

2024

“Friendly” Men and Social Roles: Collective Responsibility for a Culture of Rape

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Recommended Citation

Patrizio, Ross. 2024. “‘Friendly’ Men and Social Roles: Collective Responsibility for a Culture of Rape.” *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (1/2). Article 11.

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Abstract

In 1983, Andrea Dworkin gave a speech entitled “I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce during Which There Is No Rape,” in which she argued that the only way to put an end to the culture of rape in society is for men to take responsibility for it. The view that it is up to men to dismantle the culture of rape—including “friendly” men, who do not actively endorse and perpetuate this culture—might have been considered radical at the time, but the same is no longer true today. Dworkin’s view, or something very close to it, is now garnering widespread attention and credibility. The purpose of this article is to find a philosophical theory of responsibility that can vindicate and elucidate Dworkin’s claims. In order to do so, I develop a view that combines Zheng’s role-ideal model of responsibility with Witt’s conception of gender as a mega social role. I argue that by combining these accounts we find a philosophically satisfying theory of what it means to say, with Dworkin, that men are responsible for the culture of rape.

Keywords: collective responsibility, structural injustice, social roles, rape culture, Andrea Dworkin

Introduction

In 1983, Andrea Dworkin gave a speech at the Midwest Regional Conference of the National Organization for Changing Men entitled “I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce during Which There Is No Rape.” In the audience were roughly five hundred friendly men. These men were “friendly” in the sense that they were sympathetic and amenable to feminist concerns. They probably all would have agreed that women are systematically subordinated in society and that this fact upsets them greatly. In her speech, Dworkin aimed to convince these men that their sympathy would not suffice. Women live in a culture of rape—that is, a culture in which sexual violence directed toward them by men is both systemic and institutionalized. Real freedom and equality, Dworkin argues, are not compatible with the existence of such a culture. Sitting around discussing the subordination of women and the perils of toxic

masculinity will simply not do; men must take ownership of this problem as one that is on them to solve.

But what does it mean to say that men are responsible for the culture of rape? We're quite familiar with holding *women* responsible—consider the stock advice issued to women in the immediate aftermath of yet another high-profile case: “Don't walk home alone, and if you must, keep your keys between your knuckles.” We're also quite used to holding *unfriendly men*—that is, rapists and enablers—responsible. We've seen campaigns for the issuing of tougher sentences on sexual offenders and to reconsider which actions are officially recognized as rape.¹

But what about *friendly men*? Typically, the responsibility of such men has been a topic sidelined to only the most radical of feminist activist circles. These men, after all, are the kinds of people who openly denounce rape culture and even congregate in their free time to discuss the perils of toxic masculinity. But Dworkin's view—or something very close to it—seems to be garnering significant credibility in recent times. This was evidenced in the discourse that ensued in the wake of multiple high-profile cases throughout 2020 and the beginning of 2021. The horrifying cases of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa, in particular, sparked mainstream debate surrounding how best to address the seemingly ever-present culture of rape in society. There was, of course, a sense of frustration at the inevitable rehashing of old tips and tricks for women about how they ought to be mindful when travelling from A to B. More notable, though, was the palpable sense of bemusement, frustration, and anger that the most likely response from friendly men—those men who we might like to think of as feminist allies—would be to pay lip service to the cause for a few weeks and then return the issue to the back burner. The thought was that if men really want to help and really are outraged by this long-standing injustice, then sharing infographics with rape statistics to social media channels in a performative gesture of allyship will not suffice. Friendly men need to do more. Whether they like it or not, men are uniquely well positioned—both socially and politically—to make a meaningful difference, and so these gestures are no longer enough. If men want to help eradicate this culture of rape that pervades the everyday lives of women, then they must assume substantive and meaningful responsibility for it as a problem that is theirs to solve.

The main purpose of the current article is to investigate whether this sentiment can be supplemented with a philosophical theory of collective responsibility. Suppose Dworkin was right that men's taking responsibility for the culture of rape is necessary for its dismantling, the question then arises as to whether and in what sense we can count all men—including those who openly denounce the

¹ See Jenkins (2017) for comprehensive discussion on the effects of failing to correctly count instances of rape as such.

culture—as meaningfully responsible for its existence. I aim to explore whether the tools of analytic philosophy can help answer this question; whether there is a satisfactory theory of responsibility that counts all men, qua men, as responsible for ending the culture of rape.

In section 1, I will detail what I take to be Dworkin’s key claims and use these to lay down some desiderata that will help guide our search for a theory of responsibility. In section 2, I turn to the literature on collective responsibility for structural injustice. I argue that Robin Zheng’s (2018) “role-ideal model,” according to which we are all responsible for structural injustice through and in virtue of our social roles, is a very promising candidate for an account that can vindicate Dworkin’s claims. It faces a problem, however, in that gender roles do not seem to sit comfortably among the kinds of social roles Zheng has in mind. In section 3, I argue that this issue can be resolved by incorporating Charlotte Witt’s account of gender as a “mega social role.” We can have the account of collective responsibility that Dworkin convinced us we need by combining Zheng’s role-ideal model of political responsibility with Witt’s social metaphysics of gender.

1. Dworkin on the Culture of Rape

1.1. Culture of Rape

It will first be helpful to get clear on some of the key claims I take Dworkin to be making. This will allow us to lay out some desiderata by which we may later judge the success of our theory of collective responsibility.

