

Entitlement, Backlash, and Feminist Resistance



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Feminist psychologists in recent decades have correctly incorporated the topic of privilege into discussions of prejudice and discrimination (Anderson & Accomando, 2002; White et al., 2001). White privilege, male privilege, cisgender privilege, heterosexual privilege, and class privilege, for example, reflect the unearned advantages enjoyed by individuals in dominant groups—even if they also occupy identities that are not advantaged.¹ Thus, to understand the full impact of inequality and oppression, scholars and activists scrutinize both discrimination against people in marginalized groups and the corresponding unearned privileges of people in dominant groups. One psychological phenomenon that has received less direct examination but powerfully influences the persistence of social, economic, and political inequality is psychological entitlement. The concept of entitlement captures one's sense of deservingness and is particularly helpful in understanding backlash against progress toward equality for marginalized groups. Dominant group members' sense of entitlement sets the stage for their resentment when they perceive their position or status is undermined. Even when such group members might be otherwise disadvantaged (e.g., working-class white people, men of color, cisgender women), entitlement still plays a significant role in resentment, horizontal hostility, and backlash.

¹ Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins and other women of color feminists have identified how we all occupy multiple locations in the matrix of domination. Being targeted in some ways does not negate the privileges one receives for their location in any dominant groups. This idea is key to the notion of intersectionality. See Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.

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In this analysis, we particularly draw upon social psychology, critical race theory, and intersectional feminism. Social psychology tells us to examine not only internal psychological processes but also social contexts and hierarchies. Critical race theory tells us that racism is systemic and structural, not just interpersonal (Accomando & Anderson, 2022). Intersectional feminism tells us that identity, oppression, and resistance exist in a matrix of domination. These approaches, taken together, offer complex and complementary lenses to examine backlash and resistance.

Entitlement, in the context of unequal power and privilege, is key to understanding backlash, which, in turn, is key to understanding why progress moves forward, slows, and reverses even as nations have seen powerful and effective movements for progressive change. Critical race theorist and intersectional feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1988) points out that historically, and in the present, wherever there is reform, we also see retrenchment, and often the retrenchment is even more powerful than the original progress that preceded the backlash. We argue that power entitles those with it to process information in self-serving and convenient ways. Studies show that entitlement also produces reckless, even dangerous behavior. When dominant group members' sense of entitlement is disrupted, they engage in backlash as an attempt to bring the world back to stasis—the time when they believe they were comfortably in power. Viewing backlash through a lens of entitlement allows us to understand the emotional component to backlash. Backlash emotions range from confusion and defensiveness to rage, and the behavioral manifestations of these emotions span a similar gamut. Backlash emotions are given social and political validity by pundits and politicians (Kranish, 2021), not because they are legitimate responses to social progress, but because they are expressed by dominant group members.

Backlash is not unique to the present era—it happens again and again throughout history by an advantaged group in response to progress made by those on the margins (Anderson, 2016). There was backlash when newly freed African Americans made economic and political gains during Reconstruction; when women sought to control their reproduction; when queer people demanded marriage rights; when transgender people insisted on having public lives; and when educational materials began to acknowledge systemic inequality (Accomando & Anderson, 2022). The rage of the entitled has profound socio-political consequences, from policy retrenchments and group violence to public support for authoritarian leaders (Anderson, 2021). Thus, feminist psychologists would do well to follow the dynamics of entitlement and backlash with vigilance.

In this chapter, we argue that entitlement is key to understanding the persistence of inequality, especially backlash against progressive change. We begin by defining entitlement and situating it among the concepts of power and privilege. Next, we offer some contemporary manifestations of entitlement that capture the range of behavior it produces, including men's ignorance as perpetrators, mansplaining, and precarious manhood. Finally, we explore the relationship between entitlement and backlash against progressive change, such as the punishment of confident and competent women and patterns of violence—usually committed by men across different ethnic backgrounds—against marginalized groups. As we explore these dynamics, we offer examples of intersectional feminist resistance as a counterweight to backlash.

Power, Privilege, and Entitlement

Power is the ability to influence others. It is the capacity to affect the conduct of others through the real, perceived, or threatened use of rewards and punishments (Fiske, 1993). Power holders can be in influential positions, meaning they make the laws that govern society, enforce the laws, or run powerful organizations. Their power is based on achieving recognized status that allows them influence. There is also cultural power, which is determined not by specific achievements, but by the status of the group to which one belongs (e.g., one's racial, gender, or religious category). Being white, a man, cisgender, heterosexual, and Christian confers power and status relative to those who are not the normative identities in these social categories.

The powerful are influential because they have the resources to influence. Those who have cultural power but not material resources in the form of wealth and political influence are still powerful relative to those without cultural power. For example, a white working-class heterosexual man has cultural power even if he lacks economic power. His gender, race, and sexual orientation make him the cultural default in three ways. A Latinx working-class heterosexual man will not be considered the cultural default in terms of his ethnicity or class status, but his heterosexual maleness confers power in relation to women and queer people. That a white working-class heterosexual man has more power than people of color, queer people, and women does not mean that he *feels* powerful or believes himself powerful. He might not feel powerful when he is passed over for a promotion or hollered at by a passing driver. He may experience many challenges in his life. Those challenges, however, are likely not due to his gender, race, and sexual orientation.

