

MISOGYNY AND INDEPENDENCE

Biology is certainly not destiny, but it remains true that women can give birth to and nurse the young, while men cannot. In contrast, there is nothing men can do that women cannot. Because men do not have a unique capacity by which to define themselves, they tend to define themselves by oppositeness – specifically, as being the opposite of women.

(Stiehm, 2000, pp. 223-224)

Misogyny defined

The dictionary definition of misogyny is that it is a hatred of, or prejudice against, women. But, institutionally, it is more than that. Misogyny is a fundamental supporting narrative of a patriarchy that values war over peace, conquest over community, profit over value, commerce over childcare, and the masculine over the feminine. That is, it is a hatred of, and extreme prejudice against, those things defined as feminine.

In this definition, individual women may be found in masculine roles but these roles are integral to the patriarchal model of social organisation. It is also not uncommon that women share the misogynist worldview, evident in the opinions, structures, activities and roles they value. Dominant ideology, as we saw earlier, is exactly that – a frame that structures our social world and shapes our understanding of it.

From a time of integration, the complementary feminine and masculine principles that framed early human society separated into dichotomous notions of passivity/agency, receptivity/dominance, and chaotic nature/systematic rationality that better suited social hierarchy organised around physical strength, private ownership, and bellicosity. Many belief systems and some psychological theory understands a balance of the feminine and masculine to be optimal for individual and communal health and wellbeing (Baring, 1999). Patriarchy does not allow such a balance in Western social organisation, which instead is dominated by ideology that values acquisition, possession, and hierarchical aspiration. Feminine principles of relationship, integration, and materiality are devalued or exploited for patriarchal advantage.

In patriarchal society, by definition, the masculine dominates and the feminine is dominated. I argue that domination of the feminine is the mainstay of patriarchal identity. Without it, there is no family to head and no personal or national assets worth accumulating because demonstrating authority by possession is redundant. Domination of the feminine is evident in gendered power relations from Afghanistan to Australia, in the environmental exploitation that sees increasing tranches of Mother Earth's shared resources plundered for private gain, and in economic

ideology that values the individual over the collective and wealth generation over social welfare.

Resistance

The “truths” of patriarchy are so embedded in our culture that they are beyond consciousness. Both women and men accept the normality of the shared values and women, too, seek the kudos of “making it in a man’s world”. In the terminology of the social sciences, those who meet the criteria for membership of patriarchal society belong to an in-group (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 2007), with consequential marginalisation of those who do not, or will not, comply with the demands of dominant ideology.

As we have seen, independent women have attracted animosity, to varying degrees, since patriarchy imposed its values on our prehistoric, preliterate culture. The social positioning of independent women, through religious, economic and political discourse, has swung between honourable and dishonourable status, with high and low social value, subject to the conflicting power relations around dominance of the feminine and national economic need. I believe that the problematisation of independent women was not only because of their subversion of patriarchal social organisation based around (nuclear) family values but also because of the need of patriarchy to rid social consciousness of feminine agency. This was achieved first by religious discourse that gradually reduced the status of the Goddess from omnipresence to mediator between a distant masculine adjudicator and humanity, then by science, embedded in patriarchal culture, that perpetuated the “truth” of women’s subordination to masculine domination.

Public discourse found in literature, the theatre, art, legislation, medicine, policy and philosophy (e.g., Bennet & Froide, 1999; Bernau, 2007; Bloch, 1991; Foyster, 1999; Harrison, 1995; McCarthy, 2004; Power, 1973; Showalter, 1978; Wiesner, 2000; Yeo, 2008) reflected dominant ideology even when it argued against it (Cooper, 2001; Dolin, 1997; Hassel, 2002; Kranidis, 1999; Showalter, 1978). It continues in contemporary discourse found in news media, advertising, film, television, music and literature (Amador & Kiersky, 1998; C. Anderson, et al., 1994; Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Chandler, 1991; Chasteen, 1994; DePaulo, 2007; Schwartzberg, et al., 1995; Stein, 1976; Whiteley, 2000).

