

February 2021

Introducing Rape to High School and College Students: An Analysis of Asking for It

Giulia Mastrontoni

Monash University, giulia.mastrontoni@hotmail.it

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo>

Recommended Citation

Mastrontoni, G. (2021). Introducing Rape to High School and College Students: An Analysis of Asking for It. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 20 (1). Retrieved from <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo/vol20/iss1/10>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Article in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education* by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

Introducing Rape to High School and College Students

An Analysis of *Asking for It*

Giulia Mastrontoni

Abstract

The analysis of rape representations in literature must be grounded in criminological research. The benefits of this approach, which should be offered to college and high school students, are numerous. Not only would readers better understand the insidious implications that are often interlocked with rape representations, but they would also be compelled to openly investigate their own standpoint in regards to consent and rape myths, the key concepts to rape. This, in turn, would contribute to fostering a meaningful conversation about rape among a population where peer pressure for sexual intercourse and alcohol abuse often result in sexual encounters where the lines of consent are blurred. In this paper, I will briefly draw on the reasons why rape representations are problematic, then I will review relevant criminological findings and proceed to analyse Louise O'Neill's *Asking For It*, a 2015 novel focused on the gang-rape of teenage Emma O'Donovan. I have chosen a contemporary text, but the framework and methodology that I propose can be applied to analyse rape representations from different epochs.

Introduction

The literary representations of rape that we offer to college or high school students are often problematic in that the female body has consistently been reduced to a mere “plot space” for male potency (Haraway, 1989; de Lauretis, 1987; Jardine, 1985). Biblical and classical discourses, for example, represent rape as a model for marriage and endorse the rapist's right to ownership of the raped (Dworkin, 1976; Brownmiller, 1976). The cross-disciplinary power of these

Giulia Mastrontoni is a doctoral student in creative writing at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Email address: giulia.mastrontoni@hotmail.it

© 2021 by Caddo Gap Press.

representations constitutes an issue because it “cuts across boundaries of juridical, diplomatic, political and literary discourses” (Higgins & Silver 1991: 1). Arguably, religious and legal texts have long-established the boundaries of women’s lives, thus playing a key role in the construction and maintenance of patriarchy (Franiuk & Shain 2011, de Beauvoir 1949).

Presenting these rape representations to students in an over-simplified or normalised perspective can be detrimental for their education. Rabinowitz (2011) argues that we need to be “cautious” because “both the text and our reading of it *do* things to readers” (p. 6, emphasis in the original). Similarly, Tanner (1994) suggests that the experience of reading rape involves negotiating acceptance or rejection of the assumptions present in the text about the dynamics of violence. She defines the victim’s body as “an object of imaginative manipulation” upon which the reader, paralleling the autonomy of the violator, creates a narrative of violence that responds to the violator’s desire (Tanner, 1994, p. 9). In their study, McDonald and Kline (2004) corroborate the hypothesis that the language used to describe the rape affects students’ perceptions of the episode.

College and high school students have a very limited understanding of rape, according to socio-criminological findings. College victims of experiences that meet legal definitions of rape do not label those episodes as such and are very unlikely to report the crime (Kittleson, Harper, Hilgenkamp, & Kittross, 2005; Muehlenhard, 2000). This is due to rape myth acceptance being worryingly high (Bell, Kuriloff, & Lottes, 1994; Holcomb, Holcomb, Sunday, & Williams, 1991; Beneke, 1982). Additionally, the impersonal nature and prevalence of hookups on campus, often paired with great alcohol consumption, contribute to obliterating the lines of consent, thus fuelling erroneous beliefs about rape (Patel & Roesch 2018; Adams-Curtis, Leah, & Forbes, 2004; Paul, McManus, & Hayes 2000; Boswell & Spade 1996).

