



CAUSING A STIR: AN EXPLORATION OF RAPE MYTH
CULTURE IN IRISH YOUNG ADULT FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the idea that Ireland can be seen as a rape myth culture through works of young adult fiction that accurately portray a rape victim's legitimate experiences and how living in a rape myth culture is damaging for them. When many people believe and spread stereotypical and prejudicial beliefs about rape, it leads to an entire culture that shames victims and shifts the blame from the rapist to them. This serves to extremely affect how rape victims are viewed in society and as a result many victims fail to speak up about their assault, choosing to remain silent rather than be judged and blamed. These tropes can be analysed by two Irish authors that use the medium of young adult fiction to make it accessible and educational for all, as O'Loughlin and O'Neill intentionally portray their protagonist's surroundings as symbolic of Ireland's actual rape myth culture. Both protagonists are hesitant to come forward about being raped because they fear what others will think of them and that they will be blamed themselves. This is indicative of the thought process of Ireland's legitimate rape victims. A feminist theoretical framework was applied to ground the primary texts. Theories of sexism, violence against women, homophobia and standards of masculinity are all used in order to explain the belief and spread of rape myths. Additionally, a close reading of both primary texts was undertaken to highlight the techniques the authors used to portray Ireland as a rape myth culture that mirrors real life. Findings indicate that these two young adult fiction novels are extremely suggestive of the way Ireland's rape myth culture severely affects its victims.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis considers the prevalence of rape myths, which accumulate and lead to a rape myth culture in Ireland, as reflected in two key young adult texts that represent sexual violence against male and female characters. Throughout this thesis, I discuss the damaging influence these stereotypical and prejudicial beliefs that underpin our society have on rape victims. I use Larry O'Loughlin's *Breaking the Silence* and Louise O'Neill's *Asking for It*, both young adult fiction novels by Irish authors, in order to look at these issues in an Irish context.

1.2 Background Information

Martha Burt defines rape myths as "Stereotypes and myths - defined as prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (217). Some common examples of these myths are "men can't be raped", "rapists can only be strangers that attack you down dark alleyways" and "she wore revealing clothes so she was asking for it to happen". Rape myths such as these serve to judge the victim's character and shift the blame from the rapist onto the victim. This can be extremely damaging to victims, as when they live in a society that continuously believes and spreads these myths, they are shamed into silence as a result.

When many people in one society hold these beliefs, it leads to the creation of a rape myth culture, which is defined as "a society or environment whose prevailing social attitudes have the effect of normalizing or trivializing sexual assault and abuse" (Oxford Dictionary). We ourselves live in one of these and by taking the example of a

recent court case in Cork¹, we can see that rape myth culture is flourishing. In the Cork trial, the defendant's lawyer passed the victim's underwear around the courtroom as evidence, intending to imply that because she was wearing a lace thong, she must have been sexually interested and consenting. This is just one example of a rape myth that is used to silence and shame victims in Ireland today. By looking at two Irish works of fiction, I aim to analyse how a rape myth culture operates as well as the links that can be seen to the culture we are actually living in. I wish to show how these Irish works of fiction are indicative of and are commenting on Ireland's actual rape myth culture.

Breaking the Silence and *Asking for It* are classified as Young Adult Fiction, which is a particularly interesting genre as it is one of the most wide-spread and popular categories of novels available. While it is marketed to twelve to eighteen year olds, "by some market estimates, nearly 70 percent of all YA titles are purchased by adults between the ages of 18 and 64" (The Balance Careers, 2018). This shows us the wide scope and interest that young adult fiction has. While young adult fiction encompasses many genres of books, the one factor they all have in common is the fact that "YA means challenge – encountering diverse protagonists and situations I'll never experience myself, but which stretch me to empathise with and contemplate" (*The Guardian*, 2014) and it is most likely this high-intensity of emotion and challenge within the books that draw so many people to them. In both of the primary texts I have chosen, the protagonist of the novel is a rape victim who must navigate their way through the rape myth culture in which they live. In choosing my primary texts for this thesis, I wanted to discuss two entirely separate and different rape myths, one

¹ This trial happened in 2018 as a 17-year-old girl was accusing a 27-year-old man of rape at a party. Using her lace thong as evidence was widely condemned by the public and TD Ruth Coppinger embodied this when she held up a thong in the Dáil and called for an end to what she described as "routine victim blaming". Following the verdict, the victim was said to be heartbroken as she fears that she wasn't believed.

concerning men and one concerning women. I also wanted to write on novels by Irish authors, as it is necessary and worthwhile to discuss and examine the culture that we ourselves live in.

Asking for It tells the story of Emma, a victim of gang rape at a house party. Although Emma doesn't remember the previous night's events, countless pictures and videos have been taken and uploaded online for all to see. Even with these as proof of the rape, we can see that Emma lives in a rape myth culture as numerous people turn on her and don't believe that she was raped. Her character is continuously judged as her society places the blame on her rather than her rapists. As a result, she is shamed into silence by the surrounding rape myth culture. The novel illustrates issues of consent, social media and the internet and self-confidence. Similarly, in *Breaking the Silence*, numerous flashbacks throughout the novel allow us to piece together the full story of the main protagonist Declan. We learn that he has been raped by three fellow basketball team-members. Shamed by a homophobic society, Declan doesn't report it or tell anyone and he internalises the negative comments he hears. The rape myth culture surrounding him doesn't allow for boys to be raped and so he turns the blame on himself. This novel illustrates the fact that rape isn't about sex but about power and control, non-penile rape is still rape and that men and boys can, and do, get raped.

Both of these primary texts are written for a young adult fiction audience, and both authors are known for their writings in this category². By both O'Loughlin and O'Neill choosing to aim their novels towards this audience, it shows the wide reach and

² *Asking for It* was awarded the American Library Association's Michael L. Printz Honor for excellence in literature written for young adults and The Guardian called Louise O'Neill "the best YA fiction writer alive today" (Sproull, *The Guardian*, 2015). Larry O'Loughlin has written 13 books for children and teenagers and *Breaking the Silence* was awarded the prestigious International White Raven citation for Young Adult Fiction novels.

impact they wanted them to have. Using these novels as a base point, I analyse how Ireland is presented as a rape myth culture and how prevalent rape myths are within it, I also look at how this affects rape victims and how society sees and judges them.

1.3 Rape Myths

In 1980, Martha Burt first mentioned the term 'rape myth', which has since been highly influential. Burt states that these rape myths create a "climate hostile to rape victims" (217). She discussed examples of rape myths popular in her current society, "examples of rape myths are "women ask for it", "rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both"" (Burt, 217), these are unfortunately still present in today's society. Burt's study looked at how certain groups of individuals are more predisposed to believe rape myths, for example, those who are sexually conservative and those who carry out interpersonal violence are groups that were studied. As predicted, her study proved that people within these two groups were more accepting of rape myths and more likely to spread them themselves. In the case of the first category, Burt found that "A sexually conservative individual might feel so strongly threatened by and rejecting of the specific circumstances of a rape that he or she would overlook the coercion and force involved and condemn the victim for participating" (Burt, 218). For example, a common rape myth is that rapes only happen with strangers down dark alleyways. If it was to occur with someone the victim knows, sexually conservative individuals would instead be quick to blame the victim for putting themselves in that situation, rather than feel abhorrent towards the actual rapist. In the category of those who participate in interpersonal violence, Burt found that "Acceptance of interpersonal violence refers to the notion that force and coercion are legitimate ways to gain compliance and specifically that they are legitimate in intimate and sexual

relationships” (Burt, 218). For those who already carry out violence, obtaining sex in this way is seen as the norm and they are therefore less willing to believing that forced sex is rape. Because of this, they will side with the rapist and blame the victim instead.

Burt then discusses the idea of a rape myth culture and hypothesizes that it is our environment that supports it, “Much feminist writing on rape maintains that we live in a rape culture that supports the objectification of, and violent and sexual abuse of, women through movies, television, advertising, and ‘girlie’ magazines. We hypothesized that exposure to such material would increase rape myth acceptance because it would tend to normalize coercive and brutal sexuality” (Burt, 219). Which makes sense that in a society that endorses violence and extreme sexual behaviours towards women, it would try and normalise it in some way through the use of rape myths. By believing these ideologies, rapists and the culture that supports them, have an excuse. The combination of living in this environment and the spread of rape myths by many culminates in a rape myth culture that is damaging to victims.

Overall, Burt’s study found that “First, many Americans do indeed believe many rape myths. Second, their rape attitudes are strongly connected to other deeply held and pervasive attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, distrust of the opposite sex (adversarial sexual beliefs), and acceptance of interpersonal violence” (Burt, 229). This therefore proved her hypothesis and meant she could successfully use the term ‘rape myths’ to explain what was happening throughout society. She found that not only do most of the population endorse rape myths, but they also contribute to them with ingrained attitudes surrounding gendered sex roles, sexual conservatism and interpersonal violence. Burt concludes her paper by stating the urgent need for us to understand rape myths, “Developing an accurate theoretical understanding of rape attitudes and assaultive behaviour will help make social change efforts more

effective” (Burt, 229). By admonishing rape myths, it will help us as a society to understand and better support our rape victims, while shifting the blame back onto the rapists, where it should be.

1.4 An evaluation of the current works in this field

In this thesis, I analyse current works that follow on from Burt’s original paper. Critically, there is a clear gap for a work that is specific to Ireland as the majority of the works done on rape myths have been done by American academics, with the remainder from Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. This means there is a huge gap in the field in terms of showing Ireland as a rape myth culture. With this thesis, I hope to base my argument in this research and use it to show that Ireland can also be proven to be a rape myth culture.

Male Rape Myths

There are significantly more works relating to female rape myths than male ones. This is important in itself as it shows the lack of societal interest and discussion of them. Findings of studies on male rape are extremely insightful and interesting, as they indicate a similar theme behind male rape myths with differing variables. Examples of findings are that male rape is actively forgotten through the processes of hegemonic masculinity and harmful gender expectations (Javaid, 2018), heterosexual men endorsed more rape myths and carried out more victim blaming than heterosexual women or gay men (Davies and McCartney, 2003) and men feel their masculinity may be threatened after an attack by another man (Gebhard et al, 2018). In addition to this, findings showed that sexism towards men and interpersonal

violence are huge indicators for someone's acceptance of rape myths (Chapleau et al, 2008), rape is seen to be more traumatising for heterosexual men and women than it is for gay men (Doherty and Anderson, 2004), the fact that research so far is not enough and we need a study done on the implication of these attitudes on male victims of sexual assault (Davies and Rogers, 2006) and the idea that gender expectations are harmful to male rape victims as they construct fear, shame and silence (Kimmel, 2003). These findings are extremely important in looking at *Breaking the Silence*, as themes of masculinity, sexuality, violence and gender consistently crop up. Declan's confusion over his sexuality after he is raped by a man is a typical trope throughout these papers. More broadly, the combination of hegemonic masculinity, violence and set gender stereotypes can be blamed for the creation of an Irish rape myth culture in the novel.

