

MANCHESTER  
1824

THE MEANING OF **Misogyny**

LEVERHULME  
TRUST \_\_\_\_\_

◇ KEYNOTE ◇

ROBIN JESHION (University of Southern California)

THE MEANING OF **Misogyny**

◇ **JUSTINA BERŠKYTĖ** (University of Manchester)

◇ **VITTORIA CAMPISI** (Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele) & **SERGIO GUERRA** (Universidad de Granada)

◇ **CHRIS COUSENS** (University of Manchester)[invited]

◇ **GRACE LI** (The University of Hong Kong & KCL)

◇ **FILIPA MELO LOPES** (University of Edinburgh)[invited]

◇ **AMANDA MCMULLEN** (University of Arkansas)

◇ **MENGYUAN QI** (University of Pittsburgh)

◇ **AYŞE SEDA UMUL** (Independent Researcher)

◇ **ALBA MORENO ZURITA** (University of Santiago de Compostela) & **DAN ZEMAN** (University of Porto)[invited]



| 30.06.2026-01.07.2026 |  
| HYBRID CONFERENCE |  
| UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER |

LEVERHULME  
TRUST

MANCHESTER  
1824

# The Meaning of Misogyny Conference

30<sup>th</sup> of June—1<sup>st</sup> of July 2026

## Day 1 — Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> of June — Room G.33

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Time	Session
10:45–11:00	REGISTRATION
11:00–11:50	<i>Justina Berškytė (University of Manchester)</i>   Introduction: Where Should the Boundaries Lie? The Descriptive and Expressive Scope of Misogyny
11:50–12:05	BREAK
12:05–12:55	<i>Vittoria Campisi (Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele)</i> & <i>Sergio Guerra (Universidad de Granada)</i>   Presuppositional Obstacles in Sex Negotiation [online]
13:00–13:50	<u>Invited Talk</u>   <i>Filipa Melo Lopes (University of Edinburgh)</i>   Misogynistic Dehumanization: Women as Witches
13:50–15:30	LUNCH
15:35–16:25	<i>Mengyuan Qi (University of Pittsburgh)</i>   Event Labels [online]
16:30–18:00	<u>Keynote Talk</u>   <i>Robin Jeshion (University of Southern California)</i>   The Language of Misogyny: Slurs, Stereotypes, and Rape Threats
18:30–19:30	DRINKS
19:30–21:30	CONFERENCE DINNER

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## Day 2 — Wednesday the 1<sup>st</sup> of July — Hanson Room

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Time	Session
09:45–10:00	REGISTRATION
10:00–10:50	<i>Ayşe Seda Umul (Independent Researcher)   The Meaning of Misogynist: An Internal Critique of Manne</i>
10:55–11:45	<i>Grace Li (The University of Hong Kong &amp; King's College London)   Who's Afraid when Feminists "Box"?—Reclaiming Anti-Feminist Slurs in China</i>
11:45–12:00	BREAK
12:00–12:50	<u>Invited Talk</u>   <i>Dan Zeman (University of Porto) &amp; Alba Moreno Zurita (University of Santiago de Compostela)   Misogyny Beyond Neutral Counterparts: Gendered Slurs as Norm Enforcement</i>
12:55–13:45	<u>Invited Talk</u>   <i>Chris Cousens (University of Manchester)   Names, Norms, and Power</i>
13:45–15:25	LUNCH
15:30–16:20	<i>Amanda McMullen (University of Arkansas)   The Context-Sensitivity of Extreme Manosphere Language</i>
16:20–16:30	GOODBYE & END.

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# Day 1

The Meaning of Misogyny Conference

University of Manchester | 30.06.2026–1.07.2026

Room G.33

# DAY 1

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**Introduction: Where Should the Boundaries Lie? The  
Descriptive and Expressive Scope of Misogyny**

JUSTINA BERŠKYTĖ

University of Manchester

TBA

11:00

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11:50

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Room

G.33

12:05

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## Presuppositional Obstacles in Sex Negotiation

12:55

VITTORIA CAMPISI & SERGIO GUERRA

(online)

Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele & Universidad de Granada

This paper identifies the notion of *presuppositional obstacles*, understood as a pragmatic mechanism that can hinder sexual negotiation by constraining what speakers are able to say within a conversation. Building on Stalnaker's (1974) account of pragmatic presuppositions, we argue that presuppositions can function as obstacles when they make certain utterances difficult to perform, for instance, by encoding as presuppositional content what would otherwise be openly contested.