Those who are members of dominant groups—groups that are the cultural default and the more valued members of a social category—are granted privileges based on their higher-status group position. Privilege refers to the unearned advantages, opportunities, protections, and benefits-of-the-doubt granted to dominant group members simply because of their group membership (McIntosh, 2020/1989). These privileges exist regardless of whether the recipients seek them out, and they are so regularly given to dominant group members, they often do not realize they have them. Many of these benefits should be available to everyone, but they are not, and some benefits should be available to no one, but are. And because these benefits are so taken-for-granted by dominant group members, they may either naively assume everyone gets them or come to believe they deserve the unearned advantages.

Psychological Entitlement and Its Relation to Power and Privilege

When a group is viewed as the ideal or normative identity in a social category, they are valued and become accustomed to expecting privileges as the norm. Entitlement is one's *belief* or *sense* of what they deserve (Major, 1994; O'Brien et al., 2012).

Power and privilege produce an inflated sense of entitlement. How does entitlement relate to power and privilege? Power is about *position* or social location: one's ability to influence is due to having resources or membership in a dominant group. Privilege is about *advantage*: certain benefits or protections given to someone based on power. Entitlement is about *expectations*: the inflated sense of deservingness one has as a result of power and the benefits of privilege. Entitlement exists in a social context but captures something psychological. Power, privilege, and entitlement amount to a kind of triad of dominance.

Entitled people are more likely to define their own deservingness based on ascribed characteristics (i.e., who they are), rather than achieved characteristics (i.e., what they have accomplished; Major, 1994). Entitled people tend to be self-centered. They have the tendency to take credit for positive events and to blame others for negative ones (Harvey & Martinko, 2009). Entitled individuals agree with statements such as "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others" and "People like me deserve an extra break now and then." On self-report measures, men tend to show higher levels of entitlement than do women (Crone et al., 2020). Unfortunately, most empirical studies on entitlement are limited by the over-reliance on white U.S. college student participants. However, one study of Latinx, black, and white U.S. college students found that men reported higher levels of entitlement than women across all three ethnicities (Crone et al., 2020).

Whereas gender differences are detected in self-report measures, entitlement can be a tricky phenomenon to capture because those who feel entitled do not usually recognize their sometimes-breathtaking sense of entitlement. The entitled have the luxury of lacking introspection. They are accustomed to an environment that quietly and seamlessly moves in their direction. Therefore, other measures of entitlement are less direct but no less illustrative of the phenomenon. For example, men feel entitled to a higher salary than their similarly situated peers, whereas women are more likely to believe that they are entitled to the same salary as their peers (Barron, 2003).

Brenda Major's classic research studies (e.g., Major et al., 1984) reveal how some individuals' sense of entitlement is independent of actual accomplishment. Undergraduates in these studies were asked to complete a task. When they were finished, they were instructed to pay themselves what they considered fair for the work they completed, leaving behind any remaining money. Like other studies, men paid themselves significantly more than what women paid themselves. This pattern held even when women outperformed men. When Major and her colleagues paid students a *fixed* amount of money to perform a task, women were more likely than men to work longer, to complete more of the work, to be more accurate, and to be more efficient. When participants were asked to provide evaluations of their own performances, women and men did not differ in their self-rated performance evaluations, even though the women performed better than the men (Major et al., 1984).

Perhaps it is not surprising that men believe they are worth more than what women believe women are worth. People reward men accordingly (Solnick & Schweitzer, 1999). In experiments in which respondents are asked to allocate salaries to job candidates with exactly the same credentials, respondents allocate higher salaries to men than to women (Williams et al., 2010). In addition, jobs that are arbitrarily

labeled as “male” are viewed as higher value and therefore meriting a higher salary than jobs with the exact same characteristics labeled “female” (Alksnis et al., 2008). These findings give men good reason to believe they deserve things that they do not necessarily deserve. These findings also provide insight into why dominant group members can be inflexible and brittle when adaptation is required, such as changes in the economic or demographic landscape (Anderson, 2021).

Power, Entitlement, and Self-Centered Disregard of Others

Research studies illuminate the relationship between power and one’s sense of entitlement. Those in power tend to process information in a self-serving manner that produces dismissiveness and ignorance in relation to those without power (Fiske, 1993; Guinote, 2015). Whether power is generated by a simple prime in a laboratory, or from real-life groups, powerholders do not need to be careful in their attention to and interpretation of others. They feel less pressure than those without power to scrutinize their decisions and behavior because they are less likely to be held to account (Fiske, 1993). Research studies on attention find power decreases attention to other people (Fiske, 1993). Power holders can be careful and deliberate in their thinking when motivated, but they are quite comfortable relying on stereotypes when evaluating people—especially if those they are evaluating have little power. Experiments in which power is manipulated in the laboratory find that power holders tend to encode and remember stereotype-consistent information and ignore information that contradicts their stereotypes (Guinote & Phillips, 2010). And from the power holder’s perspective, why not stereotype? Stereotyping others doesn’t really cost power holders anything. Their power entitles them to stereotype with few consequences.

In contrast, those with less power are more likely to attend evenly to all information. They are required to consider consequences of their actions and ponder their judgments because they have to; often their employment and their safety make them vigilant in a way that power holders do not need to be (Fiske, 1993). This dynamic undergirds W. E. B. Du Bois’s notion of “double consciousness,” by which African Americans are “gifted with second-sight in this American world” (Du Bois, 2005/1903, p. 7). It also informs Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) concept of *la facultad*:

the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. . . Those who do not feel psychologically safe or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest—the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. (p. 38)

The flip side of this capacity, this perceptiveness, is the ignorance afforded to the powerful and the entitled.

