

Kate Manne

Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny

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In *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Kate Manne argues that the concept *misogyny* should be reconceived as a social and political phenomenon instead of its usual "naïve" rendering as a psychological phenomenon. In this, Manne is successful. *Down Girl* is highly recommended for its contribution to feminist, moral, and political philosophy, offering a parsimonious framework for scholars to intelligibly articulate why patterns of sexual objectification, threats, and violence toward women persist in a supposedly postpatriarchal world. Though Manne limits the application of her argument to misogyny imposed on white women living in the US, UK, and Australia, this is not a weakness of the text. Manne explicitly and repeatedly explains that this limitation is due to the boundaries of her own lived experience. The versatility of Manne's argument enables and encourages different persons working in different contexts to examine misogyny in its various manifestations. Indeed, this reviewer expects *Down Girl* will form a foundational text for future research in this domain.

Manne begins *Down Girl* by criticizing the commonly received, dictionary definition of misogyny. Misogyny, usually conceived, is "primarily a property of individual agents (typically, although not necessarily, men) who are prone to feel hatred, hostility, or other similar emotions toward any and every woman, or at least women generally, *simply because they are women*" (32). However, Manne argues this dictionary definition is "naïve" about the broader social and political relations that misogynistic behavior is generated through and operates within (32). If misogyny is understood as a primarily psychological phenomenon of an individual, moral blame is limited to the inscrutable and irrational attitudes of a person. As such, this understanding cannot make sense of ongoing patterns of such behavior--and Manne wants to say that these acts are not merely random, unsystematic occurrences. Indeed, what this naïve definition fails to do is contextualize such behavior within the milieu in which such actions are embedded: an enduring patriarchal system--a framework in which the reasons behind misogynistic attitudes can become comprehensible. The logic of misogynistic behavior is thus revealed: "misogyny primarily targets women because they are women in a *man's world* . . . rather than because they are women in a *man's mind*" (64).

Manne goes on to argue that misogyny should be understood specifically as the "law enforcement" branch of a patriarchal system, "which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing norms and expectations" (78). Misogyny is therefore the violent manifestation of a relational form of power permeating throughout a patriarchal society, in which any woman who steps out of her "traditional" or "natural" roles will be met with discomfort and unease at best, and hostility and violence at worst. Importantly, such enforcement is not only applied by men who are threatened by women imposing on men's traditional or natural roles; it is also applied by women who are rewarded and valorized (and thereby seemingly conditioned) for attacking other women who have stepped out of line.

If any point could be added to Manne's delineation of misogyny here, future academic work might consider utilizing the language of already established frameworks to aid Manne's articulation. Perhaps misogyny might also be expressed using the language of a Foucauldian lens of power, Tocqueville's and Mill's concept of social tyranny, or the literature surrounding hegemonic masculinities. This could help broaden the reach of Manne's argument across scholarly boundaries. Of course, *Down Girl* is a crossover text, intended to be accessible to both general and academic audiences. For the purposes of *Down Girl*'s publication, Manne's choice of language is clear.

One of the benefits of Manne's reconceived misogyny is that sharper demarcations can be made among misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy--especially useful for a general audience who may struggle with defining such concepts. As Manne clarifies, whereas misogyny enforces patriarchy through social norms, expectations, and (sometimes) violence, sexism "should be understood primarily as the 'justificatory' branch of a patriarchal order" (79), an order that delineates what traditional and natural roles, interests, and appetites should be for men and women. In particular, women are not expected to encroach upon masculine-coded privileges, including "social positions of leadership, authority, influence, money, and other forms of power" (113). Yet perhaps most intriguingly, Manne also writes that men should expect "freedom from shame and lack of public humiliation" (113). Indeed, the humiliation a man might experience under a patriarchal system is precisely when women seek out and attain male-coded privileges at that man's perceived expense.

