

## Internalized Misogyny and Women's Autonomy: A Correlational Study Among Indian Women

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### ABSTRACT

This research synopsis delves into the concept of internalized misogyny and its negative impact on women's autonomy, particularly in the context of Indian society. Internalized misogyny occurs when women subconsciously adopt and reinforce sexist beliefs, often due to deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that uphold male dominance. This study aims to assess the extent of internalized misogyny among Indian women using the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) while evaluating their autonomy through the Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS). Using a correlational survey approach, the research will examine the connection between internalized misogyny and women's autonomy, focusing on participants aged 18 to 50. The anticipated findings suggest that higher levels of internalized misogyny are linked to reduced autonomy in women, emphasizing the importance of awareness programs to address this issue. This study seeks to deepen the understanding of how internalized misogyny shapes women's decision-making and self-perception, ultimately advocating for stronger support systems to help women reclaim their independence.

**Keywords:** *Internalized Misogyny, Autonomy, Women, Self-perception, Agency, Gender roles, Female body, Decision Making, Independence*

Internalized misogyny occurs when women absorb and express sexist beliefs about themselves and other women. This mindset is often reinforced by patriarchal structures that prioritize male dominance, creating a societal hierarchy where men are placed above all other genders.

Misogyny is deeply embedded in everyday life, often going unnoticed until it escalates into extreme attitudes that infringe upon women's rights over their own bodies. This ingrained sexism fosters an environment where women's autonomy is compromised, limiting their ability to make independent choices about their own physical well-being. (Balsam, 2022)

Historically, there has been a pattern of erasing the female body, which plays a major role in denying women ownership of their own bodies. This erasure isn't just an individual experience—it's a broader societal issue that upholds patriarchal norms and continues to restrict women's rights. The link between misogyny and the systemic denial of bodily autonomy further exacerbates this issue. Women are often subjected to rigid societal

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expectations about how they should behave and present themselves, reinforcing their marginalization and loss of control. (Balsam, 2022)

This historical erasure is deeply rooted in patriarchal societies that have long determined that women's bodies are of lesser value and, therefore, do not deserve the same attention or respect. This disregard is evident in various fields, including literature, medicine, and society as a whole.

The erasure of women is not a recent phenomenon; it has been ingrained in historical narratives where women's contributions have often been overlooked or diminished. A striking example is one of the earliest known works of science fiction, written by Mary Shelley. Initially published anonymously, her work highlights how female authors were frequently disregarded in literary and cultural spaces. It is likely that her novel was even considered for publication due to her privileged background as the daughter of a well-known philosopher. However, the circumstances of her life—being an unwed mother after a relationship with a married man—could have easily led to her work being erased or dismissed altogether. (IdeaSmith, 2025)

Medical neglect of the female body, particularly the clitoris, is another example of this long-standing disregard. For centuries, this vital organ was either omitted or misrepresented in anatomical literature, reflecting a wider pattern of indifference toward women's health. Even menstrual hygiene products, such as pads and tampons, were not properly tested with menstrual blood until recently. The materials used in these products also lacked thorough research, and only in recent years have studies begun to expose their potential toxic effects on women's health.

It wasn't until 1998—after 50 years of medical oversight—that Australian urologist Helen O'Connell published the first comprehensive study of the clitoris, accurately illustrating both its internal and external structures. Her research revealed that the clitoris has three times the number of nerve endings as the penis, a discovery that had astonishingly been overlooked for centuries. (Gordon, 2019)

Women are often socialized to prioritize others' needs over their own, a learned behavior that can make it difficult for them to advocate for themselves. This societal conditioning fosters feelings of inferiority and powerlessness, making it harder for women to challenge gender norms and assert their independence. Furthermore, patriarchal systems perpetuate cycles of trauma, passing restrictive beliefs from one generation to the next. (Gupta, 2023)

This inherited trauma reinforces self-doubt and limits autonomy, creating additional barriers to personal growth and decision-making. Rigid gender roles prevent women from fully expressing themselves and exploring their identities, forcing them into predefined expectations that restrict their potential. (Gupta, 2023)

Internalized misogyny affects women's choices across all aspects of life—personal, professional, and social. It can lead to self-doubt, diminished self-confidence, and hesitation to seize opportunities. Additionally, women may internalize unrealistic beauty standards and negative stereotypes about femininity, leading to body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. These internalized beliefs influence decisions about appearance, health, and self-care.

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Moreover, internalized misogyny can manifest in distrust of other women or a preference for male-dominated environments, which can negatively impact friendships and professional relationships. Instead of fostering solidarity, this dynamic can create unnecessary competition and isolation among women.

Eva Marriott-Fabre, the Standard Features Editor, discusses in her article how internalized misogyny often leads women to reject things traditionally associated with femininity—such as the color pink or long nails. Both students and faculty have shared how these ingrained biases impact their self-expression and interests. The “not like other girls” mentality stems from a patriarchal society that has systematically oppressed women, ingraining anti-female sentiments into their subconscious. Over time, this conditioning fuels a cycle of division among women, passed down through generations.