Dworkin (2019, 200) noted that, at the time of her speech, a woman was raped once every few minutes, and the statistics are no less bleak today. The latest study from the World Health Organization (2021a; 2021b, 9) states that one in three women worldwide, which amounts to around 736 million, have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a nonpartner. The National Union of Students’ (2010) “Hidden Marks” report indicated that one in seven women experience “serious physical or sexual assault” while at university.² Furthermore, in recent times, the lockdowns imposed by governments worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic have both increased women’s exposure to abusive partners whilst restricting their access to support services (World Health Organization 2021a; 2021b, 2).

To say that a culture of rape exists, however, is not merely to say that we live in a culture in which rape occurs often. Though this is true, the scope of the problem Dworkin describes is, I think, far broader. A culture of rape is a culture in which the

² See Burrell (2023) for a detailed analysis of the gendered dynamics of the culture of abuse specifically as it manifests itself on university campuses.

threat of coerced sex—be it physical, economic, or emotional coercion—is pervasive in the lives of women. This threat of sexual violence is upheld and perpetuated not only by instances of rape but also in the way that our systems and institutions are set up. Here is Dworkin:

The power exercised by men day to day in life is power that is institutionalized. It is protected by law. It is protected by religion and religious practice. It is protected by universities, which are strongholds of male supremacy. It is protected by a police force. (Dworkin 2019, 201)

It is not that every man believes he has a right to rape women. Indeed, the existence of what Dworkin is referring to—and what I am calling a “culture of rape”—is, I think, consistent with no individual man holding this belief. Rather, the culture of rape is better thought of as a structural injustice, embodied not in any particular individual’s or group of individuals’ bad beliefs and actions but rather in bad systems and institutions. Structural injustices like this one persist irrespective of what any individual does or thinks about them (Lavin 2008; Young 2011; Haslanger 2015; Zheng 2021). Indeed, as Zheng (2021, 519) puts it:

Most of us are only dimly aware of exactly how we reproduce structural injustice, and do not intend our actions to do so; this marks a salient moral difference compared with “classic” wrongs like murder, rape, and theft.

This is the way in which I take Dworkin to be conceiving of the *culture*—as opposed to any particular instance—of rape. This culture is established and upheld not merely by bad individuals but also by the way in which our collective groups and institutions treat the issue. Indeed, as Manne (2019, 216) puts it: “Serial sexual predators comprise a small minority of men, but the system works to shield and protect them from the law.” The context of Manne’s discussion is the case of Daniel Holtzclaw, the Oklahoma police officer convicted of eighteen counts of sexual assault, all against African American women, many of them sex workers with prior convictions Holtzclaw could use to manipulate them. Manne draws out the extent to which, even in a case like Holtzclaw’s, all possible stops were pulled out to ensure that the narrative surrounding the case suggested his innocence. Here’s Manne summing up her discussion in this chapter:

There is a strong if, typically, unwitting disposition to protect dominant men’s interests and uphold their reputations. Many will hence

instinctually reach, with a sense of moral necessity, for any excuse in the book as to why he’s innocent, and all the women who testify against him can’t be trusted. (Manne 2019, 218)

This quote from Manne helps illustrate the systemic and structural nature of what we are calling the culture of rape. It is perpetuated not only by bad individuals but by the systems and structures of which they are merely a small part, the way that those systems go into overdrive when the time comes to find an excuse for a man or to make it exceedingly costly for anyone who speaks out against one.

So we know what the culture of rape *is*, according to Dworkin, but we now need to know what it *does*; that is, how exactly does the existence of this culture manifest itself in the lives of women? These two questions should not be divorced from one another. Given that, as has been noted, Dworkin thinks of the injustice itself as embodied in our systems and institutions—rather than in any particular agent’s thoughts or actions—it follows that there is no neatly circumscribed realm of women’s lives in which it is present. That is, the culture of rape, at least on Dworkin’s characterization, does not manifest itself in the lives of women exclusively within certain well-defined parameters; rather, it is salient and operative across multiple dimensions of women’s social lives. It impinges upon the way in which women may interact with the individuals, groups, and institutions that constitute their social environments.

It will be helpful at this stage to draw on the work of Claudia Card, who, in her 1991 article, “Rape as a Terrorist Institution,” crystallizes the precise harm the existence of this culture causes for women. The key insight we learn from Card (1991, 299) is that the ever-present threat of sexual violence is a tool which is used to exert power over women. Women live in a society in which governments and lawmakers have been better at protecting men from accusations of rape than they have at protecting women from rape itself (Card 1991, 300). This underlies the gendered sociopolitical dynamic in society; it makes women vulnerable and reinforces men’s power. It is a tool that functions to maintain and perpetuate a dynamic in which it is men who occupy the positions of social superiority and women who are subordinated—doing what they can to survive in such a system.

Furthermore, and importantly, part of surviving in such a society involves relying on other men for protection (Card 1991, 304). This amounts to a situation in which women need to wear what men want them to wear, behave the way that men want them to behave, avoid walking home at night without a man by their side, and so on. This underlies women’s willingness to do the jobs that men deem it appropriate for them to do (296). Like other tools for maintaining order within systems and institutions, it is the threat itself that does most of the work. The culture of rape—the

ever-present threat of sexual violence—forms the backdrop to the everyday lives of *all* women (296).