Contradicting this discourse, and evidencing the struggle between the power relations surrounding adult relational possibilities, is that of resistance. In earlier times, women co-opted religious discourse to resist interdependence imperatives, taking advantage of opportunities to dedicate their lives to deities to become a third gender (Salih, 2001), separate from the demands of conventional femininity. In the Classical

world, prostitution allowed women to live autonomous lives in a separate sphere from patriarchal control even as they profited from practising the sexuality that is the focus of patriarchal control.

In contemporary times, women's independence does not require its practice from the cloisters or the brothel. However, as at all times, the struggle between patriarchal and liberal discourses about women's potential and aspirations finds ideological pressures privileging interdependence. Whereas marriage was a legal requirement in Classical periods (Pomeroy, 1995), and independent living by women prohibited in parts of England during the Middle Ages (Froide, 2002), today's woman is enjoined by institutional discourse channelled through mass media, science, and popular culture to seek interdependence for personal growth and wellbeing.

Across time, when economic and ideological circumstances have permitted, the numbers of women able to live independently have increased (e.g., Kowaleski, 1999). Further, many women in control of their own resources have directed bequests to enable other women's independence (Barron, 1994; Forth, 2008; Howell, 1998). In contemporary times, good incomes are identified as necessary for wellbeing, irrespective of in/ter/dependence status (e.g., Cummins, et al., 2005). As in previous times when it held economic value, women's access to independent means challenges "the intersection of compulsory heterosexuality and economics" (Rich, 1980, p. 641), weighting alternative discourses, such as *family* and *companionship*, more heavily to encourage and normalise interdependence. Financial independence and a political ideology that tolerates diversity, however reluctantly, means that some women choose to create a family, and seek companionship, outside the patriarchal model when their options for interdependence are limited, unacceptable, or just unattractive. It is at this intersection of ideological discourse, between the patriarchal and the neoliberal, where the possibilities for independent women's identities expand.

Power relations

It is the gap (Foucault, 1969) between the discourses systemically disadvantaging and disempowering women living outside marriage and those better reflecting their lived experience that locates the power relations surrounding the position of independent women. The gap, it seems to me, is a vortex of economic relations and the degree to which these demand women's participation in any era, within the context of patriarchal interests. Whereas in previous times, women were excluded from financial self-sufficiency when the economy contracted (e.g., Hanawalt, 1992; Hill, 1989), contemporary capitalism requires women's participation as producers and consumers (Mohanty, 2003). The

ideological dilemma constructed by discourses about women's in/ter/dependence and their importance to the economy is described well by Billig and colleagues (1988) when they described the "common sense" interdependence of women and men to be one of the most prevalent unification myths in Western society, opposed by an individuation myth of the neoliberal free market with its different relations of power, value and interests.

The technologies of neoliberalism frame a discourse of "freedom" for which the individual is ascribed personal responsibility and individualistic consumer orientated self-management (Walkerline & Bansel, 2010). Yet, while patriarchal ideology may adapt to economic forces, its essential maintenance of masculine privilege is unaltered. This may be seen in ostensibly contradictory discourses of neoliberal individualism that support public consumerism and those of patriarchy that privilege the private world of the nuclear family. The link here is discourse privileging an idealised interdependence compared to positioning independent women as desperate and dateless, while simultaneously affording high social value to independence. In the power relations around women's in/ter/dependence swirl discourses of social cohesion, women's sexual practice, institutional authority, group membership, gender performance, family, deviance, marginalisation, the natural order, and others, all of which demonstrate struggle for dominance or, at least, equal authority.

History shows that patriarchy is right to be concerned about women's commitment to supporting male privilege and the status quo. When times are good, increasing numbers of women choose relational independence, sometimes to create a family with no male head (Hudson, 1995). Where financial independence is limited by economic or class constraints, marriage and fertility increases as women's occupational options shrink but many turn to lives of celibacy (e.g., Leyser, 1995) or prostitution (e.g., McNamara, 1985) to avoid conventional subjugation to a husband.