My suggestion is to ground our analysis of rape representations in socio-criminological research so as to present students with a nuanced discourse on rape. This would foster a better understanding of the insidious implications that are often interlocked with rape representations, while compelling students to openly investigate their own standpoint in regards to consent and rape myths, the key concepts to rape. In this paper, I will review relevant criminological findings and proceed to analyse Louise O’Neill’s *Asking For It*, a 2015 novel focused on the gang-rape of teenage Emma O’Donovan. I have chosen a contemporary text, but the framework and methodology that I propose can be applied to analyse rape representations from different epochs.

I. Criminological Research

In this section, I will focus on research pertaining to consent and rape myths, the key concepts to rape. Research on consent is often related to alcohol consumption because half of sexual assaults are associated with alcohol abuse by the

perpetrator, victim or both (Abbey, Clinton-Sherrod, McAuslan, Zawacki, & O' Buck 2003). This is particularly so among college students, a population in which the high incidence of partying contributes to the high prevalence of rape (Patel & Roesch 2018). Rape myths, on the other hand, are considered a set of beliefs and prejudices that shift the blame of the rape onto the victim, while undermining the seriousness of this crime (Hall, Howard, & Boezio 1986; Briere, Malamuth, & Check, 1985; Burt, 1980). In the first half of this section, I will draw on research focused on consent and alcohol abuse, whereas in the second half, I will investigate the nature and prevalence of rape myths.

1.1 Consent and Alcohol Abuse

Research consistently emphasises the alarming prevalence of coerced sexual activity¹ among college students (Jessup-Anger, Lopez, & Koss 2018). Kirkpatrick and Kanin (1957) reported that 56% out of 291 college women who took part in their study have experienced episodes of coercion, while 21% of them have experienced forceful attempts at intercourse. Koss and Oros (1982) surveyed 2,000 college women, among which 6% reported having been raped and 30% reported having been a victim of force to obtain kissing or petting since the age of 14. Similarly, Muehlenhard and Linton (1987) showed that 65% of the college women that have taken part in their survey have reported unwanted sexual aggression, while 15% experienced non-consensual sexual intercourse.

The most cited study in this field is the one carried out by Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987), as 6,159 students from 32 colleges and universities were surveyed. The findings were alarming: 6% of the women reported having been a victim of an episode meeting the legal standards of rape in the previous 12 months, while 15% reported having been raped since the age of 14. Furthermore, 64% of women reported having been sexually victimized since they were 14 and 54% reported having been sexually victimized in the past year. Research consistently shows that women are unlikely to report the episode (Kittleston, et al. 2005; Warhaw & Koss, 1988).

The reason why rape is so prevalent on campus may be due to rape myth acceptance and the high incidence of partying, two dynamics that take place in this environment (Patel & Roesch 2018). Rape myth acceptance stems from erroneous beliefs, such as that women “ask for it” or that they enjoy being raped (Lea, 2007; McGregor, 2005; Beneke, 1982). The incidence of partying, on the other hand, decreases the likelihood that the victim will identify what happened to them as sexual assault and report it (Armstrong, Hamilton, & Sweeney, 2006). Additionally, Randall (2010) shows that a woman’s credibility is reduced when she engages in a kind of behaviour that falls outside the stereotypical expectation of “appropriate behaviour.” This might include, but is not limited to, drinking, dressing provocatively and having multiple sexual partners in a short window of time.

The prevalence and impersonal nature of “hookups” further contribute to blurring the lines of consent (Boswell & Spade, 1996). This phenomenon, which

is often associated with alcohol intoxication, “strongly parallels many aspects of coercive sexual behaviour” (Adams-Curtis, & Forbes, 2000, p. 95). Hookups usually last for one night, take place between acquaintances or strangers and don’t necessarily involve sexual intercourse. Paul, McManus, and Hayes (2000) note that hookup experiences culminating with coitus are associated with greater levels of intoxication than hookups without coitus. Overall, college experiences often juxtapose sex and aggression in a population who experiences strong peer pressure for sexual activity and alcohol intoxication (Adams-Curtis & Forbes, 2004).