This, I think, is consistent with, and helps bring into clearer view, the way in which Dworkin conceives of the role the culture of rape plays in women's lives. Here is Dworkin again:

We are very close to death. All women are. And we are very close to rape and we are very close to beating. (Dworkin 2019, 200)

It is a misconception, then, that the effects of rape start and end with the direct victims of individual crimes; one does not need to have been raped, or even know someone who has been raped, to have one's everyday interactions and engagements marred by its threat.

1.2. Freedom and Equality

For Dworkin, the existence of such a culture is simply incompatible with freedom and equality. Suppose you agree that there is indeed a culture of rape. Still, you might say, this is a complex and multifaceted issue, and we can make meaningful steps toward gender equality while we are working through it. In Dworkin's view, however, this would be a mistake:

You can't have equality or tenderness or intimacy as long as there is rape, because rape means terror. It means that part of the population lives in a state of terror and pretend—to please and pacify you—that it doesn't. So there is no honesty. How can there be? Can you imagine what it is like to live as a woman day in and day out with the threat of rape? (Dworkin 2019, 208)

The existence of such a culture simply precludes the possibility of real freedom and equality for women. Meaningful progress toward real freedom and equality cannot be made while some portion of society is terrorized by the threat of rape. Of course, this is not to say that nothing can be done to better the situation in general. Suppose we eradicate some particular manifestation of patriarchal power to which women have historically been subjected. Insofar as we have erased a preexisting injustice, one might think that we have made at least some progress toward freedom and equality for women. But this would be wrongheaded, on Dworkin's view, and would be so because of *the kind of thing that equality is*. For Dworkin, equality is not merely some abstract idea:

Equality is a practice. It is an action. It is a way of life. It is a social practice. It is an economic practice. It is a sexual practice. It can't exist in a vacuum. You can't have it at home if, when the people leave that home, he is in a world of supremacy based on the existence of his cock and she is in a world of humiliation and degradation because she is perceived to be inferior and because her sexuality is a curse. (Dworkin 2019, 206–7)

A culture of rape, then, is simply incompatible with meaningful political and social justice in society. We cannot even have an honest discussion about exactly what is involved in bringing about equality for women until the pervasive and ever-present threat that is the culture of rape is erased.

1.3. Responsibility

Having made clear what it is that we must put a stop to (what the culture is), and why we must put a stop to it (what its existence does to women), we are now in a position to address the question of how to go about it. Dworkin thinks that men, qua men, stand in a particular kind of relationship to this ongoing injustice such that their taking responsibility for it is necessary for its dismantling. I will return to this thought at length in what follows, but for now recall precisely what it is that they would be taking responsibility for in doing so. They would not be taking responsibility for any individual unjust action or belief. Rather, they would be taking responsibility for the fact that women live in a society in which the threat of sexual violence is used as a tool to exert power over them, and that irrespective of what any individual thinks about this fact, it is upheld and perpetuated by the structures and institutions we have in place (Dworkin 2019, 201). For Dworkin, the only way we might see an end to this deep-set, institutionalized, and systemic injustice is if men acknowledge that it is up to them to eradicate it.

At this stage one might wish to pause. Perhaps this is excessive. If the culture of rape is indeed as deep-set, institutionalized, and systemic as Dworkin suggested, should the responsibility not be dispersed among all genders? Why only men? And, in particular, even if it is particular to men, surely it should exclude “friendly” men, who we have stipulated are allies.

There are two reasons Dworkin seems to think that responsibility here lies specifically with men—including friendly ones. The first is just that, even if they don't themselves actively perpetuate and uphold the culture of rape, they share a social status with those who do. That is, those in society that most actively contribute to the culture of rape and most actively uphold and defend the systems and institutions that protect patriarchal power are, primarily, men. Part of the responsibility friendly men

bear, then, according to Dworkin, they bear in virtue of their sharing a social status (namely, the status “man”) with such individuals.

The second reason is closely related and pertains to the *power* that men, qua men, possess to make the necessary societal changes.³ Here is Dworkin again:

There’s no point in telling me. I’m only a woman. There’s nothing I can do about it. These men presume to speak for you. They are in the public arena saying that they represent you. If they don’t, then you had better let them know. (Dworkin 2019, 205)

“Friendly” men may claim that they do not want their power, that they did not ask for it, or even that they feel terribly bad about their possessing it. But they do, as a matter of fact, possess it. If they really do feel bad, then what better way to show it than to put their power to good use?

³ One might worry about whether there really is a distinction here. Suppose we think, for instance, à la Haslanger (2015), that social categories are defined at least partly *in terms of power*; then does this distinction not collapse? It is true that the Haslangerian line would complicate matters somewhat. If one goes this route when it comes to defining social categories, then one will indeed think that the relevant power men possess is not merely *derived from* but is rather *partly constitutive of* their social status as a man. I am happy with this tweak, even if it might well amount to concrete extensional divergences—i.e., in ruling *out* men who lack the relevant power and ruling *in* certain individuals of other genders who possess it. I lack the space here to adequately explore the differences that would result between opting for or against a Haslangerian approach. It is, however, worth pointing out that the relevant kind of power—i.e., the power Dworkin emphasises as particularly important with respect to this particular injustice—is not merely broad, sociopolitical power; rather, it is a more specific kind of power—namely, the ability to *get through to* and *speak on behalf of* men. This is the kind of power that, on Dworkin’s view, partly grounds men’s responsibility for redressing the culture of rape, and if the Haslangerian thinks of it as partly constitutive of their gender itself, then they will only disagree with non-Haslangerians on individuals who possess this particular kind of power. Having noted this complication, I now set it aside in what follows for the sake of simplicity and so as to walk in lockstep with the original Dworkin piece, wherein she strongly suggests that there are two *distinct* sources of men’s responsibility here: their merely sharing a social status with the unfriendly men who most actively uphold and perpetuate the injustice, and the particular kind of power they possess to get through to and speak on behalf of their group. My thanks to an anonymous referee at *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* for pressing me on this point.

