

Reflections on Misogyny and Women Doing Philosophy in the Philippines

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that despite the prominent and progressive structure of the discipline of philosophy, it is not exempt from the perpetuation of the gender-based form of oppression. The fortunate ratio of women doing philosophy today obscures the extent to which misogyny is seen and felt. Even in what seems to be a gender-egalitarian setting like academia, the subtle, indirect, and sometimes unintentional verbal and behavioral offenses against women function as a mechanism of systemic oppression. It is a manifestation of the restrained form of misogyny that enforces the hierarchical, patriarchal order in academia. In this light, I have three goals in mind. The first is to initiate a conversation about misogyny in academia further; the second is to better understand the lived experiences of misogyny and sexism of Filipina Philosophers through the work of Kate Manne—the logic of misogyny; and the third is to reflect upon the importance of the foundation of the Women Doing Philosophy group in the Philippines and their response against misogyny.

Keywords: *Filipina Philosophers, gender-based oppression, misogyny, Women Doing Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION

My aim in this paper is to give a glimpse into the place of women and the state of feminist philosophy in the Philippines. In doing so, I will present three parts of the discussion. The first intends to initiate a conversation about misogyny in academia further. I will cite different levels of experience of misogyny in the institutional, and scholarly/

academic.¹ Further, I will analyze these contexts based on Kate Manne's *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Lastly, I will reflect upon the necessity of organized communities such as the Women Doing Philosophy and its importance as a philosophical organization in the Philippines.

There are only a few universities that offer philosophy programs in the Philippines. In recent years, significant changes in the representation of marginalized communities transpired. This is due to the efforts to make equality, diversity, and inclusion a serious institutional program. This marks the increase in gender diversity and other support to the various stakeholders of the academe. In a way, it is fair to say that gender inclusivity has slightly been won through legal measures and codes of conduct. The advancement of the inclusion of women in academia, however, does not apply to the discipline of Philosophy in the Philippines.

Dr. Marella Ada V. Mancenido-Bolaños and Dr. Darlene O. Demandante, both Filipina women philosophers, in their introduction to the *Women and Philosophy: An Initial Move Towards a More Inclusive Practice of Philosophy in the Philippine Context*, a volume in the online journal of *Philosophy in the Philippines—Kritike*, talked about the demographics of women in the existing departments of philosophy in some universities in the Philippines. Their study found a stark difference in the number of women in philosophy.

In the Philippines' purportedly "big four" universities, where there are existing departments of philosophy, the range of the proportion of female faculty members is between 32-35%. Outside of Manila, the data is not any better. For example, in the University of San Carlos, Cebu only 22% of philosophy faculty are women and in Ateneo de Davao, only 29% are women (Mancenido-Bolaños & Demandante 2020).

¹ These lived experiences suggest that misogyny happens from the institutional down to the personal level. As Fiona Jenkins and Katrina Hutchison recalled in their introduction to *Women in Philosophy*, 'as often been the case with the best feminist scholarship, reflection on lived experiences, as well as the evidence of statistical data, become a stimulus for asking searching questions that probe broad social and institutional conditions.' This precisely the process in which the arguments in this paper would proceed. See Katrina Hutchison and Fiona Jenkins, 2013.

This percentage of women in philosophy, however small, is already considered to be progress. Yet this number remains meager as compared to the inclusionary practices in the other disciplines. This is an event not detached from the state of women in philosophy in other countries. In her article 'Women in Philosophy: What's Changed?', Helen Beebee cited an empirical study.² In which they discovered that "based on a large-scale survey of philosophy departments... that, while some 44% of undergraduate philosophy students were women, the numbers rapidly declined – to 33% at Master's level, 31% at PhD level, 26% at permanent lecturer level and just 19% at professorial level" (Beebee 2021). In addition, according to the data collected by the Australasian Association of Philosophy from the late 1980s to early 1990s, the 28% of women in philosophy did not significantly change. These numbers are tantamount to the representation of women in philosophy in the Philippines. This is not a new phenomenon. As Beebee further argued, "that women are significantly underrepresented is pretty much universally known; and that it is a problem, rather than merely a fact, is (to most people) not a claim that needs to be justified" (Beebee 2021). It is nevertheless inevitable to ask when all of the indicators suggest successful inclusionary practices, why does philosophy lag so poorly in gender equity?

