

## Book Review

*Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, by Kate Manne. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. xxiv + 307.

### 1. The structure and moral psychology of misogyny

Kate Manne's *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* combines traditional conceptual analysis and feminist conceptual engineering with critical exploration of cases drawn from popular culture and current events in order to produce an ameliorative account of misogyny, that is, one that will help address the problems of misogyny in the actual world. The result is a timely, engaging, and relatively accessible account of a phenomenon that, in a variety of ways, structures the lives of millions.

Manne's definition of misogyny aims to capture usage patterns in many feminist circles. She presents her view as an alternative to the naïve yet widespread belief that misogyny is a matter of the internal attitudes of individual men. On Manne's account, misogyny is not primarily a matter of the psychology of individuals. Rather, it is a matter of the social norms, expectations, and consequences that order the lives of women and girls under a system of patriarchal oppression. Misogyny is to be contrasted with sexism, which Manne takes to comprise the set of ideological justifications, often scientific in nature, that serve to rationalize and naturalize the patriarchal order.

On Manne's account, the primary function of misogynistic acts and behaviours is to punish women who deviate from patriarchal norms and expectations. Under these norms, women are expected to provide men with feminine-coded goods, such as deference, attention, care, and sympathy. When women do not provide such goods or request masculine-coded goods like status or authority, they can expect to be put in their place as 'more or less subtly hostile, threatening, and punitive norm-enforcement mechanisms will be standing at the ready' (p. 47). Misogyny is thus construed as the series of 'coercive enforcement mechanisms' that ensure that women stick to their assigned patriarchal roles of providing emotional labour and that those who deviate from the script are swiftly punished.

Manne puts to rest many of the silly yet persistent myths surrounding misogyny, such as the belief that misogyny involves hating or feeling negatively toward all women. Why, she asks, should we expect even deeply misogynistic men to write off *all* women, even those who adhere to patriarchal

standards of femininity, deference, obedience, emotional availability, and so on? Such universal animosity toward women including those who amicably serve the interests of men would require a very strange moral psychology. The naïve picture that misogyny involves animosity toward all women also superficially restricts the phenomenon, as only men who hold the most severely aversive attitudes towards women would count as misogynists.

Having dispensed with such an oversimplified moral psychology, Manne gives an account of misogyny whereby it embraces a wide variety of attitudes, specifically the ‘reactive attitudes’, such as blame, resentment, and guilt, as well as a diversity of punishments such as shaming and ousting behaviour (p. 58). Her extensive analysis of real-world examples shows that misogynistic retribution can take a range of forms from subtle workplace hostility to physical attacks and even mass murder.

In addition to offering an ameliorative account, one of Manne’s stated goals is to produce an analysis that can be compatible with intersectional work. This goal is situated in a recognition of the history of white feminism and the problems it faces. The question that still exists for white women doing feminist work in the twenty-first century is how to proceed without doubling down on the worst parts of white feminism’s history and present. White women, feminists included, have generally sought to share in the spoils of white supremacy with white men. Much has been written on the devil’s bargain that members of the early women’s suffrage movement made with white supremacy. While early white women’s suffragists allied with abolitionists, they were weary of treating Black enfranchisement as a goal of equal import to women’s suffrage. By treating the two instead as competing goals, they made clear that their aim was to share in the racial and class-based power and privilege that they felt they were entitled to as educated white women of means. In an 1865 letter to the editor of the *New York Standard*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote:

The representative women of the nation have done their uttermost for the last thirty years to secure freedom for the negro; and as long as he was lowest in the scale of being, we were willing to press his claims; but now, as the celestial gate to civil rights is slowly moving on its hinges, it becomes a serious question whether we had better stand aside and see ‘Sambo’ walk into the kingdom first. (Davis 1983, p. 70)

A sense of entitlement to share in the benefits of white supremacy motivated white women suffragists, and this was exacerbated by their perception that Black people were gaining ground at their expense. A century and a half later, white women voted for an openly misogynistic and white nationalist presidential candidate because they cherished the privileges of white supremacy and were unwilling to renounce them.

