

## Scene on Radio

### Himpathy (MEN, Part 7)

<http://www.sceneonradio.org/episode-53-himpathy-men-part-7/>

**John Biewen:** Hey everybody, a content warning: this episode includes a description of a sexual assault.

**Janey Williams:** Um (clears throat) ... Mathew and I met our senior year of high school. And... basically he was just a really different kind of a guy. He had this amazing sense of humor. We hit it off right away, became best buds.

**Celeste Headlee:** This is Janey Williams. She's 38. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two-year-old son. She has a story to tell about her former friend, Mathew. The story begins in the late 1990s.

**Janey Williams:** We were really, really close. And as happens sometimes, that kinda led to some more romantic feelings on his side that I didn't necessarily reciprocate. And that put a strain on our friendship, but we continued on.

**John Biewen:** Eventually, Janey says, Mathew gave her an ultimatum: If she wouldn't date him, he would end the friendship.

**Janey Williams:** And I foolishly agreed to enter a relationship under those terms. I was 20. And I just didn't want to let him go. Because I cared for him, I loved him, as a friend. So we did that for a couple months and it didn't work out.

[Music]

**Janey Williams:** He really did not take that breakup well, at all. He really lost it. He just started acting really crazy, kind of being abusive to me, with words and sometimes even slight physical altercations as well. Like throwing water in my face, but hard. Or like pinching me too hard. Nothing like extreme violence but just these weird little reminders that he was angry.

**Celeste Headlee:** The worst was yet to come. Mathew would eventually punish Janey much more severely for her ... crime.

**Janey Williams:** I broke up with him. (little laugh) I didn't reciprocate his romantic feelings.

**John Biewen:** This isn't just another story about a dangerous, misogynistic man, or about sexual violence and how it goes down. It's really about what happens afterwards. Hearing that, you might think, ah ok, it's another story about the system – police and the courts, employers and the media – and how they disbelieve and blame women for the things men do to them.

**Celeste Headlee:** But no, Janey's story isn't about that, either. Her story never got to the system. Janey became intensely interested in what happened with the people closest to her – her best friends, even her mother. She decided to explore

that, almost as an investigative reporter would. What they remember and how *they* responded, or didn't, when Janey told them what Mathew had done to her.

[MUSIC]

**John Biewen:** From the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and PRX, it's *Scene on Radio*, Part Seven of our series, MEN. We're taking a season-long look at sexism, misogyny. How patriarchy really works. And how we can all get better at seeing it so we can take it apart. I'm John Biewen.

**Celeste Headlee:** And I'm Celeste Headlee. This time: Janey's story. And the phenomenon that the philosopher Kate Manne has dubbed "himpathy." The kind of sympathy that's applied exclusively to males. Not to mention "himpunity." The striking, damaging, and downright weird habit in our culture of letting men off the hook for the awful things they do, even serious crimes. Especially if they do those things to women.

**John Biewen:** As we'll hear, himpathy is not just something men do. Kate Manne argues it's a deeply embedded habit of mind, one that seems so natural for many of us, of all genders, that we don't even know we're doing it. We need to see the habit before we can break it.

**Celeste Headlee:** So let's start with Janey Williams and what happened to her fifteen years ago. It's important to understand that Janey and Mathew were part of a tight group of friends, young adults knocking around L.A. Janey's best friends

were also Mathew's good friends. Janey's mother was friends with Mathew's mother. Remember that.

**John Biewen:** So, what happened. It's 2003, about two years after they dated briefly and Janey broke up with Mathew. She's been away at college, but now she's back and they still see each other sometimes when their gang of friends gets together. Janey's friends would later say that Mathew was still obsessed with Janey in 2003. In Janey's words, he was still making it clear he was "heartbroken."

**Janey Williams:** And he had been acting in ways that were scary and unhealthy leading up to that night. And then, we went out with a couple of friends to a bar and he got me a drink and I drank that drink. And immediately felt sick. I went to the bathroom and threw up violently. And then when I came out he was there and offered to take me back to his place which is where I had parked my car -- we'd come together. So we went back and he helped me to lie down on the couch. I did notice that he was pacing back and forth in the living room, which was strange. And I at that point was conscious but woozy, like not in control, like not, my body was weak and not fully functional. At some point he said I should get some rest in his bed. And he helped me get there. And then he left the room but then he returned and he proceeded to sexually molest me. He took off my clothes and his mouth, tongue, hands, fingers, were everywhere. And while he was doing this he was saying "we will never be friends," over and over again. He just kept repeating that and I was saying "no" and "stop," over and over again. And he kept on. At some point I was able to regain enough control of my body to push my way up, get dressed, go to the door. And I remember he followed me

there and said “no wait, I'm so sorry, don't go.” And I said no, that's really fucked up. And I took the chain off the door and went to my car.

