

**BEFORE AND AFTER MISOGYNY:
A Psychoanalytic Discussion****ANTES E DEPOIS DA MISOGINIA:
Uma discussão psicanalítica**Deborah P. Britzman¹

RESUMO: Para aquelas/es de nós que trabalham nos campos da educação e da psicoterapia, a insistência no fato de que a misoginia afeta todos nós traz, para o primeiro plano, a dolorosa questão de abordar a negação a fim de pensar na nossa própria contribuição para o ódio corporal negado. Pensando com a temporalidade psicanalítica do *antes e depois*, a misoginia é abordada como uma constelação mental da atração da mente para o repúdio, a objetificação e despersonalização da fluidez sexual e de gênero. Analiso as consequências da lógica emocional da misoginia insidiosa nas práticas educacionais e clínicas que resiste trabalhar com seu papel nos estados mentais desassociados externalizados. Meu foco está na geração e difusão das defesas psíquicas de idealização, divisão, negação e repúdio da diferença que impulsiona fantasias de onipotência e se apresentam como ataques no que vem antes e depois da condição humana, ou seja: a natalidade, a bissexualidade, a dependência, a vulnerabilidade, e o amor pelo ambiente materno. Os temas do feminismo, da psicanálise, da teoria queer são apresentados como efeito antidepressivo.

Palavras-chave: pensamento, ação adiada, negação, ideação, colapso simbólico, reparação.

ABSTRACT: For those of us working in the fields of education and psychotherapy, the insistence that misogyny affects us all brings to the forefront the painful question of lifting negation in order to think of one's own contribution to disclaimed bodily hatred. Thinking with the psychoanalytic temporality of *before and after*, misogyny is approached as a mental constellation of the mind's attraction to the disavowal, objectification, and depersonalization of gender and sexual fluidity. I examine the psychical consequences of the emotional logic of insidious misogyny in practices of education and the clinic that resists working through their role in dissociated externalized mental states. My focus is on the generation and diffusion of psychical defences of ideality, splitting, denial, and disavowal of difference that compel phantasies of omnipotence and present as attacks on what comes before and after the human condition, namely: natality, bisexuality, dependency, vulnerability, and love for the maternal environment. Themes of feminism, psychoanalysis, and queer theory are offered as a counter-depressant.

Keywords: thinking, deferred action, negation, ideality, symbolic collapse, reparation.

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Narrative revolts

In the Spring 2016, the Toronto Advanced Training Program in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy held its 44th Scientific Meeting on the topic “Misogyny in the clinic.” Immediately, those present were asked to think about how the destiny of hatred of women and girls unconsciously impresses their emotional attitudes, theoretical frames, anxiety, modes of relationality and interpretation, and our discussion of the problem. The request was to think about our thinking and analyze our clinical imaginary as affected by normative, socio-cultural, familial, and personal idealizations and disparagements of femininity and masculinity. In terms of the politics of education, the meeting resulted from the demands of students and analysts to open the parameters of the clinic with the crucial question of how the psychoanalytic field is affected by movements of civil and human rights and the new therapeutic imaginary that follows from the theoretical critiques of feminism, queer theory, and transsexuality. The problem—at once pedagogical and existential—encompasses transforming the ways we think from the interplay of culture, oppression, and depression so as to fathom breakdowns in and resistance to opening psychological imagination of practitioners to the wider world. All of this is to be taken personally, perhaps the most difficult challenge of all.

Our main presenter, Dr. Leticia Glocer Fiorini, a senior training psychoanalyst of the Argentina Psychoanalytic Association, is internationally known for her pioneering books and papers on affecting psychoanalysis with new theories of sexuality, gender, and social thought, not typically encountered in or even considered as central to clinical education (2007, 2015; 2016). She asked the urgent question: “are psychotherapists

immune from misogyny?”(2016, n.p). Her answer involved a wide-ranging critical assessment of how the psychotherapeutic field enacts mechanisms of sexual and gender normalization through theory, through transmission of paternalistic social attitudes, through cultural prejudices, through the history of psychoanalysis, and through techniques of listening and interpretation. What then is to be undone?