A feminist account of misogyny that is both intersectional and ameliorative must provide theoretical tools for recognizing misogyny in its many-dimensional forms, as it interacts and overlaps with other oppressions. It must also

be able to hold women with power and privilege accountable for their role in perpetrating misogyny against other women. Does Manne's account rise to this challenge? In some ways it does, and in others it does not. Manne recognizes that white women have played a central role in upholding white supremacy and participating in the oppression of women of colour, which is an important starting point. But while she thinks subtly about many of the material conditions that create misogyny as a set of normative social practices, she does not fully extend this care to the other intersectional forms of oppression she discusses. If Manne had done for other dimensions of oppression what she does for gender, she would have been better able to fulfil the promises of her text.

After touching on the book's strengths, I track variations of the main problem as it shows up throughout the text. This is its failure fully to conceive of oppressions besides sexism and misogyny as systemic patterns of social practices, as inherently structural rather than mere collections of individual beliefs and behaviours. It is important to note that the critiques offered here are in the spirit of our shared goals. They are also in the spirit of promoting the success of this project so that it isn't brought down by the problems it didn't have to have.

## 2. Monsters and golden boys

A particularly illuminating section of the book is Manne's exhortation to readers to give up certain conceptual and rhetorical practices that excuse and absolve men who perpetrate violence against women. The urgency of this issue is evident in the chapter 'Exonerating Men', where Manne looks closely at the narratives deployed about Brock Turner, a 19-year-old convicted rapist, who was described during his trial as one of Stanford's star athletes and the loss of whose bright future was repeatedly lamented. So great was concern for the rapist's future that he was sentenced to a mere six months in prison, of which he served only three.

The rhetoric surrounding the case illustrates why the 'golden boy' narrative must be relinquished. The narrative's argument works to clear allegations on the basis of character: Turner is a golden boy; a golden boy wouldn't do this; therefore Turner wouldn't do this. Manne notes the words of one of Turner's female friends who testified that he had always been sweet and caring toward her. The friend distinguished Turner's crime from that of someone who would kidnap and rape a woman in a parking lot at night: 'That is a rapist. I know for a fact that Brock is not one of these people' (p. 198). As Manne emphasizes, 'the trouble is, virtually no one will seem like "that person" to people who know them, especially their family and friends' (p. 211). Male perpetrators of sexual violence often have female friends and family members who love them and whom they love in return and even treat with care and respect. This does not preclude them from perpetrating sexual abuse against others.

Manne pointedly diagnoses the reasoning behind these harmful rape myths:

‘These people’ are pictured as unlovable, invulnerable, and as having no past beyond their crimes, no life of their own to date, and no valuable future to miss out on. ‘That person’ is not a socially situated, morally multifaceted, and sometimes talented human being. Rather, they are a caricature; or, again, a monster. (p. 211)

Manne’s account of exoneration-via-caricature captures what so many survivors of sexual violence have heard from well-meaning friends, family members, colleagues, and mentors: ‘*Him?* Really? But he is such a nice guy! And he’s married! Are you sure you didn’t misinterpret it? We had him to dinner recently, and I just can’t believe that he would do that’. These rape myths are resources that perpetrators of sexual violence rely on for epistemic cover. They draw on them to create plausible deniability so that they may continue their violations. Manne usefully draws attention to the urgent need to change these myths and perceptions if we are to make progress in our collective reasoning about rape.

### 3. Dehumanization is a social process

Just as Manne argues that it does not take an especially monstrous villain to commit acts of sexual violence, she also argues that it does not take an especially monstrous conception of an oppressed group as sub-human in order to commit acts of mass cruelty or genocide against them. In the chapter ‘Humanizing Hatred’, Manne takes aim at humanism, which she characterizes as the view that treating others cruelly often depends on conceiving of them as less than human. Manne argues against the common view that dehumanization plays a central role in the perpetration of violence and cruelty against marginalized, othered populations.

