

The Fourth Wave Fights Back:
Deconstructing the Performativity of Rape Culture Through
Contemporary Irish Theatre, Performance and Society

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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2019

Declaration:

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Summary:

This dissertation uses fourth wave feminism as a lens to interrogate and deconstruct contemporary rape culture. It specifically focuses on Ireland and Irish culture, but includes reference to, and discussion of, international and global matters where applicable and relevant. This is due to the fact that rape culture is endemic across the world. It is also because, with the near instantaneous dissemination of information internationally in the twenty-first century, Ireland and Irish culture is undoubtedly heavily influenced by external social, political and cultural sources. It defines and explores fourth wave feminist theory, and the new and ever-changing challenges that contemporary feminists are tackling.

The main theoretical framework for the dissertation comes from gender and feminist theory. Although the thesis takes a fourth wave approach to deconstructing rape culture, it also applies the theories of second and third wave feminist writers, as they are integral to the understanding of all component parts of rape culture and their historical constructions. Judith Butler's theory on the performativity of language forms a core basis throughout the dissertation, along with her interrogation of gender as a cultural construct. Andrea Dworkin's work on rape culture and ending systemic sexual violence against women is also a fundamental part of the theoretical framework. Naomi Wolf's definition of the 'beauty myth' forms the basis for this dissertation's conceptualising of 'toxic femininity' and 'toxic masculinity'. Such theories are linked to emerging, contemporary feminist writers such as Laura Bates, Laurie Penny, Roxanne Gay, Emer O'Toole, Holly Baxter and Rhiannon Lucy Coslett. The aim is to link established feminist theory with developing popular feminist theory in a bid to understand, attack and deconstruct contemporary rape culture.

There are four main chapters to this dissertation that examine the prevalence of rape culture throughout various modes of performance, and through wider societal exchanges. The first chapter examines the performativity of language for women affected by sexual violence. It contests and deconstructs the words 'victim' and 'survivor'; the two most commonly used terms for those who experience sexual violence. It examines the construct of sexual violence in Irish law. It challenges the major arguments claiming that rape culture does not exist. It explores the power of language in constructing components of rape culture that include victim blaming, slut-shaming, rape myths, 'toxic femininity', 'toxic masculinity' and violent misogyny. It shows how such language must be challenged in order to challenge rape culture. The second chapter uses five Irish plays that have premiered between the years 2000 and 2016, and each contain a narrative of sexual violence against women. The five plays examined are Gillian Greer's *Petals*, Marina

Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*, Mark O'Rowe's *Our Few and Evil Days*, Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl* and Caitríona Daly's *Test Dummy*. This chapter argues that these plays can be used to explain and explore how contemporary rape culture is affecting our daily lives. Each play highlights a different aspect of sexual violence against women and together they comment on the ways in which the performances of 'toxic femininity' and 'toxic masculinity' have a direct impact on the prevalence of rape culture. The third chapter explores the perpetuation of rape culture in beauty pageants, specifically in the *Rose of Tralee* festival. It argues that, although women choose to enter such competitions willingly, and have every right to do so, as institutions, the competitions are misogynist, oppressive and damaging to women in nature. They support and perpetuate internalised misogyny, 'toxic femininity' and indoctrination into the beauty myth from an increasingly young age. Beauty pageants highlight the vast spectrum of rape culture, and the research exposes how they directly feed into this culture. The fourth chapter carries on the idea of revealing the presence and influence of rape culture where it may not seem initially apparent. This chapter examines competitive Irish Dance performance and explores how contemporary competitions have been infiltrated by rape culture. It exposes how this has happened by discussing the influence of touring shows such as *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*, the sexualised vision of contemporary costume designers, and the impact of American pageant culture on dance competitions.

The dissertation as a whole, exposes the spectrum of rape culture, where the act of sexual violence rests on one end, and 'locker room talk' exists on the other. It uses many sources and examples from mainstream popular culture, as these highlight the ways in which we engage with, and actively participate in rape culture. Only when all of the component parts of rape culture have been exposed and recognised for what they are, we can finally begin to seriously challenge and deconstruct this culture. This dissertation is one such approach to tackling contemporary rape culture.

Acknowledgments

I would firstly like to extend my dearest gratitude to my dissertation supervisor, Dr Melissa Sihra, for her guidance, insight and knowledge; without whom, this dissertation would not have been possible. I wish to thank her for believing in me when I could not quite believe in myself, for supervising me through both my Masters and PhD dissertations, and for giving me my first teaching opportunities as a TA. I would also like to thank all of the staff members of the Drama Department of Trinity College for their teaching, mentoring and encouragement ever since I entered the Beckett Centre as a Masters student.

I would like to thank my new colleagues at the Drama Department in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, namely; Dr Michael Finneran, Dr Fiona McDonagh, Dr David Clare and Dr Dorothy Morrissey, for giving me a wonderful opportunity as a young academic and for supporting me through the final stages of my dissertation.

I would like to thank the Feminist Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research, in particular, Dr Lisa Fitzpatrick, Dr Aoife Monks, Dr Aoife McGrath and Dr Shona Hill, for their guidance, warmth and friendship throughout the research process. I wish to thank Dr Eric Weitz and the Executive Committee of the Irish Society for Theatre Research for providing me with the space to grow and develop as a researcher.

I am eternally grateful to my dear friend Angie Butler with whom I have shared three wonderful years of research, travel and growth. This journey would have been incredibly lonely without her. I am tremendously thankful to both Dr Chris Collins and Dr Cormac O'Brien who have been exceptional teachers, mentors and friends throughout the years.

Finally, I wish to extend to sincerest loving gratitude to my wonderful parents, Dr Paul and Patricia Quigley; for loving and supporting me through my many endeavours. I wish to thank my friends and family for helping me through this process. In particular, I wish to thank Stephen Dunphy for his kindness, patience and unconditional love.

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To anyone who has ever experienced sexual violence, you are not alone, I believe you.

Content Warning: This dissertation includes reference to, and discussion of, acts of sexual violence including incest, gang rape and child sexual abuse.¹

¹ There is a content warning given at the beginning of this dissertation due to the nature of the research presented. As the dissertation as a whole focuses on the deconstruction of contemporary rape culture, sexual violence is continually referenced throughout, particularly in Chapter One and Chapter Four. There is much debate about the inclusion of content or ‘trigger’ warnings on papers, articles and online media sources at present. I have chosen to use the word ‘content’ instead of ‘trigger’ because I do not wish to sensationalise its inclusion. The research presented is not intended to ‘trigger’ a painful emotional response from any reader or to upset them. This dissertation gives an academic analysis of sexual violence and rape culture. As an academic, I do feel an obligation and a responsibility to readers to make them aware of the difficult nature of the research. It is my belief that everyone is either directly or indirectly affected by rape culture. While this can be argued against, I have chosen to err on the side of caution and to give a blanket warning to all readers. In my experience, it is better to make all readers aware of the content, even if some do not feel it necessary, than to upset or emotionally challenge any reader who could be potentially affected by the nature of this dissertation.

Introduction:

Where Are We Now? Women and Empowerment in Contemporary Ireland;
“My voice was stolen from me and feminism helped me to get my voice back.”¹

¹ Roxanne Gay, ‘*Confessions of a Bad Feminist*’, Staged as part of the ‘Ted Women 2015’ Conference, May 2015, *Ted.com*, May 2015, accessed February 26, 2016, http://www.ted.com/talks/roxane_gay_confessions_of_a_bad_feminist

Section One: Aims of the Dissertation

This dissertation argues that we have entered the fourth wave of the feminist movement; and discusses why this wave differs from previous waves of feminist activism. It focuses on the existence and persistence of a contemporary ‘rape culture’, and strives to deconstruct this prolific and dangerous societal construct. It has a particular focus on the pervasiveness of this culture in Ireland, but also examines globalised examples of this culture, and how they impact on Irish society.

There are four main types of performance analysed in this dissertation, namely performative speech acts for women affected by sexual violence, narratives of sexual violence against women in contemporary Irish theatre, beauty pageant performance and competitive Irish dance performance. The main argument throughout the dissertation examines the structure and existence of contemporary rape culture on a spectrum. The four main types of performance studied are used to highlight different aspects of this spectrum, and to draw clear links between all of the different component parts of rape culture. This dissertation argues that until the varying facets of contemporary rape culture are examined as part of this wider spectrum, it cannot be deconstructed in a meaningful way. Component parts of this culture include performances of slut shaming, victim blaming and rape myth narratives, toxic masculinity, toxic femininity, hegemonic patriarchy, the ‘beauty myth’, and complicity. These terms are defined and deconstructed in turn, and applied to the performance examples in each chapter. Through foregrounding examples, or examinations of, rape culture in four main performance types, and naming them as component parts of this culture, this dissertation acts as a way of challenging this culture.

Rape culture is a spectrum, with the physical act of sexual violence forming one end, while inappropriate comments, remarks and opinions form the other end. Throughout this spectrum, all manner of incongruous behaviour has a place. Placement on the spectrum can vary depending on a variety of malleable factors involved in different situations. This thesis does not try to define concrete positioning of behaviours on this spectrum, but rather, it is examining, or ‘calling out’ actions that belong on the spectrum as elements of rape culture. If we disregard certain actions as ‘just a joke’ or ‘misguided but harmless comments’, we delegitimise the spectrum of rape culture. This inadvertently confirms its continuance. Those who commit acts of sexual violence are not anomalies in contemporary society. They are not ‘monsters who lurk in dark corners’ with no real connection to the world. They are fathers, mother, sons, daughters, professionals, educators, leaders, followers, adults and children. They do not exist in a vacuum, and

neither do their actions. This thesis is arguing that we need to draw links and parallels between types of behaviour that all form a part of contemporary rape culture.

The first chapter of this thesis uses Judith Butler's theory on performative speech acts to consider that a person who experiences sexual violence must be allowed to self-identify with terminology in order to prevent re-victimisation. This chapter argues that it is a violent performative act to impose a label or identity onto someone who has experienced sexual violence. There is an inherent power in naming something. Using this same logic, this thesis argues that it is necessary to name and label performative actions of rape culture in order to highlight and ultimately deconstruct it.

Section Two: Literature Review

Part One: Defining Feminist Waves

Western feminist theory and the feminist movement can be loosely defined by 'waves'. Theorists argue over the defining of feminism into 'waves', the existence of a contemporary fourth wave, and the usefulness of utilising the 'wave' interpretations of feminist thought and activism.² Defining feminisms according to various 'waves' does not suggest that feminism and feminist activism has only taken place during specific time periods. Instead it is a helpful way to map western feminisms throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century. As Finn Mackay argues,

[M]any scholars have pointed out the that metaphor of a wave is perhaps misleading precisely because it obscures all the activism that was going on prior to, between, and after these so-called waves. We can think of the wave descriptor as a handy and popular shorthand to refer to recognised peaks in the movement.³

This dissertation argues that it is important to define feminisms in this manner for several reasons. Firstly, it enables researchers to historicise previous movements and to study them accordingly. It provides a clear indication of what the most pressing issues facing feminists were at particular times. It also allows for reflection on how far women's rights have progressed over the past hundred and fifty years. For example, one of the defining missions of the first wave feminists was to achieve voting rights for women. By

² It is also important to note that the concept of feminist 'waves' is a distinctly Western idea. Particularly for the first, second and third wave; these feminist movements are predominantly historicised as American and British. What happened in these countries did impact on other nations, but primarily these nations are part of the 'Global West', like Ireland. I have chosen to focus on mainstream feminist Western politics and histories, and the concept of feminist 'waves', as these have had the greatest impact on Irish performance, and are the most relevant for this dissertation. I am not suggesting that the notion of feminism is an entirely Western construct.

³ Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 34.

2018, this has been achieved as, with the exception of The Vatican City,⁴ women have voting rights in every country in the world. Such an aim no longer applies to contemporary feminisms. Defining feminisms in terms of waves also allows feminists to examine which aims have not yet been reached, and to see how and how long feminists have been fighting for certain rights. For example, second wave feminists were heavily involved in the fight for reproductive freedom for women. Although many countries now provide access to full reproductive healthcare services, not all do. Until 2018, Ireland had some of the most restrictive legislation in the world regarding female healthcare, as defined by *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (the *Constitution of Ireland*), and fighting for this right has arguably been the most pressing issue facing Irish feminists today. Successive waves of feminist movements also allow more progressive and inclusive feminist practice. For example, British and American suffragettes were known to support white supremacy and racism. Anita Anand comments that when Maori women in New Zealand were granted voting rights in 1893, “Prominent [British] suffragists, like leader Millicent Garrett Fawcett thought it was appalling that white women with a certain station in society didn’t have the vote in the home of the empire but in one of the colonies they did.”⁵ Radhika Sanghani notes that in America,

American suffragette Carrie Chapman Catt, founder of the League of Women Voters, is known to have said: “White supremacy will be strengthened, not weakened, by women’s suffrage.” While Rebecca Ann Latimer Felton, the first woman to serve in the Senate, said: “I do not want to see a negro man walk to the polls and vote on who should handle my tax money, while I myself cannot vote at all.”⁶

In stark contrast to this, successive feminist movements have actively sought to tackle racism. This began with second wave feminists who tried to ensure in the 1960s, “that the

⁴ In relation to voting rights, The Vatican City is more complex than any country. There are no traditional elections in The Vatican City. Instead, the only election that takes place occurs when a new Pope needs to be appointed. According to the Roman Catholic Church, only Cardinals are permitted to elect a new Pope, and, as women are not allowed to be priests, let alone rise to the rank of Cardinal, women cannot vote. This also means that most men cannot vote in The Vatican City. However, the reality that women will never be able to vote until there are female Cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church highlights one deep inequality in contemporary society. Saudi Arabia was the last country to grant voting rights to women, with women voting for the first time in the 2015 elections. Saudi Arabia forbade women from driving until 2018, women can be punished for leaving their home without a male guardian and a woman who has been raped can be forced to marry her rapist. So, while the ability to vote can be used as a marker for how far gender equality has come, it is only one way to cite such progress and there are countless examples of how gender equality has not been reached the world over.

⁵ Radhika Sanghani, ‘The uncomfortable truth about racism and the suffragettes’, *Telegraph* (London), October 6, 2015, accessed March 29, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11914757/Racism-and-the-suffragettes-the-uncomfortable-truth.html>

⁶ Radhika Sanghani, ‘The uncomfortable truth about racism and the suffragettes’, *Telegraph* (London), October 6, 2015, accessed March 29, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11914757/Racism-and-the-suffragettes-the-uncomfortable-truth.html>

conversation changed, and women's rights movements started to applaud and promote black modern-day suffragettes."⁷ Anti-racist rhetoric and activism has continued to motivate contemporary feminists, as intersectionality⁸ has become one of the most important aims of fourth wave feminism. It is for these reasons that this research finds it necessary and useful to define varying feminisms in terms of waves.

The first wave feminists are commonly referred to as the suffragettes, dating from the 1850s onwards. They were predominantly concerned with voting rights for women and improving laws to promote equality with men.⁹ However, the Suffragettes were also involved in less publicised campaigns concerning a variety of issues that subsequent waves of feminists would take further. For example, "They campaigned against rape within marriage, [...] for fair divorce and custody laws, to raise the age of consent, for equal education for women and also against prostitution and the prostitution of children."¹⁰ The second, third and fourth waves of the feminist movement do take place chronologically, and they do seek to build on what achievements have come before them, but they also overlap to some extent. Such overlaps occur both in time and in ideas. For example, this dissertation argues strongly that we are now in the midst of the fourth wave of the feminist movement. Fourth wave feminism is defined and explored in depth in the next section of this Introduction, but, the fourth wave is not universally accepted, with some feminists and commentators arguing that it is not distinct enough from third wave feminism. Ealasaid Munro states that,

⁷ Radhika Sanghani, 'The uncomfortable truth about racism and the suffragettes', *Telegraph* (London), October 6, 2015, accessed March 29, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11914757/Racism-and-the-suffragettes-the-uncomfortable-truth.html>

⁸ Intersectionality has been used in relation to feminist theory since the 1990s. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term 'intersectionality theory' in 1989. The premise is that there are different forms and levels of oppression that can intersect and lead to greater oppression and marginalisation. For example, women experience sexual violence to a much greater extent than men. However, women of colour tend to experience sexual violence more than white women, and they are also less likely to be believed or taken seriously when they come forward with an allegation of abuse. In the same way, the 'pay gap' still exists and women are often paid less than their male counterparts for working the same job. However, women of colour are often paid less than white women in the same roles. It is estimated in American that white women earn eighty-two cents for every white male dollar, but black women earn only sixty-five cents for every white male dollar, and Hispanic women earn only fifty-eight cents. So, intersectionality highlights how different marginalisations can create larger barriers and modes of oppression for certain people. The fourth wave of the feminist movement is strongly concerned with ensuring that it is not just white women who have a say and who look for equality, as many white women already have access to privileges beyond those for people of colour. Intersectionality implies that no one is equal until everyone is equal. For more information on examples of women of colour facing more oppression than white women see;

Eileen Patten, 'Racial, Gender Wage Gaps persist in U.S. despite some progress', *Pew Research Centre*, July 1, 2016, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/01/racial-gender-wage-gaps-persist-in-u-s-despite-some-progress/>

⁹ Harriet Dyer, *The Little Book of Feminism* (Chichester: Summersdale Publishers Ltd., 2016), 11.

¹⁰ Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 34.

Contemporary feminism is characterised by its diversity of purpose, and amid the cacophony of voices it is easy to overlook one of the main constants within the movement as it currently stands – its reliance on the internet. [...] Many commentators argue that the internet itself has enabled a shift from ‘third-wave’ to ‘fourth-wave’ feminism. [...] The existence of a feminist ‘fourth-wave’ has been challenged by those who maintain that increased usage of the internet is not enough to delineate a new era.¹¹

This dissertation argues that internet access and usage is one of the driving factors behind the fourth wave of the feminist movement, but it is not the only distinction between the third and fourth waves, as is further discussed.

The second wave of feminism grew out of the ‘women’s liberation movement’ and began in the 1960s. The most popular phrase associated with this movement is ‘the personal is political’ as these feminists were mainly concerned with bodily autonomy, equal pay and equality in the work place.¹² This term was coined by American feminist activist Carol Hanisch in an essay of the same name.¹³ Hanisch originally wrote this essay under a different name in 1969. The phrase also highlights the impact of sexism and patriarchy on every aspect of women’s private lives. One of the founding and most iconic voices associated with second wave feminism is that of American author and activist Betty Friedan. She is often credited with kick-starting the second wave with the publication of her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*. This book is an examination of ‘the problem that has no name’, or, the increasing alienation and unhappiness that was experienced by American post-war housewives. Friedan has been widely critiqued as racist and transphobic, as she, and numerous other second wave feminists, “treated women as a homogenous group, without paying attention to the many axes of difference that cleave apart the singular category of ‘women’.”¹⁴ This is evidenced in the fact that *The Feminine Mystique* speaks exclusively to middle-class, higher educated, white women, of which she was one, and did not recognise intersectional discrimination. bell hooks, a prominent third wave feminist, academic and author heavily critiqued this singular viewpoint and in her seminal book *Ain’t I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), she, “noted the devaluation of black femininity, and the side-lining of women of colour within the feminist movement. This, she argued, reinforced racism and classism within the movement, and the only ones who suffered were women themselves.”¹⁵

¹¹ Ealasaid Munro ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’ Political Insight September 2013, 22.

¹² Dyer, *The Little Book of Feminism*, 34.

¹³ Carol Hanisch, ‘The Personal is Political’, in Barbara A. Crow, ed., *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p.113.

¹⁴ Munro ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’, 23.

¹⁵ Munro ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’, 23.

The second wave of the feminist movement also saw the first International Women's Day in 1971. On this day, several thousand women who had been a part of a Women's Liberation Group at Ruskin College, Oxford, marched to hand a set of four demands that they had created to the British Prime Minister.¹⁶ This list was expanded into seven, and became the main demands of the Women's Liberation Movement. Catherine Redfern and Kristin Aune state these demands in *Reclaiming the F Word* (2010) as,

1. Equal pay.
2. Equal education and job opportunities.
3. Free contraception and abortion on demand.
4. Free twenty-four hour nurseries.
5. Financial and legal independence.
6. An end to all discrimination against lesbians; a woman's right to define her own sexuality.
7. Freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status; and an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.¹⁷

Second wave feminism also gave rise to nuanced factions within the feminist movement. For example, the concept of radical feminism and revolutionary feminism began at this time. These differed from socialist feminism. Essentially the main ideological differences derive from the fact that radical and revolutionary feminists saw male violence against women as the foundational block of oppression and patriarchal control. Socialist feminists were more concerned with patriarchal capitalism. As Mackey notes, on radical and revolutionary feminism, "insisted on conceptualising male violence against women as a keystone of women's oppression and a tool of male supremacy, whereas socialist feminists, often reluctant to problematise men as a homogenous group in this way, focused instead on the role of capitalism in the oppression of not only women, but men too."¹⁸ Essentially radical and revolutionary feminisms saw patriarchy as more misogynist capitalism, and argued that male violence is a symptom of patriarchy first and foremost. Some of the most influential radical feminists of the time are Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon, most well-known for their work on trying to end prostitution. Dworkin's theories on male violence against women form a core argument throughout this

¹⁶ Anna Coote, Belatrix Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation*, (Blackwell: Oxford, 1982), p. 24-6.

¹⁷ Catherine Redfern, Kristin Aune, *Reclaiming the F Word: Feminism Today*, (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2010), p.14.

¹⁸ Finn Mackay, *Radical Feminism*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 51.

dissertation. She was arguably the first person to name and conceptualise contemporary rape culture, and her books such as *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1979), *Intercourse* (1987), and *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War on Women* (1997), plainly call out sustained male oppression of females through male violence against women. Dworkin vehemently argued against pornography and prostitution as she stated that, “Prostitution in and of itself is an abuse of a woman’s body. [...] Male dominance is a political system. [...] If you want a definition of what a coward is, it’s needing to push a whole class of people down so that you can walk on top of them.”¹⁹ Although this dissertation is an example of fourth wave feminist theory and activism in and of itself, the writings of prolific second and third wave feminists, such as Dworkin, form its theoretical framework. Dworkin argued that,

Male supremacy is fused into the language, so that every sentence both heralds and affirms it. Thought, experienced primarily as language, is permeated by the linguistic and perceptual values developed expressly to subordinate women. Men have defined the parameters of every subject. All feminist arguments, however radical in intent or consequence, are with or against assertions or premises implicit in the male system, which is made credible or authentic by the power of men to name. No transcendence of the male system is possible as long as men have the power of naming... As Prometheus stole fire from the gods, so feminists will have to steal the power of naming from men, hopefully to better effect.²⁰

The act of defining, identifying and beginning to deconstruct rape culture comes from this idea that the act of naming can be used as a feminist tool of reclamation and empowerment.

The third wave of feminism began in the 1990s and was highly critical of the classist, white centrality of many prominent figures of the previous waves. Third wave feminism is also intrinsically linked to queer theory, ‘choice feminism’ and intersectionality. Some of their main goals include female representation in the media and politics, sexual freedom and the universally accepted importance of intersectionality within the feminist movement.²¹ Stacy Gills and Rebecca Munford discuss definitions of third wave feminism in their 2004 article, ‘Genealogies and Generations: the politics and praxis of third wave feminism’. They examine the tensions between second and third wave feminisms. They write that,

¹⁹ Andrea Dworkin, *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 141, 142, 148.

²⁰ Andrea Dworkin, <https://real-feminist-history.com/2016/12/29/andrea-dworkin/> Accessed 1 June 2018.

²¹ Dyer, *The Little Book of Feminism*, 60.

The generational divide between second wave feminism and the new forms of feminism – whether it be a third wave or not – is one of the defining characteristics of the movement. Despite, or perhaps because of, these criticisms against it, this new generation of feminist voices is increasingly demanding to be heard, to be given credence and to claim a place in a feminist genealogy.²²

They argue strongly that a defining feature of third wave feminism, in differentiating itself from second wave feminism, is the push towards less academic, more mainstream concepts of what feminism is and what it has the power to change in society. They state that,

To date, the majority of third wave feminists have been quick to define themselves as primarily non-academic. *To Be Real: telling the truth and changing the face of feminism* (1995), *On the Move: feminism for a new generation* (1999) and *Manifesta: young women, feminism, and the future* (2000) are guides to feminism for the popular audience, and have a lineage in such widely read texts as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970).²³

Gills and Munford point out that, “The very fact that third wave feminists often define themselves by their date of birth is an indication of the movement’s disavowal of academic rigour and practice.”²⁴ Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards define third wave feminists as “women who were reared in the wake of the women’s liberation movement of the seventies”,²⁵ while Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake argue that third wave feminists are those born between 1963 and 1974.²⁶

Mackay argues against the generational shift between second and third wave feminists stating that, “the differences within contemporary feminism are political and not generational. In relation to third wave, these political differences are usually around pornography and prostitution, but also men’s involvement in feminism, with third wave feminism being seen as favourable to both.”²⁷ Mackay is arguing this from a radical feminist standpoint, with particular regard to the inclusion of men in ‘Reclaim the Night’

²² Stacy Gillis & Rebecca Munford (2004) Genealogies and generations: the politics and praxis of third wave feminism, *Women's History Review*, 13:2, 167.

²³ Stacy Gillis & Rebecca Munford (2004) Genealogies and generations: the politics and praxis of third wave feminism, *Women's History Review*, 13:2, 168.

²⁴ Stacy Gillis & Rebecca Munford (2004) Genealogies and generations: the politics and praxis of third wave feminism, *Women's History Review*, 13:2, 179.

²⁵ Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards, *Manifesta: young women, feminism, and the future*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000) p.15.

²⁶ Leslie Heywood & Jennifer Drake, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 4.

²⁷ Mackay, *Radical Feminism*, 194.

marches, that have taken place since the 1970s. She argues that third wave feminism and post feminism are inherently linked as she states that, “there were indeed overlaps between post feminism and the third wave, and that these two were not always so easily distinguishable.”²⁸ Ann Braithwaite agrees with this argument, stating that, “this insistence on examining one’s personal life, on exploring its many contradictions, desires and pleasures and fun marks one especially salient example of the overlaps and similarities between third wave and post feminism.”²⁹ However many third wave feminists disagree. Lise Shapiro Sanders writes that, “Postfeminism should not be confused with third wave feminism.”³⁰ Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake also argue for the distinct differences between third wave feminism and post feminism writing, “many of us working in the ‘third wave’ by no means define our feminism as a groovier alternative to an over-and-done feminist movement. Let us be clear: ‘postfeminist’ characterises a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticise feminists of the second wave.”³¹ This dissertation vehemently argues against the linking of third wave and post feminism in this way. This research argues that post feminism is a false concept of patriarchal oppression that started at the same time as third wave feminism in a bid to undermine it. Just as the rise in technology has become a cornerstone of fourth wave feminism, so too has the reaction against, and deconstruction of, the myth of post feminism.

This thesis argues that the fourth wave of the feminist movement builds on and pushes the aims of third wave feminisms further. The great battles of the fourth wave of the feminist movement are taking place online, and as embedded parts of mainstream discourse. When examining the shift of third wave feminism away from the academy, Gills and Munford note that, “Tension between the ‘real world’ and ‘theory’ is nothing new and the blame can be apportioned to both sides of the feminist divide. What is of interest here is how third wave feminism emerged in the popular consciousness as a result of cultural anger and activist interventions and the academy subsequently has been trying to control it theoretically.”³² This thesis argues that fourth wave feminism has taken this further. If third wave feminists are seen as the children of second wave feminists, then fourth wave feminists are the next generation. Lynne Segal writes in *Why Feminism?*,

²⁸ Mackay, *Radical Feminism*, 154.

²⁹ Ann Braithwaite, ‘The Personal, The Political, Third wave and Postfeminisms’, *Feminist Theory* 3.3 (2002) 335-44.

³⁰ Lise Shapiro Sanders, ‘Feminists Love a Utopia: Collaboration, Conflict and the Futures of Feminism’ in Stacy Gills, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford (eds.) *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration, Expanded Second Edition*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5.

³¹ Heywood, Drake, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, 4.

³² Stacy Gillis & Rebecca Munford (2004) Genealogies and generations: the politics and praxis of third wave feminism, *Women's History Review*, 13:2, 169.

“There have always been, and will always be, differing versions of what feminism is about, with the ‘new’ or latest trajectories invariably keen to mark their distance from the old.”³³ When commenting on the waves of feminist movements, Germaine Greer writes that it is the job of each generation to, “produce its own statement of problems and priorities.”³⁴ That being said, this dissertation argues that each of the successive waves of the feminist movement have built on from each other, and take on new issues not necessarily faced in the same wave by their predecessors.

Part Two: Defining Fourth Wave Feminism

The fourth wave of the feminist movement conceivably began in 2008 according to Jennifer Baumgardner.³⁵ As previously noted, feminists argue over the move from third to fourth wave feminism. However, other feminist waves have tackled issues they may have felt unable to in previous waves, for example, the quest for sexual liberation by second wave feminists would have been unlikely had women not received such fundamental equalities as voting rights. They have also had to tackle issues that did not exist in previous waves. An example of this can be seen in the struggle for equal pay for women in the workforce; this was not a serious issue for middle and upper class suffragettes who did not work outside of the home. In a similar manner, fourth wave feminism challenges issues the previous waves did not encounter.

This dissertation strongly argues that we have entered the fourth wave of the feminist movement for three main reasons.

Firstly, technological advancements have fundamentally changed how we interact and communicate indefinitely. This technology has brought about positive and negative changes for feminists and feminisms. Feminists are using the Internet, social media and other technological developments to create a platform for this new wave of feminism, and to mobilise positive change for women throughout the world. However, the Internet has enabled a new form of misogyny to breed online, and to ultimately oppress women indefinitely, as is further discussed in this chapter. As Natasha Walter points out, “There is no room for complacency. [...] When a woman who tries to speak up for silenced women is threatened with rape over the Internet, we still know that feminism’s work not done.”³⁶ Contemporary feminism is undeniably taking place to a large extent online. This

³³ Lynne Segal, *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology, Politics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 205.

³⁴ Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (London: Anchor, 2000), 55.

³⁵ Jennifer Baumgardner, *F'em! Goo Goo, Gaga and Some Thoughts on Balls* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2011).

³⁶ Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago Press, New Edition 2015), xxv.

has created a move away from more traditional academic feminisms, towards a more accessible, if arguably less researched, form of feminism. Julia Schuster has examined the growth in popularity of online feminisms and feminist activism.³⁷ She argues that there has been a generational shift towards online feminism, which may have caused some divide between younger and older feminists.³⁸ When examining this generational divide and online feminism Munro argues that, “This may create a divide between young feminists and older activists, as the new wave of feminists unwittingly hide their politics from their older peers. Many of those academics in a position to research and publish on feminism belong to this older age group, hence academic feminism is arguably guilty of failing to properly examine the shape that the fourth wave is currently taking.”³⁹ Part of the aim of this dissertation is to combine online contemporary feminisms with more traditional academic feminisms in order to fully examine rape culture.

The vast increase in the use of technology and online platforms also leads to the inclusion of multiple global activities and performances as reference points for the performances analysed in this dissertation. For example, Irish dance performance cannot be analysed without reference to the influence of American style child beauty pageants. This influence has clearly informed many of the developments in the aesthetics of contemporary competitive Irish dance performance. Similarly, the *Rose of Tralee* is a festival that exclusively celebrates women of Irish origin or extraction, but it too has been influenced by more traditional beauty pageant competitions. Also, the performative power of language for women affected by sexual violence is not an issue that exclusively impacts upon Irish women and girls. The use of social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, allow for the proliferation of slut shaming and victim blaming narratives that affect women from all over the world.

Secondly, fourth wave feminism is staunchly intersectional. This is not a new concept for fourth wave feminists, but the globalisation of culture has led to a monumental increase in awareness of intersectionality. As Munro points out, “Academic feminists have been comfortable with the idea of intersectionality since at least the 1980s, when

³⁷ Julia Schuster, (2013) ‘Invisible Feminists? Social Media and Young Women’s Political Participation’, *Political Science*, 65 (1), 8-24.

³⁸ This generational shift can be seen between so called ‘Baby Boomers’, or Generation X, and their children, ‘Millennials’, or Generation Y. Different studies use varying years of reference for Millennials. For example, a 2018 report from Pew Research Centre defines Millennials as those born between 1981-1996. They chose these dates for ‘key political, economic and social factors’, such as the 9/11 terror attacks. Those born between these years would be old enough to have some comprehension of it. Goldman Sachs, Resolution and *TIME* Magazine use 1980-2000. Author of *The Lucky Few: Between the Greatest Generation and the Baby Boom*, Elwood Carlson, uses 1983-2001. Millennials can also be defined as the generation who didn’t have access to the technological advancements, such as the smart phone, from birth, but did grow up with them as teenagers and young adults.

³⁹ Munro, ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’, 24.

prominent third wave feminists such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua and Audre Lord spoke out about women of colour being side-lined within feminism, These feminists undermined the idea that gender alone was a sound basis for identification.”⁴⁰ However, arguably the advancements in technology have allowed feminists to communicate internationally in ways that were previously unheard of, and this has driven the importance of understanding and being conscious of intersectionality much further. Those previously marginalised by mainstream feminist discourse now have a platform for debate and for their voices to be heard. This allows for a reclamation, or reinvention, of a narrative that feminists from traditionally marginalised groups had not yet had. Munro continues, “While controversy abounds concerning the delineation between second, third and fourth wave feminism, it is clear that several key issues animate contemporary feminism. Intersectionality and the exclusionary nature of mainstream feminism remain a real concern. The political potential of the fourth wave centres around giving voice to those still marginalised by the mainstream.”⁴¹

Thirdly, fourth wave feminism is a reaction to the false narrative of ‘post feminism’. Post feminism. The argument for ‘post feminism’ is that the original aims of feminism have been reached and therefore the movement has become redundant, but as Janelle Reinelt argues, embracing ‘post feminism’ risks the “performatively defeatist” suggestion of “giv[ing] up on the project of feminism”⁴². Since the beginning of the twenty-first century there have been rapid advancements not only in technology, but also in globalisation, and large shifts in social issues such as mental health and LGBTQ⁴³ rights. Despite these advancements, gender equality has undoubtedly not yet been reached, but the concept of the ‘post-feminist’ era has been a part of public discourse since the 1980s, used at that time to describe the backlash against second-wave feminism and its ‘monolithic’ ideas. According to Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters, the concept of ‘post feminism’ has been in existence for close to one hundred years in some circles as, “the first documented use of ‘postfeminism’ occurred in 1919 when it was appropriated by a woman’s literary group in Greenwich Village to signal a shift in political focus from

⁴⁰ Munro, ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’, 24.

⁴¹ Munro ‘Feminism: A Fourth Wave?’, 25.

⁴² Janelle Reinelt, ‘Navigating Postfeminism: Writing Out of the Box’, in *Feminist Futures? Theatre Performance Theory*, eds. Elaine Aston, Geraldine Harris, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 17.

⁴³ LGBTQ stands for ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning’. There are several different ways of referring to members of the ‘non-heterosexual, non-cis gender’ community. Throughout this research, I have come across acronyms such as LGBT, LGB, LGBTI (I standing for Intersex), LGBTQIA (A standing for Asexual/Agender) and LGBT+. I found that the most commonly accepted contemporary acronym in mainstream discourse is LGBTQ and that is why I have used this configuration. Some members of the LGBTQ community find this acronym limiting as some feel it is not wholly representative of the full spectrum of gender identities and sexualities. However, as it is the acronym most often accepted and used in mainstream discourse, and this dissertation does not explicitly deal with LGBTQ issues, LGBTQ is used where relevant throughout.

‘women’ to ‘people’.”⁴⁴ Post-feminist writers such as Christina Hoff Sommers and Amelia Jones have produced books where women are told that equality exists and so feminism is no longer relevant.⁴⁵ Claire Fox, author of *I Find That Offensive*⁴⁶, stated in an interview with *The Irish Times* that,

I think the influence of contemporary feminism has been very unhelpful to the current generation of girls. They are constantly being encouraged to speak out about how they feel victimised. I think the sexist issue has gone full circle and is beginning to have serious consequences, with many young men being accused of heinous crimes through naff or inexperienced attempts at chatting up a girl.⁴⁷

In this quote, Fox simultaneously slams contemporary feminism, delegitimises females who experience abuse and promotes rape culture through downplaying potential sexual misconduct as merely a result of ‘inexperience’. She is equally offensive to men and women here as she postulates that women are too quick to claim ‘victim status’ and men are incapable of knowing what constitutes sexually inappropriate behaviour. This is an example of post-feminist thought that actively perpetuates rape culture and needs to be deconstructed by fourth wave feminism.

Munford and Waters discuss the dangers of accepting a ‘post-feminist’ discourse as they postulate that post-feminism, “is not only concerned with consigning feminism to history but also with reanimating the glamour of an earlier age, a pre-feminist past.”⁴⁸ They claim that, “postfeminist discourse...is inevitably haunted insofar as it is not only structured through generational conflict, but also through a dis(re)memberment of feminist history.”⁴⁹ This concept of ‘post-feminism’ may be adopted by some, but the reality is that gender equality has not been achieved.

There are numerous ways of quantifying this lack of gender equality. Firstly, one way is to look at the number of women and girls who are still experiencing sexual violence. Although difficult to provide accurate statistics for those who experience sexual violence, more than one in three women worldwide, an estimated 35%, will be exposed to some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.⁵⁰ As Dworkin argues, “We use statistics not to

⁴⁴ Rebecca Munford, Melanie Waters, *Feminism & Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2014), 25.

⁴⁵ Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

⁴⁶ Claire Fox, *I Find That Offensive* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016).

⁴⁷ Claire Fox, quoted by Arlene Harris, ‘If you’re a young, white straight man today you’re in trouble’, *Irish Times*, June 27, 2016, accessed March 30, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/if-you-re-a-young-white-straight-man-today-you-re-in-trouble-1.2696818>

⁴⁸ Munford, Waters, *Feminism & Popular Culture*, 26.

⁴⁹ Munford, Waters, *Feminism & Popular Culture*, 28.

⁵⁰ United Nations Development Fund for Women (2008-2009). “Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability”. http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/media/POWW08_Report_Full_Text.pdf (Accessed 11 February 2016).

try to quantify the injuries, but to convince the world that those injuries even exist. Those statistics are not abstractions. [...] Those statistics are not abstract to me. Every three minutes a woman is being raped. Every eighteen seconds a woman is being beaten. There is nothing abstract about it. It is happening right now as I am speaking.”⁵¹ The reality that sexual violence and violence against women continue at these rates highlight one way of representing the lack of gender equality reached.

Secondly, another example of the lack of gender equality, and hence the false narrative of post feminism, is evidenced in the fact that until 2018, reproductive freedom has been incredibly limited for Irish women.⁵² This limitation existed because of the *Constitution of Ireland*. Although the constitutional amendment that effectively banned abortion in Ireland was repealed by Irish voters in 2018, the Constitution remains oppressive and misogynist as the words ‘mother’ and ‘woman’ are still interchangeable in Article 41 of the *Constitution of Ireland*.⁵³ As noted by Gabriella Calchi Novati,

It is worth noting that the equation ‘woman equals mother’ has consigned ‘woman’ to a passive position within the symbolic order. Woman is signified but does not have any power of signification; she is relegated, via the libidinal realm of heterosexist desire, into a very strict biological or ethereal role.⁵⁴

The *Constitution of Ireland* was originally written in 1937 and it is fair to argue that gendered terminology used eighty years ago is no longer representative of the women of contemporary Ireland. Post feminism implies gender equality has been achieved, such realities for women proves otherwise.

Thirdly, another example of the lack of gender equality in the Irish workplace can be seen in the 2017 report entitled *Gender Counts*, produced by the research team of the #WakingTheFeminists movement. This report details persistent and systemic gender discrimination in the Irish theatre industry. Both the #WakingTheFeminists movement and the *Gender Counts* report is discussed later in this Introduction as exemplary of fourth wave feminist activism. These three examples provided; namely the continued pervasiveness of sexual violence against women, the misogynist phallogocentric language

⁵¹ Andrea Dworkin, ‘I want a twenty-four hour truce during which there is no rape’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds, (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 14.

⁵² The Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution effectively banned abortion until it was repealed by a Referendum in May 2018.

⁵³ *Bunreacht Na hÉireann: Constitution of Ireland*, ‘Article 41.1 and 41.2’, October, 2015, 164, accessed February 6, 2017, http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/Bunreacht_na_hÉireann_October_2015_Edition.pdf

⁵⁴ Gabriella Calchi Novati, ‘Challenging Patriarchal Imagery: Amanda Coogan’s Performance Art, in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, eds. Sara Brady, Fintan Walsh, 2nd ed, (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 183.

of the *Constitution of Ireland* that continues to equate being a woman with being a mother, and the necessity of the #WakingTheFeminists movement, highlight how fourth wave feminism must react against the falsehoods of gender equality purposed by post feminism.

This dissertation states that as a result of the arguments presented, we have undoubtedly entered the fourth wave of the feminist movement. The research both uses and adds to fourth wave feminist discourse. It is both a component part, and a product of fourth wave feminist activism.

Part Three: Defining Rape Culture

The dissertation uses the definition of ‘rape culture’ given by Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher and Martha Roth in the introduction to *Transforming a Rape Culture* as a starting point for a deeper understanding of what contemporary rape culture is. They write,

What is a rape culture? It is a complex set of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm. In a rape culture both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life, as inevitable as death or taxes. This violence, however, is neither biologically nor divinely ordained. Much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact the expression of values and attitudes that can change.⁵⁵

Using this definition, the research questions how these values and attitudes can be changed using four different types of practise and performance.

Although this dissertation argues that the fourth wave of the feminist movement is firmly underway, and that rape culture is a primary concern for feminists at this time, awareness of this rape culture began with the second wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s. As Lisa Fitzpatrick notes,

Rape became an increasingly urgent subject of public debate during the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Feminists campaigned strongly on the issue of violence against women, particularly domestic abuse and rape, seeking changes in the law, increased support for women from social services, and changes in cultural attitudes and practices.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., *Transforming A Rape Culture*, (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), xi.

⁵⁶ Lisa Fitzpatrick, *Rape on the Contemporary Stage*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3.

One of the foundational, and ground-breaking, texts of anti-rape analysis, Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) is a product of second wave feminist discourse, and it identified rape as a systemic form of violence for the first time. Brownmiller argues that rape and sexual violence form, "a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear."⁵⁷ Brownmiller examines the processes of power and authority inherent in all forms of rape and sexual violence. She writes,

All rape is an exercise in power, but some rapists have an edge that is more than physical. They operate within an institutionalised setting that works to their advantage and in which a victim has little chance to redress her grievance. Rape in slavery and rape in wartime are two such examples. But rapists may also operate within an emotional setting or within a dependent relationship that provides a hierarchical, authoritarian structure of its own that weakens a victim's resistance, distorts her perspective and confounds her will.⁵⁸

Brownmiller's ideas situate rape and acts of sexual violence as performative actions that cause damage beyond the confines of the physical activity itself. Critiquing rape as a process of systemic oppression in this way has paved the way for theorisations of contemporary rape culture. Rape, and rape culture, are not modern or contemporary problems, but this examination of rape in such a way allowed for a re-evaluation, and considered deconstruction of rape culture. Brownmiller's analysis shifts the focus from the credibility of the individual rape 'victim', to the overarching narrative that sustains and perpetuates this systemic behaviour. It is an examination of deeply rooted gender bias power structures and hierarchies. It is an analysis of rape culture.

Against Our Will was published in the midst of the 'Reclaim the Night' marches of the mid 1970s, where women were seeking safe access to public spaces and starting to speak out about the unchallenged proliferation of rape and sexual violence. This was happening as other feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, were actively tackling the pornography and prostitution industries. Brownmiller's theory, along with radical feminists' concerns about sexual violence, aligned with Robin Morgan's postulation that, "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practise."⁵⁹ These feminists were highlighting the fact that rape, and acts of sexual violence, need to be re-evaluated as part of a wider cultural problem; that they are not issues only concerning the individuals

⁵⁷ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1975), 15.

⁵⁸ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1975), 105.

⁵⁹ Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist*, (New York: Open Road Media, 1977), 26.

directly affected by them. Morgan's linking of pornography to rape shows how the act of rape does not exist in a vacuum, but is a product of broader, systemic issues.

Dworkin remarked in 1983, "It is astonishing that in all our worlds of feminism and anti-sexism we never talk seriously about ending rape. Ending it. Stopping it. No more. No more rape."⁶⁰ She argues that hegemonic patriarchal oppression and rape are inextricably linked, and that true equality cannot be reached without an absence of rape. She writes, "And another thing about equality is that it cannot coexist with rape. It cannot. And it cannot coexist with pornography or with prostitution or with the economic degradation of women on any level, in any way. It cannot coexist, because implicit in all those things is the inferiority of women."⁶¹ Dworkin was one of the first feminists to name rape culture, stating, "We live in a rape culture. [...] We live under what amounts to a military curfew, enforced by rapists. We say we're free citizens in a free society. But we lie. We lie about it everyday."⁶²

Although this examination of rape as part of a rape culture is an historically feminist venture, the framing of rape as an act of violence, instead of desire, was first put forward by Michel Foucault. While many feminist writers have picked up on this idea, and developed it further, it has been criticised for downplaying the effects of rape. As Fitzpatrick notes,

In situating rape as a crime of violence rather than desire, Foucault is in sympathy with the dominant feminist analysis. However, his proposal that rape is similar to a punch in the face minimizes its impact upon the victims, and disregards the intimate exposure, the coerced physical intimacy, and the cultural consequences of shame, humiliation and ostracism often experienced by rape victims.⁶³

The 'cultural consequences of shame' to which Fitzpatrick refers are representative of other component parts of rape culture. These include victim blaming and slut shaming narratives that serve to perpetuate rape culture. In critiquing Foucault's argument from a feminist standpoint, Holly Henderson states that, "feminist theorizing on rape [...] argued that rape was specifically not about sex in order to highlight the power relations and politics that are involved in rape. [...] Thus while Foucault seeks to avoid the disciplinary effects of power, feminist theorizing attempts to bring to light the very differentials of power that structure rape."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Andrea Dworkin, 'I want a twenty-four hour truce during which there is no rape', in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 11.

⁶¹ Dworkin, 'I want a twenty-four hour truce during which there is no rape', 19.

⁶² Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 116.

⁶³ Fitzpatrick, *Rape on the Contemporary Stage*, 8.

⁶⁴ Holly Henderson, 'Feminism, Foucault, and Rape'. *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law and Justice* 22 (2007), 239.

While many feminists have actively spoken out about sexual violence, and the wider societal reasonings behind its pervasiveness, others have claimed that rape culture is not as extensive as it is. Moving into third wave feminism and the 1990s, as the concept of post feminism came into mainstream discourse, feminists such as Camille Paglia (1990)⁶⁵ and Katie Roiphe (1994)⁶⁶ argued that anti-rape and anti-rape culture feminism was infantilising, censoring and limiting the sexual freedom of women. This idea has persisted into the present day as Laura Kipnis arguing that the use of content warnings and excessive demands for college campuses to be ‘safe spaces’ ill-prepares students for the real world.⁶⁷

Germaine Greer has also remained staunchly critical of the ways in which feminists tackle the issues of rape and rape culture, with particular regard to the #MeToo movement⁶⁸ that garnered international recognition in late 2017. In 2018, Greer argued that we need to reconsider how rape as a crime is judged and punished, because severe penalties for rape decrease the likelihood of a conviction. She argues against historical allegations of rape and sexual abuse as the burden of proof is too high and that most rape is actually, “lazy, careless and insensitive”⁶⁹ sex. Speaking at the Hay literary festival in 2018, Greer said, “I want to turn the discourse about rape upside down. We are not getting anywhere approaching it down the tunnel of history.”⁷⁰ While it is fair to argue that current legal systems are not sufficiently convicting rapists, her dismissal of the effects of rape on the person who has experienced sexual violence is flippant and harmful. She questions statistics that suggest seventy percent of those who experience rape also experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the rape, while only twenty percent of war

⁶⁵ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁶⁶ Katie Roiphe, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994).

⁶⁷ Laura Kipnis, *Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus*, (New York: Harper, 2017).

⁶⁸ The ‘me too’ movement was originally founded by American intersectional feminist, Tarana Burke, in 2006 as a way to help people who had experienced sexual violence; particularly young women of colour from low income backgrounds and communities. The original aims focused on addressing the lack of resources available to help these young women, and to create a community of sexual violence ‘survivors’. In late 2017, as a reaction to the public denouncement of American film producer, Harvey Weinstein, the hashtag, #MeToo, began trending on social media sites as predominantly women began to speak publicly about their experiences of sexual violence and sexual harassment. Many of these experiences took place in a work environment and it became clear how accepted and normalised sexual harassment against women is in professional settings. American actress Alyssa Milano encouraged women to speak out about their experiences of sexual violence and harassment in a bid to, “give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.” As of 2018, the movement is ongoing and is actively working towards highlighting the extent of normalised rape culture globally.

⁶⁹ Gillian Greer quoted by Laura Bates, ‘Germaine Greer calls for punishment for rape to be reduced: Feminist academic tells Hay festival that ‘most rape is just lazy, careless and insensitive’, May 30, 2018, accessed July 19, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/may/30/germaine-greer-calls-for-punishment-for-to-be-reduced>

⁷⁰ Gillian Greer quoted by Laura Bates, ‘Germaine Greer calls for punishment for rape to be reduced: Feminist academic tells Hay festival that ‘most rape is just lazy, careless and insensitive’, May 30, 2018, accessed July 19, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/may/30/germaine-greer-calls-for-punishment-for-to-be-reduced>

veterans experience PTSD. She stated, “What the hell are you saying? Something that leaves no sign, no injury, no nothing is more damaging to a woman than seeing your best friend blown up by an IED is to a veteran? Society wanted women to believe that rape destroyed them. We haven’t been destroyed, we’ve been bloody annoyed is what we’ve been.”⁷¹ Greer’s opinions highlight the continued division within the feminist movement about the prevalence and damaging consequences of rape and sexual violence. Through downplaying the possible effects of sexual violence, Greer is actively supporting rape culture.

This dissertation vehemently argues against such views as those of Greer, as it highlights the pervasive power of rape culture. This dissertation argues that the full spectrum of rape culture needs to be addressed and recognised in order to deconstruct rape culture in a meaningful way. This spectrum is not just about rapists or staunch misogynists, it also includes the words of those like Greer. Although Greer is in no way sympathetic towards rapists, or believes that some women are ‘asking for it’, her dismissal of the effects of sexual violence serve to diminish the lived experience of those who are subjected to sexual violence.

There is a large focus on sexual violence carried out on women throughout the dissertation. Chapter One, the chapter concerned with the performativity of language, and Chapter Two, the Irish theatre chapter, are explicitly concerned with sexual violence, while the effects of sexual violence implicitly influence Chapters Three and Four, the chapters on pageantry and dance performance, respectively. This is due to the fact that committing an act of sexual violence against a person is the epitome of an expression of rape culture. Many of the building blocks of rape culture are perpetuated through how society treats those affected by such violence, especially women who experience it. Also, as Joanna Bourke writes, “Rape is a form of social performance. It is highly ritualised. It varies between countries; it changes over time. There is nothing timeless or random about it. Indeed, meaning has not been stripped bare from deeds of brutality, but has been generously bestowed.”⁷² Bourke argues that rape is about more than an act of physical violence for both the person raped, and the rapist, “For perpetrators of sexual violence, it is never enough to merely inflict suffering: those causing injury insist that even victims give meaning to their anguish. Although rape or sexual abuse may not be the worst thing

⁷¹ Gillian Greer quoted by Laura Bates, ‘Germaine Greer calls for punishment for rape to be reduced: Feminist academic tells Hay festival that ‘most rape is just lazy, careless and insensitive’, May 30, 2018, accessed July 19, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/may/30/germaine-greer-calls-for-punishment-for-to-be-reduced>

⁷² Joanna Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present* (London: Virago Press, 2007), 6.

that can happen to someone, it remains a terrifying and agonising experience for victims.”⁷³

Rape is a tool of power and control and it serves to disempower both those directly and indirectly affected by it. With this in mind, there is an emphasis on empowerment through the deconstruction of rape culture presented in this research. The quote by American academic Roxanne Gay used in the title of this chapter is representative of this quest for empowerment. If true gender equality can be achieved through the deconstruction and destruction of rape culture narratives, then logically such an action would involve the empowerment of those disempowered by sexual violence and rape culture. As discussed in Chapter One, the performative power of language cannot be understated. Language can act as either an empowering or disempowering force. Gay is highlighting how she feels that feminism gave her the power to speak, and so it took on a positive performative act for her. In a similar manner, this dissertation uses fourth wave feminist discourse as a means to explore the performative potential of language when rape culture is deconstructed, and when speaking itself becomes an empowering feminist act.

There is a deliberate effort made throughout the dissertation to use the theories and ideas of female writers. This is not a misandrist attempt to erase or silence the valid contribution of men to this field of research. In fact, male voices and masculinity studies are vital components in the deconstruction of rape culture as Michael Kimmel points out,

Part of transforming a rape culture means transforming masculinity, encouraging and enabling men to make other choices about what we do with our bodies, insisting that men utilise their own agency to make different sorts of choices. To ignore men, to believe that women alone will transform a rape culture, freezes men in a posture of defensiveness, defiance and immobility.⁷⁴

Male theorists are referenced where relevant but the deliberate inclusion of predominantly female theorists is a political statement on the position of the ‘female voice’. As Dworkin argues, “Societies have been organised to maintain the silence of women – which suggests that we cannot break this deep silence without changing the ways in which societies are organised.”⁷⁵ Through using mainly female voices throughout, this dissertation addresses this silencing. While it is not only women negatively affected by sexual violence and rape culture, they are disproportionately affected by it and so this research specifically focuses on such effects on women. Also, as Emilie Buchwald points out, “For most men, sexual

⁷³ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 6.

⁷⁴ Michael Kimmel, ‘Men, Masculinity, and the Rape Culture’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 157.

⁷⁵ Andrea Dworkin, *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 170.

violence is an invisible issue.”⁷⁶ She argues that this is because men do not have to consider the very real threat of sexual violence, that women have to, on a daily basis. She continues, “The fear of being sexually assaulted is simply not on a man’s mind as it always is on a woman’s. I would go further and say that sexual violence is a *nonissue* for most men, with none of the clout, say, of the state of the economy or the standing of a favourite baseball/football/basketball team.”⁷⁷

Choosing to use predominantly female voices throughout the dissertation is a radical attempt to aid the empowerment of women through promoting the female voice. As Shelley Budgeon argues when discussing contemporary feminism, “The aim is not to develop a feminism which makes representational claims on behalf of women but to advance a politics based upon *self-definition* and the need for women to define their personal relationship to feminism in ways that makes sense to them as individuals.”⁷⁸ Using predominantly female theorists is a way to promote such ‘self-definition’, and the performative power of ‘self-definition’ is fully explored in Chapter One, in relation to women directly affected by sexual violence. Budgeon further contends that, “Since there is no ‘pure’ definition of either the category woman or feminist there is no ‘real’ feminist identity that transcends the culture within which it is produced.”⁷⁹

Deliberately promoting the female voice is also a meta-theatrical attempt to highlight the imbalance of female voices in academic discourse. As Emer O’Toole notes when discussing the theorists she studied at university,

If men and women were equal, why were the vast majority of texts I was studying written by men? Okay, the canon of ancient or classic philosophy was composed of mostly male voices for an obvious reason: the millennia-long oppression of women. However, my courses on contemporary philosophy had hardly any female thinkers on the syllabus either, and we studied far more male than female authors, poets and playwrights in my literature classes too. Something didn’t add up.⁸⁰

The dissertation uses ‘feminisms’ and ‘femininities’ in their deliberately plural form precisely because there can be no one authoritative voice or definition when discussing

⁷⁶ Emilie Buchwald, ‘Raising Girls in the Twenty-First Century’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 225.

⁷⁷ Emilie Buchwald, ‘Raising Girls in the Twenty-First Century’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 225.

⁷⁸ Shelley Budgeon, ‘The Contradictions of Successful Femininity’, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, eds., (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 283.

⁷⁹ Shelley Budgeon, ‘The Contradictions of Successful Femininity’, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, eds., (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 282.

⁸⁰ Emer O’Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls: Dressing Up, Playing Parts and Daring to Act Differently* (London: Orion Books, 2016), 55-6.

such topics. The dissertation promotes the multiplicities inherent in feminist discourse and seeks to investigate such nuances.

Part Four: Defining Toxic Masculinity

Young adult fiction author, Brendan Kiely, was interviewed by *The Guardian* newspaper in July 2018 about his opinions on writing young male characters for a young male audience. He argues that, “A definition of masculinity that emerges from a culture which silences, shames and gaslights women is dangerous – it harms women and robs boys of the potential to be better human beings. Seeing [American President Donald] Trump in all his ugliness has acted like a wake-up call to male authors. We need to teach boys that they do not need to perform outdated gender norms to look like men.”⁸¹ What Kiely is referring to is the contemporary mainstream manifestations of ‘toxic masculinity’ that have wide-reaching, exclusively negative connotations for people of all genders. This thesis argues that performances and experiences of toxic masculinity are some of the key driving forces behind the proliferation of contemporary rape culture. In order to understand the workings of rape culture, its component parts need to be defined and deconstructed. The practice of toxic masculinity to sustain rape culture is highlighted heavily throughout Chapter Two. This chapter argues that the five contemporary Irish plays use characters driven by, or embodying aspects of toxic masculinity to demonstrate its performative potential for rape culture, and for women affected by sexual violence. In order to understand the practise of toxic masculinity, the theory behind it is now examined.

‘Toxic masculinity’, particularly in mainstream discourse, is a largely contemporary concept. However, it is fundamentally a product of the theories of hegemonic masculinity put forward by sociologist R. W. Connell in the 1980s. This research argues that the concept of ‘toxic masculinity’ is the natural development of hegemonic masculinity, in a similar manner to how successive waves of the feminist movement have been reliant on previous waves, in order to further the movement. In reflecting on the concept of hegemonic masculinity twenty years after it was first proposed, Connell and Messerschmidt state that, “The concept of hegemonic masculinity, formulated two decades ago, has considerably influenced recent thinking about men, gender, and social hierarchy.”⁸² They consider how hegemonic masculinity has informed

⁸¹ Donna Ferguson, ‘Authors steer boys from toxic masculinity with gentler heroes’, published in *The Guardian*, July 14, 2018, accessed July 14, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/14/how-boys-can-grow-into-real-men-male-authors-fight-toxic-masculinity?CMP=fb_gu

⁸² R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society*, Vol 19 (6), 2005, 829.

a variety of both academic and practical disciplines, “It has provided a link between the growing research field of men’s studies (also known as masculinity studies and critical studies of men), popular anxieties about men and boys, feminist accounts of patriarchy, and sociological models of gender. It has found uses in applied fields ranging from education and anti-violence work to health and counselling.”⁸³

The concept of hegemonic masculinity first arose in reports from a field study of social inequality in Australian High Schools.⁸⁴ This study focused on, “the making of masculinities and the experience of men’s bodies.”⁸⁵ The initial results from this study were further examined in the article, ‘Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity’.⁸⁶ The model developed in this article proposed a model of multiple masculinities and power relations. This model was in turn consolidated into a, “systematic sociological theory of gender. The resulting six pages in *Gender and Power*⁸⁷ [...] became the most cited source for the concept of hegemonic masculinity.”⁸⁸ The original hegemonic masculinity theory was influenced by feminist theories of patriarchy, particularly those of W. Goode⁸⁹ and J. Snodgrass.⁹⁰ However, “women of colour—such as Maxine Baca Zinn (1982)⁹¹, Angela Davis (1983)⁹², and bell hooks (1984)⁹³—criticised the race bias that occurs when power is solely conceptualized in terms of sex difference, thus laying the groundwork for questioning any universalizing claims about the category of men.”⁹⁴ Hegemonic masculinity was also influenced by sociological and social psychology theories of ‘male sex role’ throughout the 1970s.

Hegemonic masculinities has been further defined in more recent times by Connell and Messerschmidt. They write, “Hegemonic masculinity was understood as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue. Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished

⁸³ R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society*, Vol 19 (6), 2005, 830.

⁸⁴ S. J. Kessler, D. J. Ashenden, R. W. Connell, G. W. Dowsett, *Ockers and disco-maniacs*, (Sydney: Inner City Education Center, 1982).

⁸⁵ R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society*, Vol 19 (6), 2005, 830.

⁸⁶ T. Carrigan, R. W. Connell, J. Less, (1985) ‘Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity’, *Theory and Society*, Vol 14 (5), 551-604.

⁸⁷ R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

⁸⁸ R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society*, Vol 19 (6), 2005, 830-1.

⁸⁹ W. Goode, ‘Why Men Resist, in *Rethinking the Family: Some feminist Questions*, ed. B. Thorne, M. Yalom, (New York: Longman, 1982).

⁹⁰ J. Snodgrass, (ed.), *For Men Against Sexism: A Book of Readings*, (Albion: Times Change Press, 1977).

⁹¹ M. Baca Zinn, ‘Chicano Men and Masculinity’, *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Vol 10 (2), 1982, 29-44.

⁹² Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, (New York: Vintage, 1983).

⁹³ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre*, (Boston: South End, 1984).

⁹⁴ R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society*, Vol 19 (6), 2005, 831.

from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities.”⁹⁵ They discuss how hegemonic masculinity should not be regarded as ‘normal’ behaviour, but how it has become a ‘normative’ mode of behaviour, “Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.”⁹⁶ They go on to argue that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily imply violence, but more so continued ascension based on performances of gender. Hegemonic masculinity is undoubtedly dangerous for women, as it relies on the continued dominance of the male gender. However, it also has largely negative effects on males. This is due to the acceptance and performance of ‘normative’ gender roles created and sustained by it.

This research argues that the concept of hegemonic masculinity has heavily influenced the notion of ‘toxic masculinity’. ‘Toxic masculinity’ has been set up in binary opposition with the concept of ‘toxic femininity’ throughout this dissertation. The two work in tandem to produce negative, damaging and toxic effects on people of all genders and gender identities.

The term ‘toxic’ as opposed to ‘hegemonic’ is used for three reasons. Firstly, it is the term most readily used in contemporary mainstream discourse, and this dissertation is firmly embedded in such discourse. Secondly, it serves as an opposite to the theory of ‘toxic femininity’, as is laid out in the next section. Thirdly, the word ‘toxic’ fundamentally highlights the damaging and negative consequences of this type of normative masculinity.

On January 20, 2017 American businessman and celebrity Donald Trump was inaugurated as the forty-fifth President of the United States of America (POTUS). This is a man who routinely uses his personal *Twitter* account to abuse women, including his main rival in the Presidential Election Campaign, Hillary Clinton, to refer to Mexican immigrants as ‘bad hombres’ and use derogatory terms such as ‘overrated’, ‘sad’, ‘pathetic’ and ‘weak’ to refer to anyone who opposes his ideological viewpoints.⁹⁷ After his inauguration, there was much debate in the media over the crowd size present for his inauguration with images of the crowd shared on social media sites and compared with

⁹⁵ R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society*, Vol 19 (6), 2005, 832.

⁹⁶ R. W. Connell, James W. Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept’, *Gender & Society*, Vol 19 (6), 2005, 832.

⁹⁷ Donald Trump, Twitter feed, accessed January 31, 2017, Twitter Handle: @realDonaldTrump <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>

the crowd for former POTUS Barack Obama's first inauguration in 2009.⁹⁸ Although it was easily provable through photographic evidence and official ridership figures released by the Metro Washington subway system that Obama did have a larger crowd,⁹⁹ Trump and his team persisted in claiming that his crowd was larger and that the media was producing 'fake news' to undermine the new minority President. When questioned about the incident, Trump's Election Campaign Manager and senior advisor Kellyanne Conway suggested that The White House presented a set of "alternative facts"¹⁰⁰ that proved the crowd size was larger. The actual figures are irrelevant, what really matters is the repeated insistence of lies by Trump and his administration that his crowd was the largest to ever attend and American Presidential Inauguration Ceremony. Trump's then Press Secretary, Sean Spicer, spent much of his first official press conference insisting on the large crowd size.¹⁰¹ This need to be considered as the 'biggest and best' is a clear sign of Trump's 'toxic masculinity'. Trump is arguably the very epitome of a sense of 'toxic masculinity' or of hetero-normative hegemonic patriarchal ideals of masculinity that have reached a crisis point in the contemporary moment and subsequently detrimentally alter the lives and behaviours of those around him.

Trump uses violent and aggressive language to control those around him, including those who voted for him, as he encouraged his supporters to "knock the crap out of" protestors present at his rallies.¹⁰² American sociologist, Michael Kimmel's concept of an 'angry white man' can be appropriately used to define Trump. Trump feels entitled to entice and embrace violence when his internalised sense of 'manhood' is under a perceived threat. As Kimmel writes on masculinity and violence, "Masculinity is about impermeability, independence. Perhaps feeling vulnerable and dependent is regressive, reminding us of our earliest dependence on our mothers."¹⁰³ He argues that, "One must feel entitled to use violence as a means of restoring what was experienced as threatened,

⁹⁸ Images of both inaugurations are imbedded in this article: Elle Hunt, 'Trump's inauguration crowd: Sean Spicer's claims versus the evidence', *Guardian*, January 22, 2017, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/22/trump-inauguration-crowd-sean-spicers-claims-versus-the-evidence>

⁹⁹ Elle Hunt, 'Trump's inauguration crowd: Sean Spicer's claims versus the evidence', *Guardian*, January 22, 2017, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/22/trump-inauguration-crowd-sean-spicers-claims-versus-the-evidence>

¹⁰⁰ NBC News, 'Kellyanne Conway: Press Secretary Sean Spicer Gave 'Alternative Facts' | Meet The Press | NBC News', *YouTube*, January 22, 2017, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSrEEDQgFc8>

¹⁰¹ ABC News, 'LIVE: Press Secretary Sean Spicer Full Press Conference ABC News', *YouTube*, January 23, 2017, accessed January 31, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vu1tU5_JMSE

¹⁰² Ainara Tiefenthaler, 'Trump's History of Encouraging Violence', *New York Times*, March 14, 2016, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000004269364/trump-and-violence.html>

¹⁰³ Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, (New York: Nation Books 2013), 177.

that part of the self that is suddenly made vulnerable. If you don't feel entitled to use violence, then all the vulnerability in the world won't lead you to hit somebody."¹⁰⁴

Trump also uses violent language to refer to women, whether in a positive or negative light. He has a history of sexually inappropriate comments about his own daughter,¹⁰⁵ he implied CNN journalist Megyn Kelly was unprofessional and menstruating during the first Republican Party debate of the election campaign¹⁰⁶ and he infamously remarked that his celebrity status allowed him to "grab [women] by the pussy".¹⁰⁷ His violent use of performative language towards women highlights his belief in the superiority of men and masculinity and his behaviour is comparable to Kimmel's point about the use of language to describe women in contemporary discourse,

Think, for a moment, about the words we use to describe women's beauty, women's sexuality, women's attractiveness: they're words of violence and injury – to men. Women are *ravishing* or *stunning*; she's a *bombshell* or a *knockout*; she's *dressed to kill*, a real *femme fatale*. Women's beauty is perceived as violent to men: men use violence to even the playing field – or, more accurately, to return it to its previously uneven state that men thought was even.¹⁰⁸

Trump ultimately represents the growing resentment of certain men towards the achievements of contemporary feminisms and gender equality. This is a particular type of anti-feminism and his actions are reactionary and emblematic of 'normative (or hegemonic) masculinity' under threat, producing behaviours of 'toxic masculinity' as a result. Trump symbolises normative hegemonic hetero-patriarchal masculinity in crisis as strides towards gender equality are made. As Kimmel writes,

But if this is the end of one era, the era of men's sense of unquestionable entitlement, it is the beginning of another, the beginning of the end of patriarchy, the unquestioned assumption men have felt to access, to positions of power, to corner offices, to women's bodies, that's casual assumption that all positions of power, wealth, and influence are reserved for us and that women's presence is to be resisted if possible, and tolerated if not.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, 177.

¹⁰⁵ Adam Withnall, 'Donald Trump's unsettling record of comments about his daughter Ivanka', *Independent* (London), October 10, 2016, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-elections/donald-trump-ivanka-trump-creepiest-most-unsettling-comments-a-roundup-a7353876.html>).

¹⁰⁶ CNN Tonight, 'Trump on Kelly: Blood was coming out of her eyes', *CNN Tonight*, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/videos/us/2015/08/08/donald-trump-megyn-kelly-blood-lemon-intv-ctn.cnn>

¹⁰⁷ Ben Jacobs, 'You can do anything': Trump brags on tape about using fame to get women', *Guardian* October 8, 2016, accessed February 1, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/07/donald-trump-leaked-recording-women>

¹⁰⁸ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 183.

¹⁰⁹ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, xiv.

If normative masculinity dictates that to be feminine is negative and that to truly epitomise masculinity is unattainable, a clear crisis point for masculinity has been reached. When so much weight is placed on the socially constructed notions of ‘normative’ gender identity and performance, those who do not fit the narrow requirements of ‘truly masculine’ do not encapsulate a nominally superior role to everyone else even if they feel they should. This causes a platform for ‘toxic masculinity’.

‘Toxic masculinity’ is a prominent term in contemporary feminist debate that is often misused as a reason to abuse men for their very existence. What often goes unexamined are the reasons behind the creation of ‘toxic masculinity’ and the negative effect that it has on men. This dissertation deals with several instances of the effect of ‘toxic masculinity’ on women and femininities, but it is important to examine its negative effects on men as the two impacts are intrinsically related. Throughout the dissertation, reference is made to the term ‘toxic masculinity’, particularly in relation to the male characters featured in the selected plays in Chapter two, and to the link between the proliferation of sexual violence carried out by men on women to ‘toxic masculinity’ in Chapter One. When discussing ‘toxic masculinity’, I am referring to the crisis point masculinity has reached in the contemporary moment where men are trapped by the confines of strictly gendered social conditioning. This trapping causes behaviours that fundamentally damage men and women and the gender relations between them.

As stated by R. W. Connell in *Masculinities* when discussing the social organisation of masculinity, “the concept is also inherently relational, ‘Masculinity’ does not exist except in contrast with ‘femininity’”. A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarised character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture.”¹¹⁰ When defining masculinity, Connell references four main strategies of interpretation, stating that, “They are easily distinguished in terms of their logic, though often combined in practice.”¹¹¹ These are listed as essentialist, positivist, normative and semiotic approaches to masculinities.¹¹² All of these methods of analysis overlap to a greater or lesser extent, but this dissertation focuses on the use of normative definitions because “*normative* definitions recognise these differences and offer a standard: masculinity is what men ought to be.”¹¹³ Telling men what they *should be* allows room for the creation of a ‘toxic masculinity’ because inevitably, not all men, if any, can naturally fulfil these imposed and constructed concepts of what a man ‘should be’. The word ‘normative’ is a problematic

¹¹⁰ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 68.

¹¹¹ Connell, *Masculinities*, 68.

¹¹² Connell, *Masculinities*, 69-70.

¹¹³ Connell, *Masculinities*, 70.

place to start with a definition. ‘Normative’ implies that there is some blueprint or universally accepted standard of pre-determined masculinity that must be adhered to in order to identify and perform as a ‘masculine male’.

The performance of masculinity is fundamentally different to the performance of a male gender identity. If they were the same thing, then the term ‘masculinity’ would become void. Masculinity, and femininity by proxy, is a term that came to prominence during the nineteenth century¹¹⁴ in order to differentiate between the supposed innate biological, physical and psychological behaviours of men and women. Originally they were built on the belief that men, as a whole group, are superior to women, as a whole group. This was not a revolutionary idea in the nineteenth century, as the prevalence of wholly patriarchal societies throughout the course of history has supported male superiority and female oppression. In fact, the construction of the concept of masculinity, and its binary relationship with femininity, is solely based on the existence of long established patriarchy. What the creation of such terms does is legitimise sexist beliefs and further segregate male and female identity. It is important to note the link between performing masculinity and superiority.