The thought is that men are uniquely well positioned to dismantle the current state of affairs and that this is so irrespective of their opinion on the matter. It is no coincidence that the ones in society who have this status are the ones that have the power to end the culture of rape. If friendly men really are opposed to it, like they say they are, then it is their responsibility to use the power they possess—at least in part as a result of it—to put it to an end.

These two reasons both point to an important connection, then, between responsibility for redressing the culture of rape, on the one hand, and something that is common to all men, friendly and unfriendly, on the other hand (that is, their shared social status as men as well as the associated power they have in virtue of this status). Men bear responsibility, on Dworkin’s picture, in virtue of this status that they all share—friendly and unfriendly.

1.4. Desiderata for a Theory of Collective Responsibility

We now have a clear idea of both the nature of the injustice Dworkin draws our attention to as well as the way in which she thinks it needs to be redressed. I think that all of this raises an important and hitherto underexplored question: supposing we take for granted Dworkin’s claim that men taking responsibility for the culture of rape is indeed the method by which it can be put to an end, can we provide an account of collective responsibility that gets this result? We may now lay down some desiderata for a theory of responsibility in order that it can adequately play this role.

1) It cannot be overinclusive.

In counting all men as responsible, our account must not also count all gender identities as responsible in the same way.

2) It cannot be underinclusive.

Our account must include friendly men as well as unfriendly men; men who do not actively endorse and perpetuate the culture must nevertheless count as responsible.

3) It must be sufficiently fine-grained.

In counting men as responsible, our account must not entirely erase the distinction between unfriendly men, who actively endorse and perpetuate the culture, and friendly men, who do not.

4) It cannot be overly demanding.

As with any theory of responsibility, our account cannot play the role we want it to play if it renders its subjects responsible in such a way that they are unable to enact change.

I think that these four desiderata capture what a theory of responsibility would have to be like in order to vindicate Dworkin's claims.

2. Finding the Theory

The remainder of this article will be dedicated to finding a theory of responsibility that satisfies these desiderata. Before I proceed to my positive proposal, however, it will be useful to distinguish my project from a similar one, found in May and Strikwerda (1994).

I have noted that the current project—of finding a philosophical theory according to which all men are responsible for the culture of rape—is relatively underexplored in the literature to date. One notable exception to this, however, is Larry May and Robert Strikwerda's (1994) "Men in Groups: Collective Responsibility for Rape." May and Strikwerda aim to demonstrate that men in general are collectively responsible for the prevalence of rape in society because it is men in general who both contribute to and benefit from it. Their argument rests on five main points: (1) Rapists are responsible for the rapes they have committed, and most rapists are men; (2) Some men contribute to the prevalence of rape in society through their interactions with other men and thereby share responsibility for this prevalence; (3) Some men would be rapists if they were placed in a situation where their inhibitions against rape were removed and thereby share responsibility for the harms of rape with actual rapists; (4) Many men could have prevented other men from raping but failed to do so, and they share responsibility as a result; (5) Some men benefit from the existence of rape in society and thereby share responsibility for its existence. They highlight and elucidate some important points concerning the different ways in which men (who are not rapists) both contribute to and benefit from the institution of rape.

However, their project is importantly different from mine. In order to see how this is so, note first that men who fall under categories (1) through (4) are all *unfriendly* men. These men all actively contribute to the prevalence of rape in society insofar as they either rape women, would rape women if given the opportunity, or condone the raping of women through their interactions with other men. Now, I certainly agree that unfriendly men bear responsibility for the prevalence of rape in society, but the responsibility they bear qua unfriendly men will be *over and above* the responsibility they bear just qua men. I, following Dworkin, am interested specifically in the question of the responsibility of *friendly* men—that is, those men who sincerely claim to be feminists, who claim to be antirape, who claim to be allies. Aside from the fact that unfriendly men are responsible for rape, there is a particular and interesting question concerning whether and to what extent friendly men—whom we have stipulated do not actively endorse and perpetuate the culture of rape—are nevertheless

responsible for redressing it. *This* is the question that constitutes the sole focus of my project.

So much for (1) through (4), but what about (5)? Men who benefit from the prevalence of rape are not necessarily unfriendly men. Could it be that those friendly men who have not contributed to the culture of rape nevertheless bear responsibility because they benefit from it? I don't think so. The reason for this is that, as May and Strikwerda agree, not *all* men benefit from the prevalence of rape in society. The responsibility that is the focus of the current article is not, and should not, be contingent on the fact that men benefit from the existence of the culture of rape. The sentiment I am developing in this project—which found its voice in Dworkin and is gaining widespread credibility in public political discourse today—is that men, as a matter of fact, are well positioned, socially and politically, to do something more than mere performative gestures against the culture of rape. That is, whether or not they have directly contributed to its existence, men enjoy a social position that renders them capable of meaningful change in this domain and are thereby responsible for doing so. Their power to redress the culture may be importantly linked to their having benefitted from it, but it need not be, and the former is not derived from the latter.