When we think of social and cultural power outside the laboratory, that is, when we put things in terms of already-existing hierarchies, we can see how dominant group

members know relatively little about subordinated group members but subordinated groups are compelled to be well-informed about dominant groups. A domestic worker knows a lot about her boss—when they are in a bad mood, the kind of food they like. A boss knows little about the domestic worker—the boss does not need to. And this arrangement might be preferable for the boss as this lack of personalization allows them to view employees as expendable and exchangeable. Whether we are talking about gender, race, class, or citizenship hierarchy (or any of their intersections), the privilege of being in the dominant group comes with the paradoxical *disadvantage* of ignorance. James Baldwin (2010) wrote,

You cannot lynch me and keep me in ghettos without becoming something monstrous yourselves. And furthermore you give me a terrifying advantage [Y]ou never had to look at me . . . , and I had to look at you. I know more about you, therefore, than you know about me. (p. 17)

Sexual Misconduct: The Convenient Cluelessness of Entitlement

As discussed above, dominant group members feel liberated from paying attention, especially in attending to those with less status. One area where convenient cluelessness abounds is in men's sexual assault and harassment of women. The #MeToo movement started by Tarana Burke rose to global attention in 2017 and has been a reckoning for some powerful men who had escaped consequences from groping, assaulting, and raping women for years and sometimes decades. Several high-profile men were rightly forced to account (some have lost jobs, while a few have faced criminal penalties). Enter the convenient bumbler. In "The Myth of the Male Bumbler," Lili Loofbourow (2017) writes that the male bumbler is astonished to discover that men have power relative to women, and he believes that he personally has never had power over anyone. *Who, me?* he says. *What power?* Loofbourow says there's a reason for this sudden claim of cluelessness: The bumbler's culturally enabled ignorance exonerates him. And ignorance and incompetence are seen as less damaging than malice. "The bumbler takes one of our culture's most muscular myths—that men are clueless—and weaponizes it into an alibi," writes Loofbourow. "Our culture makes this script available. We need to shed the exculpatory scripts that have mysteriously enabled all these incompetent bumlbers to become rich, successful, and admired even as they maintain that they're moral infants" (para. 14).

A variant of the convenient bumbler is when men "misremember" violating women. Emma Gray (2017) writes that when men feel entitled to women's bodies, their bad behavior feels normal, even routine to them. When you are used to taking advantage of people, taking advantage of someone is not noteworthy. In fact, it doesn't even feel like taking advantage. So why would an entitled man remember something exploitative he did years before? A brutal irony of sexual assault and harassment is that the traumas that frequently shape the trajectory of survivors' lives are often unremarkable to the men who have inflicted them. This may be why some men seem

shocked (either genuinely or performatively) when they are asked to answer for their actions. When perpetrators respond to claims against them with “nothing happened,” they may, in many cases, be lying. But an alternative explanation offered by Gray is that when some men say “nothing happened,” it’s not just a denial—it’s that they truly consider the incident so trivial that they do not remember it (Gray, 2017). The perpetrator has learned that he is entitled, even expected, to treat women in these ways. A violation that can crush a woman’s sense of self, her ability to trust, her relationships, her sexual life, her sleep, and her ability to move freely through the world, may mean nothing to the person who caused it all. Inga Muscio (1998) describes her fear-driven upbringing by a mother who, she learns only in adulthood, had been raped at the age of nine, profoundly shaping her and her daughters’ lives. Muscio writes that “the two men who raped our mother have no idea either of us exist on the planet to have been raised under the shadow of their action” (p. 154). Individual entitlement in concert with a rape-supportive culture allow such a divergence of experience.

Alongside the male bumbler are the men seemingly flummoxed by women’s allegedly confusing signals. At the height of #MeToo, articles emerged in the popular press written for men about how to read women’s “confusing” signals. One article begins with this curious assertion: “In most cases, when a woman gives you mixed signals, she is simply testing to see how confident you really are” (Bacon, n.d.). Take note of the gendered nature of “signals”—a term rarely attributed to men’s communication. That women are believed to deploy “mixed signals” suggests an indirectness, a subtlety that contrasts with men’s straightforward and direct communication. This construction of women’s inscrutability further serves to exonerate men, often casting them as the real victims of women’s mysteriousness.

Are women really as confusing as some men claim? Are men really confounded by women’s words? Is it necessary for a woman to say a hard *No* before a man understands she’s not interested in giving him her phone number? Advice offered to women to just say *No* is simplistic and ignores the sophisticated and complex manner in which both women and men typically conduct refusals in everyday life. In most cultures, it is unusual to just say an unequivocal “No” in any context. It is precisely women’s knowledge of the culturally normative ways of doing refusals that makes it challenging for them to simply say *No* to an unwanted invitation. Do men understand these same social rules? Research from O’Byrne et al. (2006) says yes. O’Byrne conducted focus groups with heterosexual undergraduate men in Australia to see how they comprehend and perform refusals.