The 2016 American Presidential Campaign produced numerous examples of the belief that masculinity remains superior to femininity. This could be seen with comments such as “being President is a man’s job” and “a woman can’t be President because she has more hormones and could start a war in ten seconds” made when Jordan Klepper, a reporter for Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* interviewed Trump supporters at a rally.¹¹⁵ While such views are arguably not held in the majority in contemporary culture, the fact that people who believe this rhetoric elected Trump as POTUS shows that these views are commonly held.

Such rhetoric has been tackled by feminists, and attitudes towards the feminine as a negative attribute are changing, with contemporary media campaigns such as the #LikeAGirl campaign¹¹⁶ challenging preconceived notions of the performance of femininity. *Plan International* has set up a foundation for increased access to healthcare and education for disadvantaged females throughout the world under the title ‘Because I Am A Girl’.¹¹⁷ This title plays on the idea that accepted notions of feminine inferiority need to be challenged. In addition to offending and oppressing women and girls by

¹¹⁴ Connell, *Masculinities*, 68.

¹¹⁵ The Daily Show, ‘Putting Donald Trump Supporters Through an Ideology Test: The Daily Show’, *YouTube*, August 19, 2016, accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4Zdx97A63s>

¹¹⁶ Always, ‘#LikeAGirl’, *YouTube*, June 26, 2014, accessed August 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs>

¹¹⁷ Plan International, ‘Because I Am A Girl’, *Plan International*, accessed August 16, 2016, <https://plan-international.org/because-i-am-a-girl?gclid=COrN3OrIpc8CFQtAGwodfYkGiQ>

accepting feminine traits as lesser than masculine behaviours, men are feminised as a means of insult and abuse. Common phrases such as ‘big boys don’t cry’, ‘you play like a girl’, ‘big girl’s blouse’ and, arguably the most damaging of all, ‘man up’, are used as a way to berate men deemed ‘less than masculine’, or feminine. Such phrases deny the full spectrum of the male experience and force men to take part in constructed rituals of normative masculinity that they may not necessarily identify with.

‘Normative masculinity’ establishes arbitrary notions of traits and behaviours that a ‘man’ should possess, and alienates and oppresses any man who fails to meet such construct social standards. The existence of masculinity cannot be essentialist due to uniqueness of human identity. For example, to say that all men enjoy watching sports and drinking beer, and that those who do not partake in such activities are not normatively masculine as a result, is simply false. The creation of a normative concept of masculinity becomes dangerous and oppressive when it involves such hierarchical stereotyping. In the example given here, men who do not enjoy such socially accepted masculine pastimes risk abuse and subjugation as a result. Those who enjoy such activities are deemed to be ‘more masculine’ and ‘more manly’, with normative masculinity being deemed worthy of constant aspiration towards.

As Kimmel points out, a prevalent reaction of men who are deemed to be less masculine than others is violence, and, “violence has long been understood in America as the best way to ensure that others publicly recognise one’s manhood. [...] Violence is proof of masculinity; one is a “real’ man because one is not afraid to be violent.”¹¹⁸ As seen in the plays analysed throughout Chapter Two, it is often men’s perceived lack of masculinity, or expression of ‘toxic masculinity’ that leads to the perpetuation of violence against women. This is most apparent in Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*, O’Rowe’s *Our Few And Evil Days* and Spallen’s *Pumpgirl*, with male protagonists committing violent acts against women in order to reclaim their lost or lacking sense of manhood.

Normative masculinity becomes more dangerous again when the standards deemed acceptable to aspire to remain ultimately unattainable. As is argued in the next section in relation to ‘toxic femininity’, in Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*, the construction of unrealistic beauty standards for women in the media and throughout popular culture leads to the proliferation of ‘toxic femininity’ through promoting unattainable ideals. Wolf speaks of how the beauty myth has been created to make public life more difficult for women as they are uniformly pressured into conforming in order to succeed in life. Arguably in recent years, a similar form of a beauty myth has been created for men as a direct result of the existence of normative masculinity.

¹¹⁸ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 178-179.

Traditional male role models portrayed as pillars of masculinity were found throughout the twentieth century in fictional characters such as James Bond in the James Bond film series,¹¹⁹ and Han Solo¹²⁰ in the Stars Wars franchise. Such characters were widely regarded as ‘manly masculine men’. James Bond in particular is portrayed as a sexist, misogynist who fully believed in the superiority of men and the possession of women. The most recent actor to play the role, Daniel Craig, stated in an interview that James Bond is undeniably misogynist, “But let’s not forget that he’s actually a misogynist. A lot of women are drawn to him chiefly because he embodies a certain kind of danger and never sticks around for too long.”¹²¹ While Bond as a character presents some aspects of an unattainable life, e.g. a life as an international spy with a ‘license to kill’¹²², this dissertation argues that contemporary portrayals of male protagonists in movies have become more damaging to the concept of aspirational ideals of manhood for numerous reasons.

Since the early 2000s, comic book companies Marvel¹²³ and DC Comics¹²⁴ have produced a steady flow of high budget, blockbuster superhero movies. The vast majority of these movies contain male protagonists. Such protagonists include Batman, Superman,

¹¹⁹ The James Bond movie series was originally based on the books of Ian Fleming who featured the British Secret Service Agent known as 007 in twelve novels and two short story collections dating from 1953. To date, six male actors have taken on the role in a series of twenty-four films. The first actor to play the role was Sean Connery who starred in a total of six movies beginning with *Dr No* in 1962. Since then, George Lazenby, Timothy Dalton, Roger Moore, Pierce Brosnan and Daniel Craig have played the role. James Bond as a fictional character is known for his womanizing behaviours, dangerous stunts and sophisticated demeanor. For more information, the official James Bond movie franchise website is <http://www.007.com> accessed February 1, 2017

¹²⁰ Han Solo is a fictional character, who first appeared on screen in the first movie *Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977) of the original Star Wars trilogy. He is based on a fictional character from novel *Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker* published in 1976. In the movie series, he was played by the actor Harrison Ford. For more information, the official Star Wars movie franchise website is <http://www.starwars.com> accessed February 1, 2017

¹²¹ Daniel Craig, interview by Rudiger Strum, ‘Is James Bond a good role model? What makes him irresistible to women? 007 through the eyes of the man who plays him’, *Red Bulletin*, accessed February 1, 2016,

<https://www.redbulletin.com/us/us/culture/daniel-craig-tells-us-what-he-really-thinks-of-bond>

¹²² According to the James Bond Franchise, one part of taking on the role of a ‘00’ Agent meant that the agent had a ‘license to kill’ and would ultimately not face criminal charges for murders committed while on a work assignment.

¹²³ *Marvel Comics* was originally founded in 1938 as *Timely Comics*, switching to the new title in 1961. The first Marvel movie was released in 1944, but there has been a monumental increase in support for the movie franchise since the year 2000 with forty films released featuring *Marvel Comics* characters between 2000-2016, in comparison to the six films released between 1944-1998. In the forty films released between 2000-2016, there was only female led film, *Elektra* (2005). All of the thirty-nine films featured male protagonists. For more information, the official Marvel website is <http://marvel.com> accessed February 1, 2017

¹²⁴ *DC Comics* was founded in 1934 and created some of the most well-known comic book characters of all-time including Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman. The first film featuring a *DC Comics* character was released in 1951. Between the years 2000-2016, there were fifteen films released containing characters from the franchise with only one female led movie, namely *Catwoman* (2004). In 2017, the first *Wonder Woman* movie was released to large commercial success. For more information, the official website of *DC Comics* is <http://www.dccomics.com> accessed February 1, 2017

Iron Man, Captain America, Thor and Spiderman. As each new movie is released, the physique of the protagonist is increasingly focused on. The argument can be made that as a superhero character, it is reasonable for the protagonist to have an unrealistic body type, and that these body types reflect those featured in the original comic book drawings. However, if the physique of the various actors who have played the characters of Batman and Superman since the 1990s is compared, a clear difference may be seen in the physical shape of these actors as time progresses. Actors such as Ben Affleck and Henry Cavill are much larger and more physically imposing than their predecessors George Clooney, Christian Bale and Brandon Routh. Actors Cavill and Affleck spend increasing amounts of time physically training to play their respective roles as well as more time spend talking about their fitness routines during press interviews for their movies. They join their fellow contemporary group of male superhero actors who have spoken about the difficulties of getting into, and maintaining unrealistic body shapes. The focus on a topless scene with the visible presence of a six-pack in these movies is challenging the limits of physical masculine idealism and increasing the pressure of the beauty myth on 'normative' men. The cure for the blanket sexualisation and objectification of women in the media and popular culture is not found in increasing the objectification and sexualisation of men, yet contemporary constructions of masculinity are doing exactly this. The link between exposure to unattainable beauty standards and the mental health of women and girls has been widely proven. It is fair to compare these unattainable beauty ideals for women with those now created for men in the media. When normative masculinity includes aspiration to unrealistic beauty standards, the mental health of the men and boys exposed to such relentless imagery is affected.

The word 'normative' when used in relation to masculinity also creates a link to perceived or assumed 'hetero-normativity' or heterosexuality. Identifying as a queer man can have serious detrimental implications for the performance of masculinity. Queerness is often 'othered' and is seen as conventionally more feminine. An example of this can be seen in the historic exclusion of queer men from serving in the American armed forces. When questioned about the practice Connell reports that, "The admirals and generals defended the status quo on a variety of spurious grounds. The unadmitted reason was the cultural importance of a particular definition of masculinity in maintaining the fragile cohesion of modern armed forces."¹²⁵ This cultural belief in the lack of masculinity of queer men, related to the negative connotations associated with femininity for men, leads to the support of a socially constructed image of 'normative masculinity'. Such a

¹²⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*, 73.

constructed image is devoid of any biological reasoning and instead perpetuates out-dated, stereotypes of what a ‘real man’ is.

The established link between markers of normative masculinity and physical strength are challenged with the move away from the dominance of physical labour in favour of sedentary professions in Ireland in the twenty-first century. Vast advancements in technology and the positioning of global corporations, such as *Google* and *Facebook*, in Ireland has led to an increased need for a technically skilled workforce. As stated by *The Irish Times* in an article discussing the positioning of modern men in Ireland in relation to women, feminism and masculinity,

If the market value of physical labour is dwindling towards zero, how does that affect the way we think about “strength”, once one of the traditional defining attributes of masculinity? You can see a lot of contemporary culture as a reaction to such changes. The over-inflated superheroes of popular cinema, the ever-increasing obsession with male body shape and the easy availability of unlimited hardcore pornography all represent different forms of displacement through (often enforced) leisure activity.¹²⁶

Such a decline in the emphasis on manual labour, coupled with the obsession of the male beauty myth and the objectification and sexualisation of men, is partially leading to a crisis point in masculinity and the societal expectations of what a man ‘should’ be in contemporary Irish society and discourse. As stated by the Irish entertainer and activist known as Blindboy Boatclub in an interview with Ryan Tubridy on RTE’s *The Late Late Show* in November 2016, “What these young men need is feminism. [...] When I actually speak to them and get to the root of what’s bothering them, what they always say to me is, ‘I have nothing to offer a woman. How am I supposed to provide for a woman?’ The fact of the matter is that is a patriarchal attitude that is no longer relevant to us in the twenty-first century.”¹²⁷ In this quote, Blindboy is highlighting the effect of ‘toxic masculinity’ on young men in Ireland today.

‘Toxic masculinity’ is a cultural construct that is having real-life damaging consequences on people of all genders in contemporary society. From the vitriol of the minority American President Donald Trump to the insecurities of young Irish men and boys growing up in rural towns in Ireland, the prevalence of ‘toxic masculinity’ is clear. Just as is evidenced in real life, ‘toxic masculinity’ also violently impacts upon the lives

¹²⁶ Hugh Linehan, ‘How to be a modern man in Ireland: Irish men on masculinity, feminism and violence’, *Irish Times*, September 24, 2016, accessed September 26, 2016

¹²⁷ Blindboy Boatclub, interview by *The Late Late Show*, ‘Young men in Ireland need feminism’ - Blindboy Boatclub | The Late Late Show | RTÉ One’, *YouTube*, November 18, 2016, accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWUDQdiFB7A>

of the characters in each of the plays analysed throughout this chapter. The existence of both ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’ as driving forces for action in these plays are exemplary of their respective damaging consequences in contemporary culture.

Part Five: Defining Toxic Femininity

‘Toxic femininity’ is fundamentally the carrying out of destructive, learned behaviours and actions by women with the definite intention of causing harm to themselves or other women. The idea that a woman could cause harm to her own person is linked to the power of internalised misogyny, a power that permeates all areas of contemporary culture. This theory of ‘toxic femininity’ is explicitly used in reference to the plays analysed in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Throughout these plays, there is much evidence of the existence of ‘toxic femininity’ and its detrimental effects on the psyche of other women. ‘Toxic femininity’ is particularly apparent throughout Greer’s *Petals*, Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*, Spallen’s *Pumpgirl* and Daly’s *Test Dummy*. In Greer’s *Petals*, the presence of this ‘toxic femininity’ is clear in the character of the nun Sister Margarita, who employs established ‘victim blaming’ and ‘slut-shaming’ techniques to influence the behaviour of the young women in her class. In *On Raftery’s Hill* ‘toxic femininity’ is evident in the character of Dinah as she arguably fails in her maternal duty to her daughter Sorrel through choosing to ignore Sorrel’s rape as she instead becomes jealous of her. In Spallen’s *Pumpgirl* ‘toxic femininity’ is apparent from the opening lines of the play where the character Pumpgirl describes a negative interaction with female customers at the petrol station where she works. These customers question her gender identity in a derogatory manner and proudly critique her appearance because they deem her to be ‘unfeminine’. In Daly’s *Test Dummy* the woman references the external sexualisation and objectification she experiences simply for being female, and subsequently goes on to blame herself for this unsolicited behaviour and her sexually violent experiences. There is also an aspect of ‘toxic femininity’ in O’Rowe’s *Our Few And Evil Days* as Margaret feels compelled to relive her rape nightly in her imagination as her need to act as a mother outweighs the deep trauma she continues to put herself through. The relationship of ‘toxic femininity’ to these plays will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter.

Numerous scholars have commented on the notion of ‘toxicity’ itself and its relation to masculinity and feminism. Claire Colebrook writes of toxic feminism in her article ‘Toxic Feminism: Hope And Hopelessness after Feminism’ as she unpacks the idea

of ‘one true feminism’ through discussing traditionally feminist ideals and their relationship to feminism,

If a militant, power-seeking woman becomes Thatcher, then the hope for a woman leader needs to reject and refigure; if the mobilisation that promised to lead to Hillary Clinton — and who knows what hopes and disappointments she might have actualised? — led to Sarah Palin, then we need to recognise that the figure of woman upon which we place so much hope is at once that which promises a future and also that which often closes that future down. What will lead to utter hopelessness is the elimination of a figure as such, a utopian desire to take feminism beyond women entirely, or — as perhaps we are seeing today — women beyond feminism.¹²⁸

Roopika Risam discusses the toxicity within contemporary online feminist discourse in her article ‘Toxic Femininity 4.0’ concerning so-called ‘white feminists’ and intersectional feminists stating that, “Toxic discourse further begs the question of who has the right to online spaces uncluttered, free from pollution. The very “threat of infringement” that Buell identifies as fundamental to toxic discourse plays out in online space. Perceived toxic threat itself plays a role in creating affinity groups who share the experience of having their “sense of place identification and social identity disrupted by toxic menace”.¹²⁹ She considers the potential juxtaposition between intersectional and hegemonic feminisms, “Subtending these conversations is the unspoken tension with feminist movements, the real question of what role the disruptive discourse of intersectionality has in feminist analysis. The threat of intersectionality to hegemonic forms of feminism is consolidated in the figure of the toxic woman of colour, shoring up the position of the good white feminist in opposition.”¹³⁰

The concept of ‘toxic femininity’ is not theorised in this dissertation to create an inherent link between toxicity, and feminist theory or discourse. Instead, it is used in direct relation to the concept of ‘toxic masculinity’. ‘Toxic masculinity’ is a term that has become relatively common and popular in contemporary culture, while the concept of ‘toxic femininity’ is arguably not discussed largely at all. However, if gender is taken as a cultural construct, but men and women remain labelled on opposing ends of a gender binary, there are inevitably negative constructions of gendered behaviour that are deemed to be ‘normative’. Such constructions lead to the proliferation of ‘toxic masculinity’, as is

¹²⁸ Claire Colebrook, ‘Toxic Feminism: Hope And Hopelessness After Feminism’, *Journal for Cultural Research*, Volume 14, Number 4. (October 2010), 11.

¹²⁹ Roopika Risam, ‘Toxic Femininity 4.0’, *First Monday*, Volume 20, Number 4 - 6 April 2015, 17.

¹³⁰ Roopika Risam, ‘Toxic Femininity 4.0’, *First Monday*, Volume 20, Number 4 - 6 April 2015, 17.

often discussed in the media,¹³¹ but it logically follows that if men are faced with such negative and dangerous proliferations of masculinity, then women would be faced with the binary opposition problem of negative and ‘toxic’ stereotypes of femininity.

If ‘toxic masculinity’ is to display negative, violent and dangerous behaviours associated with the performance of an extreme form of masculinity, then ‘toxic femininity’ is this same portrayal with reference to the conventional ideals of a particular femininity. ‘Toxic masculinity’ can be seen as a driving force for sexism, misogyny and sexual violence in contemporary culture. These issues work in a cyclical manner where the existence of hegemonic patriarchal society sustains their influence and power. Essentially, the permeation of this ‘toxic masculinity’ in contemporary discourse has led to a rise in the perpetuation of a ‘toxic femininity’. The binary of ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’ exists as a result of the strict gender binary between male and female. Although the terms ‘male’ and ‘masculinity’ are not interchangeable, in the same way that ‘female’ and ‘femininity’ are not, when discussing the toxic aspects of masculinity and femininity, they are directly linked to the performance of male and female genders respectively, as they generally serve to support hetero-patriarchal binary gender performances.

As previously mentioned, a prolific aspect of ‘toxic femininity’ comes from the existence of internalised misogyny experienced by women. Internalised misogyny occurs when women listen to, and believe anti-woman rhetoric, that is perpetuated to ultimately maintain an oppressed status of women indefinitely. In relation to sexual violence, internalised misogyny becomes effective in the prevalence of ‘victim blaming’ and ‘slut-shaming’ narratives. For example, if a woman who has experienced sexual violence believes even in part that she is to blame for her experience - through what she was wearing at the time or her level of intoxication for example - then she is internalising a damaging narrative that becomes a form of internalised misogyny.

All women experience internalised misogyny to some degree, whether they are conscious of its affect, or not. Just as Irish Drag Queen and gay rights activist Panti Bliss remarked in her infamous 2014 Noble Call Speech at The Abbey Theatre that it is

¹³¹ I searched the databases of *The Irish Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*, as examples of national Irish, British and American media respectively, to compare their number of articles regarding ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’. There were no articles directly referencing the concept of ‘toxic femininity’ on any of the databases. There was discussion of ‘toxic feminism’ on all three sites and many articles on ‘toxic masculinity’. The oldest article directly referencing ‘toxic masculinity’ was found on *The Irish Times* database in a letter to the editor by Harry Ferguson that was published on November 28, 1997. When searching for ‘toxic femininity’ on *The Guardian* database, the top search result was from an interview with American actress Anne Hathaway that had the title ‘Male energy is very different from toxic masculinity’. A search for ‘toxic masculinity’ on the database of *The Washington Post* produced articles on sexism, misogyny, sexual violence and Donald Trump, while a search for ‘toxic femininity’ resulted in a plethora of articles relating to toxic shock syndrome and underwear designed for menstruation. It is clear from a search of all three of these national news sources that the conversation about ‘toxic masculinity’ is much more prevalent than that of ‘toxic femininity’.

essentially impossible to live in a homophobic society and be entirely non-homophobic, the same is true of misogyny in a patriarchal society. Panti said,

I do, it is true, believe that almost all of you are probably homophobes. But I'm a homophobe. It would be incredible if we weren't. To grow up in a society that is overwhelmingly homophobic and to escape unscathed would be miraculous. So I don't hate you because you are homophobic. I actually admire you. I admire you because most of you are only a bit homophobic. Which all things considered is pretty good going.¹³²

Internalised misogyny is most often sustained by the presence of the 'beauty myth' and 'toxic femininity' becomes apparent in women when the concept of the 'beauty myth' has become fully ingrained in the psyche. Naomi Wolf states that, "The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called "beauty" objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it."¹³³ Wolf argues that, "This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless."¹³⁴

Both 'toxic masculinity' and 'toxic femininity' are the products of cultural creation and reiteration, and they perpetuate certain 'truths' about the gender binary. They are produced and sustained through repetition. Such constructed 'truths' in turn support the cultural ideology where they were created and conceal its conception. As noted by Butler,

Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what you put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds.¹³⁵

'Toxic femininity' is intrinsically linked to the concept of the beauty myth because subscription to the beauty myth creates the toxic behaviours. They exist and repeat in a

¹³² Rory O'Neill, 'Panti's Noble Call at the Abbey Theatre - With Subtitles', *YouTube*, February 2, 2014, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXayhUzWnl0>

¹³³ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1991), 12.

¹³⁴ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, 12.

¹³⁵ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 194.

cyclical manner. The word ‘subscription’ implies that such adherence is voluntary for women, but it is most definitely not. From the moment a doctor enacts the performative speech act of gendering a baby at birth, indoctrination into a very specific set of gender norms begins.

The act gendering a baby at birth is highly performative as it initiates the lifelong journey of a person who is ultimately limited by the confined constructs of the gender they are placed into. This feeds into Simone de Beauvoir’s idea that a ‘woman’ is a historical situation rather than a natural fact¹³⁶ and in gendering a baby at birth, the baby is forced to enact this historical idea and, “induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialise oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project.”¹³⁷ This leads to a situation where women grow up surrounded by cultural expectations in beauty magazines, sexist media coverage and expectations of what it is to perform the role of woman in contemporary culture and to embody the historical idea of how to “become a woman”.¹³⁸

The construction and prevalence of ‘toxic femininity’ can also be linked to the rise of ‘raunch culture’ and, what Ariel Levy defines as ‘female chauvinist pigs’, “If Male Chauvinist Pigs were men who regarded women as pieces of meat, we would outdo them and be Female Chauvinist Pigs: women who make sex objects of other women and of ourselves.”¹³⁹ Levy goes on to discuss how these ‘female chauvinist pigs’ claim to explore a ‘new feminism’ for the twenty-first century, but they ultimately perpetuate long established sexist patriarchal order, “Why is this the “new feminism” and not what it looks like: the old objectification?”¹⁴⁰ All of these external forces act as stimulators for ‘toxic femininity’, as they literally enact the toxic behaviour. For example, women’s beauty magazines, and their obsession with female aesthetics, act as a central point for the creation of ‘toxic femininity’. These magazines are loaded with advertisements aimed to sell the latest diet craze, lauded with airbrushed photographs of conventionally beautiful women in the public eye and commentary on what fashion accessory will ‘change your life’.

¹³⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, New Edition, (London: Jonathan Cape Vintage Books, 2011), 38.

¹³⁷ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 189.

¹³⁸ de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 301.

¹³⁹ Ariel Levy. *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. (London: Pocket Books, 2006), 4.

¹⁴⁰ Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, 81.

In September 2016, a *YouTube* content creator uploaded a video to *YouTube* entitled ‘Stay Beautiful: Ugly Truth in Beauty Magazines’.¹⁴¹ In the video, the user removed all of the advertisements from a then recent issue of *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan* magazines. Out of a total of four hundred and twenty-six pages in the *Elle* magazine, three hundred and sixty-four pages, or eighty-five percent of the total content, contained advertisements. For the *Cosmopolitan* issue, one hundred and fifty-eight pages out of a total of two-hundred and forty-four pages, or sixty-five percent of total content, were paid advertisements.¹⁴² Other videos concerning the same topic may be found on *YouTube*.¹⁴³ New York based advertising intelligence site *MediaRadar* published a report in 2013 stating that the seven highest selling American fashion magazines - namely *Vogue*, *InStyle*, *Elle*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Marie Claire*, *People StyleWatch* and *W Magazine* - had between one thousand and two thousand advertisement pages each in their issues from January to September 2013.¹⁴⁴ Numerous studies have been carried out to critique the content of women’s beauty magazines and their negative impact on women. In 1994, Englis et al., published a study entitled, ‘Beauty before the Eyes of Beholders: The Cultural Encoding of Beauty Types in Magazine Advertising and Music Television’ in which they investigate and critique the construction of femininity through advertisements and comment on their effectiveness in women’s fashion and beauty magazines. The authors remark that, “Fashion magazines have a long history in the United States and they are widely read. These magazines essentially provide prescriptions for becoming more beautiful—through artful use of make-up, exercise, clothing selection, and so on. And, fashion magazines target distinct taste cultures—compare, for example, the sophisticated, *haute couture* emphasis in *Vogue* with the deep cleavage look of *Cosmopolitan* cover girls.”¹⁴⁵ The authors highlight the link between these magazines and the perpetuation of the beauty myth in stating, “Audiences cull through these magazines for tips, examples, and perhaps prototypes of beauty, which they may use as benchmarks for evaluating themselves. Thus,

¹⁴¹ OskarTBrand, ‘Stay Beautiful: Ugly Truth In Beauty Magazines’, *YouTube*, September 26, 2016, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIIKTNPP5Ts>

¹⁴² OskarTBrand, ‘Stay Beautiful: Ugly Truth In Beauty Magazines’, *YouTube*, September 26, 2016, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIIKTNPP5Ts>

¹⁴³ Kittydorable, ‘What a magazine looks like after you remove all the ads’, *YouTube*, January 16, 2015, accessed January 31, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uxvYw8Qvi8>

¹⁴⁴ Aaron Taube, ‘Here’s How Vogue Is Doing Against Its Rivals In The Fight For Fashion Ads’, *Business Insider*, September 6, 2013, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/womens-fashion-magazines-are-selling-more-ads-2013-9?IR=T>

¹⁴⁵ Basil G. Englis, Michael R. Solomon, and Richard D. Ashmore, ‘Beauty Before the Eyes of Beholders: The Cultural Encoding of Beauty Types in Magazine Advertising and Music Television’ JSTOR

fashion magazines are a potent means of socialising young consumers about beauty and fashion and for advertising beauty- and fashion-related products.”¹⁴⁶

It could be argued that fashion magazines can be ignored and presented as sexist and out-dated notions of femininity that are no longer relevant to women but, as Wolf argues, “Why do women care so much what the magazines say and show? They care because, though the magazines are trivialised, they represent something very important: women’s mass culture. A woman’s magazine is not just a magazine.”¹⁴⁷ Wolf fundamentally differentiates the ways in which women interact with these magazines, with how men read magazines specifically targeted at them, “The relationship between the woman reader and her magazine is so different from that between a man and his that they aren’t in the same category: A man reading *Popular Mechanics* or *Newsweek* is browsing through just one perspective among countless others of general male-oriented culture, which is everywhere. A woman reading *Glamour* is holding women-oriented mass culture between her two hands.”¹⁴⁸

Following on from that point, what happens when that representative of mass culture is perpetuating dangerous and misleading ‘rules’ on how to be a perfect woman as a result of the media culturally constructing relative standards of beauty? The diet industry, estimated to be worth \$33-billion-a-year worldwide¹⁴⁹ has thrived due to its inclusion, alongside the \$20-billion-a-year worldwide cosmetics industry and the \$300-million-a-year worldwide cosmetic surgery industry¹⁵⁰, in the advertisements included in beauty magazines. The sole purpose of a multi-billion dollar industry that disproportionately targets women is not for these women to actually lose weight, for that would negate the need for the industry, but instead it aims to force women to monitor and control their own bodies to a neurotic degree. As Wolf shows, “The appeal of the material is not the fantasy that the model will come to life; it is precisely that she will not, ever. Her coming to life would ruin the vision. It is not about life. Ideal beauty is ideal because it does not exist: The action lies in the gap between desire and gratification.”¹⁵¹ She argues that, “‘Femininity’ is code for femaleness plus whatever a society happens to be selling.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ Basil G. Englis, Michael R. Solomon, and Richard D. Ashmore, ‘Beauty Before the Eyes of Beholders: The Cultural Encoding of Beauty Types in Magazine Advertising and Music Television’ JSTOR

¹⁴⁷ Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 70.

¹⁴⁸ Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 70.

¹⁴⁹ i.D. Team, ‘how the fashion industry affects the bodies of young women’, *Vice*, November 20, 2014, accessed January 31, 2017, https://i-d.vice.com/en_gb/article/how-the-fashion-industry-affects-the-bodies-of-young-women

¹⁵⁰ i.D. Team, ‘how the fashion industry affects the bodies of young women’, *Vice*, November 20, 2014, accessed January 31, 2017, https://i-d.vice.com/en_gb/article/how-the-fashion-industry-affects-the-bodies-of-young-women

¹⁵¹ Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 176.

¹⁵² Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 177.

The striving for an ideal that is actually unattainable perpetuates a cycle of self-abuse and self-hatred where the woman feels as if it is her own fault for failing at these standards when the reality is that she had lost before she began. When considering the pressure on women to succumb to a constant need for weight loss, as an example of striving towards this unachievable ideal, Wolf talks about, “the medium of what I call the One Stone Solution. One stone, the British measurement of fourteen pounds, is roughly what stands between the 50 per cent of women who are not over weight who believe they are and their ideal self.”¹⁵³ The reality is that even if those women lost their one stone in weight, they would not be satisfied, because their body image is already so distorted that they cannot recognise they are indeed healthy to begin with. This shows how the ideal figure is not actually based on health and well-being, but on thinness and a false aesthetic, “A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience.”¹⁵⁴ These women are subconsciously forced to be obedient to unattainable standards in order to perpetuate the strict gender binary. This is an act of violence against women, as women do harm to themselves, both physically and psychologically, when asserting these behaviours of ‘toxic femininity’ onto their own body.

It is fair to argue that the persistence of objectifying and sexualised images of women throughout the media is a result of the need to please the male gaze,¹⁵⁵ but this dissertation argues that these sexualised and objectifying images of women in magazines, directly marketed at women, are a perpetuation of ‘toxic femininity’. Wolf uses John Berger’s quote about the female relationship to the male gaze to highlight this point, “This pattern, which leaves out women as individuals, extends from high culture to popular mythology: “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men to women, but the relation of women to themselves.”¹⁵⁶ The constant bombardment of images of modern day celebrities alongside commentary on their weight and image teaches the women consuming these images that to be thin is to be beautiful, and to be beautiful is to be liked. The beauty myth tricks women into believing that how they look is actually more important than any other aspect of their personhood when in fact, “The state of her fat, like the state of her hymen in the past, is a community concern [and] society really doesn’t care about women’s appearance per se. What genuinely matters is that women remain willing to let others tell them what

¹⁵³ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 186.

¹⁵⁴ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 187.

¹⁵⁵ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al, 2nd ed, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 2084-2095.

¹⁵⁶ Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 58.

they can and cannot have.”¹⁵⁷ The over exposure to sexualised and objectifying images of women in beauty magazines also lends itself to the claim that women become liberated through playing out their sexuality in such a manner. As Levy says,

We decided long ago that the Male Chauvinist Pig was an unenlightened rube, but the Female Chauvinist Pig (FCP) has risen to a kind of exalted status. She is post-feminist. She is funny. She *gets it*. She doesn't mind cartoonish stereotypes of female sexuality, and she doesn't mind a cartoonishly macho response to them. The FCP asks: Why throw your boyfriend's *Playboy* in a freedom trash can when you could be partying at the Mansion? Why worry about *disgusting* or *degrading* when you could be giving – or getting – a lap dance yourself? Why try to beat them when you can join them?¹⁵⁸

This mentality allows for the creation of a victim blaming culture where women discount the experiences of other women by claiming that sexualisation and objectification are trivial matters that are made out to be more traumatising than they really are. This happens because we are utterly surrounded by images that display women in such a way.

The cultural fixation with female weight is just another facet of anti-feminist rhetoric aimed at oppressing women and attaching their self-worth to their self-image. It has been proven that, “When women find we cannot stop thinking about food, we are not neurotic – we are being quite self-aware: This form of repetition, enforced on anyone who is already under pressure, actually changes the functioning of the brain.”¹⁵⁹ This obsession is undoubtedly turned inwards on the woman fixated on her weight, but it has also become intrinsically linked to how women view other women. This focus on other women becomes the point of inception for ‘toxic femininity’. Such beauty magazines filled with unsolicited photographs of, usually female celebrities and their respective weight issues, serve only to have female readers compare themselves to the celebrities and form an opinion on the weight of complete strangers.

A common feature of these magazines is an article that includes a list of the weights of a myriad of female celebrities.¹⁶⁰ These will range from the medically underweight supermodels and pop starlets to the medically obese actors who strive to break down the stigma on ‘fat shaming’ in their industry. This form of media serves only

¹⁵⁷ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 98-99.

¹⁵⁸ Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 93.

¹⁵⁹ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 123.

¹⁶⁰ On searching the database for popular British fashion and lifestyle magazine *OK! Magazine* using the term ‘celebrity weight’, there were almost three and a half thousand articles listed. With the exception of one article published on January 17, 2017 relating to British singer Ed Sheeran’s weight loss, all other articles featured on the top page of results were about female celebrities either losing or gaining weight. I found similar results in searching the databases of other British, American and Irish fashion and lifestyle magazines.

to entice an impossible competition between women who have been peer pressured into following the cult of weight loss and fail to examine the situation rationally. As Wolf points out, “The weight mania would indeed be trivial if a woman joined the cult voluntarily, and could leave it whenever she chose. But the mentality of weight control is frightening because it draws on techniques that addict the devotee to cult thinking, and distort her sense of reality.”¹⁶¹

When women are subconsciously tricked into a mode of thinking that supports irrelevant competition between them, bad feeling and hostility are created. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, Levy interviews a group of high school students about their relationship to sex, sexuality and their appearance. One young woman spoke of the natural competition she feels with other women, “I remember one time I was at John’s house with him and David, and I was looking at the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. [...] I got in a really, really terrible mood and I wouldn’t talk because I thought Heidi Klum was just so pretty, and I was, like, *mad*. I get really upset when guys find girls really attractive. Because I want that attention.”¹⁶² This quote highlights how deeply ingrained competition between women has, and can become. For a young woman to compare herself to an airbrushed photograph of a supermodel and allow it to genuinely impact on her emotional state so deeply shows how damaging this form of ‘toxic femininity’ can be, particularly for young and impressionable women and girls. The fact that she so closely linked her own self-confidence and self-worth with how many males are attracted to her sexually also conveys the damaging messages that beauty magazines and sexually objectifying images of women are having on other women. The conventional attractiveness of a supermodel – i.e. tall, thin, fair haired and objectively aesthetically attractive - in a posed magazine photo shoot should not impact on how males view this student, but the very notion that she thinks it does, shows just how ingrained this behaviour is, and how it is so closely linked with the male gaze. The ideal standard of conventional beauty is an ideal because it is ultimately unattainable. In the same way that the masculine ideal creates hostility between men, which can result in violence against women, the feminine beauty ideal creates the very same sense of hostility between women and so they impose these beauty standards on each other, critiquing one another for not reaching the ever elusive ‘ideal’. This action fundamentally sustains the toxic concept of strict gender identity and becomes a form of ontological violence against women.

Obsession with weight issues form just one part of the structure invented to force women to oppress themselves and other women. ‘Slut-shaming’ and ‘victim blaming’

¹⁶¹ Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 121.

¹⁶² Levy. *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 153.

ideologies inserted in a wider rape culture also serve to create and perpetuate ‘toxic femininity’ manifestations and will be discussed throughout this chapter and in Chapter One. Women are trained to police each other’s body language and behaviours to blame other women for any violent experiences they may have. A clear example of this can be seen in the fact that a female dominated jury in a rape trial in Ireland is less likely to convict a male rapist than a male dominated jury. In 2017 *The Irish Times* carried out a study of two hundred cases in the Central Criminal Court to examine the gender breakdown of juries selected. The report found that, “The gender imbalance was most noticeable in rape trials, where 61 of 100 juries were dominated by men compared to only 13 dominated by women. To put it another way, 723 men sat on the juries compared to 477 women.”¹⁶³ The report also noted that, “Many studies suggest women are more likely to judge female rape complainants harshly and to acquit men accused of rape.”¹⁶⁴ This finding was replicated by a 2009 report by the *Rape Crisis Network Ireland* entitled ‘Rape and Justice in Ireland’ which states that, of the cases studied, “Female-dominated juries did not convict any defendants of rape charges. Male-dominated juries were most likely to convict a defendant of rape.”¹⁶⁵ This report also argues that, “a woman with traditional attitudes as to sex roles is likely to be more hostile to a rape complaint than a man with more egalitarian values. Accordingly, there is little evidence that simply increasing the number of women on rape juries would improve the conviction rate.”¹⁶⁶ It may seem surprising or counter-intuitive that women are less likely to convict a man of committing sexual violence against a woman than male jurors. However, this research argues that this is an example of ‘toxic femininity’ where slut-shaming and victim blaming narratives are ingrained in females who then, on some level, blame or do not believe women who say they have experienced sexual violence. Dworkin gives another example of ‘toxic femininity’ in action in a jury saying,

On the same day the police who beat Rodney G. King were acquitted in Simi Valley, a white husband who had raped, beaten, and tortured his wife, also white, was acquitted of marital rape in South Carolina. He had kept her tied to a bed for

¹⁶³ Conor Gallagher, ‘Women under-represented on juries in serious criminal trials’, *Irish Times*, July 17, 2017, accessed July 18, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/women-under-represented-on-juries-in-serious-criminal-trials-1.3156886>

¹⁶⁴ Conor Gallagher, ‘Women under-represented on juries in serious criminal trials’, *Irish Times*, July 17, 2017, accessed July 18, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/women-under-represented-on-juries-in-serious-criminal-trials-1.3156886>

¹⁶⁵ Rape Crisis Network Ireland, ‘Rape and Justice in Ireland’, *Women’s Aid*, December 2009, accessed July 18, 2017, 10, https://www.womensaid.ie/download/pdf/rape_and_justice_in_ireland_ex_sum.pdf

¹⁶⁶ Rape Crisis Network Ireland, ‘Rape and Justice in Ireland’, *Women’s Aid*, December 2009, accessed July 18, 2017, 10, https://www.womensaid.ie/download/pdf/rape_and_justice_in_ireland_ex_sum.pdf

hours, her mouth gagged with adhesive tape. He videotaped a half hour of her ordeal, during which he cut her breasts with a knife. The jury, which saw the videotape, had eight women on it. Asked why they acquitted, they said he needed help. They looked right through the victim – afraid to recognise any part of themselves, shamed by her violation. There were no riots afterward.¹⁶⁷

This is a distinct example of the performance of ‘toxic femininity’ as on some level, this female dominated jury, when presented with definitive proof for sexual violence, blamed this woman for her own experience of violence. This highlights the dangerous and all-encompassing nature of rape culture as theoretically, everyone would likely claim to be against domestic abuse and sexual violence, yet in practise, this is not the case.

Just as men are trained to believe that certain traits and behaviours are inherently masculine, such as natural aggression and belief in the concept of the ‘alpha male’ figure, women are taught that certain traits are inherently biologically female. Such behaviours include the image of the ‘catty’ or ‘bitchy’ woman who promotes her own self-worth through tearing down that of others. This promotes constant competition between women and as Wolf points out, “The myth does not only isolate women generationally, but because it encourages women’s wariness of one another on the basis of their appearance, it tries to isolate them from all women they do not know and like personally.”¹⁶⁸

This model of the ‘catty’ woman is a recognised trope within mass culture and can be clearly seen in the film genre of American high-school movies. Many films of this nature include a female character, typically the leader of the cheerleading troop, whose sole purpose is to bully and attack the female protagonist of the film who is often portrayed as a quiet outsider. The trope can be interrogated as a traditional bullying storyline, but in the specific case of women attacking women, it becomes a portrayal of ‘toxic femininity’. The film *Mean Girls*,¹⁶⁹ released in 2004, aims to tackle these stereotypes and break them down through exploring the limitations of such behaviour. The main villain of this film, namely Regina George, is the archetype of the most popular girl in school who intimidates all other female students and teachers. The film plays with the concept of post-feminist rhetoric by using the supposed ‘rules of feminism’¹⁷⁰ to further oppress and control other women. This film is a satirical commentary on the behaviour of teenage girls, and it pushes

¹⁶⁷ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Wolf. *The Beauty Myth*, 74.

¹⁶⁹ *Mean Girls* was released in cinemas in Ireland on June 18, 2004. It was directed by Mark Waters, the screenplay was written by Tina Fey and based on a book of the same name by Roselind Wiseman. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377092/> Accessed January 31, 2017

¹⁷⁰ In a discussion between Gretchin and Cady over Cady’s ability to date Regina’s ex-boyfriend Aaron, Gretchin states that Cady can never date him simply because he is Regina’s ex-boyfriend and that “is like the rules of feminism”.

the trope to its limits, but through this, the audience can see how easily we accept and replicate this trope both on screen and in everyday life.

The overt pressures of conventional beauty standards, rape myths, slut-shaming and internalised misogyny lead to the existence of ‘toxic femininity’. Wolf compares women’s indoctrination into the beauty myth to indoctrination into a religious cult as women are pressured into fixating on their weight and physical appearance,

*Cult members believe that they alone “are gifted with the truth.” Women with weight obsessions ignore compliments because they feel that they alone really know just how repulsive is the body hidden from view. Anorexics are sure they are embarked on a quest that no one else can understand by looking at them. Self-denial can lock women into a smug and critical condescension to other, less devout women.*¹⁷¹

‘Toxic femininity’ comprises of numerous examples of the performance of the beauty myth and inherently forced subscription into the performing of gender norms. It is a culturally constructed set of behaviours that serve to perpetuate anti-feminist rhetoric and sustain, “a misogynist culture [that] has succeeded in making women hate what misogynists hate.”¹⁷² It is highly prevalent in the plays analysed in this chapter, and its very existence in the plays partly drives their respective actions and narratives.

Part Six: Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework for this dissertation comes from feminist theory. It applies the theories of second, third and fourth wave feminists to contemporary feminist issues, thus adding to the field of fourth wave feminist discourse. Second and third wave feminist theories are used as a building block for fourth wave feminist theory.

There is a particular emphasis on the works of American philosopher Judith Butler. The ideas from her 1990 text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*,¹⁷³ particularly that of ‘gender being a social construct’, are reflected throughout the dissertation, as perceived stereotypes of performed femininities are interrogated alongside the influence of these stereotypes on both the body of the performer and the audience member or onlooker. The dissertation will also integrate Butler’s theories on the performativity of language discussed in her 1997 text *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the*

¹⁷¹ Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 122-123.

¹⁷² Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, 150.

¹⁷³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 9.

Performative,¹⁷⁴ particularly in the chapter concerning the performativity of language for women affected by sexual violence. This theory acts as a fundamental basis for the dissertation and will also feature throughout, as the ontological violence inherent in the act of naming is highlighted, and the violent act of forcing of a name onto someone else without consent is considered. This theory relates to the limiting contemporary notions of what ‘conventional femininity should be’, and the ideas put forward by Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth*,¹⁷⁵ as it examines the pressure and rules that young women in particular are subjected to in order to stabilise dominant patriarchal societies. The dissertation also uses Andrea Dworkin’s theories on the politics of rape, rape culture and sexual violence presented in *Woman Hating*,¹⁷⁶ *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*,¹⁷⁷ *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women*¹⁷⁸ and *Intercourse*.¹⁷⁹

There is a heavy emphasis on the theory of contemporary rape culture throughout. Several of the central texts concerning this topic include Joanna Bourke’s *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*,¹⁸⁰ Kate Harding’s *Asking For It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture – and What We Can Do About It*,¹⁸¹ Emilie Buckwald, Martha Roth and Pamela Fletcher’s *Transforming a Rape Culture*,¹⁸² and Miranda A Horvath and Jennifer Brown’s *RAPE: Challenging Contemporary Thinking*.¹⁸³ The arguments put forward in these texts are used to help to understand, and begin to deconstruct rape culture. They are applied to the performances analysed throughout as a way to interrogate the performativity of rape culture in the selected performances, and how these performances mimic or challenge a wider cultural framework. To refute the arguments that claim rape culture does not exist, Luke Gittos’ *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth: From Steubenville to Ched Evans*¹⁸⁴ is deconstructed and delegitimised.

¹⁷⁴ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁷⁵ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1991).

¹⁷⁶ Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1974).

¹⁷⁷ Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1989).

¹⁷⁸ Andrea Dworkin, *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

¹⁷⁹ Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

¹⁸⁰ Joanna Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present* (London: Virago Press, 2007).

¹⁸¹ Kate Harding, *Asking For It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture – and What We Can Do About It* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2015).

¹⁸² Emilie Buckwald, Martha Roth, Pamela Fletcher, eds., *Transforming a Rape Culture*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2005).

¹⁸³ Miranda A Horvath, Jennifer Brown. *RAPE Challenging Contemporary Thinking* (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2009).

¹⁸⁴ Luke Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth: From Steubenville to Ched Evans* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2015).

The field of performance studies will also be considered as the dissertation looks at Richard Schechner's¹⁸⁵ theorisation of performance along with the ideas of J.L. Austin¹⁸⁶ and Jacques Derrida on performativity. This theory will help to interrogate the concept of how we all experience and partake in performance in everyday life and will also be incorporated to explore beauty pageant performance. In addition to these theorists, the dissertation will also incorporate the concepts and ideas put forward by Erving Goffmann in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*,¹⁸⁷ and his analysis of the relationship between theatrical performance and the performances we take part in as part of everyday life.

While the main theoretical framework of this dissertation will come from the application of the initial ideas of feminist theorists such as Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir and Andrea Dworkin, there will be reference to, and exploration of recent feminist texts from current 'popular feminism' writers such as Caitlin Moran, Roxanne Gay, Laura Bates, Louise O'Neill, Holly Baxter, Rhiannon Lucy Coslett, Emer O'Toole and Victoria Pepe. The works of such writers bridge the gap between academic and mainstream contemporary feminisms, and allow for a connection between theories of rape culture and the real life implications of this culture. Also, given that much of the thinking for this dissertation comes from a fourth wave feminist viewpoint, it is vital to apply established theories that date from before the inception of fourth wave feminism to contemporary feminisms to examine developments in feminist theory.

The framework will come from both feminist theory and gender theory, as it is important to highlight the construction of feminisms and femininities within a dominant hetero-normative patriarchal environment. Queer theory will also be examined, particularly when dealing with the ideas of Butler, as this exploration of contemporary representations of feminisms and femininities, and challenging of the dominant patriarchal hegemony, is in itself still a deeply queer act.

The majority of this thesis focuses on 'cis women', that is women who identify with the biological gender that they were assigned at birth, but there will be some reference made to 'trans women', or women who were gendered male at birth, but who now identify as female, and express their gender identity accordingly. Such references will arise when discussing female beauty pageants, and the ability, or lack thereof, for trans women to compete in them. It will also emerge when statistics for sexual violence are mentioned, as trans women, particularly those of colour, disproportionately experience sexual violence in society. Fourth wave feminism is deeply concerned with intersectionality and equality

¹⁸⁵ Richard, Schechner, *Performance Theory*, new ed. (Oxford: Routledge Classics, 2003).

¹⁸⁶ J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁸⁷ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

for all women, regardless of gender identity, sexuality, class, creed, ability or ethnicity. Arguably contemporary rape culture affects trans women, as much, if not more than, cis women, and this is a topic that deserves comprehensive analysis. However, in order to cover the numerous different aspects of performance in this dissertation, it is necessary to focus primarily on cis women. This is because trans women arguably experience their gender identity differently to cis women, as trans women know that they were incorrectly gendered at birth. Identifying as a trans woman adds another layer of complexity to how women experience rape culture, sexual violence and gender identity. This added layer can be read as further oppression, and to equate trans women's experience of rape culture with cis women's experience is an oppressive act in itself. For this reason, unless otherwise stated, when the word 'woman' or 'female' is used throughout the dissertation, it is specifically referencing cis women.

Section Three: Fourth Wave Feminist Activism in Ireland

There are numerous examples of the presence and power of fourth wave feminism in action in Ireland. While many of the issues fourth wave feminists are tackling are ones that have been in existence in Ireland for a long time, but have reached a critical climax in recent years as a result of mounting public pressure from feminist activists. Two such examples are the lack of reproductive freedom for women in Ireland and the systemic misogyny facing women in the theatre industry.

Reproductive freedom for women in Ireland will become legalised in 2018 as a result of the referendum on the removal of the Eighth Amendment to the *Constitution of Ireland* that took place in May 2018. This referendum was called, and passed, as a result of the tireless effort of feminist campaigners that has been ongoing for several decades, but that reached fever pitch in the last few years. Campaigners and feminist activists worked against the backdrop of conservative governments continually. While abortion rights became a major election issue for the 2016 General Election, Ireland's then Minister for Health, and now Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Leo Varadkar, a qualified medical doctor, publicly stated that the Eighth Amendment to the *Constitution of Ireland* concerning abortion rights, namely the equal right to life of a woman and a foetus, should not be repealed. He believes this even though he does state that it is too restrictive.¹⁸⁸ When questioned about his views on repealing the Eighth Amendment in the lead up to the 2016 General Election, he stated, "It would be weird to me if the right to property was there [in

¹⁸⁸ *RTÉ News*, 'Varadkar: Abortion referendum should not happen in 2015', *RTÉ*, September 19, 2014, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2014/0918/644769-varadkar-2015-abortion-referendum-a-bad-idea/>

the Constitution] and not the right to be alive."¹⁸⁹ In the same interview, when asked if abortion rights are a class issue in Ireland, after he admitted that his own private health insurance costs €700 annually, he stated that he did not know what saying it is a class issue means and when the interviewer clarified the question, he said that he does not think it is a class issue at all. Niamh Horan writes,

Does he believe abortion in Ireland is a class issue? "No," he laughs. "I don't know what that question means." I explain that a woman who is wealthy and can afford to travel to the UK has greater access to a safe abortion and medical care than a woman who has no access to similar funds. "No, I don't think it's a class issue."¹⁹⁰ Ironically the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, dated December 23, 1992, states that, "(the right to life of the unborn) would not limit freedom to travel between Ireland and another state."¹⁹¹ So there is an acceptance for women to travel abroad to receive the medical care that they need written into the Constitution, but in order to travel, a person must have access to adequate funds, and the then Health Minister for Ireland believes this does not turn reproductive health care into a class issue. Varadkar also stated in 2010 that he is against abortion for women who have been raped. The *Irish Examiner*, quoting him, writes,

I wouldn't be in favour of it in that case, and, you know, first of all, it isn't the child's fault that they're the child of rape. How would that work practically? Would someone have to prove that they've been raped? I think where that's been brought in in countries it has more or less led to abortion on demand.¹⁹²

In the same article, responding to criticism that he was sexist towards then Tánaiste Mary Coughlan, Varadkar said, "If anything I went easier on her because she was a woman. [...] She's accused everyone of sexism. Nobody that I know would ever say that I'm sexist."¹⁹³ Varadkar clearly did not realise the irony of his statement as treating someone differently

¹⁸⁹ Niamh Horan, 'I am not so naive that I think I can make all the problems go away', *Independent* (Dublin), February 7, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/election-2016/i-am-not-so-naive-that-i-think-i-can-make-all-the-problems-go-away-34430155.html>

¹⁹⁰ Niamh Horan, 'I am not so naive that I think I can make all the problems go away', *Independent* (Dublin), February 7, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/election-2016/i-am-not-so-naive-that-i-think-i-can-make-all-the-problems-go-away-34430155.html>

¹⁹¹ Bunreacht Na hÉireann, Updated to include Thirty Fourth Amendment (Marriage Equality) and Printed September 2015, Downloaded from, http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/Bunreacht_na_hEireann_S EP2015.pdf (Accessed 12 March 2016).

¹⁹² Mary Regan, 'Varadkar opposed to abortion for rape victims', *Irish Examiner*, May 3, 2010, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/health/varadkar-opposed-to-abortion-for-rape-victims-118760.html>

¹⁹³ Mary Regan, 'Varadkar opposed to abortion for rape victims', *Irish Examiner*, May 3, 2010, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/health/varadkar-opposed-to-abortion-for-rape-victims-118760.html>

because they are a woman is inherently sexist. Although Varadkar called for a referendum on the Eighth Amendment for 2018,¹⁹⁴ and the electorate voted overwhelmingly in favour of repealing the Eighth Amendment, this was largely due to mounting public pressure from Irish campaigners and the recommendations of a ‘Citizen’s Assembly’ set up to determine if the people of Ireland want to re-examine the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. Although Varadkar publicly supported the repeal campaign by the time the referendum was called, it is fair to argue that given his staunchly anti-choice views historically, this decision may have been partly influenced by the correct belief that the electorate wanted reproductive freedom for women in Ireland. It is clear from the opinions of Varadkar here provided that in 2018, the Taoiseach of Ireland is a misogynist who is not concerned with promoting gender equality. The World Health Organisation has placed the Abortion Pill on their list of essential medicines¹⁹⁵ for basic health care, yet, as of 2017, such pills remain illegal in Ireland and using them can incur a prison sentence of up to fourteen years.¹⁹⁶ Fourth wave feminist activists continue to fight against the inherent misogyny of senior government members, including the Taoiseach.

The second example noted of fourth wave feminist activism in Ireland is evidenced in the #WakingTheFeminists campaign. The 2016 programme of events, entitled *Waking The Nation*, was announced on October 28, 2015¹⁹⁷ for The Abbey Theatre, Ireland’s National Theatre. The message of gender exclusion was blatantly clear for the theatre makers of Ireland – women and their artistic work, do not belong on the national stage, and they do not represent a part of the nation deemed worthy of ‘waking’. The irony in the press release was palpable as a short promotional video released alongside the programme featured only female theatre makers, and began with a quote from Helena Molony, a 1916 Rebel and an Abbey Theatre actress that read, “We saw a vision of Ireland, free, pure, happy. We did not realise this vision, but we saw it.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Michael O’Reagan, Marie O’Halloran, ‘Abortion referendum to be held next year, Varadkar says’, *Irish Times*, June 14, 2017, accessed June 20, 2017,

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/abortion-referendum-to-be-held-next-year-varadkar-says-1.3119981>

¹⁹⁵ World Health Organisation, “WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, 19th List, April 2015, Amended August 2015”,

http://www.who.int/selection_medicines/committees/expert/20/EML_2015_FINAL_amended_AUG2015.pdf?ua=1 (Accessed 5 January 2016).

¹⁹⁶ *Abortion In Ireland*. ‘The Legal Situation of Abortion’, *Abortion in Ireland*, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://www.abortioninireland.org/republic-of-ireland/the-legal-situation-of-abortion-in-the-republic-of-ireland/>

¹⁹⁷ Abbey Theatre, ‘Press Release for *Waking The Nation* at *The Abbey Theatre*’, *Abbey Theatre*, October 29, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/waking-the-nation-2016-at-the-abbey-theatre/>

¹⁹⁸ Abbey Theatre, ‘Waking the Nation – 2016 at the Abbey Theatre’, *YouTube*, October 28, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HL6_Bh2nQd0&feature=youtu.be

This programme came one hundred and twelve years since The Abbey was founded and Lady Augusta Gregory was denied her rightful recognition for co-authorship of one of its inaugural plays *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. This play incidentally has had a significant influence on many of the plays and cultural performances analysed throughout this dissertation. The artistic director at The Abbey, Fiach Mac Conghail, who decided on the works included in *Waking The Nation*, presented a programme to commemorate the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising that featured the work of no female playwright or director on its main stage or its smaller stage, The Peacock. His reasoning was contentious and his *Twitter* outburst in reaction to the backlash over his choice of programme showed an audacious disregard for the work of women in the theatre.¹⁹⁹ Some of his Tweets from October 29, 2015 read, “All my new play choices are based on the quality of the play, form and theme. It's my call and I'm pleased with the plays I picked for #wtn [Waking The Nation]”, “I don't and haven't programmed plays or productions on a gender basis. I took decisions based on who I admired and wanted to work with”,²⁰⁰ and the since deleted but infamously obnoxious and offensive final response, “Thems the breaks,”²⁰¹ as he defiantly claimed that there were no appropriate new plays written by women, or usable old plays in The Abbey archives. He claimed this as fact even though, as Melissa Sihra points out, it is estimated that there are over six hundred Irish plays written by women since 1663.²⁰²

Feminists within the Irish Theatre community challenged The Abbey's patriarchal, oppressive, phallogocentric, offensive and misogynist thinking, and the #WakingTheFeminists movement, an example of activism in fourth wave feminism, led by Irish theatre maker Lian Bell, quickly garnered attention and momentum both nationally and internationally on social media.²⁰³ On November 3, 2015, Lian Bell had been fielding questions and comments about The Abbey's programme and she took to the social media site *Facebook* to say,

If all these posts about wanting equality in the arts mean something to you, say something. Even if you don't want to bang a drum. Even if you don't know what to say. Even if your comment is 'I stand with you'. Say something. It helps us to

¹⁹⁹ Fiach Mac Conghail, Twitter Feed, October 29, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, Twitter Handle @fmacconghail <https://twitter.com/fmacconghail>

²⁰⁰ Fiach Mac Conghail, Twitter Feed, October 29, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, Twitter Handle @fmacconghail <https://twitter.com/fmacconghail>

²⁰¹ Fiach Mac Conghail, Twitter Feed, October 29, 2015, accessed February 8, 2016, Twitter Handle @fmacconghail <https://twitter.com/fmacconghail>

²⁰² Melissa Sihra, Twitter Feed, November 4, 2015, accessed January 13, 2016, Twitter Handle @MelissaSihra <https://twitter.com/MelissaSihra>

²⁰³ *Waking The Feminists* website, Archival information regarding development of #WTF available along with full video of public meeting held at The Abbey Theatre, November 12, 2015, photo gallery of all of their events and weekly updates on their progress accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org>

know you're out there. If possible - say it on Twitter (it's louder).
#WakingTheFeminists.²⁰⁴

Bell's message was a call to arms for feminists and women within the Irish Theatre community, and the movement escalated dramatically. The reaction to the exclusionary programming and the explosion of interest in, and support for the #WakingTheFeminists movement culminated in a public meeting staged at The Abbey on November 12, 2015,²⁰⁵ chaired by Senator Ivana Bacik and theatre producer Sarah Durcan. Durcan was subsequently elected to the Board of Directors of The Abbey in 2016. Thirty women spoke of their experiences in the theatre industry.²⁰⁶ These women spoke as actors, writers, directors, producers, designers, academics, dramaturgs and theatre makers. The Abbey was chosen as a suitable, if not ironic, location for this meeting, as it was highly symbolic to have so many women discuss problems within the Irish theatre industry on the country's National Stage. As The Abbey also kindly offered the theatre space to those involved in the campaign, it showed their willingness to engage in this conversation. Soon after this meeting, the board and director of The Abbey issued a public statement pledging their support for striving towards a gender balance in Irish theatre, and Fiach Mac Conghail stated:

I am determined to programme the work of women artists in the latter half of 2016. An exciting and innovative programme of plays will be confirmed when we announce our Autumn/Winter Season. A national conversation is underway; one which I look forward to participating further in with members of the theatre community. The Abbey Theatre looks forward to leading the way in achieving a much-needed cultural shift in gender equality in the years to come.²⁰⁷

Since this inaugural meeting, the #WakingTheFeminists founders have gone on to host numerous other events including follow up meetings to discuss their progress and investigations into gender equality within the theatre.²⁰⁸ In December 2015, #WakingTheFeminists put out a call for feminists to organise meetings for January 6,

²⁰⁴ Lian Bell, Facebook Feed, November 3, 2015, accessed March 25, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/lianbell?fref=ts>

²⁰⁵ Full video of #WakingTheFeminists first public meeting available on #WakingTheFeminists website, accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/2015/11/03/public-meeting-video/>

²⁰⁶ A Full list of speakers is available, accessed December 1 2016, <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/public-meeting-women-irish-theatre/>

²⁰⁷ *Abbey Theatre*, 'A Statement from the Board and Director of the Abbey Theatre', *Abbey Theatre* (Dublin), December 22, 2015, accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.abbeytheatre.ie/a-statement-from-the-board-and-director-of-the-abbey-theatre/>

²⁰⁸ A full list of the events that took place to celebrate Nollaig na MBan both in Ireland and internationally can be found at: <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/2015/12/10/celebrate-wakingthefeminists-on-nollaig-na-mban/> accessed July 28, 2016

2016²⁰⁹, a day also known as ‘Nollaig na mBan’, or ‘Women’s Christmas’. Their open call looked for people to meet up, socialise and plan events for #WakingTheFeminists,

Nollaig na mBan is traditionally a day for women to gather socially and chat, a quiet celebration of women and their work. We thought it would be the perfect time for all feminists, women and men, who have been following and supporting the WakingTheFeminists campaign to get together locally over a drink or a cup of tea. It’s a chance to kick start the year by meeting each other, discussing the issues, telling their stories and having a bit of craic.²¹⁰

On International Women’s Day, March 8, 2016, #WakingTheFeminists hosted its second public meeting in Dublin’s Liberty Hall.²¹¹ This meeting was entitled ‘Spring Forward’ and discussed the progress of the movement. It featured reactions from seven key Irish theatre organisations as they discussed their response to the call of #WakingTheFeminists to work towards gender equality in Irish theatre. The seven speakers represented The Abbey Theatre, Druid, Dublin Fringe Festival, Dublin Theatre Festival, Gate Theatre, Project Arts Centre and Rough Magic Theatre Company. The meeting also featured an update from Lian Bell on the work of the movement and a presentation from Brenda Donohue and Sarah Durcan on the research plans for #WakingTheFeminists.

On June 7, 2017, the #WakingTheFeminists research team launched their report entitled *Gender Counts*.²¹² This report provides an analysis of gender in Irish theatre from 2006-2015, focusing, “on ten of the top Arts Council-funded organisations that produce or present theatre in Ireland.”²¹³ The six members of the research team, led by Brenda Donohue, sourced data on 1,155 productions²¹⁴ and found that “women are

²⁰⁹ A full list of the events that took place to celebrate Nollaig na MBan both in Ireland and internationally can be found at: <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/2015/12/10/celebrate-wakingthefeminists-on-nollaig-na-mban/> accessed July 28, 2016

²¹⁰ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘#WakingTheFeminists celebrated Nollaig na mBan’, #WakingTheFeminists, accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/2015/12/10/celebrate-wakingthefeminists-on-nollaig-na-mban/>

²¹¹ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘International Women’s Day Meeting’, #WakingTheFeminists, accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/international-womens-day/>

²¹² #WakingTheFeminists, ‘Gender Counts’, #WakingTheFeminists, June 6, 2017, accessed June 14, 2017,

https://www.dropbox.com/s/gawewk3dq43rqnd/Gender_Counts_WakingTheFeminists_2017.pdf?dl=0

²¹³ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘Gender Counts’, #WakingTheFeminists, June 6, 2017, accessed June 14, 2017, 7,

https://www.dropbox.com/s/gawewk3dq43rqnd/Gender_Counts_WakingTheFeminists_2017.pdf?dl=0

²¹⁴ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘Gender Counts’, #WakingTheFeminists, June 6, 2017, accessed June 14, 2017,

https://www.dropbox.com/s/gawewk3dq43rqnd/Gender_Counts_WakingTheFeminists_2017.pdf?dl=0

underrepresented in every role studied²¹⁵ except costume design,²¹⁶ and, “To achieve parity in all roles, women face a gap of between 8 and 41 percentage points.”²¹⁷ They also found that the four highest-funded organisations in their sample have the lowest female representation and, in general, the more funding an organisation receives, the lower its female representation throughout.²¹⁸

In conjunction with their research project, as stated by the campaign, “#WakingTheFeminists have also begun to engage with the Arts Council to ensure that gender equality is addressed across the sector at policy level, in a way that will be practical, significant and long-lasting.”²¹⁹ The #WTF campaign has also led to other events such as the ‘Irish Women Playwrights and Theatremakers’ Conference held at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick in June 2017. This curated conference gathered academics and theatre makers alike in a bid to, “Highlight women’s overlooked contribution to Irish theatre from the 1700s to today.”²²⁰ The conference featured talks and presentations on a wide range of female playwrights and theatremakers, from re-examining the positioning of seminal playwrights such as Lady Gregory and Marina Carr as ‘token female playwrights’, to uncovering the hidden histories of writers such as Teresa Deevy and Mary Manning, to looking at the new work of emerging Irish theatremakers such as Caitríona Daly and Amanda Coogan. One of the keynotes given by Melissa Sihra, entitled, ‘Beyond Token Women: Matriarchal Lineage from Lady Gregory to Marina Carr’²²¹ exemplified how his conference looked at re-inventing the Irish dramatic canon post #WakingTheFeminists.

²¹⁵ For the purpose of this research project, there were seven roles within the theatre studied. They are: Director, Author, Cast Member, Set Designer, Lighting Designer, Sound Designer and Costume Designer.

²¹⁶ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘Gender Counts’, #WakingTheFeminists, June 6, 2017, accessed June 14, 2017, 25,

https://www.dropbox.com/s/gawewk3dq43rqnd/Gender_Counts_WakingTheFeminists_2017.pdf?dl=0

²¹⁷ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘Gender Counts’, #WakingTheFeminists, June 6, 2017, accessed June 14, 2017, 25,

https://www.dropbox.com/s/gawewk3dq43rqnd/Gender_Counts_WakingTheFeminists_2017.pdf?dl=0

²¹⁸ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘Gender Counts’, #WakingTheFeminists, June 6, 2017, accessed June 14, 2017, 7,

https://www.dropbox.com/s/gawewk3dq43rqnd/Gender_Counts_WakingTheFeminists_2017.pdf?dl=0

²¹⁹ #WakingTheFeminists, ‘Story So Far’, #WakingTheFeminists, accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.wakingthefeminists.org/about-wtf/how-it-started/>

²²⁰ David Clare, ‘Fired from the canon: Waking the Feminists, the conference’, *Irish Times*, May 16, 2017, accessed May 16, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/fired-from-the-canon-waking-the-feminists-the-conference-1.3084729>

²²¹ Melissa Sihra, ‘Beyond Token Women: Matriarchal Lineage from Lady Gregory to Marina Carr’, Keynote given at ‘Irish Women Playwrights and Theatremakers’ Conference, held in Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, June 8-10, 2017.

What has become so apparent through the work of #WakingTheFeminists is that this kind of sexism still exists and needs to be tackled immediately. In this vein, such sexism is evident in the continued existence of the gender pay gap; the reality that on average, women are paid 14% less than men for the same jobs in Ireland²²². This figure rises to 24.6%²²³ for those in the top 10% or earners, showing that there is still a ‘glass ceiling’ in place for women in the workforce in Ireland today. There is also distinct discrimination against women seeking promotion in certain fields in Ireland and in 2014, a botanist in the National University of Ireland Galway, “Dr Micheline Sheehy Skeffington won an Equality Tribunal case in December against her university, [...] for discrimination on the basis of gender in the 2009 NUI Galway round of promotions to Senior Lecturer. She is the first female academic to achieve this in Ireland.”²²⁴ Although Sheehy Skeffington won her case, the fact that she had to take legal action shows that this kind of discrimination is still routinely carried out and accepted and she was one of six women deemed eligible but denied promotion at this time.²²⁵ The evidence is clear; we cannot be post feminist, as we have not achieved gender equality and it is the aim of the fourth wave feminist movement to continue to challenge such inequalities.

Section Four: Contemporary Rape Culture in Action in Ireland and Further Afield

As previously noted, the globalisation of mass culture, that has greatly increased due to technological developments in the twenty-first century, has increased the potential for international influences on Irish performance and culture. Given that these influences have impacted heavily on many of the performances analysed as part of this dissertation, and have become part of the globalised Irish cultural experience, it is important to examine how these influences both add to, and sustain, contemporary rape culture on a global scale.

The media and popular culture continue to sexualise and objectify females from a prepubescent age. ‘Reality television’ programmes such as the American shows *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* (2007-) *Jersey Shore* (2009-2012), the British shows *Geordie*

²²² National Council for Women in Ireland website, accessed January 16, 2016, http://www.nwci.ie/?/discover/what_we_do/womens_economic_independence/women_and_employment/gender_pay_gap/

²²³ National Council for Women in Ireland website, accessed January 16, 2016, http://www.nwci.ie/?/discover/what_we_do/womens_economic_independence/women_and_employment/gender_pay_gap/

²²⁴ Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington, ‘Micheline’s Three Conditions’, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://michelinesthreeconditions.wordpress.com/about/>

²²⁵ Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington, ‘Micheline’s Three Conditions’, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://michelinesthreeconditions.wordpress.com/about/>

Shore (2011-), *The Valleys* (2012-2014), *Big Brother* (1999-), *Celebrity Big Brother* (2001-), *Celebrity Love Island* (2005-2006) and *Love Island* (2015-) and the Irish show *Tallaformia* (2011-2013) seek to simultaneously sexualise women and shame them for expressing their sexual desires. This practice of shaming and sexualising these women is exemplary of rape culture. It is reasonable to contend that these women have agency and are choosing to allow themselves be portrayed in such a manner, but this dissertation argues that their agency is deeply connected to the concepts of internalised misogyny, 'toxic femininity' and the male gaze. These women are denoted as 'sluts' by men, but also by other women, and, "Historically, the term 'slut' has long been used by women against women, commonly by way of maintaining or enforcing sexual norms,"²²⁶ and, "meanings of the 'slut' around appearance and displays of flesh rather than (hetero) sexual behaviours."²²⁷ While such television shows may be presented as a harmless form of entertainment, they are actually partaking in contemporary rape culture through their portrayal of their female characters. The women involved may argue that they are equal to their male counterparts, and as such have no need for feminism. However, the ways in which they police each other, and are portrayed by the producers of the shows, ultimately mimic and sustain the hegemonic hetero-patriarchal oppressive gender binary. As Walter points out, "The rise of a hypersexual culture is not proof that we have reached full equality; rather, it has reflected and exaggerated the deeper imbalances of power in our society."²²⁸ These women are ultimately demonised for expressing their respective sexualities in particular ways.

Not only can this demonisation affect how these women portray their sexuality in a consensual manner, but it can also lead to a situation where a woman is slut-shamed for making an allegation of non-consensual sexual behaviour. On June 11, 2017, the American celebrity media site *E!Online* published an article entitled '*Bachelor in Paradise* Production Suspended Amid "Misconduct" Allegations'.²²⁹ The article detailed how production on the series of *Bachelor in Paradise* being filmed at the time had been halted indefinitely due to an allegation of 'misconduct' between two contestants, namely DeMario Jackson and Corinne Olympios. It subsequently emerged

²²⁶ Sue Jackson, Tiina Vares, 'Media 'Sluts': 'Tween' Girls, Negotiations of Postfeminist Sexual Subjectivities in Popular Culture', in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.), 139.

²²⁷ Sue Jackson, Tiina Vares, 'Media 'Sluts': 'Tween' Girls, Negotiations of Postfeminist Sexual Subjectivities in Popular Culture', in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.), 139.

²²⁸ Walter, *Living Dolls*, 8.

²²⁹ Meg Swertlow, '*Bachelor in Paradise* Production Suspended Amid "Misconduct" Allegations', *E! News*, June 22, 2017, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.eonline.com/uk/news/860384/bachelor-in-paradise-production-suspended-amid-misconduct-allegations>

that Olympios alleged Jackson sexually assaulted her on camera during the production and that the studio in charge of the show, *Warner Bros.*, stopped the production in order to conduct an investigation of the incident.²³⁰ It is not yet clear whether or not an assault took place, but much of the reaction to the news of the allegation online exemplified negative attitudes towards women and the representation of their sexuality. One article entitled ‘‘Bachelor in Paradise’ star hires lawyer after alleged misconduct that shut down the show’’, published by *The Washington Post* on June 14, 2017 objectively reported the facts that an investigation was underway and both parties involved had hired lawyers.²³¹ The article made no reference to whether the allegations were true or not and yet, numerous people commented on the article, using slut-shaming rhetoric. Some comments read, ‘‘Here’s how her statement would read, if she was honest about it: ‘‘I am a victim ... of my own stupidity and low morals, and have no one to blame but myself for my public humiliation and disgrace.’’’, ‘‘What did you think happens on the sets of that ‘‘show’’?’’, ‘‘Ladies: please do not drink yourself into a stupor. Predators exist and will take advantage of you if given the opportunity.’’ And, ‘‘I am NOT victim shaming/blaming but Corrine was rather ‘overt’ when she was on the Bachelor. That is a fact that can be found in Bachelor archives.’’²³² These comments slut-shame and victim blame Olympios.

