouraging women to become leaders
- Helping women inhabit, rather than objectify, their own bodies
- Expecting women to prioritize themselves
- Validating women's ways
- Taking other women's feelings and concerns seriously
- Encouraging women to trust their own thinking and to find and share their voices
- Not criticizing, disparaging, or invalidating women

- Interrupting the derogation of women when seeing it
- Supporting women to collaborate with one another (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014).

Such behaviors can help decrease misogynistic behavior in women. They can be implemented through empowering practices and education, following, for example, Paulo Freire's conscientization theory. The concept of empowerment through education (*conscientization*) was introduced by Freire (1970) in his work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." Similarly to Gramsci, Freire argues that to achieve liberation, people should enact cultural action for conscientization, a form of self-awareness of a person as an individual within a society that oppresses them (Freire, 1970). As an educator, Freire focuses on the importance of developing a critical consciousness in oppressed individuals through a process of reflection and action (Lloyd, 1972). Such empowerment will provide them with the necessary mental strength and critical thinking skills to fight their internalized oppression. By establishing themselves as conscious subjects within society, the oppressed masses can undergo a passage from submersion in semi-intransitiveness to full emergence (Freire, 1970). Following Freire's theory, I argue that self-awareness achieved through education and personal development is a sine qua non-condition for women's personal emancipation and empowerment.

In her influential essay "One is Not Born a Woman" published in 1980, Monique Wittig also states that the awareness of oppression is not solely a response to confronting oppression, but rather "the comprehensive conceptual reassessment of the social world, its whole reorganization with new concepts" (Wittig, 2016, p. 52). To reorganize our society beyond the patriarchal framework, attaining a state of self-awareness necessitates a profound reevaluation of existing notions and principles.

In practice, following the Feminist Theory perspective in therapy, Worell and Remer (1996) have conceptualized how Empowerment Feminist Therapy (EFT) can be applied in the sphere of mental health to empower women and increase their self-awareness of living in an unequal society where they are oppressed. EFT was developed following the rise of women's consciousness-raising groups in the '70s as a response to the dissatisfaction of women with traditional treatment (Worell & Remer, 1996). In response to these concerns, new psychological approaches for women were developed and defined as feminist psychology. Feminist psychology acknowledges that women are an oppressed group under the patriarchy and emphasizes the need to empower them by making them aware of their position in society and the fact that they share this position with other women.

The principles of feminist psychological practice include attention to the diversity of women's personal and social identities, a consciousness-raising approach, an egalitarian relationship between client and therapist, and a women-valuing and self-validating process (Worell & Remer, 1996). Therefore, this empowerment model, unlike classical therapy, instead of assuming the patient should accept her situation in order to progress, focuses on the conscious-raising process of understanding one's oppression and promotes strength

through awareness to activate social change. By recognizing that all women are survivors in a patriarchal society (Worell & Remer, 1996), we can use Empowerment Feminist Therapy to raise awareness of internalized misogyny in women and help them recognize, analyze, and fight this phenomenon. By promoting feminist values such as sisterhood, mutual support among women, intersectionality, and self-care, this approach can have a positive effect on women and further instigate a change in society.

Han and Lee (2023) also consider that women's solidarity and sisterhood serve as prerequisites for social justice, and that addressing internalized misogyny can be a compelling tool for dismantling oppression. They propose the Feminist-Multicultural Orientation and Social Competencies model as a therapy framework for counselors working with women. The model gives importance to the self-assessment of counselors, who are encouraged to discover if they themselves suffer from internalized misogyny. With the assistance of standardized tests, counselors can reflect on how their own biases can impact the counseling process (Han & Lee, 2023). They should also fully understand the dynamics of internalized misogyny in clients and use effective skills and interventions based on feminist therapy in their sessions (Han & Lee, 2023). Mental health professionals are encouraged to empower their clients by making them aware of their position in society and the oppression they suffer. Some of these awareness techniques include "reversal questions," which involve making the client question the situation she is suffering by inviting her to a new perspective, imagining a gender-switch. Such questions begin with "what if" and increase the client's awareness of sexist messages that women internalize, such as valuing men or distrusting women (Han & Lee, 2023).

All feminist approaches highlight the high importance of action and social advocacy and consider the sociocultural factors that oppress women. They ensure that the suffering of women cannot be understood outside of their environmental context (Brown, 2018). Adopting these approaches can help women build self-awareness and empower themselves through the ability to recognize internalized misogyny and stand up to it. By connecting with other women as allies, we can mobilize resources, share experiences, and amplify voices to challenge patriarchal structures and advocate for gender equality. This collective empowerment fosters a sense of community and support, providing women with the strength and resilience to resist and dismantle oppressive systems.