Community-Specific

Another five of the studies are community-specific, meaning they focused specifically on certain societal sub-cultures, mainly college campuses. By focusing on a specific sub-set of society, the researchers can isolate common beliefs and focus on the influence these have in creating a rape myth culture. Findings from these papers indicate that hook-up culture endorsement may be among the most significant predictors of male and female rape myths acceptance in US college students (Reling et al, 2018). Varying findings on this theme showed that college campuses foster a culture in which date rape is common and accepted (Burnett et al, 2009) and the fact that they are places of frequent sexual assault occurrence, therefore it is important to focus on them as they can indicate attitudes and cultural norms towards rape (Iconis, 2008). A researcher looked into the concept of rape-prone societies in relation to how

they could be transferred over to college campus cultures (Reeves Sanday, 1996). Another looked specifically at sport on college campuses and found that athlete subcultures are inherently masculine and have a higher belief and use of rape myths (McMahon, 2007). All of these findings show that sub-cultures have a huge influence on how rape myths develop and circulate.

Sexism

A common viewpoint from a feminist perspective is that rape myths are the result of sexism towards both men and women. Findings from these studies show that men display more sexist and stereotypical attitudes than women do (Davies et al, 2012), those who display hostile sexism towards women also advocate for rape myth acceptance (Chapleau et al, 2007) and rape myth acceptance is strongly associated with hostile attitudes and behaviours towards women (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010). These papers support the feminist hypothesis that sexism perpetuates rape myth acceptance, as they show that the same people who display sexist behaviours are the ones culturally spreading rape myths.

Influence of Social Media

Reactions to victims have a huge impact on rape victims. This is particularly relevant when looking at *Asking for It*, as Emma receives countless negative, victim-blaming responses from online sources. Findings from these studies indicate that social media reactions have a huge effect on someone who was raped (Heyes, 2016), the way news media portrays sexual violence is full of rape myths and gendered stereotypes (O'Hara, 2012) and rape is becoming a mode for entertainment and an

activity that allows an audience (Oliver, 2016). Overall, these three papers are written in order to combat victim blaming and the spread of rape myths through social media. The media in general is found to be damaging to victims, as it portrays the alleged rape through commonly held views of rape myths.

1.5 Evidence of Rape Myths in Ireland

Though the studies above give many insights into rape myths and rape myth culture, they are all focused on North America. There is thus a gap in research examining contexts outside this, such as Ireland. Through rape trials and public reactions, rape myths are still clearly prevalent in Irish society.

News Media

Online news media has become the most common way we receive news and there are many articles that discuss rape myths and Ireland's rape myth culture by looking at how they permeate court trials.

Caroline Forde from *The Irish Examiner* argued that rape myths has a huge part to play in the Cork rape trial, "Rape myths regarding female and male victims have a long history. Women who report sexual violence tend to be ascribed blame based on their character type or for being 'careless'. For instance, it is commonly believed that rape is the response of a man's uncontrollable passion, which a woman 'invites' with her 'provocative' clothing or behaviour" (Forde, *The Irish Examiner*, 2018). Examining the not-guilty verdict of the trial, the author discusses the effect that rape myths had on the jury's decision. Her article clearly analyses the ways that rape myths can

infiltrate the public's opinion on rape victims and serve to negatively affect them and the outcomes of their rape trials.

Another example of this occurring is within the Belfast rape trial, where four men were acquitted of all rape charges. In the *Irish Times*, Moriarty discussed a report by John Gillen. After the verdict of the Belfast Rape Trial, John Gillen was tasked with reviewing how the law deals with serious sexual offences. His published report finds that the law needs a major overhaul. Throughout his research he came across rape myths multiple times and found that social media commentary may be affecting rape trials, "Jurors are reading and hearing totally inadmissible stuff. There is a real danger that social media pollutes the stream of justice" (Moriarty, The Irish Times). This extensive report found that the spread of rape myths throughout our society was a leading factor in the non-guilty verdict found in so many rape trials.

The news media thus portrays the downfall of rape trials as the fault of the spread of rape myths throughout society.

Popular Literature

A background to rape myths in Ireland can also be examined by looking at popular literature that discusses them. Claire Hennessy's article (2015) discusses a brief history of rape culture in young adult fiction with a specific interest in Irish works. This article was written just after *Asking for It* had been published and Hennessy discussed the fact that, though excellent, it is not the first book of its kind to discuss these issues, "What infuriates me, as is perhaps inevitably the case whenever a 'big book' in a particular field goes mainstream, is the sense that young adult fiction hasn't been engaging with these issues already" (Hennessy, 1). Hennessy wrote that the genre of Young Adult Fiction is an ideal genre for discussing difficult issues and

then backtracks through the Young Adult Fiction that has engaged with issues of consent, rape culture and rape myths.

Hennessy starts with one of the first works of fiction surrounding rape myths. *Speak* was published by American author, Laurie Halse Anderson in 1999. It received such high acclaim that it was brought out in the UK and Ireland the following year. *Speak* is about a girl, shunned by her friends because she called the police after a party at which a popular, older boy raped her. It earned Anderson many awards and accolades and was cited when she won the Margaret A Edwards Award from the American Library Association in 2009. Following on from this, Ireland began to pick up in its publishing of literature representing such important topics. *Breaking the Silence* was published in 2001, drawing huge influence from Richie McMullen's non-fiction book *Male Rape: Breaking the Silence on the Last Taboo*, published in 1990. Hennessy writes that O'Loughlin's version, "invites us into the head of a teenage male rape victim, who worries that he might have been 'asking for it' – that his unwilling arousal during an assault means that he is not only gay but guilty" (Hennessy, 3). In 2006, *A Swift Pure Cry* by Siobhan Dowd is published in Ireland, which tells the story of a naïve heroine and a charismatic older boy. The encounters are never labelled as rape but "there is certainly a power imbalance and lack of understanding about the consequences of sex at play there" (Hennessy, 3). *A Girl is a Half Formed Thing* was Ireland's next addition to its collection of young adult novels portraying Ireland as a rape myth culture. Published in 2013, Eimear McBride's stream-of-consciousness novel describes a young girl's troubled relationship with her sexuality after she is raped by her uncle at a young age. Two years later, Louise O'Neill's *Asking for It* was released and it immediately "sparked a discussion about rape culture and consent that is important, necessary, and long overdue" (Hennessy, 3).

These novels all show that portraying Ireland's rape myth culture has been attempted in popular young adult fiction throughout the past few decades. While originally confined to American culture, the topic was then picked up by O'Loughlin with *Breaking the Silence*. Successfully bringing attention to the idea of Ireland as a rape myth culture, Irish writers were then prompted to continue discussing this theme, while also continuing the use of young adult fiction as a medium. This allowed for Ireland's rape myth culture to be discussed in various manners in an accessible format.

1.6 Reviews and Reactions to the novels

There is a significant imbalance between the reviews and reactions to both novels. They are published just fourteen years apart but media attention is seen to be considerably lacking for *Breaking the Silence*. This could also show the fact that much less attention is paid to male rape victims rather than female rape victims.

Breaking the Silence was published before the internet and social media itself could promote a book. In 2001, book reviews were through traditional media or word-of-mouth. The only review that can be found for *Breaking the Silence* is from *The Irish Times* in 2001, after archiving and uploading all past printed articles online. The Irish Times calls it "A powerful and compelling teenage book which deserves to be read" (*The Irish Times*, 2001). The internet and social media allows for a faster and further spread of information, this means that as *Breaking the Silence* was published before the internet hype, it did not receive the same amount of attention it would have received were it published during the internet age. Clearly, the fourteen years between the publications of both novels serves to severely impact how it is received by the public. The lack of attention paid can also show that while Irish society has

become relatively comfortable with talking about rape within our culture, there is still a noticeable lack of concern for male rape victims.

Asking for It on the other hand, received a huge amount of attention and the influence of social media was an important aspect in this. The internet and social media allowed widespread access to the novel and it did well because of it. Anyone's opinion on the novel could be posted and shared online and if these reactions are mainly positive, it means the novel will garner attention and success. Were it released before online reviews allowed such widespread access to so many people, it might not have done as well as it did. The internet and social media facilitated the book in doing as well as it did. Cassie Delaney from *Her* called it "a captivating look at rape culture in the digital age" (*Her*, 2016) and Sarah Gilmartin from *The Irish Times* cited one of the most stand-out aspects to be "the treatment of the victim by her community in the aftermath" (*The Irish Times*, 2015). Clearly, the most shocking and memorable aspects of the novel are the equating of the online, digital age with the spread of rape myths and the culmination of these to create a hostile rape myth culture. The digital aspect of the novel clearly resonates with the way it gained its popularity.

As the book was so successful, O'Neill did a documentary³ for RTE in 2016. *Asking for It: Reality Bites*, covers issues such as consent workshops, porn and rape court trials. It is largely comprised of interviews with a wide variety of people including rape victims, various support workers, journalists and legal staff. This shows that the message contained in *Asking for It* was deemed so important that it continued on in different mediums. Again the use of the internet is important here, as it can be

³ *Asking for It* was also adapted into a play in the Abbey Theatre. It ran from 9th-24th November 2018 and is on stage again for another run in late 2019. Just as the novel and documentary before it, it received similarly excellent reviews.

watched on-demand at any time online. Unlike *Breaking the Silence*, *Asking for It's* message has found a way to get across to people in different formats and therefore become substantially more popular and acknowledged.

1.7 What I aim to achieve in this thesis

Throughout this thesis, I examine both novels in detail and identify aspects that show that Ireland is a rape myth culture. I also consider how the central characters are negatively affected by rape myths and how we as readers are encouraged to have compassion and understanding for them. Through these fictional strategies, both O'Loughlin and O'Neill point the finger at the wider myths about rape circulating in Irish culture. O'Neill says that the process of writing *Asking for It* has taught her that "culture can change culture" (The Journal, 2018) and that art forms such as fiction or theatre are an "important way of facilitating difficult conversations" (The Journal, 2018). Paring it back, this is what both of these novels are doing. Both authors are using the novel as an expressionist aspect of our culture to discuss a difficult topic and in doing so it shows us that culture can in fact change culture.

2. Breaking the Silence

2.1 Introduction

Male rape has only recently been identified as a serious issue and with a continual shaming discourse surrounding it, it still remains a largely silent problem. Doherty and Anderson (2004) discuss the fact that it was only in 1994 that “the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act redefined rape within English Law to take account of male as well as female victims” (2). Statistics show that men are 1.5 times less likely to report a rape than a woman, and it is widely recognised that “official statistics on male rape greatly underestimate the number of actual incidences of non-consensual sex” (Doherty & Anderson, 2). It has been theorised that the reasons for this are a widespread homophobic attitude and a view of masculinity that male rape victims aren’t seen to be able to live up to. These misconceptions are spread throughout society in the form of rape myths. Homophobic attitudes towards rape victims lead to the idea that most men who are raped are homosexuals and an unattainable version of masculinity doesn’t recognise male rape as an issue because a real man would have been able to fight off their attacker. In this thesis I will be looking at how these rape myths are present in Ireland. By using *Breaking the Silence*, a novel that contextualises male rape within an Irish community, I aim to show that Ireland is indicative of a rape myth culture.