Alcohol facilitates rape because it “allows perpetrators to focus on their immediate feelings of [...] entitlement, rather than on more distal cues such as the victim’s suffering or their own sense of morality” (Abbey, Clinton-Sherrod, McAuslan, Zawacki, & O’ Buck, 2003, p. 814). At low to moderate levels of consumption, alcohol encourages perpetrators to use greater force, which in turn leads to greater victim resistance, whereas at higher levels of blood alcohol level, perpetrators are so impaired they cannot act effectively, hence they are less able to commit a crime. As for the victim’s intoxication, at low to moderate levels, alcohol may be found to increase the resistance, whereas at higher levels it may facilitate the rape (the woman is physically incapable of resisting).

College students do not perceive rape at the hands of a date or acquaintance as an issue, particularly if the perpetrator’s sex is female (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008). The reason for this might be that college students expect and accept coercion or force to be a natural part of relationships (Shea, 1998). Ryan (2011) contends that this is due to how rape myth acceptance affects sexual scripts in that it informs desire and seduction. Peterson and Muehlenhard (2007), on the other hand, found that “wanting” (sexual desire) is not a unidimensional and dichotomous feeling. In their study, unacknowledged rape victims reported wanting the sexual intercourse more than acknowledged rape victims, despite not having consented.

1.2 Rape Myths

Rape myths are the backbone of socio-criminological research on rape. First discussed by Burt (1980), they are a set of prejudices and erroneous beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists. They affect the breadth or narrowness of rape definitions in that they deny or reduce the perceived injury, hence acting as facilitators for victim blaming. According to Hall, Howard and Boezio (1986), they focus on one or more of the followings:

1. Denial of rape’s existence (rape reports are false because women make it up)
2. Excusal (the rape is the victim’s fault and the rapist’s behaviour is understandable)
3. Denial of rape’s seriousness (no harm was done because sex is enjoyable)

The most accepted rape myth measurement methodology is the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, proposed by Briere, Malamuth, and Check (1985), and followed

by Field's Attitudes Toward Rape Scale (1978). Many researchers have attempted to modify, by shortening or adapting the existing scales, RMAS or ATR. However, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) emphasise that all rape myth measurement methodologies show that rape myth acceptance is worryingly widespread.

Patriarchy has long been identified as the main proponent of rape ideologies (Alcoff, 2018). Laws dictating the inferiority of women have been built upon religious texts that portray women as second-class citizens or that have been interpreted through the lens of a white male (Franiuk & Shain, 2011). The narratives of female chastity and wifely duties suggested by an array of texts contribute to excusing men's violence against women, while perpetuating this phenomenon (Franiuk & Shain, 2011). Similarly, rape signs within the context of contemporary societies reiterate ideas and feelings that humorise, eroticise, aestheticise and athleticise rape without acknowledging it (Beneke 1982).

Traditional gender role beliefs are likely to be predictive of higher victim-blaming attitudes (Angelone, Mitchell, & Grossi, 2015). College men are significantly more likely than college women to endorse statements such as that women deserve to be raped or enjoy it (Holcomb et al., 1991). They believe that a woman could prevent rape if she really wanted to and that when a woman says "no" she actually means "yes." Bell, Kuriloff, and Lottes (1994), however, found that both men and women tend to blame date rape victims more than stranger rape victims. They speculate that this might be due to the belief that the perpetrator and the victim share the responsibility for the rape if they have a pre-existing relationship. In their study, McDonald and Kline (2004) found that the type of language used to describe the rape to students largely determined their perception of the episode. Participant gender, however, accounted for a greater portion of the variance in assigned blame.

The closer the relationship the victim has with the perpetrator, the less likely they are to report the crime (Kittleston et al., 2005). This is because victims often believe that *they* will be put on trial for the rape, instead of the rapist. This adds feelings of isolation and depression to the fear and guilt that victims often experience in the aftermath of the rape (Warshaw & Koss, 1988). In the case of raped women who had been virgins before the assault, the rape marks a traumatic beginning of their sexual life. These women might feel that, now that they have been taken away what they had been taught to protect, they have nothing left worth protecting (Warshaw & Koss, 1988). They might, therefore, engage in frequent and casual sexual encounters or they might decide to withdraw from sexual contact completely.

