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On Not Blaming and Victim Blaming

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RESUMEN

En este artículo se muestra que ser culpable por acusar a una víctima es estructuralmente similar a ser culpable por no acusar. Ambos fenómenos se ajustan a los perfiles tradicionales de la responsabilidad moral: la condición de conocimiento y la condición de control. Pero lo interesante es que en ellos conocimiento y control son condiciones interdependientes. Al tener una relación con otra persona se dispone de distintos grados de conocimiento sobre ella. A su vez, este conocimiento proporciona distintos grados de influencia mutua a los sujetos de la relación. Ejemplos en los que alguien es especialmente culpable por no acusar a un amigo, a un colega cercano o a un cónyuge así lo atestiguan. La interdependencia de estas dos condiciones en las relaciones interpersonales aclara (parcialmente) por qué es moralmente malo acusar a una víctima. Se argumenta que los que acusan a las víctimas padecen una forma de miopía moral al fijarse únicamente en lo que la víctima podría hacer, por el hecho de tener algún tipo de relación con el causante del abuso, para evitar este. De manera particular, se atiende a los casos en los que la miopía moral se alimenta de relatos y esquemas de género jerárquicos y misóginos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *responsabilidad moral, ética de la acusación, acusación a las víctimas, normas, misoginia.*

ABSTRACT

In this paper we show that being blameworthy for not blaming and being blameworthy for victim blaming are structurally similar. Each involve the two traditional contours of moral responsibility: a knowledge condition and a control condition. But interestingly, in these cases knowledge and control are importantly interrelated. Being in a relationship with another person affords us varying degrees of knowledge about them. This knowledge in turn affords agents in relationships varying degrees of influence over one another. Cases where an agent is especially blameworthy for failing to blame a friend, a close colleague, or a spouse highlight this. The interdependence of these two conditions in interpersonal relationships sheds (partial) light on why victim blaming is morally wrong. We argue that victim blamers suffer from a kind of moral myopia by only focusing on what the victim could do, in virtue of their being in a relationship of some sort with their abuser, to avoid abuse. We focus specifically on cases where such moral myopia is fueled by misogynistic and hierarchical gender schema and scripts.

KEYWORDS: *Moral Responsibility, Ethics of Blame, Victim Blaming, Norms, Misogyny.*

I. INTRODUCTION¹

Victim blaming is a serious moral wrongdoing. In this paper we show that being blameworthy for failing to blame a wrongdoer and being blameworthy for victim blaming are sometimes similar, and we can use the former to help understand the latter. We show that, with respect to at least one kind of victim blaming, both kinds of cases involve claims around the two traditional contours of moral responsibility: a knowledge condition and a control condition. By assessing cases where a person is blameworthy for failing to blame someone else, we argue that the two cannot always be understood as independent conditions. Rather, they are often interdependent in complex and interesting ways that hinge on our being socially situated moral agents. Examining this interdependence is key to understanding why it might be appropriate in certain instances to blame others for failing or refusing to blame but not appropriate, and in fact wrong, to blame victims.

We are not making a claim about all cases of victim blaming.² Instead, we take cues from feminist philosophy and contemporary theorizing about moral responsibility to focus on an important class of cases, where victim blaming occurs in a misogynistic social context. In such cases, victims are blamed for failing to blame and otherwise protest or fight back against perpetrators. What we take to be theoretically interesting about such cases is that a more traditional view of moral responsibility, focusing on knowledge and control, can be enhanced by a social dimension. From a practical perspective, a clearer eyed view of what goes wrong when we blame wrongly is an important part of figuring out corrective strategies. That being said, we do hold that such cases are reflective of commonplace practices of blaming, and that examining such cases does give us an insight into a more general ethics of blaming.

What is so important about the social dimension? For many in the moral responsibility literature, our moral sanctioning practices are fundamentally (or paradigmatically) public and communicative [e.g., Watson (2008), pp. 116-121; Darwall (2006), pp. 70-74; McKenna (2012), pp. 174-175]. Strawson (1962) first articulated a theory of moral responsibility that highlights this feature of praise and blame. On this view, praise and blame are expressed *reactive attitudes*, emotions that are particularly reactive to the intentions of other persons. To be held responsible is to be the target of one of these attitudes.

According to Strawson's view, for Amanda to blame Ben is for her to express to Ben that she believes Ben has acted with ill will (and so act-

ed wrongly) *by resenting Ben*. For Amanda to praise Ben is for her to express that she believes Ben has acted with good will *by showing Ben gratitude*. Fundamental for our purposes is the fact that our moral responsibility practices are communicative, as seen in the examples with Amanda and Ben. When one holds the other morally responsible, she is communicating things to the other via expressed reactive attitudes like resentment and gratitude. Thus, the expression of reactive attitudes is often taken to be a kind of moral address, where blame as resentment, for instance, is addressed to an intended recipient.³ In talking about blame, we will focus primarily on this Strawsonian-inspired, communicative view of blame.

Building upon this communicative view of blame many in the literature recognize that blame inevitably takes place within a background of social conditions: institutions, norms, and a background of shared social meanings that necessarily mediate our blaming practices.⁴ Of course, though, one can be interested in many different aspects of our practices of moral responsibility, and accounts have typically focused on prototypical instances of blame; we want to think about how these practices manifest against a backdrop of morally pernicious social norms and expectations.

The strategy for the paper, then, is as follows: we will first examine cases where an agent is blameworthy for not blaming. In such a case, the blamer is alive to the wider social context in which the blameworthy agent – the one who has failed to blame – is situated. We then offer a two-stage diagnosis of what is wrong about victim blaming. What goes wrong with respect to victim blaming, however, is that these token instances of blaming ignore the wider context in which such acts occur, focusing narrowly on the social situation of the victim alone. We term this narrowing of focus *moral myopia*. In many instances of victim blaming, the best explanation of this myopia is misogynistic and sexist social practices.

II. SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS, KNOWLEDGE, AND CONTROL

Now, one might rightly ask: why does a paper that purports to examine victim blaming start off with examining moral responsibility for not blaming? Focusing on these sorts of cases draws out the role of what we call special relationships – like friendship – that play in responsibility for blaming.

The best way to understand these special relationships is to see them as relations between persons occupying positions within a social structure, one that is inevitably shaped and mediated by shared social practices. This relationship illuminates the structural features of claims about one's failing to blame, and as such, these cases are worthy of close attention.

To see the importance of special relationships for responsibility for not blaming, let's examine a modified version of R. Jay Wallace's (1994), pp.76–77 case of the charming colleague:

Charming Colleague: Jane is a philosophy professor. Her colleague and friend, John is often disparaging and condescending not only towards his colleagues, but his students. John and Jane are close friends, however, and he might be receptive to Jane's criticism, as he holds her opinion in high regard. Despite his mean demeanor, John can be exceedingly charming when he is in the right mood. Therefore, whenever she tries to criticize John, Jane cannot bring herself to do so. Jane rationalizes this behavior by saying: "I am not to blame for not being able to criticize him, I think he's just such a charmer! Besides, as a friend, it would be inappropriate for me to chastise him."