Consider the infamous case of Grace's (pseudonym) horrible sexual encounter with comedian Aziz Ansari (Way 2018), reported by *Babe.net*. Ansari asked Grace repeatedly:

(1) Where do you want me to fuck you?

Grace found (1) "tough to answer because she [...] didn't want to fuck him at all" (Way 2018). In our view, part of the difficulty Grace experienced in refusing sex with Ansari stems from the fact that (1) constitutes a loaded question (Davis 2016), presupposing her prior consent to have sexual relations. Although Ansari's behavior does not necessarily constitute sexual violence in a strict sense, Grace's story belongs to a broader constellation of phenomena that reveal women's lack of access to a "reliable language for saying no" (Gavey 2005: 147).

The idea that presuppositions can work as an obstacle aligns with the widespread assumption that blocking a presupposition is costly (Heck 2021; Murray 2014; Roberts 2012; Sbisà 2023). The cost is both social and cognitive. Socially, rejecting a presupposition often requires adopting a confrontational stance, disrupting the conversational flow, and challenging the legitimacy of the speaker's move (Cepollaro 2025: 361). Cognitively, it imposes additional processing demands compared to answering a straightforward question. Hence, we think that this feature of presuppositions show that by repeatedly uttering (1), Ansari put Grace in a situation in which in order to assert that she did not want to have sex, she had to employ more cognitive and conversationally disruptive resources, at the cost of being perceived as rude or prudish (Kitzinger and Frith 1999). Drawing on Manne's account of misogyny as "the branch of patriarchy that polices and enforces norms and expectations"

(Manne 2018: 78), it is valuable to take into account how these obstacles play a part in creating an unsafe communicative space for women.

We believe that, as in Grace's case, the use of presuppositional obstacles constitutes a situation in which women's speech capacities are truncated in a way that is relevant for approaches to social justice. More specifically, such obstacles can foreclose the intelligibility of sexual negotiation, thereby producing effects akin to those identified in the literature on silencing (Caponetto 2021; Dotson 2011; Langton 1993). They can contribute to both illocutionary silencing, by preventing women from successfully performing certain speech acts, and preemptive silencing (Medina 2023: 109), by distorting women's capacity to negotiate sex by imposing unfavorable conversational conditions.

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## Misogynistic Dehumanization: Women as Witches

FILIPA MELO LOPES

University of Edinburgh

13:00

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13:50

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Room

G.33

In early modern Europe, tens of thousands of women were tortured and killed because they were accused of being witches. Even though these episodes of violence were shaped by economic and political factors, they also required a mass psychological phenomenon of *misogynistic dehumanization*. There was a vast propaganda campaign that depicted women as essentially demonic and convinced much of the population to accept and even support the cruel torture of their family members and neighbors.

Surprisingly, however, the idea that women qua women can be dehumanized — literally thought of as inhuman entities — remains highly controversial in contemporary philosophy. Feminists like Kate Manne have argued against explaining violence in terms of dehumanizing attitudes, citing ways in which perpetrators acknowledge women’s humanity. David Livingstone Smith, who has given a moral psychological account of dehumanization linked to genocidal and racist violence, has repeatedly maintained that this framework is not applicable to misogyny. In this paper, I push back against these two forms of skepticism and argue that we *can* and *should* use the explanatory framework of dehumanization to capture a distinctive strand of hostility towards women qua women. When they are dehumanized, women are represented simultaneously as human and as inhuman embodiments of the natural world. They appear to be magical, contaminating, sexualized threats towards whom violence is acceptable or even necessary. This analysis allows us to bridge philosophy of race and feminist theory and to reject recent claims that racialized and gendered violence require a radically different analysis. I conclude by suggesting that recognizing the role of misogynistic dehumanization in the large-scale violence of the witch-hunts forces us to critically rethink the current use of ‘the witch’ within feminist politics. If this is a dehumanizing figure, reclaiming it as empowering may be much more dangerous than we think.