The concepts of ‘slut-shaming’ and ‘victim blaming’ shall be fully discussed later in the dissertation, but it is clear from the opinions posed in these comments, these people believe that if Olympios was sexually assaulted, it was largely or partly her own fault. The first comment blames her for expressing her sexuality and believes she should be ashamed of her own behaviour. The second comment implies she entered the show knowing that sexual assault was a likely probability. The third comment blames her, and all women, for drinking alcohol excessively, taking blame away from potential attackers who seemingly cannot prevent themselves from attacking intoxicated women. The final comment ironically claims not to shame or blame her, yet criticises her previous consensual sexual behaviour as if it has any relevance to the alleged assault. There were no comments posted about Jackson’s involvement, thus highlighting that the focus of such shows is on the sexual behaviour of the female contestants explicitly, and the misogyny inherently present

²³⁰ The investigation was on going, and no criminal charges had been filed at the time of writing.

²³¹ Emily Yahr, ‘Bachelor in Paradise’ star hires lawyer after alleged misconduct that shut down the show’, *Washington Post*, June 14, 2017, accessed June 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/06/14/bachelor-in-paradise-star-hires-lawyer-after-alleged-misconduct-that-shut-down-the-show/?utm_term=.ed709a879f7f#comments

²³² Emily Yahr, ‘Bachelor in Paradise’ star hires lawyer after alleged misconduct that shut down the show’, *Washington Post*, June 14, 2017, accessed June 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/06/14/bachelor-in-paradise-star-hires-lawyer-after-alleged-misconduct-that-shut-down-the-show/?utm_term=.ed709a879f7f#comments

in them. Slut-shaming women for engaging in consensual sexual behaviour on such shows leads to a situation where women can be slut-shamed for being subjected to non-consensual sexual experiences, hence proving false the proclaimed narrative of post feminism.

All of these ‘reality television’ shows portray female nudity at some point, and it has become acceptable and expected in this world of ‘reality television’ for a woman to expose her breasts for male pleasure on television, even if she is deemed a ‘slut’ for doing it, but yet it is frowned upon and taboo for a woman to breast-feed her baby in a public space.²³³ Such representations exemplify what Laura Harvey and Rosalind Gill describe as the ‘sexualisation of culture’, writing that, “The phrase is used to capture the growing sense of Western societies as saturated by sexual representations and discourses, and in which pornography has become increasingly influential and porous, transforming contemporary culture.”²³⁴ Harvey and Gill go on to quote Ariel Levy’s argument, “Levy asserts that the sexual objectification of women is being repackaged as empowerment, but contends that ‘raunch culture is not essentially progressive, it is essentially commercial’.”²³⁵ So fundamentally what is promoted through post-feminist rhetoric is a sense of false empowerment for women. Harvey and Gill state that,

A new binary opposition that has emerged in the last decade among feminist scholars attempting to make sense of a Western postfeminist landscape relates to whether the proliferation of representations of women as desirable and sexually agentic represents a real and positive change in depictions of female sexuality, or whether, by contrast, it is merely a postfeminist repackaging of feminist ideas in a way that renders them depoliticised and presses them into the service of patriarchal consumer capitalism.²³⁶

I agree with the latter and contend that it is one aim of fourth wave feminist activism and discourse to expose this rebranding of misogyny for what it is; a recycling of old sexist ideals that serve to oppress women and sustain rape culture. Journalist Hadley Freeman has tackled the issue of false empowerment stating that,

²³³Mark Tran, ‘Claridge’s Hotel Criticised After Telling Breastfeeding Woman To Cover Up’, *Guardian*, December 2, 2014, accessed September 23, 2015,

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/dec/02/claridges-hotel-breastfeeding-woman-cover-up>

²³⁴ Laura Harvey, Rosalind Gill, ‘Spicing It Up: Sexual Entrepreneurs and *The Sex Inspectors*’, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.), 53.

²³⁵ Laura Harvey, Rosalind Gill, ‘Spicing It Up: Sexual Entrepreneurs and *The Sex Inspectors*’, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.), 53.

²³⁶ Laura Harvey, Rosalind Gill, ‘Spicing It Up: Sexual Entrepreneurs and *The Sex Inspectors*’, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.), 53.

We could sit around and argue about where the line lies between sexual empowerment and sexual objectification until the self-empowered cows come home. Personally, I'd rather not see yet another wave of feminism die on the hill over whether or not pole-dancing is a feminist act. So maybe the easiest way to deal with the kinds of arguments raised by choice feminism is to end with this simple truth: while the ability to choose is feminist, that doesn't mean the choice itself is.²³⁷

Fourth wave feminism does benefit from technological advancements, as evidenced in the 'viral' and powerful nature of the #WakingTheFeminists campaign, but the widespread global reliance on the Internet has led to the creation of online 'trolls', whose only purpose on the web is to abuse, attack and intimidate others. Any *Facebook* post, Tweet, *YouTube* video, newspaper article or blog post is left open to be commented on by anyone who can see it, and much of the abuse posted seeks to sustain and reaffirm rape culture indefinitely. 'Trolls' can create false profiles to comment on any item while retaining full anonymity. This allows for hate speech, performative speech that incites violence, or negative and offensive commentary in general to be posted without any consequence for the person who says it. Just as Peggy Phelan remarks on the power created and retained in the act of remaining invisible, or removing oneself from society in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*,²³⁸ 'trolls' command power over those they choose to troll through the anonymity provided by the Internet. As well as constructing power through protecting their own identity, 'doxing'²³⁹ has become a prevalent tool used by trolls and hackers to compromise the safety and integrity of anyone they disagree with. The Internet allows this kind of power dynamic to be established. Many people legitimately fear the threat to their personal security posed by anyone with sufficient knowledge about how to remain anonymous online. 'Trolls' disproportionately target active online feminists and trolling is a phenomenon not seen before the rise of the Internet, meaning that it is a distinctly fourth wave feminist issue. Whitney Phillips describes 'trolling' as follows,

Trolling as described by self-identifying trolls is a game, one only the trolls can initiate and only the troll can win. Pulling from a seemingly endless nest of self-referential memes, and steeped in a distinctive shared language, subcultural

²³⁷ Hadley Freeman, 'From Shopping To naked Selfies: How 'Empowerment' Lost Its Meaning', *Guardian*, April 19, 2016, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/19/from-shopping-to-naked-selfies-how-empowerment-lost-its-meaning-feminism>

²³⁸ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, new ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005).

²³⁹ 'Doxing' is the searching for and publishing of a person or persons' private information online, usually with a malicious intent. It can also be spelled 'doxing'.

trolling is predicated on the amassment of lulz, an aggressive form of laughter derived from eliciting strong emotional reactions from the chosen target(s). In order to amass the greatest number of lulz possible, trolls engage in the most outrageous and offensive behaviours possible – all the better to troll you with.²⁴⁰

As journalist Helen Lewis Tweeted in 2012, “the comments on any article about feminism justify feminism. That is Lewis's Law.”²⁴¹ The largely violent, sexualised and abusive nature of trolling commentary makes this practise a part of contemporary rape culture. As proof of the disproportionate effect of trolling on women, in 2016, “As part of a series on the rising global phenomenon of online harassment, *The Guardian* commissioned research into the 70m comments left on its site since 2006 and discovered that of the 10 most abused writers eight are women, and the two men are black.”²⁴² The same report found that, “Although the majority of our regular opinion writers are white men, [...] the 10 regular writers who got the least abuse? All men.”²⁴³

There has also been a new form of cyber-crime created in recent years with the rise of ‘Revenge Porn’, where intimate photos of predominantly women are posted online for judgment by disgruntled ex-partners. Matthew Causey describes ‘revenge porn’ as,

Another recent, abusive and traumatic phenomenon in which explicit video or photographs, which may have been created with consent from the data subject or exist as a ‘selfie’ circulated through sexting, are uploaded online without the consent of one or more of the subjects of the images. An ex-partner who has been jilted or a bullying peer group generally perform the uploading and find revengeful satisfaction in the posting of the highly personal material.²⁴⁴

Causey goes on to state that it is, “an extreme form of abuse, bullying and invasion of privacy.”²⁴⁵ The comments posted under revenge porn photographs show a continued level

²⁴⁰ Whitney Phillips, ‘What an Academic Who Wrote Her Dissertation on Trolls Thinks of Violentacrez’, *Atlantic* (Boston), October 15, 2012, accessed May 17, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/10/what-an-academic-who-wrote-her-dissertation-on-trolls-thinks-of-violentacrez/263631/>

²⁴¹ Helen Lewis’s Twitter Feed 9 August 2012, <https://twitter.com/helenlewis/status/233594800908169217?lang=en> Twitter Handle @helenlewis (Accessed 30 March 2017).

²⁴² Becky Gardiner, Mahana Mansfield, Ian Anderson, Josh Holder, Daan Louter, Monica Ulmana, ‘The dark Side of Guardian Comments’, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments> Published by *The Guardian* 12 April 2016, (Accessed 30 March 2017).

²⁴³ Becky Gardiner, Mahana Mansfield, Ian Anderson, Josh Holder, Daan Louter, Monica Ulmana, ‘The dark Side of Guardian Comments’, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments> Published by *The Guardian* 12 April 2016, (Accessed 30 March 2017).

²⁴⁴ Matthew Causey, ‘The Right to be Forgotten and the Image-Crimes of Digital Culture’, in *The Performing Subject In The Space of Technology: Through the Virtual, Towards the Real*, Matthew Causey, Emma Meehan, Néill O’Dwyer, eds., (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 77.

²⁴⁵ Matthew Causey, ‘The Right to be Forgotten and the Image-Crimes of Digital Culture’, 77.

of disrespect for, and violent abuse of women in contemporary society.²⁴⁶ This is a form of abuse that continues indefinitely as images remain online. In a similar manner to trolling, the violent, sexualised nature of revenge porn make it a part of contemporary rape culture. Just as the physical act of rape is about power and control over a person's body, revenge porn acts in the same way. The person who experiences revenge porn, and has sexualised images of themselves uploaded, has control over their own body taken from them. This is a violent performative aspect of rape culture in action. As Causey notes, "There are now many possibilities for recurrent victimisation through the tyranny of the digital image and the replaying of traumatic events."²⁴⁷ The 'recurrent victimisation' Causey references is akin to the 'double disempowerment' that women who experience sexual violence are exposed to when slut-shaming and victim blaming narratives are applied to them, as is discussed in Chapter One.

On February 3, 2016, one of University College Dublin's (UCD) student newspapers, *The College Tribune*, published an article entitled, "200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls".²⁴⁸ This article alleges that a private Facebook group chat, containing as many as two hundred active members, had been active in UCD. This was a platform allegedly specifically designed for members to share stories and rate photographs of female students they have slept with.²⁴⁹ While no physical evidence was found to prove the existence of this group, it follows on from the misogynist UCD Facebook group shut down in 2015, entitled *Girls I'd shift if I was tipsy*,²⁵⁰ in showing how revenge porn and misogynist online forums are rampant among the student body of Ireland's largest university. It also clearly demonstrates that these groups are established to target women disproportionately. This displays a general acceptance of rape culture on campus as normative. Internet access and social media also has a very real impact on the physical safety of women in public. The mass sexual assault attacks on women in Cologne, Germany on New Year's Eve 2015,²⁵¹ along with other European cities, exemplify rape culture in action and shows that the kind of organisation needed to achieve such horrific acts, is made much easier through the use of the Internet and social media accounts.

²⁴⁶ My Ex website, accessed January 16, 2016, <http://www.myex.com>

²⁴⁷ Matthew Causey, 'The Right to be Forgotten and the Image-Crimes of Digital Culture', 73.

²⁴⁸ Jack Power, '200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls', *College Tribune* (UCD), February 3, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://collegetribune.ie/ucd-facebook-chat-rating-and-sharing-girls-photos-who-they-have-slept-with-highlights-toxic-lad-culture/>

²⁴⁹ Jack Power, '200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls', *College Tribune* (UCD), February 3, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://collegetribune.ie/ucd-facebook-chat-rating-and-sharing-girls-photos-who-they-have-slept-with-highlights-toxic-lad-culture/>

²⁵⁰ Jack Power, '200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls', *College Tribune* (UCD), February 3, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://collegetribune.ie/ucd-facebook-chat-rating-and-sharing-girls-photos-who-they-have-slept-with-highlights-toxic-lad-culture/>

²⁵¹ Jasmine Coleman, 'Cologne sex attacks - Search for answers', *BBC News*, January 8, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35241808>

Ireland, and many parts of the world, are unquestionably in a pivotal and significant moment in time for the development of feminisms and feminist theory. This particularly pertains to issues of rape culture, sexual liberation and sexual consent. On January 26, 2016, the Student's Union of Trinity College (TCDSU) voted to introduce mandatory sexual consent workshops for incoming first year students who would be living at the off-campus accommodation site in Rathmines for Trinity students, beginning in September 2016. This was a student-led initiative, proposed by TCDSU's then Citizenship Officer, Kieran McNulty. The plan for future years includes an online campus-wide module for all incoming students at the university.²⁵² The then President of the Junior Common Room, Shane Rice, stated that they would be looking to follow the Oxbridge model of consent workshops, in which they are "marketed as mandatory", but where there is no penalty if you choose to leave once the workshop begins.²⁵³ Arguably this questions the potential positive effects of the workshop given that students do not have to attend, and in this way, the concept is inherently flawed. The original *University Times* article that published the result of the student vote to introduce the workshop, and *The Journal* article published on January 27, 2016²⁵⁴ that announced the introduction of this module to the media nationwide made no reference to gender at all, simply stating that the workshops would be mandatory for all students. However, in spite of this, and the fact that the workshops are mandatory to students of all genders, the media throughout Ireland critiqued the concept, and the public reaction to the announcement was largely negative. Much of the reaction focused on the demonization of young Irish males, as people believe that these workshops are directly and disproportionately targeting them as 'potential rapists'.²⁵⁵ This public outrage over an invented sexist issue highlights how public

²⁵² Sinead Baker, "Mandatory" Consent Workshops to be Introduced for Trinity Hall Residents from Next Year", *University Times* (TCD), January 26, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.universitytimes.ie/2016/01/mandatory-consent-workshops-to-be-introduced-for-trinity-hall-residents-from-next-year/>

²⁵³ Sinead Baker, "Mandatory" Consent Workshops to be Introduced for Trinity Hall Residents from Next Year", *University Times* (TCD), January 26, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.universitytimes.ie/2016/01/mandatory-consent-workshops-to-be-introduced-for-trinity-hall-residents-from-next-year/>

²⁵⁴ Catherine Healy, 'Sexual Consent Workshops to be compulsory for New TCD Students', *Journal* (Dublin), January 27, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, http://www.thejournal.ie/tcd-mandatory-sexual-consent-workshops-2569766-Jan2016/?utm_source=facebook_short

Tayna Sweeney, 'Are sexual consent classes a step too far? Students at Trinity College Dublin have backed plans for mandatory workshops on consent. Our reporter asks if we should be offended, or embrace the idea as a positive move', *Independent* (Dublin), February 4, 2016, accessed February 5, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/life/are-sexual-consent-classes-a-step-too-far-34418518.html>

²⁵⁵ Matthew Mulligan, 'Irish media has painted TCDSU's consent project as latest diatribe against men: Cynical articles which pretend workshops are only for straight men fuel anger towards the idea', *Trinity News* (TCD), January 29, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://trinitynews.ie/predictably-the-ignorance-in-irish-media-has-painted-tcdsus-consent-project-as-latest-diatribe-against-men/>

discourse is currently forming surrounding expectations and assumptions about sexual violence and sexual consent.

The physical act of sexual violence is the ultimate expression of the dangers of rape culture and so it forms a core area of research throughout this dissertation. Sexual violence towards women is one of the most vile and violent forms of policing and controlling the bodies of women in contemporary society, and its prevalence in contemporary culture is forcing women to remain oppressed by dominant patriarchal structures. It is by no means a new issue, as it has been used to subjugate and enslave women for thousands of years, but its current extensiveness is a topic frequently contested in fourth wave feminism. On one side of the contemporary debate, there are anti-feminist movements such as the *Twitter* campaign entitled ‘#IDontNeedFeminism’,²⁵⁶ where women of all ages are taking to the social media site to proclaim that feminists are ‘self-victimising, man haters’. At the opposite end of the debate, feminists such as the British journalist Laura Bates have started global online forums such as ‘The Everyday Sexism Project’,²⁵⁷ where hundreds of thousands of people, predominantly women, are gathering to share their stories of everyday encounters with sexism.

Anti-woman and anti-feminism sentiments are rife online. These sentiments serve to sustain and protect the normalisation of contemporary rape culture through the promotion of brutally misogynistic and violently performative speech and actions. One prolific online forum that demonstrates such misogyny is *Return of Kings*, a ‘Men’s Rights Activist’ (MRA) group who actively perpetuate rape culture by promoting the belief that rape should be legalised if it takes place on private property.²⁵⁸ David Futrelle describes MRAs, stating that, “Unlike the original Men’s Movement, which was inspired by and heavily influenced by feminism, the self-described Men’s Rights Movement is largely a reactionary movement; with few exceptions, Men’s Rights Activists (or MRAs) are pretty rabidly antifeminist, and many are frankly and sometimes proudly misogynistic.”²⁵⁹ *Return of Kings* has formed a global online community and it organised a global ‘meetup’ in one hundred and sixty three locations across forty-three countries in February 2016. The reason for the gathering was to allow members and interested parties from all across the world come together officially for the first time and discuss anti-feminist and anti-

²⁵⁶ Twitter Search, ‘#IDontNeedFeminism’, *Twitter*, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://twitter.com/hashtag/idontneedfeminism>

²⁵⁷ The Everyday Sexism Project website, accessed September 23, 2015, <http://www.everydaysexism.com>

²⁵⁸ Roosh Valizadeh, ‘The Truth Behind ‘Rape Culture’ Hysteria’, *YouTube*, February 20, 2015, accessed February 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gxjc37i0JOc>

²⁵⁹ David Futrelle, ‘WTF is a MGTOW? A Glossary,’ *We Hunted the Mommoth*, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://www.wehuntedthemammoth.com/wtf-is-a-mgtow-a-glossary/>

woman topics that are frequently discussed on the website.²⁶⁰ These ‘meetups’ were subsequently called off by the group’s leader Roosh Valizadeh as he published a statement on his website stating,

I can no longer guarantee the safety or privacy of the men who want to attend on February 6, especially since most of the meetups cannot be made private in time. While I can’t stop men who want to continue meeting in private groups, there will be no official Return Of Kings meetups. The listing page has been scrubbed of all locations. I apologise to all the supporters who are let down by my decision.²⁶¹

Valizadeh believed that feminist activists would endanger those who attended the meetings, as public outrage quickly erupted once news of the meetings became public. It is notable that this man is one who blames women for their own experiences of sexual violence, thus delegitimising their experiences and their reasoning behind being fearful of attack while in a public space. He felt he was endangering the safety of his followers and yet he sees fit to preach the message that legalising rape on privately owned property would make women take responsibility for their actions and ultimately make them safer in public.

Valizadeh’s hypocrisy is comparable to the firing of the conservative American political commentator Tomi Lahren in March 2017 after she stated on American television talk show *The View* on March 17, 2017 that she is pro-choice.²⁶² She was fired for holding views in opposition to those who run the television network she appears on, *The Blaze*. However, only one month before this, the Network’s founder criticised ‘liberals’ for what he perceives as a shutting down of free speech saying, “They don’t believe in freedom of speech. They believe in the freedom of speech that they like.”²⁶³ Such rhetoric suggesting that political liberals are actively trying to discriminate against conservative free speech while simultaneously firing a female conservative for enacting that right to free speech is similar to MRAs claiming to be silenced and oppressed while their views explicitly silence

²⁶⁰ Return of Kings, ‘The 35 most important articles on ROK’, *Return of Kings*, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.returnofkings.com/52295/top-35-most-important-articles-on-rok>. The articles linked on this page display a clear anti-woman and anti-feminism ideas with titles including, “The Intellectual Inferiority of Women”, “Women Should Not Be Allowed To Vote”, and “This Accidental Experiment Shows The Superiority Of Patriarchy”, (Accessed 16 March 2016).

²⁶¹ Roosh Valizadeh, ‘ANNOUNCEMENT: The Meetup On February 6 Is Cancelled’, *Return Of Kings*, February 3, 2016, accessed February 9, 2016, <http://www.returnofkings.com/79537/announcement-the-meetup-on-february-6-is-cancelled>

²⁶² Video Link to Lahren’s comments embedded in: Joseph Milord, ‘Tomi Lahren Got Fired For Her Opinion, And Here’s Why It’s So Hypocritical’, *Elite Daily*, March 27, 2017, accessed March 30, 2017, <http://elitedaily.com/news/politics/tomi-lahren-fired-hypocritical/1840121/>

²⁶³ Joseph Milord, ‘Tomi Lahren Got Fired For Her Opinion, And Here’s Why It’s So Hypocritical’, *Elite Daily*, March 27, 2017, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://elitedaily.com/news/politics/tomi-lahren-fired-hypocritical/1840121/>

and oppress women. While the *Return of Kings* situation had a positive outcome in that the meetings were cancelled, it is a worrying fact that in 2016 an anti-feminist, misogynist, largely white, hetero-normative patriarchal supremacy group such as *Return of Kings* exists and that the group appears to have members from all over the world, including in Ireland.²⁶⁴ It is vital to challenge such groups in order to deconstruct rape culture.

Another prominent MRA group manifested on the user-generated content website *Reddit*. This website hosted an active forum entitled ‘The Philosophy of Rape’ where men could discuss and share stories of how to rape, who to rape, who deserves it and how to get away with it.²⁶⁵ During the life span of this group, the then President of The United States of America, Barack Obama, released a Public Service Announcement (PSA) in April 2014²⁶⁶ in a bid to tackle the issues of college campus rapes and the thousands of people affected by it. In particular this PSA was aimed at those students who are too afraid to come forward. In the same vein, the online forum ‘Faculty Against Rape’ (FAR) was set up in 2014 as a, “Volunteer-run collective dedicated to getting more faculty involved in confronting campus sexual assault as researchers, teachers, survivors’ advocates, and policy reformers, [and] is committed to supporting faculty members who experience retaliation because of their efforts to address sexual assault on campus.”²⁶⁷ FAR was launched in North America. As of 2018, it is trying to bridge the transatlantic gap and connect with faculty members in European universities.

Sexual violence does not just affect women, but statistically, women are much more likely to be assaulted than men, with 77.92% of those who made contact with the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in 2013 identifying as female,²⁶⁸ and, “according to a 2013 global review of available data, 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.”²⁶⁹ Sexual violence is effected by the presence of contemporary rape culture, including the increasing sexualisation of women.

²⁶⁴Return of Kings, ‘Full City Listing and meeting Points for International Meetup Day on February 6 2016’, *Return of Kings*, January 16, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.returnofkings.com/78021/full-city-listing-and-meeting-points-for-international-meetup-day> The Courthouse in Naas, Co. Meath was listed as the only Irish meetup. Listing removed after meetup was cancelled on 3 February 2016.

²⁶⁵ https://www.reddit.com/r/PhilosophyOfRape/comments/38wwvj/whats_rape/ This was the website link for the page, it was finally banned and taken down in July 2015 after months of protesting by other *Reddit* users. The page says that, “This subreddit was banned for inciting harm against others”.

²⁶⁶ The White House. ‘NOT ALONE: The First Report Of The White House Task Force To Protect Students From Sexual Assault’, *The White House*, accessed April 30, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/report_0.pdf

²⁶⁷ Faculty Against Rape, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.facultyagainstrap.net>

²⁶⁸ Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, accessed October 19, 2015, <http://www.drcc.ie>

²⁶⁹ ‘United Nations Development Fund for Women (2014)’, *Facts And Figures: Ending Violence Against Women*, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

A clear example of the ever increasing level of female sexualisation in popular Western culture can be seen in American singer and actress Miley Cyrus' rise to international notoriety in 2013 with a now infamous live performance at the MTV Video Music Awards with singer Robin Thicke. During this performance the two performers sang a song about the 'blurred lines' between active sexual consent and rape, with lyrics such as, "I hate these blurred lines, I know you want it," "I'll give you something big enough to tear your ass in two...I'm a nice guy, but don't get confused, this pimpin'," and, "Nothin' like your last guy, he's too square for you, he don't smack that ass and pull your hair like that."²⁷⁰ Throughout the performance, Thicke remained fully clothed, while Cyrus emerged from a giant teddy bear wearing a leotard with the design of a teddy bear's face on the front. She carried out sexually suggestive moves during the first half of the performance when she sang her own hit, 'We Can't Stop', while her dancers carried around over-sized teddy bears on their backs. The link between sexualisation and infantilisation of the female body was clear during this segment. Then she removed her leotard to sing with Thicke and wore only a skin coloured bikini, as she continued with sexually suggestive and submissive dance moves for the duration of the performance.²⁷¹ As this live performance was recorded and has been viewed online more than three million times to date, the impact and influence of this performance on a global level must not be understated.

There is an argument to be made for the empowerment of women through the reclamation of their sexuality and so, one could argue that Cyrus felt empowered throughout. However, as previously discussed, the freedom to choose is empowering, but not every choice is. Also, given the link to infantilisation in the performance, the violent lyrics of the song, and the fact that Thicke was not presented in a sexualised light, this dissertation would argue that this performance objectified Cyrus and portrayed her as the female who 'really wants it', thus explicitly reinforcing rape culture, and rape myths in particular. In addition, even though a performer may feel that they are portraying their body or sexuality in an empowered way, they cannot control the ways in which their image may be consumed and interpreted. As Sue Jackson and Tiina Vares point out, "Despite the rhetoric of Girl Power sexual freedoms, in practice girls' sexuality continues to be under surveillance and regulated...Miley should be able to do what she wants to but is

²⁷⁰ Islandfabrics, 'Miley Cyrus & Robin Thicke MTV VMA Awards 2013 Performance', *YouTube*, August 26, 2013, accessed September 23, 2015,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFLv9Ns1EuQ>

²⁷¹ Islandfabrics, 'Miley Cyrus & Robin Thicke MTV VMA Awards 2013 Performance', *YouTube*, August 26, 2013, accessed September 23, 2015,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFLv9Ns1EuQ>

constrained by expectations of conformity with notions of ‘good girl’ femininity.”²⁷² This performance took place on a global stage, Cyrus has no control over how those viewers interpret her suggestive dance moves and general decorum as she becomes a product of the ‘male gaze’. In this way, this dissertation argues that she has her sense of empowerment taken from her.

Despite the active support for sexual violence against women evident in the song lyrics, and the explicit nature of this performance, ‘Blurred Lines’ became the biggest selling single of 2013, with 1.44 million copies of the single sold in the United Kingdom²⁷³ and 6.5 million copies sold in the USA.²⁷⁴ Although there was criticism of the song, the fact that it became the highest selling single of the year highlights a mass global support for this song. The global popularity of the MTV Video Music Awards performance highlights the acceptance of sexual violence against women in contemporary society and the overt sexualisation and infantilisation of women as normative. It also suggests a widespread disbelief in the existence of a global rape culture. All of this works to actively sustain and perpetuate contemporary rape culture.

Meanwhile, in September 2015, American singer Lady Gaga released a challenging music video for her song entitled *Til it Happens to You*.²⁷⁵ This song was written to feature in Kirby Dick’s 2014 documentary film, *The Hunting Ground*.²⁷⁶ The documentary deals with the issue of college campus sexual assault in North America. While Cyrus gave a shocking but largely applauded ‘risqué’ performance,²⁷⁷ Lady Gaga has received heavy criticism²⁷⁸ for supposedly ‘attention grabbing’ and simply ‘seeking the limelight’, even though she has been very public about the fact that she experienced

²⁷² Sue Jackson, Tiina Vares, ‘Media ‘Sluts’: ‘Tween’ Girls, Negotiations of Postfeminist Sexual Subjectivities in Popular Culture’ in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff, eds., (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.), 143.

²⁷³ Adam Bychawski, ‘Robin Thicke’s ‘Blurred Lines’ named 2013’s biggest-selling single’, *NME*, December 8, 2013, accessed March 12, 2016
<http://www.nme.com/news/robin-thicke/74290>

²⁷⁴ Edward Keeble, ‘Robin Thicke’s ‘Blurred Lines’ is Biggest Selling Single in America in 2013’, *Gigwise*, January 3, 2014, accessed March 12, 2016,
<http://www.gigwise.com/news/87280/robin-thickes-blurred-lines-is-biggest-selling-single-in-america-in-2013>

²⁷⁵ Lady Gaga Vevo, ‘Lady Gaga – Til It Happens To You’, *YouTube*, September 17, 2015, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmWBrN7QV6Y>

²⁷⁶ IMDB, ‘The Hunting Ground’, accessed September 22, 2015,
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4185572>

²⁷⁷ Islandfabrics, ‘Miley Cyrus & Robin Thicke MTV VMA Awards 2013 Performance’, *YouTube*, August 26, 2013, accessed September 23, 2015,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFLv9Ns1EuQ>

Some of the top comments under the video posting on YouTube include, “Wow Miley, so brave and challenging,” “love her, amazing,” and “best performance ever”.

²⁷⁸ Lady Gaga Vevo, ‘Lady Gaga – Til It Happens To You’, *YouTube*, September 17, 2015, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmWBrN7QV6Y>
Some of the tope comments under the YouTube video include, “This video disgusts me,” “This is not true, it is based on lies from feminists and SJWs (Social Justice Warriors),” and “This song is a joke”.

sexual violence at the age of nineteen²⁷⁹ and she speaks about it regularly to promote awareness of sexual violence.²⁸⁰

Once Lady Gaga's song was nominated for an Oscar in 2016 in the 'Music (Original Song)' category,²⁸¹ she was then criticised for her role in writing it. Although Lady Gaga did not win an Oscar for the song, she performed it at the awards ceremony on February 28, 2016. During this performance she was joined on stage by a group of people who have experienced sexual violence. These people had positive affirmations written on their forearms such as, 'unbreakable', 'not my fault', and 'survivor'.²⁸² This performance came just days after fellow American female singer Kesha was denied a legal request to leave the contract she holds with the Sony Record Label after she alleged her producer, Lukasz Sebastian Gottwald, sexually abused her over the course of ten years.²⁸³ Her request was denied on the basis that she had no physical evidence proving the abuse took place. However, given that sexual violence is difficult to prove through physical evidence, particularly when the assault is not immediately reported, it is clear that the law protects the accused perpetrator over the person allegedly assaulted, and exemplifies rape culture in this way. There is an argument that she may have falsified her reports of sexual violence. However, the prevalence of false allegations of sexual violence is a complicated issue and is explored in Chapter One. Assuming that Kesha is one of the vast majority of people who do not fabricate allegations of sexual violence, the absolute protection of the suspected perpetrator in this instance acts as another example of how the sexualisation of women, and its correlation to violence against women, is pervasive in contemporary society and seeks to perpetuate rape culture.

Another high profile example of the perpetuation of rape culture can be seen in the court case against American actor and comedian Bill Cosby. In recent years, over one hundred women have publicly accused Cosby of committing sexual violence against them from 1965-2008. Most of the alleged offences now fall outside the Statute of Limitations but in 2017, Cosby was tried for three counts of aggravated indecent assault of Andrea

²⁷⁹ Howard Stern, 'Stern Show Clip – Howard Talks To Lady Gaga About Vomit Art & Rape', *Sound Cloud*, December 2, 2014, accessed January 16, 2016,

<https://soundcloud.com/howardstern/ladygaga-vomitarape>

²⁸⁰ The New York Times, Times Talk, 'Lady Gaga, Diane Warren, Kirby Dick + Amy Ziering: "The Hunting Ground"', *New York Times*, December 10, 2015, accessed January 16, 2016,

http://timestalks.com/detail-event.php?event=the_hunting_ground

²⁸¹ Jim Donnelly, 'Oscar Nominations 2016: View The Complete List Of Nominees', *Oscars*, accessed January 16, 2016, <http://oscar.go.com/news/nominations/oscar-nominations-2016-the-complete-list-of-nominees>

²⁸² Lady Gaga Vevo, 'Lady Gaga - Til It Happens To You (Live From The 88th Annual Academy Awards)', *YouTube*, February 29, 2016, accessed March 12, 2016,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZhsJ1saExI>

²⁸³ Mahita Gajanan, 'Kesha denied legal request to escape contract with man she alleges raped her', *Guardian*, February 19, 2016, accessed March 12, 2016,

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/19/kesha-dr-luke-denied-legal-request-record-label-rape>

Constand. On June 15, 2017, the jury informed the judge that they were deadlocked and unable to decide whether or not Cosby was guilty. A mistrial was declared. There were several undisputed facts of the case. These included the facts that Constand came over to Cosby's house, she did not tell him that she expressly wanted to engage in intercourse with him, he gave her drugs without telling her what they were and he then put his hand down inside her underwear.²⁸⁴ Accepting these undisputed facts and still failing to reach a guilty verdict is exemplary of contemporary rape culture. As Elie Mystal notes,

That, my friends, is “rape culture.” It’s not that all men rape, it’s not that every attempt at cajoling your way into sex constitutes rape, it’s that we can’t get 12 people to agree that sticking your hands down a woman’s pants requires express — and preferably drug-free — consent. Cosby’s defence, which has involved zero exculpatory evidence but a ton of she-was-asking-for-it innuendo, has been designed to take advantage of rape culture to exonerate Cosby. But the key problem is not exactly in victim-blaming defence techniques, but in the simple fact that we cannot seem to agree on what rape is.²⁸⁵

Using victim blaming and slut-shaming rhetoric to protest innocence, while a jury fails in its ability to recognise sexual violence, is rape culture in action.

An Irish performance of rape culture can be seen in the comments made by Irish broadcaster, George Hook, on national radio in 2017 regarding a specific case of sexual violence. Hook said,

Why does a girl who just meets a fella in a bar go back to a hotel room? She’s only just barely met him. She has no idea of his health conditions, she has no idea who he is, she has no idea of what dangers he might pose. But modern-day social activity means that she goes back with him. Then is surprised when somebody else comes into the room and rapes her. Should she be raped? Course she shouldn’t. Is she entitled to say no? Absolutely. Is the guy who came in a scumbag? Certainly. Should he go to jail? Of course. All of those things. But is there no blame now to the person who puts themselves in danger?²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Elie Mystal, ‘Bill Cosby Jury Deadlocked, Because 12 People Can’t Actually Agree On What Rape Is’, *Above The Law*, June 15, 2017, accessed June 21, 2017, <http://abovethelaw.com/2017/06/bill-cosby-jury-deadlocked-because-12-people-cant-actually-agree-on-what-rape-is/?rf=1>

²⁸⁵ Elie Mystal, ‘Bill Cosby Jury Deadlocked, Because 12 People Can’t Actually Agree On What Rape Is’, *Above The Law*, June 15, 2017, accessed June 21, 2017, <http://abovethelaw.com/2017/06/bill-cosby-jury-deadlocked-because-12-people-cant-actually-agree-on-what-rape-is/?rf=1>

²⁸⁶ Kitty Holland quoting George Hook, ‘George Hook should be challenged, not silenced’, *Irish Times*, September 13, 2017, accessed December 6, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/george-hook-should-be-challenged-not-silenced-1.3219952>

This is not the first time that Hook has made such ignorant and dangerous comments about women and sexual violence. Two years previously, Hook commented on the case of convicted rapist Magnus Meyer, who admitted to repeatedly raping and sexually assaulting his then-girlfriend while she slept. Hook claimed that if a woman shares a bed with a man, there must be a level of ‘implied consent’ present. His full statement reads, “What about this. Hypothetically, you go into a relationship with somebody, be it marriage or be it you’re living with someone. So now you’re sharing a bed with somebody, yes, and obviously sexual congress takes place on a regular basis because you’re living with someone. Is there not an implied consent therefore that you consent to sexual congress?”²⁸⁷ This dissertation argues that such comments are tantamount to hate speech. Aside from their uninformed nature, they are dangerous performative speech acts. Granted, Hook’s programme lost major sponsorship deals almost immediately, he made a public apology and his show was taken off the air. However, that became irrelevant as he is back on the same radio channel presenting a different programme. The fact that his 2017 comments were not made in isolation implies that he is unlikely to learn what is truly wrong with what he says and thinks, as he demonstrably hasn’t in the past. Arguably his comments form an example of hate speech because of their violent and dangerous performative potential.

To clarify, this dissertation is not claiming that his comments imply that he has in the past, or is likely to commit an act of sexual violence. Neither do they insinuate that he in anyway supports or condones violence against women. However, as a broadcaster, he has a responsibility to understand how his comments could affect his audience. He cannot control how his comments may be interpreted by some, but the responsibility remains. So, on one side, we see the very public backlash to what he says with those who have experienced sexual violence and those angered by his words speaking out loudly and angrily about what he said. Arguably, this outcry was the reason for sponsorship deals with the radio show to fall through as businesses wanted to disassociate their brand from Hook’s comments. It was also the reason for Hook to apologise on air and for his show in its then current format to be halted.

However, what we don’t see is the effect his words could have on those likely to commit acts of sexual violence. For example, members of online MRA, or Men’s Rights Activist, forums such as The Red Pill, The Return of Kings or The Philosophy of Rape could react to such comments differently. Although impossible for me to comment on the exact impact Hook’s statements could have on such misogynistic groupings, it is plausible

²⁸⁷ George Hook quoted in, ‘Rape survivor “shocked” at George Hook’s comments on ‘implied consent’, *The Journal*, July 15, 2015, accessed December 6, 2017, <http://www.thejournal.ie/george-hook-comments-niamh-nic-domhnaill-2218672-Jul2015/>

to consider that opinions such as Hook's could be interpreted as a justification for sexual violence for those prone to commit such acts in the first place. This is how such commentary becomes dangerous, anti-woman and potentially violent. This is rape culture in action.

We are now living in a world where 'to Google' has become a verb, and this has both broadened and challenged how we interact with feminisms today. While much focus of contemporary feminisms and the performance of femininities lies on the international and the global, the dissertation specifically looks at Ireland, and the Irish context to add to the field of feminist research through a close examination of contemporary Irish Theatre, performance and culture. The objects chosen for critical analysis throughout the dissertation are of Irish origin, but they are placed in a global context as Ireland is a part of global discourse and needs to aim for the deconstruction of rape culture both at home and abroad.

Section Five: Chapter Breakdown

The dissertation interrogates the operations and representations of feminisms and rape culture in contemporary Irish theatre, performance and culture. There are four chapters, in addition to the introductory and concluding chapters. The four main strands of research explored in each chapter respectively, cover the areas of the power and performativity of language for women affected by sexual violence in contemporary Irish culture, contemporary Irish Theatre, Irish beauty pageants, and traditional Irish Dance performance. These four strands are linked through discussing issues of prohibition, power, agency, authority, language and identity, and their effect on the female body in contemporary Irish society and performance. All four of these chapters seek to deconstruct rape culture through questioning notions of empowerment for women and girls, how their bodies are monitored and controlled, how their actions and reactions must conform to societal norms, or strive to defy them. The dissertation is concerned with how women both choose to, and are forced to inhabit and perform²⁸⁸ their gender in a specifically contemporary Irish context, with reference to works and performances dating from the year 2000 to the present day.

²⁸⁸ Gender is largely performative, and it is reproduced through repetitive performance of ritual behaviours. That is not to say that gender is entirely performed or performative, as trans people would argue that their gender identity is innate to their sense of personhood. However, as this dissertation is largely concerned with cis women, I focus on the performance and performativity of gender as it directly relates to cis gendered females.

All of the plays and performances referenced in this dissertation premiered in the twenty-first century, but to give some historical context for some of the objects, there will be reference made to Ireland in the twentieth century. For example, when discussing the *Rose of Tralee* pageant, its fifty-seven year history is historicised. Similarly, in Chapter Four, the contemporary feiseanna of *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*²⁸⁹ (CLRG) is the main focus of discussion, as this is the largest and original Irish Dancing organisation, but reference is made to the huge changes that have taken place in Irish Dance performance since *Riverdance* premiered in 1994.²⁹⁰

The first chapter explores the performativity and violence of language when dealing with the trauma of sexual assault and rape and its mediation in current media. It focuses on the use of the words ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ in describing those who have experienced some form of sexual violence, and the capacity for these words to create or destroy a sense of empowerment using Judith Butler’s theories on the performativity of language. This chapter also deals with the politics and power of gendered language surrounding instances of sexual violence. It closely analyses the cultural stigmas and perpetuated stereotypes that encompass sexual violence. This chapter is about the concept of ‘double disempowerment’, where the person who experienced the sexually violent act can be further marginalised and vilified through the inappropriate use of language by those who have not undergone the experience. This chapter focuses on tackling rape culture to de-stigmatise women who have been affected by sexual violence.

Chapter Two focuses on several Irish plays that have premiered since the year 2000 in Ireland. The five main plays are; Gillian Greer’s *Petals*,²⁹¹ Marina Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*,²⁹² Mark O’Rowe’s *Our Few and Evil Days*,²⁹³ Abbie Spallen’s *Pumpgirl*,²⁹⁴ and Caitríona Daly’s *Test Dummy*.²⁹⁵ Using these five plays, the dissertation examines how issues of sexuality and sexual violence are dealt with on stage, how women who go through such events are represented and how these playwrights are interacting with rape culture. These plays have been chosen because of how they depict their individual themes, but also because of how they relate to each other when dealing with issues of sexual violence against women in contemporary Irish theatre. They deal with differing aspects of

²⁸⁹ *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* website <https://www.clr.ie> Organisation Founded by Conradh na Gaeilge in 1927, accessed February 8, 2016.

²⁹⁰ Escbelgium4 1980-2003. ‘Eurovision 1994 Interval Act – Riverdance’, *YouTube*, accessed February 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mC0rWgUqTc> YouTube. First performed 30th April 1994 as *The Point Theatre*, Dublin. Choreographed by Michael Flatley, Original Score by Bill Whelan, Produced by John McColgan and Moya Doherty, Lead Dancers Jean Butler and Michael Flatley.

²⁹¹ Gillian Greer, *Petals*, (Unpublished Script provided by the playwright, 2014)

²⁹² Marina Carr, *On Raftery’s Hill* in ‘Plays 2’, (London: Faber & Faber, 2009).

²⁹³ Mark O’Rowe, *Our Few and Evil Days*, (Dublin: Nick Hern Books, 2014).

²⁹⁴ Abbie Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2006).

²⁹⁵ Caitríona Daly, *Test Dummy*. (Unpublished Script provided by the playwright, 2016).

sexual violence against women including incest, child abuse, coercion and gang rape. The research presented examines the causes and effects of rape culture performance in these plays, and how such notions of ‘toxic masculinity’, ‘toxic femininity’, rape myths, victim blaming and slut-shaming evident in contemporary culture are represented on stage. These are not the only contemporary Irish plays that deal with sexual violence against women but the scope of this research only allows for select analysis and these plays interrogate various aspects of both violence and rape culture.

The third chapter of this dissertation examines the performance of Irish pageantry competitions and their role in contemporary Irish culture. It uses the *Rose of Tralee Festival* as a case study. It discusses how the *Rose of Tralee* can be seen as a support, or a hindrance to fourth wave feminism. It examines both its perpetuation and, potential deconstruction of rape culture. The chapter also explores Erica Murray and Oonagh O’Donovan’s one-woman monologue play *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*.²⁹⁶ This chapter is studying the festival through a lens of cultural performativity along with feminist theory. It uses the ideas raised by Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*²⁹⁷ to critique and address the cultural constructions of ‘conventional beauty ideals’ that are creating this kind of pressure on women and competitors to conform to unrealistic standards. It examines the role of these standards in the competition and the perpetuation of rape culture.

The fourth chapter focuses on Irish Dance performance and competition, and the regulated female body within. It looks at the largest and oldest Irish Dancing organisation, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* (CLRG), and the strict rules and regulations imposed upon women and girls in feiseanna, or competitions, regarding their appearance. It examines how these rules have changed drastically in the twenty-first century. It analyses these rules and focus on how they can be restrictive and misogynist in nature, as they inflict one particular type of limiting conventional femininity on female dancers. It interrogates the link between the aesthetics of performance for female dancers and contemporary rape culture. The theoretical framework for this chapter comes from cultural performativity. The chapter examines the influence of *Riverdance* on contemporary Irish dancing. It also includes a study of the CLRG World Championships in 2017 to investigate contemporary aesthetics. Chapters Three and Four are specifically linked through my direct engagement with the performances. I entered the *Rose of Tralee* in 2013 and I have been an Irish dancer in the CLRG for over twenty years. The research presented is not

²⁹⁶ Erica Murray, Oonagh O’Donovan, ‘*Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*’ (Unpublished Script provided by the playwrights, 2016).

²⁹⁷ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1991).

focused on myself as an artist. Rather, I seek to provide objective analysis with insider knowledge. It is the patriarchal structures and frameworks I examine in a bid to deconstruct rape culture from within.

The four main chapters of this dissertation seek to explore the limiting actions and stereotypes that women are forced into within contemporary performances of feminisms and femininities. They investigate how women may be forced to perform traditional feminine roles or seek to retrieve a sense of agency through breaking from, subverting and denying these stereotyped performances of gender. They examine different facets of rape culture and attempt to demystify and deconstruct this culture. This dissertation is about recognising and challenging contemporary rape culture. Dworkin writes in her preface to *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women*, “I am asking men who come to these pages to walk through the looking glass. And I am asking women to break the mirror. Once we all clean up the broken glass – no easy task – we will have a radical equality of rights and liberty.”²⁹⁸ This dissertation has a similar motivation. Until rape culture is recognised for what it is and acknowledged in all of its many forms, gender equality cannot become a reality.

The four main chapters of this dissertation cover widely varying aspects of contemporary Irish performance. At first glance, it may be difficult to see the inherent link between theatre, beauty pageantry, competitive Irish Dance and the performativity of language for women affected by sexual violence. This dissertation argues that clear connections may be made between these diverse performances when they are analysed through a lens of cultural performativity and a contemporary rape culture framework. Rape culture works to subjugate and dis-empower women by sexualising and objectifying them, while silencing their voices and autonomy. Chapter Three and Chapter Four highlight the ways in which women and children are sexualised and objectified in pageant and dance performance. Chapter One and Chapter Two examine the extreme potential of contemporary rape culture, where acts of sexual violence, and the normalisation of sexual violence have a detrimental effect on the safety of women. All four chapters are examining components of contemporary rape culture in terms of bodily autonomy, agency, power, performative speech and identity in everyday life, popular culture, the media, language and theatre. They are concerned with female empowerment, or the reclamation of empowerment through fourth wave feminist theory and practice. This research contends that women can never be equal in society as long as rape culture prevails.

The concluding chapter draws together all of the arguments presented throughout the dissertation and looks to pinpoint how and in what ways contemporary rape culture

²⁹⁸ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, xvii.

can be deconstructed by fourth wave feminism. The fast-paced nature of fourth wave feminism, and of contemporary culture as a whole, is both a positive and negative attribute. For example, the *#WakingTheFeminists* movement sparked such a response on a national and international level because of the ability for trending hashtags to ‘go viral’ across the Internet and the globe within days, or even hours. This means that ideas spread quickly and are able to gather momentum, but it also means that keeping up with these campaigns and breakthroughs can be challenging. Ultimately, the dissertation will become a historical document that deals with the contemporary moment as it is by the year of its completion and the conclusion sums up the position of fourth wave feminism and rape culture at this time.

Chapter One:

Victim or Survivor?:

The performativity of language for women affected by sexual violence in contemporary
Irish culture

Section One: Introduction

The power and pervasiveness of contemporary rape culture is a unifying theme throughout this dissertation. As is argued in the course of the varying performances analysed, rape culture is not just about the act of sexual violence itself, but it also centres on the construction of sexual violence narratives throughout society as a whole. These narratives range from the representations of sexual violence on stage to the sexualisation and objectification of the female body in social and cultural performances. In order to firmly deconstruct the rape culture narrative, it is vital to understand how the people who directly experience sexual violence have their narrative of violence dictated to them by varying components of rape culture. These components operate as rape myths, victim blaming and slut-shaming behaviours, and ultimately serve to perpetuate and sustain the culture from which they come.

The chapter is exploring the performativity and violence of language when dealing with the trauma of sexual assault and rape in current Irish media and public discourse. It focuses on the use of the words ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ in describing those who have experienced some form of sexual violence, along with the politics of language surrounding ‘rape myths’ and ‘victim blaming’. It looks at the capacity for language to create or destroy a sense of empowerment using Judith Butler’s theories on the performativity of language. It also deals with the power and violent potential of rape culture, and the ability of ‘rape myths’ to detrimentally alter public discourse surrounding sexual violence. It examines how the language used when discussing sexual violence is often gendered, and how this gendering of language seeks to reaffirm oppressive stereotypes for those who experience such violence. The research looks at the increased number of sexual assaults and rapes in Irish universities and how these are key issues intrinsically linked with women’s lives and the performance of feminisms in contemporary Irish society and culture today. Ultimately, it aims to discuss the use of loaded and performative language when considering experiences of sexual violence, and unpack the potential performative authority of such language itself, and of those who engage in uttering such speech acts.

Section Two: Sexual Violence in Irish Law and its Gendered Implications

For the purpose of this chapter, all forms of sexual assault and rape are referred to using the term ‘sexual violence’. In legal terms, the difference between sexual assault and rape comes down to the issue of penetration, but any form of sexual assault or rape may be

defined as an act of sexual violence. As stated by the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre for Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan,

Sexual assault is an act of physical, psychological and emotional violation, in the form of a sexual act, which is inflicted on someone without consent. It can involve forcing or manipulating someone to witness or participate in any sexual acts, apart from penetration of the mouth with the penis, the penetration of anus or vagina (however slight) with any object or the penis, which is rape.¹

Section One of the Irish *Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981* states that a ““**complainant**” means a woman in relation to whom a rape offence is alleged to have been committed.”²

Section Two of the same act states that,

(1) a man commits rape if –

(a) he has unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who at the time of the intercourse does not consent to it, and

(b) at that time he knows that she does not consent to the intercourse or he is reckless as to whether she does or does not consent to it.

(2) It is hereby declared that if at a trial for a rape offence the jury has to consider whether a man believed that a woman was consenting to sexual intercourse, the presence or absence of reasonable grounds for such a belief is a matter to which the jury is to have regard, in conjunction with any other relevant matters, in considering whether he so believed.³

Section 10 of the same Act, entitled ‘Punishment of indecent assault on female’ states that, “10.—(1) If a person is convicted on indictment of any indecent assault upon a female he shall be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.”⁴ There is no similar section written to give protection of males who may experience sexual assault.

The legal definition of rape has since been widened to include the penetration of the anus or mouth with any object, as is stated under Section Four of *The Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990*,

4.—(1) In this Act “rape under section 4” means a sexual assault that includes—

(a) penetration (however slight) of the anus or mouth by the penis, or

¹ Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan, ‘What is Rape and Sexual Assault?’, SRCC, accessed February 2, 2016, <http://www.srcc.ie/frequently-asked-questions-on-rape-or-sexual-assault/what-is-rape-and-sexual-assault.html>

² *Criminal Law (Rape) Act, 1981, Irish Statute Book*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1981/act/10/enacted/en/print#sec2>

³ *Criminal Law (Rape) Act, 1981, Irish Statute Book*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1981/act/10/enacted/en/print#sec2>

⁴ *Criminal Law (Rape) Act, 1981, Irish Statute Book*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1981/act/10/enacted/en/print#sec2>

(b) penetration (however slight) of the vagina by any object held or manipulated by another person.⁵

This section of the Amendment Act also removes the gendered language from the original Act stating that,

(2) A person guilty of rape under *section 4* shall be liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for life.⁶

Although this section of the amended Act has been written as gender neutral, at the time the original Act was written in 1981, the crime of rape was, legally speaking, one solely perpetrated by a man on a woman. The use of gendered binary language throughout the Act is clear as it explicitly states that only a male can do this to a female, and there is no acceptance of the ability of men to rape other men, women to rape men or women, or of those who do not fit the hetero-normative patriarchal gender binary being either a complainant or a perpetrator. Also, none of the section quoted here make reference to paedophilia.⁷ Although this gender-stereotyping is factually incorrect, as it does not accept that anyone other than a man is legally capable of raping anyone other than a woman, the use of gendered language favours the notion that the crime of rape is primarily an act of violence carried out on women by men. American data released by the White House Council on Women and Girls in 2014 suggests that nearly ninety-eight per cent of rapists are male, regardless of the gender of the person or people they assault.⁸ This implies that it is fair to argue that the act of rape is overwhelmingly one committed by men. Nonetheless, due to the very nature of rape statistics being so difficult to corroborate, and the fact that it is estimated that at least two percent of sexual assaults are carried out on males, this use of gendered binary language in Irish Criminal Rape Law is discriminatory. Bourke says that, “Only 1 per cent of incarcerated rapists are women (in America).”⁹ She then argues that this fact may not accurately represent the percentage of women who commit acts of sexual violence. She writes,

When we turn to *sexual* violence, however, girls and women often slip under the radar. A significant proportion of female perpetration fails to be registered in judicial statistics. For instance, women who sexually molest men or other women

⁵ *Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act, 1990, Irish Statute Book*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1990/act/32/enacted/en/print>

⁶ *Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act, 1990, Irish Statute Book*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1990/act/32/enacted/en/print>

⁷ Part Two of the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017* is entitled ‘Sexual Exploitation of Children’ and deals extensively with paedophilia. Sexual violence of an adult and a minor remain separated in Irish Criminal Law.

⁸ *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*, White House Council on Women and Girls and the Office of the Vice President, 2014, accessed 29 February 2016, https://www.knowyourix.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/sexual_assault_report_1-21-14.pdf

⁹ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 212.

are likely to be charged with lewd and obscene conduct rather than indecent assault, thus muddling statistical comparisons between male and female offending. In law enforcement and legal precept, women are assumed to be passive as sexual subjects, in contrast with the active male.¹⁰

This highlights the discriminatory practices at play when dealing with the construction of sexual violence in the law; and gendering the crime of sexual assault is deeply damaging to people of all genders. It is also irresponsible and potentially dangerous for those who feel unable to come forward about their sexually violent experiences through fear that the law will not protect them. For example, even though statistics about the rate of rape and sexual assault in contemporary culture are complicated and will be further considered later in this chapter, statistics suggest that up to fifty per cent of the transgender community will experience sexual violence at some point in their lives.¹¹ Transgender people are excluded from this description of sexual violence entirely, even though the *Gender Recognition Act 2015*¹² has been written into Irish Law.

Rape in marriage was only criminalised in the *Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act, 1990*. Although this Act removed the gendered terminology present in the previous Act of 1981 when discussing the action of rape outside of a married couple, its language is explicitly gendered in criminalising marital rape. Section Five of this amended Act states that, “Any rule of law by virtue of which a husband cannot be guilty of the rape of his wife is hereby abolished,”¹³ and, “Criminal proceedings against a man in respect of the rape by him of his wife shall not be instituted except by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions.”¹⁴ Rape and sexual assault are acts of power exertion over one person or persons. They are not primarily about sexual gratification, but instead, they are about control, supremacy and dominance. According to Irish Law, a woman is not capable of raping her husband; in fact it is not deemed a crime. This gendered language is dangerous on two levels; firstly it delegitimises the potential violent sexual experience of a man at the hands of his wife, but it also fails to accept that a wife would be capable of holding this

¹⁰ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 212.

¹¹ Rape Response Services, ‘National Statistics’, accessed March 17, 2016, http://www.rrsonline.org/?page_id=944 The statistics listed on this site are North American as I could not find any reliable Irish statistics for transgender sexual violence, but it is reasonable to assume that members of the transgender community in Ireland would experience sexual violence at a similar rate.

¹² *Gender Recognition Act 2015*, *The Irish Statute Book*, accessed June 23, 2017, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/25/enacted/en/html>

¹³ *Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act, 1990*, *The Irish Statute Book*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1990/act/32/enacted/en/print>

¹⁴ *Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act, 1990*, *The Irish Statute Book*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1990/act/32/enacted/en/print>

power and dominance over her respective husband.¹⁵ Also, in the year 2015, same sex marriage was legalised in Ireland,¹⁶ and the gendered language of the *Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990* does not protect any person in a same sex marriage or civil partnership who experiences sexual violence at the hands of their husband or wife. As Bourke points out, “The effects of coerced sex are traumatic, irrespective of the sex of the perpetrator. Despite the suffering caused by female perpetrators of sexual violence, their actions are routinely belittled.”¹⁷ If men who experience sexual violence remain unprotected by the law, then such dismissal and belittling will remain common and unchecked.

The use of hetero-normative gendered binary language in describing rape in legal terms is deeply rooted in patriarchal oppression and violent assumptions about the power of women or people who have non-binary gender identities. It sustains both ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’ as it promotes the idea that only men rape women. As previously described, this language is also deeply damaging for men, as both Acts determine that a man could not legally be raped in any circumstance in the initial Act, and not if he was married to the perpetrator in the Amended Act. Such gendering is not limited to Irish Law as, “In recent years even the United Kingdom’s allegedly ‘gender-free’ Sexual Offences Act of 2003 has failed to excise the penis altogether from its definitions of rape. [...] The Home Office admitted that it had debated removing the precondition, but in the end decided that rape ‘as commonly understood’ involves the penis.”¹⁸ This assumption violently rejects men’s suffering and delegitimises their experiences of sexual violence. It can result in men feeling unable to accept that they have experienced rape. It can leave men feeling ‘emasculated’ and unsupported and it ultimately silences them. Such a belief that men cannot be raped, particularly by women, feeds into the construction of toxic ‘normative’ gendered identities as it delegitimises their trauma. This directly correlates to the construction of ‘rape myths’ where one common rape myth perpetuated by this

¹⁵ Another example of the gendering of sexual violence laws can be found in the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017*. Section 28 of this act refers specifically to the crime of incest as one carried out by males, on females. This section reads,

“28. The Act of 1908 is amended by the substitution of the following section for section 1: “1. (1) Any male person who has carnal knowledge of a female person, who is to his knowledge his grand-daughter, daughter, sister or mother, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for life or a lesser term of imprisonment. (2) It shall not be a defence to proceedings for an offence under this section for the defendant to show that the carnal knowledge was had with the consent of the female person.”” *The Irish Statute Book*, accessed June 23, 2017, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/2/section/28/enacted/en/html#sec28>

¹⁶ *Constitution of Ireland, Amending Acts*. Thirty-fourth Amendment of the Constitution (Marriage Equality) Act, 2015 [provided that persons may marry without distinction as to their sex.] 29 August 2015, accessed February 29, 2016,

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/

¹⁷ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 216.

¹⁸ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 213.

gendered language perceives that men cannot be raped. Another myth is that men always enjoy sex with a woman and, as Bourke points out, “More typically, however, female-on-male rape is presented as the source of envy or wry humour.”¹⁹ This gendered language also affects women as it places them in the position of unwitting victim and sees them as incapable of enacting the violent power and dominance of rape over another person. It assumes that women are always in the vulnerable position and need to be protected as such. This language is deeply offensive and patronising to both men and women as it does not sanction or protect those who live with the realities of the infinite range of sexually violent experiences, and it completely ignores the experience of anyone excluded from the heteronormative gender binary. Butler points out that, “gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.”²⁰ This implies that gender is constructed within society and culture. Such an idea insinuates that a person’s ability to, or likelihood of experiencing sexual violence is only linked to their respective gender identity because of how gender has been constructed. Language, especially gendered language, is used to construct this. Butler finishes this essay with what may be read as a warning for what can happen when gender is assumed to be a natural identity that such experiences can be ascribed to,

Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds.²¹

All of this shows that the use of legal language in describing those affected by sexual violence, and rape in particular, can have a vast impact of those affected, as this gendered language shapes the discourse around who can be raped, who can rape, who can have their experiences invalidated and who becomes the perpetual victim.

Section Three: The Power of the Speech Act

In her 1997 text *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Butler explains that ‘excitable speech’ is a legal term. It refers to statements that are deemed to be beyond

¹⁹ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 217.

²⁰ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 197.

²¹ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 197.

the utterer's control because they have been made under duress. Her argument is that all speech is beyond the speaker's control in some sense.²² The argument in this chapter is that language, when used to describe those who have been affected by sexual violence, is a powerful entity that forcibly takes agency from the person who has been violated. This speech act or use of language enacts its own kind of violence.

Butler agrees with J.L. Austin's hypothesis presented in *How To Do Things With Words*,²³ that all utterances are in some sense an act, and that by saying something, we are inherently always doing something. They both argue that all language is ultimately performative in this way. Butler contends that the dominance of a speech act does not take place in the isolated moment of its utterance, but it is the 'condensation' of past, present and even future unforeseen meanings. This leads her to posit that speech acts are always beyond the speaker's control in this sense, as the utterer may not even fully comprehend the power of their language, and this power may exceed the moment of its utterance.²⁴ While the arguments presented in this chapter do not focus on the understandings of the utterer about their speech acts, this research does question and discuss the far-reaching consequences that a violent speech act may have on the person it is directed towards or it is speaking about. For example, repeating rape myths or partaking in slut-shaming and victim blaming behaviours adds to a culture of normalised sexual violence where the very utterance of such speech acts supports the fundamentally violent system from which they come. Rape culture is supported linguistically in this way.

Butler comments on the trauma of having a speech act enacted upon you saying, "After all, to be named by another is traumatic: it is an act that precedes my will, an act that brings me into a linguistic world in which I might then begin to exercise no agency at all."²⁵ This idea supports the mentality presented throughout this chapter, namely that the person who experiences an act of sexual violence becomes doubly disempowered by the use of certain stereotyped language upon them. Initially, disempowerment occurs in the act of violence, and double disempowerment occurs through the use of violent language. The person affected may re-experience their initial physical trauma, or may encounter a new form of meta-physical trauma connected to the use of violent speech acts they come up against. Butler goes on to postulate that even if you choose to reject the name applied to you, that same name will still be forced upon you, and that subjects who do not willingly embrace the names or language used to describe them will continue to be constituted by

²² Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 15.

²³ J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

²⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 14-15.

²⁵ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 38.

these words regardless.²⁶ When this idea is related to experiences of sexual violence, it becomes clear that the loaded use of terms at play in contemporary public discourse surrounding this issue serve to continually oppress those affected violently. As Dworkin argues, “Words matter. O.J. Simpson’s defence team asked Judge Lance A. Ito to order the prosecution to say *domestic discord* rather than *domestic violence* or even *spousal abuse* – already euphemisms for wife-beating – and to disallow the words *battered wife* and *stalker*.”²⁷ This is an example of the potential for manipulation by those in power, or those who commit violent acts, through performative speech acts.

Butler later states that there is a performative power in appropriating the terms by which one has been abused, which ‘depletes’ the term of its degradation and converts it into an affirmative.²⁸ She discusses how the words ‘queer’, ‘black’ and ‘women’ are all examples of this affirmative re-appropriation.²⁹ This concept may be related to contemporary conversations about the prevalence of sexual violence in the present day when discussing the reclamation of the word ‘slut’ by many feminists. When discussing reclaiming the word ‘slut’, Laurie Penny writes,

Slut: just saying the word parts the lips a little too wide. The sloppy vowel-sound sloshed around the underside of the palate and then snatched back, too late, like some cast-off notion of reputation. Slut. It’s fun to say and it’s fun to be, as long as you abide by the principle that if you’re going to break a rule, you may as well snap it over your knee, set fire to the pieces and run away. Slut. It’s a word of power. I’m taking it back.³⁰

Since 2011 there have been marches, also known as ‘slut walks’, held all over the world annually to contest the idea that what a woman wears may be responsible for why she will experience sexual violence. These marches were sparked as a reaction to a talk given to students at the Osgoode Hill Law School in Toronto by a Canadian policeman named Michael Sanguinetti in January 2011. Sanguinetti is reported to have told the students that, “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimised.”³¹ This sparked global outrage as women came together to march and protest the opinion that their choice of clothing indicates their sexual consent. It also launched a conversation on the

²⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 33.

²⁷ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 44.

²⁸ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 158.

²⁹ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 158.

³⁰ Laurie Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), 104.

³¹ Lorraine Courtney, ‘Slutwalks aren’t the lunatic fringe of feminism. They’re a reminder that dressing “like a slut” is never an invitation to rape’, *Journal* (Dublin), November 22, 2015, accessed March 17, 2016,

<http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/slutwalks-arent-the-lunatic-fringe-of-feminism-theyre-a-reminder-that-dressing-like-a-slut-is-never-an-invitation-to-rape-2458301-Nov2015/>

connotations of the word 'slut', one traditionally used in colloquial contemporary society to pass unfavourable judgment on the sexual activities of women. The historical construction of the word 'slut' and its connotations is discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, and 'slut walks' aims to challenge such historically accepted stereotypes of what a 'slut' is. They re-appropriate the term in a bid to associate positive connotations with it, while protesting the theory that dress code has any impact on sexual consent or availability.

The re-appropriation of the term 'slut' has had mixed success. Unlike Butler's example of the re-appropriation of the word 'queer', which now has largely positive connotations in contemporary discourse, 'slut' still remains a contentious word and is constantly used as an insult, or in a derogatory way towards predominantly those who identify as female. Penny points out that historically, "the word 'slut' was used simply to mean any woman who didn't behave: a woman who was 'dirty, untidy or slovenly', a slack servant girl, a woman who failed to keep her house in order and her legs closed before marriage, a woman who invited violence and contempt."³² She then argues that, "Today, in a visual culture sodden with images of shorn and willing female bodies, a slut is any woman with the audacity to express herself sexually. That should really tell you everything you need to know about modern erotic hypocrisy."³³

Butler ends *Excitable Speech* by advocating for the risky practice of appropriating potentially harmful terms stating that, "insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change."³⁴ This approach is appropriate when considering terms such as 'queer' and 'lesbian', as her examples deal with. However, due to the level of patriarchal oppression towards women that has been so deeply ingrained in all facets of society for thousands of years, it becomes difficult for women to re-appropriate derogatory terms for them that are so vehemently instilled in our collective consciousness. To free the word 'slut' fully from its negative associations entails dismantling patriarchy, hetero-normative binaries and rape culture as a whole. Also, as Helen Benedict argues, there is a strong anti-woman bias written into the English language as, "There are 220 words for a sexually promiscuous woman and only 20 for an equally promiscuous man. This anti-woman bias in our language not only reflects the culture of rape but encourages it, because it portrays women as sexual objects, fair prey for the hunter-man. In short, English is a language of

³² Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution*, 104.

³³ Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution*, 104.

³⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 163.

rape.”³⁵ If such a patriarchal linguistic bias is enshrined in language – specifically the English language for the purpose of this research – then it is imperative that such linguistic constructions are examined in order to deconstruct contemporary rape culture. As Alice Stride points out, “If we do not address sexist language, we will not drive the change we need to stop women being viewed as second-class citizens.”³⁶

One central argument of this chapter is that unless those who experience sexual violence are heard and genuinely believed, the stigma and violence associated with speech act utterances towards or about them will not allow for such re-appropriation of language and power. This re-appropriation of language is vital to begin to deconstruct rape myths and rape culture. The power of language and its re-appropriation cannot be underestimated as, “Some might argue that changes in our language can only follow changes in legislation and the social balance of genders, but I believe changes in language can also lead the way.”³⁷ With this in mind, given that the legal construction of sexual violence in Ireland remains inherently flawed and gendered, a change in the way sexual violence is discussed in the mainstream consciousness can lead to a deconstruction of rape culture and potentially a change in the law. It is of vital importance to allow those affected by sexual violence to name themselves and their respective experience. If this does not happen, as can be seen in contemporary society, rape myths guide our understanding of all aspects of sexual violence, and the performative power of the speech act serves to perpetuate rape culture and oppress those who experience it.

Butler also speaks of the notion that language cannot be separated from its history and that prior usages are important in determining the meaning of signs, “there is no purifying language of its traumatic residue, and no way to work through trauma except through the arduous effort it takes to direct the course of its repetition.”³⁸ This complicates the debate around the use of the words ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ in particular, as historic uses of the words affect their connotations in contemporary discourse. This will be discussed more in the next section of this chapter.

Rape can be defined as, “Originally and chiefly: the act or crime, committed by a man, of forcing a woman to have sexual intercourse with him against her will, esp. by means of threats or violence. In later use more generally: the act of forced, non-consenting,

³⁵ Helen Benedict, ‘The Language of Rape’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, eds., Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 125.

³⁶ Alice Stride, ‘This is NOT a Feminist Rant’, in *I Call Myself a Feminist: The View From Twenty-Five Women Under Thirty*, eds., Victoria Pepe, Rachel Holmes, Amy Annette, Alice Stride, Martha Mosse (London: Virago Press, 2015), 79.

³⁷ Helen Benedict, ‘The Language of Rape’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, eds., Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 123.

³⁸ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 38.

or illegal sexual intercourse with another person; sexual violation or assault.”³⁹ However, the origins of the word come from late Middle English and Anglo-Norman French with the use of the words ‘rapt’ and ‘rapture’. In Old French *reperre* was changed to *ravir*, source of ravish in Middle English. The plant name, rape, originally referred to the turnip. It is from Latin *rapum, rapa* ‘turnip’. The size and shape of the turnip can be symbolically linked to the size and shape of the uterus. From the sixteenth century it was largely used to describe “the wanton destruction or spoiling of a place,”⁴⁰ and this initially meant, “the violent seizure of property, later carrying off a woman by force”.⁴¹ The original meanings describe how it has connotations with property and place, with objects primarily, before it was used to describe an act of sexual violence against women. This word association highlights how it creates and sustains the objectification of women as the original meaning for the word entailed carrying out an act on an object that belonged to another man.

The act of committing sexual violence against women is not about sex or fulfilling some sense of sexual desire. Instead it is about the portrayal of power and dominance, as Laura Bates writes, “Rape is *not* a sexual act; it is not the result of a sudden, uncontrollable attraction to a woman in a skimpy dress. It is an act of power and violence. To suggest otherwise is deeply insulting to the vast majority of men, who are perfectly able to control their sexual desires.”⁴² Both in its original and contemporary connotations, the act of rape is about the violence, control and ownership of a person’s body by another without consent. The person who is raped, has their control, agency and sense of bodily autonomy forcibly taken from them as the perpetrator seeks to gain possession of that person. When they also lose their control over the language used to describe them, they become doubly disempowered through the power of the speech act, and rape culture is sustained indefinitely.

Section Four: Victim or Survivor?

The title for this chapter sets the words ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ up in binary opposition. They are the two most commonly used words for describing those who have lived through an experience of sexual violence. They are not the only words used, for example, the word ‘complainant’ is used in legal situations, but they are the most powerful

³⁹ "rape, n.3". OED Online. December 2015. *Oxford University Press*, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158145?rskey=m6ZbDr&result=3>

⁴⁰ "rape, n.3". OED Online. December 2015. *Oxford University Press*, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158145?rskey=m6ZbDr&result=3>

⁴¹ "rape, n.3". OED Online. December 2015. *Oxford University Press*, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158145?rskey=m6ZbDr&result=3>

⁴² Laura Bates, *Everyday Sexism* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 34.

and pervasive. They have been juxtaposed in a binary position to allow for comment on the damaging potential of language when it used in such a definitive way.

The title suggests that the person who has experienced sexual violence can only be a ‘victim’ or a ‘survivor’, never both, never neither. For example, the newspaper article title, ‘Paraguayan rape victim, 14, dies giving birth’⁴³ removes agency from the child who experienced sexual violence through describing her only as a victim. The by-line underneath this article reads, “Doctors say baby is stable, but relying on breathing machine,” and, “Tragic case renews focus on Paraguay’s strict abortion laws.”⁴⁴ The child becomes secondary in the story, as she is a passive victim. Another article from the same newspaper seeks to re-affirm the subjectivity of the person who has experienced the act of sexual violence through using the word ‘survivor’, ‘Rape survivors’ powerful rebuke to Jeff Flake a key moment on day of drama’.⁴⁵ The by-line in this article reads, “Ana Maria Archila and Maria Gallagher confronted Flake in the elevator and told him ‘you’re telling women they don’t matter’. Hours later, he demanded a delay”.⁴⁶ The subjectivity and agency of these women is clearly highlighted here. This is one example of how being described as a victim or a survivor can impact how we view those who experience sexual violence in mainstream discourse. It also highlights how, through the performativity of language, we view victims and survivors differently.