Internalized misogyny can also lead to self-objectification, where women begin to see themselves primarily as objects for others' gratification rather than as individuals with autonomy over their own bodies. This perspective can weaken their ability to make independent decisions regarding reproductive health, sexual consent, and overall well-being. The constant pressure to meet societal beauty standards can result in body dissatisfaction, reinforcing the idea that their bodies exist to be managed and perfected rather than embraced as their own.

As a result, many women feel pressured to engage in extreme behaviors—such as restrictive dieting or excessive grooming—in an attempt to align with unrealistic beauty norms. This not only compromises their autonomy but also influences their overall well-being and self-worth.

Internalized misogyny can also take a toll on mental health, contributing to anxiety and depression, which in turn affects decision-making and bodily autonomy. Women struggling with these psychological challenges may feel less empowered to take control of their own lives and bodies, further reinforcing cycles of oppression.

At some point, women may shift from being victims of patriarchal internalized misogyny to unknowingly perpetuating it. This transformation occurs as societal stereotypes become deeply ingrained, shaping perspectives in areas like film, television, and social media. It's striking how female characters are often subjected to intense scrutiny, while their male counterparts typically escape such judgment. Our culture has grown accustomed to critiquing women in every aspect of their lives, fostering a sense of dissatisfaction with their achievements.

A recent example of this is the backlash faced by Millie Bobby Brown, the young actress known for her role in *Stranger Things*. After appearing at an awards event, she received widespread online criticism for her makeup and outfit choices, with detractors claiming she looked too mature for her age and urging her to dress more conservatively. The situation escalated to the point where Millie had to publicly defend herself and other women facing similar scrutiny. This incident reflects a broader societal issue—women, especially in the public eye, often find their appearances scrutinized far more than their talents or achievements, and, disappointingly, many of these criticisms come from other women.

Patriarchal values are so deeply embedded in our collective mindset that even when they are challenged in literature and media, they often fail to spark meaningful change. Many people

insist they would never engage in harmful behavior, especially against women, yet societal norms continue to reinforce these biases. There is something both compelling and unsettling about witnessing these dynamics from an external perspective. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood vividly illustrates how systemic misogyny is reinforced through institutional oppression and rigid gender roles, showing how even women themselves can become enforcers of patriarchal norms.

While it's often believed that women will always support each other in times of need, this isn't always the case. The dystopian world of Gilead serves as a reflection of real-life scenarios where women, sometimes unknowingly, internalize and uphold patriarchal values. This can lead to weakened solidarity, emotional harm, and the normalization of violence—paralleling many issues seen in today's world.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Deterioration of Agency*

Subtle forms of misogyny, often embedded within cultural norms and everyday interactions, can gradually erode a woman's sense of agency. As these messages become internalized, women may feel less inclined to assert their rights or advocate for themselves, ultimately diminishing their ability to make independent choices. Misogyny often fosters a perception of women as passive objects rather than individuals with full autonomy. This mindset can strip women of their sense of control, making it harder for them to articulate and pursue their own needs and desires. (Lundquist & Adams, 2023)

Women who internalize misogynistic beliefs may struggle with issues of self-worth and autonomy. This inner conflict can make it even more difficult to resist patriarchal norms. While some women who have experienced violence still manage to assert their autonomy, their choices are often misinterpreted or dismissed by others. This invalidation can reinforce feelings of inadequacy and a reliance on external validation, further entrenching patriarchal influences. (Goodmark, 2009)

When women are reduced to mere objects in society's eyes, their ability to make independent decisions is significantly compromised. Covert misogyny, which often appears in subtle and insidious ways, can leave women feeling confused and uncertain about their own agency. This self-doubt can undermine their confidence, making it difficult for them to recognize and assert their rights. Because these forms of misogyny are often difficult to detect, women may unknowingly internalize them, leading to deeper forms of oppression. Misogyny exists on a spectrum, from overt discrimination to more subtle, covert expressions, both of which contribute to an ongoing sense of ambivalence in women's experiences with autonomy. This uncertainty can blur their understanding of their rights, making it harder for them to navigate their choices with confidence. (Lundquist & Adams, 2023)

#### *A Vicious Cycle*

Internalized misogyny refers to the deeply ingrained sexism that women absorb and then project onto other women. This mindset becomes an intrinsic part of one's identity, shaped by societal conditioning from an early age. It influences how women think, speak, and behave, often reinforcing the belief that men hold a position of superiority. The psychological weight of internalized misogyny is not something that can be easily discarded—it lingers, shaping perspectives and interactions throughout life. (Kyaio, 2016)

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Women often play a role in enforcing patriarchal norms by regulating each other's choices—whether it's their clothing, career paths, or decisions about motherhood. This can manifest in behaviors like slut-shaming, criticizing women who choose not to have children, or dismissing traditionally feminine interests as trivial or unimportant.