2. Louise O'Neill's *Asking For It*

In this section, I will proceed to analyse 2015 novel *Asking For It* by Irish-born author Louise O'Neill. Rape myths acceptance is a key theme to the novel, which focuses on the character of Emma O'Donovan, a beautiful high school

woman who is gang-raped by her peers while intoxicated through alcohol and drugs. The aftermath of the rape is extremely rough for Emma, who attempts to take her life on multiple occasions. Only her brother Bryan shows sympathy towards Emma, while both their peers and their parents condemn Emma's behaviour. I will focus on the prevalence of hookups, peer pressure and alcohol consumption first, then I will analyse the reactions of Emma's peers and parents to the rape and, lastly, I will consider Bryan's offer to support Emma.

2.1 Hookups, Peer Pressure and Alcohol Consumption

The group of students that O'Neill describes is a proponent of practices that encourage coercion and objectification, such as "drunken hookups." Much in line with Boswell and Spade's (2000) and Patel and Roesch's (2017) findings, for these students, sex is not separate from exploitation and violence. A good example of this is Emma's experience of forced oral sex with Kevin (p. 29), which he takes pride in and which she never labels as sexual assault. Another example is Jamie's experience of forced sexual intercourse with Dylan. Unlike Emma, Jamie labels the episode as a crime and discloses it to Emma. Emma, however, meets the disclosure with disbelief and encourages Jamie to "pretend it never happened" (p. 94). She explains that "Dylan is a dick, but he isn't *that*, he wouldn't do *that*" (p. 93, both emphasis in the original). This passage highlights that rape myths pertaining to the seriousness of rape affect Emma's decision-making process, eventually determining her choice not to support Jamie (Ryan 2011, Shea 1998).

As the novel progresses, Emma partially reconsiders her choice due to Jamie's evident struggles to cope in the aftermath of the rape (Kittleson et al., 2005). Emma wishes she could go back to the night of the party and tell Dylan to "leave Jamie alone" (p. 35). While acknowledging that Jamie has been harmed, however, Emma does not change her behaviour towards her friend. At a later party, when Jamie is in distress because she will soon meet Dylan with his girlfriend Julie, Emma claims that Jamie is "just looking for attention" (p. 67). Additionally, when Eli suggests that Jamie should not have engaged in sexual contact with Dylan, Emma does not defend her (p. 67). This is most likely because defending Jamie would require Emma to go against a whole set of beliefs (rape myths) that her peers share. This represents a risk in that Emma would most likely be ridiculed for endorsing Jamie's rape accusations. Overall, peer pressure seems to affect Emma's choice not to support Jamie.

Emma's motivators for downplaying Jamie's accusations become clearer when Jamie directly confronts her. They are in the bathroom at a party and Jamie is barely able to speak because the thought of Dylan being so close nauseates her. Jamie feels betrayed by Emma because Emma accuses her of merely crying rape (p. 92). Jamie is very vocal in explaining that "that's not how it happened" (p. 92), pointing out that she had never consented to the sexual encounter with Dylan. At

this point, the reader is made privy to Emma's thoughts. Emma is concerned that, if Jamie reports Dylan's rape, their peers will isolate *them*, instead of Dylan. She encourages Jamie to refrain from using the word "rape" because "when you say that word, you can't take it back" (p. 93). Emma's primary concern is to maintain her social status, which would not be possible if Jamie reported the rape.

Similarly, alcohol and drugs consumption is crucial to the maintenance of Emma's status (Patel & Roesch, 2018). Throughout the novel, intoxication is seen as fun and desirable. Emma takes pride in making use of drugs and expresses the hope that Jack saw her swallowing a pill (p. 98). When Paul offers her a second pill, stating that it is "for you, my darling" (p. 113), she perceives the gesture as an acknowledgement of her desirability and gladly accepts the pill. However, while she is unconscious, her peers gang-rape her and capture the crime through numerous photographs, which are then uploaded to the Easy Emma Facebook page.