Dr. Glocer Fiorini’s main communication was that meta-theories of social, political, cultural, and psychical life carry the defenses of splitting through binary logic, idealization of the phallus, and, in the context of the clinic, through the imposition of authoritarian relations of power and control. No one is immune. Dr. Glocer Fiorini proposed ongoing efforts of reconceptualizing sexual difference beyond binary splitting of femininity and masculinity. I was a respondent to her presentation and here extend a needed inquiry into the difficulties associated with understanding misogyny as a significance force in the social disavowal of gender and sexual diversity.

The larger context of any response is daunting; misogyny involves an urgent and seemingly intractable situation of gender and sexual breakdowns that, for both life and the clinic, present as difficult, challenging, disturbing, and painful to address since we must speak of hatred of the body along with phantasies of disgust and shame for human origin. How may we intervene within the claustrum of misogyny and transform practices of education and psychotherapy, particularly because the pain of symbolizing the advent and vicissitudes of such destruction affects any attempt at narrative cohesion and requires ongoing self-analysis. Indeed, all at once, the disclaimed emotional logic of misogyny erases the subject. After all, misogyny is the destruction of the birthing of meaning, and by word and action, by family and education upbringing, and through institutional and cultural

designs of inequality and discrimination, everyone is subject to attacks and to attacking those fragile links to singularity, freedom, dependency, autonomy, and the other and, too, further affected by the fear of the vulnerabilities of getting to know the emotional depth and destiny of intersubjectivity in mental life.

More narrative problems emerge with any attempt to gather the consequences and broken relations that drive pernicious misogyny. There is neither a single entrance point of discussion nor an exhaustive account of misogyny's condensations and displacements. As mindless state, misogyny somehow confirms itself, collapsing psychological procedures of splitting, projective identification, and denial with the cultural functions of exclusion, degradation, and violence. In trying to speak of misogyny, ontological difficulties challenge the very possibility of understanding, relationality, and communication as we know them (Pitt and Britzman, 2015). And our constructions, too, are subject to symbolic collapse of nature and culture, a seething morass of the denial and hatred of psychological reality as our capacity for depression, freedom, and imagination. So we have to ask how does symbolic equation, or the collapse of difference between subject and object, leave us with the affectivity of social constructions that sustain misogyny? And, how do we work through the rigidities, instructions, and defenses of the ideality of social constructions with the emotional freedom necessary to create significance for new mental constructions?

The socio-political global context of violence against women and girls today is overwhelming. Misogyny leans hatred of the body. It is a revolt against life itself. Mass rape, sexual enslavement, humiliation, burning, disfigurement, and murder of women, girls, and transgendered people are misogyny's obscenities. Its aftermath leaves survivors and those who can witness such socially induced terror with traumatic grief. Our age of

worldwide wars and failed States, of global displacement and masses of stateless people, of the burning of libraries, schools, and hospitals, of the destruction of art and the censorship of ideas, and the assassinations of journalists, human rights activists, lawyers, and teachers and students brings us to ask why, as the political theorist Hannah Arendt (1993) asked, are human rights as the right to have rights, so disparaged?

Even as I gesture toward crimes against humanity, the tension between the one and the many overwhelms thought. We seem better prepared to list an avalanche of failures and find ourselves rehearsing a litany of despair as if to convince those who turn away that destruction does hold terrible significance for how we live. And in doing this accounting, helplessness overwhelms while individual stories slip away and the complexity of defending emotional life is shoved aside. How then do we understand everyday dissociation and doubts over meaning? How do we find the words to say that in body and spirit, we too are affected? Can we, too, imagine culture through what D. W. Winnicott (1982) named as, “the potential space between individual and environment“? (p. 100). If misogyny is so unrecognized in our own work, how, as Dr. Glocer Fiorini, asks, “is it possible to detect something that is also naturalized in the psychotherapist” (2015, n. p.).

To engage Dr. Glocer Fiorini’s urgent question, I bring education into the fray and treat subterranean misogyny through two intertwined psychoanalytic temporalities that constitute revisions of psychical life and memory: themes of “before” and “after.” My approach draws from psychoanalytic thinking on deferred action, delay in meaning, or more technically, the activity of *Nachträglichkeit* that signifies the belatedness of apprehending the first event (what happened before conscious apprehension) that is already overwritten by the second event (the struggle of creating meaning from what comes after).