2.2 Overview

From the opening of the novel, it is clear that something shameful and secretive has happened to the main protagonist, Declan. While throughout there are

references and reveries to the past, it is not until late into the novel that Declan actually reveals his secret, that he was raped by fellow basketball team members two years previously. In addition to this, Declan also witnessed his friend Doc being raped by the same boys. As Declan did not intervene, when Doc dies in a car crash three days later, he blames himself. The rapists are three boys on Declan's basketball team that continue to antagonize him up until this day; Meade, O'Connor and Cahill, with Jason Meade being the main provoker and rapist. It is clear that Declan finds what happened to him shameful and unspeakable, as it takes him years to open up after the rape and tell anybody what happened. As it was a male rape, there are other shameful connotations connected to it, as Declan believes he may be gay after experiencing an erection during it. Fearing negative reactions from others, Declan doesn't tell others about the rape, or even think of himself as a victim. This is a common thought process for not only victims but the law system also. Studies such as one done by Bullock and Beckson (2011) highlight the fact that the law system is not sympathetic to male rape victims that have experienced arousal during the assault, "the lack of judicial concern for male victims appears strongly influenced by the idea that having an erection or ejaculating signifies consent" (203). This is extremely damaging to victims that make it as far as a trial. For Declan, these stereotypical attitudes ingrained are what stop him from coming forward. O'Loughlin undeniably included Declan having an erection during the rape to set him up for the rape myths present in our society and so his attitudes could mirror those actually present.

This shows the influence of rape myths on Declan's own perceptions of what happened to him. With the construction of a rape myth culture in the novel, we can see the aspects of homosexuality and masculinity as extremely important factors in Declan's shame surrounding the incident. The fact that Declan feels that by admitting

to being a victim of rape, he may be labelled as unmanly and gay, shows how rape myths have penetrated the culture that surrounds him.

Therefore, we can surmise that O'Loughlin is portraying Ireland as a rape myth culture throughout the novel from Declan's shame and silence surrounding the incident and it is clear that a delay in information surrounding the rape serves to show that Declan is shamed into silence by the social-environment he is living in.

Throughout this chapter on *Breaking the Silence*, I wish to do a close-text analysis to fully examine examples of Ireland being portrayed as a rape myth culture, and the effect this has on Declan as a rape victim.

2.3 Declan as a Character

Declan is portrayed as an extremely likeable character who has had something horrible happen to him. The reader feels extremely sorry for Declan, as he struggles to return to life in a rape-myth culture after having been in Nepal for so long. After his rape three years ago, Declan spent his summer at a camp in Nepal, helping underprivileged children, where he had an extremely moving time and cannot wait to return. For the reader, this is an aspect about Declan that we can appreciate and respect. His concern and interest in an underprivileged country serves to make the reader take a liking to him. After the rape, Declan's life has completely changed as he seems to be on a different trajectory than before. Preceding the rape, Declan was a celebrated basketball player who had received a scholarship to do a business course in America. Now, he wants to return to Nepal and help the children he met in the camp "His future had been neatly mapped out...Since the camp, that had changed. He had no interest in finance and marketing. He had a new ambition: he wanted to qualify as a teacher, or something in development work, and go back to

Nepal. His old subjects wouldn't fit either course. So he'd gone back to fifth year to start the two-year course from scratch" (O'Loughlin, 44-45). The fact that this occurs as a result of the rape makes the reader feel for Declan. It is clear that things were going extremely well for him as he received a basketball scholarship to pursue the course of his choice, however, after the rape he is no longer interested. It eventually comes to light that Declan receiving the scholarship is what made Meade so angry and jealous, and eventually led him raping both Declan and Doc, "Meade just glared at him and stormed off. Later, Declan had heard him screaming at Doc. 'You swung that for your little bum-boy, you poof! I'll get fucking even with you if it's the last thing I do'" (O'Loughlin, 49). Clearly, there are extreme influences of homophobia and masculinity involved in the 'why' of the rapes, which will be discussed further below. In terms of Declan's character, the surrounding negative narrative of basketball involved in the rapes, makes it clear that Declan is sacrificing a huge aspect of his life that he is clearly good at, because of the memories surrounding it. In fact, just being in the changing rooms brings out an extremely negative emotional response for Declan, "his hand shook as he reached for the door. Just being there brought it all back- the sounds, the pain, the terror, the dull aching sickness" (O'Loughlin, 107). Having been accepted onto the basketball team was a hugely important moment in Declan's life, but he cannot view it in that way as it is tarred by memories of the rape "he should have been able to look back on that night with joy and pride. He'd made school history- the first third-year ever chosen to play basketball on the senior team. It should have been one of the happiest memories of his life, but it wasn't. They'd made sure it wasn't" (O'Loughlin, 11-12). This ensures the reader feels for Declan and the missed opportunities that have occurred as a result of the rape. This portrayal of Declan by O'Loughlin ensures the reader feels extremely sympathetic towards him as a character but does not know how to feel about Doc. Following

Declan's rape, Doc compels Declan to feel that what happened to him was completely normal and warranted on a basketball team. In this way, he is complicit in Declan's rape and ensures his silence on the matter. While Doc was a very close, important friend to Declan, we do not know how to feel about him as a character because everything is told through Declan's point of view after Doc has died. There can never be a resolution between the characters and the reader has to accept mixed feelings about Doc as we know his influence in shaming and silencing Declan, while also being repeatedly told that he was a good friend who is intensely missed by Declan.

2.4 Doc's complicity and the effect it has on Declan

Although Declan is clearly the main character, Doc is equally important to the novel's commentary on rape myths. Both boys are present for both rapes, with the aftermaths varying greatly. The first night, after Declan is raped, Doc makes sure that Declan won't tell anyone what happened, and makes Declan view it as harmless locker-room play instead of serious sexual abuse, thereby ensuring Declan's silence. The second night, Doc himself is raped, while Declan watches nearby, frozen and unable to help. Declan's inability in the moment to stop what was happening to Doc, leaves him with a lasting guilt that Meade uses against Declan throughout the novel, "you weren't much of a hero last time, were you, Deckie?' he moved his hips suggestively" (O'Loughlin, 104). Declan's version of Doc's story is intensely emotive, and centres on his own experience and shame surrounding the two rapes. Certain aspects of the novel indicate that for Declan, witnessing Doc's rape was more traumatic than experiencing his own one. This is perhaps because Doc dies in a car crash three days later. Declan tries to convince himself that the two events are not

related, but ultimately blames himself for Doc's death, "When the numbness is gone, when he is back in his body, he knows. He killed Doc, as surely as if he'd driven the car into that tree himself" (O'Loughlin, 60). The fact that Doc is dead heaps another aspect of shame upon Declan. Were he alive, Doc and Declan could have banded together over their rapes carried out by the same group of boys and perhaps gone to the Gardaí about them. However, with Doc dead, Declan is left by himself. It is only logical that Doc solely blamed his rapists, but with him dead and not able to communicate this to Declan, Declan ultimately blames himself for Doc's rape and death, even though he wasn't involved in either. When thinking about his own rape on the first night, Declan uses phrases such as "the first night they came for him" (O'Loughlin, 8). However, when thinking upon Doc's rape, he refers to it as 'That Night' with specific capitalisation used each time. Declan therefore denotes the second night, the one where Doc was raped, as the night that is the most traumatising for him, "they'd destroyed his life- not on that first night; later, on the second night, That Night" (O'Loughlin, 11). This portrays the ideology that Declan does not see himself as harmed as much as Doc was. Because the rapists used a deodorant bottle on Declan, he therefore does not see himself as a rape victim. It also portrays the fact that he blames himself intensely for Doc's rape and subsequent death.

During regular visits to Doc's grave, Declan talks to him and the reader gets a sense of what happened as time goes on. The fact that Declan is extremely silent and vague at the beginning of the novel, indicates that he feels a sense of shame and confusion about the rapes. As the novel progresses, Declan becomes more open as he fully processes what has happened to him. Doc walks in on Declan being raped by the three men and breaks it up. His immediate reaction is then to ensure that Declan remains silent about everything, "don't say anything about this, Dec. It's sort

of the team code that messing like that doesn't get mentioned outside of the changing room" (O'Loughlin, 120). This idea that what happened to him was a regular welcoming that happened to everyone, means Declan doesn't view the incident as a rape. By Doc telling Declan to keep it a secret, and framing the rape in way that normalises it, Declan then feels as though he cannot open up about it, and keeps the shameful incident to himself, "you OK, Dec? They really didn't mean anything' says Doc soothingly. 'They were honestly just messing. Welcoming you to the club'. 'It's OK, really' sniffs the boy, lying. The pain makes him want to vomit. But if this is what everyone went through, he will not be any different" (O'Loughlin, 120). At this point in the novel, the reader gets an insight into why Declan has remained silent about the rape for so long. Having just joined the basketball team, he does not want to speak up and make a fuss about something Doc tells him they have all been through. However, three years on, Declan's life has changed significantly as a result of keeping this experience hidden. All of the shame surrounding the incident is pent up and he comes across as an extremely emotional, volatile and isolated character. In one of the opening pages, his pent-up rage surrounding the rape can be seen, "he pounded at it with his bare fists. His hands stung from the impact but he couldn't stop. He kept punching hard over and over again, wishing that every punch were being delivered straight into the faces of Jason Meade and his friends" (O'Loughlin, 10). Clearly, he feels very strong, negative emotions towards his rapists, but doesn't feel as though he can ever have an outlet by talking to someone about it, as Doc made him feel as though it was a normal experience. There are many instances throughout the novel where Declan wishes he could talk to someone about what happened, but then recalls what Doc said to him. Right from the beginning of the novel, Declan mulls over this 'code' that prevents him from opening up to anyone about the rape, "he couldn't tell anyone. That was the code: what happens in the

locker room stays in the locker room. So he lied” (O’Loughlin, 8). Declan resents this years later, as this code has severely affected him by not allowing him to come forward about the assault, “he wished he could tell them the truth. *Dad, mam, there’s something I want to tell you...*but he couldn’t say it. That famous fucking code, huh, Doc?” (146). It’s evident that Declan blames this unwritten code of support for abusers and acceptance of rape and rape myths as the reason for his feeling so ashamed and unable to speak about the rape. The idea that this is the normality of being on a team and that it was done as a joke, means Declan believes that to tell anyone about the attack would be to reveal a widely-held secret and portray him as weaker than the rest of the team. Towards the end of the novel, Declan fully processes what has happened to him, and feels as though he can finally open up about the rape. The first instance of this is when he visits Doc’s grave and finally admits to it being more than locker-room play, “we should have told. That wasn’t messing. That was sexual abuse- serious sexual abuse. Balls to your code! Look where it got us. And those bastards are just carrying on the same way” (O’Loughlin, 121). The rejection of Doc’s advice and the idea of a locker-room code, is the first step in Declan fully understanding and accepting what happened to him. From then on, he goes on to open up and tell the truth to people surrounding him. Declan, as a male rape victim, was severely harmed by the ideology that what happened to him was normal, but by accepting that it was sexual abuse, Declan is now in the position to seek help.