When economic coercion is diluted by a need for women's participation in the workforce and marketplace, what better way to reduce their resistance to gendered interdependence than by idealising marriage as the one-stop shop for romantic love, erotic bliss and inalienable friendship? Labelled as a new form of tyranny (Gillis, 1985), the modern marriage is an unrealistic expectation for many. It is likely that disappointment at the mismatch of the ideal with the real conjugality contributes to the Western world's high divorce rates (ABS, 2012b) as people find their spouses less than the ideology promises they will be.

Nonetheless, the idealised marriage has become the shibboleth of adult development in the West. My analysis of developmental psychology

textbooks, that included editions published in the twenty-first century, found that science continues to confirm the primacy of marriage for adult achievement with other domestic arrangements diagnosed as problematic and possibly, for those who remain independent, pathological (Shoebridge, 2012).

Perhaps in response to the ideological dilemma brought by neoliberalism's cult of the individual and patriarchy's interdependence imperative, the fluctuating marriage rate has been accommodated by some acceptance of alternative categories of interdependence which itself remains a signifier of adult identity (Gillis, 1996). That is, while formal marriage remains the normative model, being part of any type of romantic dyad that approximates marriage indicates adjustment to adulthood. Living independent of romantic attachment is not what adults do, in this ideology.

Gendered power relations are vital for the maintenance of prevailing political and economic systems, and societal functioning. The independent woman is of sufficient threat to a patriarchal social order that she is identified for punitive attention whether this be through legislation outlawing her independence as in Classical times (Pomeroy, 1995) and in the late Middle Ages (Froide, 1999) or through denigratory public discourse in theatre, literature, science or mass media (e.g., Bennet & Froide, 1999; Brookmyre, 2006; Demand, 2001; Lanser, 1999; Showalter, 1978; Vicinus, 1985). Even when she embraces her independent identity, her practices of the self are "not something invented by the individual himself (*sic*). They are models that he (*sic*) finds in his (*sic*) culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him (*sic*) by his (*sic*) culture, his (*sic*) society, and his (*sic*) social group" (Foucault, 1997, p. 291). Nonetheless, women have resisted the patriarchal model of marriage and maternity since its imposition millennia ago, hence the on-going struggle between a patriarchy that vilifies women's independence as a mechanism of control and independent women's claim to a valid social identity.

Conclusion

The history of misogyny reaches back to prehistoric times when the arrival of patriarchy in the cradle of Western civilisation brought systematic devaluation of the feminine. This is most obviously signified by millennia-long active expunging of the Goddess from religious practice, made necessary to legitimise masculine privilege. Women's sexuality became the prime focus of control in both secular and religious discourse. In the lay world, control of women's sexuality meant paternity security for patriarchal management of private, public and political resources. Women were commodified to better serve the interests of men, family and state.

For institutional religion, control of women's sexuality not only reflected and validated patriarchal construction of society. It also was the antithesis of the spiritual practices that celebrated worship of the Goddess. The sexual rituals that demonstrated obeisance to the feminine principles observed in cyclic nature and seasonal fertility were anathema to the theologians of androcentric belief.

Independent women, in particular, became problematic for a society increasingly built around the accumulation of wealth and its protection. Less open to scrutiny than interdependent women, their sexual practice was subject to male projection that expected the now labelled licentiousness associated with pre-patriarchal times. As with Lilith, refusal to accept subjection to male dominance, whether by father or husband, was synonymous with devilry and sexual depravity. Patriarchy has waged a war on women's independence, always associated with discourses of sexual morality that continue to be a fundamental narrative of social control in the twenty-first century.

With the origins of these ideologies now lost to memory, the practices continue so that women in general, and independent women specifically, remain subject to the vicissitudes of patriarchal prescriptions that allow or prevent equitable citizenship. From time to time, over millennia, women's independence has been tolerated for its value to the economy, such as when male populations have been reduced by war or migration, but public discourse has continued to marginalise those who choose to live lives without conventional romantic attachment.

Women, across the centuries, have seized every opportunity for the self-sufficiency that patriarchy perceives as threat to its model of social organisation. Its response is discursive management of women's lives, heavily weighted by misogynistic values, in social relations, popular culture and public policy that seeks to regulate women's freedom to choose (McRobbie, 2009). Misogyny is the fundamental narrative that asserts dominion of the masculine over the feminine in our social, political, economic, and natural worlds.