ONE

Indelible—
On the Entitlement of Privileged Men

He was a picture of entitlement. Brett Kavanaugh, fifty-three, was red-faced, petulant, and shouted most of his answers. Clearly, he thought the proceedings were beneath him, a travesty. It was September 2018, and Kavanaugh was being questioned by the Senate Judiciary Committee regarding allegations that he had sexually assaulted Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, fifty-one, when they were both in high school. At stake was not only Kavanaugh's appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court; this was, more importantly, a tribunal on sexual assault, male privilege, and the workings of misogyny.

America did not pass the test. Despite highly credible evidence that Kavanaugh had indeed sexually assaulted a fifteen-year-old Ford some thirty-six years prior, Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court was confirmed by a slim majority.

Ford testified that she had been attacked by Kavanaugh, who, together with his friend Mark Judge, had "corralled" her into a bedroom at a party in Maryland. Ford alleged that Kavanaugh had pinned her to the bed, groped her, and ground his crotch against her. She said he tried to remove her clothes and covered her mouth to prevent her from screaming. Ford said she was afraid that Kavanaugh would accidentally smother and kill her. She said that she managed to escape when Judge jumped on the bed, knocking the two of them over.[1]

"Indelible in the hippocampus is the laughter," said Ford—a professor of psychology—in describing the incident and its traumatic aftermath. But even for many of those who professed to believe her, Ford's experience just did not matter enough to be worth depriving a man like Kavanaugh of his perceived due, given his background and reputation.[2] And, of course, there were also people who refused to believe her, saying she was either lying or mistaken.[3]

By the time the Kavanaugh hearings were front-page news, I had been thinking for quite some time about male privilege and the toll it takes on girls and women. The case seemed to encapsulate many of the social dynamics I'd been studying. It perfectly captured the concept of *entitlement:* the widespread perception that a privileged man is owed something even as exalted as a position on the U.S. Supreme Court.[4] This is a perception that Kavanaugh himself shared, judging by his aggrieved, belligerent, and, at times, borderline unhinged conduct during the hearings. In contrast with Dr. Ford's calm, tempered demeanor, and her poignant attempts to be "helpful" to the senators in respond-

ing to their queries, Kavanaugh was furious about being questioned. Especially, it might appear, when the questioner was a woman. Senator Amy Klobuchar asked him, in a now notorious exchange: "You're saying there's never been a case when you drank so much that you didn't remember what happened the night before, or part of what happened?" "You're asking about a blackout. I don't know, have *you*?" Kavanaugh replied, in a tone both contemptuous and whiney.[5]

The case also highlighted the phenomenon of *himpathy:* the way powerful and privileged boys and men who commit acts of sexual violence or engage in other misogynistic behavior often receive sympathy and concern over their female victims. Senator Lindsey Graham, fuming, epitomized such a himpathetic attitude:

> Graham: [*To Democrats*] What you want to do is destroy this guy's life, hold this seat open and hope you win in 2020. . . . [*To Kavanaugh*] You've got nothing to apologize for. When you see Sotomayor and Kagan, tell them that Lindsey said "hello," because I voted for them. [*To Democrats*] I would never do to them what you've done to this guy. . . . [*To Kavanaugh*] Are you a gang rapist?
> Kavanaugh: No.
> Graham: I cannot imagine what you and your family have gone through. [*To Democrats*] Boy, you all want power. God, I hope you never get it. I hope the American people can see through this sham. . . . You had no intention of protecting Dr. Ford—none. [*To Kavanaugh*] She's as much of a victim as you are. God, I hate to say it, because these have been my friends. But let me tell

you, when it comes to this, you're looking for a fair process? You came to the wrong town at the wrong time, my friend. Do you consider this a job interview?

KAVANAUGH: If the advice and consent role is like a job interview.

GRAHAM: Do you consider that you've been through a job interview?

