

BOOK REVIEW

Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women

Kate Manne. New York: Crown, 2020 (ISBN 978-1-9848-2655-8)

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Kate Manne's *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women* succeeds in making terrifyingly clear the connections between misogyny and privileged male entitlement. Her eagerly awaited second book is a welcome addition to the rapidly emerging canon in public feminist philosophy. In this, her first book for a general readership, Manne explains how, under patriarchy, women and girls are expected to provide traditionally feminine social goods—such as domestic, emotional, and care-giving labor—and not expected to pursue masculine social goods that confer power, status, and authority. This “illegitimate sense of male entitlement,” she explains, “gives rise to a wide range of misogynistic behaviors. When a woman fails to give a man what he’s supposedly owed, she is usually punished for her refusal either by the man himself, his himpathetic supporters, or within misogynistic social structures in which she is embedded” (11–12).

Manne's ten chapters are organized thematically around privileged men's social expectations about what women and girls owe them. Each entitlement is illustrated with a concise and thoughtful discussion of current events and cultural trends. Consider how privileged men and boys may feel entitled not only to women's and girls' time, labor, admiration, attention, sex, and consent, but also to their unfair share of opportunities, resources, and high-status positions. Manne devotes additional chapters to undertheorized entitlements to knowledge and medical care. She also speaks to the social goods to which all women and girls *are* entitled, but repeatedly struggle to claim. These include entitlements to bodily autonomy, epistemic credibility, and the freedom to express one's sexuality and gender identity.

Entitled introduces the conceptual framework Manne develops in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Manne 2018) to a broader audience. The result is an accessible account of how misogyny, sexism, himpathy, and entitlement function to maintain patterns of social control. In nonacademic contexts, *misogyny* describes men and boys who exhibit a pathological disrespect for women, girls, and all things feminine. This definition is too reductive for Manne's purposes. The entitlements that misogyny, white supremacy, and other complex systems of domination generate are not reproduced by a handful of woman-haters. Patriarchy is a *systemic* expression of social control. It functions as a disciplining force that puts sexist ideologies into action. Just as the police rely on traffic laws to enforce orderly flow of vehicles on public roads, so patriarchy uses sexist, racist, and heteronormative ideologies to funnel people into orderly, racialized gender lanes. Misogyny disciplines and punishes women and girls who stray from their assigned lanes. It works like those shock collars dogs wear to prevent them from straying beyond the boundaries of the backyard invisible fence (7). Misogyny

also rewards those who abide the gendered traffic patterns. As Manne puts it: “Sexism wears the lab coat; misogyny goes on witch hunts” (Manne 2018, 80).

Entitlement convinces privileged men and boys that they not only have a deserving claim to these feminine social goods, but also to the spoils of the witch hunts. Recognizing the relationships between misogyny and entitlement, however, requires that readers shift their focus away from individual misogynists and toward “misogyny’s targets and victims” (8). When we do, the patterns of entitlement come sharply into focus. Some readers will accuse Manne of cherry-picking sensational cases to bolster her claims, but the patterns Manne identifies are not anomalies. They are ordinary and ubiquitous. Even the most repugnant examples fit comfortably into the broader spectrum of everyday controlling behaviors.

Manne’s book opens predictably with Brett Kavanaugh—a fitting poster boy for white, privileged, male entitlement. Kavanaugh, during his confirmation hearings, repeatedly reminded the Senate Judiciary Committee that his Yale pedigree and strong work ethic entitled him to a seat on the US Supreme Court. The hearings provide an indelible opening image of the active relationship among misogyny, entitlement, and himpathy at the heart of Manne’s project.

The opening four chapters focus exclusively on how the toxic trio of entitlement, misogyny, and himpathy pick out the patterns of social control present in men’s perceived entitlement to admiration, sex, and consent. It would be a mistake to read these entitlements as simply an updated inventory of male privileges. Standard discussions of male privilege set out to name the unearned, systemically conferred advantages that men and boys receive under patriarchy. Framing these as entitlements reorients the conversation. Entitlement is more than the expectation that the unbalanced gendered economy of providing and receiving social goods and services will always count in your favor. The persistent need for privileged men to seek out and preserve access to power and control is an inherent feature of abusive behavior.

