

### ***Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny***

Kate Manne. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, 368 pages

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The explosive spread of the #MeToo movement since the Harvey Weinstein story broke in 2017 has made misogyny, once again, one of the hottest keywords of our public discourse. I say “once again,” because it is sadly not the first time misogyny is being named as an undeniable vector that affects our social existence, even though it has been some time since the arrival of a post-patriarchal and post-feminist era was hailed. And yet we hear it asked: What exactly is misogyny, and where is misogyny located? Ironically, these questions are raised more often when misogyny manifests itself more virulently than usual. Resistance to misogyny is likely to be met with complaints about how confounding the notion is, as if the seemingly intractable term itself was somehow guilty of conjuring up a phenomenon that does not exist. The nature of misogyny is such that it does not exist for those who do not grasp its meaning

Particularly resonant in the era of #MeToo, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* by the moral philosopher Kate Manne is a timely contribution to the ongoing struggle with the concept of misogyny and its real-life proliferation worldwide. Misogyny tends to be summarily understood as men’s deep-seated hatred for women. But such a definition, which Manne calls “the naïve conception” (p. 32), can worsen the confusion. She aptly observes that this naïve conception is inadequate in its attribution of misogyny primarily to individual agents. Such a view psychologizes it and reduces it to a private problem, when it is a question of the structure in which the individual is embedded—“a property of social systems or environments as a whole, in which women will tend to face hostility of various kinds *because they are women in a man’s world* (i.e., patriarchy)” (p. 33). Representing misogyny as an individual’s issue is all the more detrimental, for it renders misogynist extremism a mere aberration, thus nullifying its cultural and political significance. Naïve conceptions of misogyny can also be willfully misused to exculpate misogyny—this we know from the visceral

objection we feel toward any attempt to invalidate criticism against misogyny by claiming that the man being accused does not hate women but *loves* them. Besides, misogyny ascribed to hidden psychological causes “would threaten to make misogyny epistemologically inaccessible to women” (p. 44), thereby foreclosing criticism and prevention.

Manne’s “epistemology” of misogyny puts forth a few notable points. The first is a differentiation she draws between misogyny and sexism: Whereas sexism refers to the set of ideas that justify and naturalize unequal power between men and women in patriarchy, misogyny is sexism’s police force, i.e., a mechanism through which male domination is maintained and reproduced. Sexism and misogyny of course operate in tandem, with the latter as a kind of enforcement strategy for the former. In this way Manne thoroughly politicizes misogyny and posits it as a significant conceptual tool, along with sexism and patriarchy, for feminist analyses of gendered power dynamics.

Second, Manne’s rigorously politicized definition of misogyny suggests a shift in focus: From the men’s feelings to the victims. Manne argues interestingly that it is largely “reactive” (p. 61), meaning that misogyny, which may be latent or dormant, will manifest in reaction to any woman held to be failing to live up to patriarchal standards and encroaching upon male entitlement. Punishing women for such failures and rewarding them for fulfilling the role of “givers” of emotional and sexual services as well as labor (p. 110), it thereby operates as a strategic and coercive mechanism for policing women and maintaining a patriarchal notion of justice. Though “*particular* women and *particular kinds* of women” become targets (p. 33), “one woman can often serve as a stand-in or representative for a whole host of others in the misogynist imagination”; and this is why “misogyny can exist with or without misogynists” (p. 73) and “almost any woman will be vulnerable to some form of misogynist hostility from some source or other” (p. 68).

We need to take into account, however, that Manne’s work is (unabashedly) grounded in the feminist framework of critiquing patriarchy and sexist ideology. *Down Girl* is for that reason somewhat anxiogenic and salutary at once. The overarching, bi-gendered rubric of patriarchy may create anxiety and theoretical discontent about queer and trans individuals being excluded from consideration. However, this is a thematically focused analysis of a particularly problematic aspect of male–female relations that

has not been superseded or solved by discursive objections to gender binarism. Despite the attempt by different feminist positions to account for non-normative gender identifications, misogyny remains a phenomenon that operates widely, almost universally, across races, ethnicities, classes, and locales, though some groups of women are more vulnerable than others.

Indeed, women are still dismissed, disrespected, slurred, attacked, mutilated, violated, and even killed around the globe. Over 80% of victims of *vitriolage* (acid attacks) in Bangladesh are women who rejected men's romantic or sexual demands. As Hollywood actresses and Korean female district attorneys have attested, even women with relative fame and power are not exempt from abuse and assault. While it is crucial to sidestep pitfalls of identity politics and gender binarism, it is nonetheless necessary not to forget how the binary gender system still functions as a blanket pretext for macro and micro injustices. In this regard Manne's seemingly antiquated invocation of patriarchy and sexism is still valid, and also has a salutary effect of reminding us of the relentlessly compromised reality.

One important merit of *Down Girl* is that it is one of the very few feminist books exclusively devoted to the issues of misogyny. Manne's discussion leaves room for further speculation, however. In fact, *Down Girl* builds on various strands of feminist discourse and her politicized concept of misogyny is a view already shared among feminists, but she does not acknowledge or actively engage with preceding feminist thinkers. Also, Manne curiously does not historicize misogyny and does not seem to think that misogyny (and patriarchy) might change shape and tactics under different historical conditions. As a result, it seems that we are caught in this unchanging matrix of patriarchal power that perpetuates itself by deploying misogyny. Finally, while explaining misogyny in terms of men's desire for women to adhere to patriarchal norms and to serve men's interests, she does not go so far as to substantiate it as a constitutive element of masculinity that reveals the paradoxical aggression and fragility of patriarchal masculinity.

It was twenty-seven years ago that Susan Faludi's *Backlash* warned us of patriarchy's violent resistance to the few victories of feminism. *Down Girl* is a record of the ongoing backlash in myriad forms of misogyny, which reminds us that the problems of misogyny are almost identical, at least in its deep structure, everywhere from the victim culture to the exonerating logic of perpetrating men; that we are in truth far from living in post-femi-

nist or post-patriarchal times; that the “heteropatriarchy” (p. 297) and its norms stand alive and well despite deconstructive endeavors in theory and praxis. Mostly a diagnostic account, *Down Girl* ends without a specific prescriptive conclusion. But Manne also sets her project out to be an ameliorative approach, and as such it leads the reader to anticipate at least some hope for change.

We are currently witnessing extensive outcries against misogyny—“once again,” as I wrote in the beginning. #MeToo is a continuation of “#YesAllWomen” that the Isla Vista killing spree ignited in 2014. It may yet morph into another hashtag, should some other incident(s) launch yet another anti-misogynistic wave. But we are definitely going through a cultural moment. I hope these accusations have opened a dam that won’t close. I hope these outcries will finally lead us to turn a corner in history. The debates and conversation should continue so that the momentum does not get lost. For nothing protects misogyny like silence.

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