Such temporality references revision and forms the basis of symbolizing both the fallout of representation and the crisis in witnessing in literature, pedagogy, and psychoanalysis (Felman and Laub, 1992). On these terms, two questions can be asked. First, what sort of thinking can we manage if we can imagine the question, what comes before thinking? Second, what can it mean to think after misogyny?

What sort of thinking before thinking?

Misogyny sutures ideology with pathological misunderstanding; as negation, its confusion of libidinal ties leads ideality into its disparagement; and, through denial misogyny conceals its phantasies of fusion and exclusion. Such woeful disregard may also be at work in our clinic and classrooms. Dr. Glocer Fiorini's critique is that our clinical work is badly compromised should we ignore the contentions, disagreements, contradictions, and uncertainties within the psychoanalytic field and within political cultures. And much has to do a contradiction within psychoanalysis: while at times, psychoanalysis may mistake infantile theories of sexuality and epistemophilia with infantilization by theory, it is also the case that psychoanalytic theories and techniques provide the means to analyze our negations.

So what are we analyzing when we negate? For the literary critic Lyndsey Stonebridge (2015) in her exceptionally insightful article, "Statelessness and the Poetry of the Borderline," the call is for a new kind of thinking that questions the ideality of '*no, that's not me.*' New thinking, Stonebridge writes,

is not a once and for all narrative moment in the development of the ego. . . We cannot recall that first scene of taking in and spitting out or that judgment and separation. Negation must be grasped retrospectively as an act of thought that has to acknowledge not just the ‘no’, but the state of merging that preceded it. (Stonebridge, 2015, p. 1337)

Of course that first scene of taking in and spitting out occurs with the breast is also the beginning of object relations. The act of the mother giving and taking away her breast, the experience of presence and absence, creates the infant’s psychical reality. Negation thus defends against a time before any boundaries. For the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, the “no” partially signifies the depth of our lost impressions of our earliest object, the emotional relationship with the breast that ushers what also Klein understood as our earliest anxiety situations. Klein’s (1975b) main idea, perhaps still shocking for those who see adulthood as a progressive development away from one’s earliest history, centered the adult’s mind as rooted in infancy. The negation then is directed at the maternal environment, an area of dependency, helplessness, fusion, and love and, significantly, the founding relation from which selves emerge. Indeed, the thinking that comes before thinking is beholden to the mother’s feminine mind and body. If so, the lines of masculinity are variations of femininity, an idea suggests a constitutional bisexuality and that may feel as anathema.

Klein considered anxiety as a feature of loss of love and so as separation anxiety. Such foundational loss, she argued, is the basis for the self’s aggression and creation of two mental positions or orienting phantasies that compose psychical life: the paranoid-

schizoid and depressive positions. Whereas the paranoid-schizoid position expels frustration, splits the part object into good or bad, and creates the talisman principle of attack and revenge from this phantasy of persecution, the depressive position emerges as beholden to thoughts of the other, a pinning for lost love and a position of ambivalence needed to link good with bad. The depressive position is an area of concern for the self and other accompanied by the desire to repair what phantasy has destroyed. Sometimes, the negation comes as bare sentence. I'm thinking of six-year-old Erna, one of Klein's (1975a) Berlin patients. In their first session, Erna tells Mrs Klein: "There is something about life I do not like" (p.35). It is an extraordinary sentence made from the pathos of six years of life. Erna's play was filled with such despair and enacted through her use of small toys as delegates of violent scenarios of murder, revenge, and manic triumphalism. With Erna, Klein had to create a new kind of story made from her play technique that both called upon anxiety, phantasies, and defenses and somehow still invited new conditions for becoming, understood as the depressive position dedicated to the links among freedom, imagination, and care of self with others (Britzman, 2016).

What kind of stories today?