Manne conceives of dehumanization in an unusual way—as the straightforward, literal belief that the relevant population is non-human or sub-human. But there is an important distinction between dehumanization as an ideologically driven, propagandistic, social process, and dehumanization as a stable belief in the lack of the Other’s humanity. While Manne’s target is the latter view, it is the former that is most relevant to the book’s purposes.

Here, Manne’s discussion of dehumanization would be more illuminating (as well as ameliorative) if it were more similar to her take on misogyny—namely, if she eschewed an oversimplified psychology and recognized the phenomenon ‘as a property of social environments first and foremost’ (p. 66). Just as Manne recognizes misogyny to be a system of enforcement mechanisms rather than the descriptive belief that women are inferior to men, dehumanization should be recognized as an ongoing social process rather than merely a theory about the propositional content of individuals’ beliefs.

Manne’s primary argument against humanism is that many of the acts that dominant groups perpetrate in order to enforce oppression in fact depend on

the humanity of the oppressed group in order to make sense. Even the process of dehumanization itself hinges on the human status of the target. Manne explains,

When a white police officer in Ferguson called a group of black political protestors 'fucking animals' ... he was using this trope to demean and degrade the protestors and reassert his own dominance ... Such put-downs would hardly be apropos when it comes to *actual* non-human animals, who could neither comprehend the insult nor *be* successfully put down by having their nonhuman status correctly identified. This requires human comprehension, not to mention an incipient human status to be degraded *from*. (p. 164, emphasis in original)

This may well be true, but it does little to undermine the claim that dehumanization as a social and psychological process increases associations between a subordinated group and non-human animals in a way that facilitates cruelty and oppression. Acknowledging the empirical research in this area is essential to understanding the phenomenon of dehumanization and its pernicious effects.

Goff, Eberhardt, Williams and Jackson (2008) showed both that white Americans have significant implicit associations between Black faces and apes and that stronger associations were linked with greater support for anti-Black police violence. The authors also looked at news archives of stories written about people convicted of capital crimes and found that Black convicts were more likely than white convicts to be described using ape-like language connoting animalistic and subhuman qualities. They further found that those who were described using such language were more likely to be executed by the state.

There is no real conflict then between the view that a process of dehumanization makes cruelty easier and the claim that it is the belief in the humanity of the oppressed group which makes the process of dehumanizing them necessary in the first place. As has often been emphasized, ideological schemas that justify oppression and the controlling images they produce need not be coherent or consonant with one another and are, in fact, frequently inconsistent.

During U.S. slavery, the social process of dehumanization of African and African-descended peoples allowed white people to enact a brutal regime of racial domination. Proponents of slavery asserted that forced manual labour was good for 'Africans' and that their minds could not function properly without it. Slaveowner, physician, and famous scientific racist Josiah Nott justified the continued enslavement of African-descended peoples on the basis of conjured craniological features that purported to demonstrate limits on their capacities for rationality. Yet laws across the antebellum South prohibited teaching slaves to read. Plantation owners frequently expressed the belief that people held in slavery were sub-human 'animals', yet Plantation owners' wives forced lactating enslaved women to nurse their white infants. But if African and African-descended enslaved peoples

weren't capable of higher thought, what would have been so dangerous about their having access to education? And if slaveowners sincerely believed that enslaved peoples were animals, then why would they force them to nurse their infant children?

One thing Manne's chapter can be taken to show is that there is an element of bad faith in the production of dehumanizing propaganda and ideology. But this does not mitigate the need to recognize that processes of dehumanization are absolutely central to all forms of oppression, or that dehumanization comprises a collection of social practices that structure hierarchical orderings of bodies and lives. Even the forms of debasement and control that humans practise over non-human animals are systems of social practices of devaluation and domination. There is no manifestation of oppression that is not a social practice. When we talk about the role that dehumanization as a social process plays in producing violence against oppressed groups, it is clear that we are not generally talking about *sincerely and literally believing* in the sub-humanity of oppressed groups.