We can understand Jane's claim as involving both an exemption and an excuse: Jane claims that as John's friend, she should be excused from blame for failing to chastise him. Moreover, she claims that she just finds John so darn charming. As a friend who is especially susceptible to his charm, she just cannot bring herself to blame him. Thus, she thinks the special relationship between John and herself, one of close friendship, makes it inappropriate for her to chastise John.

Much seems to turn on the special relationship in Jane's attempts to deny responsibility. Yet it seems appropriate to blame Jane for her failure to blame John precisely because of the special relationship. That is, it is by virtue of her friendship with John that she is able to get through to him where other persons would fail to do so. Blaming Jane for failing to initiate moral address is not the same as ignoring the friendship between Jane and John, as Jane would have it. Rather, it seems to be built on the fact that Jane should be held responsible for failing to blame John because of the relationship they have.

On what grounds might someone blame Jane, then? It is widely maintained that in order to be morally responsible, a person must have

some pertinent knowledge about what they are doing (i.e., do they know that the action is right or wrong or permissible?) and a kind of control over their own actions. Call these the knowledge condition and the control condition, two necessary (and perhaps jointly sufficient) conditions on being morally responsible. Many situate the debate over free will within the context of the control condition. Free will *just is* the kind of control needed to be morally responsible according to these theorists [e.g., see: Pereboom (2001), p. xxii, Mele (2006), p. 17, and McKenna (2008, p. 187)]. Although we agree about how to think about the free will problem, for our purposes here we can set aside larger questions about the exact nature of the control in question, and whether or not it is compatible with determinism. We will assume that at least some persons can be morally responsible for what they do, and so have the requisite control. We will also assume that people can know the moral status of their actions. Our interest is not in either the knowledge or control condition *per se*, but rather, how they interact, and how that interaction is mediated by social contexts, like special relationships.

Let's return to Jane and John. On the one hand, the addresser (the person blaming Jane) is making a claim about the addressee's (Jane) ability to change the situation through her criticism of John. This part of the address is implicitly relying on some notion of control that Jane has over John. The special relationship between Jane and John gives Jane the unique opportunity to blame John, and therefore alter his behavior and modify his attitudes. She has a special influence over John in virtue of their close friendship. It is because Jane is in this relationship with John that makes her failure to blame him starker. Independent of any considerations about herself, John is a fitting or apt target of blame, of course. But Jane seems to have a special reason to be someone who blames him. Again, we will set aside complicated questions about the free will debate here, (although we suspect that the control Jane has regarding John does not require an ability to do otherwise), and note that it is Jane's closeness to John affords her an ability to (perhaps) make a difference to what John in turn does. This makes it seem like her responsibility hinges on the *outcome* of her blaming. But that is a mistake. She can't control what John does! That she is an apt candidate for blame because she might have made a difference, and her choosing not to blame seems to reveal a lack of moral concern. (More on that in a second).

Notice that there is an important interdependence between control and knowledge in this case. It is because of Jane's special relationship

that she should have knowledge about how to make John understand what he has done. For instance, she might know how to specifically blame him so as to make him feel guilt, and to thereby motivate him to modify his behavior and attitudes. Moreover, she should have knowledge that her omission of blame is harmful. It is her special position as John's friend, then, that makes it appropriate for others to blame her for her refusal or inability to blame John.⁵ Generally speaking, the control and knowledge conditions don't have such a consequentialist flavor to them. Nor is the only special reason Jane has to blame John a forward-looking consideration about her ability to modify his attitudes and behavior, for she might have a reason to be someone who blames him because it is fitting or appropriate to blame one's friends in virtue of your being their friend. The important point, though, is that friends like Jane have a special degree of knowledge and control sufficient for moral responsibility for failing to blame.

There is of course, a technical term for the special position that Jane is in: this refers to the *standing* she has with regards to John.⁶ Because Jane stands in a special relationship to John, not only does she have an opportunity to blame him (which she has recognized but failed to take up), but she should also be cognizant of the kinds of harms her non-blaming will bring about from her unique vantage point, afforded to her through the relationship she has with John as both a friend and a work colleague. She seems to lack moral concern for the harms her failure contributes to. What exactly are these harms? While we do not take this to be an exhaustive list, we shall provide a brief taxonomy of the harms involved.

We can speak roughly of three kinds of harm corresponding to four areas: (a) the harm done to John by Jane's failure to blame, (b) the harm to victims of John's behavior, and (c) the harm to the moral community writ large. (This last harm is tied to the moral significance of the act of blaming; although as we shall see, this too can be taken too far).

Of all the three kinds of harms involved, perhaps (a) is the most controversial. What harm is done to John? On one interpretation, this might seem insensitive to those whom John has hurt through his actions. He is after all, the one who is being disparaging and condescending. So, how can he be *harmed* through Jane's non-blaming? Even if we leave that aside, we still face another problem: on what grounds can we say that John is harmed? And didn't we acknowledge that blaming can cause harm to the person blamed? So somehow blaming and not blaming can *both* cause harm?

These are pertinent and sharp objections. Here's what we say. In blaming Jane, the addressee's blame is aimed, at least in part, at showing Jane that as a result of her standing in a certain relationship with John, *she* should be cognizant of a set of possible harms to John. That is, the harms in question can be made sense of *internal* to Jane's practical standpoint as a friend. Jane should recognize that John's behavior is in some way impairing his ability to form proper interpersonal relationships, frustrates some of his goals (to be a good faculty member), and goes against some of his core interests and beliefs (his interests to be a good professor, mentor, his beliefs that to be a good mentor he should be caring towards his students and colleagues, and so on). This list is not exhaustive, but simply point out that Jane should be aware of the harms to John.

Notice that this highlights how special relationships come in degrees, and thereby, one's moral responsibility regarding the purview of said relationships. If Jane were not such a good friend, her failure to blame John would be diminished to some degree. This is not to say that it is inappropriate for persons who do not know each other well to blame one another, rather, that knowing someone well and caring for them places special demands on someone.⁷ It is precisely because Jane stands in a close relationship to John that she is more likely to change in his behavior and attitudes. Again, these two components of Jane's position vis-à-vis John do not stand apart: it is because she stands in such a relationship to John that she should be more cognizant of the various harms that occur to him and to those he interacts with. It is this relationship that makes the control condition salient in that she can intervene to prevent these harms through moral address, i.e., by blaming. Of course, this assumes that Jane as a friend wants the best for John, which presumably includes desiring, wanting, and wishing that things go well for him. This is implicit in the account we have given.

From here, filling out the claim that Jane should have been cognizant of the potential harms outlined in (b) and (c) is relatively simple. As a member of the philosophy department and someone who cares about her fellow faculty members and students, Jane presumably would desire, want, wish that they do not undergo emotional distress whenever they interact with John. Similarly, upon reflection, Jane might find that her inability to criticize John might lead to an overall harm to the community and the department as a whole: it might send out a signal that she is implicitly condoning such behavior, or that she does not care about the welfare, interests, desires, and so on of the members of the department.

A further point about Jane's knowledge in this case can be made: Jane is also a teacher herself, and so her special relationship to her own students, and the student body in general, makes her failure to blame John even more obviously blameworthy.