Overall, throughout the novel, we see Declan from being extremely closed up and volatily emotional, to making new friends and slowly opening up to people right at the end of the novel. This progression occurs as Declan has a chance to process fully what happened to Doc and himself. At the beginning of the novel, the self-assurance that what happened to him was a normal part of being on a team,

prevents Declan from telling anyone what happened. As a result of this, Declan displays worrying symptoms of a rape victim. Chapleau et al (2008) found that as a result of rape, “men can experience vulnerability, depression, suicidal thoughts, sleep disturbances, social isolation, sexual dysfunction, and confusion about their sexual orientation if the perpetrator was male” (601). Throughout the novel, Declan displays every single one of these behaviours. This shows the reader just how much Declan has been affected by what his rapists did to both him and Doc, and allows us to truly feel sorry for him. However, towards the end of the novel, Declan’s acceptance and understanding that what happened to him was rape, allows him to finally open up to people and display his emotions.

2.5 The idea that men cannot be raped

A rape myth present in *Breaking the Silence* is the idea that men cannot be raped. Throughout the novel this is repeatedly enforced through views of homophobia and masculinity that do not allow for a man to be raped in a culture full of rape myths. One of the first studies done into rape myths regarding males was by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992), related here by a paper from Davies et al (2012), which found three generic myths about male rape. These are “(a) male rape does not happen (e.g. “it is impossible to rape a man”), (b) male rape is the victim’s fault (e.g. “men are to blame for not escaping or fighting back”), and (c) men would not be traumatized by rape (e.g. men do not need counselling after being raped)” (Davies et al, 2810). Throughout *Breaking the Silence*, we can see that Declan and the society around him, believe and actively partake in these rape myths. So much so, that Declan does not even consider himself to have been raped. While it is clear that Declan is disturbed by the incident, because of the ideas about it that

Doc has instilled in him, he doesn't consider it anything but rough play between team mates until well into the novel.

Declan undoubtedly feels an immense amount of shame and confusion after the incident, which is the typical reaction of male rape victims. Javaid's research (2018) shows that "There are cultural, social and emotional barriers that hinder men from coming forward to report and to seek help" (199). In Declan's case, for a long time he believed that what had happened was just his team-mates fooling around, and that it was impossible for him to have actually been raped. In addition to this, the negative homophobic connotations in his society surrounding him, make him fearful of coming forward about the incident, as he is afraid of people thinking he's gay. There is also a clear ideal of masculinity present in the novel, embodied by Meade, an aggressive, competitive bully. Masculinity in a rape myth culture does not allow for men to be weak or a victim. Declan is therefore afraid about coming forward about the rape, as he will be seen as less of a man. These two factors of homophobia and masculinity are "problematic for a number of reasons; for one, these victims may be left isolated, alone and emotionally damaged. Another implication is that societies may continue to deny the existence of male rape" (Javaid, 199). We can see this is true in Declan's case, as he feels extremely isolated and confused after the incident, with no true sense of what happened to him. Because of this, he does not consider himself to have been raped or to be a victim.

Just before we get the entire story, we learn that after the incident Declan told his nephew, Christy, about some of what happened, omitting the rape. In present time of the novel, Declan is cornered by Meade, and when Christy comes to his rescue, we get the first glimpse into what happened three years ago, "you mean this little weasel was one of the guys who jumped you in the shower, grabbed your balls and pissed

on you?’ asked Christy” (O’Loughlin, 114-115). Unfortunately, this is only a small part of what actually happened, as Declan feels too ashamed to tell the entire story “he has eventually told Christy about that first night, but only the edited version, and he’d sworn never to tell anyone else” (O’Loughlin, 115). Declan feels that by opening up about the rape, he is simultaneously opening himself up for his sexuality and masculinity to be judged. The easier option for Declan is to remain silent, and it is clear he does this because he feels an immense amount of shame surrounding the rape, “the fear, the panic, the shame- it was all there” (O’Loughlin, 11) and that this shame is a direct cause of the rape myth culture that he lives in. Doherty and Anderson discuss the emotions of male rape victims and we can see that Declan is indicative of the majority of them, as “overwhelmingly, male rape survivors remain silent, hidden and isolated” (2-3).

2.6 Homophobia

The rape myth that men simply cannot be raped is propelled throughout society through the idea of homophobia. Declan’s belief in the rape myths and ideas on homophobia leads to him feeling confused over the arousal he experiences during the attack and ultimately leaves him in shame and silence, dealing with the traumatic event by himself. Javid discusses these ideas of homosexuality in male rape in his paper, “when heterosexual men engage in gay acts- male rape may be considered as a homosexual act since it involves a man penetrating another man- they may be marked by homophobia, clandestineness, stigma and may possibly be seen to be in denial about being homosexual” (205).

Michael Kimmel (2003) is a leader in the field of homophobia within masculinity and in his 2003 chapter entitled *'Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity'* he theorises that masculinity is something that is constantly challenged and must be proved to others. To do so, men practice homophobia, as it is not simply negative attitudes towards gay people, but is used in the furthering of oneself away from 'gay' attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, the lives of most men are occupied by the "constant necessity to prove to their fellows, and to themselves, that they are not sissies, not homosexuals" (130). Kimmel places homophobia as the "central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood" (131), in that, in order to be seen as a normal, masculine man in our society, you must be homophobic. The fear surrounding being seen as gay is where rape myths about homophobia become dangerous, as they lead to shame, which then leads to silence, "homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves is proof to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend...shame leads to silence" (131). By using these theories, we can see that Jason Meade is being portrayed as the ideal of masculinity, and consistently uses homophobic language in order to further himself from the idea of being gay. Although Meade himself is carrying out violent, homophobic sexual acts with other boys, phrases such as "faggot" (O'Loughlin, 49), "you little queer" (O'Loughlin, 104) and "you little poof" (O'Loughlin, 159) are consistently used by Meade in order to shift any suspicion on himself being gay. The novel never specifies whether Meade is gay himself, but by using belittling and homophobic language towards Declan and others, Meade is upholding standards of masculinity, by asserting himself as powerful and distancing himself from the possibility of being gay. A paper from Davies and McCartney discusses this idea of

shifting the attention from yourself by using homophobic language and trying to ensure that nobody thinks you are gay “Men are brought up to endorse traditional gender roles to a greater extent than women are, and part of being a ‘real man’ is to be homophobic. Male rape, by its nature, portrays homosexual (albeit non-consensual) sex between men” (392). One thing that the novel makes clear is that the two rapes that Meade carries out are acts of power and not simply a want for sex. There is also a level of competitiveness and jealousy involved, as we learn that Meade’s dad is quite hard on him and sets high standards of achievement. When Meade can’t meet these, he lashes out at those who can. Both of the rapes are surrounded in jealousy relating to basketball. Declan is raped after his first match on the senior team, when the coach had praised him afterwards. “It had been done out of spite...their macho honour had been offended” (O’Loughlin, 15). From this behaviour towards Declan, it is clear that he is attempting to carry out the traditional male gender role by being homophobic.

Something that is present throughout the entire novel is shame, which comes not only from the rape itself, but also from Declan questioning his sexuality. In the section of their study investigating rape myths about male victims, Chapleu et al found that “research has identified the following beliefs...’men who are sexually assaulted by men must be gay” (603) which is synonymous with many other studies done into male rape myths. Because Declan’s attackers were three men, he seriously questions his sexuality throughout the novel. With Meade spreading rumours that Declan is gay, Gnasher confronts him about it, and Declan reveals he has been questioning it for the past three years since the attack;

‘Just so I know, Dec, *are you gay?*’ ‘I don’t know.’ ‘How in God’s name could you not know? I would have thought it was fairly clear.’ Declan took a deep breath. Then he told Gnasher all about the night they

came for him the first time... 'God, Dec, I'm really sorry. But I don't see how it makes you gay.' 'When they did that to me, even though it hurt, something happened - you know, physically...down there'

(O'Loughlin, 151).

Declan's view of the rape is seriously harmed because of the cultural rape myths surrounding him. In a rape myth culture, there is a view that a male rape victim must be gay. Because Declan experienced an erection during the attack, he buys into this rape myth and it is yet another aspect of the attack that prevents him from coming forward about it. Unfortunately, this is an added layer of shame that is heaped upon male rape victims. Doherty and Anderson found that most "survivors remain silent rather than risk being labelled as a 'closet homosexual', 'bi-sexual', or as promiscuous and thus somehow 'deserving' of rape" (3). With the persistent homophobic rape myths surrounding them, Javaid's paper finds that the victims' first reaction is to feel shame and remain silent, "Preventing or avoiding homophobic reactions, responses or appraisals from others may be important for male rape victims; otherwise, they may bring about fear, stigma and silence, leaving these men to manage the aftermath of their rape all by themselves" (205). Overall, it is clear that when it comes to homophobia in *Breaking the Silence*, Declan's involuntary physical reaction to the rape makes him question his sexuality and prevents him from telling others about the attack. This is indicative of how rape myths can be extremely harmful to victim's perceptions of themselves and the rape.

2.7 Masculinity

While there is not much research done on male rape myths, Davies et al finds that "the limited research on myths about male rape indicates that myths about this

crime in part surround issues relating to the perceived lack of masculinity in men who are raped, because they failed to fight back and thus fail to behave like 'real men'" (2809). The second rape myth that permeates this novel is the idea that masculinity doesn't allow for men to sustain being raped by another man, and if you are raped, then you must not be much of a man at all. Javaid finds that this rape myth is extremely damaging for victims, as it affects their sense of self "this is a male rape myth, in that 'men cannot be raped by other men'. This male rape myth stems from, arguably, gender roles and gender patterns of conduct, maintained and supported in societies. For instance, rigidly traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity construct men as unable to be victims per se" (208). The idea in our rape myth culture that men cannot be raped is damaging to male victims, it causes them shame and an inability to come forward about the assault. In these terms of masculinity, a man must always be powerful and in control, there is no room for weakness or displays of emotion. Therefore, the idea of a man being raped is seen as impossible, as that would mean relinquishing power. Chapleau et al's study (2008) finds the fixed ideologies that "men are supposed to be invincible and, if a man is raped, he must have showed some unmanly weakness to provoke or permit the assault" (612). The need to constantly keep up a display of masculinity in itself can lead to violence and on the rare occasion that Declan challenges Meade's bullying and homophobic behaviour, Meade responds by being even more excessively volatile. When cornered by Declan in the gym in front of fellow sixths years, Meade reacts by displaying typical characteristics of masculinity, "Meade moved, as if to let Declan pass, but at the last moment he shifted his weight onto one foot and bumped into him, shoulder to chest. He put his hand out as if to steady Declan, but instead his hand went between his legs. He grabbed Declan's testicles and squeezed hard" (O'Loughlin, 112). Aggressive physical and sexual violence allows Meade to look and feel powerful and

in control of the situation. If Meade sees himself as failing to portray these characteristics, it can lead to further aggression. This aggression is seen as normal in relation to portraying these ideals of masculinity, Gebhard et al's study (2018) confirms that "there is something about enacting the male gender role, and all of the stress and difficulty that can involve, that leads some men to turn to aggression" (1). Meade, as a stereotype of ideal masculinity, is in constant control over his emotions and is always seen to have the powerful upper-hand in every situation. In this way, O'Loughlin represents Meade as an embodiment of the typical male gender roles.