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15:35  
-  
16:25  
(online)

## Event Labels

MENGYUAN QI

University of Pittsburgh

How does labeling an event shape how we understand its participants and significance? Philosophical research on labels has focused almost exclusively on Agent Labels—slurs, nicknames, identity labels—that pick out people. This focus has left the labeling of events philosophically uncharted, despite the pervasiveness and power of expressions like “riot”, “domestic dispute,” and “love triangle killing.” This paper introduces Event Labels as a foundational category in the study of labels, arguing that they constitute a genuinely distinct kind from Agent Labels—with direct implications for understanding how misogynistic language operates beyond gendered slurs and epithets.

Using “riot” as a paradigmatic case, I develop a three-part framework. First, I establish that Event Labels denote eventualities (Bach 1986, Vendler 1967), a semantic category fundamentally distinct from the objects denoted by Agent Labels. This is not merely taxonomic; it grounds Event Labels’ distinctive communicative behavior. Second, I show that eventuality-denotation warrants two capacities unavailable to Agent Labels: framing event participants by encoding implicit agents, and cueing for specific narratives by selectively consolidating subevents. When Black Americans’ protests are labeled “riots” rather than “protests” or “rebellions,” the label directs attention to participants as violent criminals, dissolves the activities’ connection to the Civil Rights movement, and makes military suppression appear a natural response—all while appearing to merely describe social facts. Yet the same word carries none of these associations when applied to Super Bowl fans or children’s tantrums. Third, I articulate a compounding mechanism explaining this radical contextual variability: “riot” communicates racist content specifically in Black protest contexts because its canonical association with violence compounds with racist stereotypes about Black Americans. The additional content Event Labels communicate is thus determined by the interplay between a label’s linguistic associations and the relevant stereotypes about the subject matter.

This framework speaks to several questions central to the conference. First, it reveals how misogynistic content can be communicated through event-denoting expressions that existing accounts of gendered Agent Labels cannot capture. Labels such as “domestic dispute” or “love triangle killing” exploit the same compounding

mechanism to dissolve perpetrator responsibility and restructure narratives of gendered violence—not by essentializing persons, but by framing events. Second, the framework also bears on the differences and similarities between misogynistic and racist language: just as “riot” produces racist content only when its association with violence meets racist stereotypes, “domestic dispute” may produce misogynistic content only when its association with private, minor conflict meets gendered stereotypes—suggesting that what distinguishes misogynistic from racist labeling is not semantic structure but the stereotypes feeding the mechanism. Lastly, the compounding mechanism reveals linguistic harm that operates independently of speaker intention: speakers who conventionally use “riot” for Black protests or “domestic dispute” for intimate partner violence can inadvertently proliferate oppressive attitudes, exemplifying how harmful speech can persist through convention alone, resembling structural injustice rather than strategic manipulation.

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**The Language of Misogyny: Slurs, Stereotypes, and Rape  
Threats**

16:30

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18:00

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Room

G.33

ROBIN JESHION

University of Southern California

**KEYNOTE**

TBA

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## Day 2

The Meaning of Misogyny Conference

University of Manchester | 30.06.2026–1.07.2026

Hanson Room

# DAY 2

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## The Meaning of *Misogynist*: An Internal Critique of Manne

10:00

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10:50

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Hanson

Room

AYŞE SEDA UMUL

Independent Researcher

Kate Manne’s reconceptualisation of misogyny in *Down Girl* (2018) is widely regarded as the most systematic and politically significant account of misogyny in contemporary analytic philosophy. By defining misogyny as the “law enforcement” branch of patriarchy, consisting of hostile social forces that police and enforce patriarchal norms and expectations, Manne moves beyond the psychologistic and individualistic naïve conception and offers an ameliorative, unified, and intersectional feminist framework. This paper finds Manne’s characterisation of misogynistic hostilities useful and does not aim to challenge it. Instead, it identifies a specific and damaging internal tension in her framework concerning the relationship between misogynistic acts and misogynists as agents.