KAVANAUGH: I've been through a process of advice and consent under the Constitution, which—

GRAHAM: Would you say you've been through hell?

KAVANAUGH: I—I've been through hell and then some.

GRAHAM: This is not a job interview.

KAVANAUGH: Yes.

GRAHAM: This is hell.

According to Graham, it was unconscionably hellish—and, beyond that, ridiculous—for a man in Kavanaugh's position to have to respond to serious, credible accusations of sexual assault, and undergo a truncated FBI investigation, in order to ascend to one of the highest positions of moral authority in America. And Kavanaugh clearly shared, and was further emboldened by, Graham's views here—not wasting the opportunity to indulge in self-pity. No comparable outpouring of feeling for Ford and her family was forthcoming from Graham, despite his giving lip service to the idea that she was "as much of a victim" as Kavanaugh in this process (referring to the supposed attempt on the part of Democrats to discredit Kavanaugh for political gain). "Miss Ford has got a problem, and destroying Judge Kavanaugh's life won't fix her problem," Graham fulminated on Fox News, later.[6]

Himpathy made Kavanaugh seem to Graham to be the *real*

victim in all of this. And not confirming a man like Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court became tantamount to ruining his life, not just withholding an opportunity.[7] It wasn't only men like Lindsey Graham spouting this kind of rhetoric and casting such aspersions on Christine Blasey Ford, either; many of the naysayers were women, and included other senators, journalists, and laypeople.[8]

Finally, the Kavanaugh case highlighted several aspects of misogyny's nature and function. In my previous book, *Down Girl,* I argued that misogyny should not be understood as a monolithic, deep-seated psychological hatred of girls and women. Instead, it's best conceptualized as the "law enforcement" branch of patriarchy—a system that functions to police and enforce gendered norms and expectations, and involves girls and women facing disproportionately or distinctively hostile treatment because of their gender, among other factors.[9] The sexual assault of Christine Blasey Ford (about which, for the record, I believe her) would certainly fit this description, since girls and women are significantly likelier to be subject to assaults of this kind than are their male counterparts.[10] In addition to this, misogyny is typically (though not invariably) a response to a woman's violations of gendered "law and order." The fact that Ford received abusive messages and death threats for speaking out about a powerful man's mistreatment of her exemplifies such punishment.[11]

In general, I think of misogyny as being a bit like the shock collar worn by a dog to keep them behind one of those invisible fences that proliferate in suburbia. Misogyny is capable of causing pain, to be sure, and it often does so. But even when it isn't actively hurting anyone, it tends to discourage girls and women from venturing out of bounds. If we stray, or err, we know what

we are in for.[12] All the more reason, then, why Ford's testimony was so courageous.

In contrast to misogyny, I take sexism to be the theoretical and ideological branch of patriarchy: the beliefs, ideas, and assumptions that serve to rationalize and naturalize patriarchal norms and expectations—including a gendered division of labor, and men's dominance over women in areas of traditionally male power and authority. Though this book focuses more on misogyny than sexism, it's important to recognize that the two typically work in concert.

But we need to understand that someone can engage in misogynistic behavior without necessarily having sexist beliefs about women. Brett Kavanaugh's defense of himself against the allegations of sexual misconduct, on the grounds that he had employed an unusually large number of female clerks, is really no defense at all.[13] A man may believe that a woman is intellectually capable in law, business, or politics, say, and therefore be willing to have her serve as his subordinate in this domain, while still subjecting her or other women to misogynistic treatment—sexual assault, for example. More broadly, a man may be happy to extend a certain amount of power to a woman, as long as she does not threaten or challenge him. But if she does, he may engage in misogynistic behavior to put her in her place, and punish her for having ideas beyond her station. He would then be more of a misogynist than a sexist, on my analysis.