There is ongoing debate about whether feminism is solely about the freedom to choose. Some argue that even if a woman makes a decision that aligns with patriarchal expectations, the mere fact that she made the choice autonomously makes it a feminist act. For instance, if a woman decides to take her fiancé's last name after marriage, some might justify it by saying, "Since it's her personal choice, it qualifies as a feminist decision." (McKelle, 2014)

However, not all choices can automatically be considered feminist, and not every decision is made with full autonomy. Simply identifying as a feminist does not mean every action one takes aligns with feminist principles. There is a misconception that being a feminist inherently validates all choices as feminist acts, but this is not the case. Feminism is not a perfect, all-encompassing ideology that prevents individuals from participating in behaviors that may contradict its core values. People are complex, and feminism is just one part of a person's identity—it does not dictate every aspect of their beliefs or behaviors. Being a feminist does not mean one must always make perfect, ideology-aligned decisions. (McKelle, 2014)

This phenomenon, known as horizontal oppression, occurs when women enforce patriarchal expectations upon each other. Instead of uniting against a common system of oppression, women may find themselves in competition, engaging in mutual criticism that diverts attention from larger systemic issues. This is evident in behaviors such as victim-blaming, where women criticize their peers for experiencing violence or discrimination, suggesting that they somehow provoked these situations. (Evteeva et al., 2024)

Evteeva categorizes internalized misogyny into four distinct types: the Puritan, the Self-Hater, the Self-Contemner, and the She-Devil. Each represents different ways in which women direct misogynistic attitudes toward one another, often shaped by their adherence to or rejection of traditional gender roles. For example, Puritans tend to judge and criticize women who do not conform to conventional feminine ideals, while She-Devils may view themselves as superior to other women. (Evteeva et al., 2024)

A case study by Lisa Weygold (2023) on the reality TV series *The Real Housewives* highlights how these dynamics play out in popular media. The show frequently reinforces traditional gender roles, emphasizing women's physical appearances and their relationships with men. As a result, women watching such programs may internalize these roles, associating their self-worth with their attractiveness and conformity to societal beauty standards.

Participants in these shows often engage in self-objectification, evaluating themselves based on their physical appearance rather than their intrinsic qualities. For instance, conversations among cast members frequently revolve around weight loss or behavior modifications aimed at attracting male attention, reinforcing the idea that a woman's value is tied to how she looks rather than who she is.

When these misogynistic ideals are continuously portrayed in reality television, they can start to feel normal. Women who consume this content may unconsciously adopt similar

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beliefs, perpetuating the same attitudes toward other women. Additionally, reality TV often rewards aggression and competition among women. Engaging in such behavior may provide a temporary sense of empowerment, but it ultimately reinforces the same misogynistic dynamics that these women have internalized. (Weygold)

### ***Ability to Resist the Misogyny***

Internalized misogyny fosters a culture of competition and comparison among women, often leading to a diminished sense of self-worth and a tendency to undervalue other women. This dynamic can create divisions that make it harder for women to unite in challenging patriarchal norms, as the focus shifts toward individual achievements rather than collective empowerment. (Rische)

Women who internalize misogyny frequently struggle with self-doubt, which can lead them to censor their own thoughts and expressions. A lack of confidence may prevent them from speaking out against patriarchal norms, fearing judgment or exclusion from their peers. Additionally, internalized misogyny restricts the ways women feel they can express themselves, leading to passive acceptance of traditional gender roles. This limitation can suppress their voices and make it more difficult for them to advocate for meaningful change. (Rische)

A key characteristic of internalized misogyny is the fear of being judged—by friends, family, or society at large. This fear can discourage women from addressing injustices or seeking help, as they may worry about being seen as weak or incapable. The pressure to conform to societal expectations often makes it even harder for women to speak out, particularly in situations like mediation, where they may feel powerless to voice their concerns. (Goodmark, 2009)

Abusers can exploit internalized misogyny to maintain control over their victims. By manipulating a woman's self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, they make it increasingly difficult for her to resist or leave an abusive situation. This form of psychological control can create a dependency cycle, where the victim feels incapable of making independent decisions. Societal structures that uphold patriarchal norms further reinforce internalized misogyny, making it even harder for women to challenge these beliefs. The absence of strong support systems that validate and uplift women's experiences can intensify these struggles, fostering a deep sense of helplessness in the face of oppression. (Goodmark, 2009)

### ***Asceticism and Autonomy***

In her article *The Rush to Motherhood – Pronatalist Discourse and Women's Autonomy*, Diana Tietjens Meyers explores how traditional gender roles often pressure women to prioritize caregiving and domestic responsibilities over their personal ambitions. This societal expectation can limit women's career opportunities and reinforce the belief that their primary value lies in their ability to nurture others. Over time, these messages can lead to internalized feelings of inadequacy, making women question their competence or worthiness in professional and personal achievements beyond the home.