[MUSIC]

**Celeste Headlee:** It would take years, and lots of therapy, for Janey to fully grasp the impact of Mathew’s attack on her. That’s not unusual for people who face trauma, regardless of gender. So at first, she didn’t tell anyone what he’d done – not the police, not anyone. That would have made it real, she says. At the same time, she didn’t want to see Mathew’s face. That was another wish he did not respect.

**Janey Williams:** And in fact the night after the assault he came to where he knew I would be. And when I saw him there I went to him and told him to leave, and he smiled and said, No, you leave. It was clear to me at that point that he was exerting power through that move and that I didn't really have another choice. I had to leave. So I did, I left.

**John Biewen:** In fact, Janey soon left Los Angeles. She moved to San Francisco, then to Colombia, then to Germany – she stayed away most of the time for about ten years. She says she couldn’t see a place for herself in her hometown, not after what Mathew had done, and given that her friends were his friends. For the first few years, she wasn’t prepared to tell anyone what he’d done.

**Celeste Headlee:** Why not? This question comes up again and again when women accuse men of sexual assault years after the fact.

**John Biewen:** Yeah. We seem to understand why it can take decades for a man to accuse someone like a teacher or priest who abused him, but not why women don't immediately report sexual assault.

**Celeste Headlee:** So why don't women talk about it, at least with friends and family, right away? Before we get to everything that's coming in this story, Janey wants you to understand this: Besides just not wanting to face what she'd gone through, and hoping it would go away, she says she also had an impulse to protect *him*. Despite what Mathew had done to her. She didn't want him hurt.

**Janey Williams:** I cared for Matthew. He had been kind of a lonely person before I'd brought him into this group of friends. I knew how important they were to him, they were to me as well. We were really kind of like family. And I didn't want to take that away from him. I didn't want him to lose those friends.

[MUSIC]

**Janey Williams:** Then on another level I really, somewhere inside of me, I knew that if I told my friends what he did, he wouldn't lose them, that they would kind of excuse his behavior, ignore what I said or find some way to justify it. And then I would end up losing them in a really painful way. I think it's this unspoken,

unconscious knowledge that I think we all have, as women, about how the rules work. (kind of laughs). And the rules have been that there are no repercussions.

**Celeste Headlee:** Janey's hunch about the rules would be confirmed. She moved back to LA in 2006, and the next year she worked up the courage and told a few of her closest friends what Mathew had done. That he molested her that night in 2003, and probably drugged her first – probably put a roofy, a date rape drug, in that drink he gave her, though she could never be absolutely sure about that. Her friends listened, they expressed concern and empathy. They did not confront Mathew; their friendships with him were unaffected. So Janey left again, went on with her life overseas.

**John Biewen:** Then in 2012, back in L.A. again, she felt stronger, and newly frustrated with the lack of accountability Mathew had faced, so she wrote the story of that night in 2003 – in detail – and posted it on Facebook. She named Mathew and tagged all of her friends, women and men, who knew him.

**Janey Williams:** Most of my closest friends did not have a response. They didn't respond to me. They didn't reach out to me or, or respond in any way shape or form to me. I later found out that they did reach out to Matthew, some of them, to make sure he was OK and to ask him how he felt about the Facebook post. And one of my close friends even assured him that she was still his friend.

**Celeste Headlee:** A few years after that, in 2015, Janey was talking with one of her good friends, Nicole. Mathew's name came up. Janey alluded to the fact that

he'd sexually molested her all those years before, a fact Janey had disclosed to Nicole more than once – in a direct conversation in 2007, and then in that Facebook post five years later.

**Janey Williams:** And she said, “Yeah, well, but he didn’t really do anything, did he?” And it kind of blew me away.

[MUSIC]

**John Biewen:** This was all before our current #MeToo moment broke open. But Janey was convinced there was something important going on. What did it mean that her friends just seemed unwilling or unable to face what she was telling them – that one of their friends had done something inexcusable, something criminal, to another good friend? Not only were they not shunning Mathew, they hadn’t even really challenged him about what he’d done. What was going on?