Conclusions

This article provides an analysis of the underlying causes of internalized misogyny in women and its internal manifestations. Internalized misogyny, with its multifaceted nature, may initially evade recognition. However, its pervasive influence permeates all facets of our society, deeply rooted in the hegemonic patriarchal system in which we live. The ramifications of internalized misogyny are profound, impacting the mental well-being of women and perpetuating the systemic oppression they face. To envision a more egalitarian society where women are not regarded as inferior to men, it is imperative to

acknowledge and address the significance of misogyny. Regrettably, misogyny tends to be relegated to a secondary concern, as Manne (2019, p. 280) contends: “The fact that misogyny is killing girls and women, literally and metaphorically, clearly isn't enough to grip that many people.”

Misogyny is the cause of the atrocious femicides that we hear about every day, the extreme inequalities between men and women in the workplace and in private life (social reproduction), the alarming absence of fundamental human rights for women in numerous countries, and the frequent perpetration of war crimes specifically targeting women. Consequently, it is imperative to address internalized misogyny in order to promote women's empowerment, improve mental health outcomes, advance gender equality, foster inclusive communities, and challenge oppressive systems. By acknowledging and confronting internalized misogyny, women can play a role in establishing a more just and supportive environment to thrive and assert their rights. By analyzing this issue, we can identify and tackle the underlying factors that contribute to this behavior within women. I firmly believe that doing so will pave the way for a transformative shift in societal norms and structures.

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AUTHOR INFORMATION:

Maria Evteeva completed her B.S. in Humanities at the Open University and her Master's in Human Cognition and Evolution at the University of the Balearic Islands. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Human Cognition and Evolution at the University of the Balearic Islands (Spain). Her research focuses on gender studies, migration, and human cognition. She is a collaborator of the *PRAXIS* group, which specializes in political philosophy.

Address: Maria Evteeva, Department of Social Philosophy, University of the Balearic Islands, Carretera de Valldemossa, km 7.5, Nord, 07122 Palma, Mallorca, Spain.

Email: maria.evteeva@uib.cat

Lucrecia Burges is Associate Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of the Balearic Islands, Department of Philosophy. Lucrecia Burges has recognized three positive research periods evaluation by CNEAI. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of the Balearic Islands in 2001. She has served as visiting Professor at the University of California Irvine several times. She does research on moral philosophy, gender studies, evolutionary epistemology and sexual dimorphism. Lucrecia Burges is member of the research group PRAXIS in practical philosophy (UIB). Dra. Burges is the Director of the Laboratory of Human Systematics (LSH), University of the Balearic Islands (UIB). She has participated in thirteen national research projects mainly focused on philosophy and evolution. She is IP1 of the R + D + i Project 'Biological reproduction, social reproduction and public sphere' REPRODUCE, PID2020-115079RB-I00.
Address: Dr. Lucrecia Burges, Department of Social Philosophy, University of the Balearic Islands, Carretera de Valldemossa, km 7.5, Nord, 07122 Palma, Mallorca, Spain.
Email: lburges@uib.es

Tomeu Sales Gelabert is Assistant professor on Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of the Balearic Islands; Ph.D. in Philosophy. University of the Balearic Islands, 2009, Modernity, politics and globalization. The social and political theory of Ulrich Beck. He has taught in the Bachelor and the Degree of Philosophy. Doctor of Humanities and Social Sciences at the UIB (2009) with the thesis: Modernity, politics and globalization. The social and political theory of Ulrich Beck (excellent cum laude). Master's in Cognition and Human Evolution by UIB (2007). Degree in Philosophy by UIB (2003), Degree in Political Science and Administration at UNED (2020). He has enjoyed a FPI research grant from the Ministry of Education and Science (2005-2009). As part of the scholarship, he developed research staying at the Ludwig Maximinials Universität München (April-August 2007), under the direction of Prof. Ulrich Beck. Member of the Research Group Practical Philosophy (Praxis) of the Department of Philosophy and Social Work at UIB. Participated as research in I+D+I Projects. He has participated in several international, national and regional conferences as speaker.
Address: Dr. Tomeu Sales Gelabert, Department of Social Philosophy, University of the Balearic Islands, Carretera de Valldemossa, km 7.5, Nord, 07122 Palma, Mallorca, Spain.
Email: tomeu.sales@uib.es