Jacqueline Rose's (2014) *Women in Dark Times*, makes the argument that not only do we need new stories that can tell us more about what the old ones destroy. We have to sort through the rubble of lies and idealizations that destroy our capacity to think. Rose argues for, "a scandalous feminism, one which embraces without inhibition the most painful, outrageous aspects of the human heart, giving them their place at the very core of the world that feminism wants to create" (p. ix). And the scandal is a turn to the agency of

the subject. With great courage Rose constructs new narratives, just at the point where women's lives also serve as warnings for they must face. Rose mediates on the reception, creativity, and our transference to women such as Rosa Luxemburg, Marilyn Monroe, Charlotte Salomon, then to the voices of Shafiea Ahmed, Heshu Yones and Fadime Sahindalon the horrors of honor killing. Her study of some women meeting more than what culture gives concludes with the views of artists who challenge the erasures and lies of national pasts with the insistences of representing the unspeakable. "It is time," Rose demands, "to return to what feminism has to tell us . . .to make the case for what women have uniquely to say about the perils of our modern world" (ix).

The Nobel Prize winning author Toni Morrison (1988) called the fact of racism in the history of United States literature, "The unspeakable things unspoken." The poetics and criticism of Morrison's devastating phrasing may also characterize the soupy chaos that stirs the syndrome of gender ideality, where gender, also subject to the paranoid-schizoid defenses, is felt as either perfect or damaged. Ideality wards off the depression and disappointment of one's own situation and functions as terrifying logic. Ken Corbett's (2016) *A Murder Over a Girl* enters this morass and leaves readers with more questions on what is most inexpressible within enactments of phantasies of destruction. Corbett's study is at once crime reportage of a white fourteen-year-old boy's murder of a fifteen-year-old brown boy who had just begun to identify as a girl, Leticia. The murder occurred in a classroom, a day after a fourteen-year-old white boy walking in a school hallway became unhinged with the question of a fifteen-year-old brown girl, Leticia, who may have said to him in passing, *What's up baby?* Was this an address of passion and a calling out? Was this the unspeakable thing spoken?

As Corbett sits in the court room day after day, as he interviews parents, teachers, and adolescents about what each has seen and felt in trying to make sense, readers face what is ordinary and terrible: the town's symbolic equation that "boys will be boys" was its way of justifying inchoate gender rage. Gender violence is never just that and Corbett's analysis turns to the larger context: the aftermath of the corrosive poverty, the disorders of racism, sexism, homophobia, and the negligence of education to find any meaning in distress and desire.

Many in the town blamed those who loved Leticia as the cause of her murder. There was the female teacher who had given Leticia the gift of a dress and a lesbian teacher who complained to the school administration of homophobia. There were adolescent girls who took pleasure in Leticia's happiness. And there were even other boys who tried to ease the growing tension. Yet the volatility of ideologies of hatred played out in school life, refracted through the psychological failures of turning away that accrue from family and community indifference. Beneath the indifference one finds the chaos of and defense against helplessness. Corbett's layered narrative is unsettling since he must give words to that which resists significance: conflictive stories without awareness lived by boys and girls, teachers and parents, and principals and judges. Corbett narrates resistance to and denial of any symbolization of fear and hatred. Who is the girl? In the wasteland that is murder, meaning is killed off, lives are lost, desire is ruined, and reasons only sustain paranoid logic and conspiracy. The families, teachers, welfare system, and other young adolescents were all involved in what none of them could think, namely the collusion of gender transitions with the tragic failure of the erotic imagination. Corbett deftly analyzes the slow unfolding of this crime scene and how the passion for ignorance, on the part of

the adults in the town, created a fantastical hostility toward gender variability fueled by rumors, magical thinking, blunt paranoia, and the ideality stew of masculinity excited by the attractions of gun culture, Nazism, whiteness, hatred.

Our clinic, whether psychotherapy or education, is challenged to own up to our failures of response as also met by social revolutions that demand new ways of relating. We are, after all, intimately affected with gender fluidity, queer sexualities, choice, and invention. There are new words to learn. Social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Rights for Indigenous People, the disabilities rights movements, and transsexual demands for civil rights all having to do with the body. All insist upon embodied political life and then, when the world of others matters, we encounter more than what any one of us can know. And there are, in Kristeva's (1995) view, "new maladies of the soul" tied to human desire in conflict with its limits. Our clinics, whether psychotherapy or the classroom, are charged with responding to situations we cannot anticipate but that nonetheless bring our thinking to a crossroad.