Manne defines misogynistic hostilities qualitatively: for a hostility to count as misogynistic, it is sufficient that it has a distinctively gendered basis or quality, targeting women for actual, perceived, or representative violations of patriarchal norms. She explicitly rejects the quantitative “folk criterion,” which asks whether women experience a given hostility more than men, in favour of this qualitative understanding. However, when Manne turns to defining misogynists as persons, she shifts to a considerably different approach. She characterises “misogynist” as a comparative threshold concept, to be applied only to individuals whose misogynistic behaviour is more severe and more consistent than the majority of people in the same social position, what she calls “overachievers” in patriarchal law enforcement.

I argue that this shift generates a direct internal inconsistency in Manne’s framework: an individual who personally perpetuates an act with a distinctively gendered basis or quality, satisfying Manne’s own qualitative criterion, may nevertheless escape the label “misogynist” simply by virtue of not overachieving relative to their comparison class, a conclusion I find both philosophically implausible and politically damaging for an account that explicitly aims to be ameliorative.

This inconsistency has concrete consequences. Some women, some allies, and some men who occasionally perform misogynistic acts, such as a man who jokes to his female coworker that she should “go back to the kitchen,” systematically escape the label “misogynist” under Manne’s account, not because what they do fails to meet her qualitative criterion for misogynistic hostility, but simply because they

are not overachievers relative to their comparison class. This risks exonerating a wide range of agents whose acts Manne's own framework identifies as misogynistic, undermining the ameliorative and political ambitions of her account. In response, I argue that we must reconsider how we define misogynists in a way that accommodates cases where an act satisfies Manne's own qualitative criterion for misogynistic hostility, yet its perpetrator fails to meet her overachiever threshold. I suggest that such a reconceptualisation is not only possible but necessary if Manne's framework is to achieve its own ameliorative ambitions.

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## Who's Afraid when Feminists "Box" ? –Reclaiming Anti-Feminist Slurs in China

10:55

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11:45

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Hanson  
Room

GRACE LI

University of Hong Kong & King's College London

There was a time that each and all feminists in China are in a witch-hunt: you must prove to the world that you are a liberal, egalitarian (potentially Marxist) women's rights activist, instead of a radical, "ungrateful", "reversely sexist" feminist. The former, is addressed as "nv quan1" (女权) or "ping quan" (平权), namely women's rights or equal rights; the latter, is addressed as "nv quan2" (女拳), namely women's fists, or women who box.

This paper argues that 1) "nv quan2" (女拳) has been used as a slur against all feminists 2) slurs of this kind carries illocutionary force 3) slurs of this kind constitute epistemic exploitation 4) the subsequent reclamation of "nv quan2" (女拳) re-establishes women's fair epistemic agency.

Online slurs have been understood as a form of silencing (Berškýtė & Popa-Wyatt 2026) and thus carry illocutionary force over all women. It is argued that online trolling such as repetitively demanding a feminist blogger to explain whether she was "nv quan1" (女权) or "nv quan2" (女拳) can intimidate all women users into "self-censure, avoidance or withdrawal from online spaces", constituting "pre-emptive silencing" (Berškýtė & Popa-Wyatt 2026). The essential challenge is on her epistemic agency and her fair share of public space for speech.

The division between "nv quan1" (女权) and "nv quan2" (女拳) is arbitrary and constitutes a form of epistemic exploitation (Berenstein 2016), namely a form of epistemic labour that is expected from the oppressed to their oppressors. One must prove/explain their oppressive status and educate/convince the oppressive class that oppression is real. Furthermore, the epistemic labour involved will very often go to waste, and thus feminists fall in the trap of patriarchy to "identify herself" and "explain herself" without furthering any rights or activisms (Pohlhaus 2017).

However, recent trends of reclamation bring positive light to "nv quan2" (女拳). Many women in China identify comfortably with women's fists, or women who box because such a term symbolizes power and activity. Reclamation makes the oppressed group identify with slurs and thus transforms the meaning (Valtonen 2025; Jeshion 2020). By challenging the epistemic objectification they were going through, feminists in China re-establish their fair share of public space as well as their equal epistemic agency.