Additionally, societal norms frequently emphasize sexual restraint for women, particularly for those who are unmarried. This can create a sense of shame around natural sexual desires, leading women to internalize misogynistic attitudes and judge themselves for feelings that are inherently human.

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The glorification of celibacy and chastity as virtuous qualities further entrenches these ideas, implying that a woman's worth is tied to her sexual behavior. As a result, many women may experience guilt or shame when expressing their sexuality, reinforcing the belief that they must suppress their desires to conform to societal expectations—an outcome that reflects deeply rooted internalized misogyny. (Meyers, 2001)

### *Culture and Perpetuation of Internalized Misogyny*

Family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward gender roles. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* by Amy Tan, the relationship between mother and daughter highlights how internalized misogyny can be passed down through generations. Mothers often reinforce traditional Chinese values and gender expectations, influencing their daughters to adopt similar beliefs. This generational cycle underscores how family expectations can perpetuate gender inequality and sustain internalized misogyny. Within a family setting, these beliefs are often normalized, making it difficult for women to recognize and challenge them. (Sunny & Sreenivasulu, 2024)

Because internalized misogyny is often subtle, many women may not even realize its presence in their lives. It is frequently framed as a cultural or familial duty, which can make it harder to identify and resist. As a result, these beliefs continue to be passed down, sustaining the cycle of misogyny. Family narratives often reflect larger cultural norms that uphold patriarchal structures, reinforcing the expectation that women should prioritize family responsibilities and obedience over their own aspirations. From an early age, girls are socialized to accept traditional roles and behaviors that align with patriarchal values. Within family interactions, adherence to these gender norms is often encouraged and rewarded, further embedding internalized misogyny. (Sunny & Sreenivasulu, 2024)

### *Research Gap*

Much of the academic and scientific literature that exists today is largely centered around men and their experiences. Historically, women have been underrepresented in both academic and scientific research. While there is some work exploring how misogyny impacts women, one of its deeper effects—internalized misogyny—is often overlooked.

Internalized misogyny is particularly difficult to recognize because it doesn't always manifest in obvious ways. Since it operates within our own thoughts and perceptions, it can be challenging to identify and unlearn. Existing research tends to treat internalized misogyny as a universal experience among women, without fully considering how factors like race, class, sexuality, and disability influence its impact on personal autonomy.

Moreover, most studies on internalized misogyny and autonomy focus on Western societies, especially the U.S. and Europe. There is a noticeable gap in research examining how internalized misogyny functions in non-Western or collectivist cultures, where gender norms and societal expectations are significantly different.

## **PROBLEM ANALYSIS**

Studies have demonstrated a correlation between misogyny and the autonomy of women. It is important to note that misogyny is not solely expressed in overt manners; it is also perpetuated in more subtle, covert ways. Thus, further research in this domain is necessary. This study intends to address this gap by investigating the role of internalized misogyny among Indian women and its impact on their autonomy.

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### *Purpose of the Study*

This study seeks to explore how internalized misogyny affects women's autonomy within the context of Indian society. Internalized misogyny occurs when women unconsciously absorb and reinforce sexist beliefs, often shaped by deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that uphold male dominance. While misogyny itself has been widely studied, its internalized form remains an overlooked factor in shaping women's self-perception, decision-making, and independence.

Using a correlational survey approach, this research will assess the extent of internalized misogyny among Indian women through the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) and evaluate their autonomy using the Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS). By studying participants between the ages of 18 and 50, the study aims to determine whether higher levels of internalized misogyny are linked to lower autonomy.

Since most research on this topic has focused on Western societies, this study addresses an important gap by analyzing internalized misogyny in a non-Western, collectivist cultural setting. The expected findings will offer deeper insight into how internalized misogyny shapes women's autonomy, highlighting the need for awareness programs and support systems that help women recognize and challenge these ingrained biases. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to greater self-empowerment and independence for women.

### *Research Objectives*

1. To investigate the levels of Internalized Misogyny in Indian women using the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS).
2. To evaluate the spectrum of autonomy among Indian women with the Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS).
3. To explore the relationship between Internalized Misogyny and women's autonomy.

### *Methodology*

- Participants: Indian Women (between ages 18 - 55)
- Design: Correlational survey design
- Procedure: Participants will complete a questionnaire assessing their Internalized Misogyny through the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) and Women's Autonomy through the Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS).
- Data Collection: Data is collected through surveys that are administered online.