**Janey Williams:** I had this idea to ask them, to ask all of them. And I thought well maybe their answers will mean more, you know, will have implications for more than just my story. Maybe other people will want to hear this. So I got a really dinky Sony tape recorder, it was like 50 bucks. I had no idea what I was doing and I just, I asked them and I recorded what they had to say.

**Celeste Headlee:** Janey recorded many hours of her conversations with her friends, and with her mother. Janey takes it from here with a small sample of

those interviews. Then we'll hear from Kate Manne, and talk more, on the backside.

**Nicole:** I don't, cuz I feel like, honestly Janey, if I remember you telling me...

**Janey Williams:** This is Nicole, one of my very best friends. Here I was asking her about the first time I told her the story in 2007, which she remembered.

**Nicole:** When you were talking to me, you were very unsure of the whole situation in the first place.

**Janey Williams:** Well I wasn't unsure about what happened. I was not sure that I'd been roofied because there was no way to prove it.

**Nicole:** Yeah.

**Janey Williams:** What I was sure of was the facts. And the facts were that we went to this bar together, he got me the drink, I drank the drink....

**Janey Williams:** I go over the story again, the details of what happened that night...then we go back to discussing what I told her in 2007.

**Janey Williams:** I think it's possible that what I told you was that 'he molested me.' I don't think it's possible that I didn't tell you that he molested me, because the story wouldn't make any sense.

**Nicole:** I mean it's definitely a possibility that you did say 'molestation.' You definitely didn't say like what exactly that entailed.

**Janey Williams:** I think I said, I'm pretty sure this is what I said, "he molested me while saying over and over again we will never be friends..."

**Nicole:** I don't remember that part, but I could definitely see you saying that. And that's probably, like, the molestation part of it is what's iffy in general, and your mind is like, well, what does that really mean. I know for a fact that you didn't elaborate on what that meant.

**Janey Williams:** I probably didn't. I probably didn't.

**Nicole:** And I don't blame you, because that's hard...

**Janey Williams:** But I thought molestation meant something bad....

**Nicole:** It does, for sure. Yeah. I feel like it was, I mean, I don't know if, ... I guess, the way it was told to me too, I feel like just because you were unsure about a lot of things, maybe that's why I was like 'well maybe she's not sure if all this stuff is happening, cuz if she was roofied...'

**Janey Williams:** I was completely sure of everything I just told you. I can never be 100% sure that he was the one that slipped something in my drink. However, it does LOOK that way...

**Janey Williams:** What Nicole remembered, and focused on, was the part of my story I was unsure about – whether Mathew had drugged me. She clung to that ambiguity, and extended that doubt to the part of the story I *was* sure about – the details of the sexual assault, stalking, and abuse.

My friend Anthony, who's also good friends with Mathew, read my Facebook post. He says he struggled to square the story I told him with what he'd heard in a short conversation with Mathew.

**Anthony:** I think that he basically felt that you felt something happened that he didn't feel happened. Like I guess that you felt that there was, like – your interpretation of the situation was not accurate of where he was coming from per se, like he felt misunderstood about how the night went down.

**Janey Williams:** Did you believe what I was saying was true?

**Anthony:** I ... I believed that you certainly had every right to believe what you believed, based on all the facts you were laying on the table. The one thing that I guess I was always uncertain about was just the sort of intentional drugging, I guess. That was always the one thing that like, I don't know, like that's a tough one for me.

**Janey Williams:** Take notice of how my friends want to give Mathew the benefit of the doubt. Their reluctance to believe he could do something terrible to me. I didn't say it then but I was thinking, not only do you guys know me, and know I would never lie, but you also know Mathew. They do. All my friends have seen him in action ... many many times.

**Nicole:** : I mean, he was just out of control, drunk, out of control, getting naked, doing inappropriate things.

**Woman:** He's just crazy and wild, has no filter, doesn't know boundaries.

**Jonas:** A little sleazy always.

**Nicole:** I think at Melia's he was like sitting on a table and pulled his pants down, and was just like sitting on this table or something.