In Declan's case, the lack of emotional control and feelings of powerlessness are what he beats himself up about most. The idea of being emotional and out-of-control are things that don't fit into society's ideal of hegemonic masculinity, and so Declan feels ashamed to have experienced these things during the rape, "he knew he hadn't been in control of his own emotions that night, with Doc; or that first time, three years ago. They had. Both times they'd taken complete control. He'd begged, and cried like a baby, but it had made no difference. They'd carried on, enjoying his fear, owning him" (109). O'Loughlin is showing a version of masculinity throughout the rape that isn't a customary form. By infantilizing Declan and making him show emotion, O'Loughlin writes Declan as the complete opposite of the typical, cultural masculinity. For Declan, the act of showing emotion and losing control during the rape doesn't fit into this version of masculinity and it serves to further shame him.

Another aspect of masculinity relating to rape in the novel is the fact that both of the rapes happened after basketball training in the changing rooms and the influence of sport is heavy. There has been some research on rape and rape myth cultures in male athletic teams by McMahon (2007), who identified athletic teams as subcultures and whose research has suggested that there is a higher acceptance rate of rape myths within these. McMahon theorises that this is the case because instances of

violence, aggression and jealousy are a lot more likely within this male sporting subculture than anywhere else. Sport is seen as an overtly masculine arena and therefore it promotes these characteristics and beliefs, “the athletic culture may foster violence against other men and women through narrowly defined ideas of masculinity that include dominance, aggression and competitiveness. They have also argued that the institution of sport provides an arena for positively sanctioned violence” (359). Iconis (2008) also studied rape myths within a sporting sub-culture, and found that “Some researchers have speculated that certain behaviours associated with all-male groups might encourage attitudes supportive of sexual aggression” (48). This indicates the possibility that not only Declan, but his other teammates; Doc, Cahill, O’Connor and Meade, all believe the rape myths surrounding males. This is possibly a reason for the fact that Declan and Doc did not believe Declan to have been raped and their rapists don’t see themselves as doing an inherently wrong thing. In addition to this, Iconis also found that team sports support rape-myths more than non-team sports, “rape myth acceptance was significantly higher among freshmen and sophomore male student athletes than juniors and seniors and athletes participating in individually-focused sports, such as golf, were less accepting of rape myths than those involved in more team-based sports” (Iconis, 49). This shows that the beliefs about rape myths portrayed by members of the basketball team within *Breaking the Silence* are indicative of beliefs widely-held by actual sports teams.

Overall, it is clear that, as Javaid has found, “male rape challenges, confronts and affects men’s masculinity. Men are not expected to be a victim of a crime seen solely to affect the female population, but this is a male rape myth, in that ‘men cannot be raped by other men’. For male rape victims to question their masculinity results in their inability to embody hegemonic masculinity” (207). It is an achievement when Declan can admit to himself being a rape victim, as although this doesn’t fit into a

description of typical masculinity, it ensures that he can acknowledge his own particular version of masculinity.

2.8 The word 'rape'

The novel is 165 pages long, but it takes until page 151, near the very end of the book, for the word 'rape' to even be used for the first time. Notably, it isn't by Declan himself, but his friend Gnasher who has just heard the full story. Gnasher is the first person that Declan fully opens up to, and he is met with acceptance and understanding, "Declan took a deep breath. Then he told Gnasher all about the night they came for him the first time. 'Those bastards' said Gnasher, in disbelief. 'That's rape'. Declan nodded. He knew it was. Rape didn't have to involve a penis; any forced entry was rape. He'd read that in *Newsweek*" (O'Loughlin, 151). Declan has been extremely guarded about the rape and by getting a supportive reaction from Gnasher, Declan feels free to go on and tell others. O'Loughlin is clearly making a commentary on rape myth cultures at this point in the novel. Doc's immediate silencing of Declan caused him to become extremely closed-off, volatile and self-isolating. However, when Gnasher responds in a way that makes Declan feel heard and understood, Declan can then open up to others and seek help. This clearly shows that rape myths and acting negatively towards rape victims only serve to further victimise them. In the long run, these silenced victims will remain full of shame and fear. However, if we as a society are to react in the way Gnasher reacts, it will help the rape victim overcome their trauma and seek more support.

We can see this when Declan tells more people about the rapes, this time Laura's parents, and he finally accepts that he is a victim of rape. Whereas before, Declan's shame surrounding the rape and his belief in rape myths meant that he did not

consider himself to be a victim, by sharing his experience with others, he can finally accept what happened to him and to Doc wasn't his fault. The first time the word victim is mentioned is on page 162, three pages before the end of the novel. Just like with Gnasher, when Declan opens up to others he receives empathetic support and acceptance. After Declan tells his story, Laura's dad replies, "Declan you're a victim too" said Chris Byrne softly. "You didn't do anything wrong, they did" (O'Loughlin, 162). This is the first mention of Declan being a victim and he responds quite positively to it. While it is clear Declan does not like the idea of being labelled as a victim, it allows him the freedom to be honest and to feel accepted for the first time in three years, "*victim*. Declan had never liked the sound of that word, but suddenly it was a liberation. He'd done nothing wrong" (O'Loughlin, 162). The fact that the word was never mentioned throughout the entire course of *Breaking the Silence*, shows the reader that it is only when Declan can fully open up about his experience and be accepted by others regardless, that he can consider himself to be a victim. In a rape myth culture, the spread of rigid, false ideologies about rape do not allow for a male to consider himself a victim. *Breaking the Silence* shows us that we must disregard these socially-embedded rape myths and allow rape victims to be heard.

It is clear that Declan is being portrayed as living in a rape myth culture within *Breaking the Silence*, as the presence of rape myths and the impact they have on his society are evident. They have a negative impact on Declan himself, as for a long time he didn't believe that what had happened to him was rape and could not consider himself a victim. Within a rape myth culture, this is common and only leads to the furthering of rape myths, especially with males. Rape myths surrounding males commonly portray the idea that they cannot be raped if they are heterosexual and masculine enough. Javaid discusses the idea that this is extremely damaging to victims, as

Many male rape victims do not know that what has happened to them is rape, so they have not got the words to describe and define their sexual victimisation, because it is not reflected in the legal framework since male rape is hardly acknowledged in society. The lack of legal acknowledgement of forced acts, such as penetration with a bottle or finger, as rape is problematic since many male victims classify such acts as rape. Consequently, the notion of 'male rape is not a serious issue' may be reinforced and strengthened (201)

This is particularly true for Declan in *Breaking the Silence*, as Declan is hesitant to think of himself as a rape victim as it was done with a deodorant can. It is clear that O'Loughlin's purposely wrote this novel in order to combat these rape myths as, throughout, Declan is portrayed a stereotypical male rape victim living in a rape myth society. By breaking free from these myths surrounding homophobia and masculinity, Declan can understand that what happened to him was rape, and he has the ability to seek help and be warmly accepted by others.

2.9 A point of contention

In fact, a point of contention in the novel is just how accepted Declan is by everyone he opens up to. When he finally tells the story of the rapes, he is wholeheartedly understood and empathised with by everyone surrounding him. The absolute acceptance of Declan by his community is somewhat confusing, as O'Loughlin had successfully narrated a rape-myth culture in the novel previous to this. Another factor of rape myths is the idea that they prevent victims from coming forward for fear of being shamed and misunderstood. Suarez and Gadalla (2010) find that, in rape myth cultures, "an important factor that discourages rape victims from

reporting is the non-supportive reactions that they often encounter after disclosing the assault. Research findings indicate that rape victims may experience post-rape trauma as a result of these nonsupportive reactions” (2011). Usually, if the victim does come forward, these fears are realised as the victim is often further shamed and receives secondary victimization from their community around them. However, in *Breaking the Silence*, this is not the case, as Declan is wholly accepted and understood by everyone he opens up to. The first person he tells, Gnasher, just happens to volunteer for Amnesty and has experience and a working knowledge of male rape, “I work as a volunteer in Amnesty. I’ve read a lot about male rape. It’s used quite often as a weapon of war- disgusting as that is. It’s not a sex thing, it’s about power. The reaction you’re talking about is quite normal. It’s a physical, involuntary thing; it comes from the stimulation of a gland. It doesn’t imply anything. The defence in a recent prison rape case tried to use the fact that the guy got an erection as some sign of consent. The judge laughed it out of court” (O’Loughlin, 152). This is unlikely for a sixth-year boy, but in the moment helps Declan to feel optimistic about opening up for the first time. As discussed, Laura’s dad helps him to realise that he is a victim, while her mother coincidentally works with rape victims in the Rape Crisis Centre, “‘Declan,’ she said softly, ‘I’ve worked with women who’ve been abused. It’s not my area of expertise, but I’d like you to call this number sometime. They can help’...It took him two days to get up the courage to phone the number. When he did, he heard the words that he hoped might help him to put his life back together. ‘Good afternoon. The Rape Crisis Centre” (O’Loughlin, 163). Although it is encouraging for Declan that in both sets of people he opens up to, someone is involved in an organization that may be helpful for him, it does not seem to fit in the negative view of a rape myth culture we received throughout the novel. *Breaking the Silence* closes with Declan seeking help from the Rape Crisis Centre, and in a

session with a counsellor says, “I want to stop being a victim and start being a survivor. To take back control of my life, not give it to them” (O’Loughlin, 164). For the readers, it is enjoyable to end on a relatively happy note, but the idea that a rape victim could open up to people and immediately receive recognition and acceptance is not a probable outcome.

Perhaps O’Loughlin is making a comment on the need to respond positively to rape victim’s allegations, especially when they are male, instead of the usual disbelief. However, it seems out of place and does not fit in with the rape myth culture he has spent an entire novel constructing. While it is obviously a positive way to end the novel and the reader can be assured Declan is getting help, it does not truly display an Irish rape myth culture.

2.10 Conclusion

To conclude, we can see that Ireland is being constructed as a rape-myth culture throughout the novel, as O’Loughlin successfully sets up an environment in which Declan feels he cannot be open and honest about the rape. Because of this silencing, Declan’s life changes enormously, and it is through the flashbacks and mentions of three years ago, compared to now, that we can fully appreciate the downfalls in his life and empathise with him as a character. In contrast to this, Doc is a character that is present in a large amount of the novel, but not in his own words, as a result the reader is left with mixed feelings on his character. Overall, it is clear that O’Loughlin has written *Breaking the Silence* in order to contradict the common societal-embedded rape myths surrounding male rape, and Declan performs as a typical male rape victim throughout. Rape myths permeate *Breaking the Silence*, especially those concerning homophobia and masculinity. Because of these, Declan

feels as though he is not a rape victim, and remains shamed into silence for most of the novel. This is incredibly indicative of Ireland itself as a rape myth culture, as most rape victims, especially males, remain silenced and shamed.

