Ordinary Cruelty: Explaining Misogyny without Dehumanization

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I argue that interpersonal cruelty can often be explained in ordinary moral terms in conjunction with facts about social ~~hierarchy~~hierarchies. Specifically, I argue that misogynistic cruelty often stems from the sense that certain women are wrongdoers; it often stems from the sense that certain, privileged men are entitled to violate women; and it often stems from the sense that, at least when they threaten such men, women simply do not matter. Misogynistic cruelty is thus more a product of moral vilification, entitlement, and devaluation than dehumanization proper. I explore the implications for the need to posit dehumanization as a mechanism to explain cruelty elsewhere.

KEYWORDS: misogyny; dehumanization; moral psychology

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Central to my view is that cruelty is ordinary.[1] We may not want to believe it, and we may attempt to stave off the realization in any number of ways. But it is difficult to deny, especially when one confronts the realities of misogyny and male dominance. Men rape, strangle, and beat women—and, oftentimes, children too—in our own neighborhoods and communities, even our own families, on a disturbingly regular basis. (Manne 2018; 2020) If one wants to examine human cruelty, it is common to begin by examining the periods of historical unrest that make us reach for words like “atrocity” and “genocide.” I don’t deny, of course, that this is important and illuminating. But beginning closer to home has long been my modus operandi.

In my 2017 book, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, I begin with an observation: many of the misogynistic reactions that women face belong to the class that P.F. Strawson famously dubbed "the participant reactive attitudes." (1962/2008, p. 10) These are "the non-detached attitudes and reactions of people directly involved in transactions with each other;" they are "the attitudes and reactions of offended parties and beneficiaries;" and in the second-person case, involving an "I" and a "~~you~~you," they include resentment, blame, and hurt feelings, as well as forgiveness, gratitude, and certain kinds of love. (1962/2008, p. 5) They are reactions to your sense as an agent of the "quality of the will" that is apparently manifested in the actions of another agent towards you: goodwill, or ill will, or indifference of the kind that Strawson once calls "studied." (1962/2008, p. 6) The idea is basically this: if I step on your hand, the pain may be just the same regardless of my attitude or intention in so doing. But if it is a manifestation of meanness, an attempt to deliberately hurt you, or done with a sense that you simply don't matter—I'll step on you to get what I want faster—you may intelligibly resent or even hate me in a way that you would not and should not if my misstep was just an accident. (1962/2008, p. 6) The participant reactive attitudes are a reaction to the quality of the will ascribed to recognized human beings who are being held to moral standards during ordinary interpersonal, human-to-human interactions. Their will is intelligible, reasonably mature, and morally assessable. (1962/2008, p. 15)

Strawson contrasted the participant reactive attitudes with the "objective stance," which is something of a ragbag—it includes the attitude we take to young children, people who are severely mentally ill, and those who are "not themselves," as well as people to be avoided, managed, and contained, in being, roughly, mad, bad, and dangerous to know. (1962/2008, pp. 9–10) I do not hold, of course, that all objective attitudes are dehumanizing; however, I think it is plausible that all dehumanizing attitudes will be objective. Thus, if I can show that misogynistic reactions of the first of three major species I'll distinguish in this article are participant reactive attitudes, then this will advance my eventual conclusion that misogyny can be explained without invoking dehumanizing attitudes whatsoever. This will be my aim in the first section of this article.

1. Vilification

Imagine now that you are a woman who is stepping not on people's hands but committing other kinds of trespass: you are Virginia Woolf in Oxbridge, treading on the grass which only men were historically allowed to walk on. The groundskeeper has internalized the norm so strongly that he bristles when she treads there. Viscerally, and manifestly, he is hostile; she does not "know her place" as a woman in men's territory. (1929/2008, p. 2)

Another example: you are a server at a restaurant, and a customer is hungry, waiting for his dinner. He is angry that you are not serving him—maybe you're not *his* server, or you are busy with other tables. Or maybe you are moving slowly tonight, tired of your job within the service industry. It is easy to imagine

this customer growing irritable, even angry. It is easy to imagine him clenching his fist under the table. It is easy to imagine him exploding in frustration. (Manne 2018, p. 50)

One more example: you are a woman who is "breaking the heart" of a man who has come to feel entitled to your love, your admiration, your sexual attention. You are leaving him, thus hurting him—which in his mind is a betrayal. The kind of love that Strawson says two adults may feel reciprocally for each other (1962/2008, p. 9) can then morph into something toxic: a wounded, aggrieved hatred that often inspires, as an empirical matter, deadly forms of violence. The most dangerous time for a woman in a relationship with a man is undoubtedly when she leaves it, and him, and he perceives himself as wronged. It's a gendered form of violence that is endemic—and moralistic.