**Guy:** He'd grab me and like have his lips on my ear.

**M:** But I would see him do it a lot of people, he would just bite. It's like, who acts like that? Who just bites?

**Jonas:** Sometimes with a girl that he might have just met, too.

**Nicole:** So I had a co-worker that worked with Matthew. He basically sexually harasses like all the employees there.

**Melia:** And it hurt friends of mine. My roommate refused to have him in the house anymore after he had groped her.

**Veronica:** And so it was situations like that that he constantly overstepped the boundaries. You know and we had a term for it, it's like Matthew's getting creepy, let's go.

**Melia:** And I was constantly offering excuses. Sort of like determined obliviousness.

**Janey Williams:** So this is the person my friends had such a hard time believing could do what he did to me. From the outside looking in, it might seem impossible, make no sense at all. But I wanted to dive in to try to understand why, how, so many people turned a blind eye to it all.

[MUSIC]

**John Biewen:** We'll hear more of Janey's conversations in a minute. But Celeste, it seems important to think about *why* Janey's friends were reluctant to confront Mathew once they'd heard what he did to Janey – or for that matter, why did they put up with all this over-the-top creepiness that we've just heard them describe?

**Celeste Headlee:** Right, from the very beginning. In many of the cases that make headlines, like the ones we're seeing with the #MeToo Movement, the people who fail to hold men accountable do so because there's something they believe they're getting from this man. Something important. A TV or radio network that lets the guy run roughshod over the women he's working with because he gets good ratings. Or the CEO who's seen as irreplaceable by the board and the shareholders. Cuz they're making money. That's not really the case with Mathew – at least, the stakes aren't that tangible, they're not that big. So why would people let this guy off the hook?

**John Biewen:** I asked her to reflect on that. She says a relationship with Mathew was hard to give up.

**Janey Williams:** A lot of what the interviewees said, my friends, said that he kind of made them go out and experience the world in a different way, to really be at the center of things, be the life of the party. He was also really, really funny and knew all the cool things to do in town, and would make sure everybody was getting on board to go and do those things.

**John Biewen:** It was fun to be friends with him.

**Janey Williams:** Yeah. It was fun to be friends with him.

**John Biewen:** Janey says the other thing that came through from her friends was that confronting Mathew as a sexual predator – really confronting him – would have just been ... hard. Awkward.

**Janey Williams:** People didn't know how to do that, nor did they want to do that. They didn't want that kind of awkwardness and drama in their lives. They wanted to just keep having fun.

[BREAK]

**Celeste Headlee:** OK. Back to Janey. We'll listen in on somewhat longer excerpts from a couple especially revealing conversations she recorded.

**Janey Williams:** This is part of a conversation I had with my friend Veronica. We were talking about the first time I told her, a few years before, that Matt had molested me. For her birthday that year, she was getting a bunch of people together at Hollywood Bowl. I told her I wasn't going if Mathew was going to be there, and that I'd been going to therapy and had fully come to grips with what he did to me. This was the first time I'd told her directly what happened.

**Veronica:** I believed you. No, there was no doubt that he wouldn't do that.

**Janey Williams:** Did you feel like knowing that that happened put you in a difficult position?

**Veronica:** Oh, definitely. I think at that point you were going through a lot and you were just facing it, but you did put ultimatums. You put an ultimatum that night. You said, if you're gonna hang out with me, then I don't hang out with him. And it was during a time when we're planning the Hollywood Bowl thing, and to me it was like, what do you do now, do you disinvite? Do you do this, do you do that? So it was awkward in that sense, of like what do you do with this information now?

**Janey Williams:** When I gave you that ultimatum what did you say?

**Veronica:** I don't know if I said anything. Did I say something? I don't know if I said anything.

**Janey Williams:** (Pause.) What happened with the Hollywood bowl thing? Did he go?

**Veronica:** Uh-huh.

**Janey Williams:** Did I go?

**Veronica:** No. You didn't go.

**Janey Williams:** (pause) What do you imagine I would have felt about that?

**Veronica:** Horrible. Here you are, you're sharing the news that this guy is a monster, pretty much, but you're the one that's been isolated, and out. Of course you felt like everybody's taking his side. But it wasn't about taking sides, and I hope you don't see it that way. Nobody was taking sides. It's like here's a bomb of information, and it happened to you. We were all seeing how crazy he is. But he was making the effort to not be excluded whatsoever. People weren't including him, it wasn't like that. It was just, he made the effort to not be excluded and to not be a pariah. You were just like 'I can't be near him, or even see him, so I'm gonna remove myself completely from the situation.' But I don't think people stopped talking to you. You and I kept talking, you and I kept hanging out outside of that situation.