It is important to note that in filling out the structure of blaming Jane, we have not said anything about how this might impact the way one views *John's* responsibility for his actions and demeanor. One might be tempted to extrapolate from what has been said so far to say that John might not be aware of the effects of his actions, and that Jane's failure therefore absolves him of responsibility. Such an argument, however, fails to make the distinction again between Jane's vantage point and John's vantage point. That is, when the moral address is made to Jane, it is made to criticize *her* failure. This might or might not be relevant to the question of John's responsibility. Blaming Jane for her failure to admonish John does not entail that John is not responsible for his behavior and demeanour. One can blame Jane for failing to blame John and also consistently admonish John for his behavior. (Indeed, John is very blameworthy!)

So, the independence between knowledge and control seems to underpin a common form of blame, grounded in the thought that a person should have known something in virtue of a special relationship. This sort of case raises important questions about blameworthiness for ignorance in general, but we will set those aside.⁸ We have been thinking about such cases in a narrower context, namely, how special relationships afford agents privileged epistemic positions. We now will go on to argue that social and institutional roles can likewise afford agents privileged epistemic positions. Then, finally, we will turn to a class of victim-blaming cases, which seem to turn on a deep misunderstanding of these epistemic positions.

III. SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL ROLES

Let's consider another case drawn from the popular British TV series *Broadchurch*.

Broadchurch: A young boy has been murdered in a typical British seaside town. While the entire series of events that led to the apprehension of the murderer are gripping, we shall not recap them here. Of interest to us is the blaming that occurs after the murderer

is apprehended. It turns out that the murderer (Joe Miller) is the husband of one of the police officers investigating the murder (Ellie Miller). In a dramatic scene after the murderer has been apprehended, the mother of the deceased child (Beth Latimer) runs up to Ellie and shouts “how could you not have known?! How could you not have known?!” as Ellie attempts to apologize for her husband’s actions.

It is constantly implied throughout the series that Ellie has absolutely no knowledge of her husband’s actions, and in discussing this case we shall make that presumption.

Of course, one might question the need to examine such a highly stylized case. We submit that the structure of the address “how could you not have known?!” is a commonplace one, but the scene from *Broadchurch* brings this to light particularly vividly in the context of Ellie’s social roles. Specifically, we mean here that in virtue of her position in an institutional role (a police officer) and as someone intimately familiar with the murderer (as his wife), Ellie is in a special epistemic position.

What we can see from this case is that control and knowledge are once again tightly interwoven. Ellie, Beth thinks, should have been able to see that her husband was guilty all along because of two important roles that she occupies: first, as Joe’s spouse, and second, as a police officer. From Beth’s perspective, Ellie had the opportunity to truly know her husband, as well as the ability to spot evidence pertinent to the very crime she was investigating. And so, she should have been in a very well-placed position to either prevent the death of her child or more immediately recognize that it was her husband who was the guilty party. In other words, the special relationship between the officer and the murderer should have provided the officer the opportunity with some relevant evidence to the truth and should have motivated her to act upon it.

Part of what makes Ellie blameworthy, Beth might think, is the fact she is a police officer, and this puts her in a special relationship to the public. Not only does Ellie have special knowledge about her husband *and* special knowledge about the case, but she also has a special *obligation* that is grounded in her role as a police officer that makes her epistemic position all the more relevant.

Another way to phrase Beth’s expression of blame and the corresponding anger she feels towards her is to say that Beth recognizes that Ellie’s special relationships have modified her standing to blame others.

Particularly, Ellie's special relationships have provided Ellie with special obligations. Most importantly, Ellie's position as a police officer places Ellie into a relationship with Beth; Ellie's special obligation to the public is tokened as a special relationship to Beth in particular. Thus, Beth's rage is felt as both an expression of Ellie's general failure to meet her obligations as a police officer and her particular failing to meet her obligation to Beth and her son. Of course, this special relationship is at bottom *institutional* — it is not purely moral. Yet, this feature is typical of the kinds of social roles we inhabit in public space.

In *Charming Colleague*, we saw that special relationships can create an interesting interdependence between an agent's knowledge and the control she has with respect to a given situation. Being in a special relationship with someone provides unique epistemic access and thereby unique control over another person through potential moral address. Thus, one's standing to blame or praise is modified (strengthened in the case of *Charming Colleague*). Blaming someone for failing to blame is thus a form of moral address that tries to bring someone to account for failing to act on their special standing. As we saw with Jane, this failure can arise from feelings provided by the special relationship. With *Broadchurch*, we see that this failure can arise also from our social and institutional roles. Ellie stands in a special relationship to her husband, but also has social obligations to the public at large. By way of her institutional role, she also has a relationship with Beth. This feature of special relationships, that we often are in them with other people by way of institutional obligations, will play an important role in understanding other cases.

One important difference between the cases is that it seems like Jane has good reason to blame John and so is blameworthy for not blaming John. But it is not obvious that Ellie really *could* have known that her husband was the murderer, in spite of their having a special relationship. Beth's understandable rage relies on the assumption that Ellie could have, in virtue of the pertinent social roles Ellie plays in the case as a wife and as a police officer. This goes some way towards illustrating the powerful presuppositional role special relationships play in our practices of moral responsibility. Indeed, it is worth noting here that in this case, the mother's focus is on Ellie, and on her failure to know the truth about her husband as the murderer. The focus has shifted away from the real perpetrator, Ellie's husband, on to Ellie *precisely because* she is married to the murderer and a police officer.

Unfortunately, many cases of victim blaming with respect to domestic abuse seem to follow this pattern too. Individuals are chastised

for their failure to blame their abusive partners and are often presumed to be partially responsible for whatever harm occurs, thus shifting focus away from real perpetrators. As with the previous two cases, we will give a brief description of a case and then examine the relationship between failure to blame and responsibility in more detail. Before we continue, a word of warning: the next case we examine contains descriptions of domestic assault.

IV. VICTIM BLAMING AS MORAL MYOPIA

Consider the following case:

Palmer: In February 2014, a National Football League (NFL) player Ray Rice and his then-fiancée Janay Palmer were both arrested for assault at the Revel Casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Celebrity news website TMZ later posted a video showing Rice “punching his fiancée, now his wife, in the face, leaving her motionless on the floor ... He then dragged her unconscious body from the elevator” [Kantor (2014)]. After the video was posted, the NFL carried out an investigation, and Palmer was asked to testify against Rice. She declined. Later in the year, Palmer publicly defended Rice on social media through her Instagram account [ibid.]. Palmer’s actions polarized public opinion, with many individuals arguing that she was enabling Rice’s abuse.⁹ Palmer also married Rice later in the year, and this again provoked many responses with some individuals claiming that Palmer’s refusal to blame Rice and her subsequent marriage to him not only mitigated his responsibility, but also made Palmer blameworthy for her earlier predicament.¹⁰

Many might find such responses to Janay Palmer *prima facie* objectionable and insulting. We agree.

In what follows, we will offer a two-part diagnosis of victim blaming with respect to domestic abuse cases, specifically domestic abuse cases involving women in a pervasive misogynistic social environment, which we take to be a paradigmatic form of victim blaming. Whether our analysis can be extended to other cases of victim blaming is a separate matter beyond the scope of this paper.

First, we will employ the earlier cases to argue that victim blaming of this kind we are interested in its general form might be understood as a failure to address or engage all parties involved in a morally significant incident, as in *Broadchurch*. Victim blaming can thus be thought of as a kind of moral myopia.