On the whole, though, my account of misogyny counsels us to focus less on the individual *perpetrators* of misogyny, and more on misogyny's *targets* and *victims*. This is helpful for at least two reasons. First, some instances of misogyny lack any individual perpetrators whatsoever; misogyny may be a purely structural

phenomenon, perpetuated by social institutions, policies, and broader cultural mores.[14] Second, understanding misogyny as more about the hostility girls and women *face,* as opposed to the hostility men *feel* deep down in their hearts, helps us avoid a problem of psychological inscrutability. It's often difficult to know what someone's innermost states and ultimate motivations are, short of being their therapist (and even then, such knowledge may be elusive). But my account of misogyny doesn't require us to know what someone is feeling, deep inside, in order to say that they are perpetuating or enabling misogyny. What we need to know is something we are often in a much better position to establish: that a girl or woman is facing disproportionately or distinctively gendered hostile treatment because she is a *woman in a man's world*—that is, a woman in a historically patriarchal society (which includes, I believe, most if not all of them).[15] We don't need to show that she is subject to such treatment because she is a woman *in a man's mind*—which, in some instances, can't be the issue. After all, as I noted earlier, women as well as men can engage in misogynistic behavior—for example, by dismissing other women, or engaging in the kind of moralism that tends to let male counterparts off the hook, while harshly blaming women for that same behavior.

So I would argue that it is best to think of misogyny primarily as a property of the social environments girls and women navigate, wherein they are liable to be subject to hateful or hostile treatment because of their gender—together, in many cases, with their gendered "bad" behavior. Even so, I do not want to deny the reality of individual people who *do* deserve to be called misogynists. Admittedly, "misogynist" is a judgmental, pejorative term, and I don't think we should swing it about too freely, lest

this important linguistic weapon lose its characteristic "punch" and power. So I propose defining a misogynist as someone who is an *overachiever* in perpetuating misogyny: practicing misogyny with particular frequency and consistency compared to others in that environment. This definition helps us acknowledge the important truth that we are *all* to a certain extent complicit in misogynistic social structures. But at the same time, for many people, especially those who are actively engaged in anti-misogynistic resistance efforts, it would be wrong to call us misogynists on the whole. That label should be reserved for the chief offenders. We will meet plenty of them in the ensuing pages.

When I wrote *Down Girl,* I focused on making an abstract argument that misogyny should be understood as the hostility girls and women face, which serves to police and enforce gendered norms and expectations. But this definition raised many of the questions I've been thinking about ever since: What *are* the gendered norms and expectations that misogyny polices and enforces, especially in my own milieu (the United States), with its reputation for being relatively egalitarian?[16] How might the resulting, sometimes subtle social dynamics constrain the possibilities for girls and women, together with non-binary people, in various spheres of life? And how do boys and men unfairly *benefit* from this system in its concrete daily operations? Throughout the process of thinking through these issues, I've become more and more cognizant of the way misogyny is inextricably bound up with the related social ills that an intersectional approach, as pioneered by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, reminds us to attend to. These include racism (in particular, white supremacy), xeno-

phobia, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, among other things.[17]

There is no universal experience of misogyny—not least because gendered norms and expectations always intersect with these other unjust systems to produce novel forms of oppression faced by different groups of girls and women. In what follows, I hope to shed some light (without claiming to be an authority) on the specific forms of misogyny faced by trans women and Black women in the United States—transmisogyny and misogynoir, respectively. Here, as a cisgender, heterosexual white woman myself, I have benefited immeasurably from the insights of Talia Mae Bettcher, Tressie McMillan Cottom, and Jazmine Joyner, among many other crucial voices on these topics.

Entitled tackles a wide range of ways in which misogyny, himpathy, and male entitlement work in tandem with other oppressive systems to produce unjust, perverse, and sometimes bizarre outcomes. Many of these stem from the fact that women are expected to *give* traditionally feminine goods (such as sex, care, nurturing, and reproductive labor) to designated, often more privileged men, and to refrain from taking traditionally masculine goods (such as power, authority, and claims to knowledge) away from them. These goods can in turn be understood as those to which privileged men are tacitly deemed *entitled,* and which these men will often garner himpathy for wrongfully taking from women—when it comes to sex, most obviously, though by no means exclusively.