On the academic/scholarly level, feminist theory is still seen as a subpar form of theorizing. That feminism has no place in philosophy. One of the most contentious articles written by the then-president of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines denies that feminism even needs philosophy. To elucidate this, I will cite an article influential to the nascence of Women Doing Philosophy in the Philippines. Noelle Leslie Dela Cruz's *Why Social Movements Need Philosophy (A Reply to*

2 This is an empirical study conducted by Sarah Jane et. al. that is "aimed at eliciting what they call 'field-specific ability beliefs': belief about the extent to which 'fixed, innate talent' is required in order to be successful in different disciplines." So in order for you to do well in this particular discipline believed to be a field-specific ability, you must have fixed, innate talent to do so. Now when asked "Which discipline do people have the strongest field-specific ability beliefs?", the data showed that it is the discipline of philosophy. Unfortunately, the study shows that this intensity of the field-specific ability beliefs correlates to the lower representation of women. Accordingly, the stronger it is the lower the representation of women in that discipline. This belief unfortunately is translated to the lagging number of women in philosophy.

“Feminism without Philosophy: A Polemic” by Jeremiah Joven Joaquin). In the article, she emphasized the two pernicious arguments of Joaquin: “(1) feminism, as a socio-political movement, does not need philosophy to explain the nature of gender inequality and that (2) feminism cannot achieve its main goals or concerns through philosophizing” (Dela Cruz 2017).

Dela Cruz responded by claiming that the *academic feminism* that Joaquin thought to be detrimental to women’s emancipation is, in fact, misinformed and a misrepresentation. He charged academic feminism with shifting the focus of feminism from a socio-political movement to an ideological pursuit by attempting to establish its philosophical foundation that, according to him, “only she and her cohorts” could comprehend. The facetious and erroneous characterization of *academic feminism*, Dela Cruz identified, stems from his misreading of Dawn Currie and Hamida Kazi’s *Academic Feminism and the Process of De-Radicalization: Re-Examining the Issues*. Dela Cruz argued that “Currie and Kazi deplore the rejection by some feminists of Marxist feminism, a move which the authors blame for the overall de-radicalization of the movement” (Dela Cruz 2017, 5). While Joaquin rejects the need for academic feminism in attaining gender equality and deprecates its purported likeness to the ideological Marxism, Currie, and Kazi were critical of rectifying its practice that rejects Marxism to provide theories that will “challenge oppressive hierarchies, whether inside or outside the academy” (Dela Cruz 2017, 5). Oblivious of this misreading, Joaquin insisted that feminists must resign from philosophy and redirect their efforts to the public sphere which is the proper forum for the feminists’ calls for women’s rights and equalities. Dela Cruz challenged this claim, asserting that it implicitly reinforces the separation between theory and practice. The charge of elitism is no longer new in the discipline but has been argued against by many philosophers, including feminist philosophers. New discourses in feminist theory, for instance, aim to develop a foundation that integrates both theory and practice in achieving developments in the feminist struggle against oppression. In the first place, as Bell Hooks pointed out, “personal experiences are important to the feminist movement, but they cannot take the place of theory” (hooks 1984, 30). As has already been proven by many feminist philosophers like Simone De Beauvoir, Bell Hooks, Judith Butler, and many in *Women Doing Philosophy in the Philippines* among others, philosophical foundations are essential in social change. So as Dela Cruz (2017, 8) has succinctly stated,

Yes. Social struggles do need theory. At the very least, their goals will be more challenging to achieve without the thoughtful and scholarly work of philosophers. Philosophy—inevitably practiced now in the professionalized institution of the academe, with the attendant conferences, journal publications, and classroom discussions—provides feminists with the conceptual space to present, critique, justify, refine, and extend their political advocacies.

In these accounts, statistical or otherwise, we see how misogyny is evident through the underrepresentation of women and the undervaluation of their epistemic labor. Misogyny, of course, works only in a man's world. This is the reality of women doing philosophy in the Philippines. Philosophy departments are still male-dominated, and discrimination against feminists and feminism remains widespread.