This analysis of victim blaming however, while illuminating in some respects, is limited without a sufficient theory of why third parties tend to focus their attention on victims. In the second part of the diagnosis, we argue that a complete understanding of this moral myopia must not only understand it as a failure to engage all parties addressed but also situate it within a broader misogynistic and sexist social environment which unfortunately plays a crucial role in facilitating our social interactions, including our blaming practices. So, we will return to the idea of special relationships and social roles in this context.

Before we develop this diagnosis in detail, a word on why a diagnosis is needed in the first place. As the *New York Times* notes, many instances of domestic abuse have a similar structure, and victims of domestic abuse are often asked “why don’t you leave, why don’t you get out?” [Giorgis (2014)]. However, this approach backfires, as isolation is typically part of the cycle of violence, and victims have very few or close to no exit options [Ibid.]. The claim that victims of domestic abuse are enabling their own abuse through their failure or refusal to blame perpetrators and stand up for themselves is thus a common one. It also has serious practical repercussions. Understanding why persons are tempted to make such claims and analyzing what goes wrong when they do make such claims helps us to not only recognize what is conceptually wrong with victim blaming cases like these, but also develop new ways of responding.

With that in mind, we return to our examination of victim blaming. The first thing to note is that as in *Charming Colleague*, even if Palmer is blameworthy for her refusal to blame (which itself is doubtful), it does not follow that Rice has been absolved of responsibility. One can consistently blame Palmer for her refusal to blame Rice while also blaming and indeed holding Rice responsible for his actions, which in this case were the cause of grievous harm. This is puzzling given that, in such cases, attention typically shifts towards the person with more direct standing to blame. (Indeed, we can imagine someone being so frustrated with Jane over the fact that she can’t bring herself to blame John for his condescending behaviour that they almost forget that *John* is the person really doing wrong in the first place).

So, the “why don’t you leave?” response to victims of domestic abuse fails to take into account that interpersonal relations are n-place relations (monogamous spousal relations being a two-place relationship), and only focuses on one party in the relation. And this seems to be a failure that can occur in cases where a person blames another for not blaming. This is a mundane point, but it is an important one, and unfortunately, one that bears repeating. It goes without saying that part of recognizing the social background of special relationships involves an examination of all parties in the relationship.

In its most general terms, in a given instance of victim blaming, the structure of moral address is a 3-place relation: blamer, abuser, and victim. When the blamer blames the victim, the blamer is simply not addressing the abuser. This falls out just from the structure of moral address in these instances. Part of the problem with victim blaming, then, is that victim blamers place undue emphasis on the actions of the victim, and in directing blame towards them, ignores the actions of the abuser.

We might think of victim blamers, therefore, as engaging in what we might call *moral myopia*. As we understand the term, moral myopia occurs when individuals are so focused on certain morally salient aspects of a situation such that other moral aspects of the situation are ignored. Alternatively, certain moral features of the situation are disproportionately emphasized to the exclusion or neglect of others. This sort of myopia perhaps features in *Broadchurch*, where Ellie’s failure to know about her husband becomes the focus of blame, rather than her husband who is actually the murderer. In the case of victim blaming, individuals place disproportionate emphasis on the actions of the victim, often ignoring or severely discounting the role of the abuser. Most charitably, we can interpret the victim blamer as legitimately and sincerely concerned about the abused party. If that is the case, then a legitimate question can be posed: why should the focus be on the victim and not the perpetrator?¹¹

Part of the wrong of victim blaming then, is that it employs blame inequitably — it shifts the focus from the perpetrator to the victim, and this over-emphasis is often, as we have suggested, the result of being focused on certain features of the situation at the exclusion of others.

There might be different kinds of moral myopia, and it may be driven by different reasons in different cases. Here, we can at least distinguish between two different kinds, corresponding to two different kinds of mistakes on the part of a victim blamer. In some cases of victim

blaming, there is an inappropriate focus on the victim, but victim blamers do not believe or hold that the perpetrator is blameless. This strikes us as an epistemic mistake. Perhaps in such cases, a person might be persuaded to take a more balanced view of the situation as an adequate corrective, highlighting that victim blamers make a mistake by overemphasizing the role that the victim played. In more extreme cases, however, where victim blamers focus *exclusively* on the role of the victim and hold that the perpetrator is blameless, advocating for a more balanced view is unlikely to work. Here, we would need to call attention to the fact that the victim blamer has made an *evaluative* error. They might not only mistakenly focus on the control the victim has in a situation, but they might think they *ought* to be focusing exclusively on the victim. Perhaps they don't recognize the victim as such, overemphasizing the victim's agency in bringing about the harm. This leads the victim blamer to entirely exclude the role the perpetrator played, which should be the *primary* focus of the victim blamer. Here, a more balanced view is unlikely to mitigate the victim blaming response. (More on how to deal with this problem of focus in the next section).¹²

However, while the inequitable nature of victim blaming highlights an important aspect of what is wrong with victim blaming, this is still an incomplete explanation. Why do victim blamers seem to have moral myopia? We submit that we cannot fully understand the causes and effects of the moral myopia involved in victim blaming specifically without examining it as a social practice. We turn to this argument in the next section.

V. VICTIM BLAMING, MISOGYNY, AND SOCIAL NORMS

In this section, we argue that to better understand the moral myopia involved in victim blaming cases of the sort under discussion, we must understand it as a misogynistic social practice. Here, we understand the term misogyny not as a psychological state but as a property of a social environment that aims to uphold patriarchal norms in the face of non-compliance, following Kate Manne (2017).¹³

To be clear, we are not saying that victim blaming is necessarily a misogynistic social practice. Since victim blaming is often misogynistic, however, it is a useful starting point of analysis. To begin with, 1) women are more frequently targets of victim blaming than men,¹⁴ 2) gender biases lead to greater victim blaming for women in sexual assault and domestic abuse cases,¹⁵ 3) men are more likely to hold victims of rape or

domestic abuse, particularly women, somewhat responsible for the incident;¹⁶ 4) victim blaming frequently takes place in the context of, or in response to, women's protestations about the behavior or men or a social climate that tolerates domestic abuse and sexual assault,¹⁷ 5) as we will argue, victim blaming often relies upon implicit assumptions that involve hierarchical gendered notions of family and sexuality. Victim blaming can be a misogynistic social practice in all of these ways. And it can be misogynistic in some but not all of these ways. Perhaps it can be misogynist without any of these five features. Yet if we are to have a complete diagnosis of what goes wrong in victim blaming, we cannot ignore the fact that it can be misogynistic in these ways, and how victim blaming is used to support other misogynistic practices and behavior. In particular, victim blaming can often work to hide or erase misogynistic and sexist beliefs. So, again, thinking about the relationship between misogyny and victim blaming is at least a useful starting point for theorizing about victim blaming in general.

We can see the latter point more clearly by examining a potential response from someone who might attempt to defend victim blaming by drawing upon the earlier discussion. One might argue that the special relationship Palmer has with Rice (as a fiancé and later, a spouse) gives her special standing to blame Rice. It seems that just as Jane should be held blameworthy for her failure to blame John because of her special position towards him, so should victims such as Palmer. If special relationships come in degrees, then it seems as though the spousal relationship (in certain cultural contexts) is a particularly intimate one where the spouse has unique influential control over his or her partner. This is reflected in *Broadchurch*: blame directed towards Ellie might be considered appropriate partially because of her spousal relationship with Joe, which gives her unique control both in terms of influencing him and because it might give her more epistemic access to certain facts about his behavior.