All in all, this book shows that an illegitimate sense of male entitlement gives rise to a wide range of misogynistic behavior. When a woman fails to give a man what he's supposedly owed, she will often face punishment and reprisal—whether from him,

his himpathetic supporters, or the misogynistic social structures in which she is embedded.

What's more, within this system, women are often unfairly deprived of their *genuine* entitlement to both feminine-coded and masculine-coded goods. This results in inequalities that range from a woman not receiving adequate care for her pain, to her not being able to take up traditionally male positions of power, to her not being granted her rightful authority to speak about subjects in which she is expert.

Some of the chapters that follow focus more on an illegitimate sense of male entitlement; others home in on the way girls and women, together with non-binary people, are deprived of goods to which they truly *are* entitled. These concerns are two sides of the same coin, in my book—though they will often require somewhat different analyses and solutions.

Exposing the underlying logic of these and other moral biases helps me address questions like the following: What do the anti-abortion and anti-trans movements have in common? Why are women still largely responsible for the "second shift" at home? Why do certain men so routinely get away with sexually assaulting girls and women, as well as other vulnerable people? And why is mansplaining still such a common occurrence?[18]

As I will show throughout this book, the forces that hold misogyny in place are powerful and prevalent. In part, women are punished and blamed—indeed, subject to misogyny—for daring to come forward and speak out about the reality of the problem. Many people feel that men are entitled not just to be deemed innocent until proven guilty, but to be deemed innocent, period, regardless of their misdeeds. Moreover, when misogyny makes its mark, the damage may be indelible. Dr.

Christine Blasey Ford was not only deeply traumatized by the original sexual assault, and quite possibly retraumatized by fulfilling what she felt was her civic duty to testify to its having happened; she was also subsequently driven out of her home, due to death threats against her and her family, following the hearings.[19] Brett Kavanaugh was not only appointed to the Supreme Court but may well soon play a role in lending crucial SCOTUS support to the anti-abortion movement in this country. At the time of writing, Donald Trump, credibly accused of sexually assaulting and harassing dozens of women, remains the nation's president.[20]

Still, progress fortunately does not rely—cannot, and has never relied—on universal agreement that what is patently unjust *is* unjust indeed. Instead, we can—and, I increasingly believe, must—take our cues from the daily acts of courage, creativity, and political resistance being undertaken, individually and collectively, in response to such injustices. I do not know, by any means, that this will be enough to bring about the right outcomes. But this I know: it is important and worthwhile to fight. And we can fight better when we are clear about what we are up against. It is with this conviction that I offer what's to follow.

TWO

Involuntary—
On the Entitlement to Admiration

On Friday, May 23, 2014, just after nine-thirty P.M., there was a loud knock on the door of the Alpha Phi sorority house at the University of California, Santa Barbara. At least forty female students would have been living there at the time. But it being Memorial Day weekend, relatively few of them were home to answer the door. And the knocking sounded unusually loud and aggressive, according to one of the women inside. They decided not to open up, even when the knocking continued for at least another full minute. In retrospect, it was wise, not to mention fortunate, that they made the decision they did. For the man who had come knocking, Elliot Rodger, twenty-two, had a loaded gun in his hand and was planning to annihilate all of them.[1]

"For the last eight years of my life, since I hit puberty, I've

been forced to endure an existence of loneliness, rejection, and unfulfilled desires, all because girls have never been attracted to me. Girls gave their affection and sex and love to other men but never to me," Rodger explained in a YouTube video, which he uploaded immediately before driving to UCSB. "I'm twenty-two years old and still a virgin, never even kissed a girl. . . . It has been very torturous. College is the time when everyone experiences those things such as sex and fun and pleasure. In those years I've had to rot in loneliness; it's not fair," he complained. In a still more moralistic vein:

> You girls have never been attracted to me. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It's an injustice, a crime, because I don't know what you don't see in me. I'm the perfect guy and yet you throw yourselves at all these obnoxious men instead of me, the supreme gentleman.