#### 4. Amelioration and intersectionality

Producing an ameliorative account of misogyny involves creating the social imaginary required to engage with the material realities of multiple dimensions of oppression. Manne's tendency to avoid thinking structurally about forms of oppression beyond those experienced by cisgender class-privileged white women manifests in some of her methodological assumptions, which conflict with her stated goal of creating an ameliorative account of misogyny. Manne invokes her lack of lived experience as the reason she does not engage at all with the pressingly urgent issue of transmisogyny. She writes, 'I regret not being able to speak to its nature. That being said, it seemed evident to me I didn't have the requisite authority to do so' (p. 25). Manne takes the Tuvel/Hypatia controversy to highlight the 'need for lived experience to speak on these matters'. But her lack of lived experience does not stop Manne from speaking on misogynoir, so it is clear that she does not take lived experience to be a necessary condition of engagement. While epistemic humility is laudable, it does not entail that one should abdicate the responsibility to engage with the work of those who do face transmisogyny or to create a theoretical framework that considers and accounts for this phenomenon.

Trans women and transfeminine people experience numerous, multi-faceted manifestations of transmisogyny. These include incarceration in men's prisons, where they are vulnerable to assault, harassment, and sexual violence; lack of legal protection from job discrimination; lack of access to safe housing, and to life-saving and life-affirming medical care; medical and psychiatric gaslighting about their bodies and gender identities; and exclusion from feminist spaces and online harassment from a subset of self-identified radical feminists who target trans women in response to their public critiques of trans-exclusionary radical feminism.

Though Manne does not engage with the phenomenon of transmisogyny, she nonetheless expects her proposal to be counted as an ‘ameliorative, intersectional’ one (p. 62). But what is the justification for Manne’s assumption that her account provides a structural blueprint that can be made to fit unproblematically with the complex contours of social reality? Trans women may be able to fulfil exactly the patriarchal standards for women that Manne lays out (for example, providing feminine-coded goods to men) yet still be subject to trans-specific forms of misogyny and transmisogynistic retribution. If one does not begin by attending to the relevant details of intersectional forms of misogyny, such as the way that transmisogyny and misogynoir function, for instance, there is little reason to think that the resulting account will be one that can be pressed into the service of their amelioration. Worse, the resulting account might inadvertently perpetuate these forms of oppression (as is the case, for instance, with Manne’s denial that dehumanization facilitates cruelty).

To illustrate the force of this concern—which applies to much work in feminist philosophy—consider Manne’s account in light of the cautionary tale of Sally Haslanger’s (2012) view on the metaphysics of womanhood. Haslanger does not take the amelioration of transmisogyny to be a necessary starting point for her account of what it is to be a woman, and she proposes an account on which women are understood to be just those people who are subordinated on the basis of their real or imagined biological capacities for reproduction. She thus ends up unintentionally excluding many trans women from the category of ‘woman’, namely those trans women who do not ‘pass’ as cisgender (Jenkins 2016). By defining ‘woman’ in a way that inadvertently entails that many trans women *are not women*, Haslanger’s work can be used to perpetuate the very ideology that naturalizes discrimination against trans women and is used to justify the pervasive physical and sexual violence against them. It is clear from this example that feminist work that aims to be both ameliorative and intersectional must do a great deal more than simply state the desire to be so perceived.

Manne assumes that her account is compatible with an intersectional understanding of structural oppression, noting that her ‘ameliorative analysis explicitly builds in space for these insights’ (p. 13). But making room for intersectional insights is not the same as thinking structurally about intersecting oppressions. As mainstream feminism continues to be narrowly focused on cisgender white women—vividly exemplified by the Women’s March’s embrace of pink pussyhats as its unifying symbol—feminist theorists must do more than merely ‘build in space’ for marginalized voices and intersectional insights. If Manne had worked to create the social imaginary necessary to theorize misogyny and other forms of oppression as structurally interdependent, she would be well on her way to developing an ameliorative intersectional proposal.