**Janey Williams:** But Matt was still being invited everywhere, or was the source of doing everything. So he was still at the center of the social group.

**Veronica:** You have to also understand, it was very awkward for everybody. This was something that had happened, and then the bomb is dropped ... and you're just like 'fuck.' Someone that is considered a friend and is part of the social group is like this fucking weirdo. And you're just like, what do you do with this information? And then you leave. So there was never avoiding it, it was never like oh he's here, I'm leaving. So if Matthew shows up I can't be like going up to him in public and saying 'you're a fucking rapist' to people.

**Janey Williams:** I'm just gonna play the devil's advocate here. Why not?

**Veronica:** Because you're not here anymore. You left.

**Janey Williams:** Yeah, but remember I left after I told you, and Matthew was the one who came to your...

**Veronica:** The Hollywood Bowl, because he had already bought a ticket! So what do I say, Janey? I say, "Matthew is no longer invited because he's a rapist." That's not, I can't share that information unless you have told everybody about it. That news, that information wasn't mine to spread. I'm not like that, I don't like gossiping. At that point you're just like, what do I do, other than wanting to slap him? It's like, I can't avoid you because we run with in the same circle of friends. But we're not huggy, lovey-dovey friends, and the minute you get awkward with me, I just smack him away. That's all I could have done at that time.

**Janey Williams:** I understand what you're saying about why you reacted the way you do, but I'm just hoping you understand that because of the reaction, my answer was no, I don't have a home here. And I don't have – [voice breaking] I can't exist here. I can't - my best friends were still hanging out with this person who did this to me, knowing it. And I had no place here because of it.

**Janey Williams:** There's a lot going on in this conversation with Veronica. But for now let's stick with the answers she's providing about why she reacted the way she did. What I understood her to be saying was that it wasn't her place to say anything about it or do anything about it. It didn't happen to her, which made it not her business, and perhaps not her problem. It would have been awkward to

address and she didn't want to create drama. She didn't feel comfortable talking to anyone about it because, essentially, it wasn't her place.

I also decided to talk to my mother about her reactions, and how my coming out with the story of what happened affected her. In this exchange, the woman she is referring to, Diane, is Mathew's mother. They'd been friends.

**Janey Williams:** Do you remember when you did find out what had happened, do you remember talking about it at all with me?

**Mom:** Yeah. I mean I don't remember what I said but you know, like I'm sorry, so sorry that you had to go through that, and I said now I can sure see why you didn't want me having discussions with Diane about him. By that time I was not doing things with Diane, I was just fielding her calls.

**Janey Williams:** Did you still talk with her after that?

**Mom:** Uh-huh. I know I was still talking to her because I thought, every time she brought up Mathew, I thought she must wonder why I don't follow through. You know she'll say "Mathew's doing so good," and I would say "great." Then I would say I'm busy or something, because I just couldn't have a conversation with her about Mathew. It wasn't my job to tell her, but....

**Janey Williams:** Why wasn't it?

**Mom:** To tell her that her son assaulted my daughter? I don't know. No, I just don't think it was -- Matthew's grown and on his own and they've got enough problems in their relationship. I mean, I don't want to be her friend, but it's not because of what her son did. She didn't make him do that.

**Janey Williams:** Do you still get calls from her?

**Mom:** Not really. She's on my Facebook.

**Janey Williams:** I ask my mother what she thought when she first learned what Mathew had done to me.

**Mom:** I thought, he's dangerous. To himself and others. But, and here's the thing, and I think this goes along with your not calling the police, I still thought, what a tortured, tortured young man, and I just thought that he carried that really, really damaged child with him. So even in that moment, where I was so hurting for what you went through, and so angry for how he, as you described it, manipulated people against you and did all the classic things -- furious, angry, so relieved that you had stood up and said something -- I was thinking, god that poor, ruined baby, child.

**Janey Williams:** My own mother's strongest emotional response when she learned what he had done to me was extreme pity -- *for Mathew*.

And the thing is, I get it. My mother was right, a big part of the reason I didn't tell anyone right away was that I wanted to protect Mathew. I didn't want him to lose all of his friends. But perhaps it is worth meditating on a moment. I tell my friends and loved ones that I was sexually assaulted and the result is a surge of pity for the perpetrator, an instinct to protect the perpetrator. And really, not much thought at all about me.