Hence Rodger's plan, on his envisaged "Day of Retribution": "I am going to enter the hottest sorority house at UCSB and I will slaughter every single spoiled, stuck-up, blonde slut I see inside there."[2]

In the end, after being denied entry, he had to settle for shooting three other women (students from a nearby sorority house, Tri Delta) who were just then walking around the corner. He murdered two, and wounded one of them. He went on to murder one man and injure fourteen other people, in a subsequent drive-by shooting spree.[3]

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When Kate Pierson heard three sharp bangs on the wall behind her, she thought the stereo in the hot yoga studio must have fallen from its shelf. But it was gunfire. A walk-in client, Scott Paul Beierle, forty, had driven more than two hundred miles to be there for the five-thirty P.M. class in Tallahassee, Florida. He paid his twelve dollars via credit card and asked how many people were expected. Disappointed that only eleven had pre-registered, he inquired about the studio's busiest times (Saturday mornings). Nevertheless, he stuck around as the women—and one man—trickled in for the class. The yoga teacher told him to stow his bag in the cubby outside the hot room. He told the teacher he had a question. Then he donned a set of hearing-protection earmuffs and pulled out a Glock. After pausing for a moment, gun in hand, he pointed it at the woman closest to him. He opened fire, seemingly indiscriminately: his objective being to kill women of the kind who had so enraged him since adolescence, when he had penned a revenge fantasy, "Rejected Youth." He ended up shooting six and murdering two of them.[4]

This was in November 2018. Prior to the shooting, Beierle had posted a video online, citing Elliot Rodger as inspiration. So did Chris Harper-Mercer, twenty-six, before he opened fire in a classroom at his Oregon community college—murdering eight students and an assistant professor, while injuring eight others. So did Alek Minassian, twenty-five, before driving a van into pedestrians in Toronto, killing ten people and wounding sixteen. "The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Staceys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!" wrote Minassian beforehand, on Facebook.[5]

• • •

The term "incel" stands for "involuntary celibate." Ironically, the term was coined by a woman named Alana—a bisexual, progressive Canadian—who in the 1990s founded a website called Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project.[6] It was intended to help others like her deal with their dating-related loneliness and sexual dissatisfaction.[7] But nowadays the term "incel" is used to self-identify almost exclusively by heterosexual men, most of them fairly young, who frequent anonymous or pseudonymous Internet forums devoted to incel ideology.[8] Incels believe they are entitled to, and have been deprived of, sex with "hot" young women, who are dubbed "Staceys." Sometimes incels also express an abstract longing for love, or for a girlfriend—or, more concretely, a woman to provide them with the attention and affection that Rodger lamented lacking. But an incel will typically want sex and love not only, and perhaps not even primarily, for their own sake. His rhetoric betrays a desire to have these goods for *instrumental* reasons: as currency to buy status in masculine hierarchies, relative to the "Chads." These are the supposed "alpha males," whose masculine prowess contrasts with the incel's (again, supposedly) lowly status. And an incel's plans for revenge may therefore target not just women but also the men they perceive as besting and thwarting them. Elliot Rodger said, in his aforementioned video:

> All those girls I've desired so much, they would have all rejected me and looked down upon me as an inferior man if I ever made a sexual advance towards them [*scoffs*] while they throw themselves at these obnoxious brutes. I'll take great pleasure in slaughtering all of you.
>
> You will finally see that I am in truth the superior

> one. The true alpha male [*laughs*]. Yes. After I've annihilated every single girl in the sorority house, I will take to the streets of Isla Vista and slay every single person I see there. All those popular kids who live such lives of hedonistic pleasures while I've had to rot in loneliness for all these years. They've all looked down upon me every time I tried to go out and join them, they've all treated me like a mouse.
>
> Well now I will be a god compared to you.