3. Asking for It

3.1 Introduction

As shown, as male rape victims are so often hesitant to speak up about their assaults, the majority of statistical rape victims are therefore women. This also means that the majority of rape myths surround women and serve to shame and silence them. Typical examples of rape myths surrounding women are used to place the blame on them rather than their rapist. Ideas such as women who wear revealing clothes ask to be attacked and women often lie about being raped are common. For decades, researchers have proposed and studied the idea that feminism is needed in order to combat rape myths as these problematic attitudes come from a place that shame and degrade women. Feminist researchers, such as McMahon (2007) argue that “we are living in a ‘rape culture’, in which our fundamental attitudes and values are supportive of gender stereotypes and violence against women” (357). Therefore, our everyday values and sexist attitudes towards women is a leading cause of the rape myths that perpetuate our society.

3.2 Overview

Asking for It by Louise O’Neill tells the story of eighteen year old Emma whose life drastically changes one night when she attends a house party. She is raped by four men who are well-known to her while it is filmed and photographed. Before this gang rape, she is firstly also raped by one of the attackers, Paul. Though this sexual encounter is widely read as consensual, I instead argue in this chapter that it was not. I believe O’Neill included this ambiguous encounter where Emma did not say no

but we can tell she is being raped by other cues, in order to show the varying ways that rape can happen. As Emma was drinking and taking drugs at the party, she does not remember most of what happened and instead is forced to find out through social media. Although the footage uploaded shows that she was clearly unconscious and therefore unable to give consent, the entire town of Ballinacoom nevertheless turns against her and blames her for her own rape. As Emma was seen drinking, taking drugs and flirting with the men, she is completely shunned from her society after accusing them of rape, as her community believes she was asking for it. All of these widely-held beliefs about Emma contribute to Ballinacoom being represented as a rape myth culture. Not being able to face the relentless shame heaped upon her by her community, Emma eventually drops her claim against the men, proving that living in a rape myth culture can severely harm its victims. The novel is 340 pages long, with the first 114 about before and during the rapes, and the remaining 226 documenting the aftermath of the rape. This indicates that rather than focusing on the actual rape, showing Emma as living in a rape myth culture is more central and important to the novel. This novel addresses two rape myths; firstly, the idea that a woman's outfit or level of intoxication makes her responsible for her own rape and secondly, the idea that rapists are strangers, although statistics show 8 out of 10 rapes are committed by someone the victim knows (rain.org). Overall, this novel represents how rape myths operate within culture and how by writing about it can open up the discussion and spark change.

3.3 Emma as a Character

O'Neill uses the strategy of representing Emma at first as an unlikeable character in order to limit readers' identification with her, and then to show the

victimisation and change in character in the aftermath of rape. One of the main things that is highlighted in the novel is what a bad friend Emma is to Ali, Maggie and Jamie. A main example of this is when Jamie comes to her telling her she has been raped by Dylan, one of the men that goes on to be included in Emma's gang rape. Emma doesn't believe Jamie and ensures she stays silent about the incident, "*be careful, I warned her. (Dylan is a dick, but he isn't that, he wouldn't do that.) You can't just say stuff like that. When you say that word, you can't take it back*" (O'Neill, 93). O'Neill's technique of including Jamie's rape is essential in order to show that Emma herself is contributing to the rape myth culture they live in. By not believing and silencing Jamie, Emma herself is not supportive of rape victims and in turn does not receive this support herself.

Emma also comes across as extremely jealous of others. Mainly of Maggie's car, Ali's family's money and Jamie doing extremely well in school. In order to make herself feel superior to Maggie she repeatedly makes offhand, rude comments about her car, even though Maggie gives her a lift to and from school each day. This shows her to be an unappreciative and jealous character, therefore making her unlikeable to the audience. When her friends discuss a test they have later that day, Emma pretends she forgot, "'oh shit' I say. 'I totally forgot about that. I am so screwed.'" (O'Neill, 10) even though she had been awake studying since 5am. Clearly, Emma does this so that when Jamie gets higher marks than her, she can use the excuse that she hasn't studied. Although never in competition, Emma feels as though she must be ahead of her friends and she uses her beauty in order to rationalise this to herself. When at Ali's house surrounded by her family's wealth, Emma must believe that she is better in some way, "I am beautiful. I mouth the words at my reflection. That is something Ali's money can't buy" (O'Neill, 41). While Ali, Jamie and Maggie seem to be genuine friends to each other, Emma seems to be continuously trying to

one-up them. Another way she does this is by stealing. While at Ali's house, she takes a bottle of perfume and rationalises it to herself in a way that does not make her come off as looking bad in her own mind, "I spray a little on my wrists. (They won't even notice.) I open my school bag. (It's not like they can't afford it.) And I stuff it in so quickly I barely even notice myself doing it, so it's like I didn't do anything at all" (O'Neill, 41). This portrayal of Emma by O'Neill ensures that she comes across as a jealous, ungrateful friend.

Another aspect of Emma's character that makes her unlikeable is the fact that she is extremely flirtatious with everyone around her, disregarding if they have girlfriends or if her friends like them. Clearly, Emma needs to be liked by people, and does not care who she hurts along the way, showing her to be an extremely selfish, attention-hungry character. In portraying Emma as an unlikeable narrator, O'Neill makes it known that it doesn't always have to be a good person in order for us to feel sorry for them. Once we come to the realisation that Emma has been raped, her character does not matter. In a rape myth culture, people often judge the victim and refer to their character and what they could have done to have invoked the assault. O'Neill combats these rape myths by showing that Emma is a girl who in rape myth culture's terms was in every way 'asking for it' while also portraying and proving that it was in fact rape. O'Neill shows us that even though she was flirty, drank too much and cared too little about others, she still does not deserve to be raped and in no way invoked the attack on herself. By portraying Emma as an unlikeable narrator, O'Neill forces the reader to feel for her after the rapes and proves that who she is and the way she acts does not matter.

3.4 The First Rape

Although it is not widely-read as rape, arguably Emma was first raped by Paul before the gang-rape by the four men. While the gang-rape is more focused on as being a rape because she is unconscious, there were four rapists and everything was documented, it is clear that the first sexual encounter between her and Paul was also non-consensual. Before having sex with Paul, Emma displays all of the behaviours that a rape myth culture would admonish her for and use to subvert her rape claim. I believe that O'Neill has included this first sexual encounter to show that rape doesn't always occur when someone is drugged and unconscious and completely not asking for it, it can occur after the girl has made the first move, when she's drunk and when she is wearing skimpy clothing, but none of this is an excuse for the rape happening. Emma clearly wants to have sex with Paul and plays a huge role in instigating things between them. Underneath it all, Emma is interested in impressing Jack and is using Paul to make him jealous. That night, Emma goes to great lengths in order to try and impress Paul, including doing drugs "I pop it into my mouth. (I hope Jack saw me do that.)" (O'Neill, 98-99). Up until the point of Emma and Paul being in the bedroom together, it is very clear that Emma is orchestrating the entire situation. She is the one wearing skimpy clothing, taking drugs, drinking, denying help from friends, flirting with Paul and leading him down into the room. For someone in a rape myth culture who looks for anyway to subvert a victim's rape claim and place the blame on them instead, Emma is enacting every behaviour that is usually used against a rape victim. For most, there is evidence enough that Emma was 'asking for it'. However, while she may have initially wanted to have sex with Paul, the second she showing signs she does not want to have sex with him and he continues on, can be read as rape.

'Paul maybe we should go back to the party.' 'Don't be silly,' he says. (I brought him in here. This was my idea.) 'Don't be a fucking cock-tease.' 'Wait,' I try and say. 'Wait, I don't feel...' But he pushes me back down, yanking my underwear aside, and he's inside me, and I'm not ready and it hurts and I don't feel well, and I don't think he's using a condom, and I should stop him...I don't know if there's any point in stopping him. And it's too late now anyway (O'Neill, 107-108)

What's significant is the fact that Emma never says 'no' or 'stop', which is something that rape myths cultures often focus on, believing that if a woman didn't directly say no to a man, he cannot have raped her. However, there are other indicators that show she did not want to have sex with him. In asking him to go back to the party, it clearly indicates she is trying to leave the situation she's in. When he tells her not to be silly, we can see that she thinks the common thoughts ingrained into her by a rape myth culture's ideologies as she believes that by bringing him into the bedroom she now owes him something. The fact that he ignores her protestations to wait, shows that it is rape that's occurring. Not wanting to protest or disturb the rapist during the sexual encounter is common for rape victims. There are three involuntary different responses when someone undergoes trauma; fight, flight or freeze, with studies, such as one by Möller et al (2017) showing that during rape, most people's reaction is to freeze, "Immobility during rape is a common reaction" (1). Victims feel that because it is already happening they cannot protest or shout 'stop' or 'rape' and that it would be easier to just deal with it until it is over. Burnett et al (2009) writes that "during a sexually violent act, women find it difficult to assert their lack of consent, as they feel they have already failed to do so" (476). Because Emma already tried to stop the rape and it has happened anyway, she does not feel as though she is now in a position to say anything else. O'Neill includes this first rape in *Asking for It* because

Emma is conscious and has made the decision to bring Paul into this bedroom to have sex with him and while there is a sense of agency he is nevertheless still raping her. O'Neill is showing that being drunk, flirting and wearing a short dress are not the reasons behind Emma's rape, and that rape can still occur even if the victim is the one who initiated the encounter.

3.5 The Gang Rape

The second rape, the gang-rape by four men, is what the novel and Emma's community is mainly focused on. There is no description or account of it because just as Emma is unconscious and must slowly uncover what happened to her, the reader must also. The reader having that confusion and lack of knowledge about what happened is an excellent tool used within the novel, as it echoes Emma's feelings about the situation. Not even the reader can tell that Emma was about to be raped by the four men, as the situation beforehand did not seem overtly sexual. Paul unlocks the door because he wants to show off Emma, who walks back into the room naked to see the boys there, wary of other people passing by in the hallway, she makes them close the door and is then alone with them in the room. The next thing the reader gets before the rape is the group of them taking drugs. As Emma passes out and the others don't we are unsure whether the men took the drugs also or if they just wanted her to take the drugs as they had planned an attack. Whatever the case, as Emma's consciousness goes blank so do the pages, and the next text we receive is when Emma regains consciousness.

Two aspects of the gang-rape are notable. Firstly, Emma's lack of consciousness means the boys not only rape her but can document it too. The fact that she is unconscious means the men can essentially treat her as a sex doll, which they do.

They also have the opportunity to document the entire experience which is common when rape happens to unconscious victims. Heyes (2016) writes that “the rendering of rape victims’ bodies as superficial artefacts that are denied anonymity is exacerbated by a frequent corollary of sexual assault while unconscious- the taking and distributing of photos or video of the assault itself or of the victim’s body before or after” (372). Not only is it easier to rape the victim, but unconsciousness offers the opportunity to pose and document her body as “perpetrators want to pore over their deeds or brag to their friends, because it’s easy to frame your shots when your subject is lying still” (Heyes, 372). An unconscious rape victim is a goal for rapists for these very reasons, which is why taking pictures as proof is so popular. Oliver (2016) writes that because of this, “the valorisation of non-consensual sex has reached the extreme where sex with unconscious girls, especially accompanied by photographs as trophies, has become a goal” (1).

