

# MISOGYNY IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

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*For Augusta, Beattie, and Beckett*

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# Preface

When I started my training in psychotherapy, I was introduced to some of the writing of the key thinkers in psychoanalysis and I was instantly fascinated by the world that seemed to be opening up before me. I became an avid reader, and vividly remember my first experiences of reading highly recommended papers and books. Often the patients the authors described (more often than not, ‘*his*’ interactions with ‘*her*’) seemed out of this world—literally. In my previous twenty years’ experience of working in mental health, I had never met anyone as these analysts described them, in fact I had never met anyone, anywhere, as certain authors depicted them.

The more I read, learnt, studied, and have sat with many people in therapy sessions during my training and subsequently working as a psychotherapist, I have come to realise that there was something in my initial instinct about the other-worldliness of these

well-regarded analysts' patients. The 'otherness' was not to do with the extraordinary magic of psychoanalysis, though at times psychoanalysis can be magical. It was more due to the symptom created by the inherent misogyny in psychoanalysis—a desire for there to be a world that one can be on the outside of, an exclusive club where the main 'otherness' is, and always has been, aimed at women.

In psychoanalysis misogyny hides in plain sight, seemingly above and beyond the usual conventions of workplace etiquette or even a vague awareness of sexism. It is commonplace in psychoanalytic literature and in the presentation of case studies for a description of the, usually female, analysand's attractiveness to be given as a diagnosis rather than an opinion, for the word 'feminine' to be used as a synonym for submission, for psychosexual development to miss the glaringly obvious important stage of menstruation, for a child's development to be modelled on the Freudian theory of male psychosexual development, for women to still be described in terms of their loss of not having a penis but gaining a baby—not a vagina or clitoris, and for the fundamental experiences of pregnancy, birth, and menopause to continue to be overlooked. Ironically for a field whose main currency is reflection, the different treatment of women is bypassed because misogyny is institutionalised in psychoanalysis. As has happened to many psychoanalysts since the time of Freud, a refusal of this misogyny means that you then step outside of the purely psychoanalytic field and are then relegated to a 'niche' group usually described as 'feminist', thereby becoming no longer a threat to the tradition of psychoanalysis. This has happened many times over and it is with no irony that in writing this short book I am fully aware that my contribution may also be relegated to a subdivision that moves it far away from psychoanalysis and ensures it is buried under a very heavy carpet. I hope not.

Psychoanalysis is an extraordinary discipline in which, at its heart, there is a desire to make a genuine connection with, and have a full understanding of, another person's experience, but it is at its worst when it is hierarchical and 'othering', sharing in jokes—because in order for something to be 'in' the price to be paid is having to leave something or someone 'out'. Misogyny in psychoanalysis is too important to leave anything or anyone out of the conversation, precisely because it is about everyone, not *just* women.

This book is short because I would like it to be the start of a conversation that should be accessible for anyone who has an interest in psychoanalysis or in the impact of misogyny when it is allowed to spread unhindered. I use the terms psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, analyst, and therapist interchangeably as whilst acknowledging the difference between these terms, I would also not like to further the hierarchy that is often implicit in these terms especially as many therapists work in a way that would be considered analytical and vice versa. I have also used the terms woman and man, male and female to include anyone who identifies with these terms and would like to be clear that whilst I have included menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth as being part of the experience of being a 'girl' and 'woman' this is intended in both its presence and its absence in both the physical and the psychological sense, and therefore applies to all people who identify with this gender.

The book reflects my experience in the world of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as a trainee, supervisee, student, teacher, psychotherapist, and supervisor in various institutions and as a former Chief Executive of a psychotherapy organisation. My wish in writing this book is to extend an invitation for you to join me in putting psychoanalysis on the couch and to be curious about why it is the way it is. Psychoanalysis is remarkably resistant to

applying its own treatment to itself and is well defended. In writing these pieces the feeling was often with me that I was doing something wrong, speaking out of place, and sticking my head above the parapet until I discovered how much this was a symptom of the psychoanalytic misogyny I had internalised. More importantly, I realised that that needed to change, not just for myself, but for a discipline that could offer so much more if it decided to change too.



# Acknowledgements

Getting this book to publication has not been a straightforward process, but the experience has been instructive in proving that now more than ever there is a need for misogyny in psychoanalysis to be addressed. I would particularly like to thank Kate Pearce at Phoenix Publishing House for having the freedom of thought to publish this book and with such good humour and warmth.

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I am extremely grateful to Adam Phillips for his encouragement, generosity of interest in my writing, and for enabling me to go beyond my own internalised misogyny to take a seat at the table. My conversations with him are always immensely enjoyable and instrumental in expanding my thinking and writing.

Daniel Jenkinson is always my first reader, his thinking, kindness, and humour sustain me throughout. I am hugely thankful to my children for their uncompromising honesty, laughter, and for giving me hope in a generation that sees strength in a world less binary.

## About the author

**Michaela Chamberlain** trained at the Bowlby Centre and also studied in the Psychoanalytic Unit at UCL. Shortly after qualifying at the Bowlby Centre in 2016, she started teaching Freud and attachment theory and became CEO of the Bowlby Centre. She worked as an honorary psychotherapist in two NHS Trusts for several years. She has presented clinical papers at public forums and has been published in the journal *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis*. She is currently carrying out a doctoral research project on a psychoanalytic reading of gendered blood in live art and psychoanalytic writing at Roehampton University.

She is currently in private practice as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and is a supervisor and training therapist.