Or so I argued in *Down Girl.* In my second book, *Entitled: How Male Privilege Hurts Women* (2020), I emphasized pieces of the puzzle that are crucial to the explanatory picture as well. The flipside of the sense that women are *obligated* to please and serve men is the idea that men are *entitled* to receive certain goods and services from us—including our staying in our lane and out of their territory. Moreover, there is a potent sense of male entitlement to *lash out with big feelings* when their perceived dues are not forthcoming, both in general and more particularly when women are the supposed debtors. This explains the fact that the resentment, blame, and hatred that often inspire misogyny can sometimes be explosive. It's not just that the groundskeeper bristles; he yells in Woolf's direction. It's not just that the customer explodes in anger; he bangs his spoon on the table threateningly. And it's not just that the aggrieved ex-husband stews; he gets out his shotgun.

What I hope to have now made plausible, with these examples and others, is that a lot of misogyny involves the false or at least exaggerated sense that a woman is a *wrongdoer.* The existence of current or historical patriarchal norms of male entitlement, on the one hand, and female obligation on the other, makes conditions ripe for resenting, blaming, and yes, even hating women for our perceived transgressions.[2] From men's perspective, we are not giving enough; we are insufficiently admiring; we are stepping on their toes, invading their dominion. We do not know our place. We are cold, mean, frigid bitches. And they are entitled to protest these offenses and many others. This is part of the logic of misogyny that helps make it *make sense* from the perspective of many perpetrators. And that logic has no need, at least so far, for the idea that women are non- or sub-human. Rather, we are human, all too human, sinners and malefactors.

Of course, there are puzzles. When Elliot Rodger—the patron saint of incels—committed his misogynistic murders in May 2014, he sought retribution against women he didn't know, except by reputation. How does this work? I think the answer has to do partly with the way one woman may be treated as representative of a "type": here, the "hot, blonde sluts" that Rodger resented when they did not turn up at his doorstep, ready and willing to date him. Rodger also needed to find women to blame due to

the nature of his complaint: it being a perceived sin of omission committed by no woman in particular. The women at UCSB's Alpha Phi sorority house, whom he fixated on and stalked from a distance, fit the mold well enough to make them his target. When he knocked on their door, he had loaded weapons in hand, and was planning to slaughter all of them for the "crime" of not wanting him. (Garvey 2014) He spoke not only about but *to* these women in his video, and his mode of address was second-person plural: he was viciously resentful of their distinctively human violations, and attributed to these women not only minds but the agency, autonomy, and power of discrimination to decisively reject him. In his mind they owed him more. So again, they were human, all too human, debtors.

Another puzzle: why do the men who seek to harm women sometimes use dehumanizing rhetoric? But here I think that there is a fairly ready explanation: downranking women verbally is one more "down girl" move among many used to hurt us, and to justify degrading treatment more broadly. We are called dogs, pigs, and bitches; "fembots" and so on. Much like the non-dehumanizing term "feminazi," these are well-understood as insults—together, oftentimes, with a side of rhetorical rationalization. (If she's a bitch, then she deserves the harsh treatment; if she's a dog, then she isn't worth dating—or fucking. And so on.)

What this suggests so far is that a certain amount of human cruelty, at least when it comes to misogyny, can be explained without recourse to the idea of dehumanizing people. Here I follow the definition of dehumanization offered by David Livingstone Smith, who has done more than anyone to theorize what dehumanization could be, and to develop the best theory of how to understand it. (2011; 2016; 2020; 2021) On his definition, dehumanizing someone is a psychological attitude that involves seeing them as non-human or sub-human (although it is compatible with seeing them as fully human too, which makes them appear "uncanny"). I also think Livingstone Smith has done more than anyone to admit the difficulties with this idea, and to mount an impressive and sensitive defense of it. Livingstone Smith and I are actually in agreement that what is sometimes billed in the discourse as the dehumanization of women is typically better understood in other terms—for example, as I've just argued, as a form of vilification. That is, instead of being seen as sub- or non-human, the victims of misogynistic cruelty are often envisaged as *bad people*: as sinners and transgressors. Violence against women is thus often moralistic.