Fugitive States

Once again, what sort of thinking comes before thinking? In one of his last and perhaps most compact papers directed to psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud's "An Outline in Psychoanalysis (1939/1940)," turns to the ego's fragile boundaries and so to consciousness as "fugitive states" (p.159). "What is conscious," Freud wrote, "is conscious only for a moment" (p.159). While primarily determined by accidents, forgotten history, missed experience, and contemporary events, and while affected by the other, the self is always

subject to the influences of the past, the unconscious, the imperatives and aggressions of the drives, and to the entanglements of cultural histories of love and hate, first conveyed by the phantasies and prohibitions of family life and later as superego anxiety. As borderline creature, the ego is a bodily ego, a projection of its own surface and so always affected by its anticipation of reception and anxieties over the other's gaze. If early on, Freud described the unconscious as the empire of omnipotence, by the end of his life and in his "Outline," he left us with something new. "The process of something becoming conscious is above all linked with the perceptions which our sense organs receive from the external world" (1939/1940, p. 161). Even if we intellectually know that perception does not equate with reality—and this experience is at the heart of gender and sexuality—the tide of being a subject with others is another story. The body, Freud wrote, can "take the place of the external world" (p. 161). Phantasies of taking the place of the world also mean that the body becomes its own omnipotent empire. When the difference of the world disappears, all that is left is the urgency of inchoate and aggressive drives and, with terrifying negations: no potential space, no other, no alterity, and no enigma.

The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1993) took a further step. Becoming conscious requires an apparatus to think. Otherwise, there is only "a thought without a thinker" (p. 165), or what can be proposed as a body without a mind. Bion writes, "I shall use the term "thought" to the mating of a preconception with a frustration. The model I propose is that of an infant whose expectation of a breast is mated with a relation of no breast available for satisfaction" (p. 111). Bion's point is that thinking is a retroactive experience that contains thoughts, which he saw as frustrations. Thinking is our afterward. From this requirement of breast and no breast, or preconception, frustration, and absence, we can

learn to accept the meeting of emotional and mental constructions, or what Klein (1975a) understood as the emotional basis of symbol formation. In different terms, symbolization, or more simply, affecting words, break open the defence of omnipotence (O'Shaughnessy, 2015).

After misogyny?

My second question—*what is it to think after misogyny?* — follows from Dr. Glocer Fiorini challenge, “is it possible to detect something that is also naturalized in the psychotherapist?” (2015, n.p.).

My associations to the difficulties of symbolizing misogyny and the need to link its destructive features of the denial of fluidity in gender and sexuality are deeply affected by two worlds in which I live: the university and the clinic. While I understand their differences, both have a share in the expressions of emotional life along with the binds of transference and language. Within both settings, I am witness to the startles of ambivalence over whether emotional life should have any privilege or meaning at all and whether a new vocabulary that has the tendency to repeat the dilemma has any place at all (Britzman, 2015). Can we even speak of anxiety without experiencing what we are talking about? The phantasy is that one should just get over one's feelings without any awareness that omnipotence is taking hold of emotional logic. The act of reading with difference may be at first refused and interpretation may seem far-fetched, as it does when one first encounters what is far-fetched about the human, namely the affectivity of psychical reality. And yet with reading we become engrossed in the material of an author and with what is difficult

to see; in reading between the lines we give up our own empire of meaning, only to slowly learn the feats and failures of language, the consequences of mishaps in not being able to communicate, and what happens when phantasies are given their due. The same is true for writing where we become narrators of what is most incomplete. Kristeva (2000) begins with the fractures: “What are the stories that Freud asked his patients to tell? Stories full of gaps, silences, awkwardness—in a way, novels deprived of an audience” (p. 65). Even the hesitations of narrative invite a paradoxical creation: speaking as the audacity to signify the things we unconsciously set in stones that can crumble.