### *Data Analysis*

Ethical Considerations: All participants will be assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Expected Outcomes:** It is expected that higher Internalized Misogyny correlates to Less Women's Autonomy among Indian Women (aged between 18-55). This study may suggest that there might be a need for better awareness programs to help mitigate Internalized Misogyny and increase Women's Autonomy.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

This study set out to explore how Internalized Misogyny had a negative effect on Women's Autonomy, specifically those women aged between 18-55 years. This research was driven by a motivation to understand why Internalized Misogyny has been deep rooted in our

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culture and how its been conditioned to the point where it might have effects on Women's Autonomy. Misogyny is easy to identify, because it's presented outwards, but Internalized Misogyny is more subtle and harder to call out and find, because people have been conditioned to keep these thoughts in their head through generation and generations of constant repetition of those misogynistic thoughts.

The present analysis aimed to explore the relationship between internalized misogyny and women's autonomy, based on responses gathered using the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) and the Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS). The central hypothesis proposed that higher internalized misogyny would be associated with lower levels of women's autonomy, reflecting the internalization of patriarchal beliefs that constrain women's self-determination, freedom, and agency.

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the findings obtained from the correlation matrix and interpretive results. It discusses the statistical outcomes in light of existing literature, explores psychological and sociocultural implications, and reflects on the broader meaning of these patterns within the context of women's lived experiences.

### Descriptive Overview of Scores

The Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) consisted of 17 items measuring various dimensions of women's internalization of patriarchal attitudes, including distrust of women, devaluation of women, and adherence to traditional gender norms. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), where higher scores indicate greater internalized misogyny.

The Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS) consisted of 18 items designed to measure women's psychosocial freedom from conventional gender roles, encompassing personal freedom, freedom from conventional femininity, freedom from conventional masculinity, and freedom from shame. It assumes 4 dimensions: Personal freedom, Freedom from conventional femininity, Freedom from conventional masculinity and Freedom from shame. Responses were coded from 1 (low autonomy—must ask permission) to 7 (high autonomy—do not even have to inform). Higher scores thus represent greater perceived autonomy.

Preliminary examination of means indicated that participants generally reported moderate levels of internalized misogyny and moderate to high levels of autonomy. This pattern suggests that while overt sexist beliefs are becoming less acceptable, certain internalized gender expectations may persist subconsciously.

**Table 4.1: Descriptives Statistics table**  
**Descriptives**

Descriptives	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
N	8	8
Missing	0	0
Mean	10.9	4.68
Median	1.28	0.710
Standard deviation	16.0	6.28
Variance	256	39.4
Range	41.8	16.1
Minimum	0.160	0.330
Maximum	42.0	16.4

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- The descriptive statistics table summarizes the scores obtained for the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) and the Women’s Autonomy Scale (WAS). Data were collected from 114 participants, with no missing values.
- For Internalized Misogyny, the mean score ( $M = 10.9$ ,  $SD = 16.0$ ) indicates a moderate level of internalized misogyny among participants, though the high standard deviation suggests notable variability in responses—some women reported relatively low levels of internalized misogyny, while others reported higher levels.
- For Women’s Autonomy, the mean score ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = 6.28$ ) reflects a generally moderate to high level of autonomy, though again, the variability suggests differing degrees of perceived independence and decision-making power among participants.

Overall, the results indicate considerable individual differences in both internalized misogyny and women’s autonomy. The wide range in both scales (IMS range = 41.8; WAS range = 16.1) suggests that while some women experience strong internalized patriarchal beliefs, others demonstrate higher autonomy and independence, aligning with the study’s aim to explore how internalized misogyny may negatively impact women’s sense of autonomy.

### Correlation Analysis

The correlation matrix explored relationships between various IMS and WAS subscales. The primary focus was on the correlation between IMS\_Total and WAS\_Total, which would indicate whether women with higher internalized misogyny reported reduced autonomy.

**Table 4.2: Correlation Matrix of IMS and WAS Subscales**

#### Results

#### Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix		IMS_Distrust	IMS_Devaluation	IMS_Total	WAS_Personal_Freedom	WAS_Conventional_Femininity	WAS_Conventional_Masculinity
IMS_Distrust	Pearson's r	—					
	df	—					
	p-value	—					
IMS_Devaluation	Pearson's r	0.594	—				
	df	114	—				
	p-value	1.000	—				
IMS_Total	Pearson's r	0.945	0.824	—			
	df	114	114	—			
	p-value	1.000	1.000	—			
WAS_Personal_Freedom	Pearson's r	0.144	0.153	0.165	—		
	df	114	114	114	—		
	p-value	0.939	0.950	0.962	—		
WAS_Conventional_Femininity	Pearson's r	0.213	0.321	0.279	-0.032	—	
	df	114	114	114	114	—	
	p-value	0.989	1.000	0.999	0.367	—	
WAS_Conventional_Masculinity	Pearson's r	0.313	0.454	0.404	0.016	0.428	—
	df	114	114	114	114	114	—
	p-value	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.566	1.000	—
WAS_Freedom_From_Shame	Pearson's r	-0.049	-0.009	-0.038	-0.178*	-0.072	0.067
	df	114	114	114	114	114	114
	p-value	0.300	0.462	0.341	0.028	0.221	0.763
WAS_Total	Pearson's r	0.197	0.333	0.276	0.663	0.260	0.263
	df	114	114	114	114	114	114
	p-value	0.983	1.000	0.999	1.000	0.998	0.998
Grand_Total	Pearson's r	0.944	0.826	1.000	0.178	0.283	0.407
	df	114	114	114	114	114	114
	p-value	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.972	0.999	1.000