But eventually I will suggest that the lessons to be learned about misogyny may have broader implications. It's at least worth exploring the idea that *most* forms of human-to-human cruelty do not involve dehumanization, and instead have their basis in more quotidian features of moral psychology along with oppressive social structures. But I anticipate.

2. Entitlement

Misogyny, as I define it, is not *constituted* by resentment, blame, hatred, and so on: it should be

understood not as a matter of attitude on the part of the perpetrators, but rather as the hostility girls and women encounter that serves a particular function—that of policing and enforcing patriarchal norms and expectations. In a slogan: misogyny is something women face, not something men feel. And it is crucial to recognize that there are misogynistic acts that are not inspired by anything like resentment or a straightforwardly ill will either. Rather, to return to Strawson's picture, they are perpetrated out of a sense of studied indifference and—I would add—callous entitlement. I am hence flipping the picture from women as perceived transgressors to certain men as real ones, and emphasizing the fact that their cruelty can be horrifyingly casual as well as routine within a patriarchy. Their actions are nonetheless certainly hostile and hateful from the perspective of the victims, viz., girls and women. They thus count as paradigmatically misogynistic, despite their thoughtlessness, on my picture. Moreover, they stem from and perpetuate a vicious sense of male entitlement to women's sexual services within patriarchal marriage, and a corresponding lack of a sense of obligation to respect women's bodily autonomy. I will use as an example a case of mass rape that has been much in the news lately.

In 2009, Gisèle Pelicot, a woman in her late fifties, received a prescription for anti-anxiety medication. Her husband, Dominique Pelicot, seized the opportunity: he began crushing it up with sleeping pills and adding it to Gisèle's food and drinks—often, ice cream he brought to her in bed: raspberry, her favorite. As a result, she would pass out cold after finishing her dessert and not wake up until the morning. Meanwhile, her husband would rape her, and invite strange men into their bedroom in order to rape her too. He drew them maps of the house and surrounds so they could find their way to them in the darkness. Only one man, upon entering Gisèle's bedroom, didn't go through with the planned rape and merely sexually assaulted her. Forty-seven of the men (of fifty perpetrators who could be identified) have since been convicted of rape.[3] Dominque Pelicot was sentenced to twenty years in December 2024 for his own rapes and orchestration. (Porter 2024a)

I am not going to speculate on what was going on in Dominique Pelicot's mind at any level of detail. I am not a psychologist. I am not his psychologist, *a fortiori.* What matters for my argument is partly what was missing: the guilt and shame which are the first-personal analogues of the second-personal reactive attitudes with which I began this article—a sign of, and form of, holding *oneself* responsible for the quality of the will one has manifested to another. (Strawson 1962/2008, p. 16) Dominique Pelicot gave little sign in his testimony that he truly felt responsible for what he had done. Also important to my argument is the point that he surely did not see his wife of thirty plus years, with whom he had three children, as ~~in any way~~non- or sub-human. Dehumanizing someone is, after all, a deeply othering attitude, that holds that the dehumanized party is somehow utterly unlike oneself—incapable of the complex agency, cognizance, and depth of feeling standardly ascribed only to recognized human beings.[4] The intimacy and social integration that Dominique Pelicot had long enjoyed with his wife makes this kind of psychological distance unlikely. Moreover, he understood that his wife was suffering from unexplained

pains and memory loss: indeed, he drove her to see several doctors and gynecologists. He understood she was feeling ill and exhausted: he tried to ascribe it to her caring for their grandchildren. He understood that she would not stand for his abuses for a moment: hence his drugging her and making every attempt to conceal from her what was happening.