The reason for this chapter is to explore how language can be opened up and how its power potential is malleable. Using ‘victim or survivor’ as a title mimics the ‘Madonna/Whore’ binary that has been imposed on women for thousands of years. Such a binary is limiting, damaging and unaccepting of the spectrum of experiences and potential of women. A woman should not be labelled a ‘victim’ or a ‘survivor’, just as she should not be labelled a ‘Madonna’ or a ‘whore’. These terms are reductive, particularly when used in a binary manner, and become oppressive, just like the hetero-normative patriarchal definition of gender is. The title aims to draw attention to this fact.

⁴³ Santi Carneri, ‘Paraguayan rape victim, 14, dies giving birth’, *The Guardian*, March 22, 2018, accessed September 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/mar/22/paraguayan-rape-victim-14-dies-giving-birth>

⁴⁴ Santi Carneri, ‘Paraguayan rape victim, 14, dies giving birth’, *The Guardian*, March 22, 2018, accessed September 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/mar/22/paraguayan-rape-victim-14-dies-giving-birth>

⁴⁵ David Smith, ‘Rape survivors’ powerful rebuke to Jeff Flake a key moment on day of drama’, *The Guardian*, September 28, 2018, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/28/jeff-flake-elevator-rape-survivors-brett-kavanaugh>

⁴⁶ David Smith, ‘Rape survivors’ powerful rebuke to Jeff Flake a key moment on day of drama’, *The Guardian*, September 28, 2018, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/28/jeff-flake-elevator-rape-survivors-brett-kavanaugh>

The use of the word ‘victim’ in describing those who experience sexual violence is an important device in maintaining the oppressor/oppressed power struggle that sustains rape culture. The term victim is a word applied to anyone who has experienced a crime or violation in any form, but, when dealing with those who experience sexual violence, it is entrenched in rape culture, and arguably it serves to silence or generalise the ‘victim’s’ experience. The term ‘victim’ is used in conjunction with ‘complainant’ by An Garda Síochána, and on its own by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre when they refer to anyone who has undergone an instance of sexual violence.⁴⁷ It is also the word most commonly used in media articles about cases of sexual violence.

A ‘victim’ can be described as, a person who has been harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action,⁴⁸ or, a person who has come to feel helpless and passive in the face of misfortune or ill-treatment.⁴⁹ The use of the word ‘helpless’ is key here. Helpless means that a person is beyond help, that they cannot get better, that their problem is on-going and will not change. When the word ‘victim’ is used to describe a person, who has lived through an experience or experiences of sexual violence, it has far reaching consequences and implications for the identity and mental wellbeing of the person involved. According to linguistic definition and cultural construction, to identify as a victim is to take on the role of the person who is without help and for whom, their situation will not improve or be repaired.

Some women choose to identify as a victim of sexual violence and it is important that they have the right to do so. As discussed throughout this research, the most important point when dealing with the terminology ascribed to those affected by sexual violence is that it is chosen by the person affected. As stated in Roxanne Gay’s quote in the title of the introductory chapter, it is through having your own voice and the ability to name your own experiences that empowerment will come. However, the blanket acceptance of ‘victim’ as an appropriate term to apply to all people who have been affected by instances of sexual violence, coupled with the historical connotations of the word, support an inherently violent speech act utterance that seeks to doubly disempower the so called ‘victim’.

When discussing the use of the words ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ throughout *Rape, Challenging Contemporary Thinking*, Miranda A. H. Horvath and Jennifer M. Brown state at the beginning of the book that, “The majority of authors have chosen to use victims: for

⁴⁷ Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, ‘Facts and Information about Sexual Violence and Rape’, *DRCC*, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.drcc.ie/get-help-and-information/facts-and-info-about-sexual-violence-and-rape/>

⁴⁸ "victim, n.". OED Online. March 2016. *Oxford University Press*, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223196?rskey=N02fM0&result=1>

⁴⁹ "victim, n.". OED Online. March 2016. *Oxford University Press*, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223196?rskey=N02fM0&result=1>

some this is because they are working with police data which identifies them as such, for others it might be a wish to identify the harm that has been done to them by the perpetrator. The term survivor may also imply the woman has recovered from the trauma, whereas the term victim implies she is still suffering.”⁵⁰ This justification is problematic as it genders the ‘victim’ as female,⁵¹ without acknowledging this gendering, thus ignoring the fact that not all victims of sexual violence are female. Linking ‘female’ with ‘victim’, when a victim is defined as ‘helpless’, also implies passivity in performances of a female gender identity.

Bourke writes in a gender-neutral manner when discussing her choice of language, stating that she, “use[s] the word ‘victim’ in order to draw attention to the hurt of abuse; it is not a moral judgement, nor an identity. Many ‘victims’ are survivors.”⁵² She goes on to discuss the implications of using both the word ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’, writing,

In more recent years victims are represented as ‘irremediably and unidirectionally shaped by the traumatic experience of rape and hence incapable of dealing with anything but their own inner turmoil’. Even labels such as ‘survivor’ serve to construct an identity based on ‘a before’ and ‘an after’ attack, thus forcing victims of sexual violence to (yet again) define themselves in terms of the actions of the perpetrator.⁵³

The argument presented here is that applying the word ‘victim’ to those who have gone through sexual violence is damaging and ultimately perpetuates ‘rape myths’ and ‘rape culture’ by defining that person as a victim who has become helpless. For the purpose of this research, that victim is female, and, for that woman, the act of violence is never ending; she can never stop being that person whose life was eternally altered by an act of violence carried out on her against her will. Arguably, the use of ‘victim’ in relation to instances of sexual violence is a unique case where the whole purpose of the word is to oppress the person involved and keep them from moving past a traumatic point of their life. Any woman choosing to self-identify as a victim is perfectly entitled to do so, this argument is that the word cannot be forced onto a woman. In short, there is no one ‘catch all’ term that may be applied to women in this circumstance. This research argues that the wide use of

⁵⁰ Miranda A Horvath, Jennifer Brown, *RAPE Challenging Contemporary Thinking* (Devon: Willan Publishing, 2009), 5.

⁵¹ I have found that the majority of writers, critics and academics often gender the person who has experienced sexual violence as female throughout their work. This is a deeply problematic assumption and can be related to Gittos’ use of the rape myth that he will never experience sexual violence on account of his male gender identity. I do not believe that most writers are trying to sustain rape culture through using gendered terminology, instead they are commenting on the fact that the vast majority of those directly affected by sexual violence are female. However, this ultimately adds to the rape myth that men cannot be raped, and it is another issue that needs to be tackled and eradicated in order to deconstruct contemporary rape culture.

⁵² Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 7.

⁵³ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 430.

this word through the media, rape crisis support services and police proceedings oppresses the woman and violently stereotypes her through cultural associations with language. As previously mentioned, language, and English in this case, is a phallogentric language of rape that supports rape culture through its historically hetero-patriarchal construction. It can be argued that the word is intended to assist and support the women it labels but, as Butler points out in, *Excitable Speech*, “oppressive language is not a substitute for the experience of violence. It enacts its own kind of violence.”⁵⁴

This chapter aims to open up the terminology associated with women who have experienced sexual violence and to support self-identification through language. The word ‘survivor’ was originally used to describe a person who shared a tenancy agreement or owned a property with someone else and who outlived that person and dates back to 1624.⁵⁵ It literally meant living longer than another person. A survivor is a person who lives on past a traumatic experience or event, especially a person remaining alive after an event in which others have died, or, a person who copes well with difficulties in their life.

Linguistically, the main difference between the meaning of the words victim and survivor is the sense of movement and progression implied and present in the description of a survivor. This is not something associated with the definition of a victim. Being a survivor implies accepting that something traumatic has happened, emotionally and physically working through it and then leaving it in the past. So, based on linguistic and cultural constructions of the word, potentially for the victim of sexual violence, the attack remains ever present with the victim, but for the survivor, they are able to move past the experience or experiences. When such terms are applied to a woman who has experienced sexual violence, her own identity is silenced through the historically constructed and widely understood definitions of the terms.

The word ‘victim’ is a passive noun while the word ‘survive’ is an active verb drawn from the stem verb ‘to survive’. That means that linguistically, on a very profound level, there is a definite distinction between the passivity of the noun and active nature of the verb. A noun is an object, meaning that it has things done to it and does not have its own power. It is acted upon, as opposed to acting itself and imposing on other things. On a fundamental level, a noun is passive while a verb is active. This difference highlights the duality of performativity, of an active doing or, of having a thing done.

As Butler discussed in her 2015 talk at TCD, “We do not only act through the speech act, speech acts act upon us. There’s a distinct performative act to find out that how

⁵⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 9.

⁵⁵ "survivor, n.". OED Online. December 2015. *Oxford University Press*, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/195113?redirectedFrom=survivor>

you are regarded is summed up by a name that you yourself did not know.”⁵⁶ In naming a person who has gone through an experience of sexual violence as a ‘victim’, a set of cultural and social stigmas and meanings, which stem from our association with language, are attributed to that woman, none of which she necessarily identifies with. The act of naming is inherently violent, particularly in the case of sexual violence.

For ethical and moral reasons, this research is not suggesting that the use of the word ‘victim’ needs to be replaced with ‘survivor’, for that would simply be another violent speech act; instead, this chapter is trying to put forward the word ‘survivor’ as an example of another word that could be chosen by a woman who has lived through an experience or experiences of sexual violence, and also to dispel the notion that one must eternally be either a ‘victim’ or a ‘survivor’. No one term can be used to describe every woman,⁵⁷ but this is an argument for the performativity and power of language in dealing with women who have undergone sexual violence and the importance for self-identification with personal terminology, and the ability to re-name oneself as is appropriate. For example, a person who has experienced sexual violence may feel like a victim one day, yet may identify as a survivor the next. It is important that this person is allowed the space within language to shift their identity and represent their experience linguistically as they see fit. Ultimately sexual violence presents itself as a highly complex and contentious issue in contemporary culture and throughout current public discourse, and this argument is trying to unpack these complications in a bid to deconstruct contemporary rape culture.

Section Five: Deconstructing the ‘Rape Culture is a Myth’ Argument

In order to argue for the performative potential of language for women affected by sexual violence, it is necessary to assume that contemporary rape culture is both real and damaging. This dissertation reasons throughout that rape culture is very real and incredibly damaging in the twenty-first century, particularly for women. Evidence for the existence of rape culture is provided repeatedly, especially in the Introduction Chapter and Chapter Two. However, in some areas of contemporary mainstream discourse, there has been an

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, ‘Vulnerability and Resistance Revisited’ Public Lecture given by Judith Butler at Trinity College Dublin 5 February 2015, *Sound Cloud*, accessed February 15, 2015, <https://soundcloud.com/joke-dufourmont/judith-butler-vulnerability-and-resistance-revisited>

⁵⁷ Potentially a new term could be coined in order to describe a person who has been affected by sexually violence, a term that would not have the historical and cultural connotations of ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’. However, due to the multiplicities inherent in experiences of violence, it is not possible to sum up each individual’s experience using one term. Throughout the dissertation, the phrase ‘women affected by sexual violence’ is used continually as this is an objective statement of fact. I do not think it is possible to coin a new term that could firstly be representative of all who experience such violence, and secondly, remain free from subjective cultural constructions.

argument made that rape culture is a myth created by feminists, or ‘feminazis’,⁵⁸ to demonise men. This research contends that such an argument is dangerous and easily contestable. Much of this discourse takes place in online forums such as the Men’s Rights Activist group *Return of Kings*,⁵⁹ and in the Sub-Reddit group *The Red Pill*, hosted on the open discussion website *Reddit*.⁶⁰ As Kate Harding writes,

Reddit, which calls itself “the front page of the Internet”, is essentially a giant message board covering countless subjects, including things like feminism, antirape activism, and the terrible behaviour of trolls. But owing to its patchy moderation practices and 64 percent male user base, Reddit can also start to feel like the world’s largest meeting of the He-Man Woman-Hater’s Club.⁶¹

The Red Pill has been described as,

A collection of ideas encompassed by what its subscribers refer to as the "manosphere," a number of loosely-associated blogs that focus on masculinity and personal philosophy for men. At the surface level there's nothing terribly contentious about this, but if you click around one or two layers deeper, you'll find plenty of examples why chatter from this gallery regularly turns heads.⁶²

There is little published printed work that defends the argument that rape culture does not exist and that men are actually the ones experiencing gender discrimination in contemporary society. However, as referenced in the introductory chapter, Luke Gittos, a British solicitor who practices criminal law and “has extensive experience in defending allegations of rape and sexual violence”⁶³, published *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth: From Steubenville to Ched Evans* in 2015. This book summarises many of the arguments that seek to disprove the existence of rape culture and this dissertation critiques

⁵⁸ The term ‘feminazi’ is increasingly used by misogynists and ‘men’s rights activists’ as a way to silence self-described feminists. The performativity of this term shall be discussed later in the chapter.

⁵⁹ The *Return of Kings* group was discussed in detail in the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

⁶⁰ Reddit is a user content generated site where there are many group and discussions based on a wide variety of topics from politics to gardening. While the majority of the site is used as a platform for people from all over the world with similar interests to interact with each other in a positive way, numerous groups are hosted on the website that specifically engage in derogatory, injurious and negative speech, often aimed at women and minority groups. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the website previously hosted a group entitled ‘The Philosophy of Rape’ where users would discuss, among other misogynist vitriol, who should be raped and how to get away with it. Although that particular group was shut down by the website administrators in 2015, the group ‘The Red Pill’ continues to thrive in 2017. In April 2017, it was revealed that a Republican legislator for New Hampshire in the United States, Robert Fisher, was the founder and original moderator for the group. *Reddit* itself remains the fourth most popular website in America and the seventh most popular throughout the rest of the world in 2017.

⁶¹ Kate Harding, *Asking For It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture – and What We Can Do About It* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2015), 187.

⁶² Dylan Love, ‘Inside Red Pill, The Weird New Cult For Men Who Don't Understand Women’, *Business Insider*, September 15, 2013, accessed May 11, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-red-pill-reddit-2013-8?IR=T>

⁶³ This statement is printed on the back cover of Gittos’ book; Luke Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth: From Steubenville to Ched Evans* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2015).

and deconstructs his book, as it is exemplary of this mode of thinking. It is important to focus heavily in this section on this book because of how it engages in such a plethora of rape myths, victim blaming, slut-shaming techniques, while he performs ‘toxic masculinity’ throughout. This book is an excellent example of the hypocrisy of the ‘rape culture is a myth’ argument.

The Introduction states that the dissertation deliberately uses the arguments of female theorists where possible. This is a radical political choice to empower women and to promote the often-silenced female voice. It is also done because of the nature of the research. In order to deconstruct rape culture, its causes and components need to be understood. Although rape culture does affect men, it disproportionately affects women, and for this reason, the female voice holds the weight of lived experience of rape culture. However, male voices are included where relevant and helpful to the cause of deconstructing rape culture, as it is vital that people of all genders engage in such a conversation.

In his essay focusing on working as a rape prevention educator, Richard Orton describes how he initially felt defensive and offended by women describing their experiences of rape culture. He writes, “Defensiveness is, still, something I have to be conscious of when challenged by women. When women express their experiences and feelings honestly, it may be difficult to hear them. Their words, coming from this parallel world, may feel assaultive and hurtful. Denial and defensiveness can be reflexive responses in such situations.”⁶⁴ In these lines, Orton is commenting on his own prejudices and biases related to his male privilege. He goes on to note that, “Constant exposure to this information forced me, slow as I was, to open up to my own feelings – not my thoughts – about the fear and violence that many women live with simply because they are women.”⁶⁵ So Orton made a conscious decision throughout his work in the anti-rape movement to listen to the often-silenced female voice, while challenging his own preconceptions and biases. This is an act that can help to deconstruct rape culture, similar to one of the main aims of this dissertation, as it engages in a conversation with those most directly affected by a contemporary rape culture narrative. It is absolutely vital that men are encouraged to enter into this discussion, as this is one way in which ‘toxic masculinity’ can be fully deconstructed. As Kimmel points out,

⁶⁴ Richard S. Orton, ‘Learning to Listen: One Man’s Work in the Antirape Movement’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, eds., Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 240.

⁶⁵ Richard S. Orton, ‘Learning to Listen: One Man’s Work in the Antirape Movement’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, eds., Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 240.

Part of transforming a rape culture means transforming masculinity, encouraging and enabling men to make other choices about what we do with our bodies, insisting that men utilise their own agency to make different sorts of choices. To ignore men, to believe that women alone will transform a rape culture, freezes men in a posture of defensiveness, defiance, and immobility.⁶⁶

With this in mind, women must be listened to and men must be encouraged to enter the conversation in a respectful manner, devoid of notions of male privilege and behaviours associated with a performance of ‘toxic masculinity’. In contrast with this, Gittos’s book, as exemplary of the logic of rape culture deniers, does not appear to engage in a productive conversation about rape culture, but instead offers one man’s perspective that fails to remove the performance of male privilege from its narrative.

The intention of rape culture deniers is to highlight and examine how rape culture is a myth. However, arguably the logic employed, and assumptions made by deniers actually serve to reaffirm the existence of rape culture. For example, Gittos blindly accepts the rape myth that everyone who experiences sexual violence is female, and that every perpetrator of sexual violence is male. With the exception of the example he uses to open his introductory chapter, all other examples given in the book consist of a female who experiences violence and a male perpetrator. His opening example involved a case in 2015 where one sixteen-year-old boy pleaded guilty to repeatedly raping a fourteen-year-old boy. He argues that the sentencing of the rapist was too harsh and that, “For all we know, the interactions between the two boys were the actions of two boys confused about their sexuality who felt like they had no avenue to express their uncertainty other than with one another.”⁶⁷ Such downplaying of sexual violence continues throughout the book.

The language used by rape culture deniers is consistently gendered, and Gittos goes so far as to imply he will never experience sexual violence because he is male, “rape victims can suffer in ways I will never have to imagine.”⁶⁸ Such an assumption supports the existence of rape culture in two ways. Firstly, it implies that males categorically do not experience sexual violence. This is factually incorrect and stigmatising for males who have experienced sexual violence. Secondly, implying that only females risk experiencing sexual violence insinuates that all females should be fearful of assault. In *RAPE: A History From 1860 To The Present*, Joanna Bourke discusses Susan Brownmiller’s comparison of racist lynching to rape culture, “For Brownmiller rape was the means by which all men

⁶⁶ Michael Kimmel, ‘Men, Masculinity, and The Rape Culture’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, eds., Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 156.

⁶⁷ Luke Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth: From Steubenville to Ched Evans* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2015) 2.

⁶⁸ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 16.

intimidated all women. She drew an analogy with the American South, where *some* white men lynched *some* black men but the entire African-American community was held in intimidation and fear. For her the same was the case with rape: some men did it but all men accrued the benefits.”⁶⁹ While I would not agree that all men benefit from rape, I do agree that all women remain in a state of fear of sexual violence and this is a by-product of rape culture. Gittos implying that he is above that fear as a result of his gender reinforces the idea that women cannot hold the same assumption, and thus reinforces the structure of rape culture.

In Kimmel’s essay on masculinity and rape culture, he notes that, “A recent survey asked high school students what they were most afraid of. The girls answered that they were most afraid of being assaulted, raped, killed. The boys? They said that they were most afraid of ‘being laughed at’.”⁷⁰ Kimmel is using this survey to point out the crisis point ‘normative’ masculinity has reached, and is reflecting on the pervasive power of ‘toxic masculinity’ in contemporary culture. However, this research contends that it simultaneously highlights the gender divide when dealing with sexual violence. Females have a genuine fear of sexual violence, while males would not think to be fearful of it. It is factually correct that females are significantly more likely to experience sexual violence than males, but assuming that males will not experience it simply because they are male feeds into a dangerous rape myth about the gendered construction of sexual violence. This myth ensures that the patriarchal power balance of contemporary rape culture remains intact.

This chapter examines the use of the words ‘victim’ and survivor’ when applied to women who have experienced sexual violence. This is because language is performative and applying terms to women who do not necessarily identify them, risks silencing and disempowering these women as language used to describe them is violently ascribed without consent. One of the main problems with the use of the words ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ is the socially constructed meanings that are inherently applied to such language. Both words have historical and social significance, and rape culture deniers actively engage in reiterating such dangerous stereotypes attached to these words. For example, “The book is not replete with ‘survivor stories’ – a phrase with which I have a lot of difficulty, given that it suggests that rape inherently carries the possibility of some kind of internal ‘death’ – and does not dwell on the details of particular rape allegations.”⁷¹ He proceeds to use the word ‘victim’ throughout the rest of the book. His point about this use of language is dangerous on several levels.

⁶⁹ Joanna Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present* (London: Virago Press, 2007), 141.

⁷⁰ Kimmel, ‘Men, Masculinity, and The Rape Culture’, 146.

⁷¹ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 16.

Firstly, he cannot separate the use of the words from their culturally ascribed meanings. This means that he sees a victim as a passive being, one who has things done to them. He takes the word survivor at its literal meaning, that being a person who survives a particular event. The argument of this chapter is that when blanket meanings are attached to words ascribed to people who have experienced violence, the person who experiences the violence is ultimately silenced, doubly disempowered – through the initial act of violence and again when silenced after the fact – and unable to self-identify with language. This silencing is a cornerstone of contemporary rape culture.

Secondly, he says that he has never experienced sexual violence and believes that he never will. With this in mind, how can he comment on how someone who has experienced sexual violence may or may not feel internally? The phrase ‘some kind of internal death’ is dismissive, patronising and deeply injurious. His arrogance in pertaining to understand how someone who has experienced such violence may feel or identify is ultimately silencing as he has passed a judgement, clouded by his admitted lack of experience and perceived male privilege. In this way, he is complicit in sustaining contemporary rape culture.

One of the major problems with interrogating and deconstructing rape culture is the use of misinformation or allusive ‘facts’ throughout research. As is discussed in the next section of this chapter, when dealing with rape statistics, it is difficult to accurately quote reliable figures to back up any claim pertaining to how many people experience, have experienced, or are likely to experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. Removing numerical statistics from the equation, all other facts and statements used when discussing rape culture should be provable, reliable and based in fact. Rape myths can be created and sustained when due diligence is not undertaken to provide accurate information. At several points throughout the book, Gittos provides information presented as fact, without any proof of his statements. This serves to confuse and mislead the reader. For example, he praises Joanna Bourke’s *RAPE: A History From 1860 To The Present* writing that she, “wrote what is arguably the most comprehensive history of rape in recent decades.”⁷² He then implies that the following quotation is taken from this particular book, without providing a footnote or direct reference to the book,

By subsuming (the problem of rape) under a broad term like ‘rape culture’, it obscures the identities of both rapist and raped. There is also an unfortunate tendency for those who argue for a ‘rape culture’ to link it with masculinity. I seek to argue that rapists are not part of a ‘culture’ but are the inadequate rejects of a culture of masculinity... The idea that Western society is a ‘rape culture’ is one of

⁷² Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 9.

those phrases that are churned out by people who like thinking in clichés... The notion that ‘all men are rapists, rape fantasists, or beneficiaries of a rape culture’ (the most important category) is simply not true. It is not good politics either.⁷³

No footnote is provided directly after this quote, as is done with other quotes throughout the book, no notes are listed at the end of any chapter, and no bibliography is included at the end of the book. In short, this quote is provided, implying that it comes from Bourke’s book on the history of rape, without its existence being proved.⁷⁴ I contacted Bourke by email on June 19, 2017 to enquire about her knowledge of the quote. She informed me that she had made the remarks, but in a private email exchange with him, he had taken her words out of context and he had no permission to quote the private email in his book.⁷⁵ When discussing masculinity and the aims of her book, Bourke writes,

‘Men’ are not rapists. Some men are. A few women are. People choose their ‘coming into being’ from within a range of discursive practices circulating within their historical time and place. Their choices construct themselves as speaking subjects. This book is an exploration of some of the most common narratives of rape and sexual abuse, with an emphasis on how these stories have changed over time. Because of the huge discursive power wielded by professions like law, criminology, psychology and psychiatry, much of my analysis focuses on their languages of violation. In the conclusion I will be looking at alternative narratives available for (primarily male) human subjects – that is, narratives that place sexual aggression outside the threshold of the human.⁷⁶

As can be seen from this quote, Bourke is actively trying to deconstruct rape culture through tackling the gendered patriarchal construction of this culture. She does state that not all men are rapists, which is factually correct, but does not write it in the way it is suggested she does. Such a misrepresentation of Bourke’s work actively supports rape culture as he seeks to blur the line between fact and fiction to argue that a scholar such as Bourke, who has written widely on the subject of rape, agrees with his opinion.

⁷³ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 9. This quote has been included in full and is unedited from how it appears in Gittos’ book.

⁷⁴ I searched this particular book for her ‘quote’ and was unable to find it. I also searched her other book focused on sexual violence, *Rape: Sex, Violence, History*, and could not find it. I also conducted an extensive online search to see if Bourke has made this statement in any of her other books, or as part of any interview, and the only search result for this quote comes from its inclusion in Gittos’ book. I contacted Bourke by email on June 19, 2017 to enquire about her knowledge of the quote. She informed me that she had made the remarks, but in a private email exchange with Gittos, he had taken her words out of context and he had no permission to quote the private email in his book.

⁷⁵ Bourke told me that their email exchange occurred on March 8, 2015. This is International Women’s Day. So, rather ironically, Gittos ignored Bourke’s agency and voice through using her words without permission on a day that is specifically meant to be a celebration of women’s equality, and a day to highlight inequalities women still face, such as being silenced.

⁷⁶ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 13-14.

Gittos continues with seemingly deliberately obtuse discussion in the course of the chapter entitled ‘The Real Roots of Rape Culture’. He discusses the inclusion of the word ‘intimate’ in the 2015 British Act, *The Serious Crime Act*.⁷⁷ He claims that, “The criminalisation of ‘controlling or coercive’ behaviour shows that the law is blind to the reality of relationships. Some degree of ‘coercion and control’ is fundamental to any functioning relationship. [...] Anyone who claims that they have never controlled or coerced their partners, even in a way which has a ‘serious’ effect on them, is likely to be lying.”⁷⁸ This statement is made without referencing the ways in which such legislation can positively impact on people who are seriously ‘coerced and controlled’ by their partners. By claiming that anyone who has ever been in a functioning relationship has ‘coerced or controlled’ their partner, the very real and dangerous situations that people affected by intimate partner violence live with are dismissed and silenced, and abuse is normalised. It is implied that this threat is not as serious as lawmakers, or those who research and work in the area of domestic abuse, would lead people to believe. Opinion is stated as fact, and is thus creating confusion for the reader. This ultimately sustains rape culture. The criminalisation of stalking is then discussed, “Anyone who has been in love is likely to have gone at least some way to behaving in a manner which could be defined as stalking.”⁷⁹ Again, opinion is presented as fact, while those actually affected by this sort of violence are silenced. This occurs through not engaging with any literature that argues against this view. Male privilege, obtained through access to patriarchal status, is exerted, and ‘toxic masculinity’ is performed, while any marginalised or violated voice is silenced. Such an action by rape culture deniers serves to perpetuate rape culture indefinitely.

After such misinformation is established as fact, those who experience sexual violence are further silenced through an apparent lack of understanding of coercion and non-consensual sexual activity. He writes, “‘Unwanted’ is not the same as non-consensual. A person can agree to have sex even if they don’t want it for all sorts of reasons. Even if sex in a particular situation were non-consensual, whether you were raped would depend in part on the state of mind of the person you are accusing.”⁸⁰ This statement relies on numerous easily contestable rape myths.

Firstly, he says that a person can agree to sex for many reasons. This is a fair point. However, he fails to discuss any such reasons and implies that consent given under duress or coercion is still adequate consent. Given that he previously failed to realise the magnitude of what ‘coercion and control’ can entail, it is fair to argue that with this

⁷⁷ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 44.

⁷⁸ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 44-45.

⁷⁹ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 45.

⁸⁰ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 54.

statement, he also does not respect the danger of coercive and controlling behaviour when dealing with experiences of sexual violence. For example, a woman told that her children will be beaten if she does not engage in sexual intercourse with her husband cannot freely give consent. In the same way, a man with a knife at his throat cannot freely give consent to unwanted sexual activities. Although these are hypothetical situations, they represent the intricacies of providing ‘consent under duress’. As he does not interrogate the reasons why someone may agree to sexual activities when they do not want to, he silences those who experience such violence.

Secondly, he simultaneously blames the person who experiences the sexual violence. In stating that unwanted sexual experiences differ from non-consensual experiences, he is implying that those who engage in unwanted sexual experiences cannot be raped. In the two hypothetical situations here given, it is clear that consent is coerced and not freely given, but it is implied that these people are not raped. So is it implied that had they resisted they would have been raped? This is a dangerous, silencing and victim blaming idea to argue.

Thirdly, he claims that whether or not you have been raped depends on what the person who has raped you thinks. Now it is fair to argue that this is a requirement in a court of law, where the legal definition of consent has been constructed in such a way as to respect the perpetrator’s belief in non-consent. Sarah Bryan O’Sullivan explains why this is a problematic construction with regards to Irish Law, “Absence of consent is not sufficient to satisfy the mens rea⁸¹ of the offence of rape. What in fact is required is absence of consent, coupled with the male’s belief in that absence, a belief that does not need to meet any requirement of reasonableness. Such an approach significantly limits any space for the consideration of the woman’s consent.”⁸² He does not specify that he is referencing only legal cases when making his statement, and also does not comment on how this construction of consent is problematic. While it may be possible in certain situations that a rapist may not realise at the time that their actions constituted an act of sexual violence,⁸³ it is also possible that a rapist will know they have coerced someone into engaging in sexual relations with them, but can choose to lie about this, or rationalise it away later. Suggesting

⁸¹ Criminal offences and prosecutions generally rely on two elements, namely the ‘actus rea’, or physical element and the ‘mens rea’, or mental intent element. It is usually necessary to prove both in order to convict a criminal of an offence.

⁸² Sarah Bryan O’Sullivan, ‘Consent and its Construction in Rape Trials in Ireland: A Feminist Analysis’, in *Gender and Metamorphosis*, Vol.1, No.1, 2015, 9.

⁸³ Thordis Elva, Tom Stranger, ‘Our Story of Rape and Reconciliation’, *YouTube*, February 13, 2017, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyPoqFcvt9w>
This is a joint talk given by Elva and Stranger on Stranger’s rape of Elva when Elva was sixteen years old and Stranger was eighteen years old and the pair were dating. While Stranger did not initially view his actions as those of a rapist, the pair reconnected years after the assault and Stranger realised what he had done.

that rape depends on the rapist defining it as such once again silences those who experience the violence. In contrast to this definition of rape, Bourke writes,

I have proceeded on the principle that sexual abuse is any act called such by a participant or third party. The definition of sexual abuse has two central components. First, a person has to identify a particular act as sexual, however the term 'sexual' is defined. Second, that person must also claim that the act is non-consensual, unwanted or coerced, however they may wish to identify those terms.⁸⁴

These definitions operate in stark contrast to each other. Bourke accepts that coerced and unwanted sexual experiences are akin to non-consensual acts. She also does not rely on the perpetrator to claim that an act is sexual violence in order for it to be deemed by others as such. Bourke presents an objective definition while Gittos relies on dismissive rape culture rhetoric to put forward his own subjective definition. This is exemplary of his entire argument, and of the arguments proposed by rape culture deniers. Opinion is presented as fact, the intricacies of rape culture and sexual violence are not discussed, and established rape myths are relied upon to support his personal bias and prejudice. This is representative of numerous behaviours of 'toxic masculinity' as uniformed male privilege is here performed.

Contemporary rape culture is very real and very dangerous, and instead of contesting its structure, rape culture deniers actively add to its narrative. Ironically, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth: From Steubenville to Ched Evans* actively supports and sustains the privileged culture from which it comes instead of proving it does not exist. In 2013 Judith Butler was awarded an honorary degree from McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.⁸⁵ In her opening address on the value of reading and the humanities, Butler stated that we must, "Know the difference between raw prejudice and distortion, and sound, critical judgement. The first step toward nonviolence, which is surely an absolute obligation we all bear, is to begin to think carefully and to ask others to do the same."⁸⁶ Gittos does not differentiate between distortion and critical judgement throughout his book, and it ultimately perpetuates the violence associated with rape culture narratives and baseless rhetoric. His un-intentioned promoting and sustaining of contemporary rape

⁸⁴ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 9.

⁸⁵ McGill University, 'A dozen outstanding individuals to get honorary degrees', *McGill University*, May 13, 2013, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.mcgill.ca/newsroom/channels/news/dozen-outstanding-individuals-get-honorary-degrees-226752>

⁸⁶ Maria Popova, 'Philosopher Judith Butler on the Value of the Humanities and Why We Read', *BrainPickings*, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2013/06/07/judith-butler-mcgill-2013-commencement-address/>

The full transcript is embedded in the article referenced. This quote begins at 6:55.

culture in such a way is mirrored through much of the ‘rape culture is a myth’ rhetoric permeating current cultural discourse.

Section Six: Deconstructing Rape Myths and the ‘Dark Numbers’

Sexual violence is one of the most pervasive human rights violations that faces the world today. It completely devastates lives, fractures communities and stalls development. It is a violent and invasive weapon of warfare. Statistics from the United Nations Development Fund for Women 2008 show that, “for women aged between 15 and 44, rape and domestic violence are higher risk factors for death and disability than are cancer, war and motor vehicle accidents.”⁸⁷ The United Nations Women Annual Report for 2014-2015 states that even though in 1993 the UN General Assembly published the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women to provide a framework for action against the pandemic, in 2015, one in three women worldwide were still experiencing physical or sexual violence.⁸⁸ As Bourke writes in her chapter ‘Getting Away with Rape’, “Writing this chapter made me angry. One statistic does it: in the UK today only 5 per cent of rapes reported to the police ever end in a conviction. [...] (In Europe) only Ireland has a lower conviction rate than Britain.”⁸⁹ As Dworkin argues, “It is a fiction that male assaults against women are punished by law. In any woman’s life, most are not.”⁹⁰ This is a direct result of the rape culture narrative.

The experience of sexual violence and rape culture does not exclusively concern women or girls, especially when considering the levels of child sexual abuse committed against boys, but it is imperative to note that statistically females are at a much higher risk of facing some form of sexual violence during their lifetime. This can be seen in Ireland with the annual report of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre for 2013 stating that 78% of those who made contact with the Centre in 2013 were female (21.6% of callers identified as male and 0.4% identified as transgender).⁹¹ On a wider scale, studies show that, “According to a 2013 global review of available data, 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced

⁸⁷ Horvath, Brown, *RAPE Challenging Contemporary Thinking*, 17.

Original Source: United Nations Development Fund for Women (2008) *Violence Against Women facts and Figures*. Originally Accessed December 10, 2008, http://www.unifem.org/attachments/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures_violence_against_women_2007.pdf

⁸⁸ ‘UN Women Annual Report 2014-2015’, *United Nations*, accessed February 4, 2016, [http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/annual%20report%202014-2015%20\(1\).pdf?v=1&d=20150727T164001](http://www2.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/annual%20report%202014-2015%20(1).pdf?v=1&d=20150727T164001)

⁸⁹ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 389.

⁹⁰ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 201.

⁹¹ ‘Dublin Rape Crisis Centre Annual Report 2013’, *DRCC*, accessed February 3, 2016, http://www.drcc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/DRCC_Report_2013.pdf

either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. Also, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.”⁹²

It is estimated that one in seventy-one men will be raped at some point in their life.⁹³ This percentage increases for men who are incarcerated. Unquestionably this is still a statistic that is abhorrent and needs to be eradicated, but there is still an estimated dramatic difference between the numbers of women affected by sexual violence and the number of men. Also, as Ann J. Cahill points out in *Rethinking Rape*, “Rape is, for many feminists, the ultimate expression of a patriarchal order, a crime that epitomises women’s oppressed status by proclaiming, in the loudest possible voice, the most degrading truths about women that a hostile world has to offer.”⁹⁴

The statistics given here come from reliable sources and studies that have been robustly conducted and researched. They can be disputed, as Gittos argues in his chapter ‘Rape Statistics: Time to End the Numbers Game’.⁹⁵ He does this by arguing that, “Many of us would have had experiences with our partners that may meet the legal definition of rape, but which, nonetheless, would never be interpreted by either party as rape. [...] The law may recognise these scenarios as rape, but to those involved in these incidents, these could be nothing more than the everyday experience of adult sexual life.”⁹⁶ In the same way that he believes anyone who has ever been in a relationship has conducted behaviours that meet the legal definition of stalking, or are coercive in nature, he thinks that many couples have unknowingly engaged in sexual violence. Just as his argument about stalking and coercion is based on his opinion that is incorrectly presented as fact, so is this. It is not possible to dispute statistics using generalised anecdotes based on his personal experiences. His experiences are not reflective of all, or even many, experiences.

Although proven statistics are presented, the realities of sexual violence mean that it is near impossible to ever really know how many people are affected by it, involved in covering it up, or who actually commit it. Later in this chapter, the concept of ‘cry rape’ stories or false rape accusations are discussed, with a particular focus on the argument that

⁹² World Health Organisation, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence, p.2. For individual country information, see The World’s Women 2015, Trends and Statistics, Chapter 6, Violence against Women, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015. - See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#sthash.QKsKQG3p.dpuf> accessed February 3, 2016.

⁹³ ‘NISVS: An Overview of 2010 Summary Report Findings,’ National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010, *NISVS*, accessed February 1, 2016, http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_executive_summary-a.pdf

⁹⁴ Ann J. Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 2.

⁹⁵ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 17-37.

⁹⁶ Gittos, *Why Rape Culture is a Dangerous Myth*, 23-4.

the true number of false allegations will never be known due to the very nature of sexual violence as a crime. As stated by Harding, “Rape and sexual assault are unusual, if not quite unique, in that often, the only real evidence of a crime is the victim’s testimony.”⁹⁷ The truth is that the full extent of the epidemic of sexual violence in contemporary society may never be known. This is because it can be unfeasible to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt in court, particularly if months or years have passed since the alleged violence took place and that is if an allegation ever makes it as far as the courtroom. Similarly, it is impossible to know how many people across the world have experienced sexual violence because an unknowable number of those people will never tell anyone. As Bourke argues, “A range of studies shows that between half and four-fifths of rapes are never reported to the police in the first place. Other estimates are more gloomy. One survey of 1,007 women in eleven UK cities found that a startling 91 per cent of women failed to report their abuse.”⁹⁸

The statistics available vary wildly depending on the source, the most reliable ones based on respected and vigorously carried out research have been included throughout this research, but they can provide little more than a guideline into the numbers of those who experience sexual violence. The reason to state this is that, in agreement with Harding’s argument, sexual violence is a unique case where broader societal factors, including the construction of contemporary rape culture, have an unquantifiable impact on the truth of the situation. Also, as Bourke points out, “Translating human suffering into bald percentages will always be problematic.”⁹⁹ Language used when referring to those affected by sexual violence is crucial as it shapes the living realities of those affected and their ability to seek prosecution of their perpetrator. The act of naming and identifying those affected by sexual violence in a particular way, or creating assumptions that lead to the proliferation of so called ‘rape myths’, and states of victim blaming or slut-shaming, is an inherently violent act. This speech act serves to ultimately create a form of ‘double disempowerment’ that the person who experienced the sexual violence then encounters. Firstly the person becomes disempowered through the act of sexual violence itself as their power and agency is forcibly and violently stripped from them. Secondly, they then experience further disempowerment as the culture and discourse surrounding them creates and perpetuates myths and stereotypes that force them to remain silent. This is pervasive rape culture in action.

⁹⁷ Harding, *Asking For It*, 62.

⁹⁸ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 394.

⁹⁹ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 215.

In a TEDx talk given by sex worker and sex worker activist Toni Mac entitled ‘What Do Sex Workers Want?’,¹⁰⁰ Mac considers the four main legal approaches taken to sex work around the world and why they do not work. She goes on to discuss what sex workers actually want for their own work practices, which is ultimately full decriminalisation. Her argument is that this decriminalisation would lead to self-determination and solid labour rights. She says that the main problems facing sex workers as a result of the wide variety of laws about the issue throughout the world arise because sex workers are given no say into what would work best for them. They have no official input into how these incompatible laws have a direct impact on their safety, security, health and protection. This is a clear form of disempowerment through silencing. She speaks about how sex workers are stereotypically regarded as vulnerable victims or unpopular minority groups by the rest of society and says that the distinction between the victim – of trafficking and abuse – and the empowered, is an imaginary one. She claims that sex workers are made into victims by policies that induce prohibition and are created without any consultation with the workers affected by them. She quotes Indian author Arundhati Roy, saying, "There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless.’ There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."¹⁰¹ Mac uses this quote to show how silencing those involved in sex work creates myths and stereotypes that produce damaging, dangerous and potentially life threatening realities for sex workers.

Mac’s discussion of this act of silencing for sex workers also applies to those affected by sexual violence as it doubly disempowers them and excludes them from discourse about sexual violence and its effects. If the language surrounding sexually violent experiences was created and shaped by those directly affected by it, those people affected would regain agency and empowerment. This would hypothetically occur through their ability to openly tackle not just the physical acts of violence, but the linguistically violent framework that surrounds sexual violence and that ultimately seeks to silence those affected. The statistics surrounding those affected by sexual violence would become more accurate and reliable, as more people would be able to discuss their experiences, particularly those people who do not fit the hetero-normative binary that is upheld with contemporary rape law. This would potentially lead to a situation where the true extent of the expansive nature of the global issue of sexual violence would be given a space to come to light. Just as the tools that re-enforce and perpetuate rape culture are cyclical and re-affirming, a positive action

¹⁰⁰ Toni Mac, ‘What do sex workers want?’, Staged as part of an independently run TEDx event in the East End of London, January 2016, *YouTube* February 26, 2016, accessed February 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJRBx0JjM_M

¹⁰¹ Toni Mac, ‘What do sex workers want?’, Staged as part of an independently run TEDx event in the East End of London, January 2016, *YouTube* February 26, 2016, accessed February 29, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJRBx0JjM_M minute: 16:35.

to end this double disempowerment and create agency through asserting control over language would potentially create an opposing and beneficial cyclical culture.

Sexual violence is an issue inescapable in Irish society today and on January 20, 2015, an article was published in the *Trinity News* newspaper detailing the results of a survey undertaken by Trinity College Dublin students discussing experiences of sexual violence. The title of the article reads, “One in four female TCD (Trinity College Dublin) students sexually assaulted.”¹⁰² The article discusses the findings of this survey stating that, of the 1,038 male and female students who took part, “Just under a third (31%) of women (...) said they have experienced unwanted physical contact while studying at Trinity or in a Trinity social setting.”¹⁰³ Given what has previously been mentioned about the nature of statistics surrounding the discourse on sexual violence, for the sake of this research, the figures stated have been taken at face value, with the belief in the good faith of students who responded to the survey. Also, even though it is not possible to know the exact figures, there is an accepted belief that all figures quoted reasonably correspond to the reality of the widespread nature of sexual violence. The figure stated does correlate with the global ‘one in three’ figure previously mentioned. This correlation highlights the reality that sexual violence against women is something directly affecting one third of TCD’s female student body.

TCD’s problems concerning the act of sexual violence against its students does not exist in a vacuum, and in 2013, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) published the results of a survey conducted as part of their ‘Say Something’ campaign. This study was the first of its kind in Ireland as it detailed third-level students’ experiences at Irish universities of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault. This study revealed that of the 2,750 students who took part in the study, “16 per cent of respondents experienced some form of unwanted sexual experience during their time as a student at their current higher education institution.”¹⁰⁴ These articles and surveys show that Trinity, along with other Irish universities, is following in the footsteps of American and British universities that have systemic problems with sexual violence. It has become necessary for Irish universities to follow Oxbridge in introducing mandatory sexual consent workshops for all incoming undergraduate students. This is an idea that 2014-2015 S.U. Welfare Officer Ian Mooney

¹⁰² Catherine Healy, ‘One in four female TCD students sexually assaulted’, *Trinity News*, January 20, 2015, accessed February 1 2016, http://trinitynews.ie/one-in-four-female-tcd-students-sexually-assaulted-survey/#disqus_thread

¹⁰³ Catherine Healy, ‘One in four female TCD students sexually assaulted’, *Trinity News*, January 20, 2015, accessed February 1 2016, http://trinitynews.ie/one-in-four-female-tcd-students-sexually-assaulted-survey/#disqus_thread

¹⁰⁴ Laura Harmon, ‘Why we need to talk about student sexual assault’, *Irish Times*, May 4, 2015, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/why-we-need-to-talk-about-student-sexual-assault-1.2199351>

pointed out in 2015 that he wanted to implement.¹⁰⁵ When questioned at the time about the issue he stated that, “The ultimate goal here for the year would be to introduce something similar for Trinity and hopefully avoid the troubles that they faced.”¹⁰⁶ The point is that, while the statistics discussed do not label any student as a ‘victim’ or a ‘survivor’, they simply present the facts taken from the survey, these very worrying statistics show just how much sexual violence and contemporary rape culture is affecting our everyday lives.

Further evidence of contemporary rape culture in action in Irish society is the fact that, according to records obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and published in an article in relation to sexual violence in Irish universities, “only 20 incidents have been recorded since 2010 and two of the country’s biggest universities have no records of sexual assaults.”¹⁰⁷ Aaron Rogan reported these findings for the British newspaper *The Times* on October 19, 2015. Rogan’s article goes on to state that, “Trinity College Dublin, which has 17,000 students, and UCC, which has 16,000, said that they did not keep records of sexual assaults.”¹⁰⁸ Clíona Saidléar of the Rape Crisis Network Ireland is quoted in the article saying that, “There is clearly a difference between the lived reality and those numbers. We know from our work that there is a very significant problem of sexual violence and sexual harassment in third-level institutions. There is a clear rape culture among students, especially where alcohol is concerned, and colleges have to play their part in addressing that.”¹⁰⁹ She continues, stating, “that colleges (were) not under pressure to address the issue because victims of sexual assault were reluctant to come forward, especially in college settings where they were likely to know the perpetrator.”¹¹⁰ There is a conflict between the statistics obtained and presented in this article regarding to records kept by Irish universities concerning instances of sexual violence against current students, with the statistics that show the actual level of sexual violence that is happening at these universities. This juxtaposition highlights how third-level institutions in Ireland are fundamentally failing their students in this regard. It can be argued that those who experience sexual violence are not coming forward, but this is a direct result of contemporary rape culture, and is due to the fact that often people who do come forward are subjected to rape myths,

¹⁰⁵ These workshops were introduced for the 2016-2017 academic year.

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Healy, ‘One in four female TCD students sexually assaulted’, *Trinity News*, January 20, 2015, accessed February 1 2016, http://trinitynews.ie/one-in-four-female-tcd-students-sexually-assaulted-survey/#disqus_thread

¹⁰⁷ Aaron Rogan, ‘Colleges ‘failing to tackle sex crimes’’, *Times* (London), October 19, 2015, accessed October 19, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/>

¹⁰⁸ Aaron Rogan, ‘Colleges ‘failing to tackle sex crimes’’, *Times* (London), October 19, 2015, accessed October 19, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/>

¹⁰⁹ Aaron Rogan, ‘Colleges ‘failing to tackle sex crimes’’, *Times* (London), October 19, 2015, accessed October 19, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/>

¹¹⁰ Aaron Rogan, ‘Colleges ‘failing to tackle sex crimes’’, *Times* (London), October 19, 2015, accessed October 19, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/>

victim blaming and slut-shaming narratives. Also, this is another example of how those affected by sexual violence are being silenced by those in power as no record of sexually violent acts committed against students at Trinity College exists, yet one third of the female student body state that they have experienced some level of sexual violence.

As a follow up to the USI's initial 'Say Something' Campaign, on February 2, 2016 in IT Tralee the Union of Students in Ireland launched the 'Say Something Card'¹¹¹ in a bid to provide vital information for students who have been affected by incidents of sexual violence. When discussing the card and its importance for Irish university students, USI President Kevin Donoghue stated that, "We hope this card will be an aid to students who find themselves in the position where they're victims of violence and don't know what to do next. We want to reverse the culture of victim blaming in Ireland and instead of blaming the victims, we want to help, support and empower them."¹¹² These initiatives are student led because university authorities are not providing the support students affected by sexual violence need and these initiatives provide a sense of empowerment for the students as they reclaim their capacity to control their own situation and relationship to sexual violence.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, on January 26, 2016, the Student's Union of Trinity College (TCDSU) voted to introduce mandatory sexual consent workshops for incoming first year students who would be living at the off campus accommodation site in Rathmines for Trinity students, beginning in September 2016. There was a gender-based backlash to this news. A large proportion of the backlash focused on the supposed demonisation of young Irish males, as the public believe that these workshops are directly and disproportionately targeting them as 'potential rapists'.¹¹³ To label men as 'potential rapists' and women as 'eternal victims' is untrue and problematic. What is more powerful and dangerous still is the idea that the backlash suggested that the classes were brought about because those organising these classes believed these damaging stereotypes to be true. So those involved are labelled with purporting this dangerous mentality, and even

¹¹¹ Caoimhe Brennan, 'USI launches Say Something card, providing information for students who have experienced sexual violence', *Trinity News*, February 4, 2016, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://trinitynews.ie/usi-launches-say-something-card-providing-information-for-students-who-have-experienced-sexual-violence/>

¹¹² Caoimhe Brennan, 'USI launches Say Something card, providing information for students who have experienced sexual violence', *Trinity News*, February 4, 2016, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://trinitynews.ie/usi-launches-say-something-card-providing-information-for-students-who-have-experienced-sexual-violence/>

¹¹³ Matthew Mulligan, 'Irish media has painted TCDSU's consent project as latest diatribe against men: Cynical articles which pretend workshops are only for straight men fuel anger towards the idea', *Trinity News*, January 29, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://trinitynews.ie/predictably-the-ignorance-in-irish-media-has-painted-tcdsus-consent-project-as-latest-diatribe-against-men/>

though they do not, in a Butlerian sense, they may refuse the name by which they are called and yet still have it forced upon them.¹¹⁴

The open-ended nature of language provides the opportunity for “something we might still call agency,”¹¹⁵ as Butler puts it, and, “the repetition of an originary subordination for another purpose, one whose future is partially open.”¹¹⁶ By having those organising the workshops labelled as believing all men are ‘potential rapists’, their aims are subordinated by being told that they are something that they are not. The whole premise of the workshops becomes undermined by a warping of the discourse, and this happens through violent speech acts. This can be linked back to the legalities of sexual violence in Ireland and how heterosexual men were seen, and still are with regards to marital rape, as the sole perpetrators of sexual violence. This reaction demonstrates a lack of comprehension of the reasoning behind the introduction of such classes. These workshops are simply introduced to protect all students and to directly attack the contemporary rape culture in which Irish university students are all living, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Nevertheless, negative public opinion formed and voiced chose to accept the damaging rape myth stereotypes and argue that they existed for the persecution of heterosexual men.

Regardless of the fact that these workshops would specifically open students up to the idea that anyone can experience sexual violence, encouraging particularly those who are not biologically female, or who have not been assaulted by a man, to allow their respective experience to be validated and believed, a backlash ensued. In this case, the violent performative potential of language is enacted as public backlash to the workshops erupted even though there was no legitimate gender bias basis on which to erupt rationally. Due to the internalised assumptions that society accepts as a result of the language of law making in Ireland, even twenty-six years after the law moved towards gender neutrality in regards to criminalising acts of sexual violence, the sexism is still evident in the reactions.¹¹⁷

Another example of a sexist backlash, also referenced in the introductory chapter, against those who raise concerns over the safety of women on Irish university campuses came as a reaction to one of University College Dublin’s (UCD) student newspapers, *The College Tribune*, and their article published on February 3, 2016 entitled, “200 in Facebook

¹¹⁴ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 33.

¹¹⁵ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 38.

¹¹⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 38.

¹¹⁷ Finola Meredith, ‘Sexual consent classes: Neo-puritan preaching won’t stop rape: Lessons on correct way to have sex is a gross overstepping of individual boundaries’, *Irish Times*, January 29, 2016, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/sexual-consent-classes-neo-puritan-preaching-won-t-stop-rape-1.2514519>

Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls”.¹¹⁸ This article alleges that a private Facebook group chat with as many as two hundred active members has been active in UCD. This group chat allows members to share stories and rate photographs of female students they have had sexual relations with.¹¹⁹ On February 12, 2016, UCD published a report of their investigation into the matter. This report stated that no evidence of such a group had been found and no one came forward to admit to either being a part of the group, or of having their photos shared without consent. It is imperative to note that the findings of this report do not categorically prove that the group never existed. The thread would have been easily deleted and no evidence suggests that the university contacted *Facebook* to see if there was any trace left of the group on their site. The college registrar, Mark Rogers stated on publication of the results of the investigation that he is,

Not so naïve as to believe that the university community is immune to this type of activity... If you have been affected by the inappropriate sharing of private information on social media, the student advisors and wider University support services are available to you... In addition, if you see illicit and/or explicit material on university-related sites, you should immediately bring this to the attention of the university authorities or An Garda Síochána.¹²⁰

The implication from this statement is that although the investigation was inconclusive, the group may still have existed and ‘revenge porn’ may be prevalent among the UCD student body. The UCD group would come under the jurisdiction of ‘revenge porn’ as it allegedly involved uploading of sexually explicit images without the consent of the subject of the photo. The reality is, neither the college registrar, nor those who conducted the investigation can be certain as to whether or not this kind of situation is arising for current UCD students.

Despite this likelihood of the existence of a ‘revenge porn culture’, stemming from contemporary rape culture, in UCD, once the results of the investigation were made public, online commenters on articles relating to the incident violently condemned those who believed the allegations to be true. Examples of the kind of language used throughout these kinds of comment threads include, “Can we have 10 articles this week about the lies that were spread by feminist interlopers?”, “Do colleges still need those permission classes.

¹¹⁸ Jack Power, ‘200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls’, *College Tribune* (UCD), February 3, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://collegetribune.ie/ucd-facebook-chat-rating-and-sharing-girls-photos-who-they-have-slept-with-highlights-toxic-lad-culture/>

¹¹⁹ Jack Power, ‘200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls’, *College Tribune* (UCD), February 3, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://collegetribune.ie/ucd-facebook-chat-rating-and-sharing-girls-photos-who-they-have-slept-with-highlights-toxic-lad-culture/>

¹²⁰ Cianan Brennan, ‘UCD investigation dismisses ‘revenge porn’ allegations made by college newspaper’, *Journal* (Dublin), February 12, 2016, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.thejournal.ie/ucd-investigation-2601764-Feb2016/>

Leads me to doubt Trinity’s survey conducted about people claiming sexual assault”, and “So it never happened. There’ll be a lot of disappointed angry feminists. How will they whinge about horrible men now.”¹²¹ These comments act as examples of the violent use of language against feminists in contemporary Irish media. They also highlight the prominent nature of such anti-feminist rhetoric that is ultimately baseless, as it was not just self-proclaimed feminists who denounced the actions of this alleged group. Although this investigation could not find hard evidence to support the existence of this group, the college registrar accepts that its existence is still a possibility. This is not the first time a group of this type was reportedly active in the university as a misogynist UCD *Facebook* group that was shut down in 2015 entitled *Girls I’d shift if I was tipsy*¹²² (a group that the SU president for 2015-2016 admitted to being a member of¹²³). The proven existence of such a group shows how revenge porn and misogynist online forums are rampant among the student body of Ireland’s largest university.

Online ‘trolling’ commenters shut down any possibility for progressive conversation on issues about sexual violence, the existence of rape culture and the rampant presence of revenge porn, when they use the word ‘feminist’, or the more violent and derogatory term, ‘feminazi’, as insults towards those they disagree with. This denial of the rights of others to speak openly about such issues highlights how discussions surrounding sexual violence against women in contemporary Irish media are being warped by a mentality that feminists are misandrists who have created the idea of a ‘rape culture’ in order to frighten men into submission, replacing patriarchal oppression with matriarchal oppression. This train of thought is dangerous and ultimately damaging to women affected by sexual violence as it makes it more difficult for those affected to come forward and speak openly about their experience for fear of ridicule and disbelief.

The word ‘feminazi’ is one that is increasingly used as a slur in many online discussions about feminism. It is a term resorted to in a bid to discredit the voice and

¹²¹ A selection of the comments posted under numerous articles about the investigation, articles include: Cianan Brennan, ‘UCD investigation dismisses ‘revenge porn’ allegations made by college newspaper’, *Journal* (Dublin), February 12, 2016, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.thejournal.ie/ucd-investigation-2601764-Feb2016/>

Aine McMahon, ‘UCD paper refuses to publish correction about porn claims’, *Irish Times*, February 22, 2016, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/ucd-paper-refuses-to-publish-correction-about-porn-claims-1.2544434>

Clare Cullen, ‘University ‘found no evidence’ of revenge porn Facebook group’, *Independent* (Dublin), February 13, 2016, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/news/university-found-no-evidence-of-revenge-porn-facebook-group-34450339.html>

¹²² Jack Power, ‘200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls’, *College Tribune* (UCD), February 3, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://collegetribune.ie/ucd-facebook-chat-rating-and-sharing-girls-photos-who-they-have-slept-with-highlights-toxic-lad-culture/>

¹²³ Jack Power, ‘200 in Facebook Chat Sharing and Rating Photos of Girls’, *College Tribune* (UCD), February 3, 2016, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://collegetribune.ie/ucd-facebook-chat-rating-and-sharing-girls-photos-who-they-have-slept-with-highlights-toxic-lad-culture/>

opinion of someone who identifies as a feminist as it compares their beliefs and behaviour to people who identify, or identified as Nazis. Several definitions of the word found online explore the connotations of the term and its damaging implications. The website *Urban Dictionary* is one where users generate the content and are invited to give definitions for words, often colloquial terms or slang words that would not appear in a standard dictionary. Users have created definitions for the word ‘feminazi’ that include, “Feminazis believe that men should have no rights and should be killed”, “Feminazis do not encourage the killing of men. They believe in their natural extinction”, and, “Feminazis think that "woman-only" spaces are NEEDED in a man-dominant society. Ultimately, they want that space to become the world.”¹²⁴ Such definitions give a clear indication of how the slur ‘feminazi’ is used to undermine those who identify as feminists and the basis of their goals. This is usually done in a bid to validate antiquated views on gender issues. Sexist, misogynist and anti-woman rhetoric sustains negative stereotypes surrounding contemporary portrayals of popular feminisms. This use of abusive language serves to quash any reasoned discussion around feminist issues, such as the prevalence of sexual violence in contemporary society. All of this shows how language, particularly derogatory language, becomes violent and oppressive towards people when used in such ways. Just as the term ‘feminazi’ is largely employed to discredit and demean the opinions of feminists online, language used to describe those affected by sexual violence can have a similarly negative impact on those affected. This language can remove the sense of agency of that person and it ultimately creates a level of double disempowerment while sustaining rape culture.

In the preface to *Bodies that Matter*, Butler recalls a personal incident of having the violent act of language and naming of the subject enacted upon her,

Actually, in the recent past, the question was repeatedly formulated to me this way: “What about the materiality of the body, *Judy*?” I took it that that addition of “*Judy*” was an effort to dislodge me from the more formal “*Judith*” and to recall me to a bodily life that could not be theorized away. There was a certain exasperation in the delivery of that final diminutive, a certain patronising quality which (re) constituted me as an unruly child, one who needed to be brought to task, restored to that bodily being which is, after all, considered to be the most real, most pressing, most undeniable.¹²⁵

Butler uses this anecdote to highlight the power of language in self-identification and in having oneself acted upon through the use of language. She refers to herself as ‘*Judith*’,

¹²⁴ ‘feminazi’, *Urban Dictionary*, accessed February 29, 2016, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=feminazi>

¹²⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”* (New York: Routledge, 2011), iix-ix.

not as ‘Judy’ or any other abbreviated form of her full name. The name ‘Judith’ was given to her at birth. This naming act was not through her own choice as this speech act was enacted upon her, but she has chosen to take ownership of it and gains agency through identifying as ‘Judith’. To use any other name to refer to her by demonstrates the violent act of language. This violent act of forcing one type of identification onto the body, a subject or subjects executing power over another person, becomes important in relation to women affected by instances of sexual violence. The trauma and violence of language in disrupting and distorting the power balance between subjects is seen in the use of terminology around sexual violence with terms such as ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’, commonly used. The language of sexual violence posits the creation and sustainment of ‘rape myths’ and ‘victim blaming’ instances.

Rape myths and victim blaming are two very dangerous tools at play in popular culture and their existence stems from the prevalence of contemporary rape culture. A ‘rape myth’ is a misconception surrounding an experience of sexual violence and can be defined as, “descriptive or prescriptive beliefs about rape (i.e. about its causes, context, consequences, perpetrators, victims and their interaction) that serve to deny, downplay or justify sexual violence that men commit against women.”¹²⁶

Four general types of ‘rape myth’ serve to:

- Exonerate the perpetrator
- Express a disbelief in claims of rape
- Imply that only certain types of women are raped
- Blame the victim for their rape¹²⁷

Extending the discussion on from these basic ‘rape myths’ in a bid to interrogate their complexities, Harding expands the list in *Asking For It*. She writes that there are seven more specific descriptions of ‘rape myths’ that assume; she asked for it, it wasn’t really rape, he didn’t mean to, she wanted it, she lied, rape is a trivial event and rape is a deviant event.¹²⁸ Harding makes clear the damaging effects that language and the use of violent words against those who have experienced sexual violence can have, particularly for women when articulating,

If the real crime of rape is the violation of another person’s autonomy, the use of another person’s body against their wishes, then it shouldn’t matter what the victim was wearing, if she was drinking, how much sexual experience she’s had before, or whether she fought hard enough to get bruises on her knuckles and skin under

¹²⁶ Horvath, Brown. *RAPE Challenging Contemporary Thinking*, 19.

¹²⁷ Horvath, Brown. *RAPE Challenging Contemporary Thinking*, 19.

¹²⁸ Harding, *Asking For It*, 22.

her fingernails. What matters is that the attacker deliberately ignored another person's basic human right to determine what she does with her own body. It's not about sex; it's about power.¹²⁹

'Rape myths' can lead to a state of 'victim blaming' but they are different things. The word 'myth' is used as a way to describe a piece of information that is false or irrelevant but is widely accepted as factual and taken as a reason to 'victim blame' as a result. For example, one of the most common rape myths is that the attacker is not known to the attacked and that the attack happens at random. This myth is proven false, in Ireland, where according to the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre's Annual Report for 2014, of those who contacted the centre after experiencing sexual violence, 70% of attackers were known by the person they attack.¹³⁰ Similar reports from across the globe replicate this finding. While the accuracy of statistics surrounding instances of sexual violence is contentious, the statistic stated here may be taken as absolute fact because of its nature. It is reasonable to assume that this figure would be similar for those women who experienced sexual violence in Ireland but did not contact the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre that year. Also, "The closer the relationship between the female victim and the offender, the greater the likelihood that the police would not be told about a rape or sexual assault."¹³¹ This shows how any belief in the myth that most women are not acquainted with their attacker is detrimental to that 70% of women who will not fit this narrow narrative and so risk not being believed or taken seriously. This creates and sustains a culture in which people who experience sexual violence remain silent about it and their perpetrator goes unpunished. This common myth brings with it the notion that women cannot be assaulted or raped by a husband or partner and that if they are, it is not a case of 'legitimate rape'. Adding to this myth, Bourke quotes an 'experienced barrister' who reportedly said, "I feel very strongly about this. I feel very strongly that it's a great waste of public money to prosecute the ex-husband or the ex-boyfriend of rape. [...] Well she says it was a rape and probably, yes, it really was. But frankly, does it matter?"¹³²

As previously mentioned, in Ireland, marital rape was criminalised in 1990, until that point, a husband could not rape his wife by definition. Such a myth protects the attacker and leaves the attacked open to scrutiny and speculation over whether or not they were actually assaulted and what level of consent they gave. It also leads to a situation where

¹²⁹ Harding, *Asking For It*, 12.

¹³⁰ 'Dublin Rape Crisis Centre Annual Report 2013', *DRCC*, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://www.drcc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/DRCC2014.pdf> 6

¹³¹ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, 'Are We Really Living in a Rape Culture?', in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, eds., Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 7.

¹³² Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 397.

‘cry rape’ stories are brought up, but it is very difficult to get an accurate figure for the number of false allegations made. This is because such a small number of cases actually make it to trial, and even when they do, the person assaulted may recant their statement through fear or stigma. It is also possible that perpetrators are not always convicted of the sexually violent acts that they actually did commit through a lack of evidence, but this does not mean the allegations against them were falsely made. It is also a fact that many cases may not be capable of being proven beyond reasonable doubt because so many allegations are made between people in a relationship, or who are acquaintances. In these cases there may be proof that sexual activity took place but it can be difficult to prove that it was an act of sexual violence.¹³³

The length of time between the sexual violence taking place and being reported can irreparably impact upon the potential for physical evidence collection. Statistics quoted range from declaring that two per cent of allegations are false¹³⁴ to forty-one per cent, and as Megan McArdle says when discussing the actual number of false allegations of sexual violence made by women against men,

A lot of statistics are floating around the Internet: Two percent, say many feminists, the same as other crimes. Twenty-five percent, say other groups who quarrel with the feminists on many issues, or maybe 40 percent. Here’s the real answer: we don’t know. Anyone who insists that we do know should be corrected or ignored. The number of false accusations is what statisticians call a “dark number” – that is, there is a true number, but it is unknown, and perhaps unknowable.¹³⁵

Just as the number of false allegations is a ‘dark unknowable number’, the actual number of sexual assaults and rapes carried out is unknowable. Bourke points out that, “Rape and sexual abuse are common, even if we do not actually know how many women and men are raped every year. Sexual assault eludes statistical notation. It is not simply that the statistics are not collected in a consistent or reliable manner. They cannot exist.”¹³⁶

When it comes to reporting cases, Bourke contends, “But even if we agreed on a definition (let’s say a specific legal one), most acts of sexual violence are neither reported

¹³³ Cathy Young, ‘Crying Rape: False accusations exist, and they are a serious problem’, *Slate*, http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2014/09/false_rape_accusations_why_must_be_prete_and_they_never_happen.html

This article provides a comprehensive background into how false accusations happen, why they happen, how near impossible it is to know how often they happen, and how difficult it is to balance the idea of believing a woman who comes forward with little evidence with not condemning a potentially innocent man before he can be proven guilty.

¹³⁴ This number is most commonly attributed to Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* (1975).

¹³⁵ Megan McArdle, ‘How Many Rape Reports Are False?’, *Bloomberg View*, September 19, 2014, accessed February 23, 2016, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-09-19/how-many-rape-reports-are-false>

¹³⁶ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 15.

nor recorded.”¹³⁷ So the idea that there is an accurate statistic available that reflects the number of false statistics is incorrect and, depending on the agenda of the person or group of people quoting a statistic about the false number of allegations of sexual violence made by women against men, the number will greatly vary to suit their respective argument. This becomes problematic when instances of sexual violence have occurred, but become ultimately disprovable in a court of law. For example, on New Year’s Eve 2015, in the city of Cologne in Germany, women in the city centre celebrating the New Year were sexually assaulted en masse by a group of approximately one thousand men. This large-scale attack on the women in Cologne resulted in a reported five hundred and sixteen criminal complaints made.¹³⁸ The attacks, and their subsequent handling by the police, led to public uproar. On one side, conservative groups with anti-immigration agendas blamed Germany for accepting such a high volume of Middle-Eastern refugees into Europe and Germany specifically. On the other side, liberal groups claimed that the women in Cologne deserved more protection and that the police tried to cover up the situation to avoid racist sentiment.

The most important fact about the Cologne attacks is that they showed a systematic and targeted assault on the safety and security of women in public spaces. They directly demonstrated the pervasive power of contemporary rape culture. They highlighted what Emilie Buchwald writes on the prevalence of rape culture. She says,

The fear of sexual assault that is part of the daily life of women [...] takes up a continent of psychic space. A rape culture is a culture of intimidation that keeps women afraid of being attacked and so it confines women in the range of their behaviour. The fear makes a woman censor her behaviour – her speech, her way of dressing, her actions. [...] The necessity to be mindful of one’s behaviour at all times is far more than merely annoying. Women’s lives are unnecessarily constricted.¹³⁹

These heinous attacks added to the myth that it is up to women to prevent their own rape primarily. The inevitable outcome of this event is that those who committed these crimes will largely go unprosecuted. The police chief of Cologne, Juergen Mathies said, “that most of the men who sexually assaulted women in Cologne on New Year's Eve may never be caught,” and that, “CCTV footage was not good enough to identify sex crimes.”¹⁴⁰ As of

¹³⁷ Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 15.

¹³⁸ Sky News, ‘Cologne NYE Attacks: Cases Rise To 516’, *Sky News*, January 10, 2016, accessed February 20, 2016, <http://news.sky.com/story/1620206/cologne-nye-attacks-cases-rise-to-516>

¹³⁹ Emilie Buchwald, ‘Raising Girls in the Twenty-First Century’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, eds., Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 219-220.

¹⁴⁰ BBC News, ‘Cologne attacks: Most suspects ‘may never be caught’, *BBC World News*, February 24, 2016, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35647308>

February 24, 2016, only one person had been arrested on charges of sexual assault.¹⁴¹ So for those five hundred and sixteen criminal reports of assault, those responsible will almost entirely never be held accountable. This teaches women to be fearful of public spaces because the law is fundamentally flawed when dealing with instances of sexual violence against them. This is partly because, as emphasised by these attacks, it is difficult to prove an assault in a public place, particularly when there is such a high volume of people around. Just as women are indoctrinated into the 'Beauty Myth' since early childhood, they are simultaneously trained to always be on their guard and to both accept and expect the possibility that a group of men could decide to attack them at any point. The response to the Cologne attacks underlines the reality that they will be left essentially defenceless against this kind of attack. It also demonstrates to potential perpetrators the likelihood of not being punished for committing this type of crime, and so such a deterrent of prosecution is removed. The implications of this fact are detrimental to the safety of women globally.

Arguably, the stigma and shame connected to reporting instances of sexual violence - stigma and shame created through public discourse of commonly accepted rape myths and victim blaming or slut-shaming scenarios - lead to a state where less cases make it to trial, meaning less perpetrators of sexual violence are found guilty. When discussing the stigma surrounding reporting cases of sexual violence, Dworkin speaks of the difficulties involved, "If a woman's reporting a rape to the police means she will be exposed by the media to the scrutiny of voyeurs and worse, a sexual spectacle with her legs splayed open in the public mind, reporting itself will be tantamount to suicide. Because of my own experience with sexual abuse and media exposure, I know the consequences are unbearable."¹⁴² Making it difficult for women to report their experiences of sexual violence adds to the rape myth that sexual violence is not as problematic in society as it really is. The use of myths, such as the idea that sexual violence is not as prevalent as it is, in reality lead to victim blaming, instances where the attacked is blamed for their violent experience.

'Victim blaming' is a phenomenon unique to sexual violence and involves using common rape myths and misconceptions to blame the woman attacked. As Dworkin argues, "No one says, when a man hurts another man, that the second man enjoyed it. [...] But with women, whenever we're hurt, there's an explanation already in place: we wanted it."¹⁴³ This is the foundation of victim blaming those who have experienced sexual violence. Questions such as, 'what was she wearing?' and 'was she drinking?' are asked and used to discredit the story of the person assaulted. They can be seen in the media, with

¹⁴¹ BBC News, 'Cologne attacks: Most suspects 'may never be caught, *BBC World News*, February 24, 2016, accessed February 24, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35647308>

¹⁴² Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 56.