Manne traces the through lines of privileged male entitlement to admiration, sex, and consent across some of the more disturbing social phenomena of the past decade. Her chapter on entitlement to admiration lays bare the connections between the “involuntary celibate” (incel) movement, school shooters, and the abusive behavior of famous and obscure men alike. Consider Elliot Rodger’s plan to enter the Alpha Phi sorority house at the University of California at Santa Barbara and slaughter the women he imagined had rejected him. Recall the sympathetic rush to restore Brock Turner’s reputation after he raped an unconscious Chanel Miller behind a dumpster. These cases invite readers to consider collectively a phenomenon Manne calls *himpathy*—“the disproportionate or inappropriate sympathy extended to a male perpetrator over his similarly or less privileged female targets or victims in cases of sexual assault, harassment, and other misogynistic behaviors” (36).

Himpathy and misogyny are two sides of the same patriarchal coin: they work together to redirect the sympathetic gaze away from victims/survivors and toward privileged perpetrators. In Manne’s words, “When the sympathetic focus is on the perpetrator, she will often be subject to suspicion and aggression for drawing attention to his misdeeds” (37). A byproduct of himpathy is *herasure*; that is, the annoying habit of blaming and erasing the targets of misogyny. The cruel alchemy of himpathy/herasure recasts brutal assaults as crimes of passion. School shootings fade softly into tales of lovesick boys whose advances were rejected. Sexual assaults are magically reimagined as drunken he-said-she-said misunderstandings that are best forgiven. Manne’s chapter on entitlement to consent holds space uncomfortably with those stomach-turning grey

zones where women and girls unenthusiastically “consent” to sex that they don’t want, simply because an internalized sense of men’s entitlement to sex and admiration closes off polite escape routes.

Readers acquainted with Manne’s scholarship will be familiar with the entitlements covered in the first half of the book. They engage the most noticeable tip of the privileged male entitlement iceberg. The remaining chapters take up entitlements that may be less familiar to general readers: the entitlements to medical care, domestic labor, knowledge, and power.

The next two chapters engage questions of bodily autonomy. Manne’s remarks on privileged men’s felt entitlement not only over their own medical care, but also over women’s reproductive health decisions, are particularly timely. Privileged men’s bodies and pain matter. As deserving medical care recipients, they expect access to pain killers, sympathy, staff attention, and immediate medical treatment. Their sense of entitlement draws its potency from the misogyny and misogynoir that circulate freely in medical settings and in laws regulating pregnant bodies. The medicalization of bodies of color, queer bodies, female and feminized bodies, and the bodies of disabled people has been documented extensively. In medical settings women, nonbinary people, and men of color’s pain is filtered through the lens of incompetence. The alchemy of medical entitlement recasts women and nonbinary people’s testimony about their pain into hysteria, complaining, or attention-seeking behavior. Pseudoscientific, racist myths about black bodies having thicker skin and a higher pain tolerance remain stubbornly present in these settings. Women of color’s pain is routinely underdiagnosed and sometimes interpreted as drug-seeking behavior. Outside hospital settings, unentitled bodies are disciplined through restrictive abortion and contraception laws, bathroom bills, the cultural policing of pregnant bodies.

Manne’s chapter “Unassuming: On the Entitlement to Knowledge” brings out more forcefully the epistemic dimensions of male entitlement. The entitlement of privileged men rests solidly on the epistemic credibility required to make their understanding of consent, or their felt pain, intelligible to others. Manne introduces the concept of *epistemic entitlement* to name privileged men’s assumption that they are best positioned to authoritatively offer their opinions on any topic under discussion, even if they know nothing about it. She uses the examples of “mansplaining” and “gaslighting” to illustrate how certainty and authority can be used to silence those daring to give voice to their own suffering.

Admittedly, the constant drip, drip, drip of evidence in support of male entitlement makes for stomach-turning reading. Yet there is reason to be somewhat hopeful. After all, “entitlement is *not* a dirty word; entitlements can be genuine, valid, and justified” (186). Manne wrote most of *Entitled* while pregnant with her first child, a daughter. Her final chapter offers a heartfelt personal response to the question, “what do I want my daughter to know when it comes to what she is entitled to” (188)?

Composing an academic review of a book published for a general readership requires patience and flexibility. It presents the distinct challenge of holding two distinct audiences in mind while paging through the chapters. On the one hand, Manne’s conceptual vocabulary is too useful to be confined to academic discussions. The stories she selects are sure to resonate with readers, who will feel the specters of their own experiences peering between the lines as they read. General readers will take comfort in finding the words they need to make sense of what their guts have always told them—*Whatever that was, it felt creepy. . . unjust. . . traumatic. . . hurtful*. As Sara Ahmed puts it, “We encounter racism and sexism before we have the words that allow us to

make sense of the encounter. . . . Words can allow us to comprehend what we experience after the event. We become retrospective witnesses of our own becoming” (Ahmed 2017, 32). The same rings true when we encounter entitlement.