Note.  $H_1$  is negative correlation

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , one-tailed

### Relationship Between IMS and WAS

“As detailed in Table 4.1, the correlation between the overall Internalized Misogyny Total and Women’s Autonomy Total was  $r = 0.276$  ( $p = n.s.$ ), indicating a weak, non-significant relationship.” Contrary to the hypothesis predicting a negative association, this result suggests that women who scored higher on internalized misogyny did not necessarily exhibit lower autonomy. Statistically, this indicates that internalized gender attitudes, as measured by IMS, may not directly influence behavioral or decision-making autonomy as captured by WAS in this particular sample.

However, the direction and strength of correlations among subscales revealed more nuanced insights:

- The Freedom from Shame subscale of WAS demonstrated a negative correlation with WAS\_Personal\_Freedom ( $r = -0.178$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that women who experience greater fear of being labeled or shamed tend to report lower personal freedom.
- Internalized misogyny subdimensions (Distrust of Women and Devaluation of Women) were moderately correlated with each other ( $r = 0.594$ ), confirming that women who hold distrustful attitudes toward other women also tend to internalize negative views about their own gender group.

These findings collectively point toward a fragmented internalization of gender norms—where overt belief systems and lived practices may not always align consistently.

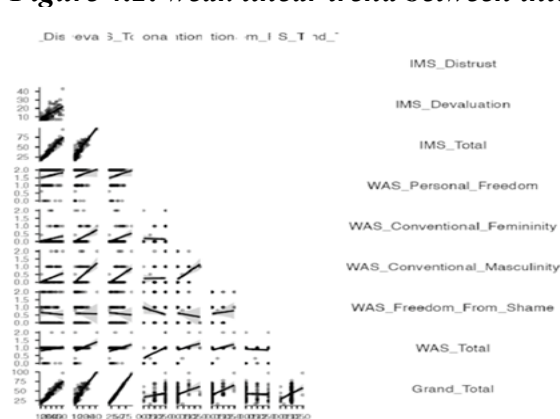
### Interpretation of Findings

#### 1. Weak Correlation Between Internalized Misogyny and Autonomy

The weak correlation between IMS and WAS scores may reflect a decoupling of ideological and behavioral dimensions of gender identity. While participants may still harbor subtle internalized biases shaped by cultural conditioning, these do not always translate into restricted behavior or reduced autonomy. In other words, women may intellectually or emotionally internalize patriarchal ideas about femininity, morality, or modesty, but simultaneously act in ways that assert independence and self-agency.

This aligns with broader social trends in post-liberal and postfeminist contexts, where autonomy is increasingly normalized, even as gendered self-policing persists beneath the surface. The simultaneous coexistence of empowerment narratives and internalized sexism may explain why autonomy scores remain relatively high despite moderate levels of internalized misogyny.

Figure 4.2: weak linear trend between internalized misogyny and autonomy.



## **2. The Role of Shame and Social Conformity**

The Freedom from Shame subscale provided one of the few significant correlations in the dataset. The inverse relationship with personal freedom ( $r = -0.178, p < .05$ ) suggests that shame remains a critical mediator in the relationship between internalized misogyny and autonomy. Socialized fears—of being judged, labeled, or dishonored—can inhibit women's autonomy even when they consciously reject overt patriarchal values.

This reflects a deep psychological internalization of the “good woman” archetype prevalent in collectivist cultures, where women's worth is closely tied to moral propriety and family reputation. Internalized shame operates as a subtle but powerful mechanism of control, regulating women's behavior through guilt and self-surveillance rather than external enforcement. (Szymanski et al., 2009)

## **3. Compartmentalization of Beliefs and Behavior**

The findings also support the notion of compartmentalized internalization, where women may consciously endorse gender equality yet unconsciously perpetuate self-limiting beliefs. This cognitive dissonance is common in transitional societies, where feminist ideals coexist with deep-rooted cultural expectations.

For instance, a woman may assert autonomy in educational or financial decisions yet still defer to traditional gender roles in emotional, familial, or relational domains. This compartmentalization may dilute the statistical relationship between overall misogyny and autonomy, as self-directed biases may not uniformly influence all dimensions of behavior.

### ***Sociocultural Contextualization***

#### **1. Influence of Education and Media Exposure**

The participants in this study—primarily young, educated women—likely represent a demographic exposed to progressive values, digital literacy, and feminist discourse. Media representations of empowered women, increased academic participation, and peer networks may strengthen external autonomy, even if internalized beliefs about gender persist. This contextual buffering may explain the relative independence of WAS scores from IMS levels.