In conclusion, this paper serves as an attempt to apply philosophy of language on online dynamics in China, locating research in misogyny and slurs in a context of anti-feminist backlash. Furthermore, the discussion of epistemic exploitation and pre-emptive silencing will be of interest to researchers on epistemic objectification and reclamation of slurs.

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## Misogyny Beyond Neutral Counterparts: Gendered Slurs as Norm Enforcement

12:00

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12:50

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Hanson  
Room

DAN ZEMAN & ALBA MORENO ZURITA

University of Porto & Univerisity of Santiago de Compostela

Misogyny Beyond Neutral Counterparts: Gendered Slurs as Norm Enforcement

In an influential paper on gendered slurs and misogyny, Ashwell (2016) argues that expressions targeting women for their sexual behaviour challenge the neutral counterpart thesis (Vallée 2014; Whiting 2013), according to which every slur has a corresponding expression that refers to the same group in a neutral way. She claims that the expressions typically proposed as neutral counterparts fail in two respects. First, they do not clearly identify a precise set of referents: descriptions such as “sexually active woman” may apply to a wide and heterogeneous group and therefore fail to capture the specific target of the slur. Second, these expressions are not genuinely neutral, since they often incorporate normative assumptions about how women are expected to behave sexually. On Ashwell’s view, gendered slurs do not merely refer to a group of women but encode social norms that condemn certain forms of female sexual behaviour, reflecting broader patterns of misogyny. These norms shape both the meaning of the slur and the contexts in which it is used.

This paper argues that Ashwell correctly identifies an important feature of gendered slurs—namely, their role in enforcing misogynistic social norms—but that her critique of the neutral counterpart thesis relies on an overly strong conception of linguistic neutrality. Drawing on the discussion in Beaver and Stanley (2023), we argue that the ideal of complete neutrality in language is largely incoherent, since linguistic expressions are always embedded in social practices and ideological perspectives. If this is correct, then the difficulty Ashwell identifies does not arise specifically for slurs, but for any attempt to refer to socially constructed groups whose identities are shaped by shared norms and expectations.

Our proposal is that the neutral counterpart thesis should be understood in a weaker, relational sense. On this interpretation, a neutral counterpart need not be completely free of normative assumptions; rather, it must simply identify the relevant group without reproducing the explicit derogatory evaluation expressed by the slur. Neutral counterparts are therefore best understood as context-dependent and normatively situated descriptions whose neutrality is relative and potentially temporary.

This reinterpretation has an important consequence for the theory of gendered slurs. It allows us to preserve Ashwell's central insight—that such slurs function as tools for enforcing misogynistic norms—without requiring the rejection of the neutral counterpart thesis. The harmful force of gendered slurs does not depend on the absence of neutral counterparts, but on their role within social practices that police and reinforce expectations about women's behaviour.

We conclude that Ashwell's arguments undermine a strong interpretation of the neutral counterpart thesis, but not a weaker and more contextual version of it. More broadly, this approach supports an account of slurs as linguistic mechanisms for enforcing socially embedded norms, highlighting the role of misogyny in shaping both their meaning and their social effects.

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12:55

## Names, Norms, and Power

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13:45

CHRIS COUSENS

University of Manchester

—  
Hanson  
Room

Invited

What's in a name? Quite a lot, actually! Among other things, names often convey information about gender, race, and class—in societies where gender, race, and class are axes of oppression, control of names and naming is very important. For example, trans people often choose a preferred name that affirms their gender, disavowing a 'deadname', while transphobes use those deadnames to undermine that affirmation. I argue that deadnaming and avowing a preferred name are opposite moves in an 'activity of oppression'—similar structures are at play when married women adopt (or reject) a husband's (or ex-husband's) name, or when someone chooses a new name to reflect their religious beliefs. In addition to changing local norms governing reference to an individual, these moves contribute to the shape of wider social norms dictating how names are chosen, whose choices are respected, and how social power is distributed.