2.1. Zheng's Role-Ideal Model

Having distinguished the current project from that of May and Strikwerda (1994), I now turn to my own positive proposal. In our search for an account of responsibility that can vindicate Dworkin's claims, I think that we would do well to start with the literature on collective responsibility for structural injustice. In the current section, I argue that Robin Zheng's (2018) *role-ideal model* (RIM) of collective responsibility for structural injustice is, *prima facie*, extremely well suited to play the role that we are looking for a theory to play.

In her article, Zheng characterizes structural injustice as injustice that “is maintained through the behavior of ordinary decent people whose choices are constrained by existing social, political, economic, and cultural institutions” (Zheng 2018, 869–70). It is the kind of injustice that may be present by virtue of the way a society's systems and institutions are set up, irrespective of whether any individual actively holds any problematic beliefs. Zheng seeks to answer the question as to how and in what sense any individual, in any given society, can be meaningfully held responsible for such sweeping and structural harms.

2.1.1. Attributability/Accountability

Zheng, building on Iris Marion Young (2011), draws the distinction between responsibility as *attributability* and responsibility as *accountability*. The former is a causal, metaphysical notion; it concerns whether and to what extent certain actions involve *genuine agency*, given that only such actions can constitute legitimate

grounds for blame or punishment (Zheng 2018, 872). Accountability, on the other hand, is grounded in the moral and the political, rather than the metaphysical. The thought here is that wherever there is some moral or political shortcoming in a society, then, irrespective of how exactly this shortcoming came about, the burdens of redress must be distributed across the community somehow. It is sometimes appropriate, on this model, to share the responsibility for rectifying a wrong among individuals with no direct, causal ties to the bringing about of that wrong. In this sense, these individuals will be thought of as accountably—though not attributively—responsible for the injustice. The value this distinction has for our present purposes should already be plain to see. The move to accountability carves out the precise theoretical space we were on the lookout for: a conception of responsibility that ties individuals in a meaningful sense to a wrong whose perpetuation they themselves do not necessarily actively contribute to.

2.1.2. Social Roles

Although we now have the conceptual space for an account of responsibility that ties individuals to structural injustices in the appropriate way, we still need to fill in the details about precisely what it is that forms this link between individual and structure.

For Zheng (2018, 873) the answer is our *social roles*. Here is how she defines them:

A social role R is a set of expectations E—predictive and normative—that apply to an individual P in virtue of a set of relationships P has with others (such that anyone standing in the same type of relationships as P occupies the same R), and where E is mutually maintained by P and others through a variety of sanctions. (873)

We are all responsible for structural injustice through and in virtue of the social roles we occupy because, on Zheng's picture, social roles are what constitute social structure (2018, 874) Social roles both *constrain* and *enable* individual actors; they simultaneously restrict and expand the ways in which an agent can act in certain contexts. One's role as a *teacher* or *mother*, for instance, plays a significant role in determining what it is that one can and cannot do—what they are expected to do, what they can get away with doing without reproach. Individual agents thus do not exist independently from the structures of which they are a part. Rather, to the contrary, these social structures emerge from individuals (together with others) collectively performing their individual social roles (874). Social roles, for Zheng, are "the site where structure meets agency" (876).

How, then, does this interconnected picture of individuals, roles, and structures function in society? Zheng (2018, 874), borrowing from sociological theory, invokes the metaphor of a biological system. In seeking to answer the question as to how societies are bound together in a relatively stable and ordered fashion, certain sociological theories point to *role differentiation*. Individuals understanding their different social roles, as well as their relationships to other roles, is what serves to structure and stabilize society itself:

Viewed as an organic whole, society thus functions as a *boundary-maintaining system*: when some people deviate from their roles, the rest of the system works to restore order, just as a homeostatic organism works to maintain a constant temperature, blood flow, and so on. (Zheng 2018, 874)

Social roles provide the link we need in order to connect individual agents to the unjust structures of which they are a part. It is through our social roles, for Zheng, that individuals *enact* structure; they are the site where structure meets agency (874). One’s causal connection to a structural wrong, then, is in an important sense, by the by. These social roles are part of what constitutes these structures, and so it is perfectly appropriate that each individual bears responsibility-as-accountability for rectifying them when they are unjust.

2.1.3. Role-Ideals

Before we set about applying Zheng’s theory to our specific task at hand, it will lastly be important to get clear on precisely what it is that each individual, through her social roles, is responsible for actually doing. Social roles provide the theoretical link between individual and structure such that we may make progress on the question of responsibility for structural injustices. However, they do not themselves tell us what it is that each individual—in their occupation of each social role—is responsible for doing.

A role, according to Zheng, is constituted by the collection of expectations and norms that apply to an individual in virtue of her relation to others in society. It follows that a role “must be such as to allow *different* individuals to occupy the *same* role” (Zheng 2018, 875). Performing a role *well*, then, consists in an ongoing process of interpreting the norms and expectations of the role and making individual decisions about how best to satisfy them. An individual’s own conception of how best to occupy her social role is what Zheng calls the “role-ideal.” Here’s how role-ideals are defined:

For every social role R occupied by an individual P, a role-ideal is P’s interpretation of how she could best satisfy the expectations

constituting R (based on P's own beliefs, values, commitments, abilities, and lived experience). (Zheng 2018, 875)

Role-ideals will thus vary in ways that social roles will not. Social roles are largely intersubjectively shared, whereas role-ideals may vary from person to person. What it takes to be a basketball coach, for example, will be roughly the same irrespective of context—presumably completing some coaching badges and convincing a club with a vacancy to hire you will suffice in most if not all contexts. What it takes to be a *good* basketball coach, on the other hand, may vary dramatically depending on who you ask. Perspectives on normative questions about the way the game ought to be played, the coaching styles most conducive to success, the ethos that best facilitates winning, and so on, will all factor into the latter but not the former. An individual seeking not just to fill this social role, but fill it well, must make a series of ongoing evaluative decisions.