An obviously misogynist form of this response will play on a different and more social-institutional special relationship between Palmer and Rice. Someone might claim in light of sexist ideology that as a *wife* and more generally as a *woman*, Palmer is especially at fault in virtue of her having special control over her *husband's* behavior. Again, we can see this as a claim about both knowledge and control, as underpinned by an understanding of the relational role of being a woman and being a wife.

One typical response to such arguments has been to argue that victims of abuse in such cases have undergone severe psychological trauma,

and this has resulted in them being psychologically impaired and unable to extricate themselves from these situations. This has become known in the legal and psychological literature as ‘Battered Spouse Syndrome’.¹⁸ Some critics have argued however, that the use of ‘Battered Spouse Syndrome’ as a legal defense ignores the agency of victims.¹⁹ At first glance, then, it looks like the victim blamers are getting something right whereas the defenders of the victim are getting something wrong. The victim blamers, when they ask, “why don’t you leave, why don’t you get out?” appear to be genuinely taking into account the agency of the victims, whereas those who wish to excuse battered spouses perhaps deny certain important facts about their agency. By saying that such persons suffer from a kind of syndrome, you exempt them from responsibility. This exemption, however, is just a denial of their agency in the situation.

One of the best ways to respond to such arguments, we suggest, is to recognize that “why don’t you leave, why don’t you get out?” is not actually a recognition of the victim’s agency but rather a denial of background structural features that influence the agent’s choices in three ways. In other words, this response is another form of moral myopia that ignores how socio-economic and cultural factors constrain individual choices, again highlighting the importance of situating victim blaming within a wider socio-cultural context and understanding it as a misogynistic social practice. By ignoring these features, cases like *Broadchurch* and *Palmer* start to look more like *Charming Colleague*. In fact, however, they are quite different.

Specifically, the victim blaming response ignores certain facts relevant to that victim’s agency in a way that makes them appear blameworthy. First, a great deal of the empirical evidence suggests that the “why don’t you leave?” response causes the victim to become socially isolated, and this only furthers the victim’s dependence on the spousal abuser.²⁰ The fact that social isolation occurs from this response again highlights that this response fails to recognize background social features.

Second, the empirical evidence suggests that women in abusive situations tend to seek help as violence against them intensifies, but their attempts to find help outside the family could be frustrated because her appeal receives no response.²¹ Some studies suggest that more than half of women have negative views about shelters and programs for battered women because they have had negative experiences with the programs.²²

Third, domestic abuse is rarely constant. Rather, abuse is better understood as a cycle with four distinct but often overlapping stages: 1) periods of tension building, 2) the acting-up stage, where abuse occurs, 3) a

honeymoon period where the abuser apologizes and 4) a calm period where the abuser might successfully make amends and the victim believes that the abuser might change.²³ Understanding domestic violence and abuse as a cycle highlights how victims can often become socially isolated — besides violence, domestic abusers often employ emotionally manipulative tactics such as gaslighting to manipulate the context of the relationship to either minimize abuse, to keep secrets within the relationship, or to manipulate victims in persisting with the relationship. Such emotional manipulation, paired with the facts that 1) external aid is often unforthcoming or a generally negative experience, and 2) there is a general hesitancy even amongst friends and family to get involved in the ‘private’ matter of domestic violence,²⁴ explain why victims find it so difficult to leave. Unfortunately, one study suggests that the majority of individuals underestimate the difficulties women face in leaving abusive relationships. Once again, this highlights that there is a tendency amongst individuals to ignore the background conditions that place constraints upon women in such relationships.²⁵

Finally, studies suggest that the stereotype of battered women as passive does not cohere well with the evidence. Women in abusive relationships often engage in a variety of strategies, such as limiting the abuser’s financial control, silence, avoidance, confrontation, or seeking external aid.²⁶ However, as the above discussion highlights, women often face structural constraints which limit their options. Victim blamers, in ascribing blame to victims, often ignore or deny these background structural features, and the very active ways victims respond to their limited options.

The preceding discussion suggests two important points. First, victim blaming involves moral myopia in the sense that individuals focus on certain morally salient aspects of a situation to the exclusion of others. Second, this moral myopia leads individuals to ignore certain background facts that influence an agent’s choices. However, this diagnosis of victim blaming is still incomplete — we still do not have a grip on how such moral myopia is engendered. To have a complete picture of how such moral myopia works, we argue that we need to return to understanding victim blaming as a function of the special relationship.

As cited earlier, special relationships are often institutional. The institutional and social factors of marriage, for instance, economic dependence between spouses, is an important and often inherent feature of marriage in our society that has been primarily shaped by patriarchal

norms, which often are employed to rationalize and justify domestic abuse. To ignore these background conditions is to have a false or incomplete picture of the social position of the victim in these kinds of cases. And thus, based on this false picture, an improper blaming response ensues.

How does this ignorance accrue? We argue that this ignorance is engendered, sustained, and propagated in three ways.

First, as we have argued, part of what is wrong with many cases of victim blaming is a form of moral myopia. However, as we have argued, we cannot fully understand the nature of this specific form of moral myopia without understanding how it serves to operate within a broader sexist and misogynist social environment. Kate Manne (2017) provides us with a powerful theoretical lens for understanding such phenomena in her discussion of misogyny — the notion of himpathy. On Manne’s view, misogyny should not be understood as a psychological notion, but a property of the social environment that attempts to uphold patriarchal norms and relations in the face of non-compliance [ibid. p. 61]. However, besides punitive social measures, misogyny also sustains itself through the complementary ideology of himpathy: “the excessive or inappropriate sympathy extended to a male agent or wrongdoer over his female victim” [ibid. p. 5]. In other words, himpathy is a cluster of moral biases that takes away sympathy that it should be directed towards the woman and shifts it higher up the social hierarchy towards men. On this account, himpathy serves to obscure other potentially damaging forms of misogyny — by placing disproportionate emphasis on the actions of the woman, it serves to detract from the actions of the abuser. On this account then, the moral myopia that we have diagnosed in victim blaming cannot be separated from the wider social environment, which in particular incentivizes sympathizing with men and also punishes individuals who might attempt to reform these practices.

However, understanding the moral myopia that characterizes such cases of victim blaming solely through the lens of himpathy is insufficient on its own to explain the kind of case under discussion. A significant component of victim blaming is that it distorts the social position of the victim, as seen in our discussion of how victim blaming often ignores key background facts that influence victims’ choices.

As we hinted at earlier, what enables such ignorance is not only biases which serve to direct excessive sympathy towards men, but also the use of certain *hierarchical gender schema and scripts* as shared social meanings. This seems at play in the misogynistically-grounded form of victim blam-

ing, where one might assume a woman is at fault for her own abuse because she is a woman and/or a wife.