#### **2. Indian Cultural Dynamics**

In the Indian sociocultural landscape, autonomy and internalization often exist in paradoxical tension. While urban and educated women experience expanding freedoms, cultural ideals of obedience, modesty, and respectability remain deeply embedded. Internalized misogyny may thus manifest not as overt self-hatred but as subtle moral self-monitoring or internalized duty toward maintaining family harmony. This could mean that internalized misogyny expresses itself in psychological self-restraint rather than overtly restricted action, which traditional autonomy measures may fail to capture.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The results align with feminist psychological theory (Enns, 2004; Szymanski et al., 2009) that conceptualizes internalized misogyny as an internal conflict rather than a simple endorsement of sexism. The weak correlation with autonomy suggests that internalized misogyny may function more as an emotional or cognitive construct—influencing self-esteem, body image, or solidarity with other women—rather than directly dictating external behaviors.

Moreover, intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1989) provides an important interpretive lens. Autonomy is not a uniform construct; it is mediated by factors such as

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class, caste, religion, and generational expectations. The interplay of these identities might obscure a straightforward correlation between misogyny and autonomy, especially in culturally pluralistic settings.

### *Interpreting the Disproved Hypothesis: Cultural and Social Significance*

Although the central hypothesis of this study—that higher internalized misogyny correlates with lower autonomy—was not statistically supported, this finding in itself carries profound social and cultural significance. Although the correlation coefficients between IMS and WAS were statistically non-significant ( $p > .05$  across most subscales; see Table 4.1), the observed pattern of scores aligns with theoretical expectations that internalized shame negatively influences freedom of movement and self-expression.

The lack of a significant inverse relationship suggests that many Indian women are beginning to decouple their self-perception from patriarchal conditioning, even when traces of internalized gender bias persist at a cognitive or emotional level.

This can be seen as an indicator of psychological transition and cultural evolution—a gradual movement away from deep-rooted gender hierarchies toward more self-defined and self-determined identities.

In the Indian context, where traditional gender socialization has long emphasized obedience, modesty, and self-sacrifice as feminine virtues, the emergence of autonomy—despite residual internalized misogyny—represents a meaningful cultural shift.

It suggests that contemporary Indian women are learning to redefine their sense of self outside inherited moral frameworks. They may still be aware of, or even experience, internalized patriarchal beliefs, but they are no longer passively constrained by them. Instead, they are actively renegotiating what it means to be a “good woman” on their own terms—balancing cultural expectations with personal freedom, ambition, and individuality.

This phenomenon reflects an adaptive process of cognitive and social transformation, where awareness of internalized misogyny does not necessarily translate into behavioral limitation. Women might still recognize traditional norms subconsciously but consciously resist them in their choices—pursuing higher education, careers, creative ambitions, or personal independence.

This distinction between internalized awareness and external behavior indicates that empowerment is taking root at both personal and collective levels, even if remnants of internalized gender scripts remain.

Furthermore, the disproved hypothesis points toward a broader sociocultural resilience among Indian women. Rather than internalized misogyny functioning as a determinant of reduced autonomy, it appears that autonomy can coexist with internalized gender beliefs, suggesting that many women are in a transitional phase of identity reconstruction.

This phase may involve critical self-reflection, negotiation of values, and selective rejection of oppressive norms—marking an important psychological and cultural step toward emancipation. The ability to challenge internalized restrictions, even subtly, signals the growing agency and consciousness of Indian women in a society still influenced by patriarchal structures.

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Therefore, the non-significant correlation is not a limitation but a symbol of progress. It implies that Indian women are no longer strictly defined by inherited ideologies; instead, they are capable of holding, questioning, and ultimately transforming them. This process represents a vital stride toward psychological liberation—where freedom is not only enacted externally through behavior but also redefined internally through thought, choice, and self-understanding.

The findings thus underscore that empowerment is not merely the absence of misogyny, but the active ability to recognize and rise above it—a step toward a generation of women who can consciously unlearn inherited biases and reclaim authorship over their own lives.

### CONCLUSION

This correlational study, *Internalized Misogyny and Women's Autonomy: A Correlational Study among Indian Women*, set out to address a critical research gap by examining the relationship between subconscious patriarchal biases and self-determination within the unique, collectivist context of Indian society. Utilizing the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) and the Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS) on a sample of Indian women aged 18 to 55, the central objective was to statistically determine if higher levels of internalized misogyny corresponded with reduced autonomy. The findings, while statistically non-significant in the overall relationship, hold profound social, psychological, and theoretical implications that challenge conventional assumptions about the impact of gender conditioning.

#### *The Decoupling of Belief and Behavior*

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, which anticipated a strong negative correlation, the study found only a weak, non-significant correlation between the total Internalized Misogyny score and the total Women's Autonomy score ( $r = 0.276$ ,  $p = \text{n.s.}$ ). This is perhaps the most significant finding, suggesting that for the women in this sample, scoring higher on internalized sexist beliefs did not necessarily result in lower autonomy in their behavioral or decision-making lives.