A spectatorship aspect is present throughout the rape as Paul wanted the other men to see her and they all watch as each other rapes her. Oliver discusses the fact that this shows “rape is becoming a group activity with spectators” (6). The idea that raping an unconscious girl is a fun-filled, group activity is clearly present here. Not only do the men receive enjoyment from raping her, but this enjoyment is heightened by the fact they are all doing it together. In doing so, it becomes a form of live entertainment instead of a horrific sexual assault. Sanday (1996) writes of rapists wants, as “watching their buddies have sex is another favourite activity...since the goal is to supply a live pornography show for their buddies, the perpetrators in these cases may easily overlook a woman’s ability to consent. They certainly don’t seek her consent to being watched” (193). Later in the novel, Emma finds out that Maggie’s boyfriend, Eli, was in the room at one point and watched the rapes. Even though he did not rape her himself, he used the rapes as a form of live entertainment and

received enjoyment from watching his friends carry out this violent sexual attack on an unconscious girl. This spectatorship aspect of rape is important to the novel as it shows us that none of the men watching saw anything wrong with what was happening.

3.6 Social Media

The fact that Emma finds out about the rape online is a major plot point of the novel. While rapists are usually secretive about what they have done, these men put pictures and videos of Emma online seeking praise and providing entertainment. The use of social media allows rapists to continue to shame their victims even after the assault is over. Oliver writes that “perpetrators can continue their victimization of targets of sexual assault using social media. Posting photographs and jeering comments extends the damage to victims beyond the rape itself” (4). A Facebook page had been set up called ‘Easy Emma’ that included all of the pictures and videos taken. The presence of social media is important, as even though all of the evidence is there to see, instead of receiving sympathy she is instead bullied and disbelieved. Emma finding out about her rape through pictures and videos instead of it being an actual lived experience is extremely traumatising, as she is forced to see herself through the eyes of her rapists. Too late to stop anything, she feels a complete loss of agency. Heyes writes that,

“This feeling of powerlessness in the face of the gaze is intensified for women whose rape has been photographed or videoed, as images of their violation are circulated in ways they cannot control, perpetuating a collective visual representation of their objectification and loss of agency. This feeling is

compounded when the rape victim has been unconscious or semiconscious during her rape” (Heyes, 373).

We can see the objectification and lack of agency through the way Emma describes herself and her body while looking through the pictures. She consistently describes herself in objective terms in order to try and distance herself from the situation, as she feels a severe disconnect from her body. She does not see herself as human, but instead as some sort of doll that these men have played with, “she has no face. She is just a body, a life-size doll to play with. She is an It. She is a thing.” (O’Neill, 146). By O’Neill using the tool of Emma referring to herself using the third person instead of first person, it shows the reader how detached and shamed she feels from the images of herself onscreen. Referring to herself in the third person shows she is unable to relate it to herself as she feels an immense amount of disconnect between the person in the picture and herself. Oliver writes that this is common for rape victims who learn about their rape online, “for a woman who sees her rape for the first time through the eyes of others, this experience of one’s own body as not one’s own, as one’s own body as a living corpse, can only be intensified” (5). Not only does Emma see the men raping her, but she sees them violating her body in other ways also, “the girl is on the ground in the next photo. She lies there. Another photo. Dylan is standing above her, his dick in his hand, a thin yellow stream flowing from him on to her head” (O’Neill, 148-149). This serves to further distance Emma from her body, as she is in disbelief that this could have been done to her. Oliver writes that when victims view their own bodies being abused and violated in various ways, it “intensifies the damage to the victims’ sense of their own identity and the coherence of their experience, further alienating them from their own experience and their own bodies.” (4). Too late to stop what is being done to her, Emma is forced instead to just watch herself as she loses a sense of agency within her own body.

These negative feelings towards herself and her body never go away, as Emma is still describing herself as an object at the end of the novel, “all I am is a thing. All I am is a collection of doll parts to be filled in and plugged up and passed on” (O’Neill, 323). This shows that even after going through the motions of accusing her rapists, her feelings of being used don’t leave her. Social media’s ability to quickly spread information and allow its users to screenshot and keep the content forever, means that the evidence of her rape is circulating forever, even after the Facebook page has been deleted.

The idea of a rape myth culture can be seen here as although this page has hundreds of views, comments and likes on every photo, it is not reported to the authorities. Even though commentators obviously see the negative sexual encounter that has happened, they do not report it “Matt Reynolds has commented under the photo: ‘Looks like Nirvana’s Rape Me is song of the night.’ Twenty people have liked it. I scroll through the names. And I know all of them.” (O’Neill, 148). Instead of reporting it, Matt chooses to interact with this Facebook-moment from a distance. The fact that all of these people are in agreement that it seems like rape, their lack of action or sympathy towards Emma shows they are living in a rape myth culture where they believe that even if she was perhaps raped, she was certainly asking for it.

Social media allows views and opinions from anyone to reach Emma. However, the ones that are most affecting are from the people Emma knows. The rape myth culture in Ballinacorney is looking for any reason to shift the blame onto the victim, instead of believing her and focusing on the accused. This is especially prevalent with Emma’s own classmates. Pictures are put up on Facebook of the girls in her year showing their support for her rapists, “in each of the photos there are girls, loads of them, each picture with a different group, all of them wearing plain white t-shirts. I know most of them...scrawled on the t-shirts in black marker are the words

#TeamPaul, #TeamDylan and #TeamSean, one or two have #TeamFitzy” (O’Neill, 300). These girls chose to disregard the evidence of the rape they all say and instead carry out significant markers of a rape myth culture, whereby they believe the rapists instead of the victim. It is common that women usually believe male accused rapists instead of female rape victims, Chapleau et al’s study (2007) discussed this “women may betray female victims and support male aggressors due to their admiration for men, their belief that women are unfulfilled without a male partner, and their need to nurture men” (136). With Paul, Sean, Dylan and Fitzy all being popular and significant people of their community, these girls choose to support them as they believe Emma was asking for it.

Online bullying and harassment is not limited to Emma’s friends. Every time she logs in online, she has hundreds of requests, notifications and messages from people she does not know, “there are so many new friend requests on Facebook and twitter notifications, from accounts with no profile pictures and names like XYZ89u4.

Slut...Bitch...Skank...Whore...We know what you

are...Slut...Bitch...Skank...Whore...We know what you did” (O’Neill, 156). The

messages from these unknown accounts serve to further shame her as a victim, and Emma gets notably more distressed from seeing these messages. This shows that the influence of social media for victims is detrimental, as not only are pictures of the rape circulating, but her friends and random strangers can give their harmful opinions easily.

Emma’s rape case received nationwide media attention, as she became known as the #BallinacorneyGirl. This is somewhat helpful, as it opened up public discussion and allowed supporters the opportunity to come forward to show their solidarity to Emma. However, it also meant that people across the country could give disparaging opinions blaming Emma for her own rape. Emma repeatedly comes across stories

and opinions of herself on the radio, in newspapers and even on the Late Late Show, meaning even closed up in her house, she is never allowed the chance to fully escape her rape. This is an important aspect of the novel, as even though Emma retreats completely from the outside world, cultural violence is so pervasive that even at home she encounters negative opinions on her own rape.

The majority of the commentary that comes from Ballinacorney is victim-blaming, adding to its rape myth culture. Listening to people discuss the rape on the radio, Emma hears the idea that those from Ballinacorney “always thought I was a little slut who was just asking for trouble, that I had been easy with my favours and had regretted it in the morning and decided to yell rape, and that I was ruining those boys’ futures, that I was an attention seeker, that I was embarrassing the town, that I deserved it, that they hoped I got AIDS and died, that I was a dirty slut” (O’Neill, 206). These opinions from Emma’s own community focus on her character and try to and shift the blame onto her, instead of examining her rapist’s personalities. Chapleau et al (2007) discuss this phenomenon when they write that, “when charges of rape and sexual assault are reported in the news the female victim’s character is often questioned and her motives are scrutinised. By comparison, descriptions of the perpetrators, when reported, seemingly are more even-handed particularly when the accused is of high status” (131). This can be seen in *Asking for It*, as Ballinacorney chooses to support the rapists regardless of their behaviour and vilify Emma instead. Their behaviour isn’t taken into account as much as Emma’s is and Ballinacorney’s rape myth culture is amplified in the rejection of judging the men and instead focusing on what Emma did that night. The fact that Paul had a girlfriend, they all urinated on her, put water bottles inside her, left her dumped on her front door step, or even that they recorded the entire thing are all completely disregarded, as their community

instead focuses on Emma's character in order to try and shame her and put the blame on her.

3.7 Rape Myth 1: Asking for It

The purpose of rape myths is to populate stereotypical beliefs that lead others to disbelieve the victim. Reling et al (2018) proposes the idea that in doing so, "rape myths subject survivors to the scrutiny of public opinion, often blaming survivors for their own victimization" (2). In *Asking for It*, this is done through the circulation of two particular rape myths. Firstly, the idea is presented throughout that the reason Emma was raped was because she was drunk, high, wearing a revealing dress and was essentially 'asking for it'. This rape myth suggest that Emma should have expected what happened to her and cannot really blame her rapists for it. The second rape myth present in the novel is the idea that Emma and her friends know these men, they are not strangers, and therefore can't have done what she is accusing them of. In regards to the first rape myth, O'Neill portrays Emma in a way that makes her look responsible for enacting her own rape. The purpose of this is to show that even though she exhibits all the typical markers of 'asking for it' she still does not deserve to be raped. O'Neill breaks down pre-conditioned ideas of rape and ensures the audience knows it does not matter what Emma wore, drank or took that night as it was solely her rapists that caused the rape. McMahon researches this rape myth and writes that "a commonly expressed belief was that women put themselves in bad situations by dressing a certain way, drinking alcohol, or engaging in other behaviours, such as flirting" (367). In a rape myth culture, gender stereotypes are enforced whereby males are overtly loud and sexual and females are timid and virginal. Chapleau et al (2007) writes that there is therefore there is a belief that

“women who violate this stereotype are partially responsible for making themselves vulnerable to sexual attack (e.g. by drinking alcohol, wearing revealing clothing etc.)” (135). By Emma enacting these behaviours, O’Neill is giving her every characteristic of a girl who is seen to have brought the rape on herself. However, by then portraying the rape as clearly being the fault of her rapists and nothing else, O’Neill breaks down this rape myth. Rape myths surrounding victim blaming are especially harmful, as O’Hara (2012) writes “these myths shift the blame to the victim” (247-248). Burnett et al also discusses the idea that victim-blaming rape myths are damaging, as they lead to a rape myth culture and effect the dominant discourse surrounding rape cases, as these myths “often casts alleged rape victims, especially females, as “sluts” who were “looking for it”” (474).

3.8 Rape Myth 2: Rapists are always Strangers

Another rape myth that is broken down within the novel is the idea that rapists are strangers. Emma is raped by four boys she knows well, has flirted with, has had sex with one of them already, and is at one of their houses. Acquaintance rape makes up a large percentage of all rapes, as most people know each other. O’Hara discusses the usual public imagery that surrounds rapists and rape victims in a rape myth culture. When the news media also picks up these ideologies, it can be harmful for victim as they are then thought to be lying if their attacker doesn’t fit into this classification, as O’Hara argues:

“The news media frequently portray rapists using monster imagery, their victims classed as either ‘virgins’ attacked by these so-called ‘monsters’ or instead as promiscuous women who invited the rape. These depictions can impact upon public opinion as the more frequently rape myths are used, the

more accessible they become. This can be harmful to rape victims when individuals who subscribe to these myths are involved in the criminal justice system” (O’Hara, 247).