To say that something has social meaning is to say that it has significance by “virtue of our collective [cultural] understandings” [Haslanger (2012), p. 13]. For example, in many contexts, public spitting or raising the middle finger means disrespect and the color pink means girl. These cultural understandings are often non-optional, shared, and create a backdrop or social background by which we navigate our social activities together. Because we are socially embedded agents, constantly implicated and engaging in shared social activities, the internalization of social meanings is crucial to guiding our actions and engaging with others in the material world. To take another example, our social practices of greetings are culturally under-girded by culturally specific meanings of gestures, arranged in broader schemas or scripts of interaction. A handshake for example, is a commonly accepted social script that enables us to engage in fluid and meaningful social interaction. Because we share these meanings, greeting each other is relatively uneventful. Things break down however, when we meet someone from an unfamiliar culture — a kiss on the cheek, for example, while well-intentioned and polite, might be awkward and disorienting. Indeed, these examples highlight the significance of shared social meanings in order to have fluid and meaningful social interaction, action, and coordination.

Crucially, as some social psychologists have argued, the hierarchical gendered schema and scripts which form our shared social meanings often rely upon essentialized social kinds, which often play an important role in informing our beliefs about certain social groups.²⁷ Following Sarah-Jane Leslie, we understand a kind or group as essentialized just in case “its members are viewed as sharing a fundamental nature that casually grounds a substantial number of their outwardly observable properties” [Leslie (2017), p. 409]. Importantly, this nature need not be biologically grounded, nor need it be seen as immutable or strictly necessary for membership to this group. A considerable amount of empirical evidence suggests that our hierarchical gendered schema and scripts often rely on essentialist frameworks, particularly in young children, as essentialist frameworks readily permit generalization across category members and allow us to learn things based on commonalities between entities.²⁸

With respect to victim blaming, women are often benevolently stereotyped as guardians of sexuality, where this is often held up as a posi-

tive stereotype (i.e. women are more virtuous than men).²⁹ This stereotype can be understood as a result of an essentializing framework, which views women as sharing a fundamental nature (being more virtuous, morally upright) that causally grounds their outwardly observable properties (guardians of sexuality).³⁰ This emphasis on women as sexual guardians also helps partially explain the moral myopia that is implicit in victim blaming — empirical evidence suggests that more attention is often paid to the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator and the behavior of the victim rather than the perpetrator's intentions or behavior.³¹ These essentialized conceptions of gender thus play an important role in shaping our blaming responses, and a fully understanding of victim blaming as moral myopia must take into account the ways in which essentialist frameworks are at play in our lay understanding of gender.

As we have emphasized throughout this paper, blame is a form of social interaction, a kind of communicative enterprise, and is thus inevitably mediated by shared social meanings. As we have argued, the shared social meanings that shape our practice of blame are deep and varied — they range from formal institutionalized norms that specify the obligations that individuals who occupy specific well-defined roles have (such as a police officer) to more informally shaped expectations and obligations, such as the social role of being a friend or colleague.³² In order to have a complete understanding of how moral myopia is engendered and sustained within our blaming practices then, we must engage not only in an examination of how formalized institutional norms and practices influence blame, but also on how more informal shared social cultural meanings are shaped and structured by differential power relations and hierarchical gendered expectations, particularly in the kinds of cases of victim blaming under discussion.

As we have noted, one important upshot of emphasizing blame's interpersonal nature is that we must understand it as an interpretative enterprise that is shaped by background social norms. One significant category of such norms, we have argued, are gendered social meanings and norms. These norms we argue, play a role in shaping and potentially distorting our ascriptions of blame, particularly when gendered schema and scripts employ an essentialist framework. To better understand how gendered schema and scripts distort our practices of blame however, we need to look even more carefully at the empirical evidence on victim blaming.

Recent empirical evidence suggests that a considerable portion (around 20%) of individuals in the European Union either know a victim

of domestic abuse from their circle of friends, family or workplace or know someone who subjected a woman to some form of domestic violence from these places (around 15%).³³ However, despite this knowledge, there is significant empirical evidence that domestic violence is underreported — it is estimated that 25% of women are affected by domestic violence, but only 2.5 – 15% report suffering from domestic violence.³⁴ These statistics suggest that part of the problem with domestic abuse is social silencing — while individuals might be aware of such abuse they are for some reason, hesitant to report or to offer help.³⁵

Of course, there are legitimate reasons why individuals might be hesitant to report domestic violence, particularly to law enforcement.³⁶ Our focus here, however, is how social norms play a role in justifying and rationalizing domestic violence, and how these norms in turn give rise to rationalizations such as victim blaming. First, while there has been a significant change in attitudes regarding domestic violence, the aforementioned studies highlight that there is still a general hesitancy to get involved in the ‘private’ matter of domestic violence.³⁷ It is useful to understand victim blaming against this background of hesitancy. As we have argued, part of the wrong of victim blaming is that it places undue emphasis on the actions of the woman or wife and directs inappropriate, excessive sympathy to the man. Such disproportionate focus on the woman cannot be completely understood outside of the traditional gendered and often hierarchical understanding of the family and the home. Empirical studies suggest for example, that individuals with traditional, hierarchical beliefs about gender roles (including but not limited to beliefs that — the man or the husband is the head of the household, and the wife or woman is subservient to him) tend to attribute more blame to the victim and less blame to the perpetrator.³⁸ Both these gendered conceptions of the family and sexuality play an important role in shaping what individuals associated with the social roles of ‘women’ and ‘wife’, which in turn play a key role in undergirding the shared social meanings that serve to support the dominant narrative underlying victim blaming practices.

Furthermore, our account allows us to explain what appears to be a puzzle. Some studies provide significant evidence that victim blaming attitudes appear to be even more prevalent in societies with more gender equality.³⁹ On its face, this appears counter-intuitive — one would expect that more egalitarian societies would adopt less hierarchical conceptions of gender and sexuality that serve to prop up victim blaming

practices. However, the account we have given can provide two reasons for why this is unfortunately, unsurprising.

First, while there has been significant progress in debunking gendered norms and expectations, gender is still a crucial axis in social coordination. Almost every aspect of our social lives is suffused by some form of gendered expectation — from what one should wear, to whether picking up the check marks romantic interest, gendered expectations govern much of heterosexual romantic interaction as well as familial life. Further, gender plays a crucial role in scripts and schema for a variety of social roles and positions. The way in which we expect an employer, an academic, a parent, or even a friend to behave is gendered. The pervasiveness of gendered social meaning is such that it is “difficult, if not impossible, to have a socially meaningful existence outside of the norms of gender identity” [Butler (1986), p. 37]. Given the pervasiveness of gendered social meanings for our social lives, it should not be surprising that it continues to play a significant role in ascriptions and attributions of blame. And given that many of our gendered social meanings continue to be hierarchical, it should not be surprising that they can continue to play a role in maintaining certain false beliefs about gender roles regarding the family and sexuality.

Second, as Manne (2017) argues, misogyny should not be understood as a psychological notion, but a property of the social environment that attempts to uphold patriarchal norms and relations in the face of non-compliance. On this view of misogyny, individuals, particularly men, when faced with the prospect of more gender equal societies, double down and attempt to reimpose gendered conceptions of the family and sexuality. Women might also internalize misogynistic attitudes as they often face hostile treatment if they violate patriarchal norms or are at least not subject to such treatment if they adhere to these norms. Such backlash is unfortunately, supported by anecdotal evidence which suggests that men who face apparent threats to their position in the social hierarchy attempt to maintain their social position by persisting with gendered social norms and also imposing them upon their partners or others within their social environment.⁴⁰ This account of victim blaming as a form of moral myopia rooted in social expectations thus gives us an explanation as to why as societies move towards more egalitarian relations, practices like victim blaming or their supporting beliefs become more prevalent and entrenched.

