



## Misogyny

by Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur

Encyclopedia Copyright © 2015, glbtq, Inc.

Entry Copyright © 2004, glbtq, inc.

Reprinted from <http://www.glbtq.com>

"Misogyny" literally means "hatred of women." However, in everyday usage, beliefs and actions described as misogynist range from intense hatred of women to a more subtle disdain that maintains women as inferior beings who must be dominated and controlled by men. There are some men who eagerly adopt the label of misogynist and others who take its definition literally to mean hatred and therefore absolve themselves of the charge.

Misogyny also infects women, including their attitudes toward themselves as well as toward others. Just as there are homophobic queer people, there are also misogynistic women.

Misogyny, and societal acceptance of it, can be blamed for men's violence against female family members, as well as strangers; discrimination against women in employment, education, and politics; lack of appropriate health care for women (such as inadequate funding for research on female cancers); and continuing unequal divisions of labor in the home, among many other social inequities.

### Lesbians

As women, lesbians experience misogyny as victims of violence and discrimination. Misogyny directed against lesbians, however, may be intensified because they are often seen as extreme feminists, women who have no need for men at all. Misogynists particularly hate lesbian feminist separatists (though they sometimes lump all lesbians and all feminists into one group, which they may give the name "feminazis"), and often blame them for corrupting heterosexual women.

Misogynists may also direct violence towards lesbians because they are seen as devoid of male "protection" (necessary in the eyes of misogynists). They are thus viewed as easy targets who need to be "taught a lesson."

Misogynist beliefs also contribute to the lack of lesbian health services and appropriate responses to victims of domestic violence in lesbian relationships.

Drag kings, women who dress as men either as entertainers or because of personal preference, are sometimes accused of misogynist behavior. Their performances and personal beliefs are sometimes focused on butchness, occasionally resulting in a ridicule of femme lesbians or feminine women in general. Far more often, however, drag kings use their masculine appearance to showcase how misogyny works in the world and how to combat it; drag king misogyny can be seen as a political satire.

### Gay Men

Gay men are both perpetrators of misogyny and victims of it. In all-male societies where women are neither necessary nor desired, gay men can create a misogynistic culture without the existence of any women to object.

Gay men's use of drag, as well as campy humor imitating or making fun of women, can be seen as misogynist behavior. Drag exaggerates and flaunts over-the-top femininity in a way that few women would or could. While many drag artists and connoisseurs respect and appreciate women, others engage in drag with the conscious understanding that they are making fun of women, or at least of certain aspects of female behavior and existence.

Gay male misogyny may also be seen in the gay liberation movement. Early organizations were explicitly focused on gay male rights, and while they welcomed the presence of lesbians as helpers in the struggle, such organizations did little to press for lesbian issues and concerns.

In smaller communities where there are few gay spaces, those community centers, support groups, and bars that do exist may be focused on the needs of gay men rather than of lesbians. While over time these conditions have improved, they have not yet disappeared. For instance, lesbians have been active in the struggle against HIV/AIDS, but gay men's groups have rarely responded by focusing their attention on issues of importance to lesbians.

As victims of misogyny, gay men are seen by the heterosexist male-dominated society as feminine and thus lumped in with women as targets for disdain. In fact, many misogynist men make gay men even more a target of their misogynist beliefs than women either because gay men are seen as choosing to act in this "inferior" manner and are thus traitors to masculinity or because heterosexual men can perpetrate violence and discrimination against gay men without endangering their own position in the heterosexual relationships they desire.

Much homophobic activity, including gay-bashing, stems from misogynistic beliefs that disparage traits seen as feminine by dominant society and exhibited by certain gay men, such as concern with personal appearance, heightened emotionality, artistic skill, and lack of prowess at some physically demanding activities.

### **Transgender Individuals**

As individuals who reside in the borderlands between maleness and femaleness, or who try to cross this border, transgendered people are subject to particularly virulent misogyny. Men who are seen as "acting like women" are subjected to misogynist violence by men who see them as degrading masculinity. Women who are seen as "acting like men" are often especially targeted by misogynists, who believe such behavior is a corruption of nature. Fear of violence from misogynists and others forces many transgender people to try to hide who they are, an onerous task in daily life.

Male to female transsexuals have a unique experience with misogyny. Though these individuals may have felt for years that they were really meant to be women, they grew up as males and thus were taught culturally dominant misogynist attitudes. After transitioning to life as women, these individuals suddenly become the victims of misogyny, as they are expected to behave in feminine ways, be submissive, and become subject to misogynist violence and discrimination.

Feminists and lesbians who try to create "womyn-born-womyn" safe space, like that at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, often exclude male to female transsexuals because of the belief that the upbringing of these individuals makes them misogynists despite their appearance as women. These policies leave male to female transsexuals with few safe spaces where they can escape the misogyny and transphobia that dominate their lives.

### **Fighting Misogyny**

Many groups are active in fighting misogyny, both as an individual belief and as a cultural construct. These

groups include feminist organizations, queer movement groups, and many other networks devoted to fighting for equality of all people in society.

However, the ability of these groups to make positive changes is limited by the dominance of misogynist ideologies in society. These ideologies are inculcated from early childhood, as boys play games where girls are considered to have "cooties" or when boys who are not good at sports are called "sissies" and told that they "throw like a girl." In order for misogyny in society to diminish, not only do popular culture and politics have to be less discriminatory and degrading towards women, but the patterns of childrearing and education also have to change.

### **Bibliography**

Brevard, Aleshia. *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.

Doane, Janice. *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Gilmore, David D. *Misogyny: The Male Malady*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

Jukes, Adam. *Why Men Hate Women*. London: Free Association Books, 1993.

Radclyffe, Megan. *Lesbophobia: Gay Men and Misogyny*. London: Cassell Academic, 1995.

Smith, Joan. *Misogynies: Reflections on Myths & Malice*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991.

### **About the Author**

**Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Rhode Island College. Her research focuses on the emergence of academic programs in queer studies, Asian American studies, and women's studies in colleges and universities in the United States.