Role-ideals, then, serve as the final theoretical tool we need in order to join all the dots. Let us now take stock. On Zheng's model, individuals are responsible in the *accountability* sense for structural injustices, and as such, they must bear part of the burden of redressing said injustices. The reason an individual bears any responsibility at all for such structural injustices is that they occupy social roles, and these are what uphold and perpetuate structural injustices. Social roles are the site where structure meets agency because they are the building blocks of social structure. Still, this may well be true of structures and societies in general, but none of it explains what each individual has any control over: What is it that I am actually responsible for doing? Every individual, according to Zheng, has control over her particular conception of what it is to fulfil a social role *well*. There is no set-in-stone way to fulfil a social role; it is up to individuals to make decisions about how to push the boundaries of their social roles. Social roles maintain structural injustice, and so they can be used to redress it. Each individual, through her conception of her role-ideals, *can* contribute, and is thereby *responsible for* contributing, to real, meaningful structural change.

2.2. Applying the Theory

Bringing together section 1 and section 2, we may now ask: Can Zheng's RIM be the theory to vindicate Dworkin's claims? I think our tentative answer ought to be yes.

This article set off in search of a way of substantiating the thought that all men—including "friendly" men—bear significant and meaningful responsibility for redressing the structural injustice of the culture of rape in society, which serves to systematically oppress and subordinate women. Zheng's framework can now be applied straightforwardly as follows. Provided "man" is a social role (I will return to this issue in detail in the next section), then all men are responsible for the culture of

rape that exists in our society by virtue of their occupying the social role “man,” which, itself, partly constitutes the structural injustice of a culture of rape. This, I contend, looks to be exactly what we needed. In order to see how, let us return to the desiderata I laid out in section 1.

1) *It cannot be overinclusive.*

The RIM will count all and only men as responsible in the relevant sense. Responsibility comes through and in virtue of one’s social roles. So long as it makes sense to think of “man” as a social role one can occupy, then it will apply to all men and will exclude those who are not men.

2) *It cannot be underinclusive.*

The conception of responsibility we are putting to work here is responsibility-as-accountability rather than responsibility-as-attributability. That one does not actively contribute to or perpetuate the injustice does not, on this conception of responsibility, render an individual free of responsibility. All men—friendly and unfriendly—have responsibility-as-accountability on the current account.

3) *It must be sufficiently fine-grained.*

The precise way in which the RIM will count all men responsible is nuanced enough to still make sense of the distinction between friendly and unfriendly men. Unfriendly men will have responsibility-as-attributability *over and above* their responsibility-as-accountability. The latter they possess just by virtue of their occupying the social role “man.”

4) *It cannot be overly demanding.*

Redressing the injustice, on the RIM, does not require that men abandon all their projects and drastically alter the trajectory of their lives. Men occupy the social role “man” anyway; it is up to individuals to make decisions about how to occupy it *well*—that is, in a way that redresses the injustice. Far from demanding too much, this demands of men only precisely as much as is required in order to make meaningful change.

Having now applied Zheng’s RIM to our current question, we see that the initial results look very promising. We can make sense of men’s being responsible for redressing the culture of rape insofar as we, following Zheng, think of responsibility in the accountability sense—irrespective of who has actively done what, there is an injustice in society that needs to be rectified, and the burdens for doing so need to be discharged in some way or other. Moreover, we can make sense of the idea that this

responsibility lies with men (as Dworkin would have it), insofar as “man” is the social role implicated in this particular structural injustice.

Before proceeding, however, it’s worth pausing to make two clarificatory points. The first concerns a slight difference between Zheng’s RIM and my own application of it here. Zheng is drawing the connection between individuals and structural injustices in general, rather than addressing any particular injustice, and she seems to think that everyone bears equal responsibility for redressing structural injustices, albeit responsibilities that are dischargeable in different ways. I, on the other hand, have no commitment nor inclination toward equal distribution of responsibility with respect to this particular injustice. I think, following Dworkin, that men play a particularly salient role in the upholding and perpetuation of this particular injustice and that their responsibility for redressing it is inevitably bound up with this role. But relatedly, it is important to point out that my proposal is not committed to men being *exclusively* responsible for redressing the culture of rape. Compatibly with everything I’ve said, we all might bear some equally distributed responsibility aside from men’s particular responsibility. Indeed, I have not here explored the contributions of other social roles. Instead, my project has been the narrow, Dworkin-inspired one of investigating whether we can make philosophical sense of the claim that men in particular bear a kind of special responsibility for redressing the culture of rape. Zheng’s RIM, I have argued, helps us to do just that.

3. Gender Roles

In the previous section I argued that the RIM does well by the desiderata set out in section 1; in the current section I consider and respond to a potential objection.

The problem, put simply, is that gender does not seem to sit neatly among the kind of social roles Zheng has in mind. It seems true for the paradigmatic cases of social roles Zheng considers—doctor, friend, teacher, and so on—that there is indeed a particular set of norms and expectations that, roughly, unify what it is to occupy each given social role, respectively. It makes sense, then, to think of an individual occupying any of these social roles and having a particular conception of what it is to do so *well*. Gender roles, however, are somewhat different. Gender roles, among other things, simply have a more global impact on one’s life. The norms and expectations of gender roles just seem far more varied and multifarious than those of the paradigmatic social roles.