It might be tempting to dismiss this rant and its ilk as the ravings of lunatics. And that's not wrong, exactly: these cartoon villain rants *are* ludicrous, almost comical. But that is not sufficient reason to disregard them, unfortunately. For one thing, some of these men are obviously highly dangerous—all the more so because, often, by the time they lash out, they are despairing and at rock bottom. They feel they have nothing left to lose, and thus plan to take themselves out in a maximally violent (and hence, by their lights, glorious and gratifying) conflagration. Rodger, Beierle, and Harper-Mercer all ended their rampages by shooting themselves fatally; only Minassian, of the four, could be apprehended by law enforcement. And given the reality of copycat behavior, it is natural to be concerned that such violence may proliferate. So it's important to understand its nature and sources.

Moreover, and more subtly, incels are but a vivid symptom of a much broader and deeper cultural phenomenon. They crystallize some men's toxic sense of entitlement to have people look up to them steadfastly, with a loving gaze, admiringly—and to target and even destroy those who fail, or refuse, to do so. And,

as will emerge here eventually, these men's sense of entitlement to such affection and admiration is a trait they often share with the far greater proportion of men who commit acts of domestic, dating, and intimate partner violence.

As I've already suggested, it's a mistake to think that incels are primarily motivated by sex. Not only are some incels also interested in love (or some outward simulacrum thereof), but their interest in having sex with "Staceys" is at least partly a means to an end—the end being to beat the "Chads" at their own game. Sex thus promises to soothe these men's inferiority complexes, at least as much as to satisfy their libidos.

It's also a mistake to accede too readily to an incel's self-reports about their lowly status in comparison with other men. With respect to male beauty standards, for example, a recent article on incels in *New York* magazine revealed photographs of perfectly ordinary-looking young men—some of them even handsome. They nonetheless hankered for different jaw lines, some going so far as to invest in exorbitantly expensive plastic surgeries, such as cheek implants and facial reshaping, to make them (in their own view) look more masculine.[9]

Yet another mistake is to think that sex would provide a solution to an incel's supposed problem. If an incel *does* start having sex, or gets into a relationship, who will he turn into? Contra several commentators, my guess is: not a nice guy.[10] A once-single incel may well become a female partner's tormentor. Anyone can feel lonely. But a wrongheaded sense of entitlement to a woman's sexual, material, reproductive, and emotional labor may result in incel tendencies prior to the relationship and

intimate partner violence afterward, if he feels thwarted, resentful, or jealous. In other words, an incel is an abuser waiting to happen.

Incels differ in the degree to which they are proactive versus reactive. Elliot Rodger was largely the latter: he never made a serious effort to go on dates, by the lights of "My Twisted World," his so-called manifesto (really more of a memoir—and a lengthy one, at more than one hundred thousand words). He seems not to have actually approached the women of the Alpha Phi sorority house, simply assuming that they would reject him (which might, of course, have been an accurate prediction). Rather than try his hand, he preferred not to run the risk of failure, instead stalking them from a distance. Long before his final act of violence, he also engaged in numerous acts of petty vengeance against the happy-looking couples he saw out and about, who aroused his envy and outrage. He was particularly prone to throwing beverages in their faces—one time, hot coffee; another time, orange juice. This was about as close to physical contact with the "Staceys" as Rodger ever got, if his account is accurate.

Scott Beierle, in contrast, had a nasty habit of touching women without their consent. He was, in a word, handsy. At the time of the shooting, he had been fired from a temporary teaching job for touching a female student inappropriately (placing his hand on her stomach, just below her bra line, and asking her if she was ticklish). He had been discharged from the army for groping several women (an honorable discharge, notably). And he had been banned from the Florida State University campus in Tallahassee, where he had graduated with a master's degree in