This result strongly suggests a phenomenon of decoupling between ideological beliefs and outward behavior. Women appear to be capable of harboring subtle, cognitive internalized biases—the residual effects of cultural conditioning—while simultaneously demonstrating high behavioral autonomy in their daily lives.

This complex coexistence, particularly evident in the sample of primarily young, educated women, can be attributed to increased exposure to progressive values, feminist discourse, and empowering media narratives that strengthen external self-agency, effectively buffering autonomy scores from the persistence of internalized misogyny. Consequently, the disproved hypothesis is interpreted not as a failure of the theory, but as an indicator of psychological transition and cultural evolution—a gradual shift away from deep-rooted gender hierarchies toward more self-defined identities in the Indian context.

#### *The Critical Role of Shame in Autonomy*

While the overall relationship was non-significant, the analysis of subscales revealed a crucial nuance: the persistence of shame as a powerful constraint on personal freedom. The Freedom from Shame subscale showed a significant inverse relationship with Personal Freedom ( $r = -0.178$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This highlights that the socialized fear of being judged, labeled, or dishonored—an internalized moral self-monitoring mechanism—can inhibit a

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woman's personal autonomy even if she consciously rejects overt patriarchal values. In a collectivist culture like India, where a woman's worth is deeply tied to her moral propriety and family reputation, internalized shame operates as a subtle, pervasive mechanism of control, regulating behavior through self-surveillance rather than external enforcement.

### *Theoretical and Practical Implications*

The study's outcomes carry several important implications:

**Theoretical Alignment:** The results support feminist psychological theory, which conceptualizes internalized misogyny primarily as an internal, emotional, or cognitive construct—one that impacts self-esteem, body image, and solidarity with other women, rather than directly dictating all external behaviors.

**Sociocultural Context:** The findings underscore the complexity of gender dynamics in transitional societies, where women practice compartmentalized internalization—asserting autonomy in professional/educational domains while potentially adhering to traditional gender roles in familial or relational domains.

**Need for Targeted Interventions:** The study strongly suggests that future awareness programs must shift focus from addressing overt sexism to tackling the insidious, subconscious nature of internalized misogyny and, most critically, the profound and inhibitory psychological effects of shame. Support systems are needed to help women recognize and challenge these ingrained biases and reclaim their independence.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

To build upon these insights and fully address the complexity of autonomy in non-Western settings, future research should adopt a more nuanced approach:

- **Intersectional Analysis:** Future studies must incorporate an intersectional lens to examine how factors such as caste, class, religion, and generational expectations mediate the relationship between internalized misogyny and autonomy, moving beyond a universal treatment of the subject.
- **Qualitative Methods:** While the correlational survey provided robust quantitative data, deeper insights into the psychological impact of shame and compartmentalization may require qualitative or mixed-methods approaches, such as in-depth interviews, to truly capture how internalized misogyny manifests as psychological self-restraint.
- **Dimensional Focus:** Research should investigate the sub-dimensions of both constructs, as the study demonstrated that while the totals showed weak correlation, key subscales, particularly Freedom from Shame, were significantly predictive of restricted personal freedom.

In conclusion, this research serves as a pivotal marker in understanding the evolving psychological landscape of Indian women. While the shadow of internalized misogyny has not been fully dispelled, its direct control over outward autonomy appears to be weakening. The battle for full independence is shifting from resisting overt external oppression to overcoming the subtle, internalized oppression of shame and self-doubt, paving the way for a more self-empowered and self-determined generation of women.

### **Limitations**

This study has a few limitations that should be kept in mind. Since the data is based on self-reported responses, there's a chance that participants may have answered in a way that seems more socially acceptable, potentially underreporting their internalized misogyny or overstating their level of autonomy. Additionally, how individuals interpret the Internalized Misogyny Scale (IMS) and Women's Autonomy Scale (WAS) could influence the accuracy of the findings.

Another limitation is that the study focuses specifically on Indian women between the ages of 18 and 55, meaning the results may not apply to younger, older, or rural populations. Given India's vast cultural and regional diversity, factors such as socio-economic status, religion, and caste could shape experiences of internalized misogyny and autonomy in ways that this study might not fully capture.

Since this is a cross-sectional study, it can only identify correlations rather than establish a cause-and-effect relationship. This makes it unclear whether internalized misogyny directly impacts autonomy or if external factors influence both. Additionally, because the study relies on online surveys, participation may be limited to individuals with digital access, potentially excluding marginalized communities.

Lastly, this research does not track changes over time, and while the IMS and WAS are valuable tools, they might not capture every aspect of internalized misogyny and autonomy within the Indian cultural context. Future studies could build on this work by using longitudinal research methods, incorporating qualitative insights, and adopting more inclusive sampling strategies.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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