On Kate Manne's Concept of Misogyny

In this section, I will analyze how these phenomena, on the institutional and scholarly levels, are misogynistic through Kate Manne's amelioration of the concept of misogyny. This groundbreaking amelioration allowed us to understand how these are particular events of misogyny without accusing them of hating all women. Manne rejects the idea that misogyny is defined as hatred towards women qua women. This naïve conception of misogyny embeds it in the inner psychological state of an individual who despises women because of this gender identity, for no acceptable reason. I abridge the reasons why this naïve conception of misogyny is indeed naïve and pernicious by posing two concerns, namely: Psychological Concern and Epistemological Concern.

1. Psychological concern: "fails to encompass more than a psychologically and hence metaphysically obscure phenomenon" (Manne 2018, 45).

Since what appears in one's psychology is dependent on an individual subject's mental and emotional condition, hatred against women without justification is most likely not a result of the individual's agency. The quality of misogyny being private to the individual makes it "a matter

of psychological ill health, or perhaps irrationality, rather than a systematic facet of social power relations and a predictable manifestation of the ideology that governs them: patriarchy” (Manne 2018, 49).

2. Epistemological Concern: “...what lies behind an individual agent’s attitudes, as a matter of deep or ultimate psychological explanation, is frequently inscrutable” (Manne 2018, 44).

This makes misogyny pernicious to those who are victimized by misogyny, even to those who are wrongfully accused of perpetuating it as it diminishes the external manifestation of misogyny. This inaccessibility is likewise engendered by the quality of universally quantified definitions. One cannot be a misogynist nor perform misogynistic actions as the hostility, coercion, and threat is done only to some women and not to, universally speaking, all women.

In this manner, the psychologism of misogyny and its property of universal quantity makes it virtually non-existent. It invalidates the experiences of hostility, coercion, and similar forms of gendered illwill endured by women. The project of ameliorating the concept thus aims to psychologically, culturally, and politically situate and clarify it. To reclaim the word that has been taken away from women principally because of its ambiguity. In rectifying this concept, Manne (2018, 33) posited that;

Misogyny is primarily a property of social systems or environments as a whole, in which women will tend to face hostility of various kinds because they are women in a man’s world (i.e., a patriarchy), who are held to be failing to live up to patriarchal standards (i.e., tenets of patriarchal ideology that have some purchase in this environment).

While the former naïve conception holds misogynists unaccountable, and particular misogynistic actions as non-existent, this ameliorated feminist definition of misogyny differentiates *good* from *bad* women. Misogynists (or an individual who commit misogyny) target and punish the latter. Others, generally men as they benefit the most in the patriarchal social order, feel entitled to receive feminine-coded

goods that ought to be supplied by women. Those who waver, disrupt, or dismantle patriarchal norms and expectations, and thus fail to satisfy the feminine-coded goods they feel deserve to receive, are particularly vilified in a patriarchal society. These good women, who know their place as essentially subordinate to men are praised and championed by them. In other words, “misogyny hence functions to enforce and police gendered norms and expectations women’s subordination and uphold male dominance” (Manne 2018, 19) while it is sexism that justifies and rationalizes the patriarchal system of gender-based oppression.

In this light, it is thus unmistakable why the underrepresentation of women and the undervaluation of feminism in the Philippines as misogynistic. They are kept to put women back in their place. As only through maintaining the natural habitat of misogyny and sexism that men perceive women as inferior and, thus, allow them to exploit women. Similarly, this shapes women’s purported absence in the discipline of philosophy. Women have always played an important role in the history of knowledge production. However, men who had the authority to knowledge do not see women as capable of serious intellectual exchange. The ascribed nature of philosophy can be the basis of this ostensive misogyny. Its nature as a hyper-rational discipline, linked with masculinity, impedes women from thriving in the profession. They are often reduced to their subjectivity and emotion, often marked as either angry or hysterical, and thus devaluing their capacity to do philosophy.