2.2 The Reaction of Emma's Peers and Family

When Ms McCarthy, Emma's teacher, sees the photographs, she encourages Emma to disclose the gang-rape. In doing so, Ms McCarthy uses the word "rape" (p. 168), which causes Emma to panic. Emma then affirms that, while the photographs were being taken, she was just pretending to be asleep (p. 166). This is in line with the thoughts that Emma has previously expressed about using the word "rape." Ms McCarthy is the only female character in the novel who supports Emma in the aftermath of the rape. Emma's friend, Ali, on the other hand, asks her if she is "sure" that the rape happened because she was "pretty wasted" (p. 248). Ali claims to be on Emma's side and to be "just asking if it was, like *rape* rape" (p. 248, emphasis in the original). Ali's perspective parallels Emma's reaction to Jamie's disclosure in that Ali's words indicate a tendency to both doubt the victim's reliability and to excuse the rape due to the victim's intoxication (Hall, Howard, & Boezio 1986; Burt 1980).

When Emma's friends visit her after the rape, Maggie accuses Emma of having behaved inappropriately at the party. Maggie focuses on the fact that Emma kissed Eli, Maggie's boyfriend, and says: "Not that it matters now, obviously, but can you understand why I was cross with you? Even a little bit?" (p. 247). In a similar vein, Ali makes remarks about having forgiven Emma for sleeping with Sean (p. 247). This shows that Maggie's and Ali's main concerns are to reiterate that they were right in holding Emma accountable for at least some of the events that happened at the party. In emphasising that Emma wronged them by having inappropriate contact with their boyfriends, they highlight Emma's agency. This heavily contrasts with the passive role that Emma was forced to have during the gang-rape.

Rape myths pertaining to victim's credibility are addressed through Emma's father as well. He questions more than once the reasons why the rape happened. In line with Ali and Maggie, Mr O' Donovan is concerned that Emma's behaviour

during the party has not been appropriate. He never openly blames Emma for the rape, but his comments are alarming. Below an excerpt:

“But why were you there?” he kept asking me in the first few weeks after it happened. “Why did you drink so much, Emmie? Why were you in that bed in the first place, Emmie? I thought you knew better. I thought we had reared you better than that. Why, Emmie?” he kept asking, and asking, and asking, only stopping when I started to cry. “Crocodile tears,” he snapped. “Oh, just get out of my sight. I can’t stand to look at you.” (p. 262)

Mr O’Donovan fully endorses rape myths in that he questions Emma’s reliability, thus shifting the focus onto the reason why his daughter was “in that bed in the first place.” Mr O’Donovan is unable to understand his daughter’s behaviour and suggests that a different behaviour on Emma’s part might have resulted in a different outcome. He is disappointed that Emma has not protected herself. This indicates that he fails to understand that rape cannot be prevented because it is the perpetrator’s fault. Her father’s reaction does not surprise Emma, who had predicted how he would react. When Ms McCarthy had manifested the intention to inform Emma’s parents, Emma had indeed reacted as follows:

I imagine Dad seeing the photos, his shock, then disgust. (He would look at me with disgust.) He would turn away from me. He would never be able to see me again without seeing those pictures. (Legs spread apart.) (Pink flesh.) He would never want to see me again. *I thought you were better than this*, he would say. *I thought you knew the difference between right and wrong* (p. 167, emphasis in the original)

Emma is aware of how the news of the gang-rape will be received by her parents because she knows how narrow their views on rape are and how they will focus on her “misbehaviour” (Kittleston, Harper, Hilgenkamp, & Kittross, 2005). However, Emma’s own ideas and thoughts are very similar to her parents’ (see her reaction to Jamie’s disclosure). This indicates that her misconceptions could be due to the values that she has been taught by her parents. Mr O’Donovan, however, is a complex character. In Conor’s e-mails to Emma, it is said that Mr. O’Donovan “goes all the way to Kilgavan to get his petrol” (p. 215). This is relevant because Mr. O’Donovan’s reason for doing this is to avoid Dylan, one of her daughter’s alleged rapists. In Conor’s opinion, this should prove that Mr. O’Donovan loves Emma.