¹⁴³ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 163-4.

headlines such as, “More rapes linked to young women on drinking binges”¹⁴⁴ and “Rape conviction rate will not go up until women stop binge drinking, says judge.”¹⁴⁵ They become particularly distasteful and damaging throughout comment threads attached to online news articles reporting sexual violence cases. They can even go so far as to have the American Senate Candidate Todd Akin claim in 2012 that “if it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways of shutting that whole thing down,”¹⁴⁶ to prevent pregnancy. Victim blaming leads to a situation where the focus of the debate around instances of sexual violence is on the woman who was assaulted and not on the perpetrator. When discussing victim blaming in *Everyday Sexism*, Laura Bates writes, “It is in this focus on young women’s behaviour while utterly failing to analyse the actions and impact of the society around them that we encounter the greatest silencing method of all: the blaming of victims.”¹⁴⁷ Bates goes on to further discuss the results of a culture that victim blames, as the focus is taken away from the heinous crimes of the perpetrator and so they become ultimately protected from public shaming, “As long as we as a society continue to belittle and dismiss women’s accounts, disbelieve and question their stories, and blame them for their own assaults, we will continue to provide perpetrators with this powerful and effective threat.”¹⁴⁸ This is continued rape culture in action.

Section Seven: Conclusion

This chapter explores the performativity of language for women affected by sexual violence within contemporary rape culture. This rape culture is sustained and perpetuated through language and the existence of rape myths and victim blaming narratives. The very word ‘myth’ succinctly describes so much of the misinformation surrounding cases of sexual violence, how they happen, why they happen and where they happen. These myths promote fears for those attacked. As Brownmiller argues, the prevalence of sexual violence contributes to gender inequality and supports the status quo of male dominance by keeping

¹⁴⁴ ABC News, ‘More Rapes Linked To Young Women On Drinking Binges’, *ABC 10 News*, July 29, 2008, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://www.10news.com/news/more-rapes-linked-to-young-women-on-drinking-binges>

¹⁴⁵ Frances Gibb, ‘Rape conviction rate will not go up until women stop binge drinking, says judge’, *Times* (London), August 27, 2014, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/law/article4187810.ece>

¹⁴⁶ Uploads1138, ‘Akin on “Legitimate Rape”’, Todd Akin appearing on Jaco Report on Fox 2 19 August 2012’, *YouTube*, August 19, 2012, accessed January 20, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fSWnqn6VgU>

¹⁴⁷ Laura Bates, *Everyday Sexism* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 33.

¹⁴⁸ Bates, *Everyday Sexism*, 42.

all women, including those women who are not directly victimised, in a constant state of fear.¹⁴⁹

The use of sexual violence against women in contemporary culture is a way to police and control women's bodies and behaviours. Examples of such rules implore women to not go out alone at night, not dress in a sexually provocative manner, or not go home with a man. Sexual violence and rape myths centre on the notion that women are sexually passive and men are sexually active. They perpetuate the hypothesis that it is for men to seek sexual contact from a woman and that women are mere sexual objects. Sexual violence is about one person, or persons, holding power over another and using that power to degrade and violate a person on the most personal and intimate level possible. Rape culture, rape myths, sexual harassment, and sexual objectification, are all power plays carried out largely by men on women in order to keep women in their oppressed position and to maintain stereotypical patriarchal power structures, and as Ann J. Cahill argues in *Rethinking Rape*,

Rape needs to be rethought as a pervasive, sustained, and repetitive, but not ultimately defining, element of the development of women's experience; as something that is taken up and experienced differently by different women but also holds some common aspects; as a factor that marks women as different from men; as an experience that perhaps begins with the body but whose significance does not end there.¹⁵⁰

Sexual violence is an issue that affects every single person in contemporary Irish society. Though not all people will be directly affected by sexual violence, everyone is indirectly affected by it. This happens because we are living in a rape culture where everyone comes into contact with the 'rape myths' and 'victim blaming' instances that are brought up and supported by this culture. Whether it is in seeing the negative reactions female global celebrities face when expressing their sexuality, or in witnessing a man harass a woman on the street, we cannot escape the issue.

On the March 8, 2016, International Women's Day, American socialite Kim Kardashian-West uploaded a nude photo of herself to her *Twitter* account.¹⁵¹ She did this in celebration of International Women's Day and to highlight her own comfort with her body. Within minutes the photo went viral, with thousands of people commenting on her

¹⁴⁹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), 20.

¹⁵⁰ Ann J. Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* (London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 5.

¹⁵¹ Kim Kardashian-West, Twitter Feed, Tweet Published March 8, 2016, accessed March 17, 2016, Twitter Handle: @KimKardashian, https://twitter.com/KimKardashian?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eautho

body, whether or not it is appropriate for her to share such images, particularly because she is a mother, and ultimately slut-shaming her. Regardless of what a person may think about the benefits of uploading such a photo to the Internet, there is no reason to negatively slut-shame her for it. The normalisation of this kind of reaction to such a publicity stunt shows just how intrinsic the belief that we all have in our right to comment on this woman or on women in general, has become. This belief in such a right comes from our interrogation of, and relationship with language.

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the power of the speech act to control our agency and sense of empowerment is monumental. Gendered language, violent language, abusive language, insensitive language and offensive language are all used to doubly disempower the person who has experienced sexual violence. This leads to and sustains rape culture. The research outlined throughout this chapter aims to tackle this negative association with language. Whether through re-appropriation, re-negotiation or a complete subversion of the ways in which we interact with the speech act in reference to those affected by instances of sexual violence, this thesis is challenging and contesting these accepted norms of rape culture, and the perpetuating of violent language that seeks to support its continuance. As Bourke argues, “The problem is not that talk of rape has been silenced, but that it has been taken over by non-victims and has become ubiquitous. [...] ‘Rape’ has not been silenced: it is just that its narrative is only rarely told by the rape victims, who are forced to tailor their courtroom account to strip it of its emotional dimensions and unique form within her embodied history.”¹⁵²

This research examines how re-appropriating language and self-identification through language can serve to radically empower those who experience sexual violence. Rape culture cannot be deconstructed until the language that supports it is challenged and ultimately, those who experience sexual violence need to be heard and no longer silenced by a culture that is complicit in sexual violence through inaction.

¹⁵² Bourke, *RAPE A History From 1860 To The Present*, 398.

Chapter Two:

Performing Violence And Toxicity:

An analysis of the portrayal of 'toxic masculinity' and 'toxic femininity' in Contemporary Irish Theatre, and their relation to the performance of sexual violence against women

Section One: Introduction

This chapter explores a selection of contemporary Irish plays which represent sexual violence narratives. The reasoning behind the plays chosen are discussed in detail in Sections Two and Three of this chapter. The theories of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’, as laid out in the Introductory chapter, are used to analyse these plays.

In contemporary global cultural discourse there is much discussion of terms such as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, and the linking of behavioural qualities to a gendered identity, and expression of self. Throughout this dissertation the word ‘femininities’ is used in its deliberately plural form. This is due to the multiplicities inherent in expressing such qualities that are deemed to represent a sense of ‘femininity’ or, concurrently, ‘masculinity’. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that to link behavioural actions to a sense of gendered identity is damaging to all people due to the reality that gender is a conceptual cultural construct that aims to place a value judgment on human beings. Gender, as distinct from biological sex, largely exists as a performative act and, as stated by Judith Butler, “gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.”¹ This means that the construction of the female and male gender identity is largely based on performative actions that serve only to perpetuate themselves and, “gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.”²

When actions and character attributes are deemed to be either ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’, a binary opposition is formed between the two most dominant modes of gender identity. This has numerous substantial implications on several levels. Firstly, it silences and delegitimises any form of gender identity that exists on the spectrum between the rigid constructs of ‘female’ and ‘male’. Secondly, it aims to label all people as being a member of one of two incredibly limiting and unmoving or ‘stable’ groups. However, as Butler points out, “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*.”³ This means that the very existence of these identities is constructed and, as a result, they are not inherent to gender identity. Thirdly, the binary constructed due to the proliferation of hegemonic hetero-normative patriarchy has a skewed power balance where traditionally ‘masculine’ traits are deemed to be more

¹ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 194.

² Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 190.

³ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 187.

important and dominating than traits stereotypically associated with the 'feminine'. This binary is taken as a given and representative of a 'normative' mode of behaviour for males and females, yet as Butler goes on to highlight, "regardless of the pervasive character of patriarchy and the prevalence of sexual difference as an operative cultural distinction, there is nothing about a binary gender system that is given."⁴

The main plays studied in this chapter are Gillian Greer's *Petals*,⁵ Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*,⁶ Mark O'Rowe's *Our Few And Evil Days*,⁷ Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl*⁸ and Caitríona Daly's *Test Dummy*.⁹ All five of these plays showcase the effects, and affects, of sexual violence against women, as at least one female character in each play experiences sexual violence. There are different forms of violence portrayed in each play. These include child sexual abuse by other children, the abuse of a child by a parent, the abuse of a parent by a child, gang rape and sexual violence against women unable to give sexual consent for a myriad of different reasons. Absent from all of these plays is the word rape and the presence of a physical rape scene. The absence of the word 'rape' is arguably intrinsically linked to the prevalence of rape culture in contemporary society, and this 'rape culture' will be dissected and examined throughout. The absence of physical rape scenes in the plays is a deliberate choice on my part. The plays have been chosen because of how they deal with the fallout of sexual violence. They are works of theatre that aim to give a voice to those traditionally silenced by cultural stigmatisation and feelings of

⁴ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 197.

⁵ *Petals* is a one-woman show originally performed by Kate Gilmore. It premiered at the Theatre Upstairs in Dublin and was directed by Karl Shiels, assistant directed by Clodagh Mooney Duggan, with set design by Laura Honan and lighting design by Eoin Stapleton. It opened on December 9, 2014 and ran until December 20, 2014.

⁶ *On Raftery's Hill* premiered at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway on May 9, 2000 as a Druid Theatre Company/Royal Court Theatre co-production and it subsequently ran at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, London on June 29, 2000. It was originally directed by Garry Hynes and designed by Tony Walton. Richard Pilbrow was the lighting designer; Rich Walsh designed the sound and Paddy Cuneen composed the score.

⁷ *Our Few And Evil Days* premiered at The Abbey Theatre in Dublin on October 3, 2014. It was written and directed by Mark O'Rowe and designed by Paul Wills. The original cast consisted of Sinead Cusack as Margaret, Ciaran Hinds as Michael, Charlie Murphy as Adele, Tom Vaughan-Lawlor as Dennis and Ian-Lloyd Anderson as Gary.

⁸ *Pumpgirl* premiered at the Traverse Theatre during the 2006 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. It was subsequently produced in London in September 2006, had its off-Broadway premiere in the Manhattan Theatre Club in 2007 and its Irish premiere in The Lyric Theatre in Belfast in 2008. It was written by Abbie Spallen, directed by Mike Bradwell and designed by Bob Bailey. The original cast consisted of Orla Fitzgerald as Pumpgirl, James Doran as Hammy and Maggie Hayes as Sinead.

⁹ *Test Dummy* premiered as a WeGetHighOnThis Collective in association with Theatre Upstairs production at the Theatre Upstairs in Dublin in 2016. It ran from November 11-26, 2016. It was originally performed by Caitríona Ennis and directed by Louise Lowe. The creative team included Laura Honan as set designer, Conor Byrne & Shane Gill as lighting designers, Carl Kennedy as sound designer, Sorcha Ni Fhloinn as costume designer, Ste Murray as photographer & marking designer, Aine O'Sullivan as producer and Emma Gleeson as Stage Manager.

internalised shame. The physical act of the violence is not what matters most, but rather how these women live on past their experiences with monumentally altered lives.

This chapter is closely linked to Chapter One in its interrogation of the trauma resulting from experiences of sexual violence. This trauma is partially caused by the external pressures of rape culture and the presence of 'toxic femininity' and 'toxic masculinity' in contemporary culture. All of the plays have premiered in Ireland in the early years of the twenty-first century and tell stories that are not necessarily unique to Ireland, but that are directly affected by Irish culture and Irish history.

Section Two: Introducing the Five Plays

Petals is a one-woman show written by Irish playwright Gillian Greer. The play was originally performed by Kate Gilmore. It premiered at the Theatre Upstairs in Dublin and was directed by Karl Shiels, assistant directed by Clodagh Mooney Duggan, with set design by Laura Honan and lighting design by Eoin Stapleton. It opened on December 9, 2014 and ran until December 20, 2014. It was nominated in the 'Best New Play' and 'Audience Choice Award' categories at the 2015 Irish Times Theatre Awards. It was the only non-funded production in both of its nominated categories. This particular production of the play is analysed as part of this chapter and photos from it are included in the appendices.

This play challenges audiences to engage with questions of sexual practice, consent, coercion, 'victim blaming', rape culture, 'toxic femininity' and statutory rape. Greer's writing highlights how women in particular are at great risk of not being believed when they recount stories of rape as a result of their sexual behaviour prior to their attack. The narrative of the play also focuses attention on the idea that a woman's own sense of internalised misogyny can easily lead to a situation where she does not believe that she has been raped.

Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* is a play fraught with family, abuse, neglect, power, 'toxic masculinity', 'toxic femininity' and fractured histories. *On Raftery's Hill* premiered at the Town Hall Theatre in Galway on May 9, 2000 as a Druid Theatre Company/Royal Court Theatre co-production and it subsequently ran at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs, London on June 29, 2000. It was originally directed by Garry Hynes and designed by Tony Walton. Richard Pilbrow was the lighting designer; Rich Walsh designed the sound and Paddy Cuneen composed the score. No specific production of this play is analysed as part of this chapter. Instead, the arguments made about the play come from textual analysis.

Carr confronts the audience with issues of familial abuse that range from verbal and psychological to physical and sexual. She deals with, and complicates the notion of sexual consent, and she challenges the power of truth; how it can be corrupted and utterly warped. Nearly all of the characters have experienced some form of abuse, and this has created a poisonous cycle where everyone becomes trapped in a stagnant environment, and the abusive pattern repeats itself indefinitely.

Mark O’Rowe’s 2014 play *Our Few And Evil Days* takes the form of a traditional Irish kitchen drama with a modern twist.¹⁰ *Our Few And Evil Days* premiered at The Abbey Theatre on October 3, 2014. It was written and directed by Mark O’Rowe and designed by Paul Wills. The original cast consisted of Sinead Cusack as Margaret, Ciaran Hinds as Michael, Charlie Murphy as Adele, Tom Vaughan-Lawlor as Dennis and Ian-Lloyd Anderson as Gary. This specific production of the play is analysed throughout this chapter

Pumpgirl is an early twenty-first century Irish play set just on the north side of the border between Northern and Southern Ireland. As noted by Lisa Fitzpatrick, “It is set in the border area with the Republic, though there is only one reference that situates it precisely in post-Ceasefire Northern Ireland – Pumpgirl says she and Hammy have sex in a deserted area ‘where two Prods were took and killed about fifteen years ago.’^{11>12}

Pumpgirl premiered at the Traverse Theatre during the 2006 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. It was subsequently produced in London in September 2006, had its off-Broadway premiere in the Manhattan Theatre Club in 2007 and its Irish premiere in The Lyric Theatre in Belfast in 2008. It was written by Abbie Spallen, directed by Mike Bradwell and designed by Bob Bailey. The original cast consisted of Orla Fitzgerald as Pumpgirl, James Doran as Hammy and Maggie Hayes as Sinead. The analysis of the play in this chapter is focused on textual analysis and does not explicitly rest on any particular production of the play, although theatre reviews are used where relevant.

It is important to contextualise the chosen plays in accordance with the varying cultural status of each. Given that *Petals* and *Test Dummy* remain unpublished, their respective influence and reach is arguably demonstrably less than the works of Carr, O’Rowe and Spallen. The audience capacity of the Theatre Upstairs is between forty and

¹⁰ The ‘Irish kitchen drama’ first came to prominence with plays such as Gregory’s and Yeats’s *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) and *The Pot of Broth* (1905); and has become a prominent structure of Irish theatre from the Irish Literary Revival right through the twentieth century.

¹¹ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 20.

¹² Lisa Fitzpatrick (2013) ‘Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage: ‘Spittin’ Blood in a Belfast Sink’’, in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23:3, 311, DOI: 10.1080/10486801.2013.806320 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2013.806320> August 25, 2013, accessed 8 February 2017.

fifty, depending on the layout of seating rig. In stark contrast to this, the Town Hall Theatre holds four hundred people, the Abbey Theatre holds six hundred and twenty-eight audience members, and, the Traverse Theatre holds three hundred and sixteen spectators. The original productions of Carr's, O'Rowe's and Spallen's plays also ran for substantially longer than Greer's and Daly's. Greer and Daly are also lesser known playwrights with lesser known actors in their respective plays. Even though this radically effects the potential impact of the plays, this research argues that all five are equally as important in terms of their challenging of contemporary rape culture.

Section Three: A note on the choice of plays

As this dissertation focuses on a range of performance types and cultural performativity throughout, it is necessary to confine a discussion of sexual violence in Irish theatre to one chapter. With that in mind, it is necessary to choose a select number of plays to focus on in this chapter. Other contemporary Irish plays that contain a sexual violence against women narrative include Mark O'Rowe's *Crestfall* (2003), and *Terminus* (2007), THEATREclub's *The Game* (2015) and Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2014).

As is discussed throughout this chapter, the five chosen plays deal with exclusively sexual violence against women, and cover five different types of sexual violence. These are date rape (*Petals*), incest where a father attacks a daughter (*On Raftery's Hill*), incest where a son attacks his mother (*Our Few and Evil Days*), child sexual abuse that continues into non-consensual experiences as an adult (*Test Dummy*), and gang rape (*Pumpgirl*). The differing types of sexual violence portrayed in these plays allows for a wider understanding of sexual violence and abuse in many of its forms. This means that performances and perpetuations of rape culture can be explored through different types of sexual abuse. This serves to disprove certain rape myths that help to sustain rape culture.

One rape myth is that only a 'certain type' of female can, or will, experience sexual violence. This rape myth implies that a female is 'asking for it' or putting herself in danger. Another pervasive rape myth is that sexual violence only happens in particular places, or to females belonging to a certain age bracket, who may have been intoxicated at the time of the attack. Emblematic of this, the protagonist in *Petals* is raped by a friend's father at a nightclub where she had been drinking. Her abuse of alcohol, admitted choice of provocative clothing willingness to trust her friend's father to look after her all feed into the likelihood that she would be in some part blamed for her own assault. This is a direct result of the rape culture in which she, and we as members of contemporary society, lives.

In this way, this play serves as a good example of how to examine and deconstruct many accepted stigmas, rape myths, victim blaming and slut shaming narratives. However, Margaret in *Our Few and Evil Days* is a middle-aged woman assaulted by her own son in the supposed safety of her own home. The most commonly associated stereotypes attributed to women who experience sexual violence do not apply to her. In this way, the different types of sexual violence narratives in the respective chosen plays allows for a discussion of contemporary rape culture, how it affects those directly affected by sexual violence in all of its forms.

It could be argued that the plays not chosen, such as those listed above, could serve the same purpose, as they deal with different kinds of sexual violence. However, this dissertation argues that they are not the best examples for this particular research. Firstly, *Crestfall* and *Terminus* were both written by Mark O’Rowe. Given that O’Rowe’s *Our Few and Evil Days* is included, this dissertation argues that including more than one of his works would limit the research and give too much weight to O’Rowe’s voice. There needs to be five different playwrights as this is not a study of one particular writer and how they write, but it is one of what is written on this subject, regardless of the age/profile/experience of the playwright. Also, as O’Rowe is a cis white male and, in keeping with the radical stance of this research to deliberately promote the female voice, it is important to not present the voice of more than one male playwright. *Our Few and Evil Days* was selected over O’Rowe’s other two listed plays because it deals with the more underrepresented case of incest where a child assaults a parent.

Our Few and Evil Days is also not a monologue play, while the other two are. Given that three other monologue plays are included, it is necessary to have the other two plays written in dialogue for balance. In a similar manner to how this chapter does not preference one playwright over another, it also does not preference the monologue form over any other writing style. The monologue form is discussed throughout the chapter where relevant, but just as rape culture is evidenced in all facets of contemporary life, the sexual violence narrative can be seen in various types of theatre.

Terminus deals with sexual violence against both women and men. In the case of the sexual violence against a woman, the act of violence is not a primarily sexual act, as one female physically assaults another with a broom handle in order to cause this pregnant woman to have a miscarriage. While this is a form of sexual violence, it does not comment on the proliferation of rape culture in the ways that the plays chosen do. As the play also has sexual violence against men, this dilutes from the stated focus of the dissertation of sexual violence against women. While sexual violence, and the effects of rape culture,

against men both deserves, and needs, more research, this dissertation specifically focuses on women and could not research violence against men in sufficient detail.

Crestfall is similar to *The Game* in that both incorporate narratives of sexual violence against female sex workers. The different levels of oppression and discrimination that sex workers face in comparison to non-sex workers needs to be examined and researched in much greater detail. The scope of this chapter does not allow for an appropriate intersectional exploration of sexual violence against sex workers, and how they are affected by rape culture.

A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing was reviewed for inclusion in this chapter in relation to *Petals* and *Test Dummy*, as these three plays have similar themes and form. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* is an adaptation of a novel by the same name. This novel has won multiple awards and has featured on *The Guardian's* Book Club.¹³ Arguably for this reason, the play has enjoyed international recognition and success. Neither *Petals* or *Test Dummy* have been published, nor produced more than once. They both premiered in the Theatre Upstairs in Dublin, a small theatre. Although Gillian Greer and Cailín Daly have both been nominated for awards for their respective plays, neither have won. For this reason, I wanted to look at plays not widely researched, seen or publicised. O'Rowe and Marina Carr and Abbie Spallen are three of Ireland's most well-known and successful playwrights. Greer and Daly are up and coming. Regardless of their relative successes, all five playwrights put forward a narrative of sexual violence against women. Just because Greer and Daly have yet to have their plays published does not mean that their narrative is of any less value than the other playwrights. In keeping with the radical stance of the research to promote the female voice, this dissertation finds it necessary to promote the voices of playwrights not as prolific as those leading Irish theatre.

It is for all of these reasons that these five plays have been selected to be analysed in this chapter.

¹³ Eimear McBride, 'How I wrote *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*', *The Guardian*, published 10 September 2016, accessed 23 July 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/10/guardian-book-club-eimear-mcbride-how-i-wrote-a-girl-is-a-half-formed-thing>

Section Four: Exploring the ‘blurred lines’¹⁴ of sex, consent and statutory rape

A study of the portrayal of sexual expression and femininities in Gillian Greer’s *Petals*

As *Petals* begins, the audience is presented with, “a young girl, 16 approx. Scruffy, certainly not well off. Rough Dublin accent. A bare stage.”¹⁵ This young woman is known only as ‘girl’ and is never given any other name throughout the play. In the original run, Gilmore appeared on stage in a white vest top and white, tight-fitting boxer shorts. She was barefoot, and her long red hair fell around her shoulders acting as a stark contrast in colour to the monotony of black and white surrounding her, as seen in [Figure 1]. The character ‘Girl’ performs a frank, honest, and at times, shocking portrayal of the sexual exploits of a young woman of about sixteen years of age who is growing up in moderate poverty in a ‘rough’ area of Dublin. It is written almost entirely in verse and is unrelenting in its graphic descriptions of how a young woman is experiencing sexual intercourse as a casual exercise, devoid of any of the emotional attachments usually associated with such activities. In reviewing the play, Emer O’Kelly writes that,

Almost its only fault is an over-exuberance of language: Greer needs to rein it in. Other than that, to maintain the discipline of verse for an hour, along with the gut-wrenching pathos of a young woman, still at school, but dubbed a "slag" by her schoolmates and the young men she meets in the grubby Diva Club where she spends her evenings, is a true accomplishment.¹⁶

This research argues that the play can be read as a product of fourth wave feminist discourse, which is reacting to the false construction of ‘post feminism’, as the character name ‘Girl’ is arguably a comment on the notion of ‘girl power’ and its failings. ‘Girl power’ is a term that was originally coined in the early 1990s by New York based feminist activist group Riot Grrrl,¹⁷ but became synonymous with British pop band The Spice Girls in the mid to late nineties. According to Susan Hopkins in *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture*, “girl power is a postfeminist movement, in the sense of coming after and perhaps overcoming feminism [...] The Girl Power of the 1990s and beyond marks a generational shift in feminist-inspired thinking toward more optimistic but individualistic

¹⁴ Islandfabrics, ‘Miley Cyrus & Robin Thicke MTV VMA Awards 2013 Performance’, *YouTube*, August 26, 2013, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFLv9Ns1EuQ>

¹⁵ Gillian Greer, *Petals*. Unpublished Script provided by the playwright on 9 October 2015, 1.

¹⁶ Emer O’Kelly, ‘Goldsmith without the dark psychosis’, *Independent* (Dublin), December 15, 2014, accessed February 6, 2017 <http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/theatre-arts/goldsmith-without-the-dark-psychosis-30828341.html>

¹⁷ Rebecca Munford, Melanie Waters, *Feminism & Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2014), 110.

positions and perspectives.”¹⁸ Hopkins goes on to say that in the popular cultural imagination, ‘girl power’ signifies, “a unique category of girls who are self-assured, living lives lightly inflected but by no means driven by feminism, influenced by the philosophy of DIY, and assuming they can have (or at least buy) it all.”¹⁹ Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters consider in *Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique* that, “ ‘girl power’ posits a simultaneous replacement and displacement of second wave feminism. While ‘girl’ represents the secession of the insurgent daughter, ‘power’ offers an alternative to an ostensibly out-dated ‘victim feminism’.”²⁰ ‘Girl’ in *Petals* is a product of an overtly sexualised and objectified society where she feels that she is in control of her sexuality as she discusses what to wear to a night club,

Give up and go for somethin’ tight – dark blue –
won’t leave much to the imagination but
it might imply the kinda night I’m out
to have.²¹

Despite the agency and ownership she believes she has; her friend’s father rapes her. This rape forcibly removes her bodily autonomy and questions the control she has over her sexual experiences. It shows how women are not safe in public places, and hence implies that they are still in need of feminism. The rape breaks with the idea that this ‘girl’ is free and supports Susan Brownmiller’s point made in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* that, “from prehistoric times to the present, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all* men keep *all* women in a state of fear.”²² This book was published in 1975, and since then there has been a seismic increase in the prevalence of ‘victim blaming’ and ‘rape myths’ due to the prevalence of contemporary rape culture. ‘Toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ behaviours have also come to prominence in mainstream public discourse, ever-heightening the control rape culture has on our collective lives. Greer’s ‘Girl’ has to contend with these complex notions on top of the initial idea that she is unjustifiably unsafe from the possibility of experiencing sexual violence simply because she identifies as female.

The nature of the bare stage allows for a sole focus on the ‘Girl’, her words and her story. There is no distraction from her monologue and this creates a sense of tension in the theatre as the girl immediately begins the play with a graphic and sensory description

¹⁸ Susan Hopkins, *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁹ Hopkins, *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture*, 17.

²⁰ Munford, Waters, *Feminism & Popular Culture*, 110.

²¹ Greer, *Petals*, 26.

²² Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women And Rape* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1975), 15

of a sexual experience. The tension and atmosphere created by this staging is comparable to the performance power of Caitríona Daly's *Test Dummy*, as discussed in Section Eight of this chapter. It feels like there is no escaping her words, no matter how powerful the imagery she creates may be, replicating the lack of escape that women have from twenty-first century rape culture. The opening lines of the play read,

I thought his cock tasted of stale, old smokes
The choke of which, the heat, the stench of pulsing
Rotted meat that smacked against my throat – is
now forever burned into my mind.²³

This sets up the experience of sexual acts, both consensual and non-consensual, as the main narrative for the play as 'Girl' continues with such descriptions throughout. It is important to note that in Ireland an overwhelming majority of Catholic ethos schools prevent access to correct, helpful and practical sexual health advice for their students, favouring 'abstinence only' programmes that fail to protect and educate teenage students,²⁴ implying that this girl has not had access to practical sexual health education. This play eloquently tries to navigate its way through the issues that this nameless young woman is facing.

From the opening line, the audience is drawn into the gritty nature of the play; the use of explicit language and graphic description of a sex act is shocking in its unapologetic realness. This sentence sets up the way in which such sexual experiences will be discussed throughout. There is no sense of a romanticised or emotional connection with this girl's sexual experiences, it appears that she does not even particularly enjoy them, she does them for some other gain. *Petals* complicates the notion of a woman's enjoyment of sexual experiences. It critiques the post feminist idea that women are now 'sexually liberated' as it re-affirms the idea that it is for men to seek sex from women who are commodities. As Jessica Ringrose points out, in the 'post post feminism' moment,

Masculinity is epitomised in buying the consumer goods (i.e. cars and shoes) with which to gain access to the sexually commodified female body. Femininity in contrast is epitomised through approximating the sexually commodified body,

²³ Greer, *Petals*, 1.

²⁴ Peter McGuire published a detailed account of the agencies invited into schools in Ireland to provide students with 'relationship and sexual education' (RSE). Of the organisations listed, numerous bodies such as 'Love for Life' and 'Pure in Heart' deliver RSE that focuses solely on heterosexual committed relationships with no information given on contraception or queer sexualities. Such organisations also push anti-choice rhetoric. For more information,

Peter McGuire, 'Who is teaching your children about sex?: The agencies that are invited to schools', *Irish Times*, February 11, 2017, accessed February 6, 2017
<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/who-is-teaching-your-children-about-sex-1.1686402>

performing as sexual object, and occupying the position of sexually desirable 'baby girl'.²⁵

The term 'post post feminism' is used to link the reaction against the construction of 'post feminism' with fourth wave feminist ideology. Arguably, fourth wave feminism grew out of a need to reject 'post feminism'. What Ringrose highlights in this quote is the contemporary construction of a 'toxic femininity' and 'toxic masculinity' mentality that relies on materialist values bourn of the myth of 'post-feminism'.

It is poignant that the only description of potential sexual enjoyment for 'Girl' comes from an arguably non-consensual kiss with her female friend Lorna who forces herself on her,

And it's only now the rush of it has left
I notice something – pourin' down my thighs
a sort of soft wet wet that I don't know
that I cannot identify at all.²⁶

This act, when read in conjunction with her other supposedly consensual experiences with men, questions whether or not she is sexually attracted to men, or if she has ever enjoyed a sexual experience with a man. Does she enjoy it or just allow herself to become a commodity for male sexual gratification? The question of sexual consent is also raised as she is described as a sixteen-year-old girl, but the age of sexual consent in Ireland is seventeen,²⁷ so it is fair to argue that even when she believes she is giving consent, legally speaking, she cannot. When describing the first time she ever had sex, her motives are clear. She claims that she was left with no alternative but to have sex with a boy at a party for a cigarette, because her mother has confiscated her cigarettes,

That first one though, the memory stuck, returns
After every night in which I fuck. That
Party, birthday of some long forgotten friend,
That house upended and me gaggin' for
a drag of someone's half-smoked cigarette.
Mine, apprehended by the scoldin' ma
forced me to partake in drastic action
Spa.²⁸

²⁵ Jessica Ringrose, 'Are You Sexy, Flirty, Or A Slut? Exploring 'Sexualisation' and How Teen Girls Perform/Negotiate Digital Sexual Identity on Social Networking Sites', in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 104.

²⁶ Greer, *Petals*, 24.

²⁷ Irish Statute Book, *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006*, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2006/act/15/enacted/en/html>

²⁸ Greer, *Petals*, 3.

Arguably she was not forced into this sexual activity by anyone, but the point is that, from her very first sexual experience, she regards herself as a commodity, exchanging her sexual services for another material good. This acts as an example of her internalised misogyny and her performance of ‘toxic femininity’ as she objectifies herself and believes she is a material possession to be used by males. This research is not implying that she is to blame for these expressions of internalised misogyny, because, as discussed in Section Two of this chapter, women portray these behaviours as a result of hetero-patriarchal constructions and assumptions. Rather, her behaviour is used as an example of the dangers apparent in the performance of such concepts. As she previously states,

A lady learns to use her value fast,
tight tits and arse in order to secure
whatever I might want to ask them for.²⁹

This calls into question the internalised misogyny and expressions of ‘toxic femininity’ that other young girls learn and practice as soon as society sexualises and objectifies them. To compare her own value as a human being with that of simply being an object of male desire erodes her agency and self-esteem. It is a performance of ‘toxic femininity’ where she damages herself through accepting her objectification as a marker for her self-worth. The girl has fully integrated the sexualisation and objectification that she experiences into her performance of her own sexuality. Through regarding herself as a commodity or material good for the pleasure of men, she enables their sexualisation of her to continue and deepen. This expression of internalised misogyny and ‘toxic femininity’ becomes cyclically tied to her external objectification and how males treat her. At this point in the play, her ability to enact free will and provide full consent for a sexual act is questioned, as it is arguably clear that there are deeper layers of misogyny and sexualisation at play.

In a similar manner to the woman in Caitríona Daly’s *Test Dummy*, this girl is not a helpless victim with no control over her own actions, that would be reductive and sexist to say. However, the level of consent this young girl would be capable of giving is contentious, and the reasons she would believe that the providing of sexual favours in return for material goods is a worthwhile and appropriate use of her own body need to be deconstructed. Ultimately, she is engaging in behaviours that are exemplary of ‘toxic femininity’ and serve to sustain contemporary rape culture. It is also important to note the emotional implications giving sexual favours to anyone who desired them would have on the mental stability and health of this young girl.

The play culminates in the retelling of a rape scene. In a similar manner to all of the other plays discussed in this chapter, this young girl never describes herself as someone

²⁹ Greer, *Petals*, 3.

who has been raped. It is highly poignant that she does not verbally identify as a female who has experienced sexual violence and been raped. As discussed in Chapter One, it is vital that the person who experiences sexual violence is given the absolute right to choose how to personally identify, but when the girl who has objectively experienced an act of sexual violence does not even accept that she has been, she is expressing a form of ‘toxic femininity’ pertinent to the proliferation of contemporary rape culture. She describes in detail her rape by friend’s father, a man she trusted to look after her when she drank too much alcohol,

Colette’s dad, his hand still on my neck,
pitbull visage contorts into a look
of genuine concern.
Better?
Alright.
Alright?
Alright.³⁰

Her lack of consent is clear,

No longer just a dad dripping ice cream –
there’s pawing, licking, grunting and hearts racing
and tongues slapping and stop stop please stop no but don’t,³¹

As she is described as a sixteen-year-old female, this is an act of statutory rape regardless of whether or not she did give enthusiastic consent,³² but she never describes it as such. In a similar manner to all of the other plays discussed throughout this chapter, the word rape is never mentioned in the text. Greer is challenging the potentially grey area surrounding ‘rape myths’, ‘rape culture’ and ‘victim blaming’ narratives. The fact is that there is no grey area where acts of non-consensual sex are concerned, and this girl is raped, but she has also been subjected to non-consensual sexual acts throughout her life. Arguably this girl is not capable of giving consent when she so closely links her sense of self with her ability to gain things from men through providing sexual favours, as she performs her internalised misogyny and ‘toxic femininity’ throughout the play as a whole. She is also legally speaking, unable to give sexual consent while she remains under the age of seventeen in Ireland.

³⁰ Greer, *Petals*, 37.

³¹ Greer, *Petals*, 39.

³² As defined by the *Criminal Law (Sexual offences) Act 2006*, of the Irish Statute Book, in Section 3, Subsection 1, “Any person who engages in a sexual act with a child who is under the age of 17 years shall be guilty of an offence”. accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2006/act/15/section/3/enacted/en/html#sec3>

Greer deals with both rape and statutory rape continually in *Petals*. These topics highlight the prevalence of sexual violence committed against women in contemporary culture, and the patriarchal structures that allow such violence to continue. The narrative of sexual violence throughout the play allows for a critique of the constructed notion of 'post feminism', and the performance of 'toxic femininity' in contemporary culture, as it shows how women and girls must still heed the message given by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*,

Her body is getting away from her, it is no longer the straightforward expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same time she becomes for others a thing: on the street men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show her flesh.³³

The proliferation of sexual violence in the play also challenges the audience to face their own prejudices about sexual violence, particularly about young women being raped. For example, there is constant reference made to how this girl believes she is viewed, and how she should be viewed by her male peers while she partakes in behaviour and attitudes synonymous with females who are 'slut-shamed' and overtly sexualised, "A lady learns to use her value fast,"³⁴ "It's fine, forget it, please let's just move on, there's somethin wrong inside me, in me heart,"³⁵ "Give up and go for somethin' tight – dark blue – won't leave much to the imagination but it might imply the kinda night I'm out to have."³⁶ It is after all of these statements that her friend's father rapes her. The play ends in the hours after this rape takes place and the girl is self-reflexively looking at her own life and actions, but never comes to terms with the implications of her friend's father's actions. Arguably, if the play continued and this girl went on to make a statement to the police about the assault and a case was eventually taken to trial, the defence for her friend's father would argue that her previous sexual history and behaviour on the night in question - tight fitting clothing, copious amounts of alcohol consumed – would call into question whether or not she really was raped.

It is an increasingly common trope seen in court criminal cases concerning sexual violence where the common mentality is that the alleged victim could have prevented their attack or that they must have given off mixed signals to their rapist who did not realise that they were raping the person in question. An example of this kind of misogynist vitriol can be seen in the retrial of British footballer Ched Evans who was acquitted on all charges

³³ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 109.

³⁴ Greer, *Petals*, 3.

³⁵ Greer, *Petals*, 25.

³⁶ Greer, *Petals*, 26.

of an alleged sexual assault in 2016. As part of his defence, two ex-boyfriends of the alleged victim were called as witnesses to comment of the sexual practices and preferences of the woman in question. After Evans was acquitted, the woman faced a plethora of misogynist abuse online. As pointed out by Holly Baxter in an article about the acquittal, Ched Evans was found not guilty today, but the wave of misogyny that was unleashed by his supporters across social media didn't make me feel optimistic about society. Nor did I find it heartening that the court case involved discussion of the woman's sex life, given by two people she'd had relationships with in the past. When women decide whether to choose to report their rapists in the future, they will remember these tweets. They will remember a trial that responded to another woman's rape claims with a defence team bringing in her ex-boyfriends as witnesses and questioning them about how kinky she was in her sex life. They will remember the people who deliberately spread this woman's name and details around on Twitter and various blogs in an effort to discredit and intimidate her. [...] Evans may not be guilty, but the way in which rape trials are conducted – and the reactions to them – are powerful indicators of whether people who have been raped will choose to come forward in future. When justice is done, it should not be done like this.³⁷

While the sexual behaviour of the girl in *Petals* is so openly discussed throughout the play before she is raped, the link between the construction of consent for her, and for people involved in rape trials becomes clear. Contemporary rape culture operates in such a way as to discredit those who come forward with allegations of sexual violence, especially women, using their previous sexual experiences. This delegitimising of the female voice in cases of sexual violence leads to a situation where a rapist's father can publicly state in a character reference given to a judge about a convicted sex offender that, "His life will never be the one that he dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve. That is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20 plus years of life."³⁸ When we reduce an act of sexual violence to a sex act, we fail the person raped and sustain rape culture indefinitely. Through its challenging narrative, *Petals* is forcing the audience to question whether or not they believed this girl was raped, and even if they believe she was, did she bring it on herself through her own actions and behaviour. Such a portrayal of sexual

³⁷ Holly Baxter, 'Justice should never be done like it was in the Ched Evans rape trial', *Independent* (London), October 14, 2016, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/ched-evans-footballer-rape-trial-acquitted-justice-woman-misogyny-consent-prison-walk-free-a7362276.html>

³⁸ Tom Cleary, 'Read: Full Letter to the Judge by Dan Turner, Brock's Father', *Heavy News*, June 8, 2016, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://heavy.com/news/2016/06/brock-turner-father-dad-dan-turner-full-letter-statement-stanford-rapist/>

violence and rape culture eloquently critiques the phenomenon of ‘victim blaming’ and the ‘rape myths’ that surround it.

As previously mentioned, this play premiered in 2014 in the midst of fourth wave feminism. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the #WakingTheFeminists campaign is a prime example of fourth wave activism as this is a movement that quickly garnered attention and support online. Advances in technology have also created more issues for feminists to contend with as shown in the existence of ‘gamer gate’³⁹ and how online trolls seek to breed a new form of misogyny and female oppression online. British actress Emma Watson gave her now infamous United Nations speech launching the ‘he4she’ campaign to work towards gender equality all over the world in September of 2014, and days after this speech went viral online, Watson was threatened by Internet hackers who claimed to have accessed nude photos of her; and would share them online if she did not give up her feminist activism. In 2016, British police are faced with tackling numerous false accounts on the photo sharing social media site, *Instagram* that claim to mimic the hit U.S. television show *Gossip Girl* in revealing personal information about young people in a particular area online; and are illegally posting photos of mainly teenage girls and attaching them to false stories about their sexual histories.

In August of 2013, pornographic images of a young Irish concert goer, dubbed ‘Slane Girl’, were published online along with stories of how this young girl performed sexually explicit acts on numerous young men in public at an outdoor concert in Ireland while she appeared obviously intoxicated. While there was outcry over the abusive nature of this event, many news articles and online comments shamed this young woman and blamed her for becoming the victim of such abuse. Although the now deleted video showing her being molested and pushed around by up to eight young men clearly highlighted that this seventeen-year-old girl was subjected to sexual violence in public, it was her actions that garnered the most attention, not those of her attackers and she was reportedly admitted to hospital requiring sedation because she was so distraught. In a response to the level of abuse that this young woman faced online, journalist Eva Wiseman wrote in *The Guardian*,

In 2013 women aren't allowed to make mistakes. Not even at a bloody Eminem concert, surely the most mistake-ridden square mile in Europe. Not even if

³⁹ Beginning in August 2014, several women in the video gaming industry, including game developers Brianna Wu and Zoe Quinn and feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian, were targeted by online abusers who made violent threats against the women involved, including threats of rape and murder. This was a misogynist reaction to the feminist ideas of the women involved and has been described as a ‘culture war’ or part of a ‘war on women’. The outpouring of abuse by online misogynists is a clear example of the proliferation of ‘toxic masculinity’ in contemporary culture as these attackers felt threatened by diversification in the gaming industry and entitled to violently critique any woman who represented this perceived threat to their male dominated spaces.

documenting and sharing the mistake was a mistake itself. Not even if it was 10 years ago and they're a different person now. Not even if the only person hurt is them, their pride, the way their mum can no longer make eye contact over tea. This kind of female focused humiliation, whether on a school-wide or international scale, has become so common now that all the responses feel tired, worn through at the elbows.⁴⁰

More recent examples of this kind of blatantly oppressive and misogynist behaviour towards young women in Ireland can be seen in the potential existence of UCD's revenge porn group, and the mass sexual attacks of women in European cities on New Year's Eve 2015 that are both discussed in the introductory chapter.

These examples highlight the grotesque levels of misogynist abuse that particularly young women are facing in the world today. This is a problem that manifests on a global scale and is greatly impacting on how societies, and Irish society in this case, are interacting with issues of 'victim blaming', rape culture and 'rape myth' acceptance in contemporary times. Women and girls who experience sexual violence are routinely delegitimised when they recount their stories of rape and assault as a result of pre-conceived notions about their supposed sexual experiences and behaviour prior to their attack. *Petals* contests these myths, and the culture of sexual violence from which they stem. The girl in the play believes she holds power over her own actions and decisions and that she is in control of her sexual experiences, but she is undoubtedly not. This is partly due to her expressions of 'toxic femininity' and internalised misogyny, but also because she is legally still a child.

Greer presents a 'judgmental onlooker' character's viewpoint in the description of the teacher at school, Sister Margarita. She is introduced as,

The Sister Margarita, guardian of
our spiritual growth, the Jackal, called
so for a smile so plastered to her face,
a grin so laced with malice that it drips
out of the corners of her lipsticked lips.⁴¹

It is clear from this description that the protagonist does not like this nun, but is also fearful of her,

My own ma one cracked pearl upon the string –
unfortunates subjected to her teaching,

⁴⁰ Eva Wiseman, 'The Slane Girl Twitter scandal proves that women can't make mistakes', *Guardian* September 1, 2013, accessed April 4, 2016,

<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/sep/01/slane-girl-twitter-scandal-women>

⁴¹ Greer, *Petals*, 6.

preaching that scarred many not hard enough
to withstand her: that stare, that smile, that intolerable glare.⁴²

It is this nun who introduces the petal theme to the play as she asks all of the students in her class to pick one flower of their choosing from the school grounds. Sister Margarita links the innocence of the flower with religious iconography and a sense of Catholic guilt,

Your flower is purity. A soul that shines before The Lord.
The nun exclaimed with pride a speech rehearsed
and well versed as I am in her approach
to nurturing and sustaining Catholic guilt.⁴³

The nun uses the metaphor of the flower to symbolise the purity, or virginity, of the teenage girls in her class. It is clear that she is aware of some of the sexual activities of her students as one of the other girls points out that this exercise is a reaction to six girls from their school becoming pregnant in the past year,

It's just a panic over the Dunne sisters. They're up the duff. The next ones.
That's six this year alone she tells us, six,
have fucked their way to buggies and breastfeedin'.⁴⁴

While the nun's efforts to impress upon the young women the Catholic belief in virginity until marriage, particularly for women, may appear well-meaning initially, it becomes clear that Sister Margarita is judgmental and disapproving of the sexual behaviour of her students, and chooses to punish and humiliate them for this. When she calls out one student called Imelda to explain why she has chosen her respective flower, the nun goes on to explain that she must pluck out one petal from the flower for each 'impure' thought or action she has ever had or done,

She said our flower is all our souls are worth
and imperfection – blemished souls were bound
for the infernal, damned, the next life and this.
With malice, to Imelda she instructs
for each impurity of thought or mind
to pluck away a petal from her souls.⁴⁵

The nun uses this exercise to 'slut-shame' these young women into feeling guilty for expressing their sexual desires before marriage. This 'slut-shaming' behaviour is a clear example of the power of 'toxic femininity'. Essentially this nun believes that these young women should live out their lives in a very particular way and she is deliberately abusing

⁴² Greer, *Petals*, 19.

⁴³ Greer, *Petals*, 13.

⁴⁴ Greer, *Petals*, 17.

⁴⁵ Greer, *Petals*, 14.

them for choosing to express themselves and their sexuality how they see fit. Just because the Catholic Church, and this nun as its representative, believe that ‘fornication’ is a sin, does not mean that it is or that these young women should refrain from sexual experiences. The nun’s performance of ‘toxic femininity’ is apparent through her need to impose her subjective beliefs on the young women in such a derogatory manner. Her ‘slut-shaming’ exercise actively damages the protagonist of the play as Sister Margarita indoctrinates a sense of victim blaming into these girls. She is judging their behaviour and mocking them for it.

Feona Attwood discusses the use of the word ‘slut’ and its mainstream contemporary connotations, “the popular meanings of ‘slut’ have shifted over time to refer increasingly in a ‘jokey’ way to one’s sexual status, in ways that appear to re-signify and reclaim slut from its injurious roots.⁴⁶ Ringrose adds to this notion commenting that, “‘whore’ [is] used extensively in popular culture to mean being ‘really into something’, like I am a cleaning ‘whore’, for instance. In this way ‘whore’ ‘sexes up’ the topic under discussion, whilst also disinvesting whore from some of its conventional meanings.”⁴⁷ However, as Ringrose claims that words such as ‘slut’ and ‘whore’ are now used in a ‘jokey’ way as they have been reclaimed, this dissertation contends that the creation of ‘toxic femininity’ proves that although the words have been ‘reclaimed’ in one way, in essence they remain firmly connected to their original ‘injurious roots’. The blatant ‘slut-shaming’ by the nun of these young girls coupled with the girl’s own sense of internalised misogyny highlight how damaging the words and ideas can be on the young women they are routinely applied to. Arguably, had this nun not so severely linked the ‘worth’ of the girls in her class to their performances of sexuality and desire, the girl may not ultimately blame herself for her rape. As discussed in Chapter One, the speech act can be as damaging and violent as a physical act of violence; and ‘slut-shaming’ and ‘victim blaming’ rhetoric sustain contemporary rape culture through the violence they enact on the person affected by it.

The rape narrative that runs through the play as a whole can be read as shedding a light on society’s judgment of these women and their sexual behaviour. This story challenges the audience to critique the preconceived notions and ideas that society has

⁴⁶ Feona Attwood, ‘Sluts and Riot Grrrls: Female Identity and Sexual Agency,’ *Journal of Gender Studies*, 16:3, (2007) 233-247, DOI: 10.1080/09589230701562921, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09589230701562921>

⁴⁷ Jessica Ringrose, ‘Are You Sexy, Flirty, Or A Slut? Exploring ‘Sexualisation’ and How Teen Girls Perform/Negotiate Digital Sexual Identity on Social Networking Sites’, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds. Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 109.

about young women who express their sexual urges so flippantly as we see the humiliating and damaging effect that Sister Margarita's actions has on these women. The protagonist is arguably haunted by the words of the nun as she mentions the innocent flower and petals after she has been raped. Near the end of the play, she stands in the shower saying,

Petals from the showerhead to cleanse me.
White petals ripped from flowers, touch, and end me
Discarded, severed, parted, shredded souls
of me and Lorna and Colette, Imelda,
of the Jackal and The Lady Eve aswell
each one of us confined to hell in this world
or the next. I drowned my heart that night. We all did.
Lost them.⁴⁸

The connection she makes between the flower picking task she took part in at school and the result of her rape are clear. She is discussing how her own soul feels damned now because of what she has been through, but she is implying that she is to blame for her own demise. As a result of Sister Margarita's embodiment of 'toxic femininity', she believes that her soul is now severed and drowned as the nun told them that a loss of purity would have such negative consequences for them. The young girl performs her own 'toxic femininity' and internalised misogyny behaviours as she victim blames herself. She never claims that her friend's father has any responsibility for her rape, she never even mentions him. Her misogyny has been internalised and institutionalised through the reinforcement of hetero-patriarchal gender roles, the positioning of the female as inferior within the stereotypical gender binary, her exposure to women purporting 'toxic femininity', such as Sister Margarita, and from external influences.

This play as a whole may appear at first glance to be a crass depiction of the active sex life of a young woman from Dublin, but it becomes clear that *Petals* serves as a mirror for contemporary society where young women are continually and increasingly sexualised, objectified, raped and vilified when they try to express their own sexual desires. The young woman presented in the play is trying to navigate her way through the misogyny, 'toxic femininity' and sexism that she faces everyday simply for being female. Greer's text shows what kind of effect growing up in this sexualised society can have on the psyche of a young woman, and how this can lead to a point where this girl does not even realise that she has been raped, even though she is experiencing the emotional turmoil of someone subjected to sexual violence. This young girl is the embodiment of years of sexism, objectification and indoctrination into a regime of routine 'toxic femininity'. She

⁴⁸ Greer, *Petals*, 41.

is a product of the rape culture in which she has grown, and this play works as a harsh commentary on, and critique of this patriarchal and overly sexualised society.

Section Five: “I don’t think Daddy’s choosy. He just wants to bate us all into the dirt.”⁴⁹

Consent, victim blaming, sexual violence and ‘toxic masculinity’ in Marina Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*

In *On Raftery’s Hill*, Marina Carr examines motherhood; what it is to be a ‘good mother’, and what happens when maternal influences are absent and ‘toxic femininity’, and its inherent relationship to ‘toxic masculinity’ and hegemonic patriarchy, reigns supreme. She also interrogates fatherhood, particularly as it takes on the form of a violent, torturing and dominant patriarch who creates an omnipotent level of fear for his family throughout the entire play. Melissa Sihra writes that,

On Raftery’s Hill presents a complex web of collusion and delusion where each character negotiates the suffering with which they are implicated behind closed doors, whether as perpetrator, victim or complicit bystander. In a rewriting of the ending of *Waiting for Godot* we see how Carr’s motif of infinite repetition is rendered painfully real as the characters remain seated in the kitchen and, like the tramps, “They do not move”.⁵⁰

As stated by Brian Singleton with regards to *On Raftery’s Hill*, “Carr presents an Irish topographical examination of the hearth and home as being violated from within, inter-generationally, that has existed for a very long time.”⁵¹ Sihra points out, “In *On Raftery’s Hill*, we remain trapped, along with the characters, within the walls of the single-set country kitchen. In the final year of the twentieth century, this play is a radical rewriting of Gregory’s and Yeats’ *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902).”⁵² In comparing *On Raftery’s Hill* to *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, Sihra states that, “While the kitchen in Irish drama has come to signify an enduring association and conflation of family and nation, Carr’s inversion of [...] *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* (1902) radically de-idealises hearth and home where

⁴⁹ Marina Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’ in *Plays 2* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 37.

⁵⁰ Melissa Sihra, ‘Marina Carr profile: Beckett’s heir and Synge’s song’, *Irish Times*, December 6, 2016, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/marina-carr-profile-beckett-s-heir-and-synge-s-song-1.2893827>

⁵¹ Brian Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) P.67.

⁵² Melissa Sihra, ‘The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr, in *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Sihra (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 212.

generational cycles of sexual abuse continue without intervention by Church or State.”⁵³ The connection between *On Raftery’s Hill* and *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* becomes apparent in Carr’s critique of the vision of ‘idealised Irish womanhood’. Carr portrays a family in crisis where Shalome, the character comparable to Kathleen, is not comfortable or content within her own home as patriarchal abuse and oppression continues for the Rafterys. Almost one hundred years after Gregory’s and Yeats’s play premiered, Carr uses her play to highlight the many ways in which Irish women are still subjected to violent patriarchal oppression and remain unequal in society. While the old woman in *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* calls for help from the young men of the house proclaiming that, “My land that was taken from me. [...] My four beautiful green fields,”⁵⁴ and those young men ultimately leave home to die for her, “He died for love of me: many a man has died for love of me,”⁵⁵ Carr’s old woman Shalome is left, “an exile within the home, repeatedly seeking futile escape across the threshold.”⁵⁶ Sihra goes on to say that,

Many critics have expressed discomfort and often derision that there are no ‘positive’ resolutions in Carr’s plays from this period. However, in a society where historical processes of female oppression have only begun to be seriously acknowledged in the social, political and academic fora of the last decade or so, painful narratives need to be addressed before transformations can occur.⁵⁷

In radically rewriting *Kathleen Ni Houlihan* with a clear influence of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot* (1953), Carr challenges such a ‘historical process of female oppression’ in an uncomfortable yet effective way. In *On Raftery’s Hill*, Carr deconstructs two such iconic Irish plays in a bid to shed a light on the hidden and forgotten histories of the plight of Irish women downtrodden by the cultural weight of hegemonic ‘toxic masculinity’.

It is important to explore the damaging limitations of a patriarchal society within this play and understand what exactly is meant by the term ‘patriarchy’. Carol A. Brown defines the term in her 1975 article, ‘Patriarchal Capitalism and the Female-Headed Family’ as she writes,

⁵³ Melissa Sihra, ‘Marina Carr profile: Beckett’s heir and Synge’s song’, *Irish Times*, December 6, 2016, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/marina-carr-profile-beckett-s-heir-and-synge-s-song-1.2893827>

⁵⁴ Lady Augusta Gregory, William Butler Yeats, ‘Cathleen Ni Houlihan’ in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 7.

⁵⁵ Lady Augusta Gregory, William Butler Yeats, ‘Cathleen Ni Houlihan’ in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 7.

⁵⁶ Melissa Sihra, ‘The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr’, in *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Sihra (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 213.

⁵⁷ Melissa Sihra, ‘The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr’, in *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Sihra (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 214.

Patriarchy takes many forms. The best known is the exploitation of an individual woman by her father, husband, or father-in-law. But, especially in reference to modern capitalism, it is necessary to recognise that patriarchy also includes the collective exploitation of the female sex, by the male sex, and the exploitation of the female sex by ruling-class men for the ruling class's economic and social benefit.”⁵⁸

On Raftery's Hill is a feminist play as Carr seeks to deconstruct unquestioned patriarchal rule that is proliferated through a series of ‘toxic masculinity’ behaviours. Carr addresses the biases present in this performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ by representing its potentially damaging consequences. When discussing feminist struggles with patriarchal oppression, Anna M. Zajicek and Toni M. Calasanti point out that, “Feminist scholars challenge ahistorical conceptions of the patriarchal state and emphasise the importance of power struggles across class, race, and gender lines in transforming state gender policies.”⁵⁹ As Eamonn Carr writes, “Carr grapples with issues of power, sexuality, secrecy, shame, dysfunction, inferiority, indignity and addiction that are at the core of sexual abuse.”⁶⁰ As she does this, she challenges the audience to face the realities of abuse of power and phallogocentric dominance. These are issues that lie at the heart of Irish identity as the *Constitution of Ireland* still discriminates against women on the basis of gender. According to the *Constitution of Ireland*, the words ‘mother’ and ‘woman’ are interchangeable in Article 41, the ‘Family Article’,

- 1.) In particular the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.
- 2.) The State shall therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.⁶¹

This distinction of woman *as* mother and conversely, mother *as* woman, and the fact that this distinction remains in twenty-first century Ireland showcases one way in which

⁵⁸ Brown, Carol A. "Patriarchal Capitalism and the Female-Headed Family." *Social Scientist- Special Number on Women* 4.4/5 (1975): 28-39. JSTOR. Accessed April 18, 2016,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3516119>

⁵⁹ Anna M. Zajicek, Toni M. Calasanti. 1998. "Patriarchal Struggles and State Practices: A Feminist, Political-Economic View." *Gender and Society*, 1998. 505. *JSTOR Journals*, EBSCOhost accessed April 19, 2016

⁶⁰ Eamonn Carr, ‘The Theatrical Representation of Incest in Marina Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*’, *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, Volume 2: Issue 3, Article 10. 2001, 141.

⁶¹ *Bunreacht Na hÉireann: Constitution of Ireland*, ‘Article 41.1 and 41.2’, October, 2015, 164, accessed February 6, 2017,

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/Bunreacht_na_hÉireann_October_2015_Edition.pdf

women remain relegated to roles solely concerned with child care, regardless of an individual's personal situation.

Eamonn Carr opens his description of *On Raftery's Hill* by stating that "for the first time in one of her midland's plays the life of the central female character does not end in suicide."⁶² Although no physical suicide takes place, Carr presents a form of psychological suicide for her female protagonist, Sorrel Raftery. She appears to follow in her biological mother's footsteps in resigning herself to a life of abuse and incest when she breaks off her engagement with Dara Mood and chooses to remain in her familial home at the end of the play,

Red: (to Sorrel) I hope you knocked some sense into young Mood.

Sorrel: Oh I soured him ouch, Daddy, don't you worry, I soured him ouch for ever more.⁶³

There is an implication that Dinah's mother, the woman Sorrel believed to be her own mother, took her own life, but any reference made to her death never clearly states how she passed away. Shalome asks, "Wasn't it an awful pity your mother had to die?"⁶⁴ Ded suggests that his mother died shortly after Dinah gave birth to Sorrel, "And do yees know the worst, the worst of it all? Mother never spoke to me again, I never seen her again. Yees wouldn't even let me go to her funeral."⁶⁵ Dinah tries to convince Sorrel that her mother died in childbirth, "Our mother died givin birth to you ... now stop all a this for your own sake."⁶⁶ It is clear at this point of the play that this statement is a lie, as Sorrel knows that Dinah is actually her biological mother. However, the implication is that Red's wife died around the time that Sorrel was born, and it is fair to argue that she may have taken her own life when faced with the reality that she forced her own daughter to sleep with her husband, resulting in child abuse and a child conceived through incest, "She sent me into the bed aside him. I was lanin on the fridge in the pantry and she comes in behind me and says ouch a nowhere, you're to sleep in wud your father tonigh. She didn't want him so she sends me in. I was twelve."⁶⁷

Whether or not Dinah's mother did end her life in suicide, Carr complicates the idea of 'traditional motherhood' through allowing the interpretation of her death as suicide. Carr does break from her pattern of having the female protagonist take her own life, but Sorrel ends her life in a metaphorical sense as the narrative of play suggests that the cycle of abuse will continue indefinitely. As highlighted by Singleton, "In the context

⁶² Eamonn Carr, 'The Theatrical Representation of Incest in Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*', 140.

⁶³ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 59.

⁶⁴ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 11.

⁶⁵ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 49.

⁶⁶ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 38.

⁶⁷ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 57.

of Carr's oeuvre this is a familiar depiction of how women struggle to 'engage in a traumatic and vociferous resistance to stifling codes of patriarchal authority and confinement', but with devastating costs."⁶⁸ With this in mind, although Sorrel does not physically end her life, as do the female protagonists in Carr's earlier plays *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *By the Bog of Cats* (1998), it is arguable that Sorrel is left with a fate worse than death as she lives on to take her place in her family's indefinite cycle of abuse.

At the beginning of the play, Sorrel appears as a compassionate and empathetic young woman. Dinah operates in stark contrast to her with her harsh treatment of Ded and Shalome, while Sorrel treats both with respect,

Dinah: Humans ates their dinner off of a table, Ded. Animals ates ud off a the fluur and slapes in sheds. (*Handing the dinner to him.*) A'ya an animal a' ya?

Ded: Thanks. (*Shoves the dinner into his mouth, with an eye on the door and an ear cocked like a frightened bird. He manages to smoke at the same time. Dinah watches him.*)

Dinah: God gimmie patience.

Sorrel: Dinah lave him, ya'll frighten him.

Dinah: And whah about him frightenin us? You're like somewan ouha the Stone Age, Ded.

Ded: Am I?

Dinah: I mane when's the last time ya looked in a mirror?⁶⁹

This interaction happens in the opening scene of the play, before any of the abuses or incestuous relationships have been revealed. The impression given here is that Sorrel is a kind hearted young woman who loves and cares for the man she believes to be her brother. She shows similar gentleness towards Shalome, an elderly woman who is introduced as, "*wear[ing] a nightdress, a straw hat and struggles with a suitcase and an armful of flowers. She is well spoken and a bit gone in her mind but with flashes of accidental lucidity.*"⁷⁰ Before knowing any of the abusive behaviours rampant in the Raftery household, it is fair to assume that Sorrel is just a more empathetic woman than Dinah. Sorrel is excited about her upcoming marriage to Dara Mood, and is full of hope for her future. Dinah appears to be a dourer character, one who seemingly resents her life and having to care for her family. Dinah can be read at this point as a woman performing 'toxic femininity' behaviours as she is seemingly unnecessarily rude to her 'sister' and her grandmother.

⁶⁸ Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 64.

⁶⁹ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 8.

⁷⁰ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 10.

It becomes apparent toward the end of the play that Dinah was to marry Dara's brother when she was younger, but she broke off that engagement suddenly and for no reason apparent to the Mood family,

Dara: Sure, hadn't you the pick a all the lads wan time? Didn't ya dangle me own brother on a string for the longest while ... he still axes after ya.

[...]

Dinah: In another life they'd have been mine ... I broke ud off wud Jimmy fierce sudden and fierce hard ... things was rickety for me thah time. Ud's allas the wans you're fondest of ya drop the axe on ...⁷¹

The fact that Dinah chose to end her engagement and remain at home – most likely as a result of the on-going abuse and incestuous pregnancy – coupled with the various abuses that she has faced since childhood, particularly the sexual abuse, imply that Dinah was once like Sorrel, but her experiences have hardened her. In this way, it can be argued that Dinah's performance of 'toxic femininity' is directly related to her father's embodiment of behaviours intrinsic to 'toxic masculinity' and his damaging patriarchal omnipotence in the family home. It is never said, but it is fair to assume that Dinah broke off her engagement because she became pregnant with Sorrel. Regardless of whether this was part of the reason or not, it is clear that the abuse Dinah had faced until that point led to her decision.

Although no two forms of abuse and their impact may be compared, Sorrel was never sexually abused as a child, and has only been raped once by her father. In opposition to this, Dinah's abuse started at a much younger age and has continued indefinitely as she is almost forty years of age now, "**Red:** Girl! She's nearly forty."⁷² Dinah also had to cope with giving birth to the child of the man who incestuously raped her. As Eamonn Carr highlights, "Dinah has been a victim for twenty-seven years; Sorrel has been assaulted once. How do we sum up the extent of Dinah's pain?"⁷³ As Sorrel is raped during the course of the play, the impact this act has on her becomes clear immediately, as Dinah describes how she has changed, "She's noh wan bih alrigh ... just cries and cries, won't ate anythin, just keeps taking a bah."⁷⁴ She goes on to imply that Sorrel has somehow been tainted by her father's actions, "Why couldn't ya just lave her alone? The wan perfect thing in the house."⁷⁵

⁷¹ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 55.

⁷² Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 17.

⁷³ Eamonn Carr, 'The Theatrical Representation of Incest in Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*', 149.

⁷⁴ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 44.

⁷⁵ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 45.

Given the drastic change in Sorrel's behaviour seen in Act Two, and the fact that Dinah's abuse has continued for nearly thirty years, it becomes clear that Dinah is not necessarily an unkind woman, as the opening scene would suggest, but instead she is a product of her surroundings and her experiences. The change in Sorrel's behaviour after she is raped highlights how the years of abuse have changed Dinah to a point where she blames her daughter for her own rape and exudes 'toxic femininity', "Ud's not the end a the world just because hands were laid on ya thah shouldn't a. Why couldn't ya a just been more careful."⁷⁶

Just like Sister Margarita in Greer's *Petals* links the purity of the girls in her class to their worth as people, and this idea haunts the young girl after she has been raped, creating and sustaining a 'slut-shaming' and 'victim blaming' narrative, Dinah goes so far as to 'victim blame' Sorrel when discussing the rape with her own abuser, "For eighteen year I watched thah wan like a hawk, protected her from you, and what does the stupid little bitch go and do? Gives ouh abouh you under your own roof. Christ, doesn't she notice anythin? Doesn't she know you be paddin round the duurs and landins, wud your cloven toes, spyin on everywan, waitin to pounce?"⁷⁷ This 'victim blaming' mentality is paramount to the success of patriarchal oppression through the carrying out of behaviours intrinsic to a performance of 'toxic femininity'. If a mother and a Catholic nun schoolteacher blame the females in their respective care for their own experiences of sexual violence, then rape culture will continue indefinitely due to the absolute lack of support for women affected by the violence from two sources that have an explicit duty of care to females in these situations. Both of these incidents highlight the ways in which 'toxic femininity' operates in a cyclical relational manner to 'toxic masculinity' and patriarchal oppression in a bid to sustain contemporary rape culture.

Dinah wilfully allows – the nature of her consent and complicity will be discussed in Section Six of this chapter – herself to take part in incestuous sexual relations, her daughter to be raped and the mistreatment of all those in the house at the hand of the patriarch, Red. Ded discusses how Dinah is a supporting part of the abusive cycle when speaking to Sorrel about it, "Ud's Dinah decides everythin round her anyway. Dinah's Daddy's cattle daler. You and me is only the cattle, Sorrel."⁷⁸ Essentially, Red has become such a dominant, oppressive force that his original victim, a woman who has been institutionalised by his continued performance of 'toxic masculinity', now allows the abuse to continue and blames those abused for their own violent experiences. Dinah portrays the power that abuse and sexual violence have to create the internalisation of

⁷⁶ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 57.

⁷⁷ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 45.

⁷⁸ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 37.

misogyny and sexism, and to genuinely make the person abused believe that this kind of behaviour is acceptable.

Just as the girl in Greer's *Petals* purports internalised misogyny as a direct result of the external oppressive forces of sexualisation, objectification and rape culture as discussed in Section Four, Dinah performs internalised misogyny and 'toxic femininity' throughout *On Raftery's Hill* as a result of her experience of 'toxic masculinity' by her father. Dinah is delusional to the level of abuse continually perpetrated against her and her family, and this disbelief highlights the ramifications of this cycle of continuing abuse, "Well, ya behher noh start tellin him lies abouh us. We're a respectable family, we love wan another and whahever happened ya happened ya be accident. D'ya honestly think we'd harm wan another?"⁷⁹ The idea that Sorrel is beginning to repeat Dinah's behaviour in breaking her engagement, treating Shalome and Ded more harshly and choosing to remain in the home of her rapist shows how neither woman can break the cycle of abuse. Both women exert behaviours of 'toxic femininity' as they cannot protect themselves, internalise their shame and suffering and allow the violent toxic patriarchal masculinity portrayed by Red throughout to continue to oppress and abuse these women.

As is the case with many of Carr's plays, there is a distinct absence of the figure of the mother throughout the play. Until Act Two, where Sorrel realises that Dinah is her mother, it appears the only maternal figure present throughout the plays is Shalome. Shalome is described as a woman who experiences only flashing moments of lucidity as she spends much of the play believing that she must travel home to her deceased father's house. The only mention she makes of her own mother occurs when she says that she died while Shalome was a small child, "I couldn't have been more than three, for Mother died at the end of that summer and we left India and came back to Kinnegar."⁸⁰ It is implied at the end of the play that Shalome was abused by her own father and that Red is the product of an incestuous rape when he describes his similarity to Shalome's father, "Don't ya remember hees funeral? Ya took me, I must a been whah? Twelve, thirteen, the army out blowin their bugles, a woman came up to me and said, God, but you're the spih of him."⁸¹ Shalome also claims early in the play that she never engaged in sexual activities with her husband, implying that Old Raftery could not be Red's father, "Well he never laid a hand on me. Thirty years of marriage and not once did I touch him. How many wives can boast of that?"⁸² The fact that she was most likely raped by her father and yet still wants to return

⁷⁹ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 58.

⁸⁰ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 13.

⁸¹ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 58.

⁸² Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 26.

to him and her familial home shows another woman unable to leave her abuser, just like Sorrel and Dinah.

Although Shalome did leave her home and marry, unlike the other two women, it is apparent that she was never happy as a married woman and would have preferred to remain at home, “And I want you all to know I never loved Old Raftery. It was all just one terrible mistake.”⁸³ She describes how he acted as a dominant force in her life, not allowing Red to be educated, “You were always so clever, Redmond. Always. I wanted you educated, I wanted to send you away to the Jesuits, away from this terrible Hill. But no, Old Raftery wanted you rough and ignorant like himself.”⁸⁴ In contrast to how she speaks savagely of her own husband, she romanticises her relationship with her abusive father;

When I tell Daddy all I’ve had to put up with. Did you know Daddy used to take me boating on Lilliput Lake? Every summer, boating on the lake, we don’t have summers like those anymore, dragonflies on the water, the sun bursting the sky, and Daddy would row and say ‘Are you tired darling?’ And I’d lie there looking at him through my fingers, and once he said, ‘Shalome, look at the heron feeding in the rushes.’ Shalome. No one has ever pronounced my name nicer than Daddy.⁸⁵

With Shalome persistently praising her abusive father, and Dinah continuing an incestuous relationship with her own father that began as child abuse, it becomes clear that neither of the two maternal figures physically present in the play are capable of reacting against their abusive patriarchs. All of the mothers portray some aspects of ‘toxic femininity’ in being unable to protect themselves and their children. This does not imply that their respective children were abused simply because these mothers were powerless to protect them from abusive patriarchs. It is fair to argue that these women fell ‘victim’ to the negative force of ‘toxic masculinity’, and so arguing that they portray traits of ‘toxic femininity’ is not to discount the reasoning behind their behaviour; they have all suffered sexual abuse. However, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the presence of ‘toxic femininity’ allows for the continued dominance of ‘toxic masculinity’ and misogyny and these women clearly behave in a manner that allows Red to continue his abuses. In this case, the presence of ‘toxic masculinity’ has led to the creation of ‘toxic femininity’ and both sets of toxic behaviours work in tandem to sustain a damaging environment where children are neglected and abused, ultimately perpetuating the cyclical of abuses.

Carr uses the image of the young mother, and their apparent failures within the narrative of the play to comment on cultural associations with pregnancy, motherhood,

⁸³ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 11.

⁸⁴ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 25.

⁸⁵ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 48.

femininities and their societal expectations. As Sihra argues, “In the final moments of the drama the old woman reappears inside the kitchen in the soiled wedding dress of the young bride-to-be, Sorrel, inverting the actions of the Poor Old Woman in [*Kathleen Ni Houlihan*] and refusing the myth of an idealised Mother Ireland.”⁸⁶ This highly symbolic image of the loss of innocence and ‘soiling’ of the bridal gown is representative of the damaging potential of performances of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’.