While Manne acknowledges axes of oppression other than gender, she largely invokes intersectionality as a disclaimer rather than as an orienting framework. In one case, she ignores the systemic conditions that are specific to Black women in order to universalize a Black feminist framework to apply it to class-privileged white women. In her discussion of non-fatal manual strangulation, Manne describes brutal scenes of domestic violence and the resulting silences by the women who survived them. She writes, ‘The matter will often go no further. She may not seek medical treatment. The incident will be “shrouded in silence” (Dotson 2011, 244)’ (p. 2). Manne invokes Kristie Dotson’s work on the systemic pressures Black women feel not to speak up when they experience domestic violence at the hands of Black men, so as not to provide fodder for racist stereotypes about Black men and aggression. Dotson writes, ‘Domestic violence within, for example, African American communities is often shrouded in silence given the possibility that testimony about domestic violence can be understood to corroborate stereotypes concerning the imagined “violent” black male’ (p. 245). Manne ignores the structural analysis that Dotson builds into her work when she universalizes her words by importing them into the materially distinct context of white women experiencing domestic violence by wealthy and powerful white men. In ignoring the particular context of Dotson’s work, Manne thus seems to participate in the phenomenon that she later dubs ‘Black women’s herasure’ (p. 214).

Despite the fact that Manne titles her discussion of Daniel Holtzclaw ‘Misogynoir in Action’, a substantive analysis of the role of misogynoir in the case is largely missing. Holtzclaw, a white and Japanese-American police officer from Oklahoma City, raped and sexually assaulted more than a dozen Black women, many of whom had formerly worked in the sex trade. Yet Manne offers little analysis of the systems that place Black women sex workers among those most vulnerable to police violence. Manne does not frame police sexual violence against Black women as a matter of police brutality against Black people more generally. Nor does she address the hypersexualization of Black women and girls that contributes to the disproportionately high rates of sexual violence against them and to their disproportionately low rates of redress through the criminal justice system.

Black women are the women most likely to be forced into the prison-industrial complex, where sexual violence continues to be used systematically as a tool of subjugation. The war on drugs, broken windows policing, and the criminalization of sex work are all systems of policing that make Black women, and especially Black trans women, particularly vulnerable to police sexual violence (Ritchie 2017). These should thus be central components of any structural analysis of the relationship between misogynoir and police sexual violence.

The Cato Institute reports that sexual misconduct is the second most common type of police misconduct report filed after excessive use of force.



Police officers also commit sexual assaults at a significantly higher rate than the general population (2010). Those who are transgender are at significantly increased risk of state-sanctioned sexual violence, as are those who work in the sex trade. Police officers frequently coerce those who engage in sex work into sexual acts under threat of arrest. Police sexual violence is not an aberration; it is widespread and systemic to the point of being routine. Until this year, it was not illegal in New York state for arresting officers to have sex with detainees in their custody. These policies along with the lack of police oversight create ideal material conditions for police officers to commit rape and sexual assault. If Manne is going to conceive of misogyny as a system of norms and their material enforcement mechanisms, she ought to do the same for police sexual violence.

Holtzclaw is not the only high-profile police rapist to target Black women in his abuse of power. In 2004, Roger Magaña was convicted of raping over a dozen women in Eugene, Oregon. Magaña's behaviour went on for an eight-year period as many of the women he assaulted, most of whom were Black, low-income, and previously criminalized did not report out of fear of retaliation and not being believed. It later came out that several other officers and supervisors had been made aware of complaints about Magaña's abuses but wrote them off as the mere 'grumblings of junkies and prostitutes' (Ritchie 2017). The parallels between the two cases are important, as they are indicative of the systemic patterns that enable the perpetuation of misogynoir.

