# What is Sexism?

In this lesson, we’ll be taking a short look at (1) **Anne Cudd** and **Leslie Jones’s** analysis of the various types of sexism and (2) **Kate Manne’s** related definition of *misogyny.*

## Cudd and Jones on Types of Sexism

**Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Sexism.** An *extrinsic* sexist is a person who believes that women are inferior to men, but ONLY because they lack certain “extrinsic” qualities that everyone would agree are important (such as intelligence, kindness, or bravery) while an *intrinsic* sexist believes that women are inferior to men just in virtue of their being women (and nothing else). As is the case with racism, self-admitted “intrinsic” sexists are pretty rare. Cudd and Jones also introduce the idea of **individuated extrinsic sexism,** which occurs when a person denies that they are extrinsically sexist (“Of course women are equal to men!” they’ll say). However, in any *individual* case (e.g., when trying to decide whether a particular woman might be promoted over a particular man) they always behave and act just like the extrinsic sexists.

**Levels of Sexism.** The word “sexist” can be applied in a variety of different ways: to individual people and their beliefs, to the actions of people (even if they don’t “intend” to be sexist), and to social institutions or laws more generally. Cudd and Jones distinguish between several of these levels:

1. **Institutional Sexism.** Institutional sexism occurs when the rules or laws of various institutions discriminate against women and in favor of men. Clear historical examples from the law would be denying women the right to vote, to inherit property, or to hold public office. Cudd and Jones also offer the example of Catholic Church hierarchy where men are allowed to become priests or bishops but women are not. (Plenty of other religious institutions have similar rules). These rules or laws don’t have to be “intended” to be sexist to have this effect; instead, its enough if they put men “above” women on the status hierarchy.
2. **Interpersonal Sexism.** Interpersonal sexism occurs when individual people (who might be men or women!) discriminate against women and in favor of men in ways that are NOT related to sexist laws or policies. Cudd and Jones give the examples of the ways girls have often been treated differently by teachers, coaches, or even parents than are boys. For example, they might be called on less in class, steered away from mathematics, or discouraged from certain sports, etc. As with institutional sexism, this can be the result of explicit beliefs, but need not be.
3. **Unconscious Sexism.** Cudd and Jones suspect that, in contemporary society, there is a significant amount “unconscious” sexism, which is done by people *who don’t think of themselves as sexist.* Their argument for this is something like the following:
   1. Premise: Women are, objectively speaking, worse off than men in many respects (especially when it comes to measures like “annual salary” or “amount of time spent on housework” or “occupy positions of political/business power”).
   2. Premise: These differences can’t be explained by explicit institutional sexism (e.g., we don’t have laws *forbidding* women from making lots of money, becoming president, etc.) or by explicit, interpersonal sexism (there just aren’t that many people anymore who explicitly say “I’ll never vote for a woman president!”).
   3. Premise: We have plenty of evidence that unconscious motivations *exist,* and we know something about what sorts of situations are likely to trigger them (e.g., when we want to think “our group” is better and more deserving that “your group.”). Bias against women seems like a plausible thing that *could* be an unconscious motivation for at least some people.
   4. Conclusion: So, unconscious sexism exists, and plays a role in explaining women’s struggles in contemporary society.

**What’s To Be Done? Two Views.** Most contemporary feminist writers would agree that something like the above types of sexism exist. However, there is considerable disagreement on many details, as well as on what might be done to *fix* things. Two main schools of thought are as follows:

* **Equality feminists** hold that men and women are, in most relevant respects, pretty similar. They have similar abilities, want similar things, and so on. The fact that men and women *in our society* live such different sorts of live is because of different types of sexism (listed above). The solution is to focus on eliminating those forces (sexist laws and beliefs) that serve to divide men and women. In an ideal world, the law shouldn’t need to do things like “pick out” men or women for special treatment at all (even if it might need to do so in the short term, in order to correct past sexism).
* **Difference feminists** hold that men and women DO differ, in at least some important respects. In particular, women place a greater emphasis on *connection* or *care* where men place a greater value on things like *status* or *rule-following.* Both are important to a good society, but our society currently disvalues the sorts of lives that women want to lead (stay home parents don’t get paid at all, and most care workers are paid sub-living wages; women who take off work to care for children/elders often never recover in their career). Difference feminists, unlike equality feminists, think our laws/practices WILL need to take account of the differences between men and women, and more specifically, make it so that women’s lives/interests are valued, even if they are different than men’s.

## Manne on Misogyny

**Kate Manne** is a contemporary philosopher who teaches at Cornell University. Her 2017 book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* is probably one of the more widely read philosophy books published in the last few years. Along with being an interesting/contemporary topic, it provides a useful example of the sort of thing in the previous section. Given its content area, Manne’s book is also unusual in that it is written from the perspective of **analytic philosophy** (a style of philosophy closely associated with logic, philosophy of science, and related areas) as opposed to **continental philosophy** (a style of philosophy that aligns more with history, sociology, English literature, etc.).