The men in O’Byrne’s study were first asked how they would respond if invited to a pub by a friend when they do not want to go. They come up with all kinds of nuanced responses—for example, they say they *can’t* go rather than they *won’t* go. These same men are then asked how they would refuse sex. Again, simply saying *No* is not in their repertoire. They would say they are not ready, or that they “didn’t have this in mind.” They would use nonverbal cues too. Instead of pouring a drink and sitting on the sofa, they would turn on the TV. Then the men in the study are asked how they would know a woman isn’t interested in sex. She would say it’s getting late. She’d ask about calling a ride, and again, body language—she would look at her watch. These are all good strategies for politely refusing. And yet, when these

same men were presented with an acquaintance rape scenario, several men became confused and made statements such as, “Well, when does no mean no and yes means yes?” and “The perpetrator could actually really be the victim when a woman is throwing themselves on you but later says, ‘Well, I said no’” (Hansen et al., 2010). Based on these data, men understand and use the same information anybody else would and yet some become confused in the context of sexual coercion. So why do some men commit acquaintance rape? Certainly, for most men, it does not result from an innocent misunderstanding of women’s ambiguous refusals (and of course many women give *unambiguous* refusals that are ignored). More likely, it comes from the witting intention of heterosexual men to engage in coercive sex while, at the same time, not seeing themselves as rapists because they have been taught that they are entitled to sex from women. Imagining themselves confused is their way out of accountability.

The Entitlement to Explain Things to Others

Some men mobilize ignorance when they know better, but other times they claim knowledge when they do not have it. Thus, another manifestation of entitlement is *mansplaining*. People from dominant groups tend to feel comfortable weighing in on an issue they know little about. Entitlement provides few repercussions from inaccuracy and failure to honestly self-reflect. A study of 15-year-olds in nine English-speaking countries found that young men, compared to young women, are more likely to claim knowledge they do not actually have (Jerrim et al., 2019). When asked about their expertise on a variety of topics—some of which were *made up*—not only did young men report having more knowledge on the topic than did young women, but so did youth from wealthy families compared to working-class and poor families. Male privilege and class privilege both functioned to generate a sense of entitlement in these young people to empower them to imagine (or pretend) that they had expertise they factually lacked.

In an article about men’s entitlement, Solnit (2014) tells the story of a man at a party who educates her on a topic he feels very knowledgeable about. After disregarding her attempts to interject, he chatters on and on about a brilliant book he has just read. He had to be told several times that it was *her* book he was telling her about with authority before it finally sunk in. *Mansplaining* has come to define the act of a man who confidently if not condescendingly lectures a woman on the basics of a topic about which he knows very little, under the mistaken assumption that she knows even less. *Mansplaining* epitomizes the clueless egocentrism of entitlement. *Mansplainers* are blind to the idea that they may have something to learn from another person, especially one from a marginalized group.

A *Washington Post* headline captures this problem in one area—the Academy: “New study finds that men are often their own favorite experts on any given subject” (Ingraham, 2016). The article describes a research study that calculated the number of times academics cite their own prior work in their current work. Universities often

factor in citation counts when making decisions about hiring, tenure, and salary, so it is easy to see how self-promotion can lead to actual promotion in the academic workplace. King et al. (2017) examined a massive database of academic work: 1.5 million papers published between 1779 and 2011. They found a substantial difference in self-citation patterns between women and men. Overall, men cited their own papers 56% more than women did, and in recent decades, men self-cited 70% more than women. This self-citation gap held true across every major academic field the authors studied, including biology, sociology, philosophy, and law. Why do men feel entitled to cite themselves? In addition to men having a higher opinion of their own abilities than women, they face fewer social penalties for self-promotion—a topic we address later in this chapter.

The arrogance of people in a dominant group to claim knowledge without learning from or even consulting the affected group permeates policymaking. People of wealth regulate welfare, white lawmakers and judges restrict the voting rights of people of color; people who cannot become pregnant legislate the bodies of those who can. In 2019, the U.S. state of Alabama passed, at the time, the most restrictive abortion law in the United States, making abortion a crime at any stage of pregnancy. Those who voted for the ban were exclusively white men (Durkin & Benwell, 2019). In 2012, U.S. Congressman Darrell Issa held a hearing on the Obama administration's mandate that insurance companies cover contraception. Not a single woman was on the panel (Zornick, 2012). These politicians seem comfortable excluding women and people of color in decisions that affect these communities directly.

The fight for reproductive rights involves much more than access to abortion and birth control, although willful ignorance and the narrow frame of entitlement help explain why it took the mainstream white-dominated U.S. women's movement a long time to broaden its approach. The systematic denial of reproductive justice in the United States certainly comes from white men, but the erasure of the intersectional realities of reproductive oppression also came from white-dominated feminist organizations that focused their efforts on white women gaining access to abortion and birth control. Black, Indigenous, and women of color have faced not only forced pregnancy but *also* forced sterilization (Roberts, 1997). Fannie Lou Hamer and other black women (and girls) in the U.S. South so commonly faced involuntary sterilization, it came to be known as the Mississippi Appendectomy (Roberts, 1997). When organizations like the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse were fighting in the 1970s to protect women of color from involuntary sterilization, however, mainstream U.S. feminist organizations did not support their efforts, saying they did not want to endanger their fight for access to voluntary sterilization. The intersectional framework of reproductive justice challenges this narrow framework and makes cross-cultural and cross-movement coalitions necessary. In 1994, Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice coined the term "Reproductive Justice" as an expansive framework that includes: "(1) the right *not* to have a child; (2) the right to *have* a child; and (3) the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments. In addition, reproductive justice demands sexual autonomy and gender freedom for every human being" (Ross & Solinger, 2017, p. 9). Reproductive Justice sees the connections between supporting abortion rights and opposing sterilization abuse,

and it further sees the relevance of related injustices, such as mass incarceration, environmental racism, and gentrification (Ross & Solinger, 2017).