2.3 Bryan’s Offer to Support Emma

Bryan warns Emma about the Easy Emma Facebook page over a phone call (well before Ms McCarthy speaks to Emma). When he calls her, she is enjoying the scent of coconut of her shampoo in the shower after a terrible day at school. Bryan asks Emma what she thinks she is doing, then he urges her to check her Facebook notifications (p. 144). Right before hanging up, he claims that he has never been more ashamed in his life (p. 145). This is how Emma is made aware

that she has been gang-raped and that the proof of the rape is freely available on Facebook. As soon as Bryan understands that Emma has never agreed to the sexual encounters and to the taking and sharing of the photographs, however, his behaviour changes entirely. He becomes supportive of his sister and urges her to file a complaint against her rapists.

The dress scene is a good example of Bryan's desire to support his sister. Before the party during which the gang-rape happens, Bryan questions Emma's fashion choices claiming that her dress is "a bit slutty, isn't it?" (p. 64). Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the rape, he never blames Emma and never mentions her dress again. This shows that Bryan rejects rape myths and holds the rapists accountable for what happened. He is the only member of the O'Donovan family who does not endorse rape myths. This undermines the hypothesis that Emma's narrow views on rape could be due to how she has been raised in that both Bryan and Emma have received the same education from their parents.

Bryan is deeply concerned with offering emotional support to his sister through physical touch. Below is an excerpt:

He gets up to hug me, his arms wrap around me tightly, and I can't breathe. I want to tell him to stop touching me, but it's Bryan, it's only Bryan. He lets go, as if he can sense my discomfort. (p. 234)

Bryan believes that hugging Emma can help her feel loved again, but Emma seems unable to accept physical touch. With a similar aim, Bryan often asks her how she is and engages in "normal" talk with her (p. 234).

Additionally, Bryan protects Emma from their parents. When Nora snaps at Emma (p. 235), for example, Bryan "frowns at her [Nora], and she tries again" (p. 235). Bryan has power over his mother and he uses it to negotiate more support for Emma. In this sense, Bryan brings balance to the family. Another example of this is offered in the dinner scene. Nora apologises to Bryan for not having made her famous pasta sauce (p. 235), but she silences Emma's requests for a vegetarian option with a "there's a vegetarian ready-meal in the freezer" (p. 236). After that, Nora offers some wine to Bryan only (p. 236). Emma is not allowed to drink and does not even get offered a soft drink. This demonstrates a complete reversal in the family dynamics compared to the beginning of the novel. At the very start of the novel, Emma is Nora's favourite child because she is beautiful and a source of pride. Now, however, Emma is considered a trouble-maker.

Bryan acts as a mediator between Emma and Mr. O'Donovan as well. When Bryan is going to the match with his father, before leaving the house, he encourages Mr. O'Donovan to talk to Emma. Bryan highlights that Father hasn't "said a word to her" since he has arrived (p. 237). Then Bryan goes on to argue that Emma needs to go back to school because "it's her Leaving Cert in a month" (p. 238). Mr. O'Donovan replies that they talked about that the previous weekend and

Bryan insists that now it is time to decide what to do. From this perspective, Bryan is the only family member who is concerned with Emma's future.

On the same occasion, Bryan calls Emma's rapists "those fuckers" (p. 239), arguing that "but as if anyone is going to look at those photos and not convict them" (p. 239). Then, he openly opposes to how Emma is being treated. He explains that "we can't just sit around and watch Emma fall apart" (p. 240). However, Nora does not want to admit that Emma is falling apart and Mr. O'Donovan believes that this is "none of your concern" (p. 240). This confirms to Bryan that their parents are not on Emma's side and that "I'm the only one who is prepared to face up to the reality around here" (p. 240).

