

On the Origins of Misogyny*

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October 2022

Abstract

Misogyny and gender inequality have coexisted for thousands of years in societies all around the world. The result is persistently lower socio-economic outcomes for women. Levels of misogyny vary greatly across societies and individuals, due in no small part to different national histories. Using machine learning, and in particular, decision trees, we rank and quantify which historical variables are the most important in explaining contemporary misogyny, and show that geography is more relevant than cultural history for predicting contemporary misogyny. Specifically, the most important determinants are: the share of land in a temperate climate; the share of land in a temperate climate with no dry season; the share of folklore containing challenge or competition motifs; and the share of folklore containing power motifs. We further conclude that the individuals in countries with temperate histories differ systematically in terms of misogyny from those in countries with other histories. Moreover when designing fables to redress gender inequality, it would be effective to include motifs of challenge and competition.

Keywords: Gender, History, Misogyny, Machine learning

*We thank Klaus Ackermann, Sascha Becker, Paul Raschky and Joseph Vecci for comments and discussions. Authorship alphabetical. All authors contributed equally to this work.

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