In *Shalome* wearing the dress instead of its intended wearer, Sorrel, Carr blatantly reveals the stifling of progression apparent in the Raftery household. Traditionally, children grow up, often marry and leave the family home. This did not happen for Dinah and it will not happen for Sorrel. Even though it did happen for *Shalome*, she allegedly did not engage in traditionally expected sexual relations with her husband, but instead incestuous sexual relations with her own father. The natural progression of people, and in this case, women, is eroded by cyclical inter-generational abuse and Dinah and *Shalome* are unable to perform the traditionally ascribed roles of ‘mother’ to their respective children. While similarly commenting on the symbolism of *Shalome* wearing Sorrel’s intended wedding dress, Singleton writes,

Meanwhile grandmother *Shalome* appears in one of her night-time wanderings in Sorrel’s now stained wedding dress in a poignant metaphor of the destruction of innocence and the play ends with Red tearing off a strip of the dress to clean his gun, a final physical assertion of his patriarchal authority, configured as an abuse and act of destruction of the virgin’s dress.⁸⁷

This lasting image is evidence of the damaging implications of unquestioned ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’. Dinah and Sorrel are unable to perform their respective roles as mothers because Red enforces a regressive regime of ‘toxic masculinity’.

Shalome’s mother was not present to protect her from sexual abuse, Dinah’s mother actively allowed the sexual abuse of Dinah to continue so that she did not have to engage in sexual activities with her own husband, and Dinah fails to intervene when Red rapes her daughter, Sorrel. This absence of the conventionally nurturing maternal figure looms over the action of the play as all of the women are left unprotected by their mothers, who are ultimately incapable of protecting them due to their own ‘toxic femininity’ produced by severe exposure to ‘toxic masculinity’. These women experience sexual abuse from toxic patriarchs, and the cycle of abuse continues. This is not to suggest that

⁸⁶ Melissa Sihra, ‘The House of Woman and the Plays of Marina Carr’, in *Women in Irish Drama: A Century of Authorship and Representation*, ed. Melissa Sihra (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 213.

⁸⁷ Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 67.

all or even most children will experience incestuous sexual abuse when their maternal figure is absent. However, arguably this narrative of the ‘absent mother’ and ‘incestuous abusive father’ is taken to its most drastic potential in this play, and this distinctly extreme narrative highlights the cyclical damaging possible implications of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’.

Carr is accentuating how these particular mothers are inevitably doomed to fail their children, because of their indoctrination into a ‘toxic femininity’ way of thinking that is produced through their own on-going traumatic experiences of ‘toxic masculinity’. This mode of belief is created by the patriarchal oppression and violent abuse they all experience. Linking back to the idea that this play serves as a radical rewriting of Gregory’s and Yeats’s 1902 play *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, Kathleen seeks the young men of Ireland to potentially die defending her, “There was a red man of the O’Donnells from the north, and a man of the O’Sullivans from the south, and there was one Brian that lost his life at Clontarf by the sea, and there were a great many in the west, some that died hundreds of years ago, and there are some that will die to-morrow.”⁸⁸ In a complete contrast to this, Carr shows how the perpetuated abuse of women by men destroys their potential for successful motherhood, as a direct result of abusive fatherhood and patriarchy, and instead sustains both ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’.

Another young mother mentioned *On Raftery’s Hill* is Sarah Brophy, whose story is discussed by Dara, Issac and Red. Sarah followed the same pattern as Dinah and Sorrel in breaking off her engagement as a result of being raped by her own father, “Gerrity tould me early on thah Sarah broke ud off wud him up on a year ago.”⁸⁹ Similarly to Dinah, she fell pregnant as a result of this abuse, but “She had the stillborn son there last wake.”⁹⁰ There is no mention of Sarah’s mother and it is implied that she was raised by her father, who goes on to take his own life after both Sarah and her baby died and he admits his abuse, “He’s whispering that ud was all a mistake, thah he only ever went near her the wance thah he wanted to die as well.”⁹¹ This absence of the proactive and protective matriarch throughout this play allows for the explicitly patriarchal operation of generations of the Raftery and Brophy families, creating and sustaining the manifestation of a ‘toxic masculinity’ that serves to maintain the abuse indefinitely. Again, this research is not implying that the absence of a maternal figure is a direct and implicit cause of incestuous abuse by a paternal figure, but rather that Carr uses such extreme examples to

⁸⁸ Gregory, Yeats, ‘Cathleen Ni Houlihan’, 8.

⁸⁹ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 20.

⁹⁰ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 19.

⁹¹ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 19.

highlight the potential for such abuse in exceptional circumstances where ‘toxic masculinity’ seemingly cannot be challenged.

Carr uses the character Red Raftery to display the damaging effects that this performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ can have on women, as evidenced with the sexual abuse of Dinah and Sorrel and the constant instances of ‘victim blaming’, but also on men, as Red’s only son, Ded is exposed to emotional abuse by his father continually. As Singleton writes on the performance of patriarchy, “the whole purpose and *raison d’être* of hegemonic masculinity is not to recognise alternative masculinities as equals but to subordinate them.”⁹² Red utterly subordinates and represses his son Ded throughout the play as a way of promoting his own masculinity and dominance. This act in itself is representative of ‘toxic masculinity’. From the opening lines a family in crisis is presented, as Ded, the son of the Raftery family, is too afraid to enter his family home for fear of his father returning. As pointed out by Eamonn Carr, “Ded just wants to know what his father wants him to do, but the capacity of the authority figure to demand and insist upon contradictory things is firmly established.”⁹³ Ded is so affected by the emotional abuse he suffers at the hands of his father that he does not even treat himself as human as his sister exclaims, “Humans ates their dinner off of a table, Ded. Animals ates ud off a the fluur and slapes in sheds. A’ya an animal a’ya?”⁹⁴ The audience is presented with a man utterly beaten down emotionally by his surroundings and family situation, a man who is terrified to do or say anything that may cause him further distress, “Rules is rules. (*Leaves cigarettes.*) I’ll go back to the shed now.”⁹⁵

Before the play allows any examination of the female characters or of the portrayal of ‘toxic femininity’ and femininities, the notion of ‘toxic masculinity’ is clearly highlighted through Ded’s behaviour and dialogue in the opening scene. Ded is presented as a ‘victim’ of a violent form of patriarchal assertion, who is experiencing clear signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. As Singleton notes, “Ded is incapable of inheriting the farm given his psychiatric problems.”⁹⁶ Red has no belief in his son’s potential as he says to his neighbour Issac,

Any other father'd have him in an asylum. Not me though, whah am I to do wud the farm, Isaac? Three hundred acre a the finest land this side a the Shannon and west a the Pale. And me only son and heir can't tell nigh from day, oak from ash, he'd milk a bull and drink ud in his tay and never know the differ. And I swear I

⁹² Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 54.

⁹³ Eamonn Carr, ‘The Theatrical Representation of Incest in Marina Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*’, 141.

⁹⁴ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 8.

⁹⁵ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 9.

⁹⁶ Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 66.

seen him talkin to the corn, kissin ud and carressin ud as if ud were a golden wench swayin in the sun.⁹⁷

This harsh mockery of his son acts as an example of Red's oppressive 'toxic masculinity' in effect. Ded is described in the play text as follows, "*He stands there shaking, smoking nervously, shuffling in his wellingtons. He teeters, he blinks, he starts, a huge man, beaten to the scut.*"⁹⁸ It is important to note that, "Patriarchal power figures know how to control, shape, limit and deny others their wishes, and just as importantly, they have the capacity to structure needs, pleasure and rewards."⁹⁹ Ded's introduction to the audience sets up the clear idea of a dominant and negative 'toxic masculinity' force within the Raftery household, a force that Ded is afraid of.

It is clear from how Ded speaks that it is his father he is fearful of, as Sorrel asks, "When're ya goin to come back and live in the house?" and Ded responds with, "When Daddy dies. I behher get back to the cattle."¹⁰⁰ Carr uses the character of Ded to succinctly portray the real fear and tension that Red, the patriarch of the Raftery household, creates for his family in the opening scene. The potential effect of 'toxic masculinity' on males is seen here as it is the junior male figure that seems to be most in fear of Red, more so than the female characters at this time, and this fear has affected Ded so greatly that he chooses to live in a cowshed instead of in his own home. The suggestion of this 'toxic masculinity' is that Red feels compelled to assert his dominance over his family, particularly his son at this point.

It becomes apparent with the rape of Sorrel by her father that Red also feels compelled to assert his dominance over his daughter and her partner, who could potentially be a new patriarchal figure through his marriage to Sorrel. Red does not want Sorrel to marry Dara Mood and subsequently allow Dara become this new patriarch, "A man can stand on hees own stairs, in hees own house, surrounded be hees own fields that Dara Mood'll never get hees scrubber hands on..."¹⁰¹

The abuse of 'toxic masculinity' throughout this play, and others in this chapter, especially Mark O'Rowe's *Our Few And Evil Days* as discussed in the next section, has an important effect on the representations of the female characters and their respective feminisms, femininities and performances of 'toxic femininity'. It also highlights the ways in which patriarchal constructions negatively impact women throughout Irish culture and history as Sihra points out that, "Carr's tenacious refusal to romanticise the realities of

⁹⁷ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 18.

⁹⁸ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 8.

⁹⁹ Eamonn Carr, 'The Theatrical Representation of Incest in Marina Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*', 141.

¹⁰⁰ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 10.

¹⁰¹ Carr, 'On Raftery's Hill', 33.

patriarchal confinement in this country is powerful and opens up a dialogue that contests the systematic abjection of women of all economic backgrounds in Irish culture and history.”¹⁰² ‘Toxic masculinity’ aimed at oppressing the female characters can be seen in Red’s ‘victim blaming’ of the women. He blames Sarah Brophy for her own rape and subsequent death, “Don’t believe wan word of ud. Sarah Brophy got whah was coming to her.”¹⁰³ He blames his wife for not wanting to engage in sexual intercourse with him, thus leading him to rape his twelve year old daughter, “I married a lunatic wud an antique violin and an eternal case a’ migraine. If Christ heeself slid onto the pilla she’d plead the migraine.”¹⁰⁴ He goes so far as to expect Sorrel to apologise to him for he believes he needed to rape her because she spoke negatively of him, “We’ll let bygones be bygones young wan. Just apologise to me now and we’ll say no more abouh ud.”¹⁰⁵

On Raftery’s Hill is ultimately a bleak play with a depressing outcome. No one effectively challenges the omnipotent force of Red, questions where his abusive temperament comes from, or tackles the abuse that he continually subjects his family to. Unlike Nora in Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879), no female character leaves their abusive home to seek a new and hopefully better life. In a similar manner, unlike The Old Woman in Gregory’s and Yeats’s *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, the abused female essentially returns to the abusive household indefinitely, and no new generation can hope for salvation or freedom. The longer the abuse continues, the more these women seem to retreat into the Raftery family and normalise their experiences. Carr is holding a mirror up to society and conveying what can happen if dominant hegemonic patriarchy is permitted to remain in a position of uncontested power, creating and sustaining ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’. Although she uses an extreme, yet realistic, story to convey this message, its parallels with contemporary society are clear. Where there is an unquestioned, toxic, hetero-normative patriarchal ruling system in place, women will disproportionately experience abuse, be it sexual, physical or emotional. Ultimately a society will be created where there can be no progression, no freedom and no happiness until the patriarch is confronted.

¹⁰² Melissa Sihra, ‘Renegotiating Landscapes of the Female: Voices, Topographies and Corporealities of Alterity in Marina Carr’s *Portia Coughlan*’, in ‘Performing Ireland’, *Australasian Drama Studies*, No. 43 (October 2003), eds. Brian Singleton and Anna McMullan, 21.

¹⁰³ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’, 46.

Section Six: ‘The Silenced Woman’

Sexual Violence & ‘Toxic Masculinity’ in Mark O’Rowe’s *Our Few And Evil Days*

The set of the original production of *Our Few and Evil Days* is presented as an accurate representation of a contemporary middle-class home with many reviews of the play commenting on its realism. Peter Crawley writes that, “The impression is enforced by Paul Wills’ set, so staggeringly convincing in construction, from its ceiling to functioning kitchen taps, it’s almost surprising he stopped short of a fourth wall.”¹⁰⁶ Helen Meany remarks that, “Every detail of a comfortable sitting room and kitchen is realised in Paul Wills’ hyperreal design of a suburban Dublin house.”¹⁰⁷ A review by ‘No More Workhorse’ says that, “The most startling thing when you enter the space in the Abbey is the size of the set. It pushes out into the auditorium, and takes the first few rows of the theatre with it. It is a suburban house, recreated in such detail that they could rent it out when the space is not in use.”¹⁰⁸ Adhering to the form of the Irish kitchen drama aesthetically, the main focus lies with the lives of a nuclear family consisting of a mother, father and adult daughter. The lives of the respective family members are embroiled with lies, vulnerabilities, violence and secrets. The play tackles sexual violence, physical violence, ‘toxic masculinity’ and the dramatic effect such actions can have on a family.

O’Rowe is most well-known for his monologue plays such as *Howie the Rookie* (1999) and *Crestfall* (2003), but *Our Few and Evil Days* marked a distinct return to dialogue in his first play since another notable monologue play, *Terminus* (2007). Writing on O’Rowe’s return to dialogue, Crawley states, “It isn’t remarkable that Mark O’Rowe, a master of sensational monologues, should return to dialogue [...] But the construction of that dialogue is utterly remarkable, so fastidiously naturalistic that every hesitation, overlap, second thought or stumble feels like music in delivery.”¹⁰⁹ Meany also comments on the naturalistic style of the dialogue saying, “In a departure from his earlier plays, O’Rowe’s dialogue is as naturalistic as the set design, with characters interrupting each

¹⁰⁶ Peter Crawley, ‘Review: Our Few and Evil Days, Nevermind Mark O’Rowe’s return to dialogue, does his family tragedy for the Abbey signal a new commitment to realism? Or is anything here as it seems?’, *Irish Times*, October 4, 2014, accessed February 6, 2017,

<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/review-our-few-and-evil-days-1.1952527>

¹⁰⁷ Helen Meany, ‘Our Few And Evil Days review: Cusack and Hinds shine through the darkness’, *Guardian*, October 7, 2014, accessed February 7, 2017,

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/oct/07/our-few-and-evil-days-review-abbey-theatre-dublin>

¹⁰⁸ No More Workhorse, ‘Our Few and Evil Days – Abbey Theatre – Review’, *No More Workhorse*, October 12, 2014, accessed February 7, 2017, <https://nomoreworkhorse.com/2014/10/12/our-few-and-evil-days-abbey-theatre-review/>

¹⁰⁹ Peter Crawley, ‘Review: Our Few and Evil Days, Nevermind Mark O’Rowe’s return to dialogue, does his family tragedy for the Abbey signal a new commitment to realism? Or is anything here as it seems?’, *Irish Times*, October 4, 2014, accessed February 6, 2017,

<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/review-our-few-and-evil-days-1.1952527>

other, letting inconsequential sentences hang in the air.”¹¹⁰ *Our Few and Evil Days* is set up and presented as a traditional drama based firmly in realism and O’Rowe uses this pretence to slowly unravel the secrets of the characters in the play while challenging the audience to not accept an initial given reality. As Crawley states,

When it duly arrives, the whole play folds in on itself, becoming fascinatingly less real, as though recasting this family drama as a purgatory of endless repetition. [...] O’Rowe has crafted an unnerving, arresting and shape-shifting play, with some terrific performances, but the suggestion that our reality is already stalked by evils beyond our comprehension is already more disturbing and more truthful.¹¹¹

In this way, *Our Few and Evil Days* can be compared to Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill* through the production of a Beckettian sense of indefinite cyclical repetition. Just like the characters in Carr’s play are trapped by the continuance of unchallenged hegemonic patriarchy and ‘toxic masculinity’, the characters in *Our Few and Evil Days* are similarly confined to respective situations as a result of the performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ and male dominated violence throughout the play and their own lives.

The play’s prologue presents a curious domestic scene in this hyper-realistic living room before dawn.¹¹² It is fair to assume that Margaret and Michael, the two characters who appear on stage, are in a romantic relationship, if not married. The text dictates that Margaret and Michael embrace, and he treats her in a gentle manner, “*She wakes up, sits up. They embrace, exchanging several words which we don’t hear.*”¹¹³ This kindness portrayed is in vast contrast to the family scene presented at the beginning of Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*. Their embrace serves as the first example of their loving relationship, which is distinctly different from the relationship presented between Dinah, Ded and Sorrel, as discussed in Section Five.

Once Michael has finished tidying the sofa, he exits and the stage directions state, “*Hold on the empty room.*”¹¹⁴ The audience is left viewing a seemingly ordinary domestic living space, nothing out of place, no sense of any potential uneasiness or heartache within the family. Again, this is in stark contrast to the opening of *On Raftery’s Hill*, and it

¹¹⁰ Helen Meany, ‘Our Few And Evil Days review: Cusack and Hinds shine through the darkness’, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/oct/07/our-few-and-evil-days-review-abbey-theatre-dublin> Published by The Guardian 7 October 2014, (Accessed 7 February 2017).

¹¹¹ Peter Crawley, ‘Review: Our Few and Evil Days, Nevermind Mark O’Rowe’s return to dialogue, does his family tragedy for the Abbey signal a new commitment to realism? Or is anything here as it seems?’, *Irish Times*, October 4, 2014, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/review-our-few-and-evil-days-1.1952527>

¹¹² Mark O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014), 5.

¹¹³ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 5.

¹¹⁴ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 5.

ultimately acts as a powerful dramatic tool in *Our Few and Evil Days* when the violence and uneasiness is slowly revealed. This is not a critique of Carr's choice of opening scene, but rather this research is highlighting another way in which such a family drama can be presented. O'Rowe's choice can be interpreted as a comment on our willingness to accept a presented reality at face value. Given Ireland's history of hidden abuses, particularly against women who experience violence in the home, this is a powerful way to deconstruct and critique such a silenced history. This lasting image serves as a metaphor for the whole play. This scene is subversive as it reverses stereotypical notions of conventional masculine and feminine roles within the home. Michael appears as the caregiver who cleans the home while Margaret consumes alcohol and falls asleep on the couch.

This reversal of the traditional construction of the gender binary may initially appear to discount the prevalence of 'toxic masculinity' and 'toxic femininity'. However, arguably this reversal actually comments on the power of hegemonic patriarchal forces to transcend even apparently subversive performances of gender. The scene as a whole is symbolic of the complicated nature of the play as the main characters strive to remain silent. It simultaneously says everything and nothing about Michael and Margaret's story and comments on the danger of silencing the vulnerable. This concept of silencing those in need is comparable to the familial pressures in *On Raftery's Hill* that cause the characters affected by violence to not discuss it.

Our Few And Evil Days is a play that features numerous themes, issues and stories throughout, none more evident than the violent potential of 'toxic masculinity'. This play focuses heavily on the effect that particular performances of masculinity can have on women. It is fair to say that male violence against women, in particular, male sexual violence against women, forms only one part of a discussion surrounding the performance of violence in contemporary society and culture. With respect to this fact, it is also fair to argue that statistically male violence against women remains the most pertinent form of violence, as is discussed in Chapter One, and as such, this discussion on the performance of masculinity is directly related to its impact on women and the performance of femininities and production of 'toxic femininity'.

Throughout the play there is constant reference made to the innate relationship between men and violence. As Crawley remarks with regard to the patriarch Michael, "Hinds [Michael] performs the model of salty sociability, but a facial scar intimates a man marked by violence."¹¹⁵ When Dennis asks Michael about his visible scar, Michael

¹¹⁵ Peter Crawley, 'Review: Our Few and Evil Days, Nevermind Mark O'Rowe's return to dialogue, does his family tragedy for the Abbey signal a new commitment to realism? Or is anything here as it seems?', *Irish Times*, October 4, 2014, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/review-our-few-and-evil-days-1.1952527>

discusses how he got it in a fight with a man in a bar over a woman when he was twenty-one, “I had a bit of a disagreement with this guy out in Tallaght. [...] I was chatting her up and it seems they were going out, which I’d no idea about, of course, and the bastard went for me.”¹¹⁶ Michael shows no remorse for the incident, is accused by Margaret of, “celebrating that stuff,”¹¹⁷ and describes his own success in the physical altercation, “Yeah, but, you ever hear that phrase, ‘You should see the other guy’? [...] Well, you should’ve seen the prick.”¹¹⁸ In this moment, Michael is comparable to Red Raftery as he appears to revel in the engagement with physical violence and feel superior in his physical prowess. While this instance of violence concerns male on male violence, it serves as an example of ‘toxic masculinity’ on two levels.

Firstly, it supports the idea of the ‘alpha male’ figure and the importance of one man physically dominating another. ‘Toxic masculinity’ thrives not only through the subordination of women, but also through the oppression of men who do not fit the strict parameters of hegemonic patriarchy by men who do, or who aspire to. As stated by Kimmel, “Violence is proof of masculinity; one is a “real” man because one is not afraid to be violent.”¹¹⁹ Also, while commenting on the reasoning behind men’s constructed ‘innate’ need to express violence against other men, Margaret Mead writes, “No one wants to take responsibility for the initial act of aggression, but everyone wants to finish the fight.”¹²⁰

Secondly, male on male violence ultimately silences women. In his description, Michael makes no reference to the woman involved in the situation. The fight started because her boyfriend deemed Michael’s behaviour toward her to be unacceptable. Her agency is removed by the two men fighting over her, irrespective of her wishes. This woman was patronised and oppressed by her boyfriend who chose to ignore her feelings and her own ability to deal with the situation as she saw fit, in favour of performing his own masculinity and dominance in a violent manner. The fact that Michael does not comment on the woman at all highlights his own misunderstanding of her personal will. This causes him to oppress her performance of self through his performance of violence and ‘toxic masculinity’. Masculinity is not inherently a performance of violence, but the two are intrinsically linked in ‘normative’ – i.e. toxic, conventional, stereotypical and hetero-patriarchal – expressions of masculinity. The play uses examples such as this anecdote to subtly reinforce the dominance of such a form of masculinity and its negative

¹¹⁶ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 16.

¹¹⁷ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 17.

¹¹⁸ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 17.

¹¹⁹ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 179.

¹²⁰ Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry* (New York: William Morrow, 1965), 157.

connotations. Red Raftery uses a similar technique to continually oppress those around him by asserting his own physical dominance over his family, and through utilising intimidation tactics wrapped up in his performance of ‘toxic masculinity’.

Near the end of the play, it becomes clear that Margaret’s own son raped her when he was a child and that she is living with severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is also clear that Adele’s friend Belinda took her own life partly due to her partner Gary coercing her into non-consensual sexual acts. Through revealing both of these stories, the play becomes one focusing on the sexual abuse of women by men. In a similar manner to the other plays analysed in this chapter, it reflects on the abuse itself, notions of ‘victim blaming’, living with trauma, ‘toxic masculinity’ and the silencing of those who experience such violence. However, *Our Few and Evil Days* goes further than the others plays examined through its narrative of silencing the woman who experiences sexual violence to expressly protect the person who commits such an act.

Sexual violence carried out on women by men is not a new issue, nor is the notion of covering up such violence, or of silencing the woman who experiences it. The history of Irish society and culture is awash with examples of the mistreatment and silencing of those who experience such violence, as discussed in the Introductory Chapter of this dissertation. Such established methods of silencing have continued to contemporary times with recessionary funding cuts to rape crisis services¹²¹ and with severe anti-choice rhetoric infiltrating crisis pregnancy services in Ireland.¹²² The indoctrination of contemporary society into a rape culture has supported the status quo of forcing those who do choose to speak out about their experiences of sexual violence to be routinely dismissed, ridiculed, blamed and not believed. This creates a situation where people choose not to discuss their experience of violence and many perpetrators regularly escape judicial consequences.¹²³

¹²¹ The Irish Examiner, ‘Rape Crisis Centre ‘shut down’ by funding cuts from Tusla’, *Irish Examiner*, June 9, 2015, accessed August 28, 2016, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/rape-crisis-centre-issues-warning-over-funding-cuts-680767.html>

¹²² This undercover video was filmed by a reporter for *The Times* (London). In it, a reporter seeks access to crisis pregnancy information and the woman she speaks to provides her with dangerously inaccurate ideas presented as medical facts. The reporter asks about the process of an abortion and the woman she speaks to uses emotionally manipulative techniques and false statistics to deter her. The Ireland Edition of *The Times*, ‘The Times undercover at a Dublin abortion advice service’, *YouTube*, September 4, 2016, accessed September 5, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFvOoMvpJGE>

¹²³ It is reported that ninety-seven percent of rapists will never spend a day in prison. ‘97 of Every 100 Rapists Receive No Punishment, RAINN Analysis Shows’, *Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network*, March 27, 2012, accessed August 28, 2016, <https://www.rainn.org/news/97-every-100-rapists-receive-no-punishment-rainn-analysis-shows> This statistic has been questioned and argued against. The reality is that due to the nature of so few people who have been raped or sexually assaulted actually reporting the crime, it is impossible to have a completely accurate number. However, it is fair to argue that very few rapists will face incarceration.

The widespread nature of sexual violence carried out by men, on women, and the ability to commit such crimes, often without repercussion, may be closely linked to the prevalence of ‘toxic masculinity’ in contemporary society. O’Rowe links Margaret’s experience of sexual violence closely to the existence of male aggression and violence surrounding her. However, he deconstructs and complicates the issue further when he questions what happens when the perpetrator pays the ultimate sacrifice for his crime; when a performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ leads to the rapist’s murder in the heat of the moment and when the woman who experienced the violence must keep silent to protect a murderer. In *Our Few And Evil Days*, the audience is presented with a story filled with abuse, violence and death. ‘Toxic masculinity’ runs through the play as the maternal figure is left trying to protect the men around her from themselves while living with PTSD. The story of this play calls attention to its timelessness because as long as ‘toxic masculinity’ reigns supreme in contemporary society, both men and women will suffer, and both will ultimately be silenced.

As previously mentioned, *Our Few And Evil Days* is a play that resonates strongly with Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill* through its slow reveal of family secrets and the presence of powerful ‘toxic masculinity’ throughout. Both plays examine the act of incest and question the issue of consensual sexual experience. Adele’s friend Belinda bears similarities to Dinah in *On Raftery’s Hill* in that both women seemingly engage in consensual sexual activities with men, but in Dinah’s case, this is as part of an incestuous relationship that has developed from child abuse, and Belinda is coerced into continually proving her devotion to her partner Gary,

Adele: ...Your victim. The things you did, I swear, how can you have had anything but contempt for her?

Gary: The things we did... (*Beat.*) **Adele:** the things we did were consensual...

Adele: No.

Gary:and if they weren’t, then she should’ve...

Adele: She couldn’t.

Gary:she should’ve said. Well, that’s *her* fucking problem, Adele.¹²⁴

A close male relative raped both Margaret and Sorrel; with Sorrel raped by her violent father Red, while Margaret is raped by her eleven year-old son. The lives of both women are eternally altered by their respective experiences of sexual violence as Sorrel breaks off her engagement to remain at home with her family and Margaret has been unable to have sexual relations with her husband in the twenty years since her rape, “It doesn’t, Michael. Especially given our situation. Any rea... you know, reasonable description of our

¹²⁴ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 72.

marriage *as* a marriage stopped being accurate years ago.”¹²⁵ While Carr uses the more traditional plot of the rape of a female child by a male parent, O’Rowe subverts this trope to force the audience to contemplate another aspect of sexual violence and incest not commonly discussed.

O’Rowe blurs the boundaries of sexual consent and complicates Margaret’s experience. Firstly, Adele argues that her brother Jonathan could not have raped their mother due to his young age, “...but he wasn’t capable of... I mean, how could anyone... a child. How could a boy...”¹²⁶ On a basic level, it appears that Adele does not want to believe that what her mother is telling her is true simply because he was so young, and he was her own brother. This is a reasonable reaction for her to have. However, on a deeper level, O’Rowe is questioning the very nature of consent.

Jonathan was eleven at the time of the assault, putting him well below the age of consent in Ireland that stands at seventeen-years-old. This means that technically, Margaret committed an act of statutory rape while she was raped. Her description of the attack clearly shows how she was unquestionably subjected to non-consensual sexual intercourse, “Well, then I felt a weight, and I woke... [...] Pressing down on me. [...] ...and I woke, and... (*Beat.*) and he was on top of me. [...] Yes... and he was inside me, Adele. [...] He was inside me Adele, Adele. (*Pause.*) He had taken off my underwear and...”¹²⁷ Jonathan never faced a court of law over the assault but O’Rowe leaves the audience wondering what would have happened in that case.¹²⁸ Could Jonathan have been tried as an adult? Could Margaret have been accused of statutory rape? Such questions are never addressed by the play, but O’Rowe uses this story to examine the potentially delicate intricacies of sexual violence.

As discussed throughout this dissertation, the violence and prevalence of rape culture in all facets of contemporary culture is partially fuelled by the supposed ‘grey areas’ or ‘rape myths’ that surround experiences of sexual violence. I vehemently argue that there is no such thing as a ‘grey area’ surrounding instances of sexual violence, as these supposed

¹²⁵ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 122.

¹²⁶ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 103.

¹²⁷ O’Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 102-103.

¹²⁸ Section 129 of the *Criminal Justice Act 2006* reads as follows, “**129.**— The following section is substituted for section 52 of the Act of 2001: “Restriction on criminal proceedings against children. 52.—(1) Subject to subsection (2), a child under 12 years of age shall not be charged with an offence. Subsection (1) does not apply to a child aged 10 or 11 years who is charged with murder, manslaughter, rape, rape under section 4 of the Criminal Law (Rape) (Amendment) Act 1990 or aggravated sexual assault.”

Irish Statute Book, *Criminal Justice Act 2006*, accessed June 22, 2017,

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2006/act/26/section/129/enacted/en/html>

So theoretically, Jonathan could be charged with rape, but the law is not clear about what would happen when the person raped is over the legal age of consent. Cases of such manner are left to the discretion of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

‘grey areas’ are too often used as a means to discredit the person who experienced the violence, but O’Rowe has successfully created such an area within this play. This particular situation is murky simply because Margaret is legally speaking, a statutory rapist,¹²⁹ as Jonathan may potentially not legally be held responsible for his actions. It is clear that she most definitely was raped yet the law may not offer her any protection because it does not include any reference to this particular type of experience. This particular narrative of sexual violence challenges the potential prejudices of the audience here. This is due to the reality that, without insight into the particulars of this situation, Margaret would arguably experience ‘victim blaming’ ideologies with potential questions such as ‘how did he physically overpower her as a child?’ and ‘how could she allow herself to end up in this situation?’ asked of her. As thoroughly argued throughout, the existence of a rape culture creates a platform for victim blaming to flourish on. O’Rowe creates an evocative dynamic of a ‘victim’ who could theoretically be delegitimised through the legal inability for her rapist to give his own consent to any sexual act.

Margaret ‘chooses’ to relive her rape every single night so that she can feel close to her son,

Michael: *You* fucking choose to stay.

Margaret: What?

Michael: *You’re* the one with the choice. Not me.

Margaret: (*beat*) How am I the one with the choice?

Michael: Just spend one night out of this house. One...

Margaret: Oh, don’t...

Michael: ...One fucking night.

Margaret: No.

Michael: Why not?

Margaret: You know why not.

Michael: Tell me again.

¹²⁹ The *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006, Section Three* of The Irish Statute Book states, “**3.**— (1) Any person who engages in a sexual act with a child who is under the age of 17 years shall be guilty of an offence and shall, subject to subsection (3), be liable on conviction on indictment— (a) to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years, or (b) if he or she is a person in authority, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years.”

Irish Statute Book, *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2006*, accessed February 6, 2017,

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2006/act/15/enacted/en/html>

The *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, Section Sixteen* of The Irish Statute Book states,

“**16.** The Act of 2006 is amended by the substitution of the following section for section 2:

“**2.** (1) A person who engages in a sexual act with a child who is under the age of 15 years shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for life or a lesser term of imprisonment.”

Irish Statute Book, *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017*, accessed June 23, 2017,

<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/2/section/16/enacted/en/html#sec16>

Margaret: No.

Michael: Tell me. (*Pause*) Margaret...

Margaret: Because if I do, he might never come again.

Michael: And you'd rather...

Margaret: Yes.

Michael: ...endure what he does to you...

Margaret: Why are you making me say this?

Michael: Why are you telling me to go? *Pause*. You'd rather endure what he does to you...

Margaret: Michael...

Michael: ...night after night...

Margaret: I *hate* what he does to me, Michael.¹³⁰

This 'choice' is comparable to Dinah's 'choice' to engage in sexual intercourse with her father on a regular basis. For twenty years, Margaret has relived her violent experience nightly, just as Dinah engages in her abuse frequently. The word 'choice' is in inverted commas because arguably neither woman has any real choice about their respective situation. Neither Margaret nor Dinah chose to be raped and Margaret did not choose for her son to be murdered. Both Margaret and Dinah find themselves in their unenviable positions as a direct result of the actions of the men around them. Dinah could not give consent to the statutory rape that she experienced as a child, and it is fair to argue that the psychological damage done to her as a minor negates her ability to consensually continue to have incestuous sexual intercourse with her father into adulthood.

Margaret did not give consent to her rape, but she also did not consent to her child's murder and so she relives her experience as a raped woman in order to connect with her experience as a mother. She justifies her choice in saying, "I fucking hate it. But, yes, I'd suffer a thousand times worse, you know I would, a *thousand* times worse, rather than risk never seeing him again. (*Pause*.) A *thousand* times worse, so, yes it *is* a choice that I have. It is, and it's a choice that I've made, and I know it hurts you, but you have a choice as well."¹³¹ This 'choice' is representative of the lack of choice afforded to women in contemporary society when 'toxic masculinity' is perpetuated and unquestioned as a justification for the sustaining of hegemonic patriarchal values. The narrative of the play puts Margaret in an unthinkable situation and this can be interpreted as a bid to force the audience to see the many undesirable positions that women continue to find themselves in

¹³⁰ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 120.

¹³¹ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 121.

as a result of the actions of men who portray violent traits of 'toxic masculinity'. As Emilie Pine comments in a review of the play,

The recurrent tropes are easy to spot – men with mother issues, men who do violence (emotional or physical) to women in the name of love, women who put up with the violence in the name of love. As with his earlier work O'Rowe uses *Our Few and Evil Days* as a vehicle for exploring the question, 'What is the worst thing you can imagine happening?' The answer is, 'It's pretty f***ing bad'.¹³²

Both O'Rowe and Carr are voicing the often-silenced rhetoric of the abused woman living with the real-life implications of experiencing sexual violence to contest the 'choice' or more accurately, the lack of choice afforded to women in such situations.

As previously discussed, 'toxic masculinity' is often used as a term in popular culture to blame men unfairly for their very existence, but it is most definitely seen as a phrase or an action that describes the mistreatment, by men, of women. While this understanding of the term is true in life as well as in this play, as both Margaret and Adele are manipulated and abused by the men around them, it is vital to recognise the damaging affect that 'toxic masculinity' can also have on men. Gary, Denis and Jonathan all appear as manipulative and violent characters who abuse the women they come into contact with, but the root cause for such abuse must be questioned.

All three of these male characters speak of their need for love and affection from women and it is clear that this validation is clearly linked to their sense of identity and confidence. As Pine states when commenting on the actions of Michael, Gary and Denis throughout the play, "It sounds unlikely; more than unlikely, downright unbelievable. Margaret says it's 'crazy'. Three men are invited into a family home, two are thrown out, one remains. All of the men are looking for love; and look to the women of the house to grant it to them, beginning with a request and ending with violence."¹³³ Gary speaks of how he forced his partner Belinda to provide him with constant confirmation of her love for him,

Sometimes a person loves another person so much and needs that love returned, so much, that they, yes, they mistreat that person. [...] Well, because, deep inside, they don't believe they're worthy. And so... [...] and so they continually, they test the other person. They push and they, absolutely, treat that person badly, and then they say, 'Well, if she can put up, you know...' [...] '...put up with that, then maybe she does.' [...] Love me. Maybe she actually does, you know? I mean, and

¹³² Emilie Pine, 'Our Few And Evil Days', *Irish Theatre Magazine*, October 6, 2014, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://itmarchive.ie/web/Reviews/Current/Our-Few-and-Evil-Days.html>

¹³³ Emilie Pine, 'Our Few And Evil Days', *Irish Theatre Magazine*, October 6, 2014, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://itmarchive.ie/web/Reviews/Current/Our-Few-and-Evil-Days.html>

I know it's a terrible way to treat a person. I do, but it comes from the, seriously, the deepest fucking insecurity, the deepest *terror*, Adele, of not being loved... of not being loved, of not, like I said, being *worthy* of love.¹³⁴

Denis concludes the opening act of the play by challenging the notion that his obsession with Margaret must remain unrequited, "Why can't you just fucking *do* it? [...] *Love* me! [...] Why? (*Pause.*) Do you know how easy it'd be? Just *decide* to. [...] Just *decide* to love me. (*Pause.*) Why can't you *do* that? [...] Why can't you just decide to *love* me?"¹³⁵ The play concludes in a similarly eerie manner as the ghost of Jonathan, or Margaret's hallucination of him, haunts her with the same sentiment, "Mammy... Why don't you love me, Mammy? Why don't you love me? (*Pause.*) Mammy...!"¹³⁶

While Jonathan actually rapes his mother as she lay unconscious, Dennis tries to coerce Margaret into having sexual intercourse with him, "This is gonna sound really arrogant or presumptuous, maybe, but I think you're wrong? And if we were to do it once... [...] ...to make love once – No, wait – and it doesn't have to be here, or tonight, it could be another time, but I think you'd see. So much of you is lying dormant."¹³⁷ Both Jonathan and Dennis project their fears and insecurities onto Margaret and such vulnerabilities are manifested in their violent need to have sexual intercourse with her. As Kimmel states when discussing the relationship of masculinity to male violence against women, "This association between violence and love is so intimate, so central for men, that it practically screams out for answers."¹³⁸

Both of these manifestations of violence are seemingly Oedipal in nature as both males seek solace in her love. Dennis speaks of how she comforts him because he is an orphan and Adele mentions how Jonathan always needed his mother's approval, "But, yeah... (*Beat.*) So, there was this sort of expectation in his face as well, as if... I don't know, as if he was waiting to see how you'd react before he did."¹³⁹ Both males turn their respective insecurities against Margaret, as their portrayal of 'toxic masculinity' results in her violent and unwanted experiences. Although neither male enacts their rage at Margaret's rejection through murdering her, there is a similarity between their respective expressions of violence and Kimmel's observations on why men murder women they love,

It's paradoxical that men could murder the women they say they love. Yet every day in America, at least five women die at the hands of their intimate partners. [...]

Put most simply, women kill their partners when they feel their lives, or the lives

¹³⁴ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 73.

¹³⁵ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 63.

¹³⁶ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 125.

¹³⁷ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 59-60.

¹³⁸ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 177.

¹³⁹ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 110.

of their children, are in danger; men kill their partners when they feel their sense of entitlement and power is thwarted. That's quite a difference.¹⁴⁰

Although Denis is not physically, but only verbally violent towards Margaret, his actions are comparable to Kimmel's point about why men enact violence on women. This is because Denis feels entitled to accost Margaret in her own home and demand her love simply due to the fact that he loves her, "Why can't you just fucking *do* it?"¹⁴¹ Jonathan is physically and sexually violent towards Margaret, unlike Denis, but his reasons for this violence are comparable to Denis', and to Kimmel's argument about men's "aggrieved entitlement".¹⁴² This is because he believed that he was not receiving the kind of love from his mother that he was entitled to, so he wanted to take it anyway. The concept of entitlement, and especially a male's sense of 'aggrieved entitlement', is explicitly linked to a performance of 'toxic masculinity'. It stems from the hierarchical patriarchal construction of the gender binary that serves to subordinate women. As Kimmel remarks, "men's anger is "real" – that is, it is experienced deeply and sincerely. But it is not "true" – that is, it doesn't provide an accurate analysis of their situation."¹⁴³ Both Denis and Jonathan are angry with Margaret and their perceived lack of love from her, but they do not recognise that they have no right to make the demands of Margaret that the both try to. This forms a part of their respective performances of 'toxic masculinity' throughout the play.

The motivations of Jonathan and Denis can be compared to Gary's, with regard to his maltreatment of Belinda, as all of their performances of masculinity directly impact on the women around them, while having nothing to do with the women in question. The women are in turn silenced and abused. Like Sorrel and Dinah in Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*, Margaret arguably commits a form of psychological suicide as she 'chooses' to remain in her toxic situation. In Adele's friend Belinda's case, the repression and external forces of 'toxic masculinity' she experienced grew to a level where she felt the literal act of suicide was her only escape. The fact that only Gary, and not Belinda, appears on stage to discuss her unhappiness and eventual suicide with Adele is significant. It acts as an example of such an erasure of the female voice, and this erasure is common throughout contemporary rape culture.

Our Few And Evil Days is a challenging play that is, "testifying to the ways in which grief can transform everyday life."¹⁴⁴ It confronts the audience with particular

¹⁴⁰ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 173, 176.

¹⁴¹ O'Rowe, *Our Few And Evil Days*, 63.

¹⁴² Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 18.

¹⁴³ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 8.

¹⁴⁴ Padraic Killeen, 'Theatre review: Our Few and Evil Days at Abbey Theatre', *Irish Examiner*, October 11, 2014, accessed February 7, 2017,

complexities concerning the portrayal of sexual violence on stage. It creates room for contemplation of such issues and reflection on potential prejudices and pre-conceived notions surrounding rape myths and rape culture. In a similar manner to Greer's *Petals* and Carr's *On Raftery's Hill*, it presents the voice of the woman affected by sexual violence physically on stage and interrogates the particular complexities of each case of sexual violence. This act works to critique rape culture through removing the ability to 'slut-shame' or 'victim blame' these women due to a lack of understanding of their individual situations.

The play presents an acute study on the construction of 'toxic masculinity' in contemporary Irish society, particularly exploring the relationship of 'toxic masculinity' to male sexual abuse of women. It shows the devastating effects of this 'toxic masculinity' on both men and women. It gives a voice to the silenced person who experiences sexual violence; and allows for clear testimony of the abused free from the societal pressures of contemporary rape culture. It ultimately serves as an example of the dangers of limitless expression of hegemonic patriarchy and 'toxic masculinity' in contemporary Irish society. From male violence against other men, to male violence against women, to the internal violence and conflict created through exposure to negative culturally constructed concepts of what it is to 'be a man' and express a sense of 'maleness' or a performance of masculinity, *Our Few and Evil Days* clearly highlights the need for the word 'toxic' in describing this particular type of learned and constructed masculinity. O'Rowe succinctly critiques and deconstructs the fallacy of 'toxic masculinity' throughout.

Section Seven: "Hammy's standing behind me with his mad face on and I can't help feeling like I've done something wrong."¹⁴⁵

Gang rape and 'toxic masculinity' in Abbie Spallen's *Pumpgirl*

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the positioning of *Pumpgirl* as a Northern Irish text adds a level of complexity surrounding the performances of gender identity and hegemonic patriarchy that is unseen in the other plays analysed in this chapter. This is due to the intrinsic relationship between the North of Ireland and its specific political, cultural and social history. This history has arguably subordinated women to a larger extent in Northern Ireland than in the Republic. As Fitzpatrick states,

The social context is significant, since it shapes both the production and reception of the work. Northern Ireland is unusual in the contemporary European context in

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/artsfilmtv/theatre-review-our-few-and-evil-days-at-abbey-theatre-290837.html>

¹⁴⁵ Abbie Spallen, *Pumpgirl* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2006). P.34

having experienced a violent sectarian conflict that endured for more than two decades, shaping the culture and society for more than a single generation. If, as these authors contend, an ‘armed patriarchy’ is the everyday context within which social and cultural conceptions of gender are performed then the performance of femaleness in the fictional world of the drama will likely be inflected by this, both in the scripting of the work and in the response of the audience.¹⁴⁶

Pumpgirl focuses on the performance of hegemonic patriarchal gender norms, ‘toxic masculinity’ and sexual violence. Unlike the two other monologue plays analysed in this chapter, namely Greer’s *Petals* and Daly’s *Test Dummy*, that only feature one character on stage, *Pumpgirl* features three main characters, speaking in a series of monologues, two female and one male. In numerous reviews of varying productions of the play, critics relate Spallen’s utilisation of the monologue form to those of Irish playwrights Conor McPherson, Brian Friel and Mark O’Rowe. Lyn Gardner reviewed the original production in the Edinburgh Fringe Festival saying, “McPherson and O’Rowe and many others have covered similar ground before, but in her first play to premiere beyond Ireland, Abbie Spallen comes out all guns blazing, with a piece of sparky and intricately observed writing.”¹⁴⁷ Caryn Jones said of the New York premiere,

With three alternating monologues (varying a form familiar from works by Brian Friel and Conor McPherson) and its story of bitterly circumscribed lives, “Pumpgirl” is hardly the most original play to arrive from Ireland lately. But Ms. Spallen’s penetrating language and unsentimental view place it among the most powerful; no bog of plummy prose or nostalgia for her.¹⁴⁸

John Thaxter commented on the first production in London stating,

Other reviews have likened Abbie Spallen’s play, an interwoven trio of monologues, to a somewhat similar work by Conor McPherson, [...] But I strongly suspect the author’s more likely inspiration is Brian Friel, whose *Faith Healer*, similarly framed, lives in a parallel world of Irish rustic menace, betrayal, poverty and utter desolation.¹⁴⁹

As Singleton writes on the inherent relationship between the monologue form as a theatrical device in Irish theatre and the construction of hegemonic masculine identity throughout Irish theatre,

¹⁴⁶ Fitzpatrick, ‘Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage’, 304.

¹⁴⁷ Lyn Gardner, ‘Pumpgirl’, *Guardian*, August 7, 2006, accessed February 8, 2017,

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/aug/07/theatre.edinburgh20063>

¹⁴⁸ Caryn Jones, ‘From Ireland, Love Songs in the Key of Desperation’, *New York Times*, December 5, 2007, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05pump.html>

¹⁴⁹ John Thaxter, ‘Pumpgirl’, *British Theatre Guide*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.britishtheatreinfo.com/reviews/pumpgirl-rev>

At the turn of the millennium a new breed of young male authors invested heavily in the monologue and monodrama forms to such an extent that it became a dominant theatrical trend. The fact that the vast majority of the characters in these plays were men calls into question how the dramatic form and the theatrical spectacle conjoin to offer a representation of masculinity that is at once abject and yet simultaneously spectacular.¹⁵⁰

Singleton goes on to note the connection between this ‘new breed of young male authors’ and the historical success of the male-authored monologue in Irish theatre stating that, “The Father of the modern Irish monology is Brian Friel.”¹⁵¹ The construction of a female-authored monologue, and the feminist possibilities of female-centred work, is further discussed in Section Eight of this chapter with specific relation to Greer’s *Petals* and Daly’s *Test Dummy*.

It is important to note here how Spallen subverts this traditionally masculine form of monology to tell a woman’s own story of abuse, “The rape is described by Pumpgirl in a monologue, spoken in the present tense, and hers is the only testimony.”¹⁵² When interviewed by Kiran Acharya about the Irish premiere of *Pumpgirl* in 2008, Spallen was critical of the culture in Northern Ireland, claiming that it was not progressive enough,

I think that one day this country's going to wake up and realise that the rest of the world has moved into the 21st century, [...] It's going to be a big shock, in terms of sexism, in terms of equal rights, in terms of the things you *can* say and the things that are acceptable with people from different races, different sexualities or who in any way just happen to be different from a certain type, y'know?¹⁵³

It is fair to argue that Spallen’s subversion of the male dominated mode of theatre making with *Pumpgirl* is a highly feminist and progressive act as she believes that Northern Ireland needs to accept external multi-cultural influences and rhetoric as a way to move forward as a nation. Returning the voice of the woman who experiences sexual violence to her is a radical act that arguably paved the way for one-woman plays that focus on similar issues such as Greer’s *Petals*, Daly’s *Test Dummy* and the Corn Exchange’s adaptation of Eimear McBride’s 2013 novel *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2014) to take this form farther and interrogate the sexual violence women experience in the context of constructed contemporary rape culture.

¹⁵⁰ Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 70.

¹⁵¹ Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 73.

¹⁵² Fitzpatrick, ‘Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage’, 311.

¹⁵³ Abbie Spallen, interview by Kiran Acharya, *Culture Northern Ireland*, August 13, 2008, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/performing-arts/abbie-spallen>

All three characters in *Pumpgirl* tell aspects of their own story over a period of time. The three characters, namely Pumpgirl, Hammy and Sinead, all know each other; Pumpgirl is having an affair with Hammy, who is married to Sinead. All three characters appear unhappy in their respective lives in some way and give their side to a story that happens over the course of a number of weeks and includes all three of them. This play critiques and analyses contemporary rape culture, 'toxic masculinity', 'toxic femininity', gender identity, gender binaries and gendered performance throughout. These issues are complicated and deconstructed by Spallen and her resulting text reflects the prominence of contemporary social issues, such as rape culture and the normalisation of sexual violence.

In a similar manner to the other plays featured in this chapter, sexual violence and the prominence of 'toxic masculinity' in contemporary Irish society form a core message throughout the play. One of the reasons that these particular plays have been chosen concerns the nature of the sexual violence that they each explore. As discussed in Section Four, in *Petals* there is the relatively straightforward rape of an intoxicated young woman at the hands of an older man she knew and trusted. Section Five concerning Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* examines the traditional narrative of incest, exploring it on a generational level. Section Six on *Our Few And Evil Days* also looks at incest; but reverses the most prominent idea of incest with a child raping his parent. *Pumpgirl* differs from these other plays in that it deals with the issue of gang rape.

Gang rape may also be referred to as 'group rape' or 'multiple perpetrator rape' and it involves the rape of one person by two or more rapists. As with many statistics surrounding instances of sexual violence, it is difficult to estimate how many cases of sexual violence involve gang rape, but it is fair to argue that this type of violence, when carried out by a group of men on a woman, conveys the most depraved and debased traits associated with 'toxic masculinity'. As Dworkin highlights, "In the United States, of the rapes that are reported, 43 percent are pair or gang rapes. Of these, 27 percent are committed by three or more men; 16 percent by two men. We are living in the world as it is not because men are physically stronger than we are but because they gang up to attack us and hurt us. In every act of brutality toward us, what we see is a coward."¹⁵⁴ Male gang rape of a female is the ultimate and most extreme form of violence that sustains patriarchal order, oppresses women and champions 'toxic masculinity'.

Pumpgirl is gang raped by three men, namely McManus, Shawshank and Hammy, at the end of the first act. In a similar manner to the other plays in this chapter, *Pumpgirl* never uses the word rape at the time of her attack, nor does she describe her experience as

¹⁵⁴ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 109.

a rape retrospectively, “At the end of Act One, Hammy, McCabe, and McManus take Pumpgirl out, get her so drunk she is barely conscious, and rape her. [...] She is unable to name it as rape (though the men are aware of what they have done and Hammy later commits suicide).”¹⁵⁵ The word ‘rape’ is never mentioned whatsoever throughout all of the plays examined in this chapter. The power and performativity of language to affect an emotional response to an event or experience is discussed in Chapter One, but on a basic level, it is important to question what affect not naming an instance of rape can have on the person who is raped and what, if any, are the implications of the playwrights choosing not to use the word.

‘Rape’ is an emotive and confrontational word that is arguably performative as its utterance is unnerving and evocative. In the Introductory Chapter, Irish drag performer Panti Bliss’ 2014 Noble Call speech at The Abbey in 2014, and her discussion of internalised homophobia, is linked to a sense of internalised misogyny. In another part of the same speech, Panti discusses the idea that it is not for people who experience instances of homophobia to use the term ‘homophobia’ to describe such experiences, as this term does not belong to members of the queer community,

And for the last three weeks I have been denounced from the floor of parliament to newspaper columns to the seething morass of Internet commentary for "hate speech" because I dared to use the word "homophobia". And a jumped-up queer like me should know that the word "homophobia" is no longer available to gay people. Which is a spectacular and neat Orwellian trick because now it turns out that gay people are not the victims of homophobia - homophobes are.¹⁵⁶

Panti’s comments relate to the ownership of language and who has the right to use such inflammatory language. When such language is used - either in an objectively reasonable or a subjectively unreasonable manner – the message interwoven with that language can become lost or misconstrued. This is arguably what happened in the case of Panti Bliss where comments she made as Rory O’Neill concerning various members of the IONA Institute caused public outcry and debate.¹⁵⁷ In all of the playwrights choosing to avoid the use of the word rape in their respective plays, they avoid such a connection. The lack of the word can also be linked to a sense of internalised misogyny on behalf of the women who experience sexual violence, as they are all a product of contemporary rape culture

¹⁵⁵ Fitzpatrick, ‘Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage’, 311.

¹⁵⁶ Rory O’Neill, ‘Panti’s Noble Call at the Abbey Theatre - With Subtitles’, *YouTube*, February 2, 2014, accessed February 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXayhUzWnl0>

¹⁵⁷ Arguably, the reaction to Rory O’Neill’s initial remarks and subsequent Noble Call speech did kick start the ‘Yes Campaign’ for the historic Marriage Equality Referendum in the Republic of Ireland in 2015, but the initial outcry focused solely on the use of the word ‘homophobe’ and the rights of O’Neill to apply that term to certain Irish citizens who he deemed to be objectively homophobic.

that seeks to silence those affected and rely on ‘victim blaming’ and ‘slut-shaming’ narratives. But this research would further contend that this absence acts as a way to entice an audience to interact with rape narratives without the pressure of difficult, emotional and delicate language that could potentially alienate an audience through its performative qualities.

Although the plays featured in this chapter recount fictional narratives, they act as a reflection on contemporary culture, and contemporary rape culture in particular. Rape culture is supported by the existence of victim blaming and slut-shaming behaviours that stem from the construction and proliferation of ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’, and they co-exist in a cyclical manner. If the women who experience rape and sexual violence are unable to, or feel uncomfortable with, using the word rape to describe their experience, rape culture ultimately succeeds in its power to silence those affected. A woman who has been gang raped who does not either realise or acknowledge that she has been raped is the most fundamental example of the power of rape culture. The narrative of a gang rape in *Pumpgirl* can be interpreted as a critique and deconstruction of contemporary rape culture.

In *On Raftery's Hill* and *Our Few and Evil Days* the lead up to, and the re-enactment of, the rapes of Sorrel and Margaret respectively, take place on stage. This is followed by a swift blackout before the physical act of sexual violence takes place. In contrast with this, *Pumpgirl*, in a similar manner to *Girl in Petals* and *Woman in Test Dummy*, describes her rape to the audience. Her choice of language is sensory and emotive. She describes the event in a literal way, interjecting her account with the numerous seemingly unrelated thoughts that come into her head during the rape. She describes the rape as follows,

Hammy stands watching as Shawshank's mouth is pressed against mine. His tongue is licking round me and his breath tastes of tin. The fish has gone now and the car is back to cold and damp and dark, and this weight is pressing on my chest as he makes another grab for my hands. The Indian buckle is pressing on my belly as he pulls open my combats. My face is pressed into the back of the seat now as he turns me over. The leather sticks and then unsticks to my face. I look up at the glove compartment now but it just sits there, a manual sticking out and above it more scratches, probably Hammy's kids I'm thinkin'. I'm turned round again, and this time it's McManus. Hammy's standing behind him with this mad face on and I can't help feeling I've done something wrong. I want to tell him about my mad shiny fish dream, but I can't because there's a hand over my mouth. A hand that tastes of dirt and salt and cigarettes. [...] And I can't help thinking of the people

whose car went into the bog. My head is moving back and forward and I'm looking at the scratches on the roof above. Four people on a night out in Warrenpoint. Four people scratchin' on the roof of a car. Broken fingernails, silent screams, stiletto shoes and Saturday-night boots banging against black squeezing windows. Hammy is the last, and when he stops he rests his head beside me and he looks so sad I whisper in his ear, 'It's okay.'¹⁵⁸

Her account of the act of sexual violence meanders through an analytical approach to the attack, a direct and literal description of the event, and self-reflexive emotive analysis. In commenting on this scene, Fitzpatrick notes,

She narrates slipping in and out of consciousness as the attack continues, and not being quite sure what is happening. Meanwhile, the aesthetic of the work gives the audience access to the character's interiority, while in no way mitigating the horror of the attack. The confusing nature of violence and its randomness, which would be difficult to fully represent in performance, is given an expression in language.¹⁵⁹

This rape scene differs from the ones found in the other monologue plays featured in this chapter because it is really focusing on the performance of 'toxic masculinity' over the experience of Pumpgirl. It is true that Pumpgirl does have agency through her ability to narrate the scene but, in the middle of Pumpgirl's retelling of her gang rape, Sinead discusses the moments after she had consensual sexual intercourse with Shawshank. She provides a visceral recounting of her experience,

There's a smell from his armpit as he snuggles me in next to him after the sex. It's a rank musky smell of onions and sweat and I want him to go, but there's false conversation to be made. I ask him how he got the nickname Shawshank and he starts to tell me about prison. That's where he read the poetry, I ask. He looks at me and laughs and says 'Aye'. There's kids playing outside Kerb-to-Kerb, and the thump-thump of the football gives a rhythm to the awkward silence between us in the bed.¹⁶⁰

Sinead has sexual intercourse with the same man who initiates the gang rape of Pumpgirl. In intertwining these two extremely different sexual interactions with the same man, the play comments on the normalisation of sexual violence in contemporary society and the prevalence of 'toxic masculinity'. It is important that Pumpgirl is the only one given the opportunity to fully describe the occurrence of sexual violence, and in this way, the play serves to empower the voice of the often-silenced women who experiences sexual violence.

¹⁵⁸ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 34-35.

¹⁵⁹ Fitzpatrick, 'Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage', 311.

¹⁶⁰ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 34-35.

The play goes further to interrogate the construction of contemporary rape culture through employing a distinct representation of the initial rapist. The rape of Pumpgirl is an act of power and control, as is the act of rape in general. However, this rape is not just about asserting dominance over Pumpgirl, but also over Hammy. Shawshank is a character comparable to Red in *On Raftery's Hill* in his need to exert his hegemonic patriarchal performance of 'toxic masculinity' over male and females alike. Just like Red delights in abusing his only son Ded, Shawshank asserts male dominance over Hammy through initiating the gang rape of Hammy's lover on the same night that he engaged in consensual sexual relations with Hammy's wife Sinead. This is an explicit example of the performance of 'toxic masculinity'. As Fitzpatrick notes, "Pumpgirl becomes an object to be used by the men to humiliate her lover Hammy. Hammy's monologue describes his realisation of the mood-change in the group and the danger that Pumpgirl is in, but he lacks the courage to defy the others and protect her."¹⁶¹ In this sense, the rape of Pumpgirl has little to do with her, let alone sexual desire, and is instead more concerned with performing behaviours that are exemplary of 'toxic masculinity'.

The most poignant moments of Pumpgirl's recounting of her gang rape are found in the lines, "and I can't help feeling I've done something wrong,"¹⁶² and, "Hammy is the last, and when he stops he rests his head beside me and looks so sad I whisper in his ear 'It's ok.'"¹⁶³ These sentiments epitomise 'toxic masculinity', 'toxic femininity', rape culture and victim blaming mentality. Pumpgirl is experiencing a violent attack and is betrayed by a man she trusts, there is no possible reason or excuse for what happens to her, yet in the moment, she appears to blame herself.

Just like all of the other raped and abused women in the other plays analysed in this chapter, Pumpgirl gave no provocation for her assault and quite clearly gave no consent for it. How then, thinking rationally, could she feel accountable or to blame for her experience? How could she bring herself to comfort one of the men who brutally raped her? The answer may be found in the indoctrination all people in contemporary culture face into a rape culture from a very young age. If women in contemporary Ireland, and globally, did not have to moderate their behaviour in public spaces to prevent unwanted sexual advances and assault, if men were not led to believe that sexual aggression towards women is natural and acceptable,¹⁶⁴ and if strict binary definitions of culturally constructed

¹⁶¹ Fitzpatrick, 'Performing Gender, Performing Violence on the Northern Irish Stage', 312.

¹⁶² Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 34.

¹⁶³ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 35.

¹⁶⁴ The most blatant example of men's sexually aggressive behaviour towards women being accepted as normal and tolerable discourse can be seen in the election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America. Several weeks before the election, a tape was published on which he remarked that when you're a famous man, you can do anything to women, including "grab[bing] them

notions of femininity and masculinity did not exist, then Pumpgirl would not blame herself for her rape. It can be argued that Spallen uses Pumpgirl's disassociation from her attack, as Pumpgirl normalises the behaviour, along with her pronounced internalised misogyny to comment on and critique rape culture.

The fact that Hammy appears to be more emotionally shaken than Pumpgirl after the rape also highlights her normalisation of the attack. Hammy's behaviour changes greatly after he takes part in the gang rape. He still sees women as objects, but he is less inclined to act on his sexual desires, "The twenty-year-old play leader is a ride but I'm not paying her no mind."¹⁶⁵ He becomes more aware of his wife's behaviour in the home, "I turn round and I notice that the pillowcase under my head is different from the one beside me. I never noticed that before either."¹⁶⁶ Sinead notices his change in behaviour, "There's a stink of petrol off him and he's warbling on about how he's goin' to be a better man and how he loves me and how there are going to be changes round here and how he really does appreciate me."¹⁶⁷ He ultimately takes his own life because he cannot live with the consequences of his actions, "A 1970s Toyota Celica has no catalytic converter, so the exhaust fumes should work real fast."¹⁶⁸ His changed behaviour and suicide portray traits associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and appear extreme.

When juxtaposing Hammy's character changes with Pumpgirl's more minor ones, for example she changes the way she dresses, "Looked at me funny, probably on account of me lookin' different. I've a skirt and sandals on and I put the baseball hat in the bin,"¹⁶⁹ Spallen accentuates Pumpgirl's immersion into rape culture as she normalises sexual violence. Simultaneously, the play critiques 'toxic masculinity' as it shows how Hammy was peer-pressured into performing a violent act against a woman with a group of other men, but he did not want to partake in this activity and his mental state suffers as a result. A previously discussed with reference to Carr's *On Raftery's Hill* and O'Rowe *Our Few and Evil Days*, performing 'toxic masculinity' can have a detrimental effect on the psyche of men, and Hammy's deteriorating emotional health is testament to this fact.

To further examine the normalisation of sexual violence towards women, Spallen intercuts Pumpgirl's account of her rape with Sinead telling the story of her consensual sexual relations with Shawshank, the same man who initiates the gang rape. Pumpgirl's line, "Something's holding my hand down. I want to lift out the wee gold Nemo fish but

by the pussy". Trump, as an example of the proliferation of 'toxic masculinity' is more fully discussed in Section Three of this chapter.

¹⁶⁵ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 37.

¹⁶⁶ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 37.

¹⁶⁷ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 39-40.

¹⁶⁸ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 57.

¹⁶⁹ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 2.

my hand, both my hands, are trapped over my head,”¹⁷⁰ is directly followed by Sinead saying, “My hands are stuck over my head as my jumper gets caught in his watch-strap. He undresses me with so much love, so much kindness, that I want to cry.”¹⁷¹ Spallen’s use of language to link together an act of consensual sex with an act of rape highlights and deconstructs the supposed blurred lines that exist around sexual violence and consent. She shows how two similar sounding events can be so remarkably different, thus emphasising the need to really pay attention to the pervasive nature of rape culture. Just because Shawshank is capable of having seemingly tender and respectful sexual intercourse with one woman does not mean that he is unable to brutally rape another. Spallen deconstructs the preconceived stereotypical ideas of what a rapist ‘should be like’.

Pumpgirl’s opening lines set up a strict idea of gender roles operating in a binary fashion. The stage directions dictate that she is “*one of the people who work in the petrol station. She’s in her twenties. A butch girl. A girl who loves her job and thinks she’s one of the lads. A tomboy all grewed up.*”¹⁷² This description presents her as an outsider to stereotypical hetero-patriarchal gendered ideals. Pumpgirl is most likely a nickname given to her as a result of her job, and only twice in the course of the play is her real name used, specifically when Hammy is speaking to her father in the pub, and is experiencing signs of guilt for raping this young woman, “How’s your Sandra? Sandra, that’s your eldest’s name, isn’t it?’ God, I’m a cunt,”¹⁷³ and at the beginning of the play where Mr. McCabe – also known as Shawshank and the man who initiates her gang rape - calls her Sandra in the garage, “Was that two-star or three-star, Mr McCabe?’ ‘Ach sure, Sandra, why don’t I let you guess?’.¹⁷⁴

It is notable that Pumpgirl is reported as in her twenties, as this means that she is an adult, yet the name ‘girl’ is used to describe her. Firstly, the word ‘girl’ is inherently gendered and feminine. Even though her gender identity is questioned several times during the play by various characters, her very name dictates that she is female. This contradicts her mentality presented in the opening stage directions as she views herself as ‘one of the lads’. The use of a feminine noun to describe her character plainly implies a fundamental difference between her and the men she seemingly aspires to be one of. When discussing the appearance of Pumpgirl in the first New York production, Jones writes,

Pumpgirl (Hannah Cabell) may have cropped hair, use unprintable language and wear men’s clothes — her blue shirt and navy trousers could pass for a gas station

¹⁷⁰ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 33.

¹⁷¹ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 33.

¹⁷² Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 7.

¹⁷³ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 40.

¹⁷⁴ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 12.

uniform anywhere — but she is so girlishly infatuated with Hammy that she repeats his name as often as possible while describing their relationship. “Hammy is pure class,” she rhapsodises, setting him apart from his oafish friends.¹⁷⁵

This showcases a juxtaposition of the gendered representation and identity of Pumpgirl. Also, the word ‘girl’ is often used in a derogatory sense as a means to patronise or delegitimise a person. ‘Girl’ refers to a female child, and to use such a word to describe a woman infantilises her.

However, it is very clear that Pumpgirl differentiates between herself and other females. She speaks of women in a derogatory manner and perpetuates the stereotype that women do not know how to use cars, “so all I really get to do now is check oil or tyre-pressure, and most people can do that themselves. Even the women can.”¹⁷⁶ Such a belief in the inferiority of women, along with a will to distance herself from being described as a woman indicates the power relations between the genders in this play. As discussed in Section One, in relation to the construction of the conventional gender binary under a hegemonic patriarchal culture, women are seen as weaker and lesser than their male counterparts. Instead of challenging and subverting such a stereotype by simply being a woman who enjoys cars, Pumpgirl performs her gender in a masculine way to the point where those around her are confused about her gender identity. When her gender identity is questioned, with the exception of Hammy’s child Darren asking her out of innocent curiosity,¹⁷⁷ it is done to demean her. For example, at the beginning of the play, Pumpgirl talks about an encounter with a group of women in the garage,

‘Well, we were just wondering, I mean I hope you don’t mind, think we’re being a bit rude, like.’ I could see the streaks in her fake tan round her chin where she hadn’t wiped.

‘Ask away.’

‘Well, we were just wondering like, if you were, like a *man* or a *woman*?’

Now they’re lovin’ this in the back of the car. There’s shrieks and howls of laughter. Oul’ ‘wipe-yer-neck’ Deirdre’s a big hit all right.¹⁷⁸

It is clear from the manner in which these women interact with Pumpgirl that they are deliberately mocking her. Arguably she in turn mocks them through her description of the streaked false tan on Deirdre, this makes fun of their performance of femininity, but it is clear that they want to upset her. Shawshank also questions her identity when he compares

¹⁷⁵ Caryn Jones, ‘From Ireland, Love Songs in the Key of Desperation’, *New York Times*, December 5, 2007, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/theater/reviews/05pump.html>

¹⁷⁶ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 12.

¹⁷⁷ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 13.

her to the actor John Wayne as he speaks to Hammy, “I can still hear the fucker’s voice sayin’, ‘What about your woman up in the garage? The pumpgirl? The one who walks like John Wayne and looks like his horse?’”¹⁷⁹ Although not maliciously, Darren also questions her gender identity, “The wee boy Darren has his Spiderman hood halfway up his face and eatin’ his ice cream. ‘Are you a boy or a girl?’ says he, but I only smile back because he’s just a kid.”¹⁸⁰ The fact that he feels the need to ask her about her gender identity highlights society’s ingrained obsession with labelling everyone according to a binary gender system. In reality, it should not be of any consequence to anyone else how Pumpgirl decides to identify herself, but due to the rigid gender norm structures that are at play this child firstly feels like he has a right to ask this question, and secondly, he feels the need to know what her gender identity is. This shows a level of unease with accepting ambiguity over gender identities and the fact that a small child feels this unease highlights his indoctrination into this binary gender system.

It could be argued that the questions and comments regarding Pumpgirl’s gender identity do not affect her in any significant way, as she chooses not to react to them, but it is clear that they are subconsciously affecting her. When discussing how Shawshank looks at her she says, “Shawshank McCabe was there too, givin’ it billy with the look. That same oul’ glad-eye stare from when he comes into the garage. The ul’ coyote face that’s not for good-lookin’ girls. They get a different look. More like shy. This oul’ gander goes with a full-fat-milk belly and a copy of the *Sunday World* and is just for the likes of me.”¹⁸¹ Although she previously described traditionally feminine traits as inferior to masculine, through her belief that women could not understand cars, it is clear here that she is subconsciously affected by her questioned gender identity. She has internalised the comments made to her and perpetuates a stereotype of ‘toxic femininity’ as a result. Pumpgirl should be a subversive character, but instead she portrays aspects of ‘toxic femininity’ where she serves to perpetuate binary gender stereotypes. The fact that her gender is questioned several times throughout the play shows how these people feel the need to put everyone into a generalised box based on their gender identity.

Pumpgirl critiques sexual violence and its prevalence in contemporary culture. It examines the power and potential of both ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’ to cause harm. It tackles rape culture, victim blaming and slut-shaming behaviours in a bid to deconstruct an audience’s prejudices towards them. In commenting on the accessibility of her play, Spallen said, “I think it’s quite universal, although it’s specifically set in south Armagh. One of the cast members in New York was from Idaho, or Ohio, and he said it

¹⁷⁹ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 25.

¹⁸⁰ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 50.

¹⁸¹ Spallen, *Pumpgirl*, 23.

was very like his back yard. It's about people, it's about loneliness and about what people will actually do to find a connection. I think that resonates with a lot of people.”¹⁸² In 2016, Spallen won the Windham-Campbell Prize for literature, worth \$150,000 (€138,000). In accepting the award, Spallen said, “I am beside myself to receive this award. Both in monetary terms and as a recognition of my work. I do try to be brave, and I’m aware that I can produce work that may not be palatable to all. Sometimes that can feel quite the lonely pursuit. Thank you so very much. I’ll stagger on. Less lonely than before.”¹⁸³ Spallen’s *Pumpgirl* is objectively challenging in its content and not necessarily palatable to all audiences, but it is a vital addition to the twenty-first century canon of Irish theatre. The citation for the Windham-Campbell Award reads, “Abbie Spallen’s plays confront audiences with all the awkward questions, reminding us with thrilling proof that theatre can still be urgently necessary.”¹⁸⁴ Nowhere is this truer than in *Pumpgirl*, where Spallen challenges the canon of male-authored Irish monologue plays, and demolishes the construction of ‘toxic masculinity’ and its proliferation in contemporary Irish society and culture, both north and south of the border.

Section Eight: “You are just a test dummy I am happy to oblige...”¹⁸⁵

Deconstructing the Narrative of a Victim/Slut Binary in Contemporary Culture Through Caitríona Daly’s *Test Dummy*

Test Dummy is a one-woman show written by Irish playwright Caitríona Daly.¹⁸⁶ This play is a brave and challenging look at the construction of sexualities, femininities and identities in contemporary Irish society. In the play, Daly is concerned with investigating how young Irish women in particular perform their gender and sexual

¹⁸² Abbie Spallen, interview by Kiran Acharya, *Culture Northern Ireland*, August 13, 2008, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/performing-arts/abbie-spallen>

¹⁸³ Martin Doyle, ‘Irish playwright Abbie Spallen wins \$150,000 prize: Co Down woman wins Windham-Campbell Prize, one of world’s richest literary awards’, *Irish Times*, March 1, 2016, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/irish-playwright-abbie-spallen-wins-150-000-prize-1.2555324>

¹⁸⁴ Martin Doyle, ‘Irish playwright Abbie Spallen wins \$150,000 prize: Co Down woman wins Windham-Campbell Prize, one of world’s richest literary awards’, *Irish Times*, March 1, 2016, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/irish-playwright-abbie-spallen-wins-150-000-prize-1.2555324>

¹⁸⁵ Caitríona Daly, *Test Dummy*, Unpublished Script provided by the playwright on November 23, 2016, 29.