Lastly, Bryan is the only one who highlights his familial ties with Emma after the rape. He does so during their family fight, when he states "it's my *sister* we're talking about" (p. 240, emphasis in the original). Bryan's words attest to the value that he attributes to his sister. It is because of his love for her that he encourages her to file a complaint against her rapists. The reader is made privy to this through Emma's thoughts:

It's because of him all of this is happening anyway. He was the one who persuaded me that I needed to press charges, that I needed to change my statement to say that I couldn't remember what had happened that night. And if I couldn't remember, how could I have given consent? (p. 240)

Bryan's reasoning for labelling what happened to Emma as "rape" is very clear: he believes that Emma could not have consented to engage in any sexual activities on the night of the party because she was too intoxicated to do so. He eventually persuades Emma to file a complaint, but this further complicates Emma's life. Below is an excerpt:

And I did what he said. I thought it would be better for him to think of me as the victim (helpless, blameless, stupid) rather than a dirty slut (*slut, liar, skank, bitch, whore*) like everyone else. And it all spiralled out of control. (p. 241)

It is evident that Bryan wants Emma to receive justice, but Emma describes her brother's behaviour as follows:

He has come into my room every fifteen minutes for the last hour, asking if I had seen his old Ballinacoom jersey, or if he could borrow my phone charger, or wondering if I had heard about this new comedian and wanting to show me a clip on YouTube. [...] He's always like this when he comes home, following me around, keeping an eye on me. He is the only one who looks at me any more and he looks too closely. I am afraid of what he must see. (p. 242)

Emma does not understand how Bryan could want to support her and she misinterprets his actions. Rather than accepting Bryan's help, she shields away from his attention. This is because she applies to herself and to her own rape case those same standards (rape myths) that she has applied to Jamie's case. Indeed,

she considers herself a victim who has asked for it because of her inappropriate behaviour. Further to that, she believes that no harm has been done to her and that, rather, it is her complaint that has caused harm to her rapists and to her family.

Conclusion

Introducing rape representations to school and high school students is problematic on several levels. Grounding our analysis of these representations in socio-criminological research can be an effective way to overcome said challenges and foster a meaningful conversation about rape myths and consent. The benefits of this approach would be two-fold: first, students would better understand the insidious implications of rape representations, and second, they would be able to question their standpoint on rape in a safe, educational environment. In support of my argument, in this paper, I have offered an overview of relevant findings and an analysis of 2015 novel *Asking For It*.

Note

¹ This includes touching, kissing and a range of acts culminating in forced sexual intercourse, or even more invasive violations. Coercion can happen through verbal pressure, use of drugs and alcohol, and threatened or actual physical force, or a mix of the above.

References

- Abbey, A. A., Clinton-Sherrod, M., McAuslan, P., Zawacki, T., & Buck, P. O. (2003). The relationship between the quantity of alcohol consumed and the severity of sexual assaults committed by college men. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 18*(7), 813-33.
- Adams-Curtis, L. E. & Forbes, G. B. (2004). College women's experiences of sexual coercion. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 5*(2), 91-122.
- Alcoff, L. (2018). *Rape and resistance: Understanding the complexities of sexual violation*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Angelone, D. J., Mitchell, D., & Grossi, L. (2015). Men's perceptions of an acquaintance rape: The role of relationship length, victim resistance, and gender role attitudes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 30*(13), 2278-2303.
- Armstrong, E., Hamilton, L., & Sweeney, B. (2006). Sexual assault on campus: A multilevel, integrative approach to party rape. *Social Problems, 53*(4), 483-499.
- Bell, S. T., Kuriloff, P. J., & Lottes, I. (1994). Understanding attributions of blame in stranger rape and date rape situations: An examination of gender, race, identification, and students' social perceptions of rape victims. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 24*(19), 1719-1734.
- Beneke, T. (1982). *Men on rape*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Boswell, A. A., & Spade, J. Z. (1996). Fraternities and collegiate rape culture: Why are some fraternities more dangerous places for women? *Gender & Society, 10*(2), 133-147.
- Briere, J., Malamuth, N., & Check, J. V. (1985). Sexuality and rape-supportive beliefs. *International Journal of Women's Studies, 8*(4), 398-403.