It's not that Dominique Pelicot didn't know what, or rather whom, he was dealing with: he didn't *care*, or care enough, at least when perverse sexual desires welled up in him. His desires and his pleasures were his unquestioned priority. At some level, he knew that his wife was not in fact his property: but, when there was a conflict between his will to violate her, and her will not to be violated, there was no real contest. "No one belongs to anyone else, but I did what I wanted when I had the urge. That's what's at the heart of this story," he testified in the courtroom. "The next day was terrible, because I saw what a bad state she was in." (Porter 2024b) But he kept causing and worsening it; he did not ostensibly want Gisèle to suffer, at least in the long term. But if that was the price of his satisfying himself, then so be it. His is an indifference that is well-termed not only cruel but studied: a deliberate riding roughshod over his wife's recognized humanity in order to get what he wanted. He felt entitled to do it, to enact his will at the expense of her suffering.

True enough, Dominique Pelicot drugged his wife, and rendered her incapable of protest during the rapes—partly, of course, to avoid her finding out and leaving him. Such men may also fantasize about women as inert, lifeless lumps of flesh to fuck at will, and be encouraged in this sick interest by the prevalence of violent and specialized pornography. (See Roberts 2024) But this is, if anything, a flight from the knowledge that reality is otherwise. It's a form of escapism: the attraction of pornography in which women are treated in this way is precisely the knowledge that we are not objects in actuality. Such men hence *rebel* against women's humanity—our minds, our desires, and our moral and sexual agency, inter alia—by fantasizing it away, or by chemically overriding our ability to express it. They render us inert or imagine us as passive; they do not actually believe we are. (Manne 2018, Chapter 3, §"Misogyny and Sexual Objectification") And, as Livingstone Smith's account makes clear, we should reserve the term "dehumanization" for a psychological attitude toward the dehumanized people, not merely their objectifying treatment or depiction.

So much for Dominique Pelicot: I am in a way more interested in the men whom he prevailed upon to rape Gisèle: at least seventy of them, whom he recruited from a website called "Without Her Knowledge." These men mostly hailed from the small town in the South of France where the Pelicots lived (they had moved there in retirement), and came from many walks of life. They were carpenters and teachers and businessmen and plumbers. They were men who their friends and families often described as kind, and who were ostensibly very ordinary.

I think appearances are not deceiving: these men *were* very ordinary. Many testified that they raped

Gisèle out of the sense that they were doing nothing wrong, because her husband had given them permission. Others said they thought it was a sex game, a threesome, and didn't rethink this hypothesis when they discovered that she was passed out, snoring. Many hence maintained their moral and legal innocence. This despite the fact that, within the French legal system, there are strong incentives for perpetrators to admit their guilt in order to enjoy reduced sentences—especially when, as here, there is compelling evidence of the crime in the form of video footage. The philosopher Manon Garcia, who wrote a book on the trial, thus reflects:

> So these men have had a very strong incentive to do this work, they have been in prison for two years or sometimes four, and yet they cannot [admit their guilt]. It's not because they're dumb. It's because there's something about what it is for them to be a man, and to be entitled to women's bodies, that makes them, I think, at least some of them, deeply convinced that they haven't done anything wrong. (Williams 2025)

This speaks to the prevalent sense that women are the distinctively human property of their husbands. There are again false moral ideas at the heart of ordinary human cruelty: that Dominique Pelicot was entitled to treat his wife in this way. That these men were entitled to take advantage of this set-up. They acted not necessarily with ill will but, for the most part, studied indifference or, similarly, "indifferent disregard" to the obviously human victim of their paradigmatically human violation. (Strawson 1962/2008, p. 15) The victims of misogyny are often perceived not as non- or sub-human but as the humans subject to norms of sexual ownership within patriarchal marriage. They are not dehumanized; they are exploited for and by their oppressors, whom they are often married to. Typically, he will be jealously possessive of his wife's body; sometimes, however, he will be licentious and generous with it in service of his own satisfaction.

And nobody said anything. Not one of the men felt guilty enough afterwards to talk to the police, or give them an anonymous tip-off. Not one of them so much as sent Gisèle an anonymous *letter.* Neither did anyone in the small town where they lived, where, surely, people talk. There was, instead, total and complete silence around these horrors. This, too, is surely studied indifference.