[Music]

**Janey Williams:** We've heard a fair amount about victim blaming in the news, and on social media. And if we think about it the way it is normally expressed, I'd say I escaped it. No one suggested it was my fault the assault occurred – what I was wearing and how much I'd had to drink were never questioned. But I came to wonder if people were actually blaming me in that way but just not saying so. Here's my mother again.

**Janey Williams:** You had an experience with sexual assault as well. Did you tell anyone?

**Mom:** Uh-uh. I was ashamed. Of myself. I was stupid. I mean, I accepted from a stranger the use of his apartment. He said he would stay with somebody else. And I was with both guys, and then we all went out to eat.

**Janey Williams:** So do you realize, you just ... blamed yourself again. It's been many years since that happened and you still blame yourself.

**Mom:** Well he's the most to blame. But I was... yeah, you're right. (pause) You know, on a level I do, I was stupid.

**Janey Williams:** If a man who...

**Mom:** What I should have done is when he said I'll walk you home, I should have said -- but I didn't know the way. Because we'd been out and eating and everything and he had to....

**Janey Williams:** Mom, there is nothing you 'should have' done. The man offered you his apartment, he said he was gonna stay with his friend, you believed in the kindness of strangers.

**Mom:** But we were flirting. He bought me a drink...

**Janey Williams:** What does that matter?

**Mom:** ...showed me his apartment, where everything was, and we were sitting, and he was saying American men don't know how to kiss, let me show you, and I let him and then I said, really and truly, pretty good, and then I said I think you should go now, and it just grew from there, and I said I think you should go now, and things grew from there and it was rape.

**Janey Williams:** Well that's what date rape is, Mom.

**Mom:** I was trying to scream and he was saying, no no my neighbors will hear. And you know what? I didn't scream, I was going [stage whisper] stop it! Stop it! So that his neighbors wouldn't hear, I was like, you know, 'terrible for them to hear and know that I'm here.' Yeah. It was pretty bad.

**Janey Williams:** You still blame yourself. You did nothing wrong. Just being alone in a room with someone is not an invitation. Flirting with someone does not mean they can rape you. Kissing them still does not mean they're allowed to rape you.

**Mom:** You're right. Absolutely, you're right.

**Janey Williams:** It's not just you, that happens to women over and over and over again. And the fact that you were screaming quietly, not to wake up the neighbors, I mean that just shows how deeply it's ingrained in us. I mean ...

**Mom, whispers:** I know.

**Janey Williams:** Do you feel that? Do you feel like there's something there that's....

**Mom:** Yes. Yeah, I do. I do. [pause] I do.

[MUSIC]

**Celeste Headlee:** My feelings about this particular story seem to come in waves. First, I feel sorrow that this woman went through this. Then there's real admiration for the kind of guts it took for her to sit down with these people she loved, ask some very tough, very awkward questions, and record it all. And then there's a recognition that this isn't just Janey's story. That's why we're listening to it. It's an echo of generations of stories from at least hundreds of thousands of women. This story is what we mean when we use the phrase rape culture.

**John Biewen:** Rape culture meaning the social acceptance of rape and sexual assault. "It's bad, but you know, it's gonna happen." We don't look at other serious crimes that way. Armed robbery, we're gonna go out and get the guy and lock him! Isn't rape more serious than armed robbery, in terms of the harm it does to somebody?

**Celeste Headlee:** Even graffiti we treat more seriously.

**John Biewen:** This kind of sense of, "well, of course it's bad, but let's not wreck the perpetrators life over it. I spoke with Kate Manne, via Skype.

**Kate Manne:** I'm an assistant professor of philosophy at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and I'm also a writer.

**Celeste Headlee:** To put it lightly. She wrote a recent book that's been called brilliant and indispensable. It's called *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*.

**John Biewen:** And in that book, Kate Manne coins the term, “Himpathy.” So she has given a name to this exact phenomenon I think that Janey is interrogating. This reflex to extend care and sympathy to the male perpetrator, often more sympathy than we give to his female victim.

**Celeste Headlee:** It was just a small part of her *Down Girl* book, but Kate Manne has said publicly that himpathy will be the subject of her next book. Because it resonated so loudly with so many readers – especially women, of course.