Manne raises a variety of cases that demonstrate the importance of this latter point on male expectation. Particularly telling is the case with which Manne opens *Down Girl*: the Isla Vista killings, an event that prompted Manne to write about and make sense of misogyny to begin with. Elliot Rodger, the shooter, claimed he had been forced into a state of loneliness, rejection, and therefore humiliation through emasculation because women had not paid him any attention or fulfilled his sexual desires. Naïve misogyny reduced Rodger to an irrational person with a psychological disorder. Misogyny reconceived as a social and political phenomenon reveals the logic behind Rodger's behavior--women had not fulfilled their natural role in providing him with his expected male-coded privileges. Indeed, Rodger directed his vicious message to all women, not any particular woman. To enforce what he thought was deserved, Rodger resorted to extreme violence.

Other forms of violence, such as male family annihilators, also fit into this logic of misogyny. When such a man is humiliated (through losing or failing to uphold male-coded privileges), his sense of shame is relieved through the killing of those closest to him--he will no longer need to face their judgment. But given that his family is an extension of self, such annihilation is a destruction of his identity; consequently, "[h]is murders remove the unbearable pressure but also the point of his being" (126). The man commits suicide. Though Manne does not speak to this issue, this particular example raises an interesting point: the patriarchal system can also have damaging impacts on men who feel socially compelled to uphold a certain gendered expectation, lest they be seen as not "man enough." In this way, some men will also be victims within this prevailing logic of misogyny.

Of course, the danger of putting too much weight on that argument (that men could be victims in the patriarchal system) is that it risks an imbalanced compassion toward male perpetrators of violence toward women, especially sexual violence. If receiving sex is a male-coded expectation, as Rodger certainly perceived it to be, then males who carry out sexual violence will receive less punishment than would be expected under a nonpatriarchal system--and perhaps even elicit our sympathy through their "humiliation." In this context, Manne introduces a helpful concept to the literature: *himpathy*, referring to the "excessive sympathy sometimes shown toward male perpetrators of sexual violence" (197). The value of this concept is how readily it makes intelligible the phenomenon of excessive sympathy toward men over women in a variety of contexts. Manne rightly raises the case of Brock Turner (who received a particularly light sentence for a sexual assault conviction in 2016) as a clear example of himpathy (196-201), but another recent example in the Canadian context is Patrick Brown's fall from the leadership of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives. Brown was in a promising position on the eve of the 2018 Ontario provincial elections to take the provincial premiership. However, following allegations of sexual assault, Brown was forced to resign his position. Himpathy was evident in the press in the aftermath, given the potential he had to become the next premier of Ontario. But precisely the point Manne wants to raise is that excessive sympathy toward Brown misdirects our attention from the real victims of this affair: the women who spoke out against Brown's violence.

If these examples do not demonstrate the timeliness of *Down Girl*, Manne's final analysis surely does: the 2016 US presidential election that saw Donald Trump beat Hilary Clinton. Through the conceptual resources developed throughout the text, Manne offers illuminating explanations of the Trump campaign's behavior toward Clinton. For instance, consider the "lock her up" chant. Clinton, as a woman, was encroaching on masculine-coded privileges--indeed, the ultimate privilege of social and political dominance in the US: the presidency. The chant certainly reflected a desire to see Clinton punished for such encroachment, but it was more than that: it was a desire for Clinton's containment (260). Should a woman be so bold as to completely step out of her traditional and natural role, she ought to be locked away to prevent further subversion of the patriarchal system. Clinton was an imposter in a man's world--a morally repugnant fraud.

Indeed, note the imbalance of attacks directed toward Clinton and Trump: for all of Clinton's faults, they did not compare to Trump's admission of sexual violence and disdain for democratic tradition. Yet voters, including a large proportion of white women, overlooked Trump's attitude toward violence at the ballot box--an apparent manifestation of himpathy. Of course, Manne's reconceived misogyny cannot do all the explanatory work of the US presidential election, nor

does it intend to. Other factors are clearly at play here: political biases, race relations, class issues, and so on. The point is that misogyny also played a significant role--a role that Manne makes comprehensible. Perhaps future research will be able to detail how all these factors intertwine to present a more holistic analysis.

Countless other examples call for an application of Manne's argument. In this way, *Down Girl* leaves the reader wanting more, and Manne eagerly invites both scholars and her general audience to fill in those gaps. Rich conversations and literatures will surely follow in this book's wake.