The only reason Dominique Pelicot was ultimately caught is that he committed a crime in public: he used his phone to take "upskirt" videos of two women who were strangers to him at a nearby supermarket. The police, upon investigating his computer, found a related USB drive: on it, video footage of the rapes, meticulously labelled with names and dates, in a folder labelled "abuses." Dominique Pelicot took the videos for "insurance" purposes, in case any of the rapists objected, so that he could blackmail them. None of the rapists objected. The folder was unnecessary—and, ironically, pivotal in his own eventual prosecution.

Its label again suggests he knew exactly what he was doing: he was acting not in ignorance of his wife's humanity, but in flagrant disregard for it. He said at the trial that he was still optimistic about reconciling with his wife. "It is important to have hope." And that, had he not been caught, he "would still be happy, and she too—everything would have continued in the same way." (Leras and Brice, 2024) He spoke like a man who did not have a guilty conscience. He spoke like a man who felt irredeemably entitled.

3. Devaluation

Let us make one more shift in perspective. I want to think now not just about the two-party interaction between (real or supposed) wrongdoer and victim. I want to think about the attitudes of third parties, which Strawson labelled "vicarious." These include the indignation or disapproval that we may feel when we witness party A's wrongdoing toward party B in a way that would naturally or normally occasion B's resentment toward A. (Strawson 1962/2008, p. 14) And it may also include, I will now argue, a second important form of indifference: that of spectators, not perpetrators. It is an indifference which is equally cruel but more avoidant than studied.

Strawson wrote that:

> The personal reactive attitudes rest on, and reflect, an expectation of, and demand for, the manifestation of a certain degree of goodwill or regard on the part of other human beings toward ourselves; or at least the expectation of, and demand for, an absence of the manifestation of active ill will or indifferent disregard… The generalized or vicarious analogues of the personal reactive attitudes rest on, and reflect, exactly the same expectation or demand in a generalized form; they rest on, or reflect, that is, the demand for the manifestation of a reasonable degree of goodwill or regard, on the part of others, not simply towards oneself, but towards all those on whose behalf moral indignation may be felt, i.e., as we now think, towards all men. (1962/2008, p. 15)

I want to suggest that this last choice of words is unintentionally telling. Women have often been, and continue to be, left out of the group of those whom people at large make moral demands for, or on behalf of. Some—typically, privileged—men are deemed entitled not just to treat women as well as girls in ways that are in point of fact wrongful. They are also allowed to behave in ways that are admitted to *be* wrong but occasion little concern for us. The spectators I have in mind turn away, avoidantly, and refuse to face up to such male wrongdoing. They protect and defend the perpetrator. They shrug off, or even about, the suffering of the female victim. Sometimes, they also blame her.

And such an indifferent spectator may be a woman herself. She may even be the victim's mother.

When Andrea Skinner was nine, she went to stay with her mother and her stepfather. Her mother was called away for the night, and Andrea asked if she could sleep in her mother's twin bed in the main bedroom. Her stepfather, Gerry Fremlin, agreed: he then exposed himself and masturbated in front of her from his own bed. The next morning he climbed into bed with her and sexually assaulted her. Andrea told her father, and her step-mother, with whom she was living. Neither of them acted. The next summer, when Andrea returned to visit her mother, the abuse continued. It continued for many years, with Gerry exposing himself to Andrea and making sexual comments. (Aviv 2024)

There is good evidence that Andrea's mother Alice knew all along about her husband Gerry's behavior. She later said she'd always wondered if Gerry had raped and murdered Lynne Harper, a twelve-year-old girl, who was found dead in Clinton, Gerry's small hometown in Canada, in 1959. This was seven years prior to Andrea's birth, and many years prior to Alice's marriage to Gerry. Alice also admitted that, when Andrea was eleven, the parents of a fourteen-year-old girl had informed her that Gerry had been sexually inappropriate with their daughter. (Aviv 2024)

Women's as well as men's complicity in familial abuse and incest is distressingly common—with girls being significantly more likely to be victimized than boys, although of course all children are, sadly, vulnerable.[5] The only reason we know about this case is that, when Andrea eventually came forward, many decades later, she exposed someone famous: her mother was Alice Munro, the celebrated Canadian writer. But Munro was statistically quite unremarkable in her inaction: Judith Herman Lewis's classic 1981 research showed that, of 40 mothers whose husbands sexually molested their daughters, 37 did nothing. Just three left their husbands: and each, like Munro, ultimately went back to him. (Giles 2024)

