

Myriad Double Standards

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Abstract

So last week, my new book, Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive, was reviewed in Publisher's Weekly - you can read the review here. It is generally positive and I am pretty happy with it! However, there is one line in the review that I feel misconstrues what I was trying to say in the [...]

Article

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When I discuss "gender systems" in the book, I am not talking about these sets of gendered norms, assumptions, and related double standards themselves, but rather the abstract theories that we create in order to describe and explain those systems. Some feminists have described this set of institutionalized double standards as "the patriarchy," "the sex/gender system," or "compulsory heterosexuality." Various LGBTQIA+ activists have described them in terms of "heteronormativity," "the heterosexual matrix," or "the gender binary." People who take a more intersectional approach might conceptualize them in terms of "kyriarchy." And so on.

In Excluded, I describe these "gender systems" - whether it be patriarchy, the gender binary, and so on - as being models that provide a fairly decent approximation of how sexism and marginalization function in our culture. However, like all models, they are necessarily incomplete, and there will always be instances where they do not accurately describe the world.

For instance, when cisgender radical feminists talk about the patriarchy, their model includes traditional sexism, but generally not cissexism/transphobia. And this omission enables them to completely ignore societal cissexism, and to mischaracterize trans people as "male oppressors" (as seen in depictions of trans women as "appropriators" and "infiltrators," and trans men as "traitors to the feminist cause").

Similarly, while the gender binary concept accounts for numerous forms of sexism, it does not really account for monosexism/biphobia. This omission often enables trans activists to ignore societal monosexism, and to assert that people who identify as bisexual "reinforce the the gender binary."

In other words, when we subscribe to one particular gender system concept (whether it be patriarchy, the gender binary, etc.), we will write some people's experiences with sexism and marginalization out of

our theories and analyses, thereby excluding them from our feminist or queer movements.

For this reason (and other reasons not discussed here), I make the case that, instead of conceptualizing sexism and marginalization in terms of fixed gender systems, we should recognize that there are myriad double standards. As I put it in the book:

“Some of these double standards are pervasive, even institutionalized, while others are fleeting, temporary, or loosely held. Some double standards change or disappear over time while others remain entrenched for century upon century. Some double standards are obvious to us while others may remain beyond our awareness. We may fight with all our might to overturn certain double standards, yet at the same time we may consciously or unconsciously hold or enforce other double standards.”

Elsewhere in *Excluded*, I say:

“Thinking about sexism and marginalization in terms of myriad double standards implores us to challenge all double standards: those that are prevalent, and those that are rare; those that negatively impact us, and those that negatively impact others; those that we are currently aware of, as well as those that are currently unknown to us. Having such a mindset can make us more open to learning about new double standards when they are first described to us (rather than outright dismissing them because they do not fit into our worldview), and more mindful of the fact that we ourselves are fallible (as we may be unknowingly engaging in, or enforcing, certain double standards ourselves). Perhaps most importantly, thinking in terms of myriad double standards encourages humility, as it forces us to admit that there are many aspects of gender and sexism that we do not personally experience, and therefore cannot fully know about. For this reason, it would be conceited for us to project our fixed and limited perspective of the universe onto other people.”

So anyway, that is a brief seven paragraph explanation of a concept that I layout over the course of several chapters in the book. There is more to it than this, but this should at least give people a bit of an introduction to the idea. Recognizing that there are myriad double standards compels us to devise approaches that challenge all double standards simultaneously (even ones that we may not be aware of), and I discuss a number of such strategies over the second half of the book. So stay tuned!

The book officially comes out on October 1st, more info about it can be found [here](#).

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