¹⁸⁶ *Test Dummy* premiered as a WeGetHighOnThis Collective in association with Theatre Upstairs production at the Theatre Upstairs in Dublin in 2016. It ran from November 11-26, 2016. It was originally performed by Caitríona Ennis and directed by Louise Lowe. The creative team included Laura Honan as set designer, Conor Byrne & Shane Gill as lighting designers, Carl Kennedy as sound designer, Sorcha Ni Fhloinn as costume designer, Ste Murray as photographer & marking designer, Aine O’Sullivan as producer and Emma Gleeson as Stage Manager. On January 14, 2017, *Test Dummy* was nominated for two Irish Times Theatre Awards – Best Actress and Best New Play.

identity. In describing the play, Daly writes that, “It is not necessarily meant to be understood but felt.”¹⁸⁷ On describing the ‘dummy’ of the play’s title she says that, “My dummy is a mother, a whore, a victim, a predator and a person. Here’s to losing control...”¹⁸⁸ The sole character in the play known only as ‘Woman’ presents a stream of consciousness monologue that invites the audience to face their own potential prejudices and question the construction of the self in contemporary culture. The play is arguably a product of fourth wave feminism, as it aims to confront contemporary notions of rape culture, ‘toxic femininity’, ‘toxic masculinity’ and the portrayal of those who experience sexual violence.

The woman in *Test Dummy* regales the story of her relationship to sexual experiences from early childhood to her mid-twenties. Her experiences have been both consensual and non-consensual as she experienced child sexual abuse along with potentially non-consensual and consensual experiences as an adult. The elusive nature of her story-telling serves to invite the audience to question what exactly this woman has experienced, and how she experienced it. As stated by Sarah O’Toole in a review of the play, it, “speaks to an Ireland that is emerging from a past mired in sexual repression and hushed-up abuse and heralds a new cultural conversation around the representation of female sexuality.”¹⁸⁹ Daly uses her writing to challenge audiences to enter this conversation, a conversation that has become particularly pertinent by in 2017, with the rise to power of Donald Trump and the ultra-conservative ‘alt-right’, with similarly minded European counterparts such as Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson, who are deeply concerned with rolling back the rights of women, members of the queer community and the most marginalised of society.

One of the most exciting and abrasive elements of the play is Daly’s refusal to label the woman in any sense. She may not be easily defined as a sum of her experiences and this is deeply unsettling for the audience. In particular, Daly argues against the labelling of this woman as a ‘victim’ of her experiences. It is clear that the woman has experienced sexual abuse as a child, “I am six and seven when someone first tries to have sex with me.”¹⁹⁰ She has also endured unwanted sexual advances as a teenager that are systemic of contemporary rape culture, “Don’t want the feel of the touching because by the time I’m fourteen people feel like they can just grab at it, grab at it cause it’s not like theirs and if it’s not like theirs then surely it’s alright and surely it’s grand sure and surely

¹⁸⁷ Author’s Note featured in the programme for the original run.

¹⁸⁸ Author’s Note featured in the programme for the original run.

¹⁸⁹ Sarah O’Toole, ‘Test Dummy – Theatre Upstairs, Dublin’, *Reviews Hub*, November 21, 2016, accessed January 17, 2017, <http://www.thereviewshub.com/test-dummy-theatre-upstairs-dublin/>

¹⁹⁰ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 15.

isn't she lucky and surely sure she won't mind and surely sure it's her I'm doing it for?"¹⁹¹
Given these lines, it would be understandable to label this woman as just a victim of rape culture and sexual abuse. However, the woman goes on to discuss numerous sexual experiences that she seemingly willingly engaged in, in a bid to regain control of her sexuality,

Don't want assumptions of fair game to easy game
Some hole to park your bench in for the night
Cause I think I'd fuck anything
If it made me feel better...good about myself¹⁹²

24 lies on her back
Crying tears without names, without words
As you close me like a wound
And open me like a present
Both times crying¹⁹³

It can be argued that even when engaging in consensual sexual relations as an adult this woman is not fully capable of giving consent as she is trapped by the trauma of her youth,

If words could walk mine would be paraplegic
Stumbled, mumbled, suffocated

[...]

Wandering into my twenties without figuring, without functioning, without a
fucking soul-

-dier

[...]

Much to remember when you're replaying everyday¹⁹⁴

However, this does not define this woman as a victim, she is much more than that, and Daly's refusal to allow the audience to stereotype this woman is an important step in the deconstruction of contemporary rape culture. This rape culture relies heavily on the ability to silence people or delegitimise their voices through forcing a label on someone who does not necessarily identify with that label. As argued by Jan van Dijk in an article entitled 'Free The Victim', "the victim label, although eliciting compassion for victims,

¹⁹¹ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 15.

¹⁹² Daly, *Test Dummy*, 9.

¹⁹³ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 26.

¹⁹⁴ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 6.

assigns to them a social role of passivity and forgiveness that they may increasingly find to be restraining.”¹⁹⁵

In Daly refusing to allow the audience to easily label the woman, she is challenging patriarchal hegemonic structure by deconstructing rape culture through ownership, agency and language. This act is comparable to the construction of the character Curtains in Marina Carr’s *Low in the Dark*¹⁹⁶ (1989), who remains shielded from the view of the audience for the entirety of the play. Removing the audience’s ability to label and judge a female character is a deeply radical and subversive feminist act as it removes the dominance of what Laura Mulvey defines as the ‘male gaze’ and cements the argument of Miriam Haughton and Maria Kurdi stated in their introduction to *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland* that, “by choosing a path away from the patriarchal heritage of realism, one can identify a common thread of attraction to alternative forms of making work and a diversity of themes relating to female experience.”¹⁹⁷

In rejecting the ability for the audience to define and label this woman, only the woman may define herself. In discussing her choice of rejecting the easy stereotyping of women in contemporary culture narrative Daly states that,

I think most young women and indeed young men have at times throughout their sexual escapades felt like both a victim, a slut and a fucking fantastic but meaningless ride. I do however find the narratives we as a society feed ourselves dangerous. We can become obsessed with putting ourselves into boxes and not allowing ourselves ways out of them because that is not what I as a type am supposed to do. The slut can’t have feelings, the mother can’t have S&M, the rugby player can’t fuck the overweight metal head and the introverted poet can’t bang the glamour model. These ideas are derived from our narratives, our stories and our images of the world. While that ability to mould lives and thoughts is amazing it leaves writers with a responsibility to broaden these stories and to open up conversations about the human experience and to tell them in different ways.¹⁹⁸

As discussed in Chapter One, this dissertation vehemently disagrees with applying any label or term to a person who has not openly identified with that term. Freedom can only be facilitated through the freedom of representation and freedom of identification. As seen in the contemporary global political sphere, when labels are forced on people as a way to

¹⁹⁵ Jan J.M. van Dijk, (2009), Free the Victim: A critique of the western conception of victimhood. *International Review of Victimology*, 16(1), 1.

¹⁹⁶ Marina Carr, ‘Low in the Dark’, in *Plays 1*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2000).

¹⁹⁷ Miriam Haughton, Mária Kurdi, eds., *Radical Contemporary Theatre Practices by Women in Ireland*. (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015), 2.

¹⁹⁸ Author’s Note featured in the programme for the original run.

judge them, they ultimately serve to delegitimise that person's opinions and freedom of expression. A clear example of this can be seen in American actor Meryl Streep's 2017 Golden Globes acceptance speech for the Lifetime Achievement Cecil B. DeMille Award where she criticised Donald Trump for mocking the *New York Times* reporter Serge Kovalski, who lives with a condition that affects his joint movements. Trump responded by saying Streep is "one of the most over-rated actresses in Hollywood"¹⁹⁹ Streep made an objective observation and Trump responded by using a subjective insult in order to delegitimise her voice. Ironically Streep had highlighted in her speech the dangers of someone in power using insults and derogatory remarks to silence others in saying that, "And this instinct to humiliate, when it's modelled by someone in the public platform, by someone powerful, it filters down into everybody's life, because it kinda gives permission for other people to do the same thing. Disrespect invites disrespect, violence incites violence. And when the powerful use their position to bully others we all lose."²⁰⁰

The word 'victim' can now be used as a term to insult and delegitimise people in contemporary times with Claire Fox, claiming that, "I would appeal to young people to stop trying to out-victim each other and instead to transcend it and put their energies elsewhere. There is a lot of real injustice in the world and a lot of other things to be thinking about. I would encourage them to stop and ask themselves if they really do feel victimised."²⁰¹ Whether or not someone agrees with Fox's hypothesis that those of 'generation snowflake'²⁰² are quick to claim victim status, and hence to be labelled a victim is a negative insult, the pervasive power of 'victim as insult' has a direct impact on how we view those labelled as 'victims' of sexual violence. In explicitly stating that the audience should not label the woman in *Test Dummy* as a traditional victim of sexual violence, Daly radically empowers her. The potentially injurious speech act of naming this woman a victim is removed and she gains agency through rejecting the trope of the Madonna/Whore binary. As stated by Daly on choosing to write this character free from easy definition, "I found that most texts I had seen or read about female sexuality tended

¹⁹⁹ Donald Trump, Twitter feed, January 9, 2017, accessed January 31, 2017, Twitter Handle: @realDonaldTrump <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>

²⁰⁰ Meryl Streep, quoted by Daniel Victor and Giovanni Russonello, 'Meryl Streep's Golden Globes Speech', *New York Times*, January 8, 2017, accessed January 23, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/08/arts/television/meryl-streep-golden-globes-speech.html?_r=0

²⁰¹ Claire Fox, quoted by Arlene Harris, 'If you're a young, white straight man today you're in trouble', *Irish Times*, June 27, 2016, accessed January 23, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/if-you-re-a-young-white-straight-man-today-you-re-in-trouble-1.2696818>

²⁰² The term 'generation snowflake' has been described as the defining insult of 2016 and is used to criticise the alleged 'hyper-sensitivity' of the younger generation. For more information read: Rebecca Nicholson, 'Poor little snowflake' – the defining insult of 2016', *Guardian*, November 28, 2016, accessed January 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/nov/28/snowflake-insult-disdain-young-people>

to come from two voices; a victim or a hyper sexualised version of a modern woman who could have it all. I related to neither.”²⁰³

The play presents many ambiguities throughout. Although the ‘notes on the script’ state that “Quotation marks are used to represent an outer voice,”²⁰⁴ when the play is performed, it proves difficult at times to discern when the woman is speaking herself or when she is speaking as someone else. Two examples of this ambiguity can be seen in the following excerpt from the text,

Soundly and surely I lay blame. Not me but my parents and see...

“They’ll know if I’ve been talking about sex, not allowed to talk, not about sex, they’ll know at the table when I’m eating my tea.”

They don’t accept that. Tell me my parents won’t know but I stop cause I’m certain it’s time they went home.²⁰⁵

Too much touching. Wants my “Cooties!” he told me I had “Cooties!” and he wants them so he touches. Told them I’d give them to him too if he-

“STOP!”

-ped touching

lie back, lower, please, lie back²⁰⁶

The woman is also never clear whether she was raped by one male or by a group as a child. She switches between referring to ‘him’ in the singular and ‘them’ in the plural when discussing her rape,

They, fling me further...not mine, not my bed, my house but not my bed. A princess in a castle, saved by a prince, his prize to prise.²⁰⁷

Wonder what happened to them, often wonder that, wonder about them. Know it’s not to be angry at. Neither of us knowing what we were at but knowing I didn’t want it²⁰⁸

It can be argued that she is reliving child sexual abuse and non-consensual sexual encounters she experienced as an adult simultaneously, hence the switching between a single, and multiple, perpetrators, but the point is that the actualities of her violent experiences are never made expressly clear to the audience. It also calls into question

²⁰³ Author’s Note featured in the programme for the original run.

²⁰⁴ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 2.

²⁰⁵ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 15.

²⁰⁶ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 13.

²⁰⁷ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 15.

²⁰⁸ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 16.

whether the woman may have experienced abuse by a single perpetrator or gang rape. She also concurrently speaks of experiences she has had at different ages,

Stop
Because feelings for 14 were premature
Dirty little girl
6 and 7 doesn't want them
Dirty little girl
But 14 doesn't want them either.
His feel
Two
Your
scars
Me
My scars
Not yours
Sorry
24 lies on her back²⁰⁹

In this sense, it is never made clear what exact experiences she is talking about, whether they were consensual or non-consensual, and how old she was at the time she experienced them.

The woman also complicates her experiences of consensual and non-consensual sexual acts when she implies in the following lines that she has given consent but arguably she was incapable of giving it due to her expressions of internalised misogyny and 'toxic femininity', and the reliving of trauma,

Wants you
But not you
You are he, for me.
Always
Interchangeable
As
He wants to be inside of something
-You!
And you
You are willing to let him
Stupid little

²⁰⁹ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 25-26.

Dummy

OW!²¹⁰

The nature of sexual consent, including its construction under Irish Law is discussed in Chapter One, but essentially, there should be no alleged ‘grey area’ in terms of giving sexual consent. However, sexual consent has been constructed in such a way that contemporary rape culture can rely on the murkiness of sexual consent law making and guidelines to justify sexual abuse and harassment. The ambiguity of the given sexual consent of the woman in the play draws attention to the false construction of ambiguous sexual consent narratives in a rape culture context.

In the course of the play, the woman also references two experiences that can be read as miscarriages, abortions, a ‘loss of virginity’ or as an analogy of the emotional strain she is under as a result of her experiences. These two references are as follows,

Inconvenient truths vacuumed into bins

Rubbished in bin bags that aren’t thrown away²¹¹

Feel my flesh –

And blood all over the carpet, on my bedroom wall.²¹²

When I initially watched the show, I interpreted these lines as referencing a miscarriage or abortion that this woman may have experienced. Upon further analysis, I believe these lines may also reference the visceral experience of sexual intercourse, the excretion of blood that women may have when they first engage in penetrative sexual relations, or the on-going trauma that this woman endures as a result of her abuse. When I questioned Daly and Ennis about the potential miscarriage or abortion theory, Ennis agreed that the woman had undergone an abortion or miscarriage and that she actively tried to make this come across in her performance. Daly remarked that she had not made a conscious decision to include a reference to abortion or miscarriage, but that it is possible to argue for this interpretation.²¹³ The point is that these lines are ultimately open for interpretation by the audience and as such, they remain ambiguous in nature.

Throughout the play the phrase “back of [a/the] church” is mentioned thirteen times. It is first used when the woman initially references her non-consensual experiences of being sexualised and experiencing rape culture,

²¹⁰ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 23.

²¹¹ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 6.

²¹² Daly, *Test Dummy*, 18.

²¹³ I first saw the show on November 22, 2016 during the show’s initial production. After the show, I attended a post-show discussion with Caitríona Ennis, Caitríona Daly and a class of students from the Gaiety School of Acting. After this discussion I had a private discussion with both Ennis and Daly and they expressed these views to me there.

A glint gazed against my face and-
I don't want it there
Upon
Against
Upon my face
And it-
Feels like an opening
The crease between
An opening
My crevasse-
An opening
An ending
A beginning
Begins at the close
Closed
Stuck and sealed
Because it feels like the back of a church
Everywhere
Feels like the back of a church²¹⁴

The woman goes on to alternate between saying “the church” and “a church” throughout. The use of “a” and “the” is an ambiguous choice in itself as it is never clear whether the woman is referencing a specific church attached to definite memories and experiences, or a metaphorical church that symbolises particular experiences for her. There is no explanation or reasoning given for the changing between “a” and “the”. Many of her references to this phrase are interlinked with sexual experiences,

You glide
-He glides
-A fondle of your finger and it-
Feels like the back of a church-
-Keep drumming your finger until it-
No!
Listen
Feels like the back of a church
Feels weird when I'm touched, by anyone, feels weird, feels like something happened but I can't remember when-

²¹⁴ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 5.

Ever we'd go to the back of the church.²¹⁵

The final mention of the phrase comes in the closing lines where the woman is expressing her own sense of agency and reclamation of strength as she proudly proclaims, "I am the back of the church".²¹⁶

Given Ireland's history of child clerical sexual abuse and this woman's references to her own child sexual abuse, a correlation between the two can be easily construed. Or, it can be argued that "the back of [a/the] church" is where this woman may have engaged in consensual sexual experiences as a teenager as it was a private or quiet space. On the other hand, it could even be argued that the woman frequently references this place as it is a place she feels safe and comfortable and she uses it to re-centre herself when the trauma of reliving her abuse becomes too painful.

When asked by the students of the Gaiety School of Acting if the use of the phrase was to comment on the sexual abuse of children at the hands of the Catholic Church, Daly responded that she did not write it deliberately to be interpreted as such. She does not believe that this is what those lines mean, but she wants the play to be left open to interpretation.²¹⁷ Again, this reinforces the general sense of ambiguity that is deeply threaded throughout the play as a whole. All of the examples given here provide specific instances of obscurity and vagueness in *Test Dummy*. When correlated, they provide the audience with a play that is thoroughly ambiguous; it is impossible to know exactly when this woman was abused, who abused her, if she has overcome her trauma and how she continues to interact with her own experiences of trauma. In doing this, Daly has created a woman who cannot be easily defined or understood by the audience and this woman can be read as a product of her surroundings. Her ambiguity allows for a clear study of the rape culture from which she has come.

There are many similarities between the woman in *Test Dummy* and the girl in Greer's *Petals*. Both females experience sexual violence, both engage in other sexual relations that can be argued as consensual or non-consensual, both express a sense of internalised misogyny and 'toxic femininity', and both blame themselves for their experiences. Even though the girl in *Petals* is a teenager of roughly sixteen years old and the woman in *Test Dummy* is at least twenty-four years old, both females tell a similar story of experiencing a toxic relationship with sexual relations and sexuality and essentially both females are a product of rape culture, 'toxic masculinity' and 'toxic femininity'. The theory behind the construction of victim blaming and slut-shaming

²¹⁵ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 12.

²¹⁶ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 29.

²¹⁷ Comments made by Caitríona Daly during a post-show discussion with students from the Gaiety School of Acting that took place in the theatre space of Theatre Upstairs on November 22, 2016.

behaviours are discussed in detail in Chapter One, but the woman in *Test Dummy*, similar to the girl in *Petals*, becomes the literal embodiment of such behaviours. The woman makes repeated references to being called a ‘slut’ and a ‘slapper’ by her peers,

Feels like the
STOP
Slut
Back of the church
Slapper
Back-
And forth²¹⁸

People shocked.
14 wept of words
Slapped slut
People, your friends uncomfortable at your opened opening
14 wept of name
Slutted slapper
To talk and to do²¹⁹

This is violent language as it negatively impacts on the woman and increases her sense of internalised misogyny. In the course of the play she can be seen blaming herself for her non-consensual sexual experiences,

Approaching
Game clear
I’m fair game it’s
Fair game
And I...
Is it because I smiled at you? Cause I do that to everyone, smile, awkward habit
but better than a growl
Grrrr
Didn’t mean to initiate if I did²²⁰

Just like the girl in *Petals* goes on to blame herself for her own rape, this woman implies that she is partly to blame for any unwanted sexual attention that she receives.

Regardless of this woman’s behaviour, she does not, as no one does, deserve or invite inappropriate sexual advances. The fact that she looks to blame herself before

²¹⁸ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 21.

²¹⁹ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 24.

²²⁰ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 8.

blaming anyone for their own sexual misconduct highlights how she has internalised the socially constructed myths of victim blaming and slut-shaming. Arguably, had she not been slut-shamed by her peers, she would not blame herself so easily for her sexual experiences.

To slut-shame a woman for engaging in consensual sexual acts is to stigmatise the very natural expression of her own sexuality and sexual desire. To slut-shame a woman who has experienced sexual violence is to ultimately silence her, hold prejudicial opinions against her and to further negatively impact upon her coping with her real and lived trauma. In referencing the construction of rape culture so clearly in the play through the expressions of internalised misogyny and descriptions of slut-shaming and victim blaming behaviours, Daly challenges the audience to face their own potential prejudices concerning sexual violence and sexual consent. In a similar way to Greer's girl in *Petals*, Daly presents a character who showcases the extreme potential of contemporary rape culture.

Another similarity between these two plays is present in their form and structure. Both are one-woman, continuous, non-realist monologues. While *Petals* is written in rhyming verse, *Test Dummy* has a fractured and fragmented structure. Such structures present subversive and radical ways to present a female who has the voice and space to tell her own story. Although this type of monologue performance is by no means unique to feminist theatre, the act of rejecting traditions of the male-authored 'big play' in favour of a one-woman monologue is deeply subversive as it explicitly and utterly empowers the voice of the woman. As discussed in Section Seven of this chapter with regards to Spallen's *Pumpgirl*, the monologue in Irish theatre has traditionally been constructed as a male dominated space. So, the appropriation of the monologue form by a female playwright to present a female character who tells her own story is a subversive and powerful act of feminism. As Singleton notes, "In the theatre, since the 1970s onwards, feminism in its various forms has contested the authorial right of the monologist to perform a hegemonic and often patriarchal authority in the public sphere, by employing the monologue for the voiceless, the muted groups who traditionally have been at the margins of society, and who often have no social agency."²²¹

In the case of both *Test Dummy* and *Petals*, the female has the space to tell her own story in her own words and in her own way. The audience is challenged by the difficult narratives presented as a voice is given to the woman directly affected by sexual violence, the woman traditionally voiceless in contemporary society. Not only is their voice heard, but also the voice of the perpetrator is not. This is a powerful act of empowerment and the re-appropriation of agency for these women as the perpetrator

²²¹ Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 70-71.

initially removed the woman's agency, but now, his has been subsequently removed in the narration of his act of sexual violence. As Singleton remarks, "If we can only see a woman on the stage, men are visually erased, and only called up in the spectators' imagination by the reconstruction of men's position in relation to how the woman constructs them in her solo narrative."²²² Both playwrights confront the audience with challenging conversations and produce politicised theatre as a result. Their monologues can also be read as a way for the characters to heal from their trauma through discussing it, "Thus the private articulation of self becomes the prescriptive methodology for the healing and the re-entry into the public domain of the performance of self, that may or may not have the authority to speak alone."²²³ Ultimately, the appropriation of the monologue form by these playwrights to portray narratives of sexual violence is deeply subversive, feminist and empowering.

As Elaine Aston says in her article 'Agitating for Change: Theatre and a Feminist 'Network of Resistance'' while discussing the emergence of fourth wave feminism as a reaction to post feminism and failed neoliberalism,

That neoliberalism has failed to meet the 'aspirations and needs' of young women, those who, as [Kira] Cochrane puts it, 'grew up being told the world was post-feminist, that sexism and misogyny were over, and feminists should pack up their placards', is now corroborated by the numerous instances of them picking up 'their placards', organising campaigns, or protesting via social media, against sexism, pornography, rape and racism.²²⁴

Through tackling delicate subject matter using such a direct and confrontational style of performance, these playwrights are using their respective works to take part in what Chantal Mouffe defines as a 'network of resistance'²²⁵ and add to the plethora of new theatre work emerging from the inception of the fourth wave feminist movement.

Although there are very few stage directions included by Daly in the original script for *Test Dummy*, the non-verbal action of the play is highly significant, and the direction of Ennis by Louise Lowe adds immeasurably to the power of the play in performance. When the audience enters the confined space of the theatre that is in traverse, Ennis is already standing at the back of the stage space with a slice of pizza in her hand, staring blankly ahead. The audience must step around her to enter and this creates a close connection between her and the audience before the play begins. The stage spaces consists

²²² Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 71.

²²³ Singleton, *Masculinities and the Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 70.

²²⁴ Elaine Aston, 'Agitating for Change: Theatre and a Feminist 'Network of Resistance'' in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 41, No. 1, March 2016, 5.

²²⁵ Chantal Mouffe, *Agnostics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013), 95.

of a narrow strip of carpet that runs straight between the two sides of the audience with an old fridge at one end and food waste such as a takeaway pizza box at the other. As described in one review of the play,

The corroded fridge - black with the peeled marks obvious - has soil pouring out from it; the once sparkling white-good is now filthy, not the kind that you would have in your kitchen, more the kind you would throw onto the dump. At the other end of the stage, there is more soil, with beer bottles stuck in, pizza slices thrown amongst the debris - the remains from the night before - in contrast to the carpet that covers the catwalk. All of this contrasts against the old fashioned standing lamps, with the retro lamp shades, and yet all of it feels uncomfortable, like an old fashioned house holding a horrific secret.²²⁶

Another review of the play states that the, “set generates the aura of a seedy bedsit.”²²⁷ When discussing the staging of the play, Chris McCormack says that, “Director Louise Lowe and set designer Laura Honan stage the action in the traverse, putting the audience facing each other. When it comes to slut-shaming and questions of consent, an audience, no less than a society, are to be held to account.”²²⁸

All of these reviews and viewpoints highlight the importance of the set design and staging of *Test Dummy*. Daly simply writes at the beginning of the script, “Time; present day. The script is written in a stream of consciousness so grammar may appear incomplete or interrupted at times. Quotations marks are used to represent an outer voice.”²²⁹ Throughout the script, she writes the stage direction “*pause*”²³⁰ four times, “*cough*”²³¹ twice, “*points*”²³² once, “*beat*”²³³ once and “*gasps*”²³⁴ once. The most elaborate direction from Daly comes directly after the scene in which the woman describes her rape, with Daly writing, “*Clenches heart [...] Clenches genitals [...] Clenches heart.*”²³⁵ Despite the sparseness of these given directions, the non-verbal action of the play added by Lowe transforms the script into a powerful live event.

²²⁶ Red Curtain Review, ‘Test Dummy, Theatre Upstairs’, *Red Curtain Review*, November 16, 2016, accessed January 17, 2017,

<http://www.theredcurtainreview.com/2016/11/test-dummy-theatre-upstairs.html>

²²⁷ Frank L., ‘Test Dummy – Theatre Upstairs – Review’, *No More Workhorse*, November 17, 2016, accessed January 17, 2017,

<https://nomoreworkhorse.com/2016/11/17/test-dummy-theatre-upstairs-review/>

²²⁸ Chris McCormack, ‘Review: Test Dummy at Theatre Upstairs, Dublin’, *Exeunt Magazine*, November 18, 2016, accessed January 17, 2017,

<http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-test-dummy-theatre-upstairs/>

²²⁹ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 2.

²³⁰ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 13, 14, 25.

²³¹ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 6, 8.

²³² Daly, *Test Dummy*, 26.

²³³ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 19.

²³⁴ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 29.

²³⁵ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 16.

When the performance begins, Ennis does not speak for almost seven minutes. She begins by staring at the fridge for several moments and then slowly makes her way towards it as she stops to pick up a jacket that is lying in the audience space, then she searches in the fridge, takes a drink, settles herself and then begins with speech. This is a long time to remain silent on stage in a theatre performance and it is deeply uncomfortable for the audience. The longer the silence goes on, the more un-easy the audience becomes, with many members of the audience visibly and audibly shifting in their seats.

The sense of unease created by Ennis in these opening moments is sustained throughout the performance, as she is physically in close proximity to the audience and engages in direct eye contact with many members of the audience during her performance. As she tells her story of abuses, the audience is left powerless to help her, as they cannot disrupt the performance, but the intimate nature of her connection with them makes this an uncomfortable reality; and is reflective of the lack of help provided to people who have experienced sexual violence in reality.

The physical actions of Ennis added to the script by Lowe are also imperative to the performance when Ennis enacts a woman physically restrained by a sexual attacker. Throughout the following lines Ennis throws herself repeatedly against the carpeted wall of the theatre as if someone else is throwing her there, as shown in [Figure 2], and she stretches out for help from the audience that never comes,

6 and 7 and all of a sudden-

-There you are you-

Dummy

Listen

I'll never see you again

Dummy

Listen!

Won't matter tomorrow

Dummy

-“Do you like that?”

Yes I-

Does it matter²³⁶

This action continues for several moments, and similarly to the opening silent scene, it is difficult to watch and highly uncomfortable for the audience. The physical actions added by Lowe and Ennis to the script highlight the difficult and challenging nature of the play's subject matter.

²³⁶ Daly, *Test Dummy*, 18.

In summarising the power of this play, one reviewer writes that, “On leaving the theatre there was a strong sensation of having been in the presence of something awkward, not easily understood. Something that haunts the brain like an abstract painting of substance. Something that will return to the forefront of the brain. A thing of value.”²³⁷ It is ultimately a challenging piece of theatre that tackles issues of sexual violence, sexual consent, the expression of sexual desire, victim blaming, slut-shaming, and the pervasive power of rape culture in contemporary society.

Section Nine: Conclusion

This chapter examines a cross-section of contemporary Irish plays that specifically deal with the issue of sexual violence against women. All of the plays analysed deal with different elements of sexual violence against women. Gillian Greer’s *Petals* looks at the rape of a teenage girl who believes her own sexual ‘promiscuity’ means that she is somehow deserving of the assault or ‘asking for it’. Marina Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill* examines incest and the cyclical patterns of inter-generational abuse apparent in the Raftery household. The incest that Carr writes about features a father raping both of his daughters. In the case of his older daughter, the abusive incestuous relationship has continued for twenty-seven years. Mark O’Rowe’s *Our Few and Evil Days* also examines rape and incest, but in this case, a young male child rapes his mother twenty years before the play begins. Even though this abuse happened many years ago, the raped mother relives her experience of sexual violence nightly in her mind as she feels this is the only way she can maintain a connection to her rapist son who was murdered by his father, her husband, on the night of the rape. Abbie Spallen’s *Pumpgirl* takes on the topic of gang rape where a young woman who is intoxicated is taken advantage of and gang raped by her lover and his friends one night. *Pumpgirl* is the only play mentioned in this chapter where the audience is given some insight into the mind of the perpetrator as Pumpgirl’s lover Hammy is present on stage. In this case, he struggles to come to terms with what he has done and commits suicide at the end of the play. Caitriona Daly’s *Test Dummy* deals with many of the issues raised throughout the other plays as it tackles child sexual abuse, rape and gang rape. However, Daly’s script is never clear about when this woman was attacked, who attacked her or where it happened. The five plays analysed in this chapter are representative of varying types of sexual violence carried out by men on women. All

²³⁷ Frank L., ‘Test Dummy – Theatre Upstairs – Review’, *No More Workhorse*, November 17, 2016, accessed January 17, 2017, <https://nomoreworkhorse.com/2016/11/17/test-dummy-theatre-upstairs-review/>

of the characters and narratives are fictitious in nature, but they are illustrative of contemporary rape culture.

This dissertation, and this chapter in particular, is concerned with deconstructing rape culture through critiquing its components. Without ‘victim blaming’, ‘slut-shaming’, ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ behaviours to sustain its prevalence, rape culture can and will be utterly demolished. The aim of this research is to examine how Irish theatre is reacting to, and deconstructing, this culture. The plays have been used to elucidate on the thesis that, through contesting and subverting the ways in which feminisms and femininities are represented in contemporary Irish theatre, performance and culture, rape culture can be challenged and undermined, as we move towards a truly equal ‘post gender’ society.

Chapter Three:

'Lovely Girl',¹ Dumb Blonde, or Empowered Woman?: Contemporary Femininities and Rape Culture in *The Rose of Tralee*

¹ The term 'lovely girl' was first used in Season Two, Episode Seven of the Channel Four series *Father Ted*. The episode is called 'Rock a Hula Ted'. It first aired on Channel Four on April 19, 1996. In it, Father Ted is asked to judge the 'Lovely Girls' competition and remarks that all of the 'girls' involved have 'lovely bottoms'. The episode was critiquing pageantry, especially the *Rose of Tralee* competition. The term has since become synonymous with mocking the festival and is used commonly in public discourse about the competition as a way to critique its value in contemporary society.

Section One: Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to interrogate the performance and performativity of women's beauty pageants in contemporary Irish culture. This chapter discusses the highly visible performance of gender present in pageants and seeks to question whether or not a pageant can be deemed as progressive and feminist. It examines the role of rape culture in contemporary manifestations of pageants, and how gendered performances can in turn sustain rape culture. The arguments presented look at the rules, regulations and limitations placed on the female body throughout these competitions. It critically analyses how these rules operate and place unrealistic expectations on the female body and identity. It looks at the potential for objectification and sexualisation of female contestants, while critiquing the narrow entry requirements for *The Rose of Tralee*. It comments on the relationship between the representation of the woman and representations of nationhood or national identity. It discusses how women's agency can be removed or heightened through taking part in this contest, while debating the power of the intention of the presentation of a body or image, with the inability to control how that image of the body is consumed and valued. It contextualises these pageants within a wider 'rape culture' and 'raunch culture' framework using the theories of contemporary feminist writers such as Ariel Levy,² Emer O'Toole,³ Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters,⁴ Jennifer L. Pozner,⁵ Holly Baxter and Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett,⁶ Laura Bates⁷ and Laurie Penny.⁸ It also interrogates how a potential audience may perceive such competitions. This research also uses Judith Butler's theories surrounding gender as a cultural construct as a platform upon which to engage with these pageants and their feminist/anti-feminist ideologies.

As stated by Fintan Walsh, "The beauty pageant typically rewards females for a public expression of gender and sexuality, and for this reason it must always be understood

² Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (London: Pocket Books, 2006. Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2015).

³ Emer O'Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls: Dressing Up, Playing Parts and Daring to Act Differently* (London: Orion Books, 2016).

⁴ Rebecca Munford, Melanie Waters, *Feminism & Popular Culture, Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2014).

⁵ Jennifer L. Pozner, *Reality Bites Back the Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV* (California: Seal Press, 2010).

⁶ Holly Baxter, Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett, *The Vagenda A Zero Tolerance Guide To The Media* (London: Square Peg, 2014).

⁷ Laura Bates, *The Everyday Sexism Project* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

⁸ Laurie Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2015).

as a performance.”⁹ The research presented in this chapter predominantly focuses the *Rose of Tralee* festival. Numerous other beauty pageants have previously taken place, or continue to take place in Ireland. These pageants include; *Miss Ireland*, *Miss Alternative Ireland* [Note 1], *Mr. Ireland*, [Note 2], *Miss Universe Ireland* [Note 3], *Miss Bikini Ireland* [Note 4], *Mrs. Ireland*, *Ms. Ireland*, *Miss Teen Ireland*, *Lady of Ireland*, *Junior Miss Ireland* and *Miss Collegiate Ireland* [Note 5].

The main focus of this chapter on the *Rose of Tralee* is because of how long it has run for, the fact that it is the most well-known pageant competition in Ireland, and because of its distinctly Irish narrative and performance of ‘Irishness’, along with its relationship to a global context. The relationship to a global context is a result of the numerous international Rose Centres that enter a woman into the competition annually. In this way, the *Rose of Tralee* mirrors the argument made in the introduction that this research focuses on the Irish context, and rape culture in Ireland, but there is an irrefutable link to a wider global context.

The *Rose of Tralee* is the second oldest running pageant in Ireland as it was first held in 1959.¹⁰ *Miss Ireland* is the oldest, beginning in 1947.¹¹ There are numerous references to *Miss Ireland* made throughout this chapter as *Miss Ireland* is a more traditional beauty pageant, and it is used to compare and contrast with the *Rose of Tralee*. *Miss Ireland* was set up by the same man who went on to create the *Miss World* pageant in 1951, Englishman Eric Morley. The very origins of *Miss Ireland* are concerned with hetero-patriarchal control of women as Morley, “First organised the event with the intention of improving the declining standards of dress in local dancehalls.”¹² *Miss Ireland* largely replicates the traditional beauty pageant form, as it is a pageant based mostly on the aesthetic value of its contestants. In juxtaposition with this, the *Rose of Tralee* represents a pageant that nominally strives to take the focus away from external beauty values and the performance of a traditional form of femininity. Instead it focuses on interviewing young women of Irish heritage in a bid to choose a ‘role model’ or ambassador for the country for one year. The ‘traditional’ or ‘conventional’ form of beauty championed in most beauty pageants is akin to the performance of ‘toxic femininity’ as described in the Introductory chapter, as it is based on the premise that the women deemed

⁹ Fintan Walsh, ‘Homelysexuality and the ‘Beauty’ Pageant’, in *Crossroads: Performance Studies and Irish Culture*, eds. Sara Brady, Fintan Walsh, 2nd ed. (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 196.

¹⁰ Rose of Tralee, ‘Rose of Tralee Legacy’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 8, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie/legacy>

¹¹ Miss Ireland, ‘Miss Ireland Official’, *Facebook*, accessed November 8, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/pg/MissIrelandORG/about/?ref=page_internal

¹² Walsh, ‘Homely Sexuality and the ‘Beauty’ Pageant’, 202.

worthy of the beauty queen title must fit a limiting, unrealistic beauty standard. Conforming to, and placing a high value on, these constructed tropes of beauty reinforces hegemonic patriarchy and promotes behaviours and beliefs associated with ‘toxic femininity’.

It is important to contextualise the history of beauty pageants, and the history of the *Rose of Tralee* festival. Walsh notes, “Rooted in the ritualistic presentation of girls to society, the pageant has appeared in a variety of modes and millieus throughout its history.”¹³ Scholars have argued over the beginnings of pageant culture. Some scholars, such as classical historian Bettany Hughes, believe that the first known pageants date back to Ancient Greece where, “Beauty contests - *kallisteia* - were a regular fixture in the training grounds of the Olympics at Elis and on the islands of Tenedos and Lesbos, where women were judged as they walked to and fro. Triumphant men had ribbons tied around winning features - a particularly pulchritudinous calf-muscle or bicep.”¹⁴ Others argue that it stems from England’s 1839 Eglinton Tournament where a medieval revel was re-enacted and Georgiana Seymour, Duchess of Somerset, was crowned the ‘Queen of Beauty’ at the festival.¹⁵ By the 1880s in England, the prevalence of May Queens chosen to lead May Day celebrations serves as an example of pageant culture. However, arguably American showman P. T. Barnum created the concept of the modern-day pageant in the 1850s when he ran ‘photographic likeness’ contests where members of the public could vote on the beauty of photographs provided by young women.¹⁶ One of the world’s most well-known and longest running pageants, the *Miss America* pageant, was first held in September 1921,

By the early decades of the twentieth century, attitudes had begun to change about beauty pageants. Prohibitions against the display of women in public began to fade, though not to disappear altogether. One of the earliest known resort beauty pageants had been held in 1880, at Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. However, it was not until the twentieth century that beach resorts began to hold regular beauty pageants as entertainments for the growing middle class. In 1921, in an effort to

¹³ Walsh, ‘Homelysexuality and the ‘Beauty’ Pageant’, 196.

¹⁴ Bettany Hughes, ‘Would you be beautiful in the ancient world?’, *BBC News*, January 10, 2015, accessed November 8, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30746985>

¹⁵ Gordon Pentland, ‘The Eglinton Tournament 1839: A Victorian Take on the Anglo-Scottish Rivalry’, *History of Parliament*, September 4, 2014, accessed November 8, 2016, <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2014/09/04/the-eglinton-tournament-1839-a-victorian-take-on-the-anglo-scottish-rivalry/>

¹⁶ ‘People & Events: Origins of the Beauty Pageant’, *Pbs*, accessed November 8, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/missamerica/peopleevents/e_origins.html

lure tourists to stay past Labor Day, Atlantic City organisers staged the first Miss America Pageant in September.¹⁷

Somewhat ironically, this pageant took place one year after women were granted full voting rights in America by the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution.¹⁸ The idealised image of perfect young American womanhood marked a stark contrast to the feminist suffragettes who campaigned for gender equality at the same time. Such a contradiction in the ideals of ‘womanhood’ is comparable to the rise of post feminism and fourth wave feminism as detailed in the Introductory chapter.

It is also important to note the historic connection between beauty pageants and commercial gain. As Keith Lovegrove points out in *Pageant, The Beauty Contest*,

By the mid-20th century, the West had begun to embrace the phenomenon of the beauty contest. Civic pageants were widespread. Sponsorship flourished in the economic and political climates of the period following the Second World War. In due course, entrepreneurs realised that the beauty parade was an ideal platform from which to advertise goods and services.¹⁹

Lovegrove goes on to mention such pageants as the ‘Donut Queen’ (1948), ‘Miss Car Wash’ (1951) and ‘Sausage Queen’ (1955).²⁰ These examples highlight how closely pageants became linked with material goods. This link showcases the objectification potential of traditional beauty pageants as women’s bodies can be used as a way to advertise physical objects. Such objectification feeds into the violent potential of contemporary rape culture, as the de-humanised object lacks agency and therefore, power. This intrinsic link to advertising continues to contemporary competitions with numerous major companies sponsoring both the *Rose of Tralee* festival.²¹

A ‘beauty pageant’ may be defined as follows,

The beauty pageant in fact represents a complicated arrangement of claims and embodies a variety of nationalist expressions: it is a civic ritual [...] and it is a mass-mediated spectacle, firmly embedded within commodity culture, in a historical moment where almost all forms of social participation and social meaning are determined by a continuous interplay between representation and

¹⁷ ‘People & Events: Origins of the Beauty Pageant’, *Pbs*, accessed November 8, 2016,

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/missamerica/peopleevents/e_origins.html

¹⁸ US Constitution, amend. 19. ‘Women's Right to Vote (1920)’, accessed November 8, 2016,

<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=63>

¹⁹ Keith Lovegrove, *Pageant, The Beauty Contest* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2001), 20.

²⁰ Lovegrove, *Pageant, The Beauty Contest*, 20.

²¹ Numerous major Irish companies sponsor the *Rose of Tralee* including *Tipperary Crystal*, *RTE* and the *Irish Independent*. For a full list of current sponsors visit, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie/sponsors> (Accessed February 16, 2017).

consumption. It is also a highly visible performance of gender, where the disciplinary practices that construct women as feminine are palpable, on display, and positioned as unproblematically desirable. And, it is a profoundly political arena, in the sense that the presentation and reinvention of femininity that takes place on the beauty pageant stage produces political subjects.²²

Traditional beauty pageants can be seen to purport behaviours associated with ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’, as will be further discussed throughout the chapter. As Banet-Weiser argues, the beauty pageant is not only a performance of gender, but also one of commodification, objectification, idealisation, political motivations and even national identities. It is necessary to deconstruct the performance and role of the beauty pageant in contemporary culture, as pageants remain popular in the twenty-first century, with an estimated thirty-five thousand pageants taking place in the United States of America alone annually.²³ As Lovegrove argues,

One day humankind discovered aesthetics and we have been preening ourselves ever since. But only a few of us dare to declare that we are more beautiful than the next person. The beauty contest in all its forms, whether it be a competition to find the most beautiful woman in the world or to find the man – or woman – with perfectly formed pectorals, must be the most blatant display of peacockesque attention-seeking, unmatched in its glamour, glitz and sheer exhibitionism.²⁴

As Lovegrove here points out, beauty pageants are essentially defined by their dependence on the aesthetic of the competitor, and that aesthetic is deemed attractive based on subjective and culturally-constructed notions of ‘normative’ beauty. This creates and sustains both ‘toxic masculinity’ and ‘toxic femininity’. ‘Normative’ or ‘conventional’ beauty standards are entirely fabricated, and to expect people, predominantly women in the case of beauty pageants, to ascribe to such limiting and subjective standards inevitably supports toxic behaviours through championing those who happen to look a certain way. It is dangerous to create competitions based on aesthetic qualities that are subjectively constructed and valued. The fact that the modern beauty pageant was originally designed to judge the perceived aesthetic beauty of predominantly young women showcases clearly the value system that is adhered to for judging women not only in pageants, but throughout contemporary culture. Based on the ideas of both Banet-Weiser and Lovegrove, it becomes clear that on a basic level, beauty pageants are fundamentally concerned with

²² Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl In The World* (California: University of California Press Ltd., 1999), 2-3.

²³ Lovegrove, *Pageant, The Beauty Contest*, Printed on the Inside Cover.

²⁴ Lovegrove, *Pageant, The Beauty Contest*, Printed on the Inside Cover.

subjectively critiquing the perceived beauty of women. This supports ‘toxic femininity’ through not only encouraging women to enter, and so publicly perform the beauty myth, but also through promoting the idea that women who do not or cannot enter are of lesser beauty, simply because they do not fit the limiting confines of socially constructed conventional beauty standards.

It could be argued that contemporary pageants are more focused on the personality and identity of the competitors than their visually aesthetic qualities, as is discussed in the course of this chapter. It could also be argued that the idea of the beauty pageant is not inherently sexist due to the existence of male pageants. This is a false argument for several reasons. Firstly, the existence of one objectifying entity does not cancel out another, both gendered pageants are sexist in nature. As discussed in Chapter Two, creating a male beauty myth does not rectify the established original beauty myth. Secondly, if female beauty pageants sustain ‘toxic femininity’ then male beauty pageants support ‘toxic masculinity’, and subsequently remain oppressive hetero-patriarchal institutions. Thirdly, the sheer ratio of female to male pageants proves that there is no gender balance in pageant culture. This ratio is visible in Irish pageants with *Miss Ireland* staged every year since 1947, while the *Mr Ireland* pageant began in 2010 and has taken place only four times by the end of 2016.²⁵ I would contend that there are more nuances apparent in contemporary pageant culture, as will be discussed in this chapter. However, on a rudimentary level, beauty pageants are based on aesthetic beauty. This is predominantly female aesthetic beauty. This provides a misogynist platform for the proliferation of objectifying, negative and damaging images of women and femininities, and the proliferation of behaviours associated with performances of ‘toxic femininity’ and contemporary rape culture.

While the *Rose of Tralee* festival is not marketed as a traditional beauty pageant, it is necessary to focus on the public perception of the festival and how it can be interpreted as a traditional pageant. The *Rose of Tralee* defines itself as “Ireland’s Flagship Family Festival.”²⁶ Promotional material for the festival describes it as follows; having “1.7 million television viewers”, a “seven day festival” that is “more than a TV show”, with “free family fun”, a “top international event” that “reach[es] the whole country” creating “lasting memories” as a “style event of the year”, “reaching 96% of Irish adults” as a “top news story” with “70 rose centres worldwide” with “47,000 Facebook fans”, “500 volunteers”, “700 participants and 70 hours of entertainment”, “connecting the global Irish

²⁵ For more information on *Mr Ireland*, see footnote 3 of this chapter.

²⁶ Rose of Tralee, ‘Ireland’s Flagship Family Festival’, *YouTube*, February 27, 2016, accessed November 9, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fH_bRVpZlw&feature=youtu.be

community since 1959”.²⁷

In 2014, Anthony O’Gara, the Chief Executive of the *Rose of Tralee*, promoted the festival as, “one of the most important threads to connect Irish people throughout the world with home and that is a fact for over 55 years. We celebrate the Roses, their families and friends in their own home towns first and their arrival in Tralee is a continuation of this celebration.”²⁸ It was originally set up to promote tourism in Tralee but grew into a large international festival as, “In 1970, as the country celebrated Dana’s victory at the *Eurovision Song Contest*, the *Rose of Tralee* began marketing itself as the *Rose of Tralee International Festival*.”²⁹

The festival is uniformly promoted as ‘not a beauty pageant’ by the organisers and Roses involved. Walsh writes that, “Since its inception, and throughout its rapid festivalisation and internationalisation, the *Rose of Tralee* has resisted associations with other beauty pageant formats. Organised around regional and national heats, it is expressly committed to celebrating ‘Irishness’, and the genetically suggestive ‘inner’ beauty of its national and diasporic entrants.”³⁰

Felicity Hayes-McCoy interviewed the 2013 Kerry Rose Gemma Kavanagh and asked her what it was like to take part in a beauty pageant. Hayes-McCoy reportedly, “said the beauty pageant words”.³¹ According to Hayes-McCoy, Kavanagh responded to her question by, “ask[ing] very politely why I’d imagine, since she’s “an educated Irishwoman in her twenties” she’d “have anything to do with something that’s just a beauty pageant?””³² The 2010 Wicklow Rose, Orla Woods, wrote an article defending the continuance of the festival claiming that,

Not to fault other competitions — and I’ve no experience with others — but I just like the fact the Rose is never based on your looks. It’s really not like any other pageant. Everyone in the Rose is confident and outgoing, and there to meet other

²⁷ Rose of Tralee, ‘Ireland’s Flagship Family Festival’, *YouTube*, February 27, 2016, accessed November 9, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fH_bRVpZlw&feature=youtu.be

²⁸ Dermot Crean, ‘Anthony O’Gara: “It’s Time To Correct Some Misconceptions About The Rose...”’ *Tralee Today*, September 4, 2014, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://traleetoday.ie/anthony-ogara-time-correct-misconceptions-rose/>

²⁹ Walsh, ‘Homely Sexuality and the ‘Beauty’ Pageant’, 198.

³⁰ Walsh, ‘Homely Sexuality and the ‘Beauty’ Pageant’, 198-9.

³¹ Felicity Hayes-McCoy, ‘How a Kerry Rose challenged my assumptions’, *Irish Times*, August 15, 2013, accessed November 10, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/generationemigration/2013/08/15/how-a-kerry-rose-changed-my-feminist-views/>

³² Felicity Hayes-McCoy, ‘How a Kerry Rose challenged my assumptions’, *Irish Times*, August 15, 2013, accessed November 10, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/generationemigration/2013/08/15/how-a-kerry-rose-changed-my-feminist-views/>

people with those qualities. These are all well-educated, confident women, they're not forced or exploited. [...] it's mostly about personality.³³

Woods defends the reputation of the festival and disputes the claims of Anna Nolan that the *Rose of Tralee* is a 'lady cattle mart'³⁴ Woods is contradictory in that she claims it is a competition solely based on personality, without providing any proof or evidence of this statement, but she also comments on the need to adhere to 'normative' aesthetics of femininity,

I don't think there's any area that you could fault about being a Rose. Although, after the year I was a little relieved about being able to take a break from putting on a full face of make-up and a dress so often — but I did love doing it at the time. [...] When you enter the *Rose of Tralee* you can just be you, but maybe make a bit more effort than just a pair of jeans.³⁵

Woods acknowledges a Rose is expected to present herself in a certain way with particular attention paid to physical appearance and normative femininity with dresses and makeup. Essentially, she proves that entrants must conform to the beauty myth and conventional 'toxic femininity'.

To be clear, women should be free to dress in any manner they choose, and in this way, dressing to emulate normative beauty standards is not inherently toxic. However, a woman dressing in a conforming manner because she feels she should is representative of 'toxic femininity'. This shows that even though the festival and its competitors may argue that it differs from traditional beauty pageants, through not focusing on the physical perceived beauty of the women involved, on some level, it evidently does.

In *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, Natasha Walter discusses the need to allow girls to adhere to normative beauty standards if they want to, once they are not forced into them, "Of course it isn't a problem that little girls are dreaming of being little mermaids

³³ Orla Woods, 'I have a PhD from Trinity, but the best thing on my CV is that I was a Rose of Tralee', *Daily Mail*, August 24, 2013, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?sid=9053c4ed-7bb2-42b8-8350-5192331def76%40sessionmgr4007&vid=1&hid=4203&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=89911412&db=ukh>

³⁴ Orla Woods, 'I have a PhD from Trinity, but the best thing on my CV is that I was a Rose of Tralee', *Daily Mail*, August 24, 2013, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?sid=9053c4ed-7bb2-42b8-8350-5192331def76%40sessionmgr4007&vid=1&hid=4203&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=89911412&db=ukh>

³⁵ Orla Woods, 'I have a PhD from Trinity, but the best thing on my CV is that I was a Rose of Tralee', *Daily Mail*, August 24, 2013, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?sid=9053c4ed-7bb2-42b8-8350-5192331def76%40sessionmgr4007&vid=1&hid=4203&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=89911412&db=ukh>

with sweet voices, or of going to the ball in a puff of silver. I wouldn't want to deny any girl these pleasures – so long as they aren't all expected to do it, and so long as it isn't all they are expected to do.”³⁶ With this in mind, if women freely choose to engage in the normative practices of femininity expected with being a Rose, they have every right to do so. However, if they need to perform their femininity in a particular way in order to fit in with the festival, they are ultimately expressing internalised misogyny and sustaining hegemonic patriarchal constructed ideals of ‘toxic femininity’.

Regardless of how those directly involved in the festival promote it, there is a common perception throughout Ireland that the festival perpetuates out-dated, sexist and misogynist notions of the ‘ideal Irish womanhood’. As noted by Walsh on the critical perception of beauty pageants,

Given its particular cultural function, it is no surprise that the form has consistently divided opinion. Heightened competitiveness has split critics into those who champion its celebration of embodied femininity and those who denounce its objectification of women. Viewed suspiciously from this latter perspective, there is little room for originality, individuality, or any kind of subjective agency where participants must ultimately operate as local, national, and global currencies of exchange.³⁷

Many commentators believe that the festival is a traditional beauty pageant with no relevance in contemporary Irish culture. Irish scientist Naomi Elster states in a 2013 article that her, “reasons for disliking the Rose of Tralee are far from original. It’s a beauty contest, sexist nonsense, nothing more to it than the “lovely girls competition” that was parodied excellently on Father Ted. [...] The competition would be a lot less condescending if it would drop the pretence at being anything other than a twee, out-dated fashion show.”³⁸ She goes on to discuss why the *Rose of Tralee*, as a beauty pageant, will ultimately remain sexist and objectifying for women indefinitely,

Beauty pageants objectify women and I don't think a convincing argument can be made otherwise. They are about women seeking approval, male approval for the most part, based on their looks. The worrying thing about modern beauty pageants is that this approval-seeking may now be subconscious. It's heart-breaking to look at all the Roses and wonder who they are really, as people, and ask if this is what they derive their sense of self-worth from, and disturbing to think of children

³⁶ Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago Press, New Edition 2015), 133.

³⁷ Walsh, ‘Homelysexuality and the ‘Beauty’ Pageant’, 196.

³⁸ Naomi Elster, ‘The Rose of Tralee’, *Irish Feminist Network*, August 26, 2013, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.irishfeministnetwork.org/articles/the-rose-of-tralee>

getting caught up in that situation.³⁹

Some of Elster's comments, particularly that of it being "heart-breaking" to watch, can be contested as overly harsh and critical of the festival. She patronises the women involved by implying that they do not know what they are doing in competing. This is reductive and unhelpful to say as the women involved enter willingly and are not forced to compete. While it can be argued that the festival as a whole entity is sexist and misogynist in nature, it is unfair to claim that the competitors are utterly unaware of their own objectification. Elster's opinion is however representative of a general critique of the festival that is present in contemporary culture.

As previously mentioned, Anna Nolan has critiqued the *Rose of Tralee*, writing in 2016 that it is a, "strange, pointless, old-fashioned piece of claptrap that returns year after year."⁴⁰ The comparison between the *Rose of Tralee* and a *Father Ted* episode that featured a 'lovely girls competition' has been made numerous times throughout a social commentary on the festival. In disputing such a comparison, CEO O'Gara says that,

The Rose of Tralee is not all about: Paddy Whackery, Colleens on Parade, Stepford Wives tricked out as national stereotypes, flagrant misogyny or masquerading as Irish culture. [...] Please, get over the out-dated 'lovely girls' joke, we have. [...] This bandwagon has long since lost its wheels after being so laden-down with the prejudices of uninformed bolony of the faux intellectuals who trip over each other to impress their peers.⁴¹

While the *Rose of Tralee* is perceived as both the epitome of beauty pageant culture and the antithesis of such, for the purpose of this chapter, it is referred to under the umbrella term of 'beauty pageants', with distinct parallels and contrasts drawn between the festival and other more traditional pageants where relevant.

Section Two: Rules and Regulations

All beauty pageants have strict rules and regulations for entrants. These range from age restrictions and exclusion on the basis of gender identity, to the importance of marital

³⁹ Naomi Elster, 'The Rose of Tralee', *Irish Feminist Network*, August 26, 2013, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.irishfeministnetwork.org/articles/the-rose-of-tralee>

⁴⁰ Anna Nolan, 'Anna Nolan: The outdated Rose of Tralee festival has nothing relevant to offer anymore', *Independent*, (Dublin), August 2, 2016, accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.independent.ie/style/voices/anna-nolan-the-outdated-rose-of-tralee-festival-has-nothing-relevant-to-offer-anymore-34931303.html>

⁴¹ Dermot Crean, 'Anthony O'Gara: "It's Time To Correct Some Misconceptions About The Rose..."', *Tralee Today*, September 4, 2014, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://traleetoday.ie/anthony-ogara-time-correct-misconceptions-rose/>

status and whether or not you are a mother.⁴² Throughout the course of pageant history, alterations have been made to such rules in a bid to entice more women to enter and to nominally maintain the idea that these pageants remain relevant in an ever-changing Irish cultural landscape. It is vital to deconstruct these rules and examine their respective message or impact on a pageant's audience and the young women who continue to take part in them.

According to the official *Rose of Tralee* website, the eligibility criteria for Rose entrants for the 2017 festival are as follows,

All entrants must:

- Be 18 years of age by January 1st 2017 and will not have reached your 28th birthday on or prior to September 1st 2017.
- Be unmarried or never been married.
- Be female, born in Ireland or an Irish citizen or of Irish origin by virtue of one of your ancestors having been born in Ireland.
- For applicants residing outside the island of Ireland - be living in the region you wish to represent for a minimum of one year and recommend that if selected as the Rose that you will remain resident in this region for the following 12 months.
- Never have previously represented any Centre as a Rose in the Regional Festival or International Rose of Tralee Selection.
- Be available for Rose Selection events and if selected be available for International Festival events.⁴³

A disclaimer printed under these criteria states, "Please note that it is your responsibility that you comply to all the above eligibility criteria. Breach of the above will result in automatic disqualification."⁴⁴

⁴² While many of the rules and regulations for female pageants expressly stated that a competitor may or may not have children, I found no such rule for any male pageant I researched. If female pageants dictate whether or not a contestant can have children, then surely a male competition should also. Similarly, for the LGBT pageants that I looked into, there were no clearly stated rules about having children. This distinct connection between cis women and motherhood present in beauty pageant culture is comparable to the culturally constructed link between women and motherhood in wider society. As discussed in Chapter Two, the *Constitution of Ireland* defines an Irish woman in relation to her role as a mother. This is a deeply sexist and misogynist mentality and the fact that it is so clearly replicated within pageant culture automatically maintains the structure of hegemonic hetero-patriarchal ideals. In this sense, female pageants that include a rule about competitors having or not having children are fundamentally sexist in principle.

⁴³ 'Rose of Tralee Selection Form', *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://blog.roseoftralee.ie/rose-of-tralee-selection-form/>

⁴⁴ 'Rose of Tralee Selection Form', *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://blog.roseoftralee.ie/rose-of-tralee-selection-form/>

Taking these regulations individually, their merit and acceptability for a twenty-first century Ireland will be discussed and deconstructed. Firstly, the age requirement stipulating a potential Rose must be between eighteen and twenty-seven years of age. Age requirements are in place for all pageant competitions.⁴⁵ This does not excuse the fact that they are required for the *Rose of Tralee* festival, in fact, their age restriction serves to directly relate this festival to traditional beauty pageants. The question must be asked why it is vital for a Rose to be a certain age, particularly when this age range systematically enforces an increased visibility of young women in the public eye, while women of an older generation are so routinely dismissed, silenced and unheard in public discourse. Such an age limitation is ultimately a sexist ideal that serves to promote youthful beauty over other potential qualities, leading to a sustaining of the ideals of ‘toxic femininity’.

In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf discusses the erasure of older women from the public eye in favour of promoting a youthful beauty for women. She uses the example of news anchors as a metaphor for such sexism and erasure, “That double image – the older man, lined and distinguished, seated beside a nubile, heavily made-up female junior – became the paradigm for the relationship between men and women in the workplace.”⁴⁶ In Chapter Two there is much discussion of the power of the analysed plays to subvert and transcend traditional roles for, and representations of women. For example, in Section Eight, where Daly’s Woman in *Test Dummy* regains agency through not allowing the audience to easily categorise and judge her. The strict age limit applied to women entering the *Rose of Tralee* denotes that the potential for full diversity within contestants is automatically staunchly limited. This means that the audience will be presented with one specific age profile and can easily contextualise Roses as ‘young women’. When this act is compared to the subversive power of the Woman in *Test Dummy* through rejecting easy definition, leading to a challenging exploration of contemporary rape culture, it becomes clear that the *Rose of Tralee* feeds into the misogynist framework of showcasing only young and normatively attractive⁴⁷ women. In this way it subsequently fails to challenge hegemonic hetero-patriarchal assumptions of ‘idealised womanhood’ as it perpetuates

⁴⁵ For every single female pageant that I could find information on, the first point made on the list of eligibility criteria stated that entrants must fall into a certain age range upon entering the competition. In all cases, except for pageants particularly designed for older women, such as *Mrs Ireland*, the age range specified was relatively young. Most competitions required competitors to be somewhere between the ages of sixteen and thirty. Teenage and Junior pageants look for females as young as ten years of age. Childhood pageants, while a separate concept from what is discussed throughout this chapter, start for babies under one year of age.

⁴⁶ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Vintage, 1991 new edition), 34.

⁴⁷ The age requirement alone does not enforce the entry of only ‘normatively’ or ‘conventionally’ attractive women. However, it is one key component of this construction.

stereotypes, and critically limits the range of women who could take part.

This promotion of ‘normative beauty’ also serves to promote contemporary rape culture through the male gaze. The concept of the male gaze was first researched by film theorist Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’.⁴⁸ Mulvey used psychoanalysis to argue that traditional Hollywood films respond to a deep-seated drive known as ‘scopophilia’, or, the sexual pleasure involved in looking. Mulvey made the case that most popular movies are filmed in ways that satisfy masculine scopophilia.⁴⁹ As Andy Simons writes, “Visual media that respond to masculine voyeurism tends to sexualise women for a male viewer. As Mulvey writes, women are characterised by their “to-be-looked-at-ness” in cinema. Woman is “spectacle”, and man is “the bearer of the look”.”⁵⁰ Mulvey continues that, “It is the place of the look that defines cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from say, striptease, theatre, shows, etc. Going far beyond highlighting a woman’s to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself.”⁵¹ Mulvey is claiming that the very systems upon which film operate, actually serve to sustain and project this objectified image. While discussing Mulvey’s theory, Jill Dolan remarks that, “Filmic representations, by replicating the process of sexual differentiation, reproduce gender roles in which men are active subjects and women are passive victims – not subjects at all.”⁵²

Mulvey’s theory can be applied to the hetero-patriarchal institution of the *Rose of Tralee*. Given that the *Rose of Tralee* festival was set up originally by businessmen, and remains a profitable marketing tool, it is fair to argue that the women involved are there ‘to be looked at’ as numerous businesses are promoted. That these women have to conform to such a specific age range, that complies with traditional ‘normative beauty’ ideals, highlights the ways in which the concept of the male gaze applies to the festival. This compliance with the male gaze also sustains and perpetuates contemporary rape culture as it works to maintain the status of the entrant as

⁴⁸ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al, 2nd ed, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 2084-2095.

⁴⁹ Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, 2084-2095.

⁵⁰ Andy Simons, ‘Explainer: what does the ‘male gaze’ mean, and what about a female gaze?’, published by *The Conversation*, 5 January 2016, accessed 23 July 2018, <http://theconversation.com/explainer-what-does-the-male-gaze-mean-and-what-about-a-female-gaze-52486>

⁵¹ Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, 2094.

⁵² Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 2nd ed. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 49.

objectified. When images of women as objects without agency are continually promoted, rape culture is also promoted. This happens as many of the rape myths, victim blaming and slut shaming narratives that are applied to women who experience sexual violence are supported through the objectified image of the female.

An argument can be made that in restricting the age to young women, the festival promotes a platform specifically for young women to showcase their talents and aspirations. It can be said that such a platform would lose its ability encourage its entrants to highlight how a cross section of women of Irish heritage are navigating contemporary culture if the age bracket was diluted and the festival became cross-generational. It could even be contended that the young upper age limit of the festival allows these women to speak about issues that directly affect young women. However, a clear example from the 2016 festival shows how this is not a legitimate argument. During the 2016 festival, the Sydney Rose Brianna Parkins, made an open call for a repeal of the Eighth Amendment to the *Constitution of Ireland* that restricts reproductive healthcare for women in Ireland. She did this through telling the presenter Dáithí Ó Sé that, “I think we can do better here in Ireland. I think it is time to give women a say on their own reproductive rights. I would love to see a referendum on the eighth coming up soon. That would be my dream.”⁵³ Parkins received a severe backlash to her comments with a number of television viewers formally complaining to the national broadcaster RTÉ, and with the chair of the *Rose of Tralee*’s judging panel, Mary Kennedy, telling the *Irish Independent* that her comments were inappropriate as the festival does not offer a political platform for its entrants.⁵⁴ The festival organisers and Mary Kennedy were criticised for their response with journalist Rosyln Dee writing,

And on Monday night one of the young women involved in this famous Irish pageant of ours took the opportunity to raise an important topic, one that we are going to hear a lot more about in the coming months. That she should be slapped down for doing so is patently wrong. She didn't deliver dogmatic utterances, she merely raised an issue of concern to all of us. Mary Kennedy says that it was not the place for it. How easily we forget that not so long ago it wasn't a matter of

⁵³ Ronan McGreevy, ‘Rose of Tralee: Sydney Rose Calls For Repeal Of The Eighth Amendment’, *Irish Times*, August 23, 2016, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/rose-of-tralee-sydney-rose-calls-for-repeal-of-eighth-amendment-1.2765617>

⁵⁴ Orla Ryan, ‘Petition set up to 'formally compliment' Sydney Rose for abortion comments: It’s in response to RTÉ receiving a number of complaints about Brianna Parkins’ remarks’, *Journal* (Dublin), August 25, 2016, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.thejournal.ie/rose-of-tralee-abortion-comments-2947169-Aug2016/>

choosing the right place to raise issues of societal importance. There was no choice. There was no right place. For, to our shame, there was absolutely no place at all.⁵⁵

The *Rose of Tralee* maintained a neutral stance in response to Parkins' comments⁵⁶ and insisted that the newly crowned Rose of Tralee Maggie McEldowney do the same. McEldowney said, "No offence to the Sydney Rose, but at this point I'm just trying to focus on what's ahead and all the wonderful things we'll be doing this year. As a representative of the festival I'd like to take the neutral ground on it."⁵⁷ Ironically, in the interview where McEldowney gave this statement, she was wearing earrings in the shape of the number eight,⁵⁸ as seen in [Figure 3], perhaps showing her silent support for Parkins and her pro-choice stance.

Parkins remarked that the topic of abortion was one of the three topics raised in the group interview stage of the competition, alongside the prospect of a united Ireland one hundred years after the Easter Rising of 1916, and the current refugee crisis.⁵⁹ It is notable that although the entrants were invited to state their opinion on such a contentious and topical issue that directly affects the lives of all of the women involved in the competition in front of the judges, they were not supported in wanting to bring those views to the audience of the festival. In this way, any argument supporting the idea that the young age range allows women to publicly broadcast issues that directly affect the women involved in the process, is disproven by the actions of festival organisers in 2016. As Dee sarcastically, yet poignantly, points out, "Yes, abortion was one of the panel topics discussed in the group sessions of the competition but come on, play the game now, girls, sure that's only to give a semblance of modernity to the whole proceedings. We couldn't be having you going out on the stage and talking about any of that stuff. Sacred Heart!

⁵⁵ Rosyln Dee, 'If the Rose of Tralee is not the place to raise issues of real importance, then where is exactly?', *Daily Mail*, August 25, 2016, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?sid=3486f0bd-e932-4ca7-8444-a587e1739f65%40sessionmgr102&vid=1&hid=103&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=117643523&db=ukh>

⁵⁶ Ronan McGreevy, 'Rose of Tralee takes 'neutral ground' on abortion debate', *Irish Times*, August 24, 2016, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/rose-of-tralee-takes-neutral-ground-on-abortion-debate-1.2766843>

⁵⁷ Ronan McGreevy, 'Rose of Tralee takes 'neutral ground' on abortion debate', *Irish Times*, August 24, 2016, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/rose-of-tralee-takes-neutral-ground-on-abortion-debate-1.2766843>

⁵⁸ Ronan McGreevy, 'Rose of Tralee takes 'neutral ground' on abortion debate', *Irish Times*, August 24, 2016, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/rose-of-tralee-takes-neutral-ground-on-abortion-debate-1.2766843> The video footage of the 2016 Rose of Tralee Maggie McEldowney is imbedded in the article.

⁵⁹ Ronan McGreevy, 'Rose of Tralee takes 'neutral ground' on abortion debate', *Irish Times*, August 24, 2016, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/rose-of-tralee-takes-neutral-ground-on-abortion-debate-1.2766843>

Sure that wouldn't be the place for it at all.”⁶⁰ It becomes clear that the only reason for such an age range is out-dated sexism and misogyny that perpetuates ‘toxic femininity’ and helps to support and sustain contemporary rape culture.

In relation to the age range stipulated for female entrants, the *Rose of Tralee* also has thirty-two Rose Escorts each year. These are young men who each accompany one of the finalists during the week of the main festival in Tralee. In a similar manner to the Roses, all male escorts must be unmarried or have never been married and must be of Irish origin or heritage. However, their age limitations are different as all applicants for the 2017 pageant must, “Be male, 21 years of age by 1st January 2017 and not have reached your 31st birthday on or prior to 1st September 2017.”⁶¹ Simply put, why must the youngest entrants be older than the women, and why can the oldest applicants be older than the Roses? Arguably, this is nothing but a sexist tradition of assuming that the Roses are ultimately seeking a romantic relationship with their escort, and supports the out-dated notion that it is for older men to seek younger women. It also relies on the presumption of hetero-normativity and strict gender roles as women must be Roses and men must be escorts, with no room for the full spectrum of gendered identities.

The second rule on the list of eligibility criteria for any prospective 2017 *Rose of Tralee* entrant stipulates that all contestants must be unmarried and must never have been married. This has been part of the criteria since the festival’s inception. In a similar manner to the age restriction, such a rule is in place for the overwhelming majority of traditional beauty pageant contestants.⁶² As such an entrance requirement is present in other traditional beauty pageant competitions, parallels may be drawn here between the *Rose of Tralee* and traditional beauty pageants once again.

The twenty-first century is in the midst of fourth wave feminism and it is impossible to justify the marital status restriction in a contemporary Ireland as anything other than anti-feminist rhetoric. When discussing the rules of the pageant, Elster asks, “If the emphasis is on personality, why must you be under 28 to enter? Why are you ineligible if you are or have ever been married? So that the “good Catholic Irish men” can daydream (or masturbate) over you without feeling guilty?”⁶³ While Elster presents a highly

⁶⁰ Dee, ‘If the Rose of Tralee is not the place to raise issues of real importance, then where is exactly?’, *Daily Mail*.

⁶¹ ‘2017 Escort Application Form, Eligibility Criteria’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://blog.roseoftralee.ie/escort-application-form/>

⁶² Every female pageant that I researched in Ireland had such a stipulation. It is possible that a contest may exist where the marital status of the entrants is irrelevant but I found no evidence of such a pageant as of 2017.

⁶³ Elster, ‘The Rose of Tralee’, *Irish Feminist Network*.

subjective dislike for the continued existence of the pageant, the reality that entrants must be unmarried and have never been married justifies such a reactionary response.

The current official website for the festival says little about the history of the pageant or of the ‘qualities’ represented by a Rose, stating only that,

The Rose of Tralee International Festival is one of Ireland's largest and longest running festivals, celebrating 57 years in 2016. The heart of the festival is the selection of the Rose of Tralee, which brings young women of Irish descent from around the world to County Kerry, Ireland for a global celebration of Irish culture. The festival also includes street entertainment, carnival, live concerts, theatre, circus, markets, funfair, fireworks and Rose Parades.⁶⁴

However Elster quotes a previous version of the website as she says, “The Rose of Tralee website, of course, oversells the event, claiming that “A Rose reflects the intelligence, compassion and independence of modern Irish women,” and “represents the collective aspirations, social responsibilities and ambitions of young women”.⁶⁵ She goes on to remark that, “to any woman who is intelligent, independent, compassionate and has meaningful aspirations, this is downright insulting and condescending.”⁶⁶ While as of 2017, the official website does not comment on the positive attributes of a potential Rose, the fact that it has in previous years, coupled with the fact that married or previously married women are prevented from entering implies that through marriage, women lose such attributes.