In 1991, Munro was tasked with blurbing a collection of short stories. When she read the final story, about a young girl who was sexually abused and subsequently died by suicide, she was left deeply shaken. Munro told Andrea that, after reading it, she couldn't look at Gerry. Andrea felt something shift between them during that conversation: "I knew that she knew." And Andrea took the opening to finally tell her mother—something which her father had expressly forbidden at the time, saying it would kill her. Andrea sent her mother a letter detailing the abuse. Munro said that, from the first line of the letter ("Please find a spot alone before you read this"), she knew what it would say: Gerry had abused Andrea. Munro didn't deny it.

She didn't deny it but she reacted like a betrayed wife. She didn't sympathize with Andrea: on the contrary, she initially blamed the nine-year-old girl for seducing her husband, and bemoaned the demise of her marriage. She left Gerry that day, but she stayed away only briefly. Soon after, ~~she~~Munro went back to him, and told Andrea it would be misogynistic of her to blame ~~her~~Munro for her husband's abuse, and that ~~she~~Andrea shouldn't expect ~~her~~Munro to sacrifice her own marital happiness because of what had happened so long ago. Andrea was cast back into a role that she had often played in childhood: a caregiver

for her mother, who was billed as the fragile "talent." "I was there for her, to hold her," Andrea told the journalist, Rachel Aviv, for a story recently published in *The New Yorker.* "There was maybe some anger at me for having an "affair" with her husband, but more than that, I really just felt that I wasn't there. I was invisible." (2024) Eventually, Andrea broke off relations with her mother. Later, Andrea read an interview where Munro lied about being close to all three of her daughters. She had a sickening sense of erasure. "I had long felt inconsequential to my mother, but now she was erasing me," Andrea wrote in *The Toronto Star*, following Alice Munro's death in 2023. All in all: "I felt like my parents might as well as have been given a video of me being raped and done nothing." (Aviv 2024)

Andrea's case shows that mothers can be not only complicit in abuse; they can cease to care about their daughters for the sake of their husbands. They can protect and defend the wrongdoer even while knowing all too well what he did, and even knowing all too well that it was wrong—nobody who reads Alice Munro's short stories, many of which borrow liberally from these events, could seriously doubt her moral cognizance if not her compass.[6] And, of course, the idea that a mother like Munro dehumanized her own daughter in Livingstone Smith's sense is difficult to credit.

Women like Andrea who speak up to the detriment of beloved and privileged men often become persona non grata, morally speaking. They become people who do not matter, or matter little. Perhaps they were always appreciated largely or exclusively for their use value. Or perhaps, more subtly, their value was held to be not instrumental so much as conditional on their not costing a beloved man his power or reputation. Whatever the case, when they are hurt, their pain is not protested. They are not protected either. They are among the people who are unhelped—or unheld, metaphorically. Like Andrea Skinner, they may even be tasked with holding those who ought to have held them. But they are again not dehumanized so much as profoundly disvalued: and with this disvaluing comes silencing, disappearance, invisibility, erasure.

Many people know all too well that girls are human, and still they let them suffer.

It has been proposed to me that, much as I define misogyny from the perspective not of the perpetrators, but the victims, perhaps we should do the same vis-à-vis dehumanization. Both Vanessa Wills (2018) and Quill R Kukla (2020) have independently suggested this, and I find the idea valuable. Perhaps it is here, in being subject to a spectator's avoidant indifference, that this sense of dehumanization can most easily be located: where we might *feel* ourselves dehumanized because we are not looked at as human beings, who matter in our own right, but rather as impediments to the happiness of others. We are not a person but a problem. I have no quarrel with anyone who wants to use the term "dehumanization" to capture this feeling, but I am not sure how often people do so (a purely empirical question) or how often they *would* do if offered more precise language (a partly conceptual one).[7] And it seems to me more natural to reach, just as Andrea did, for terms that emphasize the way such victims are erased and

disappeared as moral entities. It is not that she was non- or sub-human to her mother in this moment. She was rather a human, all too human, nuisance—and, to her stepfather, a threat. He threatened to kill her if she ever spoke of it. He ended up getting two years and a suspended sentence. (Aviv 2024)

