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The Reconceptualization of Misogyny

In “Down Girl” Kate Manne discusses the existence of misogyny, what it acts like in our social system, the importance of rejecting the naive conception of it, and why it still is so present in our society. Manne argues that because our society is so rooted in the patriarchal ideals of the past, behaving misogynistically, which often comes from internalized social standards and/or expectations, does not necessarily mean that one is misogynistic. Some, like Melo Lopes, might argue that Manne’s approach is incomplete; that she lacks the inclusion of post-feminist backlash in her interpretation of what misogyny serves to explain. To this, I would say that Manne need not include an outlined application of how misogyny explains post-feminist backlash. In this paper I will explain how Manne covers this implication and more through her explanation of how misogyny is embedded in our society because of our patriarchal assimilation and how our misinterpretation of what misogyny can be, serves to allow occurrences, like post-feminist backlash, to occur.

Throughout “Down Girl” Manne repeatedly claims that misogyny can exist without misogynists, detailing that intention is not necessary for a misogynistic patriarchal society. So why is misogyny present, what are the reasons behind its existence, and what does it work to enact? According to Manne, misogyny is present because it is heavily embedded in the patriarchy, and since our society has long followed patriarchal standards, and accepted the subordination of “the others” as social normality, we ourselves have to be participatory in maintaining the existence of misogyny and misogynistic actions. To simplify, Manne is claiming that anybody can behave misogynistically because our entire society is formed to internalize

social norms that uphold what we are used to, which is a patriarchal order. We as a collective have long been enabling misogyny, and in order for us to break it we have to dismantle the gender expectations that are so deeply immersed in our society. Although there is no concrete way to go about dismantling these norms, Manne suggests that society must look inward, and better understand what the term misogyny actually means, in an effort to remove it from our societal structure. “Silence is golden for the men who smother and intimidate women into not talking...silence isolates his victims; and it enables misogyny..So let us break it” (Manne, p. 18). This quote delivers Manne’s position on why misogyny is innate in many, it is the silence that we hold that morphs our ideals of what is and is not acceptable in society. Misogyny targets those who are in a social position that is persuaded into being too afraid to speak, this continued subordination and persuasion results in the normalization of misogyny which then in turn becomes an innate understanding among those participating in such a society. Manne is seeking to explain why misogyny has become second nature to many, and offer a perspective on what needs to change.

In an objection like Melo Lopes’s, we see an argument claiming that Manne’s analysis of misogyny fails to cover the boundaries of activism that identify under pro-patriarchal dimensions. Lopes seeks to critique Manne’s analysis by saying it cannot adequately explain the post-feminist backlash that we have seen present in society most recently. The argument that Manne has forgotten to attribute to possible groups that lead with anti-patriarchal intentions even though their actions cater to patriarchal norms is presented by Lopes in an effort to explain that Manne has left out the existence of vertigo. Vertigo, in Lopes’s definition, “is a distinct form of social anxiety,” that occurs when there are no practical social meanings for crucial interactions, which then will trigger confusion and consequent anxiety (Lopes, p. 2517). Lopes raises the

concern that Manne's approach is problematically incomplete, and argues that there needs to be an emphasis on "the continued centrality of gender distinctions in our social normative life, even as gendered social meanings become increasingly contested" (Lopes, p. 2519). Here, Lopes seeks to explain that there is a need for "feminist political intervention" that will serve to reduce the existence of vertigo and give a new view of what sexuality is and can be, which in her perspective Manne does not cover in her analysis (Lopes, p. 2159).

Although I understand that Lopes sees a missing justification in Manne's analysis of misogyny I would disagree with her claim that Manne's analysis is incomplete. The argument that Manne's analysis does not explain why anti-patriarchal activist groups are still caught up in pro-patriarchal norms is completely off-base. Manne specifically delves into how the actions we partake in are not wholly ruled by ourselves, explaining that we are not the final arbitrators of what our actions are/appear as. By saying this, Manne is able to explain why some women might be partaking in patriarchally influenced misogynistic actions without intention or the knowledge that they are doing so. Applying this theory to Lopes's example of the raunch feminist activist group CAKE, Manne's theory explains why these women might feel as though their actions are anti-patriarchal even though they are not, showing that their interpretation of liberation is so clouded by the internalized misogyny that they possess that they are unable to see for themselves how their actions are only further reinforcing and catering to patriarchal ideals. Alternatively, the want for feminist political intervention is not unjustified, but Manne also covers this critique by explaining that one must recognize what they are doing wrong in order to change it. Meaning that we as a society must come to a realization that the continued subordination of others and the internalized patriarchal social standards that we uphold in society, must first be identified and recognized as wrong before they can be changed. Vertigo

would only occur if people were unable to determine what they were outside the constructs of gender, and gender expectations/ranks, and Manne addresses this issue by explaining what must come first. So although she does not include the existence of vertigo in her analysis, Manne explains what should occur in order to avoid social instances like vertigo. Although Manne's analysis of misogyny is broad, it is broad for a reason. Ultimately she is trying to explain the reasoning behind the existence of misogyny in our culture, and casting a wide net in an effort to fully encapsulate all possible occurrences, past, present, or future.

In conclusion, Manne's analysis of misogyny works to give readers a better understanding of why misogyny has been consistently present in society, and how we can work to break this pattern. Manne's main point throughout "Down Girl" emphasizes that there can be misogyny without misogynists and that if we were to all understand this and knowingly work against it, society would be able to progress toward a society that is less influenced by patriarchal social orders. Manne makes an effort to reconceptualize misogyny, in hopes that a better knowledge of the reality behind this social force will help to aid society in reversing its impact on ourselves and the world around us.

References

Manne, K. (2019). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Penguin Books.

Melo Lopes, F. Perpetuating the patriarchy: misogyny and (post-)feminist backlash. *Philos Stud* 176, 2517–2538 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-018-1138-z>