What then is the clinician’s involvement with knowledge beyond the clinic? Bion’s (1993) conception of knowledge involves getting to know emotional experience. He posits the pain of getting to know and his work raises the question of how we engage psychoanalytically with interdisciplinary views that pressure our sensitivities and may lead to the frustration of not understanding while still needing to know. We do have a strong model opening disciplinary boundaries in Freud’s work as he too extended his ideas with the expressive arts and the aesthetics that moved him. Kristeva (1995) too gives us the idea that if one is to tolerate the variations of mental distress including our own, and learn from “the inability to represent” (p. 9) our psychical life—if we are to consider the swirls of variability that Henry James (1987) called “the germs of life,” (p. 23) – then it is best to read very long novels. There the reader will experience her or his own reading sense of life’s accidents, blows, failures, and incompleteness. But then, read psychoanalytically and notice what is not there but nonetheless insists on confronting the fate and uncertainties of object relations in mind.

The more difficult novels leave us speechless, saddened, and incomplete. We become affected by words that carry out our aesthetic conflicts, made from the wonderment with the enigmatic breast as inaugurating the thirst for beauty, truth, and knowledge (Meltzer and Harris Williams 1988). Michel de Certeau's (1993) thinking with the Freudian novel asks, "Does one read a text as if it is lying on the couch?" (p. 52). His answer is affirmative: "Psychoanalysis takes up the definition given to fiction as being a knowledge jeopardized and wounded by its otherness (the affect)...In the analytic field this discourse is effective because it is "touched" or wounded by the affect" (p. 27).

The analytic principles of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction—activities Freud (1914) described as "remembering, repeating, and working through"—serve as the symbolic means to narrate resistance to resistance, analyze the collapse of time and space, link a time before to what comes after, and interpret negations of mental life as already touched by affect. The analysis of the patient and analyst's speech is then an open admission that more is being said than what anyone knows. If, due to the fact that childhood and adolescence naturalize or idealize what will need to be historicized, the next step is that we also have to disillusion the absolute mythologies of ideality and disparagement (two sides of the same coin) that denies and negates its own gender and sexual fluidity. What comes after is the counter depressant of words. I find generative ideas with Dr. Glocer Fiorini's view that analytic work emerges from attending to constructions created to think the enigmatic within difference. Even more. Perhaps it is encountering what is most unexpected that any enigmatic construction is given its emotional tenor and freedom to break through the mesmerizing phantasy of part objects. The fading of the social construction permits the emotional construction to emerge and link to mental constructions.

The work is excruciatingly slow and subject to the pain of symbolization. But it is also subject to what Oren Gozlan (2015) develops as “the art of transitioning” within sexual difference that opens the imagination of bodily experience to symbolizing its transformations.

I think we have to accompany our patients’ phantasies along with our own through to the broken heart of their speechless agonies. It means going to where neither of us knows, while destroying what we know too well, namely a syndrome of ideality and disparagement that characterizes misogyny and the negation of gender and sexual fluidity. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl’s work as teacher, analyst, and writer provides invaluable resources for our thinking. In the *Anatomy of Prejudices*, Young-Bruehl (1996) traces the bodily roots of prejudice as secured by adolescence, an area of life subject to ideality and splitting and more difficult to reach in treatment and in life. Young-Bruehl proposes that since post World War II, any approach to addressing the activities of prejudice, the range of social discourses, literary revolts, and education will have to be polyglot. This is so because prejudices based on the “marks of difference”, as “ideologies of desire.” (Young-Bruehl, p. 28). Along with adolescence as the flowering for the syndrome of ideality, Young-Bruehl has made the stunning argument that we have go back further to think about something that comes before and has no name: prejudice against or hatred of children. Her (2012) last book, *Childism* provides a stringent critique of the helping professions of psychology, medicine, education, and law. Young-Bruehl, too rehearses the doubts that follow from accepting there are more “isms:” “When childism pervades a society, however, even people who genuinely want to make the world better for children may find it hard to realize that it exists” (p.4). No one is immune from having to be a child.

Perhaps the main communication then, belongs to how we answer for ourselves the psychoanalytic questions, “What does this have to do with that?” and, “What has happened before?” If misogyny fractures our capacity to think and to tolerate otherness—yours and mine—if its hatred of femininity can be apprehended as the denial of gender and sexual transformations—free association is our greatest ethic for sorting through the boundaries of negation and for lending signification to the repetition compulsion of meaninglessness. What comes after cannot guarantee but does depends on how we may think, for education and the clinic, the destinies of desire as a freedom yet to come, and welcome a return of the audacity of the thinking breast.

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