Precarious Manhood and the Entitlement Tradeoff

The notion of precarious manhood was captured by Vandello and Bosson (2013), who describe manhood as hard won and easily lost. Precarious manhood beliefs, measures of which have been validated in 62 countries (Bosson et al., 2021), include the idea that manhood is tenuous and hard to achieve, and that boys and men go out of their ways to perform it—sometimes to their own and others' detriment. Boys and men are expected to adhere to an anti-femininity mandate. For example, some men won't take jobs they see as so-called women's work. For example, some men hold out for diminishing coal-mining jobs when they could be applying for home health aide jobs (Vedantam et al., 2018). Women have been flexible and have pushed themselves into men's jobs; men have not pushed themselves into women's jobs (Vedantam et al., 2018).

There are consequences of precarious manhood beliefs for men. Men learn to be fixated on performing masculinity, which often entails aggression. Men tend to believe that aggression is more typical than it actually is. They believe that women are attracted to aggressive men, when, in fact, women have reported viewing aggression as weak and impulsive, a loss of self-control, not sexy or charming (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Performing obligatory masculinity is a tradeoff, and the price is worth it when entitlement is the result. In order to maintain their status as men—relative to women and the feminine—men put forth great effort repeatedly to achieve manhood and distance themselves from the lower echelon of femininity. Many men make this conscious or unconscious calculation and have determined the benefits, such as feeling entitled to the advantages of being in a high-status group, outweigh the limitations (Anderson, 2021). Studies have revealed the racialized impact of masculinity threat and the gendered nature of racism. Goff et al. (2012) asked black and white men to perform pushups before and after being exposed to racially discriminatory or racially neutral feedback. They found that racial discrimination is felt by black men, but not white men, as a masculinity threat. Further, they offer evidence that men respond to masculinity threats with physical acts of “compensatory masculinity” (p. 1115).

Men in positions of power, such as police officers, who fear that their masculinity is under threat, sometimes respond in violent ways, with dire consequences for people of color, both men and women. Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of the founders of the #SayHerName movement, summarizes some of this research and also asks for greater focus on the treatment of black women. Officers who kill civilians do not always measure high on explicit racial bias, but often fear that their masculinity is under threat. Crenshaw argues that studies of masculinity threat have so far failed to address how black women are particularly vulnerable to such acts of state violence (Crenshaw, 2020). Legal scholar Michelle S. Jacobs connects such patterns to stereotypes of

overbearing and emasculating black women, controlling images that proliferate in both media and policy. She argues that police officers encountering black women who do not readily submit to their authority may experience masculinity threat, triggering the use of excessive or lethal force (Jacobs, 2017).

All of this work reinforces the overarching argument of intersectional feminism that we must constantly “ask the other question” (Matsuda, 1996, p. 64). In cases of gendered violence, what is the role of racism? In cases of racial violence, what is the role of heteropatriarchy? When we examine—or protest—police violence, how can we attend to intersections of racism, patriarchy, and homophobia, on psychological and institutional levels? In her 2011 article “Heteropatriarchy Kills,” Angela Harris argues that this sort of analysis will change not only how theorists examine these issues but also how activists work for social change. She considers social movements that have sought to challenge violence in the criminal legal system and sees potential in transformative justice as a paradigm that “holds promise for the struggle to undermine the mutually reinforcing systems of toxic masculinity and conventional criminal justice” (Harris, 2011, p. 17). Contemporary movements are increasingly calling for not just “reform” but deeper institutional changes informed by intersectional analysis.

Entitlement, Backlash, and Resistance

Entitlement and its manifestations, such as mansplaining and overconfidence, combined with precarious manhood, are a toxic mix and set the stage for backlash. When dominant group members are accustomed to being centered, even the most modest movements toward progressive change for marginalized groups can be interpreted as an unfair sidelining of those in dominant groups. Dominant group members are highly sensitive to criticism and have strong reactions when they perceive issues relevant to them are sidelined (Grillo & Wildman, 1991). Those used to being treated as the norm, the center, the ideal, the legitimate, feel entitled to take up space, to have their worldview validated, and to not modify their behavior (Anderson, 2021; Hochschild, 2016). Thus, some dominant group members feel ignored and decentered—for instance by LGBTQ Pride Month, a Black Lives Matter chant, or even seeing someone in a public setting they think is their own. The entitled can feel entitled resentment in the face of even the gentlest request for minority rights and the most modest pace of progressive change. Privilege makes one so used to being at the center of what’s important and normal, that those with it come to expect preferential treatment as “the way things work.” To the person experiencing privilege, this expectation does not even need reminders, conscious recognition, or explicit demonstration. It is the status quo, but when it is disturbed, the entitled experience confusion and anger.