Academic readers expecting a scholarly sequel to *Down Girl* may feel disappointed with Manne’s pared-down treatment of misogyny. This is understandable, but Manne clearly states that her task is to help general readers to “get a basic grip on my views about misogyny and male entitlement . . . as well as some thoughts I’ve had since *Down Girl* was published” (Blackwood 2020). Questions of audience aside, the book raises enough thorny questions to spark future conversations. So, in the spirit of engaging Manne’s post-*Down Girl* thoughts, I’d like to put forward a few things for us to consider.

Intersectional engagements with misogyny and entitlement are as important as they are challenging to manage. Intersectional approaches to social injustices invite us to begin our inquiry from marginalized locations where intersecting oppressions operate with greater force. Manne clearly states up front that there is “no universal experience with misogyny” (11). She recognizes some of the ways misogyny partners with other complex systems of domination to keep minoritized women and girls in their lanes. She offers examples of how privileged male entitlement perpetuates transmisogyny and misogynoir.

One of the occupational hazards for white feminists—including me—is the challenge of crafting new conceptual frameworks that don’t bear the marks of our privilege too deeply. Whiteness has a strong gravitational pull on our process of crafting any conceptual vocabulary. Manne’s discussion of misogyny “focuses less on individual *perpetrators* of misogyny, and more on misogyny’s targets and *victims*” (8). Intersectionally speaking, the ground occupied by misogyny’s targets is as diverse as it is crowded. This should signal to us the complexity of the work that lies ahead. Would Manne’s account of privileged male entitlement have a different texture if transwomen or women’s and girls of color’s stories were present, not only in illustrations, but also in the act of crafting of the conceptual architecture of entitlement? Is Manne’s account of male entitlement elastic enough to offer insights into minoritized women’s and girls’ experiences with *nonprivileged* male entitlement in their own communities? If not, might it be elastic enough to get these conversations started?

Mapping the expansive and nuanced terrain of male entitlement is beyond the scope of Manne’s project. Perhaps this is why she focuses exclusively on *privileged* male entitlements. Intersectional considerations caution us against extending specific accounts of male entitlement too broadly. If there is no universal experience with misogyny, then there is no universal experience with male entitlement. White supremacy, (hetero)sexism, anti-Semitism, ageism, and ableism also have a strong gravitational pull. So, I’m curious about what directions our conversations would take if we explored the textures of nonprivileged male entitlement, and their impact on misogyny’s targets and victims in oppressed⇌resisting communities.

The unspoken social goods that Black, Indigenous, and all people of color are entitled to, but continually struggle to claim, are subject to a cruel alchemy of their own. Black people, for instance, have been described as having “an entitlement mentality and view themselves as victims.”¹ The alchemy of white supremacy prompts non-people-of-color to interpret Black and Brown men’s performances of entitlement as overly aggressive and threatening. So, what might nonprivileged male entitlements look, sound, and feel like? Do Latine straight men and boys benefit from misogyny in the same ways that straight white men and boys do? If not, should we re-orchestrate

the rhythms of the misogyny-entitlement-himpathy cluster from the standpoint of their experiences? What nuanced expressions of himpathy and herasure circulate in these communities?

The disciplining social patterns of nonprivileged male entitlement have distinct racial histories worth exploring in more detail. In general, some of the male entitlements Manne explores, such as touching women and girls without their consent or expecting women to do most of the emotional and domestic labor, comfortably inhabit every neighborhood where patriarchy dwells. Others, like the general human entitlement to medical care, bodily control, or epistemic credibility, share more with the entitlements that women and girls are due and must fight to claim: the entitlement to being believed when you are in pain—*I can't breathe*; or queer and gender-nonconforming men's entitlement to freely express their sexuality and gender identity. Himpathy may have helped Brett Kavanaugh take his seat on the court, but white guilt did most of the heavy lifting in Clarence Thomas's defense.

So, I'm curious about whether himpathy, herasure, and male entitlement, as Manne explores them, are elastic enough to capture minoritized women's and girls' experiences with male entitlement in their own communities. In all fairness, my interest in these questions asks readers to consider issues beyond the scope of Manne's project. Nonetheless, I'm grateful to her for giving us so much to consider.

Note

1 This remark was made by Rep. Jason Lewis (Kaczynski, McDermott, and Massie 2018).

References

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