- Brownmiller, S. (1976). *Against our will: Men, women and rape*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Burt, M. R. (1980). Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38(2), 217-30.
- Chapleau, K., Oswald, D., & Russell, B. (2008). Male rape myths: The role of gender, violence, and sexism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23, 600-615.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The Second Sex*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- De Lauretis, T. (1987). *Technologies of gender: essays on theory, film, and fiction*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Dworkin, A. (1976). *Our blood: Prophecies and discourses on sexual politics*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Franiuk, R., & Shain, E. (2011). Beyond christianity: The status of women and rape myths. *Sex Roles*, 65(11/12), 783-791.
- Hall, E. R., Howard, J. A., & Boezio, S. L. (1986). Tolerance of rape: A sexist or antisocial attitude? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 10(2), 101-118.
- Haraway, D. J. (1989). *Primate visions: Gender, race, and nature in the world of modern science*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Holcomb, D., Holcomb, L., Sondag, K., & Williams, N. (1991). Attitudes about date rape: Gender differences among college students. *College Student Journal*, 25, 434-439.
- Jardine, A. (1985). *Gynesis: configurations of woman and modernity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jessup-Anger, J., Lopez, E., & Koss, M. P. (2018). History of sexual violence in higher education. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2018(161), 9-19.
- Kirkpatrick, C., & Kanin, E. (1957). Male sex aggression on a university campus. *American Sociological Review*, 22(1), 52-57.
- Kittleson, M. J., Harper, J., Hilgenkamp, K., & Kittross, L. (2005). *The truth about rape*. New York, NY: Facts on File.
- Koss, M. P., Gidycz, C. A., & Wisniewski, N. (1987). The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 55(2), 162-170.
- Koss, M. P., & Oros, C. J. (1982). Sexual Experiences Survey: A research instrument investigating sexual aggression and victimization. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 50(3), 455-457.
- Lea, S. J. (2007). A discursive investigation into victim responsibility in rape." *Feminism & Psychology*, 17(4), 495-514.
- Lonsway, K. A. & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1994). Rape myths. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 18(2), 133-164.
- McDonald, T. W. & Kline, L. M. (2004). Perceptions of appropriate punishment for committing date rape: Male college students recommend lenient punishments. *College Student Journal*, 38(1), 44.
- McGregor, J. (2005). *Is it rape?: On acquaintance rape and taking women's consent seriously*. Hants, UK: Aldershot.
- O'Neil, L. (2015). *Asking for it*. London, UK: Quercus.
- Patel, U., & Roesch, R. (2018). Campus sexual assault: Examination of policy and research. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*, 10(2), 103-111.
- Paul, E., McManus, B., & Hayes, A. (2000). Hookups: Characteristics and correlates of college students' spontaneous and anonymous sexual experiences. *The Journal of Sex*

- Research*, 37(1), 76-88.
- Peterson, Z. D., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (2007). Conceptualizing the wantedness of women's consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences: Implications for how women label their experiences with rape. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 44(1), 72-88.
- Rabinowitz, N. S. (2011). Greek tragedy: A rape culture? *EuGEstA: Revue sur le genre dans l'Antiquité / Journal on Gender Studies in Antiquity*, 1-21.
- Ryan, K. (2011). The relationship between rape myths and sexual scripts: The social construction of rape. *Sex Roles*, 65(11/12), 774-782.
- Shea, M. E. C. (1998). *When the tables are turned: Verbal sexual coercion among college women*. In P. B. Anderson & C. Struckman-Johnson (Eds.), *Sexually aggressive women: Current perspectives and controversies* (pp. 94-104). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Tanner, L. E. (1994). *Intimate violence: Reading rape and torture in twentieth-century fiction*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Warshaw, R., & Koss, M. P. (1988). *I never called it rape: The Ms. Report on recognizing, fighting, and surviving date and acquaintance rape*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.