Manne does not so much provide a structural analysis of the misogynoir at play as simply note that the social meaning of Holtzclaw's actions was contingent on his victims 'being women, of a particular race and class, inter alia, in this case, in a hitherto man's world' (p. 217). At times, she reduces the case to an example of single-axis oppression, suggesting that Holtzclaw may have been acting from a sense of moral entitlement and perhaps aiming to 'wreak revenge on women who fail to uphold their end of history's bad gendered bargain' (p. 217). Her analysis of Holtzclaw's abuses does little to address the systemic social causes that create and enable the forces of misogynoir that are at work in the case. While Manne explicitly warns against the danger of perpetuating the 'a few bad apples' narrative of misogyny and sexual violence, her discussion of Holtzclaw unwittingly plays into this narrative by failing to situate the case within the broader social systems that condone and protect practices of state-sponsored sexual violence against Black women.

Manne further avoids any real discussion of the structural conditions that create vulnerability for sex workers under patriarchy, despite the fact that sex workers are among those who most frequently experience what Manne takes to be paradigmatic of misogyny. Sex workers are the targets of anger, backlash, and violence for making money from the provision of services, namely sexual and emotional labour, that women are expected to provide to men willingly and enthusiastically and without charge. Sex workers face extreme levels of dehumanization that diminish their bodily autonomy, justify life-

threatening physical and sexual violence against them, and prevent legal recourse for such violence. The criminalization of sex work and the pervasive assumption that sex workers cannot be the victims of rape block sex workers from accessing justice through the court system. Here again, Manne's inadequate conceptualization of dehumanization as a literal belief rather than a set of social practices creates a major obstacle to understanding how misogyny affects the lives of those who are situated at the intersection of multiple dimensions of marginalization.

Manne's section on the patriarchal control of women's reproduction is subject to similar shortcomings. Manne focuses solely on abortion and on the Conservative Right's efforts to retaliate morally against women who seek them. She ignores the long history of the eugenicist practice of denying women of colour and poor white women the right to reproduce and raise children. There is no recognition of the forced sterilization of Black, Puerto Rican, and Native women, nor of the controlling images that portray them as unfit mothers who are poor, promiscuous, negligent, and immoral. Had these details been included, they would have complicated Manne's idea that patriarchal ideology treats the mother's womb as inextricably related to the notion of a man's dominion over his home. Manne suggests that the foetus 'serves as a powerful cultural symbol or surrogate for certain men's sense of being neglected or deprived by women' (p. 100) and that dominant men thus come to view abortion as the 'helpless foetus' being cast out of its 'rightful sanctuary'. Yet, it is hard to see how the treatment of Black, Latinx, and Native women fits into 'the analogy between a mother's womb and a dominant man's home-cum-haven—or safe space' (p. 101). Their wombs, for example, have been portrayed as especially *unsafe* and unfit environments, and this provides justification for the rigid control of and prohibition on their reproduction. The upshot here is that a failure to think structurally about oppressions other than one's own limits the scope, accuracy, and usefulness of one's resulting conceptual picture.

Manne makes a number of gestures toward producing an intersectional account of misogyny, but does not always attend to the differences that make a difference—a key component of intersectional work. Manne invokes Audre Lorde's oft-cited but rarely engaged 1984 piece 'The Master's Tools' as a warning against white women overgeneralizing their own experiences as universal in feminist theory. But Lorde's piece also calls for substantive engagement with the differences and power disparities in women's lives in order to forge solidarity across these differences. Lorde writes,

If white American feminist theory need not deal with the differences between us, and the resulting differences in our oppressions, then how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend to your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Colour? (2007, p. 112)

While Manne focuses on ways that patriarchy requires the exploitation of women's domestic, emotional, and care-giving labour in order to function, her account could work better to address the reality that this sort of labour is specifically demanded from women of colour, often by class-privileged white women, who rely on their labour in order to pursue careers, pay cheques, and 'equality' with white men.

It is clear that we will need a range of conceptual tools to combat misogyny in all its forms. What tools will we need to uproot misogynoir? To end trans-misogyny? Attention to the complexity and diversity of the material conditions that produce misogyny is necessary for a feminist theory to be able to produce an intersectional ameliorative strategy. While Manne's account is certainly on the way to this goal, it has some distance to go before reaching it.\*

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University of Tennessee  
 nbernst@utk.edu  
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NORA BERENSTAIN

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