The reason this is a worry is that it looks, at least *prima facie*, as though the way in which responsibility can be conferred upon an individual in virtue of their social roles might differ significantly depending on the nature of the social role. Zheng does note that different social roles will have different scope; some social roles will govern narrowly circumscribed spheres of activity, whereas others will have a wider impact on an agent’s life overall. Zheng (2018, 875) even cites “woman” as an example of the

kind of social role that will have this broader, global impact on an agent. Zheng seems to assume that such roles—given that they are still social roles—will fit into the RIM framework, but she does not detail precisely how. For Zheng’s purposes I think this is fine: her aim was to provide the theoretical link between individual agency and structural injustice in general. However, I have a particular and more narrow aim here, which is to explain the precise way in which men are responsible for the culture of rape. In other words, if my contention is that what makes all men responsible for the culture of rape is their occupying the specific social role “man,” then I had better detail the precise way in which social roles *like this one* confer responsibility. Failing to do so, I risk jeopardizing the plausibility of my proposal specifically with respect to desiderata (1) and (4). That is, I risk providing an account that doesn’t really explain what it is about men specifically that makes them responsible in the relevant way for the culture of rape, and further, I risk providing an account that doesn’t really explain what it is that men can do about redressing this culture.

Put differently, the problem is that for the RIM to play the role that I think it can play—of vindicating and supplementing Dworkin’s claims—gender roles really need to be social roles. And at least on the face of it, they look importantly different from the roles Zheng treats as paradigmatic in constructing her account. There are two distinct ways in which gender roles seem different from other social roles; let us now make them explicit. First, there is the *pervasiveness* of gender. This refers to the global impact a gender role seems to have on an individual agent’s life when compared to the other, more paradigmatic social roles one might occupy (teacher, doctor, friend, and so on). But second, there is also the differing nature of the norms and expectations that gender imposes upon an agent. The norms and expectations associated with the social role “doctor,” for instance, are importantly “out in the open,” endorsed and understood by society at large. But contrast this with gender roles, which seem by nature far more tacit and implicit. There is simply no such degree of shared understanding when it comes to the norms and expectations that constitute gender roles. Suffice it to note, then, that if gender roles are indeed social roles, they are at least not straightforwardly so. If my proposal for the precise way in which we ought to hold men responsible for the culture of rape is through and in virtue of their occupying the social role “man,” then I had better say something about the significant differences that seem to exist—at least on the face of it—between social roles *like this one* and the social roles Zheng treats as paradigmatic when constructing the RIM.⁴

⁴ See Kisolo-Ssonko (2019) for an illuminating analysis of social roles like gender and, in particular, race. I return to this piece in the next section.

3.1. Gender as a Mega Social Role

I think that the above warrants a tweak to the account I have been developing. In particular, in this section, I propose to supplement Zheng's RIM with Charlotte Witt's account of the metaphysics of gender.

Witt (2011, 79–80) characterizes gender as a *mega social role*: a special kind of social role that serves to unify, organize, and define one's membership in many—or perhaps all—other social roles. Witt thinks of gender as providing a principle of normative unity for social individuals. The thought is that individuals occupy multiple social roles, each of which have norms and expectations associated with them. Gender roles are importantly different, however, insofar as they affect the way in which one occupies all of their other social roles. Here is Witt (2011, 79):

If the doctor, who is also a parent, enters into these social positions as a woman, then the norms she follows in these roles are unified, organised and defined by her gender.

One is not simply a doctor, parent, and woman; rather, one enters her social roles “doctor” and “parent” *as a woman*. That is to say that what it means for this particular individual to occupy her social role as a doctor and as a parent would be altered if her gender role were different. It is important, for our purposes, to note that on Witt's account gender is still a social role in itself; there are still specific norms and expectations imposed on an individual just by virtue of their occupying one particular gender role rather than another. However, it is not simply another role on the list of social roles one might occupy. It is different from other social roles in that, just as we suspected, its impact is indeed global; it inflects one's membership in all other social roles (Witt 2011, 78).

We are now in a position to provide a strong answer to the question with which we began this section. Moving to theorizing gender as a mega social role allows us to explain that gender is indeed different from all other social roles—those that Zheng treats as paradigm. Witt's account of gender provides us with a story about precisely what that difference consists in. Crucially, though, the difference is not the kind of difference that stops us from applying Zheng's framework to our overall project of providing a theory that can vindicate Dworkin's claims. In order to see exactly how it works, recall that the problem we began this section with jeopardized my proposal specifically with respect to desiderata (1) and (4). Let us now return to these with our new theoretical tool in hand.

Desideratum (1) demands that our account counts only men as responsible in the relevant sense. Now, with the move from “man” as social role to “man” as mega social role, we have not lost the ability to differentiate the mega social role “man” from other gender roles. That is, theorizing gender roles as mega social roles can still

account for the fact that “man” will have a distinctive set of norms and expectations that one is subject to just by virtue of occupying the social role “man.” Anyone who does not occupy this mega social role will not be subject to these particular norms and expectations. Desideratum (4) demands that our account cannot render its subjects responsible in such a way that they are unable to act to redress the injustice. Having borrowed from Witt, our proposal is now strong on this front as well. If what is common to all members of the social role “man” is something that inflects many, or perhaps even all, of each man’s other social roles, then enacting their responsibility will similarly involve engaging these other social roles. Men will need to reflect on their particular role-ideals for all these other social roles in a different way. If they want to enact their responsibility and contribute to meaningful change, there will be no neatly defined sphere of activity upon which to focus. Of course, this will be complicated and, indeed, demanding. But desideratum (4) does not require that enacting one’s responsibility be *easy*, just that it does not render its subject altogether unable to act upon it.