The idea that rapists are usually portrayed as scary strangers down a dark alleyway, rather than a friend is an outdated and damaging view. We can see the impact that this rape myth has on the people surrounding Emma, especially within her friends and family. When her friends have come to visit her after the rape, they question her on this: “‘Sean is a good guy, I just want Emma to be, like, totally sure.’ She wrapped her arm around my shoulder. ‘You know I’m on your side, right? I was just asking if it was, like, *rape rape*.’” (O’Neill, 248). This is repeated when Emma says she wants to withdraw her claim. Her parents say how happy and proud they are of her, and her mam says, “‘they’re good boys really. This all just got out of hand’” (O’Neill, 324). Although her mother knows Emma was gang-raped by these four men, she still believes that they are good boys, simply because of the fact she knows them and their families. Had Emma been claiming to have been raped by four strangers that nobody knows, we can surmise that she would have received a lot more support than she does. The fact that these boys are part of her community means they are not believed to be rapists. This leads to a wide-reaching rape myth culture that shares these same views. This is damaging to Emma as a victim, as it means she is disbelieved, victimised and eventually even drops her claim against them.

3.9 Rape Myth Cultures

Ballinacoom is repeatedly presented as a rape myth culture throughout *Asking for It* as Emma continuously overhears comments from people claiming the rape was her fault. As mentioned, the two rape myths at play are that she was asking for it with

her behaviour and that these men are 'good boys' and could not have done it. These rape myths are spread through people's archaic attitudes towards rape, whereby they try and remove the blame from the rapist by any excuse possible.

Emma hears these comments both from people she knows and people she doesn't. One such incident is when Emma overhears girls discussing the rape from a bathroom stall. While one girl is reluctant to admit it could have been her fault if she was passed out, the other girl enacts specific characteristics of someone living in a rape myth culture by blaming the victim for her own rape, "'Yeah.' Caroline still sounds unsure. 'But if she had passed out?' 'Car.' The first girl is losing patience. 'Come on. No one forced the drink down her throat, or made her take shit. And what guy was going to say no if that was handed to him on a plate?' She laughs. 'She was fucking asking for it.'" (O'Neill, 154). While it is true that it was Emma's decision to drink alcohol and take drugs, this is not an excuse for why the boys raped her. They did it, simply, because they are rapists. A rape myth culture blames the victim's behaviour for the rapist's actions.

In *Asking for It*, the reader sees rape myths circulating more widely than just the local context, as Ireland as a whole is presented as a rape myth culture. Ireland at large is continuously judging Emma's character instead of her rapist's actions. A woman calls into a radio show Emma is listening to and blames her for what happened while displaying attitudes that typically contribute to a rape myth culture "'Skirts up their backsides, and tops cut down to their belly buttons, and they're all drinking too much and falling over in the streets, they're practically asking to be attacked, and then when it happens, they start bawling crying over it. As your other man said, what do they expect?'" (O'Neill, 186). This woman displays attitudes that contribute to a rape myth culture in Ireland. By blaming women for their own rapes because they were wearing short skirts and drinking too much completely removes blame from those

actually at fault. O'Neill is not just portraying Ballinacorney as a rape myth culture, but Ireland at large. The lack of support and belief for Emma shows that people in a rape myth culture are quick to judge the victim and feel empathetic towards their accused. This lack of belief for the victim leads to silencing. This can be seen in Emma's case as even though there are immense amounts of evidence, Ireland's rape myth culture forces her into silence. Burnett et al found that, "the first and broadest factor that plays a role in...female victims, mutedness about rape, is the culture of which they are a part" (474). This is what occurs in *Asking for It*, as Emma is shamed into silence by the unsupportive and victim-blaming culture that surrounds her. Burnett et al find that because of the structure of rape myths cultures, victims:

"Become muted as they are not free to acknowledge or talk about the problem. In turn, they assimilate and mute each other, particularly female victims, who end up silenced. Such assimilation, however, proves harmful. Its direct result is a rape culture that is fed and perpetuated by the victims themselves" (Burnett et al, 481).

We can see this occur as Emma herself stays silent, thereby contributing to Ireland's rape myth culture. When Emma receives offers from news platforms asking her to give her side of the story, she remains silent as she does not believe there is any point in fighting back. In doing so, Emma herself is a contributor to Ireland's rape myth culture. This excessive silencing is also what forces her to take back her rape claim against the four men. Being part of a rape myth culture means that Emma is well-versed in the attitudes involved, as she believes that her rape trial will go the way most unfortunately do, "You had how many drinks?' their barrister would ask, the jury gasping when I told them...'Mr O'Brien- an upstanding citizen and exceptional athlete who was on track to play football for Cork senior team- you're

trying to tell us that he gave you Class A drugs?” (O’Neill, 229-230). Emma believes that the stereotypical aspects of her rape myth culture such as victim blaming and examining of her character is what the court will focus on. She believes that Ireland’s rape myth culture has permeated the judicial system, which is in fact true when you look at real-life rape cases. This lack of hope forces Emma to withdraw her complaint, as she does not think they will believe her but instead blame her, “(How many boys?) (What were you wearing?) (How much did you have to drink?)” (O’Neill, 224). This shows how ingrained Ireland’s rape myth culture is in people’s mind-sets, so much so that it causes rape victims to give up on finding justice.

3.10 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it is necessary to look at how O’Neill herself concludes *Asking for It*. By ending the book with Emma withdrawing her rape claim, her future is thrown into uncertainty for the reader, as we do not know the outcome of her story. Unlike *Breaking the Silence*, we do not get a relatively-happy ending as the protagonist is receiving help and their future seems bright. In *Asking for It*, Emma does not seem any better off for withdrawing her complaint and the novel ends with the reader knowing that Ireland’s rape myth culture has prevailed over the truth. O’Neill says that she didn’t do this to be “sensational or to emotionally manipulate the reader. I did it because I wanted to have an ending that was true to the narrative itself” (O’Neill, 342) and unfortunately this ending does accurately represent cases of rape in Ireland. A small percentage go to trial, an even smaller percent are convicted, often for short terms. O’Neill cites Ireland as a rape myth culture when she discusses the way our society handles rape claims, “Our society may not appear to support sexual violence, but you don’t need to look very far past the surface to see how we

trivialize rape and sexual assault” (O’Neill, 342). Instead of believing the victim, our society tends to take the side of the rapist, and judge the victim for their actions and what they could have done to deserve the rape. These shared attitudes result in an all-encompassing rape myth culture. Throughout this chapter, I have looked at Emma as a character, the rapes themselves, how Emma finds out about them, the influence of social media and secondary victimization, the rape myths present in the novel and Ireland as a rape myth culture. I have proven that Emma’s character made her unlikeable but in no way deserving of rape, the fact that her rape myth culture silences her and the idea that social media is harmful for victims. Something we can all take from this novel is that, “We need to talk about rape. We need to talk about consent. We need to talk about victim-blaming and slut-shaming and the double standards we place upon our young men and women” (O’Neill, 344).

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary of key findings

Ireland has a rape myth culture, as shown by its news media, court cases and general stereotypical views. As O'Loughlin and O'Neill show, living in a rape myth culture is extremely damaging for victims. This damage includes secondary victimisation, a lack of support by their communities and the serious mental health issues that come with those around you not believing you. As critics of rape myth culture argue, compassionate engagement with victims is necessary in order to displace and challenge rape myth culture. By using a base of feminist scholarly work on rape myths, combined with close textual analysis of the novels, it's evident that the societies portrayed in both novels were rape myth cultures, the result of stereotypical, prejudicial beliefs about both men and women

In *Breaking the Silence*, Declan's environment is set up as a rape myth culture as he is shamed into silence by being told what happened to him was a normal occurrence between team mates. He is surrounded by rape myths relating to homophobia and masculinity that severely affect him as a victim as he lives with this secret for three years, scared to come forward about what has happened. In *Asking for It*, Emma is seen to live in a rape myth culture as she is shunned by her community once she accuses the four men of rape. She is surrounded by rape myths that tell her she was asking for it and this severely affects her as a victim, as she ends up dropping the claim against them.

When we relate Declan and Emma's situations to the broader context of Ireland as an actual rape myth culture we see that they are indicative of the real-life experience

that rape victims in Ireland have. Rape myths prevent them from coming forward and follow them throughout their entire journey as a victim, while they also serve to ensure their communities shift the blame onto them. Testimonials, rape crisis websites and articles about court cases all unveil the fact that Ireland has an extreme rape myth culture whereby victims are affected.

Male rape is severely under reported and therefore under represented.⁴ A change is necessary as we as a society need to normalise the idea that men and boys can, and do, get raped. In doing so, it will encourage more male victims to come forward about their experiences. Likewise, as O'Neill shows, the aftermath of rape can be equally damaging, particularly how rape trials harm, rather than protect, victims. Though I have considered these novels in depth, a further step in understanding how rape myths develop would be to analyse the effects of religion in the creation and maintenance of Ireland's rape myth culture. While religion is noticeably absent from *Breaking the Silence*, it is heavily present in *Asking for It* as the local priest publicly chooses the side of the four men accused of rape. At mass one day, Father Michael "waited at the church door until Sean Casey and Paul O'Brien...came out, and he shook their hands, and offered his condolences" (O'Neill, 293) which enacts a clear, public display of his views on the rape case. This traumatises Emma as Father Michael is someone that had been so prominent in her life who has now completely turned on her, "he christened me, he heard my first confession...he was there for my first holy communion and confirmation...he would come over to our house for dinner" (O'Neill, 293). The local priest is enormously looked up to and is seen as an authority figure to in each community, so for Father Michael to display his support of the rapists so publicly, sets a tone that the rest of the community follows. This aspect of

⁴ In 2013, Rape Crisis Network Ireland reported statistics showing that of all rape victims who reported crimes, only 13% were males. <https://www.rcni.ie/wp-content/uploads/RCNI-National-Statistics-2013.pdf>

Asking for It displays the influence that religion can have on a community's perception of rape myths and rape victims, therefore I feel as though it is something that should be explored further.

4.2 A final conclusion

Overall, it is unfortunately evident that Ireland is indicative of a rape myth culture which is extremely damaging to victims and their lives after experiencing rape. On a positive note, it is clear that there is a shift within our society as we are moving further away from rigid views of consent.

While the dominant view of rape once relied on the view that the victim must distinctly have said 'no', there is now a broader view of consent. Consent is not the absence of a no, it is an ongoing agreement to each sexual behaviour proposed. With society's broadening and more understanding views of consent, we are also experiencing a broader sense of sexual violence. This change is being helped by consent classes, documentaries, news media portraying rape trials accurately, and, of course, educational novels such as *Breaking the Silence* and *Asking for It*. However, rape myths are still extremely prevalent in our society and throughout this thesis I have discussed not only the ways they creep in, but how they affect the victims they're directed towards. As a society, we need to be more open and accepting of each rape victim's individual experience, in order to try and combat these widespread rape myths.

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