**John Biewen:** I summarized Janey’s story for Kate Manne. Here’s what she said.

**Kate Manne:** It's so common. I mean this is what really shocks me. This is what got me interested in all of this stuff, in a way, is that you're told this lie as a woman, that if something awful happens to you people will care. And the reality is, if it's a white guy and, you know, or a golden boy, someone who people like, and it's not an occasion for opportunistic racism, say, they won't do a fucking thing. Doesn't surprise me in the least.

**Celeste Headlee:** I’m really glad that she highlighted whiteness, because race matters here, as in most things. The benefits of himpathy they just don’t extend to men of color in anything like the same way, as we’ve talked about elsewhere in the series. In fact, it can be just the opposite. An allegation of sexual assault by a Black man, especially, against a white woman, has often meant a quick death sentence in our history.

**John Biewen:** But when it comes to white dude perpetrators, we've already heard other examples of himpathy in our series. Those cops in Montgomery who raped Gertrude Perkins, from Part 4.

**Celeste Headlee:** Or in Part 5, Kelly Lanspa, the tech professional. Her boss gropes her on a plane, and when she tells another boss, who's also a man, he brushes it off, saying he "likes" this guy, the groper. "He's so much fun!" As if that somehow makes it go away, makes it not important.

**John Biewen:** Which it usually does settle it. It too often does. So the question is, *why* himpathy? It's not hard to see why men, and especially white men, would extend himpathy to each other. We're all in the club and it's to my advantage to let the other guy off the hook now, because that means I'll get a free pass when I need it. But why would lots of women have this impulse, too? That's part of what Janey wanted to know in having these conversations with her friends.

**Celeste Headlee:** And don't forget that she *herself* felt concerned about Mathew and wanted to protect him, even though he'd sexually molested her. So Janey's not trying to call out her friends as somehow bad friends, bad people, she's not trying to criticize her mother. She wanted to examine this tendency that is in so many of us, and somehow try to understand it.

**John Biewen:** That's exactly what Kate Manne tries to do in her book. So she says it starts with the fundamentally different roles that patriarchal cultures assign to men and women, boys and girls. Traditionally, men get to *be*, to *do* stuff. While of

course women's traditional role is to serve men, to support and nurture us while we go out there and "be all that we can be."

**Celeste Headlee:** And here's an interesting nuance in Kate Manne's thinking. She doesn't agree with the notion that's often expressed by many feminists, that men see women as less than fully human. Kate disagrees with that. She thinks you men *get* that women are human. Do you agree with that?

**John Biewen:** Well, speaking for myself, I think women are human beings. But yeah, I think Manne makes some good points. To put it in literal terms, she points out that straight men at least want to have sex with women, and *most* of us are not so interested in sex with non-human species. So that's evidence at least at the literal level that men understand women are human. It does often seem that men either don't recognize women have the same rich, complicated mental and emotional lives that men do...

**Celeste Headlee:** Or just don't care. But then why would that be true? Kate Manne says, thanks to our patriarchal culture, all of us – men and women – have been trained to see women as a *particular kind* of human. That is, a human that is here to care for you men and boys, and to give stuff to you.

**Kate Manne:** So I think of the contrast more as between human beings and human givers, where women are the givers of feminine-coded goods like, you know, pleasure, nurture, sustenance – children, for that matter. Labor of an emotional kind is a big part of this, too.

**John Biewen:** So, that brings us to Kate Manne's theory of misogyny. She argues it's not "hatred of women" in some simplistic way.

**Celeste Headlee:** This makes sense to me. A lot of the most misogynistic men also love women, and very often treat the women in their lives quite well. *Until* those women get out of line. Until they contradict the man or *stop* giving the man those "feminine-coded goods" Kate Manne is talking about, that the man expects from her. At that point, men might lash out – often with violence, sexual or otherwise. But he needs to bring her back in line.

**John Biewen:** That is misogyny, in Kate Manne's view. Not a general dislike of women, but instead, it's the punishment arm of patriarchy. Sexism is the theory, the ideology, that says men are this way and women are that way. That ideology is designed to keep people playing their assigned gender roles. But if sexism stops working and a woman gets out of line, misogyny brings the punishment. It tries to smack the woman back into her place.

**Celeste Headlee:** So let's bring this back to the concept of empathy. Because all of us, of every gender, are so deeply conditioned to see these gender roles as normal and natural, and good, we tend to go easy on men when they punish women for not playing by the patriarchal rules.