4. A Dilemma for the Dehumanization Theorist

I hope to have shown that there are considerable resources within the broadly Strawsonian framework I have used for explaining interpersonal cruelty in quotidian moral terms in conjunction with facts about oppressive social structures, especially norms of obligation and entitlement. I have argued that misogynistic cruelty stems from the sense that certain women are wrongdoers; it stems from the sense that certain, privileged men are entitled to violate women; it stems from the sense that, at least when they threaten such men, women simply do not matter. It is thus more a product of moral vilification, entitlement, and devaluation than dehumanization proper.

So far, in this article, I have focused on misogyny. But I would now like to briefly consider some potentially broader lessons. There are two important reasons to pursue this line of inquiry: one metaphysical, the other methodological.

The metaphysical point to be made here is that misogyny (in conjunction with sexism and other patriarchal mechanisms) intersects with every other major form of oppression: racism, xenophobia, classism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, fatphobia, and so on. So if the notion that perpetrators dehumanize their victims turns out to be surplus to explanatory requirements when it comes to misogyny across the board—including transmisogyny and misogynoir, crucially—then this will at least put pressure on the need to invoke it elsewhere.

This connects with the methodological point that I want to make here: just as we can ask what happens within history or indeed philosophy when we center women's voices, we can ask what would happen within moral psychology when we center women's predicaments. What would happen, in other words, if we regarded misogyny not as a marginal phenomenon but placed it firmly at the center of our understanding of how people can and do mistreat one another? What would happen if we approached even the worst historical atrocities with the observation that certain, oppressed men may now be facing something akin to what women face routinely? I do not pretend to know the answers to these questions. But I think they are at least ~~well~~ worth asking.

As I've said, Livingstone Smith and I agree that sexism and misogyny as such do not involve dehumanization. But, under the surface, there remain important disagreements. On the view he has developed, partly in response to our critical engagement over the past decade, people who are dehumanized are seen as both fully human *and* fully sub-human at the same time. (2016) This explains the

fact that, as I've long argued, those who are supposedly subject to paradigmatic forms of dehumanization are often punished for characteristically human misdeeds and with characteristically human attitudes, such as resentment, blame, and outrage. So I cannot and have not relied on the point here that those who supposedly dehumanize others actually presuppose the humanity of their victims. Again, Livingstone Smith can now accommodate this point with equanimity: after all, victims of dehumanization *are* seen as human, as well as sub-human.

Livingstone Smith argues that viewing people as both fully human and sub-human stems from ascribing to them a sub-human, racial essence. And it results in the dehumanized person appearing monstrous and "uncanny." This is due to the fact that they straddle two metaphysically incompatible realms, which inspires a kind of horror.[8] (2021, Chapter 12)

This is a fairly puzzling, somewhat byzantine psychological attitude to attribute to people, and Livingstone Smith is well aware of this. In its defense, he mounts two main arguments. First, he adduces impressive historical evidence that many racially dominant people have referred to racially marginalized people in ways that seem to bear out his hypothesis. This is so, for example, of whites vis-à-vis Black people and non-Jewish Germans vis-à-vis Jews, particularly under Nazism. (2020, Chapters 4 and 5) Second, Livingstone Smith continues to hold that there are strong if not insurmountable inhibitions against interpersonal violence. So the dehumanization of people subject to horrific violence helps to explain it. (2020, Chapter 12)

I do not agree with the second argument, since the everyday nature of misogyny shows that the inhibitions against violence are rather contingent: they hold when, and only when, people do not feel threatened, thwarted, slighted—or entitled. And feeling threatened, thwarted, and slighted by racial minorities is at the heart of white supremacy, as is entitlement. The same goes, I believe, for anti-Semitism.

So much for the second argument. But the first is more challenging. One thing I want to make clear here is that there is room to hold that dehumanization has been an important tool of racism in times past, but is less important currently.

