
Misogyny has its roots in the Greek miso-, meaning hatred, and gyne-, meaning woman; it means the hatred of women. In patriarchal culture the word is used to designate an extreme abhorrence of women, a pathological antipathy not shared by ordinary or normal men, not expressed in laws or social policy or in the presumed humanism of art, literature, and philosophy.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher (1844-1900), and August Strindberg, a Swedish playwright (1849-1912), for instance, are recognized as misogynists by the male-supremacist culture. In an 1888 letter to Strindberg, Nietzsche wrote of the "deathly hatred of the sexes." This "deathly hatred" included the convictions that women are filthy (especially genitally), slutish, and whore-like; and that physical love is a war in which the woman must be vanquished by physical force, not excluding beating, rape, and murder. The woman is regarded as a provocateur who, by her nature and will, initiates combat. In Nietzsche's and Strindberg's view, feminists were an even worse "enemy," an "army of whores and would-be whores-professional whores with abnormal inclinations," wrote Strindberg. Denunciation, humiliating insult, and a degrading sexualization of women characterize misogyny, which is bitter, passionate, and often tormented.

U.S. feminists recognize a more normative woman-hating that is institutionalized in a broad and, except for feminist challenges, uncontested social devaluation of women, second-class citizenship for women, and systematic violence against women. Across different cultures, this misogyny is organized and institutionalized to different degrees and in different ways.

In the United States, legitimized woman-hating has its origins in European and Anglo-Saxon institutions of ownership: married women were defined as chattel, or property, of their husbands, with no rights to independent civil existence; the majority of the African American population was held in captivity as slaves, and women were worth half the price of men and subjected to forced sexual intercourse by white owners. Indentured women, often white, often single, were owned for a fixed period of time, which was extended if the woman gave birth to a "bastard," a legal designation that meant the child was not owned by a man but by the mother and therefore was in permanent exile from civil society.

These institutions of domination-marriage, slavery, and indentured labor-denied legal and social personhood to women. Men, especially white men, had rights over women and children that permitted physical brutality, invasion of the body, indifference to health and well-being, and coerced reproduction.

Marriage, slavery, and indentured servitude were fundamental institutions of dominance in a European and British culture of conquest built on the genocide of the indigenous people of this continent. Thomas Jefferson wrote that the native
population could be "extirpated from the earth" or vacate the land. He was committed to killing Native American women and children in particular. This bloodsoaked land, then, was fertile ground for despotic, not democratic, institutions that wiped out personhood through ownership, domination, and civil invisibility, with a sadistic underbelly of physical assault and control.

Many misogynist violations of women were once rights of men over women and children. These rights were protected by custom, law, and force of arms: battery, marital rape, child rape and incest, acquaintance rape. Male access to women through prostitution and pornography was protected even when illegal. Stranger rape was virtually immune from prosecution and nearly always considered the victim's fault; it was a crime only insofar as it robbed a father of a pure daughter, or a husband of the exclusivity of physical possession of his wife. Women and children also lacked individual sovereignty, civil rights, and human status. The state's protection of male dominance had strong support from religions with Jewish and Christian imperatives. The theology and practices of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews upheld patriarchal power by positing a male godhead; androcentric authority; and a female nature, either depraved or submissive.

The contemporary women's movement has opposed traditional sex-role arrangements and challenged the conjunction of hierarchy and hate. Women activists have exposed intimate aggression and violation, dominance and invasion, and insult and humiliation as intolerable expressions of contempt. Women have repudiated the colonial rights of men over their reproductive and sexual capacities and resisted the industrial and technologized packaging and selling of women and children as sexual commodities. The dehumanization of women, women's civil inequality, continuing economic marginality, and ongoing exclusion from political power are manifestations of woman-hating: plain old misogyny. The war against women is not love. Nietzsche's "deathly hatred of the sexes" is not fundamental law. That hatred is the inevitable contempt a master feels for the slave he exploits. Women-hating will end when women's subordination is ended, however (or wherever) it is imposed.

Bibliography

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See also Violence Against Women.

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