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## The Context-Sensitivity of Extreme Manosphere Language

15:30

AMANDA MCMULLEN

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16:20

University of Arkansas

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Hanson  
Room

My presentation concerns language we find in the manosphere like ‘femoid’, ‘foid’, ‘hole’, ‘reproducer’, ‘roastie’, and ‘body’. Call this speech ‘Extreme Manosphere Language’. I consider EML “misogynistic” in Kate Manne’s (2017) sense: the function of literal uses of these terms can be described as maintaining and strengthening inequity between men and women. Competent literal users of EML pragmatically presuppose that women are rational, autonomous, and have a subjective life (Martha Nussbaum, 1995)<sup>1</sup>. For Manne, this distinguishes such speech from sexist language, the most common of which denies women their intellects (e.g. ‘dumb blonde’; ‘girl’, or ‘doll’ said to a grown woman).

My chief claim is that a literal use of EML is sensitive to the speaker’s judgment of whether the woman to whom the term is applied is “fuckable” (“f—able”) (Amia Srinivasan, 2021). Given how diverse these terms are—for instance, some involve the additional complications of metaphor (‘femoid’), synecdoche (‘hole’, ‘body’), and combinations thereof (‘roastie’)—one would not expect this judgment to be “semantically” encoded in any truth-conditional sense. Instead, I understand “semantic” more broadly as constraints on competent *use*.

“F—ability” is a property possessed by certain women. It is a perspectival property insofar as it involves the *speaker’s* application of certain standards, namely, the manosphere’s patriarchal beauty standards and other intersecting bigotries (fatphobia, ableism, transphobia, etc.). In this way, it has both an objective element (constraints posed by the manosphere ideology) and a subjective component (judgment within these constraints).

“F—ability” is conceptually distinct from other aesthetic appraisals, e.g. finding beautiful or hot. “F—ability” refers to whether the speaker would have sex with the target but unlike “hot”, captures what misogynistic speakers take to be a *minimum* for sex. It is even compatible with some level of disgust. In this way, although ‘f—able’ does express the speaker’s sexual desire, it is not the compliment it would seem to be. In one representative comment, Redditor TakeTimeAway explained, “Coming from a man, 80% of all women are “fuckable”. Saying someone is fuckable is just saying you aren’t grotesquely fat and ugly”<sup>2</sup>. Despite the user’s characteristically

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<sup>1</sup>I argue for this claim as part of the linguistic data for my theory

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueOffMyChest/comments/adp7ug/being\\_fuckable\\_is\\_not\\_a\\_compliment/](https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueOffMyChest/comments/adp7ug/being_fuckable_is_not_a_compliment/)

high ( “80%” ) claim, “f—ability” is exceptionally narrow, applying only to very young, cis, and able-bodied women.

There is linguistic data to support my claim, including the infelicity of applying EML to subjects considered taboo for sex, e.g. one’ s relatives, or the infelicity of conjunctions in which the speaker predicates EML to someone but denies their “f—ability”. There is also the suitability of EML for a specific misogynistic illocutionary act. The speaker who imputes EML to a woman “puts her in her place” by inserting an ideology on which, despite the implicit recognition of her human capacities, her sole value lies in her capacity for sex and childbearing. It is this recognition that makes the act an especially cruel form of domination.

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## Practical

29.06.2026

### The Meaning of Misogyny

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01.07.2026

- Location:** *Day 1:* Room G.33 & *Day 2:* Hanson Room, Humanities Bridgeford Street, The University of Manchester, Bridgeford Street, Manchester, M13 9PL. The building is wheelchair accessible, G.33 has step-free access, but the Hanson room does not. **If you require step-free access, please get in touch with the organisers.** Further accessibility information can be found [here](#).
- Lunch:** On both days, we will go to [Navarro Lounge](#). If you are planning to join (and haven't already) please let Justina know so she can include you in the booking. Vegan and gluten-free options are available, but if you do have any other dietary requirements, get in touch!
- Registration:** Registration for in-person and online participation is free but necessary. To register click [here](#).
- Organisers:** Please get in touch with the conference organisers should you have any questions:
- Justina Berškýtė, justina.berskyte@manchester.ac.uk
  - Adelina Valoschi, adelina-dalia.valoschi@manchester.ac.uk
- Policy:** We follow [BPA/SWIP Good Practice Scheme](#). Please also familiarise yourself with our [Departmental Events Policy](#).
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- Website:** [The Meaning of Misogyny Conference Website](#).
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