One final concern one might have with the resulting proposal, at least for all I’ve said so far, is that it is worryingly individualistic in tenor. The thought would be that, having noted the deeply systemic and institutionalized nature of the culture of rape, are we now just to tell every man individually that he should try harder to be a better man?⁵

In a recent article, Joseph Kisolo-Ssonko (2019) insightfully and compellingly applies Margaret Gilbert’s (2006) notion of collective intentionality to ground a kind of racialized social normativity—to make sense of the idea that race is a kind of social role, with corresponding collective aims, desires, intentions, and norms. I think that it is helpful to think of my project here as very much in the spirit of Kisolo-Ssonko’s but applied to gender rather than race. Moreover, I think that doing so will help dispel the force behind the individualistic objection.

Following Gilbert (2006), we can make sense of the claim “We will x” or “We are x-ing” in one of two ways: summative or nonsummative. The summative sense is apt when every individual, thought of as an individual, will indeed x, or is indeed x-ing. The nonsummative sense is apt, on the other hand, when the group—that is, the relevant “we”—have jointly committed to x or to x-ing. A racialized social normativity, for Kisolo-Ssonko, is thus grounded in an individual’s being bound by the collective intentionality of the “we” picked out by the relevant racial group of which they are a part—that is, “we white people.” Not all groups are like racial groups, in this sense; they do not all have Gilbert’s notion of collective intentionality, which grounds normative commitments, obligations, and responsibility. Members of such groups do

⁵ Thanks to an anonymous referee at *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* for pressing me on this objection.

not occupy any normatively significant social role, at least qua their being a member of such a group. Red-haired-in-Edinburgh, to borrow Kisolo-Ssonko's (2019, 182) apt example, is not a social role in the same way that being black is.

Thinking of my project as in keeping with the spirit of Kisolo-Ssonko's helps resist the claim that the resulting picture is unduly individualistic. The resulting proposal is as follows. Individuals can be held meaningfully responsible for structural injustices in virtue of their occupying social roles, which, in part, serve to maintain and perpetuate such injustices. In our particular case, the social role "man" does so with respect to the injustice of the culture of rape. Now, while it is true that this gives us the normative tools to hold individuals accountable for a wrong they do not actively contribute to, it does not mean that all that is required for progress is each man individually trying their best to strive toward their role-ideal. Rather, I contend, my proposal implies that what's needed is a fundamental altering of what it means to occupy this social role well. Perhaps this can only be done through individuals first setting an example—indeed, I have not commented here on which will be the best the strategies for implementing change—but such change likely could not, even in principle, be implemented by the actions of any individual man alone, even the most powerful of them. There may be many different ways to realize such change, but it certainly won't be through the isolated actions or intentions of any individual man. Men are a "we" in Gilbert's nonsummative sense, which denotes a social role with a corresponding social normativity.

As we can now see, the responsibility that emerges from this picture, far from being individualistic, is grounded in the collective intentionality of the social role. Men are, in essence, responsible for altering what it means to be a good man—for changing the norms and expectations they impose upon one another, and on themselves—such that it is no longer conducive to the perpetuation of the culture of rape. If this is the end, then the means will not—indeed, cannot—be individualistic.

Conclusion

The point in the last section concerning the way in which the proposal suggests that men go about enacting their responsibility, I think, highlights something particularly promising about the proposal itself. In particular, there is a satisfying alignment between the nature of the injustice and the nature of the proposed solution. I have not argued specifically for this in the current article—because this is not a necessary feature of a theory that meets our needs—but I think the fact that it has emerged highlights the fittingness of the proposed solution.⁶ As I argued at the

⁶ Here I certainly don't mean to suggest that I think the issue is therefore straightforward. It is not, and in any case, it is not made any more so by anything I

outset, I take Dworkin to be drawing our attention to an injustice that is by nature structural, systemic, and institutionalized. That is, one does not eradicate this culture of rape by eradicating particular actions and beliefs. The culture itself is more pervasive and all-encompassing than this; it harms women in all aspects of their lives and is maintained and perpetuated by our systems and institutions. It is perfectly appropriate, therefore, that the picture we have ended up with requires that men embody and enact responsibility through many—and perhaps all—of their social roles, rather than in one particular sphere of social activity. As mentioned above, I have neither set this explicitly as a desideratum nor provided arguments for this claim. I mention it only to point out that the picture’s coming together so neatly suggests that the solution I have provided is an especially promising one.⁷

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have argued for here. Merely taking steps toward implementing an effective solution to the culture of rape will involve navigating and negotiating a myriad of complex, practical issues that the current article has not even begun to address. The point I wish to make here pertains solely to the theoretical alignment between the nature of the current proposal and the nature of the problem it seeks to address.

⁷ This article would and could not have been written without the generous support and encouragement of Katharine Jenkins. Thanks also to Katie Moody, Dario Mortini, and two anonymous referees at *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* for helpful and constructive comments. The research for this article was supported by SGSAH (the Scottish Graduate School of Arts and Humanities).

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