**John Biewen:** Right. We might say it's bad that that guy did that thing, but ... it's understandable, in the end, considering how that woman disappointed the poor

guy. And also the man, and his precious potential – that’s what really matters, in the end.

**Celeste Headlee:** So when a woman does what Janey did and calls out a man, and says wait a minute, everybody wanted to make sure Mathew was OK, and in the process erased *me* and the damage done to *me*: she was being assertive. That’s a plea from the woman to put herself, and her pain, back at the center of the story – and that’s not something women are supposed to do in a patriarchal system. Men always have to be at the center of every story.

**John Biewen:** So Kate Manne says that’s where the backlash comes in against a woman in Janey’s situation. And I say backlash, but that could just take the form of indifference, like Janey experienced from some of her friends ... or criticism. Here’s one more moment from Janey’s recordings, something her friend Nicole said to her, as they were looking back on the ways Janey had disclosed Mathew’s assault.

**Nicole:** I mean, OK look, when you posted the Facebook thing, I didn’t think that was appropriate to post it to a public situation. I didn’t really know how to react to that. I felt it was handled not in a good way at that point. I don’t know how you handle something like that, you know, looking back....

**Celeste Headlee:** ‘What’s the best way to handle something like that.’ The answer, if you consider himpathy and rape culture, is that there’s no right way. A woman will ALWAYS be criticized for the way she speaks up against her

perpetrator. Why didn't she do it right away? Why didn't she call the cops? Then when she does find the courage to speak up, six months later or even thirty years later, then she's being selfish, creating a mess for other people over something that happened way too long ago to care about.

**John Biewen:** Yep, she's being selfish. Because with that very act of claiming victim status, a woman is asserting her own interests, and women aren't supposed to do that. Here's Kate Manne again.

**Kate Manne:** She effectively becomes the villain, and he effectively becomes the victim, of his own crime. I mean that's how twisted, that's how morally perverse this can get, if there's this antecedent commitment to upholding his good name, his good guy status, his reputation, rather than flipping the inference and saying I thought he was a good guy but apparently not.

**Celeste Headlee:** We see this again and again. "He's a good guy," people say. Brett Kavanaugh, Louis C.K., Al Franken, and a thousand other men accused of abusing their power at the expense of women. He's a good guy. That's the primary fact, it's all we need to know. And that claim overwhelms everything, including literal, tangible evidence that he's *not* a good guy.

**John Biewen:** And it overwhelms any concern about the woman that the so-called good guy has victimized. She couldn't be telling the truth because he's a good guy. And even if she is telling the truth – well, he's a good guy so we shouldn't wreck his golden future just because he made a mistake or two.

**Celeste Headlee:** Boys will be boys, after all.

**Celeste Headlee:** Hey, I'm the mother of a son. I know what it means to love a young man in spite of his imperfections, sometimes because of his imperfections. I understand worrying about his future and wanting to protect him. Himpathy – part of it, anyway – comes from a good place, a place of love. Kate Manne calls it a “pro-social” impulse, as opposed to an antisocial one. The problem, of course, is that we extend this concern and empathy to boys and men *at the expense* of women.

**John Biewen:** And it stops us from holding men accountable when they do real harm.

**Kate Manne:** And if I could change one thing about the world – well, I would change a lot of things about the world – but the idea that, yeah, a white, privileged man, cis-het, nondisabled, and usually young and a golden boy, the idea that he can do no wrong, really? If I could change that? Not necessarily to punish him. But just to recognize what moral harms are done and to make them less prevalent. Like, yeah, if I was queen of the world that's what I would do.

[MUSIC]

**Celeste Headlee:** Thanks to Kate Manne – and to Janey Williams for sharing her story with us. If you would like to hear more of her story and the conversations

she had with friends, check out her podcast, "This Happened", available on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen.

**John Biewen:** Next time: shades of manhood. How, in a racist society, masculinity is coded differently for people of different races and ethnicities. And what that means for, say, Asian and African American men.

**Celeste Headlee:** Music by Alex Weston and by Evgueni and Sacha Galperine. Music and production help from Joe Augustine of Narrative Music.

**John Biewen:** The communications team at CDS is headed by Liz Phillips. Whitney Baker manages our website. Mara Guevarra does the episode art. The MEN logo is by Harper Biewen. Follow *Scene on Radio* on Facebook – and on Twitter, @SceneonRadio.

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