The police killings in the United States of African Americans Breonna Taylor and George Floyd sparked a widespread uprising across the United States and Black Lives Matter solidarity protests in many other countries. Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors,

and Opal Tometi created #BlackLivesMatter in 2013, after the acquittal of the man who murdered Trayvon Martin. Born out of that miscarriage of justice, and now a global movement, Black Lives Matter was conceived by black queer women with a keen sense of lived intersectionality and the need to eradicate white supremacy on a systemic level. “Black Lives Matter” reimagines movement building and is larger than a protest against police and vigilante violence against young black men. Garza writes, “Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum” (Garza, 2020, pp. 719–720). The powerful impact of Black Lives Matter as a phrase and a movement, not surprisingly, led to several forms of backlash, including the aggressive retort “All Lives Matter,” which is a perfect example of stealing back the center (see Grillo & Wildman, 1991). In “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” Garza (2020) calls attention to the role of entitlement not only from those who take black lives, but also from progressive movements dedicated to social justice but still erasing the diversity of black lives in their activism and their acts of appropriation. Seeing and participating in the Black Lives Matter movement in all of its complexity, and crediting the women who founded the movement, is a vital feminist and antiracist project.

Punishing Competent Women

Psychologists have captured the entitled resentment of dominant group members who are incensed by subordinated groups who, despite their oppression, dare to live their lives with dignity, confidence, and competence. Entitled resentment can have deadly consequences, when white people call the police for no reason, for example, but it also appears in subtle, everyday contexts such as workplace evaluations. Earlier we presented a study on academic men’s propensity to cite their own work. In addition to men having a higher opinion of their own abilities than women (Pallier, 2003; Visser et al., 2008), they face fewer social penalties for self-promotion. Women face a *dominance penalty* (Rudman et al., 2012) for competence, confidence and assertiveness. That is, women who behave assertively and confidently are seen as *too* dominant and judged more harshly than men with the same personality profile.

A classic experiment from Heilman et al. (2004) illustrates how women pay a social penalty for competence. College students evaluated the competence, likeability, and hostility of clearly successful or ambiguously successful candidates in a male-dominated job. When students rated the employee’s competence, successful women and men were evaluated equally—they were both credited for their successes. When information about candidate performance was ambiguous, the woman was rated as less competent than the man—men seem to be presumed competent even with mixed evidence. A different pattern emerged in judgments of likeability but one that is consistent with the notion of a dominance penalty. When there was ambiguity about the candidate’s performance, there was no gender difference in likeability. However, when there was clear evidence of success, the woman was liked less than

the man. In fact, the successful woman was liked less than the candidates in all other conditions: the clearly successful man, the ambiguously successful man, and the ambiguously successful woman. A similar pattern emerged in terms of judgments of hostility. These patterns hold for both women and men raters; so these gender stereotypic norms, and the tendency to penalize women who violate them, are meaningful for both women and men respondents. Significantly, dislike was associated with not being recommended for promotions and salary increases (Heilman et al., 2004). These results suggest that men can feel comfortably entitled to recognition and credit even when it's not quite deserved. Women are credited with competence but they are disliked (and punished) for their competence, whereas men are not.

Women in general face the dominance penalty but the penalty may be harsher for women of color. For example, Anderson and Smith (2005) found that Latina college instructors with strict teaching styles paid a dominance penalty relative to Anglo women professors with the same teaching style. Some studies (e.g., Livingston et al., 2012) suggest that black women pay less of a dominance penalty, possibly because racialized gender stereotypes construct black women as more aggressive than passive, and thus, their confidence does not violate stereotypes in the same way as white women's confidence. Another study found that compared to white women who did pay a professional penalty for dominance, Asian American women did not face the same dominance penalty. However, Asian American women are perceived to be less fit for leadership than similarly situated white women (Tinkler et al., 2019). This study found that the negative impact on white and Asian American women was independent of their behavioral style (dominant or communal). "[W]hen competence is firmly established," the authors suggest, "white women may not avoid backlash by being nicer and Asian women may not avoid questions about their leadership by being more assertive" (p. 9).

Sexualizing Women Who Outperform Men

The studies described above could be seen in the context of *dominant group recovery*—putting women of all races and men of color back to a position that makes dominant group members comfortable (Anderson, 2016; Faludi, 1991). Another strategy for dominant group recovery is for some men to demean and sexualize women who have hurt their feelings. Dahl et al. (2015) examined men's reactions to being outperformed by women. In this study, men were led to believe they were playing a computer game with another participant. After they completed a task, they were told that their teammate was a woman. In the threat condition, they were told the woman outperformed them. In the non-threat condition, they outperformed her. The men were then instructed to pick avatars (characters that represented each player) for themselves and their partners. The women's avatars varied on how much clothing they were wearing. How did the men respond when they believed they were outperformed by a woman? They reported greater public embarrassment and anger relative to the men who believed they outperformed the woman. The reactions of

these embarrassed men in turn predicted the avatars that they chose for the women. The men who were angered at being outperformed chose more sexually revealing avatars for the women than did the other men. Sexualizing women who outperform you is a relatively subtle form of dominance, making it difficult to detect and resist. At the same time, sexualizing women is so common in popular culture that this strategy to repair harmed masculinity provides a socially approved, non-physically-violent means of asserting power and repairing masculinity. Recent research finds that entitlement predicts which men will be sexually aggressive (Raines et al., 2023).

Valenti (2018) finds that there are specific, gendered ways that men attack women in person and online. There is simply no equivalent with the genders reversed, in which women punish men in similar ways. Men's punishment of women in many cases results from the men's maladaptive strategies for dealing with strong emotions including anger and embarrassment. Revenge porn is one phenomenon by which men punish women, and this revenge is usually the aftermath of a woman rejecting a man. The fact that there are groups and forums on the Internet where men can find support for this behavior justifies and normalizes it to some men (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2016). Revenge porn is gendered behavior of men lashing out against the women they can no longer control.