Finally, before we move to discussing how we might move forward and resist victim blaming, we should deal with a potential complication.

One might argue that even if we accept that third-parties (victim blamers) ought to suspend judgment regarding the victim's behaviour, the victim herself might be right in blaming herself for what she has done or failed to do.⁴¹ This idea that self-reproach might be appropriate is clearly articulated in Primo Levi's memoir *The Drowned and the Saved*, which details his horrific experiences in Nazi concentration camps. Levi painstakingly delves into this acute sense of Survivor's Guilt, writing, "Are you not ashamed because you are alive in place of another?", detailing the sense that it is appropriate for him to feel ashamed because of his failure to act morally.⁴² Here however, it seems that Levi also suffers from a kind of moral myopia: he places an inappropriate emphasis on his failure to act, when a more appropriate response would recognise that *both* Levi and other victims who died in the camps were victims of genocide that should not have been allowed to occur. This idea that such emphasis is inappropriate is supported by the psychological evidence, which suggests that sufferers of Survivor's Guilt tend to have exaggerated or distorted views about their role in causing negative outcomes and wrongdoing on their part.⁴³ Even in cases where it might be appropriate for them to make the judgment that they could have done something, it seems that in most cases, they are focusing primarily on their role in causing harm rather than the role of the perpetrator, highlighting that they may also be suffering from moral myopia, albeit of a different kind.

VI. WHAT NOW?

The above discussion raises the inevitable question: what can someone do to revolt against the bad norms that influence such a narrow-minded picture of what it means to be a wife or women and against practices that exploit such hierarchical gendered conceptions such as victim blaming?

One of the apparently clearest ways forward is to hold persons to account for their failure to be alive to the actual structure of the background features which shape our social expectations. Once we rid ourselves of the hierarchical gender conceptions which shape our understanding of the social roles we can inhabit, and the relationships that hold between these roles, we can see that special relationships are embedded in a web of background social conditions. In turn, we can see that these conditions make the relationships in question unequal without

denying the individual agency of either party. As we have also noted, many of the gendered social meanings operate on an unconscious level, as individuals internalize these norms and social meanings in order to engage in fluid and meaningful social interaction and coordination. Part of the answer must thus lie in more critical analysis of the social meanings that undergird many of our interactions, particularly our blaming practices. We hope that this paper is a positive contribution to such an effort.

However, adopting a strategy of only calling on victim blamers to be more aware of the background social conditions that shape and structure our choices and critically examining existing gendered practices, while necessary, is insufficient for several reasons.

First, as mentioned earlier, a misogynistic social environment is likely to attempt to impose itself very strongly should we attempt to engage in calling victim blamers to be more aware of the structural constraints that victims face.

To further compound matters, as we have mentioned, gendered social meanings are at present a significant part of our shared social meanings that are often necessary to facilitating social coordination. They are crucial not only to fostering and sustaining important and valuable social interactions such as sexual interaction, but also romantic and familial heterosexual relations. Due to value pluralism and the prominence of feminist critiques of gendered social meanings, we have managed partially to break free of hierarchical gendered norms. However, gender still plays a crucial role in our interactions, and hierarchical gendered norms still hang heavy over many of our social practices. Insofar as we value certain forms of social interactions and coordination then, it seems that we are left with a tough bind. We need to formulate and clarify new means of social coordination. But given that hierarchical conceptions of gender still play a significant role in shaping these interactions, it is difficult to envision new ways of communication and interaction that do not seem to rely on potentially hierarchical gendered social meanings.

Moreover, even if we succeed in holding individuals to be alive to certain background social features and make them aware of certain structural constraints as well as hold out abusers responsible and remove misogynistic social practices such as victim blaming, it is still likely that we will face another deeper-seated conundrum. Given that hierarchical gendered social meanings are still crucial to facilitating certain valuable social interactions, individuals might revert to these highly salient shared meanings as the basis of social interactions and communications. This is so for

two reasons. We can reasonably assume that many individuals have legitimate interests in continuing and persisting with the aforementioned social interactions. These are valuable forms of social coordination. Besides this, given the prevalence of victim blaming attitudes even in egalitarian societies, it will not be surprising that many individuals, especially men but also including women, will have internalized hierarchical notions of gender, and would attempt to reimpose them through various social sanctions should we attempt to adopt a widespread strategy of calling victim blamers out. This is in line with Manne's account of misogyny, where she notes that she only hopes to provide a diagnosis of misogyny but cannot provide us with normative prescriptions for how to proceed [Manne (2017), pp. 28-29, 287].

Finally, in attempting to continue with these interactions while also revising and reforming our shared social meanings, we face a kind of discursive vacuum. We will therefore need some form of shared basis to facilitate social coordination. However, given the saliency and prominence of gendered scripts and schemas in shaping much of our social coordination, it is very likely that in reforming and reinventing our shared social meanings, we will revert to some hierarchical gendered schemas and scripts. Of course, we will not adopt these shared meanings wholesale — we will reject many of these shared gendered social meanings, in particular hierarchical gendered conceptions of family and sexuality, which we have argued, are particularly salient and pernicious. It is plausible that even in reforming such shared social meanings, there is the danger of reintroducing hierarchical gendered conceptions of family and sexuality into our social interactions, albeit perhaps in more implicit forms.

Beyond these issues, there is the further difficulty of trying to find a shared perspective from which all parties in a blame situation might understand one another. This problem seems endemic to any situation in which one party harms another. But in addition to the ways that harm can make it difficult to find a shared perspective between the one causing harm and the person harmed, we have argued that individuals who take a morally myopic look at a situation, especially the ones under discussion here, might have a different sense of the shared social meanings under discussion than the victim. This strikes us as one way in which correcting the wrong here is especially difficult. In trying to find a shared understanding of the situation, we again worry that we might reintroduce hierarchical and gendered conceptions of our social roles.

We seem to have reached a deep conundrum — on the one hand it seems that calling out abusers might provoke a misogynistic backlash. And even if we avoid a misogynistic backlash, we might reintroduce hierarchical gendered conceptions of family and sexuality as we attempt to formulate new social meanings.

Nevertheless, there is room for optimism. Part of the problem that we have identified with victim blaming of the sort under discussion is that it rests on hierarchically gendered conceptions of family and sexuality, which in turn undergird certain social structural explanations. One possible way forward is to reconceptualize gender in line with more egalitarian aspirations and remove its essentializing features. Another way forward is to downplay the role that gender plays in scripts and norms tied around sexuality and the family. Assessing between either option will depend upon whether hierarchy is inherently tied up with the notion of gender.⁴⁴ Part of the problem, as we have intimated, is that certain hierarchical gendered conceptions appear to be so much interwoven into the fabric of our social lives that we might feel unmoored when we attempt to move away or even rethink these practices.

Contemporary philosophy, in particular moral responsibility theory, can be a useful tool in this respect by examining many of the underlying assumptions that undergird our social practices. This is especially so because blame is an important way that we enforce social norms on others. Such strategies, however, are only part of a broader effort, which will include social movements that aim at changing social meanings and social norms through grassroots movements and social activism.

