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Religious Adaptation,  
The "Weapon" of Women in Latin America

One perplexing question is why women seem to be consistently more religious than men. This fact seems to remain constant across cultures, but there is an even higher rate of religiosity in women in cultures such as the Latin American, which are characterized by a high rate of domestic violence and sexism. One possible reason for the higher level of religiosity in women is their adaptation of religion as a mechanism of protection.

→ Source?

The roots of sexism in Latin America can be explained by the research "Values and Sexism in Argentinian Adolescents" conducted by Juan Diego Vaamonde. He associates individualism and collectivism with sexism in Latin America. Individualism is defined in this study as "an individual who is characterized for being independent from their groups of membership and for prioritizing the autonomy, privacy and the achievement of personal goals" (115). Collectivism is defined as "individuals who are interdependent of their groups, privilege shared goals, loyalty, who are compromise with norms and collective needs, accomplishing familiar and friend's imposed liabilities" (115). There are two types of sexism that can be found in any part of the world. Hostile

sexism is defined as holding negative and derogatory attitudes toward women, whereas benevolent sexism that is defined as holding positive yet stereotypical attitudes toward women, according to (Zaikman and Marks 334). Studies have shown that the levels of sexism in Latin America are higher than in other parts of the world. As Vaamonde states, "According to comparative studies the levels of hostile and benevolent sexism in Latin America are superior comparing to others in other parts of the world " (115). Among the results and hypothesis of Vaamonde's study, a more individualistic person would be less likely to engage in hostile sexism. Since Latin Americans tend to focus their values in the collective realm, they are more likely, therefore to engage in hostile sexism.

When it comes to sexism and violence in Latin America, there are many studies that show the link between. Rodrigo-Franco et al., evaluated the interpersonal relationships among young adults from Mexico, Argentina and Spain. Only results from Argentina and Mexico will be taken into account here. The participants were given a questionnaire that covered eight derivations of violence that they could have experienced in romantic relationships. Among the eight categories of violence that the questions were based on, there were: indifference, humiliation, sexual, coercive, physical, gender, emotional punishment and instrumental. Gender violence was one of the most frequent and related to other categories of violence as indifference, humiliation, sexual violence, coercion and physical violence. Narrowing violence and sexism against women, and coming from their male partners, it is proved by research that most adult women suffer from physical and psychological violence in Latin America from their partners. According to one study, a huge percentage (30-75%) of Latin American women are

victims of various types of abuse, including emotional and physical abuse. In most cases “this abuse is at the hand of their partners”(Bunivic, et al. 3).

That said, there is an ineluctable correlation among collectivism, sexism against women, and violence in Latin America. It is inarguable that more individualistic people tend to care less about gender stereotypes and factors that convey or categorize groups, whereas collectivists tend to classify and follow gender stereotypes that fall into gender discrimination in order to be accepted in groups. Furthermore, collectivists will be more likely to fall into sexism and violent acts in order to maintain their loyalty to the group. Perhaps these violent and sexist behaviors among men in Latin America can be controlled through religion. So, what if women have adapted religion partly in order to control men’s violent behaviors as a way of survival?

Without any doubt, humans can protect themselves through religion. Scientists, on the whole, agree that the predilection to engage in religious behavior has evolved, but when it comes to the precise mechanism leading to the evolution of the religious mind, there is disagreement. One view, the adaptionist, supports that religion has evolved due to natural selection and that thus is an adaptation, which would mean that religion conveys some kind of evolutionary advantage to humans. The adaptationist’s view is an “exquisitely functional, and elegant mechanism best explained as the target of natural selection, and best discovered by reverse engineering its design”(Bulbulia 656). Since women who live in a sexist and violent environment have not many options to defend themselves, they have adapted religion as a mechanism of defense to influence men to be less violent.

A study by Elizabeth Brusco presents how in Colombia women benefit from evangelicalism. Brusco argues, "Colombian women benefit from converting to evangelicalism. It provides tools for women to reform *machista* and, more importantly, it provides tangible rewards for the male convert" (85). It is crucial to highlight the fact that religious collectivism, in this case, gives rewards for males that change certain behaviors, including maintaining family life values that presumably include no domestic violence against women. Women involved in Christianity are likely to find a partner who has less-violent attitudes; this can be one of the evolutionary advantages of religion. As Brusco states, "When women convert to charismatic Christianity, they increase their capital as morally superior parties in the marriage and they are better positioned to save men from the perils of machismo, such as the culture of violence and drunkenness" (86). Meaning that there is an implicit benefit for women for joining in the charismatic Christianity because they have more chances to have a less-violent partner.

Women certainly have adapted religion to their own benefit by including their partners in a religion that changes violent behaviors to more family-like values. As Brusco argues "many men convert to Pentecostalism as a result of being healed at evangelical services to which their wives have taken them. More generally, the ideology of machismo can be demanding on Colombian men, and conversion liberates them from the culturally imposed role. The male convert no longer feels the need to validate his masculinity through drunkenness and physical violence" (86). What religion does is that changes these culturally arranged roles of showing masculinity through violence and drunkenness and rather imposes other roles that are seen as masculine but they bring more benefits to women.

Elizabeth Brusco's research on Colombian women is just a little example on how women have adapted religion to control violent behaviors in their male partners. This example can be extrapolated in other parts of Latin America taking in account that in this region, people tend to follow more collectivist values so they are more susceptible to religious persuasion than individualistic people. Thus, even though collectivist in Latin America are prone to engage in hostile sexism and violent behaviors, they are also likely to change these cultural arranged roles by converting in a religion as it is the evangelical or any other that promotes non-violent values.

Even though I support Bulbulia's position in "The Cognitive and Evolutionary Psychology of Religion" that the adaptionist view is stronger, there are those who do not see religion as an individual adaptation to obtain any benefit. This view, also known as spandrelist believes that religion is without an adaptive value per se. In a general view, what the spandrelist claim is that there is an adaptation in religion but that change is not deliberate, nor do humans obtain any benefit from the religion. They use as examples religions that require excruciatingly painful rituals that bring no benefits at all. "Consider adolescent Khoisa males in Southern Africa who endure excruciating ritual circumcision only to live in exile in a desert environment without any food or water until they heal" (Bulbulia 656). Also, they think that the function of religion is not evolutionary; rather they believe that religion has moral sentiments and existential doubts, which constitutes to elements of evolution.

if it is  
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All in all, the social and cultural context in Latin America has shaped the behavior of both men and women. In the case of men, there are strict masculine roles, which involve violence against women and drunkenness. Women, on the other hand, have

learned how to adapt to the violent and sexist environment using as "weapon" to control men's violence, religion. The relationship between religion and women can be seen as some kind of "mutualism" in which both sides benefit from each other. Women ensure a better lifestyle in a hostile environment and religion obtains more followers. So, the more benefits someone gets from a religion, more followers the religion will have, reinforcing the religious adaptionist view that stands that individuals adapt religion to obtain benefits.

G: 5

C: 5

Research: 8

Understanding: 9

A-

27  
30

Excellent.

You actually followed  
the instructions!

(That sounds like faint praise, but  
after so many poorly written papers, it  
is a refreshing change).

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