Men's Violence Against Transgender Women

The violence against transgender women in recent years epitomizes entitled resentment and backlash against progressive change. In the last couple of decades, transgender individuals have begun to be recognized for the gender that they identify as rather than the gender assigned to them at birth. Transgender people, as well as nonbinary people, have demanded respect and recognition of their humanity even in the face of rejection from family members, strangers, and institutions. Consistent with most progressive movements toward equality, the recognition of transgender people as fully human and worthy of dignity is met with violent backlash. Cisgender men and heterosexuals are more likely to report transgender prejudice than cisgender women and lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (Hatch et al., 2022). Significantly, transgender individuals who conform to the gender roles associated with their gender expression have been perceived more negatively than those who are less gender conforming, presumably because they are more difficult to detect as transgender and threaten the gender binary (Broussard & Warner, 2019). Violence against trans individuals tends to be especially gruesome and "personal," meaning the violence is close-up, sometimes involving torture and mutilation. Violence against transgender women, especially transgender women of color, has become so frequent that the American Medical Association has declared it an "epidemic" (American Medical Association, 2019). We understand men's violence against transgender women through the lens of entitlement.

Transgender activist Laverne Cox captures the entitled resentment of anti-trans violence when she says, "when we are living our lives, so many times just walking

down the street as a black trans woman, people saw it as some sort of affront to them, when men would find themselves attracted to me because I was walking down the street, and they would get upset about that” (Goodman, 2019). A consistent thread that runs through men’s violence against transgender women is the notion of the man feeling “fooled” or “tricked” by the victim. In fact, a legal defense strategy used by men who have murdered transgender women is the trans “panic” defense (Maigné, 2019). The revelation that the woman that a man is attracted to is transgender, according to this defense, is such a profound deception, that the man lashes out in violence. Notice the shift in responsibility here. The *perpetrator* of murder frames himself as the *victim* of a vicious deception and frames the murdered woman as the cause of the violence that ended her life. Laverne Cox ties these physical and verbal attacks to backlash against the trans community’s unprecedented visibility. “And as we come out of the shadows, people want to force us back into the dark and to back pages. And we are saying, ‘No, we deserve a right to live in the light’” (Goodman, 2019). She argues for more visibility, not less, and transgender rights activists are continuing to fight for their humanity in legal, political, economic, employment, and media contexts. These are explicitly intersectional movements that challenge the violence and invisibility to which trans people are subjected across multiple institutions.

Power, Entitlement, and Men’s Intimate Partner Violence

The aggression of rejected men plays out not just on the Internet but also in heterosexual intimate relationships. For instance, when men feel disempowered, relative to their partners, some respond with aggression. The reverse tends not to be true. A study of white heterosexual couples in New Zealand is revealing (Overall et al., 2016). This study examined couples’ communication styles based on how much power each partner has in the relationship. Men who possessed low relationship power exhibited more aggressive communication (criticism, domineering) during the couple’s conflict discussions. In contrast, women’s relationship to power was not associated with aggression. In other words, the women partners who had low relationship power did not behave aggressively with their mates. Interestingly, in these conflict interactions, the women were more verbally aggressive than their partners overall, but their verbal aggression was independent of their power status. What accounts for men’s aggression as a result of low power in interpersonal relationships? Follow-up analyses indicated that the men in the study responded aggressively to lower power because low power threatens masculinity; and such drops in felt masculinity predicted a greater probability of men behaving aggressively toward their partner. The authors argued that aggression for these men was an attempt to repair their masculinity. Men who were unable to influence their partner resorted to aggression. The implications of this study are that, in some cases, men’s violence against their romantic partners is associated with their feelings of disempowerment. Some men are highly sensitive to feeling disrespected. Traditional gender roles tell men they should be.

In her book on intimate partner violence, *No Visible Bruises*, Rachel Louise Snyder (2019) writes that violence is rooted in men's entitlement. Violence is the result of a belief system all men who are perpetrators seem to share (Snyder, 2019), a belief system that tells them they are the authority in their lives and they are to be respected and obeyed. Men are the top of the social hierarchy. Men learn to have a sense of ownership over the world, themselves, and their partners. Men become violent when their expectations are threatened. For these men, their strategy for bringing things back to status, to normal, is violence. Snyder, who observed men in anti-violence programs, found that what was so challenging for the men to grapple with wasn't becoming nonviolent. Rather, it was learning that they had internalized a false and harmful construction of what they are supposed to be like, what masculinity means, and what being a man means. Snyder found that many men were actually relieved to learn that they had been coerced into their violence, not born with it. Boys' and men's socialization into conventional gender roles limits their range of thinking, feeling, and behaving and keeps them constricted by narrow ideas of what men could be and how men could behave.