VII. CONCLUSION

Many contemporary theorists in the moral responsibility literature believe that they are taking our moral responsibility practices seriously. This has been particularly prominent in the recent “Strawsonian turn” in theories of responsibility, within which we situate our account here. Taking practices seriously, however, means investigating the societal structural elements that provide the background conditions for any instance of blame or praise. In this paper, we have argued that a close look at cases where someone is blameworthy for failing to blame illuminates some of these structural elements. When we are members of what we have called special relationships – as friends, colleagues, and partners – we stand in close epistemic relations to one another. We know each other

well enough to have some influence over one another. In cases certain cases where a person is blameworthy for failing to blame, it is because this special relationship affords a person a special standing with respect to the other member of the relationships, one where failing to blame is a mark of a lack of moral concern. This is an instance of an interesting interaction between knowledge of our actions and the control we have over what we do. Likewise, we argued that the same kind of situation might arise from our social roles, the roles we inhabit institutionally, or more generally, as inhabiting certain social structures. We argued that these features of cases where someone is blameworthy for failing to blame helps us to understand a particular kind of victim blaming, one where, in a misogynistic social context, a blamer might overly focus on the victim in light of gendered social roles. We offered a partial analysis of these cases. Although there are some reasons for thinking that it will be difficult to correct for this kind of blameworthy blaming, there are also some reasons for optimism.

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NOTES

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² It is also important to note that while victim blaming is relatively new in the moral responsibility literature, it has been widely discussed both within wider societal and academic circles, in particular a variety of feminist philosophical approaches and in a lot of social psychological research on the phenomena [Mardorossian (2002), Jensen & Gutek (2010), Lamb & Keon (1995), Janoff, Bulman, Timko and Carli (1985), Suarez and Gadalla (2010), Grubb and Turner (2012)]. Our discussion in this paper leans heavily on these sources.

³ We prefer talking about “moral address” and follow a model similar to McKenna (2013) and Shoemaker (2015). See also Watson (2008). The idea that moral responsibility is interpersonal, and specifically conversational, lends itself to a recognition of the essential *sociality* of moral responsibility.

⁴ In certain respects, you can see something like this at work in McKenna (2013), particularly pgs. 86-87. In a different way, Scanlon (2008) is also sensitive to this point. However, as we see it, the full implications of such a “social moral responsibility” were not worked out in full detail in either case. This paper attempts a partial explanation of how such a view would be fleshed out. We are tackling the hardest cases to show the power of taking on the theoretical apparatus of social moral responsibility for those, unlike McKenna and Scanlon, who are hesitant to discuss it. In recent years, philosophers have recognized the importance of including the social context in understanding questions about moral responsibility and metaethics. Vargas (2018) in particular discusses the social constitution of moral responsibility in the context of oppression. For more, see Manne (2013) and see the volume *The Social Dimensions of Moral Responsibility*, eds. Katrina Hutchison, Catriona Mackenzie, and Marina Oshana.

⁵ For more on this point, see Isserow (2018).

⁶ There is much debate in the current literature about how to understand standing to blame. We take it to be something like Radzik (2011)’s view of entitlement or license.

⁷ This insight is highlighted by T.M. Scanlon’s (2008) account of blame, in which he argues always occurs relative to the *ground relationship* (i.e., friendship), which provides the standards by which we judge the attitudes of the other in the relationship. Although his model differs from the Strawsonian model we endorse, we take it that Strawsonians can adopt the point that certain standards for blame differ given different relations between persons. One way of explaining this, as we have argued above, comes with the increased knowledge and control regarding another person follows from certain kinds of relations.

⁸ For an overview of some recent work in this debate, see Rochibaud and Wieland (2017).

⁹ See for example, New York Times (2014a).

¹⁰ See for example, Giorgis (2014) and her discussion of the reactions of various media outlets, particularly the Baltimore Ravens’ response.

¹¹ One might question the need to extend a charitable interpretation of victim blaming, given that many cases of victim blaming will be cases where victim blamers blame the victim not out of genuine moral concern but out of bad faith and an attempt to maintain the patriarchal status quo. However, this way of understanding victim blaming, while helpful in a considerable number of cases, does not fully explain what is objectionable or wrong about victim blaming in well-intentioned cases. We aim to provide an account that can show how victim blaming can be especially harmful when participants believe that they have the best interests of the abused in mind.

¹² Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing us on being specific about how to address moral myopia. We address some limitations of intervention in section VII.

¹³ We will discuss Manne’s account of misogyny later in the text.

¹⁴ See for example, Bieneck and Kranhe (2010); Gracia and Tomas (2017).

¹⁵ See for example, Vandello and Cohen (2003); Esqueda and Harrison (2005).

¹⁶ See for example, Felson and Palmore (2018), Bieneck and Kranhe (2010).

¹⁷ See for example, Pratto et al. (1997); Eagly et al. (2004); Viki and Abrams (2002).

¹⁸ The use of battered spouse syndrome as a legal defense has been criticized on several grounds. For a comprehensive survey of its history both academically and legally, refer to Thomas et al. (2009).

¹⁹ See for example Kinports (2015).

²⁰ See for example, Bieneck and Kranhe (2010); Gracia and Tomas (2017).

²¹ See for example, Gondolf and Fisher (1988) and Rakovec-Felser (2014).

²² See for example, Gondolf (2002).

²³ See for example, Rakovec-Felser (2014).

²⁴ We will elaborate on this point later.

²⁵ See for example, Worden and Carlson (2005).

²⁶ See Riddell, Ford-Gilboe, and Leipert (2009).

²⁷ See for example, Rothbart and Taylor (1992); Gil-White (2001). For philosophical discussion, see Leslie (2017).

²⁸ See Gelman & Taylor (2000); Heyman and Giles (2006).

²⁹ See Bateman (1991); Glick and Fiske (1996); Jackman (1994).

³⁰ Note that this is not a normative but psychological claim.

³¹ Bateman (1991); Weller (1992).

³² Many of the expectations and obligations that come with being a friend or colleague are institutionalized. Yet such relationships are often normatively indeterminate — individuals shape the obligations and expectations within these relationships. For more on this point, see Cibik (2018).

³³ See Gracia and Herrero (2006), p. 124.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 122-124.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 123.

³⁶ In particular, women from marginalized communities might be legitimately worried about how mandatory criminal justice policies might adversely affect their lives and their families. See for example, Bailey (2012).

³⁷ See Gracia and Herrero (2006); Rakovec-Felser (2014).

³⁸ See Storey and Strand (2017); Chemaly (2017).

³⁹ See Gracia and Herrero (2006).

⁴⁰ For a thorough discussion of these claims, see Manne (2017).

⁴¹ Thank you to an anonymous referee for raising this point.

⁴² Levi (1988), p. 81.

⁴³ The DSM-V does not categorize Survivor's Guilt as its own diagnosis, but refers to a cluster of symptoms as a specific diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder: "Persistent, distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame himself/herself or others." American Psychiatric Association (2013).

⁴⁴ For a good overview of these issues, see the exchange between Sophie-Grace Chappell and Holly Lawford-Smith in Chappell and Lawford-Smith (2018).

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