Women have just recently begun to fight their way into philosophy. However, barely a few things have changed in the discipline, and men continue to exercise dominance. According to Friedman, the business aspect of philosophy gives the authority to a few people on whom the institution could rely to carry out hiring, firing, promotions, and teaching assignments, among other things. Considering that philosophy in the Philippines is a male-dominated discipline, tenured men—who often hold an implicit bias against women, are conservative, and are egoistic—are granted this authority. They became the gatekeepers of philosophy. They decide “who gets to enter and stay in the academic field, whose voices are heard in prestigious refereed publications, and so on” (Friedman 2013, 24). Some are revered by establishing Filipino Philosophy. These same set of men are seen to have the key authority in assessing the state of philosophy in the Philippines. “Philosophy,” as Friedman posited, “has a small but very resilient canon, so the

misogynist attitudes of these important historical figures remain alive in the philosophical canon today” (Friedman 2013, 24). Along with this deprecation of their philosophical abilities are the threats of sexual harassment. Cases of these, unfortunately, remain unresolved as departments of philosophy turn a blind eye to these sexual accusations. The environment that philosophy has constructed remains hostile to women. It is therefore understandable why the proportion of women decreases at each level of philosophy, from undergraduate studies to having a tenured track in professional philosophy.

Aside from the figure of who can enter and stay in philosophy, they also influence the contents that philosophy should examine, as exemplified in the article of Joaquin, philosophy in the Philippines is resistant and hostile to feminism. At the beginning of his article, he disclaimed that the polemic is not directed to the movement and theory of feminism but to its professionalization, especially within the sphere of academic philosophy. Nevertheless, as Dela Cruz furthered in her talk in *Combatting Toxic Culture in Academia*, it was not a coincidence that Joaquin is a man who has written a misogynistic article disguised as a polemic. It was a male entitlement for certain goods that women should give or must not take that induced him to dictate what was right and not for women and the feminist movement. So, an attack against a group of women, mainly because they do not fit the gendered norms and expectations of the academia, is misogynistic. Unfortunately, in the Philippines, this so-called polemical view is the epitome of the condition of feminism in the discipline of philosophy. Many, usually men, are repulsed by gender studies for occupying the academia. Some consider gender talk as insignificant, especially in comparison to more essential topics in metaphysics, religion, etc. It is sexist to feel threatened by feminism. It is also misogynistic to decide whether or not particular theoretical inclinations by and for women are appropriate because you feel threatened by them. As Manne (2018, 291-292) observed:

The hypothesis that women just aren't as prone as men to be brilliant has been making others of us uncomfortable in academia for as long as we've been in it. For those of us who make it through, and plenty who don't, turning the tables is our prerogative. You speculated we didn't belong in the room, while we were in it. We are within our rights, having stayed, to posit theories that you may find discomfiting.

The nascence of Women Doing Philosophy group in the Philippines, founded last June 2020, along with its sub-group Beyond the Ghetto, acknowledges this “lingering specter of disenfranchisement that taints the profession of philosophizing” (Teodosio & Llanera, 2021). Their initiatives, which aim to thrive both in theoretical and practical ways of doing philosophy, are a form of resistance to misogyny and sexism widespread in academia. Indeed, there have been a great number of philosophy practitioners in the Philippines who have raised issues, made critiques, and theorized about feminism and the discipline’s patriarchal framework. These are undeniably significant in the emergence and development of the theoretical and practical dialogue on misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy. However, it is missing one fundamental component. That is the collective action and resistance to what is being theorized. Women Doing Philosophy, I believe, is an essential antithesis that ensues progression in the patriarchal history of Filipino philosophy. A much-needed and long-overdue antithesis that collectively challenges the dominant structure of the field of Philosophy in the Philippines.

Women Doing Philosophy is a form of collective love. As coined by Allison Weir, collective love is philoxenia or a love for a stranger. This love that the organization embodies, is a practice of public freedom. It is an expression of collective love, the solidarity that binds Filipina Philosophers is founded on the aim to analyze, reveal, and eradicate misogyny, sexism, and, thus, patriarchy, a very strong framework as the catalyst for political action. As bell hooks claims, “When women actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspective, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity” (hooks, 1984, p. 64). An open and inclusive, discourse and argument, are the key components of the practice of public freedom.

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