But more interestingly, and importantly, I want to suggest a dilemma for Livingstone Smith in closing that turns on the point about intersectionality with which I opened this section. Either his paradigmatic forms of dehumanization—which include anti-Black racism and anti-Semitism—encompass Black and Jewish women or they don't. If they don't, then the idea that dehumanization involves ascribing a sub-human essence to an entire racialized population is difficult to make sense of, since this essence would surely be ascribed to people of any gender within this population. (It would need to be possessed by mothers who pass the essence down to their children, in most cases, presumably.) If they do, then Livingstone Smith will have to account for the fact that most forms of genocide and enslavement have involved the brutal mass rape of women. For example, although it is not necessarily widely discussed, it is

now very well established that Jewish women were raped en masse by Nazis during the Holocaust. (Hedgepeth and Rochelle 2010) Similarly, the rape of Black women by their white enslavers was ubiquitous and brutal. These facts sit uneasily, I believe, with Livingstone Smith's depiction of dehumanizers as horrified and repelled by, if also fascinated with, their targets—and, at least in many cases, trying to exterminate without being contaminated by the monsters. Raping someone is, of course, about power rather than sex from the perspective of those who matter most, the victims. But from the perspective of the perpetrators, it is still a sexual act—often a deliberately domineering one—and one which obviously involves intimate contact and entanglement with the victim's body. If Black and Jewish women were held to be human monsters whose very bodies were polluted, and contaminating in the sense Livingstone Smith then posits (2021, Chapter 12), then surely it would make little sense to tangle with us to rape us.

How much more straightforward if bitter to hold that human-to-human cruelty is something very ordinary: a matter of resentment, entitlement, and indifference, inter alia, including in the case of white supremacists and Nazis. Perhaps no exotic psychological attitudes are needed to explain their abhorrent actions. After all, girls and women typically aren't held to be sub-human. Nor is our human status doubted. Despite that, in the end, we are still woefully mistreated.

Notes

[1] See, e.g., Manne 2018, Chapter 5. I slightly prefer the phrase "ordinary cruelty" to Hannah Arendt's more poetic and famous phrase—"the banality of evil"—because hers is easily, and perhaps correctly, taken to be primarily a point about aesthetics, especially in connection with her brilliant depiction of Adolf Eichmann. She was arguing there, in essence, that evil need not be impressive or spectacular—and that Eichmann, as a thoughtless, incoherent, and tongue-tied (though passionate) bureaucrat was for all that perfectly capable of being the chief architect of the Holocaust. (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963) Whereas my point is one about the ubiquity of iniquity, and the lack of exotic psychological attitudes in its etiology.

[2] What serves to justify these illicit norms? Sexism, on my view, which holds that women are *naturally* well-suited to feminine-coded forms of labor, among other false tenets of this ideology. See Manne 2018, Chapter 3.

[3] The remaining men were convicted of either sexual assault or attempted rape. At least twenty more men who are believed to have committed similar crimes could not be identified. (BBC staff 2024)

[4] See *Down Girl* 2018, Chapter 5, "Clarifying Humanism" for further elaboration on my "thick" rather than narrowly biological conception of humanness.

[5] Note that a form of hostility can count as misogyny on my view when it affects girls and women in either disproportionate or in distinctive ways. (Manne 2018, Chapter 3)

[6] Aviv's word for Munro is, tellingly, "passive." ("Alice Munro's Passive Voice" is the name of the online article; 2024.) It recounts the fact that, in one of Munro's short stories, she describes a mother who feels hopeful only when she watches events unfold with a sense of detachment from her family. "A watcher, not a keeper" is how Munro described her. Munro's eldest daughter, Sheila, says she always connected these words with her own mother.

[7] Similar points apply, I think, to people who use the word "dehumanization" to refer to infantilization, adultification, cartoonification, reduction to tropes, flattening, smearing, and many other forms of downranking. Of course, some people use the term "dehumanizing" just to dramatically indicate any inhumane treatment and attitudes; in which case, dehumanization is the *explanandum* not the *explanans*, and requires rather than provides moral psychological explanation.

[8] When a dehumanized person is deemed physically threatening as well as uncanny, Livingstone Smith calls this "demonizing dehumanization." But he also distinguishes "enfeebling dehumanization," which involves seeing someone as metaphysically threatening but physically innocuous. (2021, Chapter 25) Most of Livingstone Smith's focus has been on the former type of attitude.

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