Certainly, anger and aggression play significant roles in men's lives because anger and aggression are so closely tied to traditional gender roles. However, when we consider the significance of gender roles and entitlement in domestic violence, we must consider anger in a novel way. Anger is not necessarily at the root of intimate partner violence, even if it may be used as an outcome—a way for a man to bring back stasis, and status. Men who are perpetrators of domestic violence target their partners and children for abuse, but usually not people outside their immediate family (Snyder, 2019). In other words, perpetrators are not walking around seething in anger, but they do use violence to control specific others—the others they feel entitled to brutalize, particularly their woman partners (Snyder, 2019). Snyder reports that men in domestic violence programs tend not to have substantial levels of anger, and that only a small percentage were in the unusually high range. Only about 25% are so-called “rageaholics” (Snyder, 2019). The abuser's anger is targeted toward those he feels entitled to abuse, often his partner or her family. As a result, friends and acquaintances of abusers are often surprised to hear that they committed an assault. These men treat many people in a respectful manner. They know how to treat people well; they just choose not to treat their partners well.

Domestic violence generally refers to intimate partner or family abuse. But a significant amount of violence in home spaces includes violence against domestic workers—usually women of color—in someone else's home (Lopez & Rafei, 2021). Entitlement plays a role in this dynamic in several ways, from male employers who feel entitled to both the labor and the bodies of the women they hire, to women employers who rely upon domestic workers without considering the exploitation in which they are complicit. White individuals of economic privilege, including women who consider themselves feminist, often feel entitled to pursue their economic and professional endeavors while someone else does the care work that makes their professional work possible. Domestic workers have also been at the forefront of some key political struggles of our day, including fights for fair wages and safe workplaces. In 2019, at the height of #MeToo in the United States, the National

Domestic Workers Alliance joined with Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (National Farmworker Women's Alliance) to demand policies to keep all workers safe from sexual violence, including domestic workers and farmworkers. Women in these jobs face widespread sexual abuse, yet their workplaces are generally excluded from laws that are supposed to protect workers from sexual harassment.

Indigenous and First Nations communities in North America face not only domestic violence but also staggering numbers of unsolved cases of murdered and missing women, girls, and two-spirit people. Few of these crimes are solved and 95% of the cases are not covered by national media (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). An important intersectional movement in North America is the fight to bring awareness and justice to the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The profoundly murderous entitlement of settler colonialism—which imagines itself entitled to land, resources, and human bodies—underlies the murder and rape of Indigenous peoples from the earliest moments of first contact. This violence continues in multiple forms today. In a chilling intersection of colonization, racism, misogyny, and environmental exploitation, “man camps” of hundreds or thousands of non-Native men who are temporary workers are established in U.S. states such as Montana and the Dakotas by extractive industries. Studies have shown that this increase in temporary population is associated with increased rates of physical and sexual violence, with one Bureau of Justice Statistics study showing a 70% increase in violent victimization associated with the arrival of this population (First Peoples Worldwide, 2020).

Accurate statistics are elusive—cases are not always reported, and records often fail to indicate whether someone is Indigenous. Cheyenne scholar Annita Lucchesi founded the Sovereign Bodies Institute (sovereign-bodies.org), which supports community-engaged research on gender and sexual violence against Indigenous people, including the creation of the MMIWG2 (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit) Database, with 120 years of data. The Institute both shines a light on victimization and foregrounds resistance. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women USA (mmiwusa.org) provides information and grief support for families, and education programs for community members. Creative resistance has also flourished through efforts such as The REDress Project, which installs empty red dresses in public places to call attention to violence against Indigenous women and shake the rest of the community out of its complacency (redressproject.org). As discussed above, an element of dominant group privilege is not needing to bother to know about what happens to people in targeted groups, and activists work to challenge that ignorance.

Conclusion

We have laid out the case for the crucial role entitlement plays in understanding the persistence of sexism and other forms of inequality. Entitled individuals tend to have an outsized sense of deservingness, believing they are exceptional and special. They believe good things should come to them, not because they have worked hard,

but because of who they are (Major, 1994). Men tend to have a stronger sense of entitlement than do women, and other people (both women and men) seem to agree that men deserve more than women simply for being men (Alksnis et al., 2008). We have catalogued phenomena associated with entitlement here, and they tend to turn on slipshod information processing and the ignorant, indifferent disregard of others. The mansplainer cannot imagine that someone other than he could be more knowledgeable about a topic. The entitled bumbler is shocked when confronted with his abusive behavior toward women. Thus, some dominant group members feel entitled to their ignorance, even as they cloak it with false expertise.

An analysis of entitlement allows us to understand the emotional reaction of backlash by the entitled (Anderson, 2016, 2021) in response to their perception of being sidelined or having their relative status decreased in the social hierarchy. Precarious manhood and the toxic violence it can produce seem to be trade-offs for the privileges of being a man in a patriarchal culture. These phenomena are raced as well as gendered. As we can see in cases of police violence, racialized assumptions can collide with threatened masculinity, producing deadly consequences. The phenomenon of the entitled white woman who calls the police on African Americans living their lives epitomizes the interaction of race and gender in entitlement, but we also see this intertwining in the history of movements for social change. Women of color activists have always theorized and organized with intersectional lenses, but their leadership has often been sidelined, from Abolition and Suffrage to contemporary movements. The white-dominated reproductive rights movement refused to address the role of racism for decades; the male-dominated civil rights movement repeatedly dismissed issues of sexism and homophobia. Backlash is a major threat to social movements, but entitlement from within progressive movements has also stunted their effectiveness. An intersectional analysis of entitlement is necessary in our scholarship and our movement building.

Understanding entitlement's role in the persistence of inequality should help researchers, activists, journalists, and policymakers understand the entrenchment rooted in one's sense of deservingness. Entitlement is not genetic. It is learned, so it can be unlearned. But we have to see it, understand its workings, and care about its consequences.

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