**What’s wrong with the psychologistic definition of “misogyny”?** The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines misogyny as “Hatred or dislike of, or prejudice against women.” This definition notably refers to the inner psychological states of people (after all, “hatred” or “dislike” are things that happen in your mind!).What’s wrong with this definition? A few things. First, according to Manne, it’s just not that useful. So, for one thing, it’s just not clear how it is supposed to apply to even the most obvious cases. So, for example, even a serial killer who targets women might not “hate” all women as such, and might not even describe himself as hating women. Part of the problem here is that mental states like “hatred of women” are relatively **epistemically inaccessible** in that it’s hard to figure how we could go about “knowing” that someone is misogynistic. It would be better is misogyny was defined in a way that people (especially people who might be negatively affected by it) could actually know about it. A second problem is that this is an overly **moralizing** definition, in that it assumes that “misogyny” must be done by bad people that hate women. Manne grants that *some* misogyny is like this, but she’s doesn’t think it is all like that. Instead, she thinks that there are plenty of (not totally terrible) men and women who participate in misogyny.

## Manne’s Definition (Annotated)

Manne’s basic idea is to define misogyny with respect to its role in enforcing gender/sex norms against women and girls (the stuff that keeps them “down”). However, in order to spell this out, a fair number of details are needed (again, this is pretty typical of this style of philosophy, but it can sometimes make it difficult for lay people to engage with).

***Constitutively speaking [i.e., what “defines” the concept]****, misogyny in a social environment comprises the hostile social forces that:*

* *will tend to be faced by a (wider or narrower) class of girls and women because they are girls and women in that (more or less fully specified) social position; and*
  + In other words: misogynistic rules are targeted at those people who society treats as women and girls. Why this requirement? Manne doesn’t want to rule out transwomen experiencing misogyny. Also, there may be certain women (such as the Queen of England) who have such a high/different social status that none of this applies to them, since they aren’t really treated as normal “women” by society.
* *serve to police and enforce a patriarchal order, instantiated in relation to other intersecting systems of domination and disadvantage that apply to the relevant class of girls and women (such as various forms of racism, xenophobia, classism, ageism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism and so on).*
  + In other words: misogyny is made of social rules (written or unwritten) that serve to “keep women in their place” with respect to men. However, there are LOTS of rules meant to keep people in their place based on their race, social class, physical disabilities, etc. Misogynistic rules are just one special sort.

*As a****substantive matter of fact [i.e., what misogyny looks like in our world right now]****, these misogynistic social forces will:*

* *often target girls and women (in the relevant class) for actual, perceived, or representative challenges to or violations of applicable patriarchal norms and expectations (again, operating in conjunction with applicable intersecting oppressive forces).*
  + For example, if the patriarchal norm is “It is women’s responsibility to raise children” (Manne thinks society often requires women to give *care*), misogyny might consist of laws that make it difficult form them to balance work/child-raising (e.g., not enough parental leave), or in moral norms that treat women/men differently in this regard (e.g., maybe society is much more forgiving of men being subpar parents than it is of women). Another example: there are some studies that suggest that women apply to *leadership* roles are judged differently/more negatively than are equivalent men. In particular, resumes with women’s names are judged “not competent” or “not likable” at a higher rate than equivalent resumes with men’s names. Manne does NOT think that the people making these judgements are doing so explicitly because they “hate” women; however, it remains the case that this sort of thing hurts women.
* *Where patriarchal norms and expectations may involve, for example:*
  + *distinctively gendered****contents****, which reflect and help to regulate or restore patriarchal order; or*
  + *particularly harsh****enforcement mechanisms****for girls and women (in the relevant class), as compared with boys and men (in this class — that is, male counterparts); or*
    - One of Manne’s ideas is that society tends to be much more forgiving of powerful men “screwing up” than it is of women in the same position. She calls this “**himpathy.”** So, for example, when the Stanford athlete Brock Turner got 6 months for raping an unconscious women, this might be an example of that. (That is: she thinks it is tough to imagine that a woman committing a similarly serious crime would be given this light of a sentence.) Manne thinks is true more generally (e.g., in the way the press treats women politicians as opposed to male politicians.).
  + *particularly intense and/or invasive forms of policing (for example, surveillance, scrutiny and suspicion) for girls and women (in the relevant class), as compared with male counterparts.* (Manne, 2020, “Women in a man’s world…”)
    - Women arguably face greater scrutiny than men in a variety of areas: everything from school dress codes to parenting choices to health care laws (e.g., regarding abortion), etc. Again, Manne is NOT worried about the motivations of the particular people writing a particular rule; her argument is that a *reasonable* person could see the overall effect of these norms/rules as being “misogynistic,” in the sense that they make it *more difficult* for women and girls to break out of the “boxes” that society has assigned to them.

## Review Questions

1. Give an original example of each of the following. You can use real examples from history or the news, or make up ones:
   1. Intrinsic sexism
   2. Extrinsic sexism
   3. Individuated extrinsic sexism
   4. Institutional sexism regarding laws (e.g., a law that is exist)
   5. Institutional sexism NOT involving laws (but instead involving the rules of a business, religion, etc.).
   6. Interpersonal sexism
   7. Unconscious sexism
2. What do you think the best argument is in favor of “equality feminism”? In favor of “difference feminism”?
3. What do you think the best arguments AGAINST each of these two views are?
4. Which of the two views (equality or difference) do you think is more accurate/useful? Why?
5. Give TWO examples of events from your own knowledge/experience that might count as misogynistic in Manne’s sense, and explain why. Remember, misogyny need not involve “laws,” but might involve shaming/teasing/judging/etc.
6. Manne’s definition allows for misogyny to occur even if no one in particular is “to blame” for it. Do you agree with this?
7. What aspects of Manne’s definition, if any, would you change? Why?