The ban on married entrants also implies that the women entering should not have engaged in sexual intercourse. There is an assumption that married women will be ‘non-virginal’. Sex before marriage for women is relatively no longer shrouded in the stigma and shame it once was in contemporary Ireland. However, when the festival began in the 1950s, it would have been and there was an accepted implication that non-married women would not have had sexual intercourse. To continue the marriage ban to this day associates the contemporary pageant with out-dated and sexist notions of how a woman should or could express her own sexuality. As discussed in Chapter Two, stigmatising women for engaging in sexual acts or expressing their sexuality silences and oppresses women while vehemently sustaining rape culture and misogynist rhetoric. Slut-shaming directly feeds into the perpetuation of rape culture, as a component part of it, and so this dissertation

⁶⁴ ‘Home’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie>

⁶⁵ Elster, ‘The Rose of Tralee’, *Irish Feminist Network*.

⁶⁶ Elster, ‘The Rose of Tralee’, *Irish Feminist Network*.

would argue that *Rose of Tralee* actively supports rape culture through its ban on married entrants.

This championing of virginity or purity through the marriage ban further supports the idea put forward by Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* that once a woman is married, she becomes less desirable and valuable in the public eye. It also champions Jessica Ringrose's description of normative femininity, as quoted in Chapter Two, "masculinity is epitomised in buying the consumer goods [...] with which to gain access to the sexually commodified female body. Femininity [...] is epitomised through approximating the sexually commodified body, performing as sexual object, and occupying the position of sexually desirable 'baby girl'.⁶⁷ In competitors presenting as single young women, they are presented as sexually available to onlookers as they perform the role of the 'virginal ingénue'. Ireland is an ever-changing society where the definition of the 'traditional family unit', as referenced in the *Constitution of Ireland*, is no longer the only or even most common example of a family.

Whether the women who enter the *Rose of Tralee* are married or single should be entirely irrelevant. Whether they are sexually active or not is also highly insignificant, as no women should be defined by her expressions of sexuality. There should also be no level of assumed or applied hetero-normativity among the entrants as this can lead into the perpetuation of contemporary rape culture through assuming these young women are sexually available to male escorts or onlookers due to their single status. These women are entering to represent themselves, their goals, aspirations and achievements, and to limit this to unmarried women is hetero-sexist, anti-feminist, misogynist and supportive of contemporary rape culture. It suggests that a primary reason to enter is to find a husband or partner and supports the 'lovely girl' rhetoric that suggests these women are in need of male support.

The current presenter of the festival, Daithí Ó Sé, married the 2008 New Jersey Rose, Rita Talty, four years after they met during the *Rose of Tralee*.⁶⁸ While I am not implying that Talty specifically entered the competition in order to find a husband, the fact that the presenter married an entrant heightens the idea that these women are in need of a

⁶⁷ Jessica Ringrose, 'Are You Sexy, Flirty, Or A Slut? Exploring 'Sexualization' and How Teen Girls Perform/Negotiate Digital Sexual Identity on Social Networking Sites', in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds., Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 104.

⁶⁸ Irish Independent, 'It started with a poke: Daithí O Se met wife Rita on Facebook', *Independent* (Dublin), April 28, 2015, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.independent.ie/style/celebrity/celebrity-news/it-started-with-a-poke-daithi-o-se-met-wife-rita-on-facebook-31177020.html>

husband. It could be argued that this rule is not inherently sexist because it applies to the male escorts also. However, the very fact that the festival is primarily concerned with representing the Roses over their escorts shows that it is more important that these women present as sexually available ‘maidens’ to the viewing public. Also, as noted previously, applying an already misogynist notion to men does not negate its misogyny, as it remains sexist in nature.

The festival has changed some of its rules and regulations regarding the status of women since the pageant began. Until 2007, women who have children were prohibited from entering⁶⁹ with this rule changing for the 2008 festival. “Following accusations of prejudice and claims that the event was outdated, the 49-year-old *Rose of Tralee* announced in 2008 that mothers would be allowed to enter the competition for the first time, while still maintaining the ban on married women and women over 28 years of age.”⁷⁰ The first reported single mother to enter was Fiona Canavan who entered the Dublin Rose selection process in 2008.⁷¹ While this is a welcome modernisation of the original rules imposed, it seems remarkably anti-feminist that the festival should run for forty-nine years before this rule was eradicated. This particular forty-nine year period from 1959 to 2008 saw many improvements for women in Ireland including the lifting of the marriage bar in 1973 and the election of Ireland’s first female president in 1990. It is fair to argue that the very fact that the *Rose of Tralee* festival saw fit to exclude and further stigmatise single mothers until eight years into the twenty-first century, regardless of the changing roles for women in Irish society, shows how perceptions of the festival as outdated and draconian may be construed.

The third regulation for eligibility for the 2017 festival states that contestants must, “Be female, born in Ireland or an Irish citizen or of Irish origin by virtue of one of your ancestors having been born in Ireland.”⁷² This rule must be broken down into two separate parts; firstly, the gendered notion of ‘being female’ and what denotes womanhood, secondly, the racial concept of nationality and heritage.

With regard to the first aspect of this rule, and following on from the previously discussed rules, this is a requirement that applies to many traditional beauty pageants.

⁶⁹ Irish Independent, ‘Rose of Tralee to allow single mother entrants’, *Independent*, March 31, 2008, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/rose-of-tralee-to-allow-single-mother-entrants-26434286.html>

⁷⁰ Walsh, ‘Homely Sexuality and the ‘Beauty’ Pageant’, 207.

⁷¹ Irish Independent, ‘Mum of seven-year-old who is bidding to be next Rose of Tralee’, *Independent*, May 20, 2008, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/woman/celeb-news/mum-of-seven-year-old-who-is-bidding-to-be-next-rose-of-tralee-26448956.html>

⁷² ‘Rose of Tralee Selection Form’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://blog.roseoftralee.ie/rose-of-tralee-selection-form/>

Most pageants stipulate that contestants must be female. The *Rose of Tralee* application form does not specify whether or not entrants must be cis women, or women who identify with the biological sex attributed to them at birth. In 2017, the *Rose of Tralee* organisers were forced to elaborate on whether or not trans women could enter the festival after an *Irish Mirror* article entitled, 'Transgender women barred from entering the Rose of Tralee' was published on February 2, 2017.⁷³ In this article, a spokesperson for the *Rose of Tralee* was quoted saying, "The Festival is a progressive organisation that always strives to reflect changes in society in the entry guidelines for women. Transgender women entering is not something we are considering at the moment, however, we will continue to review our guidelines."⁷⁴ This is a distinctly contradictory statement as a 'progressive organisation' wishing to 'reflect changes in society' should be considering trans women as entrants, as a marker of progressive intersectionality. I would argue that this comment actually tried to avoid dealing with the topic of trans entrants instead of flatly denying their entry as the author of the article believed, "Transgender women are barred from entering the Rose of Tralee, festival organisers confirmed today."⁷⁵ However, this is still a problematic stance as ignoring and avoiding the topic is emblematic of trans-phobia and trans-erasure. It once again makes hetero-patriarchal assumptions about all entrants and supports a limiting performance of 'normative' femininity, sustaining 'toxic femininity' indefinitely.

The publishing of the article forced O'Gara, the CEO, to clarify the issue. O'Gara was interviewed on the *Ray D'Arcy Show* on RTÉ on February 3, 2017 and he said, "It's a sensitive situation that we have to prepare ourselves for but it isn't the case that transgender women are banned or barred - that would be completely silly."⁷⁶ This contradicts the initial comments quoted above, as not considering transgender entrants is essentially a ban on their entry. He criticised the original article for misconstruing the statement by the festival organiser, "I think there is something cynical and disingenuous sometimes when media get involved in sensitive issues and I think this is a good example of that. I'm sorry to say that because I'm sure I'll get slated in *The Mirror* tomorrow. [...]"

⁷³ Kathy Armstrong, 'Transgender women barred from entering the Rose of Tralee', *Irish Mirror*, February 2, 2017, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.irishmirror.ie/whats-on/whats-on-news/transgender-women-barred-entering-rose-9742040>

⁷⁴ Kathy Armstrong, 'Transgender women barred from entering the Rose of Tralee', *Irish Mirror*, February 2, 2017, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.irishmirror.ie/whats-on/whats-on-news/transgender-women-barred-entering-rose-9742040>

⁷⁵ Kathy Armstrong, 'Transgender women barred from entering the Rose of Tralee', *Irish Mirror*, February 2, 2017, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.irishmirror.ie/whats-on/whats-on-news/transgender-women-barred-entering-rose-9742040>

⁷⁶ Anthony O'Gara, quoted from interview with Ray D'Arcy, 'Rose of Tralee boss slams "Rose Bans Trans" claim', *RTÉ*, February 3, 2017, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.rte.ie/entertainment/2017/0202/849724-rose-of-tralee-boss-says-transgender-women-not-banned/>

Trans women are women and women are what the *Rose of Tralee* is all about and there is no ban.”⁷⁷ Although there may be no official ban, if festival organisers are not prepared to consider the entry of transgender contestants at present, there is an implicit ban in place. The festival is perpetuating the oppressive hetero-patriarchal gender binary through privileging entrants who conform to conventional ideals of beauty and femininity, thus reinforcing ‘toxic femininity’.

Given the comments made, it can be argued that the festival is not openly calling for trans women to enter, but only when pushed on the issue, they are providing a diplomatic response to avoid gender identity discrimination criticisms. This is inherently problematic as it promotes trans-erasure through assumed cis-normativity. The 2016 Sydney Rose Brianna Parkins wrote two tweets and provided a link to the online application form for the 2017 festival on January 26, 2017 calling for more inclusion, intersectionality and diversity in the *Rose of Tralee*, “I need to hand over the tiara and sash soon. Calling all boss ladies to apply for the Sydney Rose 2017”, “Actually calling all feminists/mixed race/queer/trans ladies to apply for the Rose wherever you live.”⁷⁸ This is an intersectional example of openly calling for greater inclusion and diversity. In O’Gara and the festival only making a statement when forced to react to ‘misinformation’ published by a media outlet, the festival is arguably only nominally diverse in its gender requirements, not actively promoting inclusion. In this way, it perpetuates gender stereotypes and ‘toxic femininity’.

If pageants such as the *Rose of Tralee* fail to recognise trans, queer, non-binary women, or do not seek such women as entrants, this rule serves to sustain hegemonic hetero-patriarchal ideals of the cis person as ‘normative’ and seemingly superior to trans people.⁷⁹ This is a deeply sexist regulation that maintains the unattainable notions of Wolf’s theory on the ‘beauty myth’. The idea that one should be cis-identifying to enter coupled with the rule that entrants must be below the age of twenty-eight to ultimately privilege the voice of the young ‘normative’ woman over the voices of those who face greater marginalisation in contemporary Irish and global culture. When discussing faux-diversity present in the reality television show *America’s Next Top Model*, Andrea L. Press

⁷⁷ Anthony O’Gara, quoted from interview with Ray D’Arcy, ‘Rose of Tralee boss slams “Rose Bans Trans” claim’, *RTÉ*, February 3, 2017, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.rte.ie/entertainment/2017/0202/849724-rose-of-tralee-boss-says-transgender-women-not-banned/>

⁷⁸ Brianna Parkins, Twitter Feed, Tweet published January 26, 2017, accessed February 16, 2017, Twitter Handle: @parkinsbrea https://twitter.com/parkinsbrea?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

⁷⁹ From my research into contestants from previous years, I could not find any evidence that a trans-woman has ever applied to the festival. As of 2017, no trans-woman has ever been selected as a Rose finalist.

notes that, “The show’s overt feminist rhetoric, criticising eating disorders and including larger-sized women, does not convince the girls: winners are almost without exception impossibly skinny, beautiful and otherwise flawless, for the most part.”⁸⁰ In a similar manner, the *Rose of Tralee* may nominally present the façade of a diverse range of entrants but ultimately, the narrow entry requirements restrict access to those who do not fit a constructed ideal of youthful femininity.

With regard to the second part of the criteria that requires participants to be born in Ireland, an Irish citizen or of Irish origin through ancestry, it can be argued that this is not a misogynist or sexist ruling, but rather one that is fundamental to maintaining the original commercial aims of the festival. The *Rose of Tralee* differs from traditional beauty pageants in that its main objective focuses on celebrating a sense of ‘Irishness’ over picking a beauty queen. As stated by the official *Rose of Tralee* website, their mission is to “bring young women of Irish descent from around the world to County Kerry, Ireland for a global celebration of Irish culture.”⁸¹ With this goal in mind, it is reasonable to assume that all entrants have a connection to Ireland in order to promote ‘Irishness’ throughout the festival. Also, the regulation permits women who are Irish citizens to enter, leaving it open to women who may not have a connection to Ireland through birth or heritage, but do through gained citizenship. While it can be argued that the focus on promoting Irish culture is somewhat cynical in its commercial aim to promote the country, and Tralee in particular, this regulation is ultimately devoid of sexism.

Although this rule is not sexist in nature, it is still problematic. Even though women who have gained Irish citizenship can enter, implying greater racial diversity in contestants, as of 2017, all overall winners have been Caucasian, as are all of the finalists in the 2016 festival. 2017 saw the first International Rose from the newly established Hong Kong Rose Centre, but Clarissa Langley Coleman, the Hong Kong Rose 2017, is Caucasian also. This is distinctly anti-intersectional and promotes a privileging of white bodies as ‘normative’ and of white hegemonic femininity. That is not to say that the festival is actively racially discriminatory, but the fact that all of the overall winners, and the 2016 finalists are white shows how the festival is not representative of contemporary Irish society, and it furthers limits the parameters of entrants, thus sustaining notions of ‘toxic femininity’ and the beauty myth. Ireland is a multicultural society and women of Irish heritage are not necessarily Caucasian. The fact that this is not reflected in the

⁸⁰ Andrea L. Press, ‘Feminism? That’s So Seventies’, in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds., Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 126.

⁸¹ ‘Home’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie>

competitors shows that the festival is still presenting an out-dated vision of Ireland that is unaccepting of globalisation and multiculturalism. It can also be linked to Press's point that, "Of course, inherent in this idea of the 'perfect' is the white, middle-class subject."⁸²

While most of the rules in place for the *Rose of Tralee* entrants are sexist in nature,⁸³ and common throughout many traditional beauty pageants, the *Rose of Tralee* falls short of requiring many of the solely aesthetic rules associated with other beauty pageants. For example, to enter *Miss Bikini Ireland* in 2017, entrants must adhere to such requirements as, "*Miss Bikini Ireland* is open to women in tattoos to a level of degree to apply and is responsible to cover these with MakeUp at the request of Miss Bikini Ireland and Swimsuit USA International."⁸⁴ Entrants must also state their height even though there are, "No Height Restrictions. Just needed for paperwork."⁸⁵ There is no swimwear component to the *Rose of Tralee* festival, and contestants are never required to publicly present themselves in any state of undress. In this sense, the *Rose of Tralee* is differentiated from traditional beauty pageants. It arguably never reaches the same level of objective sexism and sexualised misogyny as traditional beauty pageants in this way.

However, given that all winning Roses have adhered to body normativity standards,⁸⁶ as did all of the International Roses from the 2016 festival,⁸⁷ it is clear that even if the festival does not explicitly stipulate that entrants must look a certain way, they do all follow conventional normative beauty ideals regardless.⁸⁸ Just like the festival does not technically ban trans women from entering but simultaneously does not actively seek the inclusion of women with varying gender identities, the festival does not ban women who do not fit normative parameters of aesthetic beauty, but they also do not actively seek women who exist outside of conventional ideals. There is an implicit hetero-patriarchal

⁸² Andrea L. Press, 'Feminism? That's So Seventies', in *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, eds., Rosalind Gill, Christina Scharff (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 127.

⁸³ The final regulation listed on the eligibility criteria for the 2017 festival requires that entrants must be available to participate in all dates and events of the festival. This is a reasonable and practical request by the organisers that is separate from any constructions of sexism and normative hetero-patriarchy present in the other criteria listed.

⁸⁴ 'Applications now open for 2017', *Miss Bikini Ireland*, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.missbikiniireland.ie/apply-now/>

⁸⁵ 'Applications now open for 2017', *Miss Bikini Ireland*, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.missbikiniireland.ie/apply-now/>

⁸⁶ 'Legacy', *Rose of Tralee*, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie/legacy>
Photographs of all previous overall *Rose of Tralee* winners can be seen here from 1959-2015.

⁸⁷ 'Roses', *Rose of Tralee*, accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie/roses>
Photographs of all sixty-five International Roses from the 2016 festival may be viewed here.

⁸⁸ In 2013, the year that I entered the Dublin Rose competition (as will be furthered discussed later in the chapter) the Antrim Rose, Jean Daly, was a wheelchair user. In this way, she did not fully fit the mould of 'normative' femininity, and could be seen as representative of diversity, albeit tokenistic. However, she did not make the televised final that year and so was never seen by the public audience. To the best of my knowledge, no wheelchair user, or non-able-bodied entrants has ever made the final of the festival. All finalists fit a slim, able-bodied ideal that does not fully represent young Irish women.

oppressive bias at play that promotes limiting and potentially damaging performances of ‘toxic femininity’ throughout. This furthers the normalisation and acceptance of culturally constructed images of women and ‘idealised womanhood’. It ultimately supports the hegemonic patriarchal oppression of women through only celebrating those who fit a certain mould. So even though the official entry requirements may not initially appear as restrictive and exclusive as those of traditional beauty pageants, there are underlying tensions present in the accepted ideals of who should be a Rose. These ideals help to sustain the male gaze, and implicitly support contemporary rape culture through the presentation of the objectified subject.

Section Three: Contemporary Pageant Performance and Perception

Part One: *Oh! What a Lovely Rose!*⁸⁹

This chapter focuses primarily on the *Rose of Tralee* festival, but the dissertation as a whole examines numerous aspects of performance, and varying types of performance. As argued in the previous section, the *Rose of Tralee* organisation contributes to the perpetuation of contemporary rape culture through its processes, rules and regulations. However, this dissertation argues that rape culture and ‘toxic femininity’ are not only sustained through the festival itself, but also through the assumptions and stereotypes about the festival that are evidenced in its public perception. Just as rape myths are created and maintained by those not necessarily directly affected by sexual violence, negative stereotypes of the festival are put forward by those not directly involved in its process. The festival is open to critique for many reasons, but opinion-based misconceptions about the festival create negative, and possibly untrue, stereotypes about it. This research argues that instead of critiquing the festival, some of these stereotypes can actually add to the performative potential of ‘toxic femininity’ and rape culture in the festival. For this reason, this section seeks to deconstruct such perceptions. As part of the 2015 Dublin Fringe Festival, playwrights Oonagh O’Donovan and Erica Murray staged their one-woman show *Oh! What a Lovely Rose!* at Dublin’s Smock Alley Theatre.⁹⁰ This play is a direct

⁸⁹ Erica Murray, Oonagh O’Donovan, ‘*Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*’, Unpublished Script provided by the playwrights November 7, 2016.

⁹⁰ *Oh! What a Lovely Rose!* was first staged as part of the Dublin Fringe Festival 2015. It ran from September 16-19. The original production was written by Erica Murray and Oonagh O’Donovan and performed by Erica Murray. The production team consisted of director Oonagh O’Donovan, producer Heather Walsh, costumes and lighting by Molly O’Cathain, sound designer Yutaka Kumagai, production manager Caoimhe Whelan, stage manager Ursula McGinn and publicity by Aifric Ní Chrodáin. The script is unpublished as of 2016 and any quotes referenced come from an unpublished version of the script provided by Erica Murray.

representation of some of the public perceptions of the festival. It is analysed here as a case study to further examine such stereotypical perceptions.

The play aims to cast a satirical light on the *Rose of Tralee* and its relevance for Irish women in the twenty-first century. The play was well received with Frances Winston describing it as,

Energetic and witty this is a wry observation of a beloved event and a social commentary on how far Ireland has come since the earlier days of the contest. Thoroughly enjoyable you could almost see the pretty red-haired Murray as a contestant herself if she was so inclined. What makes this work is the fact that we have all seen the stereotypes that are being parodied here and we've all probably laughed at them in the privacy of our living rooms so doing it as a collective is quite liberating.⁹¹

Sean Kenehan reviewed the show saying,

The gas show *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!* rips the absolute piss out of the Rose of Tralee [...] The story follows a girl who had a dream to the Rose of Tralee, then grew up and realised how embarrassing it was... The 45 minute theatre/comedy hybrid shines a spotlight on our national lovely girl competition and examines how young women are viewed in modern Ireland. However, don't let this make you think that the show is an overly serious social commentary, rather it just pokes fun at what is essentially a bizarre and out-dated Irish tradition.⁹²

Both of these reviews celebrate the show while making subjective reference to the contemporary public perception of the festival in Ireland. In a similar manner to Naomi Elster's opinion previously quoted in the introduction to this chapter, that argues the festival is thoroughly out-dated, both Winston and Kenehan make reference to the festival's continuing relevance, or rather critically perceived irrelevance in contemporary Ireland. Winston states that Murray performs easily recognisable stereotypes of contestants often portrayed in the festival itself. Kenehan blatantly states his disregard for the festival as he sees it as 'out-dated and bizarre'. Separating these opinions from the merit of the play show how normalised these opinions of discrediting the festival have become in contemporary Ireland. It is taken as an assumption that readers and audience

⁹¹ Frances Winston, 'Oh! What A Lovely Rose!- Smock Alley – Review – Tiger Dublin Fringe Festival', *NoMoreWorkhorse*, September 17, 2015, accessed November 24, 2016, <https://nomoreworkhorse.com/2015/09/18/oh-what-a-lovely-rose-smock-alley-review-tiger-dublin-fringe-festival/>.

⁹² Sean Kenehan, 'This Gas Show Rips The Absolute Piss Out Of The Rose Of Tralee', *Lovin Dublin*, September 17, 2015, accessed November 24, 2016, <https://lovindublin.com/dublin/this-gas-show-rips-the-absolute-piss-out-of-the-rose-of-tralee>

members alike will support these claims of an out-dated festival that no longer relates to Irish women. Indeed, the play's producer Heather Walsh stated that, "We had all come on board to take the mick out of the *Rose of Tralee* and all it stood for. Really, is it not a bit weird that the whole nation gets together, sits down as a family and watches a beauty competition? It's ridiculous that we do this."⁹³ However, through researching the festival and creating the play, Walsh says that the team involved learned a huge amount about the festival and its participants and said that, "At the end of the day, if you strip away the crown, the *Rose of Tralee* is a platform for women to stand up, do their thing and be celebrated for who they are," Walsh added. "That can't be a bad thing."⁹⁴ This change of opinion by Walsh and the team involved in the play highlights how the festival itself represents the complexities of contemporary Irish feminist discourse and deserves further research.

The word 'complexities' is used here because criticism of the festival as uniformly misogynistic and anti-feminist in nature needs to be deconstructed. Much of the criticism of the festival argues that it is simply out-dated, dull and irrelevant to Irish women and Ireland in the twenty-first century. However, it is actually misogynist and anti-feminist to say that women should refrain from entering, and that they are unaware of the objectification they willingly allow themselves to engage in through taking part in the festival. Chapter One of this dissertation looks at empowerment through self-identification with language, the argument being that it is reductive and anti-feminist to force one particular term onto women who have experienced sexual violence. This is comparable to telling women not to enter a beauty pageant simply because it is a beauty pageant. Women deserve agency and so to tell women not to enter a pageant is violently oppressive. That being said, as quoted in the Introduction, "while the ability to choose is feminist, that doesn't mean the choice itself is."⁹⁵

The reality is that beauty pageants, and the ability to choose to enter them, is a complex feminist notion that needs to be deconstructed. True equality comes through freedom, especially through freedom of expression. When discussing Laura Mulvey's

⁹³ RTÉ 10, 'Lovely bottoms up! It's the Rose of Tralee play', *RTÉ*, September 16, 2015, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://www.rte.ie/ten/news/2015/0916/728200-dublin-fringe-show-pokes-fun-at-the-rose-of-tralee/>

⁹⁴ RTÉ 10, 'Lovely bottoms up! It's the Rose of Tralee play', *RTÉ*, September 16, 2015, accessed January 14, 2016, <http://www.rte.ie/ten/news/2015/0916/728200-dublin-fringe-show-pokes-fun-at-the-rose-of-tralee/>

⁹⁵ Hadley Freeman, 'From Shopping To Naked Selfies: How 'Empowerment' Lost Its Meaning', *Guardian*, April 19, 2016, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/19/from-shopping-to-naked-selfies-how-empowerment-lost-its-meaning-feminism>

concept of the male gaze, Jill Dolan writes,

For example, performance artist Karen Finley often performed nude in clubs for mixed audiences, taking female objectification into her own hands by smearing herself with chocolate, egg yolks, and mashed yams while she yelled angry, incantatory stories indicting male sexual violence. Her utter disruption of the male gaze form within a conventional viewing paradigm, [...] allowed me to consider how the live body, confronted by live spectators, could offer radical resistance to and intervention in women's objectification, and a place where the dynamics of desire – and power and gender and sexuality – could be written and restaged.⁹⁶

While the women in the *Rose of Tralee* do not challenge hegemonic patriarchy and the male gaze as the example Dolan cites does, it is fair to argue that entrants such as Parkins and the first openly gay overall winner in 2014, Maria Walsh, do challenge and subvert the male gaze from within. Parkins did this through being outspoken about contemporary feminist concerns such as the lack of reproductive choices afforded to women in Ireland, and through calling for women who do not fit the 'normative' Rose model to enter into the 2017 festival. Walsh did this through being the first openly gay winner, thus challenging the idea that all Roses are single, heterosexual and in search of a male partner. The fact that these women are entering the festival and are using it as a platform to queer the male gaze, and traditional expectations of entrants, is inherently progressive and feminist in nature. However, these women are very much the exception to the rule.

Critics arguing for the festival to be culled as a result of its sexism and objectification of women actively ignore the potential of entrants to subvert the festival from within, but that does not negate its sexist framework. As Dolan writes, "If sexuality is censored, if fantasies are legislated against, if the feminist movement is allowed to dictate or implicitly condones governmental legislation of "proper" expression and representation of sexuality, the free expression of self and sexuality will slip into a totalitarian framework."⁹⁷ In aligning with this argument, it is anti-feminist to call for an end to the festival on supposedly feminist grounds as the women enter freely, they are all adults, unlike in many other beauty pageants, and some can use the festival for subversive and feminist motives. However, as stated in Chapter Two, the ability to choose freely is feminist, but not every choice is a feminist act. This shows one complexity involved in the festival and the fact that the playwrights of *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!* changed their opinion

⁹⁶ Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 2nd ed. (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012), xvii.

⁹⁷ Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator As Critic*, 60.

of the *Rose of Tralee* through researching it, highlights such a nuance. The play deals with such complexities with great sensitivity and insight. Arguably, critical reviews of the play that fail to comment on its full portrayal of the festival - but instead rely on their authors' already biased opinions - ultimately fail to comment on the contemporary performance of the play and the festival itself.

It is fair to argue that the play is a comedy that does parody several assumed stereotypes of the play. Murray plays all sixteen characters that appear throughout; these are different Roses, Escorts, a presenter, a judge and festival administrative staff that are involved in the final night of the festival. The first character introduced is Concepta, who says she is, "the very concept of the Rose of Tralee."⁹⁸ She describes herself to the audience as,

My face! Of course. My beautiful smile! So radiant it can light up an entire room. (*Strobe light*) My nose... pert, small and tempting. My body; not too big, angled shoulders and a bust that falls just short of perfection. My dress; handmade no doubt by a champion seamstress from Letterkenny which shows off just enough of my well defined and athletic calves. I am jovial, gentle, caring and strong. I stand before with a heart of gold and a resilience unbeknownst to other cultures...

Want to hazard a guess? Not yet? Okay! I am beautiful, amn't I? AMN'T I?⁹⁹

This description sums up many of the preconceived stereotypes pertaining to how a Rose should look and act. It relies on the idea of a Rose as obedient, beautiful, silent, sexually available and obliging. This stereotype ultimately mocks any woman who chooses to enter the festival as it assumes they conform to hetero-patriarchal sexist and misogynist conceptions of Irish 'womanhood'. Thus, at the beginning, the play serves to support the most prominent contemporary critical viewpoint present in the aforementioned reviews of the play. However, when Concepta reappears towards the end of the play, she recites a poem she has written to God that comments on the oppression Irish women have faced throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The poem critiques marital rape, "Whenever he wanted to you know, have a go, I didn't have a choice,"¹⁰⁰ traditional forced domestication of women upon marriage, "Since I wed my husband I'm home morning, noon and night, I left my job, my friends, my family, I'm not complaining, it's my life! Years of education and a secretarial degree, all washed down the drain, instead I'm

⁹⁸ Murray, O'Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 2.

⁹⁹ Murray, O'Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Murray, O'Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 12.

making tea,”¹⁰¹ lack of access to contraceptives and full reproductive health care, “So Bless my fourteen children, Lord, I pray they’re never ill, I have one tiny favour to ask since I wasn’t allowed the pill,”¹⁰² the pressure of Catholic shaming and guilt, “Dear Lord let them not waste their life and be riddled with guilt and sin, Like me stuck at home all alone, drinking copious amounts of gin,”¹⁰³ the silencing of women in Irish society, “Behind closed doors in my happy home, no one heard my voice,”¹⁰⁴ and it ends with her exclaiming, “Now that my life comes towards the end I really must insist, After all those years of suffering I feel you must not exist...”¹⁰⁵ While the play has been largely comedic until this point, this poem emphasises the very real and dangerous struggles that Irish women have had to contend with while living in a rape culture, oppressed by a hegemonic patriarchal society.

Concepta as a character is symbolic of the festival as a whole and a symbol of perceived ‘Irishness’. This symbolism is comparable to the character Cathleen in Gregory’s and Yeats’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*¹⁰⁶ (1902). In Chapter Two, Section Five, Cathleen is compared to Shalome in Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill* due to their symbolism as ‘Ireland’ and ‘Irishness’. The Irish Literary Revival routinely used a female character to represent Ireland and a sense of national identity, beginning with Gregory’s and Yeats’s play. This trope has been re-appropriated by feminists in theatre, such as Marina Carr. This re-appropriation in *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!* is subversive and feminist as Murray and O’Donovan use Concepta and this poem to tell a story of the forgotten or silenced female voice, as does Carr in *On Raftery’s Hill*, throughout Irish history and culture. It is notable that this poem came from Concepta, and not from any of the myriad of other individual characters who appear throughout, as this highlights the potential nuances and complexities in the festival itself as it can be construed as potentially feminist for its entrants. The playwrights represent the festival as out-dated and sexist at first glance; but celebrate its potential for young Irish women also.

It could be argued that the preconceived popular opinions of the festival are more damaging to the Roses involved than any stereotypes it may support and mimic in the festival itself. O’Donovan and Murray use this play to contest these preconceptions and shed a light on the positives that may be drawn from such a festival. While Brianna Parkins

¹⁰¹ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 12.

¹⁰² Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 12.

¹⁰³ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 12.

¹⁰⁶ Lady Augusta Gregory, William Butler Yeats, ‘Cathleen Ni Houlihan’ in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 7.

was criticised by the judges for speaking out about reproductive rights for women living in Ireland, the CEO Anthony O’Gara did support her, as previously discussed. Regardless of the support she did or did not receive, she still spoke openly about the issue in front of the live studio audience and a television audience, encouraging viewers to engage in debate. The irony lies in the fact that the critical reception of the play fails to recognise this complexity, and instead supports the on-going bias toward the festival. This dissertation would contend that such prejudicial views are potentially more sexist and misogynist than any stereotype seen in the festival itself. This is because they ultimately silence the voice of the women involved through assuming they do not recognise their own perceived exploitation and oppression, instead of trusting the women involved to make informed decisions for themselves. Such silencing of women is a powerful component of contemporary rape culture.

As seen in Chapter Two in relation to Greer’s *Petals*, Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill* and O’Rowe’s *Our Few And Evil Days* in particular, when women are implicitly, in the case of Margaret, or explicitly, in the case of Girl and Dinah, silenced, their agency is removed from them. This helps to sustain rape culture as these women are left unable to speak about their own experiences. Although the examples in the various plays are directly concerned with the performance of sexual violence against women, and hence their relationship to rape culture is clear, they are comparable to the silencing of pageant entrants. This is due to the fact that all forms of silencing women are about skewing the balance of power against women. In this way, it can be argued that the objectification and sexualisation of women who take part in such competitions is a feature of rape culture, and this is both true and problematic. Rape culture is also sustained through critics blindly stereotyping all pageants and all of their entrants.

To argue that O’Donovan and Murray simplistically champion the festival as a whole is untrue. Instead they seek to argue both for and against the festival and its contemporary relevance for Irish women. Their final conclusion implies that the festival is not as damaging as many contemporary critics would argue, but it is not a feminist or even ‘pro-woman’ event and it does not necessarily have a place in contemporary Irish culture. Just as Concepta’s poem highlights a potentiality for the women involved, she is swiftly shut down. The presenter character Malachi responds to her by saying, “What a buzzkill. Somebody’s getting fired it’s not me! We’d hate to leave you on that dower note. As we are about to crown our winner.”¹⁰⁷ While Concepta has gotten her message across

¹⁰⁷ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 12.

through reciting her poem, Malachi's reaction shows how the festival will not necessarily support its competitors when they engage with political discourse on the role of women in Ireland and Irish society. This interaction may be read in direct comparison to the reaction of the festival to Brianna Parkins. This situation presents the festival as both feminist and anti-feminist in nature. In one sense, the Roses, both the fictional character of Concepta and the 2016 Sydney Rose, are permitted to speak and share their views. However, the festival fails to support them afterwards. So, it can be argued that while the festival permits such views and provides a platform on which discourse can be stirred and shaped, publicly distancing itself from these viewpoints and conversations essentially supports the stereotype that it is for these women to remain silent and beautiful, thus supporting the beauty myth and contemporary rape culture. As Walsh points out, "The *Rose of Tralee* [is] seminal in parading domicile femininity."¹⁰⁸ The play seeks to challenge an audience to critique such actions through playing out this situation onstage.

While the play focuses solely on the performance of the *Rose of Tralee* festival, it can also be read as a commentary on traditional beauty pageants. Towards the end of the play, two women are chosen as the joint winners. The first is the stereotypical Rose character of Aisling O'Connor, who is introduced as "An incredibly bland, normal Irish girl."¹⁰⁹ She describes herself by saying, "Hi, my name is Aisling O'Connor and I'm from Ennistymon. I'm so, so delighted to be here tonight. There's Mom and Dad down there, waving the foam finger. They're so mad sometimes! That's my boyfriend Greg beside them there. We've been together since my Junior Cert."¹¹⁰ She is representative of many of the tropes attested to the 'traditional Rose'.¹¹¹ The second winner is Gráinne O'Fhaolain who is described as a, "Tough as nails farmer from Inis Oir. She's fierce and has a bold and brazen attitude. AKA She's a badass motherfucker who don't take no shit from nobody."¹¹² She represents the antithesis of the stereotypical notion of a Rose¹¹³ as she

¹⁰⁸ Walsh, 'Homelysexuality and the 'Beauty' Pageant', 201.

¹⁰⁹ Walsh, 'Homelysexuality and the 'Beauty' Pageant', 3.

¹¹⁰ Walsh, 'Homelysexuality and the 'Beauty' Pageant', 3.

¹¹¹ The name 'Aisling' also has historical significance. The word 'aisling' was originally used to denote a particular type of Irish language political poetry. In the 'aisling' Ireland often appeared to the poet in a vision as a 'Spéirbhean' (heavenly woman). She can either appear as a young and beautiful woman or as an aging tramp. She usually laments the state of Ireland and calls for reform or change. The old woman in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* is an example of this kind of character. With this in mind, the now common female name 'Aisling' is reminiscent of historical representations of 'Mother Ireland' or 'Woman as Ireland'. In this way, the playwrights choosing this name for the character who symbolises the stereotypical traits of a Rose is deliberate and makes reference to the historically constructed vision of idealised Irish women.

¹¹² Murray, O'Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 5

¹¹³ In a similar manner to the name 'Aisling', 'Gráinne' has important Irish historical significance. Gráinne Mhaol, or Grace O'Malley was a Chieftan of the Ó Máille clan in the West of Ireland during the mid to late 1500s. She is a well-known figure in Irish folklore. She was known as a leader of men,

defies gender norms, has a traditionally male occupation as she is a farmer and she refuses to conform to conventional feminine behaviours stating, “Adversity? [...] Oh, because I’m a woman? Well ya, fair enough I suppose, but sure aren’t we all different, like it or lump it. I think it’s great to be different. I think it’s sexy. I’m very attracted to me.”¹¹⁴

The fact that the playwrights choose two such seemingly opposing representations of femininity, and of Rose culture, to win highlights how Murray and O’Donovan recognise the multiplicity of representations actually found in the festival. In order to choose an overall winner, both Gráinne and Aisling are asked to answer a question relating to the pageant. The play uses this action to comment on beauty pageant culture as a whole here as this type of a question round is not a part of the *Rose of Tralee* competition but it does form a part of many other traditional beauty pageants.¹¹⁵ The question asked of the winners is, “What is the most important part of being a modern day woman today in a changing society which is still governed by the Patriarchy as a whole... Sorry. Wrong flash card. My apologies. The real question is... Why do you want to be the Rose of Tralee?”¹¹⁶ Arguably the playwrights use this ‘mistaken’ question about the patriarchy to highlight the buffoonish vapid nature of the questions traditionally posed to beauty pageant contestants. The ‘mistaken’ question is plausibly the type of question that should be asked of these women as it allows them to discuss such issues that inevitably affect them. The question about why you would want to be the Rose of Tralee is comparable to popular pageant questions such as, “What is your favourite body part?”, “What is the best thing that has happened to you?” and “If you will be winning the crown tonight, what will be the very first thing you will do?”¹¹⁷ Such questions are arguably shallow and repetitive, and the fact that contestants study how best to answer these questions underline their superficiality. The playwrights use this point in the play to critique this trope found in traditional beauty pageants through showcasing an interesting question that is replaced by

a fierce warrior who fought against British control of Ireland, a woman who had numerous sexual relationships and has been used a personification of Ireland as a rebellious state. So she is a highly symbolic and emblematic figure, but is notorious for breaking the traditional role assigned to women in Ireland.

¹¹⁴ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!* 5-6.

¹¹⁵ In both the *Miss Ireland* and *Miss World* pageants, contestants who place in the top section of the competition must answer questions often relating to why they entered the pageants, their own personal experience or how they would like to see the world transform into a better place. The link given here is to a video of the final round of questions for the *Miss World* pageant in 2003 where Rosanna Davison became Ireland’s only ever *Miss World* winner to date.

I km, ‘Miss World 2003 Top 5 Final Question’, *YouTube*, March 1, 2012, accessed November 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pdcw7turwhg>

¹¹⁶ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 13.

¹¹⁷ Gau Callanta Jr., ‘40 Common Pageant Questions and Answers Sample’, *Pageant Answers*, May 4, 2016, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://pageantanswers.com/pageant-questions-and-answers/>

a trivial one. They portray both the potential for poignant discussion and the reality of a wasted opportunity that serves to maintain the anti-feminist stereotyping of traditional beauty pageants.

Oh! What a Lovely Rose! ends with the two winners fighting to the death followed by a child waiting to watch the festival on television,

A fight amongst the Roses begins. The Rose fight song starts. Different characters cameo in and out until the final showdown. Gráinne V Aisling. Aisling stabs Gráinne fatally but before Gráinne dies she stabs Aisling in the head. Aisling staggers to the dress puts on the crown and wins but unfortunately she dies too once she is situated behind the dress in winning position.

Flash to a sitting room. Erica as a child watching The Rose of Tralee.

Erica: Mooom!! Come on! The *Rose of Tralee* is on!!!

*Lights down. End.*¹¹⁸

The image presented of a child wanting to watch the pageant highlights the continued popularity of the festival among children. The idea that the two winners fight to the death in order to be crowned champion is comedic in nature but also showcases how tensions or agendas present in the festival may not be apparent to children, particularly female children who may hope to enter the contest in years to come.

The fight scene can be interpreted as critiquing the potential for cat fighting or back stabbing among beauty pageant contestants and the violence inherent in the trope of the beauty pageant. This trope of the ill-natured contestant is intrinsically linked to the hetero-patriarchal binary construction of femininity and is representative of ‘toxic femininity’. Aisling has previously described herself as non-violent, “Fun facts about me. I’m really, really nice. I’ve never fought with anyone ever. [...] Yeah I’m loving the competition. The girls are so, so nice here. It’s amazing being part of the Rose sisterhood.”¹¹⁹ She is portrayed as a particular version of unassuming and obedient femininity. In contrast to this, Gráinne conveys a character more associated with conventionally masculine traits such as violence and leadership, and she can be read as performing aspects of radical feminism, “A bit about me, ah well both my parents died. They died in a fight. They killed each other, with their own bare hands. [...] I’ve five brothers, I’m the eldest and I run the farm. [...] God help me if I ever got a helping hand from the eejits at home, the farm is mine and that’s that and they’re not getting it till I

¹¹⁸ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 13-14.

¹¹⁹ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 4.

die.”¹²⁰ She also resents the notion that she is forced to wear a dress in order to participate, “If I could change one thing about the competition it would probably be the dress. I could have gotten a wear out of my good suit instead of this beaded extravaganza.”¹²¹ So Aisling performs behaviours associated with ‘toxic femininity’ while Gráinne can be read as a radical feminist, or even as a woman inhabiting ‘toxic masculinity’ to a certain extent, and their fight represents the violent potential of the gender binary when it is forced upon people who defy easy definition. Although done in a farcical manner, the power of contemporary rape culture can be seen here as the fight breaks out over the culturally constructed desire to be a pageant winner.

While both of these women portray wildly differing aspects of potential femininities, their fatal fight over winning the title reduces them to a singular ‘toxic femininity’ stereotype of the catty beauty pageant competitor. This reductive act works on two levels. Firstly, it can be argued that the playwrights use this narrative to comment on the actual nature of beauty pageant contestants who may lay claim to their non-competitive intentions while harbouring aggressive ambitions for their respective title. Such a falseness of true intent and ‘catty’ nature is rarely publicised, but it is a reality as can be seen in the 2016 *Miss Great Britain* competition where initial winner Zara Holland was stripped of her title, allowing Deone Robertson to be crowned in her place.¹²² When the two women appeared on a television panel show together, their animosity towards each other was evident. Holland claimed that Robertson did not deserve the title as she was not crowned on the night. Robertson ‘slut-shamed’ Holland.¹²³ Their resentment came from their belief that they were each more deserving than the other. In this sense, the playwrights are highlighting an actuality of beauty pageant competitions.

Secondly, it can also be argued that this scene is more a commentary on the public perception of the women involved in beauty pageant competitions. If the popular belief by onlookers is that the women who partake in beauty pageants are one-dimensional, or unaware of their oppression through competing, then the idea that two women would fight to the death over the overall title supports that theory. Just as the playwrights have

¹²⁰ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 5.

¹²¹ Murray, O’Donovan, *Oh! What A Lovely Rose!*, 6.

¹²² Zara Holland was initially crowned and then appeared on the ITV2 reality television show *Celebrity Love Island* where she has sexual intercourse with a fellow cast member on camera. The *Miss Great Britain* organisation decided that this behaviour broke the rules of the conditions of winning and so crowned the first runner-up, Deone Robertson, in Holland’s place.

¹²³ Adam Boulton, ‘Zara Holland faces off against Miss Great Britain in fiery TV confrontation’, *Telegraph* (London), August 18, 2016, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/18/zara-holland-faces-off-against-miss-great-britain-in-fiery-tv-co/>

critiqued the *Rose of Tralee* festival, the public perception of it, and the performance of ‘toxic femininity’ contained within it, this scene shows how biased this opinion can be. It is ridiculous to think that two women would fatally fight over a crown and in acting this out, the playwrights show how the interpretation of the festival, and beauty pageants in general, as only portraying this ‘catty’ representation of femininity is false and reductive. This scene can be read as using physical violence to comment on the performative violence of language when applied to women who enter the festival.

The inclusion of a child watching the festival is significant. It is a representation of the indoctrination of girls by the patriarchy into contemporary rape culture at a young age. It highlights the process of the internalisation of misogyny that begins in girls in early childhood. It shows how the performance of rape culture, ‘toxic femininity’, the beauty myth and oppressive hetero-patriarchal values are embedded in the psyche of children before they can challenge or comprehend their respective significance.

The *Rose of Tralee* provides young female children with the opportunity to become involved through its ‘Rose Bud’ programme. ‘Rose Buds’ are female children aged between six and twelve who each accompany an International Rose during the festival in Tralee. They partake in parades with the Roses. They apply directly to the *Rose of Tralee* festival and sixty-five Rose Buds were chosen for the 2016 festival.¹²⁴ The initiative is run to encourage young girls to have an interest in the festival and protect its legacy through encouraging a new generation to partake in the pageant. It is a clear example of the indoctrination of young girls into the beauty myth and rape culture narratives. Commentators such as Elster have critiqued the inclusion of young girls in the festival stating,

And then there are the “Rose Buds”. These are children, aged 6-12, who are paired up with a Rose and go “on tour” with them in exchange for participating in parades and a free JLS ticket. Some of the Roses spoke of how the “Rose Buds” were “a great help” and the “cute factor” is an almost guaranteed positive PR spin for the event. Please tell me how this is not exploitation, and how there is anything positive or progressive about training children to grow up to be beauty queens.¹²⁵

There is an important distinction to be made between the role of the Rose Bud and child beauty pageants. The Rose Buds are not part of a competition and are arguably not exploited in the same way that children who compete in child beauty pageants are.

¹²⁴ ‘2016 Rose Buds’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 30, 2016,

<http://www.roseoftralee.ie/apply?lightbox=dataItem-in60yvjy8>

¹²⁵ Elster, ‘The Rose of Tralee’, *Irish Feminist Network*.

However, even if they are not competing, and so are not explicitly indoctrinated into patriarchal values on the conventional standards of beauty for women, they are implicitly exploited and indoctrinated into rape culture. Although it may seem ‘harmless’ to include young girls in this way, the Rose Bud scheme essentially promotes the culturally constructed myth of female beauty and objectification. Sustaining and actively supporting this myth is a part of rape culture.

While the girls chosen as Rose Buds are selected by the *Rose of Tralee* organisers, the application form for the 2016¹²⁶ Rose Buds did not require a photo of the child to accompany it and only asked for basic contact details of the child’s parent or guardian.¹²⁷ With this in mind, it is reasonable to contend that the children selected are not chosen for their aesthetic or physical attributes. Just as the festival organisers remained ambiguous on the status of trans entrants until pushed on the issue in February 2017, there is no clear reason given for why some girls are chosen over others. While this is problematic, the fact that it cannot be based on aesthetic attributes is important. Following this line of thought, Elster’s opinion may be critiqued as unfairly conflating the Rose Bud programme with beauty queen aspirations. However, it is fair to argue that inviting only young girls to partake in the festival while wearing a sash and a dress does essentially support the hetero-patriarchal constructions of conventional femininity that exist to sustain the beauty myth and oppressive gender binary.

When discussing the enforcement of the gender binary on young children Natasha Walter says in *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* that, “Pink girls, blue boys. Princess, fighters. Shy girls, grunting boys. Good girls, aggressive boys. That’s what we want to see, so that’s what we see.”¹²⁸ Walter goes on to quote Simone de Beauvoir in saying, “The little girl cuddles her doll and dresses up as she dreams of being cuddled and dressed up herself; inversely, she thinks of herself as a marvellous doll.”¹²⁹ The culturally constructed social gender norms enforced on children from birth serve to protect conventional and oppressive representations of femininity. Walter and de Beauvoir are explaining how the construction of ‘girlhood’ is such that imposes on all girls the idea that they ultimately want to be princesses in search of a prince. This is oppressive, sexist and misogynist. If these are the images and ideas that are impressed upon young girls, then the

¹²⁶ Even though I have used to 2017 application form when referencing the *Rose of Tralee* or *Miss Ireland* entry requirements, the 2017 application form for Rose Buds was not yet published at the time of writing.

¹²⁷ ‘Rose Bud Application Form’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.com/roses/rose-buds>

¹²⁸ Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, 131.

¹²⁹ Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, 132.

concept of a Rose Bud fundamentally reinforces this stereotype.

As Emer O'Toole points out, "The generic girls' present is pink, and has something to do with domestic chores or beauty regimes. The generic boys' present is blue, and has something to do with motor vehicles or gratuitous violence."¹³⁰ O'Toole goes on to note that, "Ofsted research from 2008 shows that a third of ten-year-old girls are unhappy with their bodies, and that, by age fourteen, half of all girls cite their figures as their number one worry."¹³¹ There is a correlation between these facts. The heteronormatively gendered way in which children are reared has an impact on how they view and perform their own gender. The overwhelming emphasis on 'being pretty' throughout girlhood is perpetuated in the Rose Buds dressing in a sash and dress, as the Roses do. As O'Toole argues, "I'm not saying that, unilaterally, telling a little girl she's beautiful is harmful. But when physical compliments are the default adult interaction with small human females, there is a great potential for harm."¹³² In a similar manner, this dissertation is not claiming that the Rose Bud programme is a child beauty pageant, but it has the performative potential to indoctrinate young children into assumed gender roles.

This aspect of the *Rose of Tralee* festival is sexist and misogynist as only young girls are invited to take on the role of the 'mini Rose' and perform a dangerously narrow and conventional expression of femininity in doing so. In having *Oh! What a Lovely Rose!* end with the vision of a child excited at the prospect of watching the televised portion of the festival, the playwrights are highlighting the impact that the *Rose of Tralee* festival and beauty pageants in general can have on children and especially girls. This impact is comparable to young female Irish dancers, as is discussed in the next chapter, and how they feel the need to dress, act and perform their femininity in a very limiting way in order to succeed as a dancer. Dance competitions and beauty pageants are two clear ways in which young female children are indoctrinated into the oppressive patriarchal value system that helps to sustain rape culture indefinitely.

Part Two: The Contemporary Pageant in Performance

The competition process of the *Rose of Tralee* is arguably where the festival differs strongly from more traditional beauty pageants, such as *Miss Ireland* and *Miss World*, by

¹³⁰ O'Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls*, 21.

¹³¹ O'Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls*, 24.

¹³² O'Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls*, 19.

proxy.¹³³ For this reason, this section examines the competition element of the *Rose of Tralee* alongside the competitive elements of *Miss Ireland* in order to highlight the differences. While many aspects of the *Rose of Tralee* have been deconstructed as implicitly supportive of contemporary rape culture, the competitive element to the festival is less so. In contrast to this, a more traditional beauty pageant, such as *Miss Ireland*, actively sustains and promotes rape culture throughout its competitive elements, and is examined in this section as a result.

The *Rose of Tralee* festival takes place in Tralee annually in August. The dates for the 2016 festival were August 17-23, 2016.¹³⁴ During that time, the two final nights were televised on RTÉ One, Ireland's National Broadcasting Service. Traditionally it is only the final two nights broadcast on live television. This means that the general public's association with the entire festival is based only on these broadcasted events. The popularity of the television broadcast is contested between different sources. For example, the RTÉ Press Centre claim that the 2016 festival had peak viewership of 743,800¹³⁵ with, "59% of people watching television at the time watching as Daithí Ó Sé made the eagerly awaited announcement."¹³⁶ These figures suggest that the festival remains one of the most watched television programmes in Ireland. However, *The Irish Times* reported that the viewing figures reached an all-time low in 2016 with a decrease of 33% since 2010.¹³⁷ This article criticises RTÉ's published figures that do not focus on the average number of viewers who watched the show in its entirety claiming that, "The "average audience" number, which calculates the average number of viewers across an entire programme, is the one most generally used to describe a TV show's actual ratings performance, and is also the measure used to calculate up end-of-year lists of the most-watched programmes."¹³⁸ While the author of this article rightfully critiques the subjective analysis of the viewing figures constructed by RTÉ, he then goes on to repeat the biased opinion

¹³³ The winner of *Miss Ireland* automatically qualifies for the *Miss World* pageant annually. For this reason, many of the entry requirements for *Miss Ireland* are directly dictated by the *Miss World* Organisation.

¹³⁴ 'Home', *Rose of Tralee*, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie>

¹³⁵ This figure is quoted in relation to the number of viewers at 23.12 during the second night of the broadcast.

¹³⁶ RTÉ Press Centre, '2016 Rose of Tralee is a Hit With Viewers', *RTÉ Press Centre*, August 24, 2016, accessed November 30, 2016, <https://presspack.rte.ie/2016/08/24/2016-rose-of-tralee-is-a-hit-with-viewers/>

¹³⁷ Hugh Linehan, 'Rose of Tralee TV viewing figures hit 10-year low', *Irish Times*, August 26, 2016, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tv-radio-web/rose-of-tralee-tv-viewing-figures-hit-10-year-low-1.2768729>

¹³⁸ Hugh Linehan, 'Rose of Tralee TV viewing figures hit 10-year low', *Irish Times*, August 26, 2016, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tv-radio-web/rose-of-tralee-tv-viewing-figures-hit-10-year-low-1.2768729>

of reducing the festival to the ‘lovely girls contest’,

Given the very particular – in fact, unique - character of the *Rose of Tralee* as a television entertainment product in the modern age, the question inevitably arises: are Irish people finally tiring of watching an endless line of lovely girls parading across their screens for hour after hour after hour? RTÉ’s attempts to gussy up the format and get rid of the poetry this year suggests the broadcaster fears that might just be the case.¹³⁹

With such overtly biased perceptions of the festival present throughout many discussions of it, I entered the selection process for the *Dublin Rose of Tralee* in 2013 in order to experience the process first hand for a deeper understanding of the festival.

A representative from the *Dublin Rose of Tralee* committee contacted me initially on January 30, 2013.¹⁴⁰ I was invited to attend an information meeting about entering the Dublin selection. As far as I am aware, the committee search the social media site *Facebook* looking for women living in Dublin who are between eighteen and twenty-eight years of age. As to why I was specifically contacted, I am unsure. I asked the committee at the time and they said that they are just looking to contact women in Dublin who fit the age profile. Since 2013, I have received emails from the committee asking if I would like to enter the current year’s contest or if I know of any other women who would like to take part in it. I was in the final year of my undergraduate degree at the time with the intention of continuing onto postgraduate study. For that reason, I decided to enter the process in case I chose to analyse the festival throughout my postgraduate research and because, as a feminist, I was intrigued by the institution of the festival.

From that first meeting in February of 2013, I was in regular contact with the Dublin Rose organisers and attended numerous events with them. In order to enter, I had to fill out an application form and secure funding for €250. The application form consisted of asking for personal details and filling out a questionnaire. Questions included, “What do you most like about where you live and work?”, “What would it mean to you if you became a Rose?”, “What qualities do you think a Rose should have?”, and, “What personal quality are you most proud of?” These questions are similar in nature to the questions posed to contestants in traditional beauty pageants and although they do not form part of the public element of the competition, they may be seen to equate the *Rose of Tralee* with

¹³⁹ Hugh Linehan, ‘Rose of Tralee TV viewing figures hit 10-year low’, *Irish Times*, August 26, 2016, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/tv-radio-web/rose-of-tralee-tv-viewing-figures-hit-10-year-low-1.2768729>

¹⁴⁰ The Facebook profile used to contact me has since been deactivated and so I can no longer see the messages sent to me. I do however have a record of my responses.

traditional beauty pageants through their seemingly shallow nature. At no point on the application form was I asked to comment on issues directly affecting women in Ireland today and there was no space to directly express my potential political views. I found myself answering the questionnaire with politically ‘safe’ and expected answers. For example, when answering the question referring to the qualities that I believe a Rose should have, I responded with, “I think a Rose should be a friendly, compassionate, kind hearted, caring person who is proud to stand up for what she believes in and who will act as a leader and spokeswoman.” While I do agree with the sentiment present in my opinion, I also felt that this was the kind of answer the festival organisers would approve of. At this point of the process, I believed that the *Rose of Tralee* would be explicitly comparable to traditional beauty pageants.

Along with the application form, I had to secure €250 funding. Roses have the choice of seeking this funding from a business, or of paying it themselves and choosing to represent a charity. The name of the business, organisation or charity that a Rose chooses to represent is printed on the sash that is worn by the Rose for the duration of the festival. I chose to represent the Irish based charity ‘SUAS Educational Development’.¹⁴¹ Representing a charity meant that at all official Rose events that I attended, I had the opportunity to promote this charity. The *Rose of Tralee* festival places a heavy emphasis on charity work. As stated by the festival organisers,

A Rose can make a difference and the Rose of Tralee International Festival is proud to be associated with a variety of charity organisations at local, national and international level through our Roses, Rose Escorts and Rose Centres worldwide. In recent years, the Rose of Tralee has also worked closely with Epilepsy Ireland, Cystic Fibrosis, Chernobyl International Children’s Project, Down Syndrome Ireland, the HOPE Foundation and Mellon Educate.¹⁴²

The *Rose of Tralee* also organises annual trips to Chernobyl for any Rose or Rose Escort, past or present, who chooses to go. The purpose of this trip is to provide assistance to those who run orphanages in Chernobyl. This emphasis of the festival on charity work and charity awareness is noble in merit. Not only does it give opportunities to the Roses to

¹⁴¹ SUAS Educational Development is an Irish based charity set up by students of Trinity College Dublin in 2002. It focuses on providing education for underprivileged children in Ireland, India and Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2011, I volunteered for ten weeks in Kolkata, India, teaching children living in poverty. The mission of SUAS is, “to transform lives through education. This means as literate, global citizens children can escape the traps of poverty and have a better chance at the futures they deserve.” For more information visit, <https://www.suas.ie/about-suas> (Accessed December 3, 2016).

¹⁴² ‘Rose of Tralee Charity Partners’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie/legacy?lightbox=dataItem-in6fzjj8>

become involved in both national and international charities, it also helps to promote particular charities personal to the Roses. In this sense, the festival is arguably feminist in its ideology as it has such a focus on striving for equality in these areas.

The *Rose of Tralee* is not unique in its involvement with charitable organisations. While the *Rose of Tralee* encourages its Roses to become involved with charities, for traditional beauty pageants such as *Miss Ireland* and *Miss World* all contestants must complete some charitable work. *Miss Ireland* and *Miss World* have a mandatory component entitled 'Beauty with a Purpose'.¹⁴³ 'Beauty with a Purpose' is a registered charity and non-profit organisation that was created in 1972 by the *Miss World* CEO, Julia Morley and has close connections with the *Miss World* beauty pageant. According to the 'Beauty with a Purpose' organisation,

Hundreds of millions of pounds have been raised and donated to local and international organisations in aid of disadvantaged children the world over. [...] The *Miss World* contestants (with the help of their *Miss World* National Organisations) have set up Beauty with a Purpose projects in more than 100 countries. This gives tens of thousands of young women every year, the opportunity to use their abilities to make a real and lasting contribution to the lives of the sick and disadvantaged.¹⁴⁴

The *Miss World* contestants are judged on their charitable work and the woman deemed to have done the most work automatically qualifies for the *Miss World* semi-final competition. In this way, the 'Beauty with a Purpose' competition becomes another element to the process similar to their national dress competition, fitness competition or swimwear competition. All entrants to *Miss World* must provide a video to discuss their charitable work. Miss Ireland 2015, Sacha Livingstone, discusses the work of all of the *Miss Ireland* contestants in her video.¹⁴⁵ She says, "As a team we have been raising funds and awareness for a variety of charities across Ireland."¹⁴⁶ She goes on to describe how the women involved in *Miss Ireland* have been using the media and their *Miss Ireland* platform to promote awareness for their respective causes. Images of newspaper articles relating to their charitable work are shown in her video. The articles shown are

¹⁴³ 'Home', *Beauty with a Purpose*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.beautywithapurpose.com/en/>

¹⁴⁴ 'History', *Beauty with a Purpose*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.beautywithapurpose.com/en/history>

¹⁴⁵ 'Beauty with a Purpose – Ireland', *Beauty with a Purpose*, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.beautywithapurpose.com/en/around-the-world/europe/ireland>

¹⁴⁶ 'Beauty with a Purpose – Ireland', *Beauty with a Purpose*, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.beautywithapurpose.com/en/around-the-world/europe/ireland>

accompanied by sexualised images of Livingstone and her competitors in Irish media. She also discusses the *Miss Ireland Charity Fashion Show* and shows an image from this fashion show where she appears in lingerie. The fact that the compulsory component of ‘Beauty with a Purpose’ in both the *Miss Ireland* and *Miss World* pageants so blatantly equates the perceived ‘beauty’ of the contestants with their ability to provide a platform for charity awareness highlights the anti-feminist and degrading nature of its very existence. In principle, the idea of using a pageant to raise awareness of, and funds for charities is noble. However, when it is intrinsically linked to conventional ideals of constructed ‘beauty’ both nominally and in practice, it becomes limiting, sexist and rooted in a misogynist and capitalist power hierarchy that serves to oppress women in general while objectifying the few who meet a manufactured standard of ‘beauty’. It is a component of rape culture in action. In this way, the *Rose of Tralee* arguably differs from traditional beauty pageants through promoting charitable causes without objectifying or sexualising the Roses involved.

The competition element of the *Rose of Tralee* comprises of three rounds of interviews. This process is repeated at all rounds throughout the competition. There are thirty-two Roses chosen each year to take part in the televised final in Tralee each August. This group of thirty-two is comprised of the winning Roses from Dublin, Cork and Kerry respectively, six or seven Irish Roses from the remaining twenty-nine counties of Ireland, ten American Roses and twelve or thirteen Roses from all other International Rose Centres around the world. While the Dublin, Cork and Kerry Roses automatically qualify for the televised final, all other Roses must compete in a semi-final round where they go through the same three rounds of interviews they encountered in their respective Rose centres. Then the thirty-two Roses who make the final repeat the same process once more. In 2016, there were Roses representing sixty-five national and international Roses centres.¹⁴⁷ This number can vary each year as some international centres do not always run a Rose selection event. The semi-final selection events took place in Tralee on August 17-18, 2016, the week before the televised final.¹⁴⁸ This is not always the case as in 2013, when I entered the Dublin Rose selection, the semi-final took place in Portlaoise, Westmeath in late May.

The three rounds of interviews consist of a personal interview with the panel of judges that lasts for fifteen minutes, a group interview where eight to ten entrants are given

¹⁴⁷ ‘Our 2016 Roses’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie/roses>

¹⁴⁸ ‘Festival Dome Events’, *Rose of Tralee*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.roseoftralee.ie/2016>

three issues to discuss in front of the judges for fifteen minutes and the final stage interview that takes place in front of an audience and lasts an average of seven minutes. The judging panel changes annually, and the three judges for the 2013 Dublin Rose selection were RTÉ presenter Nuala Carey, Irish businessman and honorary President of the *Rose of Tralee* in 2002, Con O'Connor, and the winner of the *Rose of Tralee* in 1989 and former Dublin Rose, Sinead Boyle. The final interview forms the televised part of the festival annually. In this final interview, entrants are encouraged to perform a short 'talent' but not all women choose to do this. The 'talent' can be anything from singing¹⁴⁹ and dancing¹⁵⁰ to poetry recital.¹⁵¹ No extra marks are given if a Rose decides to perform a 'talent', its only purpose is to break the monotony of interviews for the audience and add entertainment value. The entrants are marked on these three interviews alone. Through taking part in the process myself, I found the interviews to be fair and well balanced. I was encouraged at all times to speak my own mind and I felt empowered throughout. I can only speak for myself, but I do believe it is fair to argue that this method of judging entrants is in no way derogatory, sexualising or objectifying. In this regard, I would argue that the *Rose of Tralee* differs from traditional beauty pageants. I did feel like I was performing a particular version of femininity, and of myself throughout, and this is problematic, but I did not feel that I was compromising myself to the degree that I would have had to in *Miss Ireland* with bikini modelling.

The judging process for the *Miss World* pageant, and the *Miss Ireland* competition by proxy, consists of five initial 'Challenge Events'. These events take place before the final event that occurs in front of an audience. The five main events are as follows; 'Beauty with a Purpose', 'Multimedia' where the contestants are judged on their ability to connect with their fan base on social media sites, 'Sports & Fitness' where the contestants take part in numerous sporting events and are judged based on their fitness level, 'Talent' where contestants give a short performance of their choosing, and, 'Top Model' where the contestants take part in a traditional catwalk fashion show and are judged based on their professional modelling ability.¹⁵² On completion of the various challenge events, the

¹⁴⁹ Arron Presley, 'Rose of Tralee 2016 Winner Maggie McEldowney Performance', *YouTube*, August 23, 2016, accessed December 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yu1pOkfu2vU>

¹⁵⁰ RTÉ – Ireland's National Broadcast Public Service Media, 'Dublin Rose Hip Hop Dance', *YouTube*, August 23, 2011, accessed December 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MahY3MSRug0>

¹⁵¹ Kevin Gallagher, 'Rose of Tralee 2013. Manchester's Entrant Marie McDermott', *YouTube*, August 21, 2013, accessed December 6, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvfuTQ_CB6g

¹⁵² 'Challenge Events – A brief run-down of the Challenge Events which await the contestants of Miss World 2015', *Miss World*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.missworld.com/competition/2015-contest/challenge-events/>

judges then interview the contestants.¹⁵³ The results for the interview round are revealed on the final night of the competition. Then all marks are added together to form the top rankings of the pageant, the top six women have another round of judges questions and the winner is crowned.¹⁵⁴ This same process applies to the women in the *Miss Ireland* pageant.

The five challenge events listed here were for the 2015 pageant. This is the only year in the pageant's history that there was no 'swimwear' competition. The first ever Miss World, Sweden's Kiki Håkansson, was crowned in a bikini in 1951, and since then, all *Miss World* competitors have taken part in a 'swimwear' round. In 2014 the *Miss World Organisation* made the decision to eliminate this round from the competition as *Miss World's* CEO Julia Morley stated in an interview about the decision to discontinue the event, "I don't need to see women just walking up and down in bikinis. It doesn't do anything for the woman. And it doesn't do anything for any of us. I don't care if someone has a bottom two inches bigger than someone else's. We are really not looking at her bottom. We are really listening to her speak."¹⁵⁵ While this action of removing the swimsuit element could be lauded as a welcome contemporary change that strives for the eradication of the objectification of women, Emily Sawyer, a member of the *London Feminist Network* argued that,

The whole competition is sexist - swimsuits or no swimsuits. Women can be objectified whether they're in swimsuits or dresses. The fact that the organisers have removed the swimsuit round shows that the organisers are reflecting on how women are viewed. However it doesn't change the fact that Miss World is a beauty pageant and that it is a fundamentally sexist institution.¹⁵⁶

While Morley admitted that the competition should not be based on 'the size of her bottom', and the 2015 competition proceeded with no 'swimwear' round, it was reinstated

¹⁵³ The judges for *Miss Ireland* usually consist of Irish television personalities, sponsors of the pageant and former *Miss Ireland* winners. The judges for *Miss World* in 2016 included five former pageant winners, Linda Pétursdóttir (1988), Agbani Darego (2001), Azra Akin (2002), Zhang Zilin (2007) and Ksenia Sukhinova (2008), along with the CEO of *Miss World*, Julia Morley, television producer Ken Warwick, musician and composer Mike Dixon, head of the *Miss World* hair and beauty team Andrew Minarik and stage director of the pageant Donna Walsh.

¹⁵⁴ 'What is Miss World – Whether you are new to Miss World or a lifelong fan, our guide to Miss World will answer any questions you have about the World's longest running event of its kind', *Miss World*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.missworld.com/competition/what-is-miss-world/>

¹⁵⁵ Radhika Sanghani, 'Miss World ditches 'sexist bikini round' after 63 years', *Telegraph* (London), December 12, 2014, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11303129/Miss-World-bikini-round-cancelled-after-63-years.html>

¹⁵⁶ Radhika Sanghani, 'Miss World ditches 'sexist bikini round' after 63 years', *Telegraph* (London), December 12, 2014, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11303129/Miss-World-bikini-round-cancelled-after-63-years.html>

for the 2016 pageant.¹⁵⁷ The swimsuit competition can be objectively critiqued as an anti-feminist event that serves no purpose other than to evaluate the female body using the principles of constructed hetero-patriarchal beauty conventions. It is damaging to women as it further promotes the idea of this constructed representation of a very particular form of femininity as desirable over all other body types. At the time of writing, no official reason had been given as to why the competition was reinstated for the 2016 pageant. It is fair to argue that it degrades the contestants and women in general.

In 2013 the swimsuit round was modified in the *Miss World* pageant to fit in with the religious ethos of predominantly Muslim country of Indonesia where the contest was held that year. The *Huffington Post* reported that, “Out of respect to this year’s Muslim host nation Indonesia, the 137 contestants at the event in Jakarta will be wearing the traditional long sarongs of Bali instead.”¹⁵⁸ The very concept of objectifying contestants by judging their physique is demeaning to these women, but this objectification is heightened when contestants are forced to cover up their bodies in order to not cause offense to the religious class of any country. This act utterly removes all agency from the women involved. Removing the swimsuit element of the competition to appease a governing patriarchal religious ethos is deeply oppressive to women. Just because it was removed does not make it a feminist victory. This is because it was removed specifically to slut-shame women for exposing their bodies to a patriarchal society that feels uncomfortable with the female body. A naked or clothed body is neither feminist nor anti-feminist. What matters is the context and reasoning behind decisions. Sexualising and objectifying the partially clothed female body is an element of rape culture, as is insisting on covering the partially naked female body because of a belief in its inherently sexual nature. Arguably this particular ban created a level of double disempowerment for women. The competition traditionally sexualises and objectifies its contestants through expecting them to be judged while only partially clothed. To remove this element simply to avoid offense to others not involved in the process who believe that women must dress in a particular manner to promote ‘modesty’ re-oppresses these women. Morley commented on the decision stating, “I do not want to upset or get anyone in a situation where we are

¹⁵⁷ ‘Swimsuit Competition is Back in Miss World Pageant!’, *Pageanthology 101*, November 24, 2016, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.pageanthology101.com/2016/11/swimsuit-competition-is-back-in-miss.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Poorna Bell, ‘Miss World Beauty Pageant Bans Bikinis (PICTURES)’, *Huffington Post*, June 10, 2013, accessed December 8, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/06/10/miss-world-beauty-pageant_n_3415087.html?ir=Canada+Style

being disrespectful.”¹⁵⁹ This is a deeply anti-feminist act. Feminist protestors of beauty pageants want swimsuit components removed because of their level of sexualisation and objectification, removing them to avoid causing offense to a hetero-patriarchal hierarchy furthers stigmatises and oppresses these women, while supporting and sustaining rape culture. As feminist commentator Brooke Magnanti stated,

Sure, the ends some wanted have been achieved. Bikinis gone thanks to the Pope or Muslims or whoever it is this time. But at what cost? [...] Such dirty alliances always, always, come with a hidden cost. It doesn't take much imagination to see what outcome religious conservatives of any faith are aiming for when they order the womenfolk to cover up. [...] But it is interesting to see a contest that previously felt the wrath of 1970s feminists now coming under fire from the small, but vocal, fringe of religious practice in Indonesia.¹⁶⁰

All in all, the events involved in the *Miss World* beauty pageant, replicated on a smaller scale for the *Miss Ireland* pageant, may be critiqued as deeply misogynist in nature with a core fixation on the promotion of the beauty myth throughout. The pageant promotes the objectification of women sexually and physically, and ultimately sustains contemporary rape culture. Such challenges and events ultimately serve to silence women and place a higher value on subscription to the beauty myth over all other character traits and personal strengths. As Magnanti points out while critiquing beauty pageants and their purpose in contemporary society, “It is, despite some desperate 1990s rebranding, still primarily a pony show. No doubt there are some brainy women in the roster of past winners - Aishwarya Rai would not still be the megastar she is today if she didn't have grey matter to spare - but any claims to judging 'beauty with a purpose' are (if you'll pardon the pun) purely cosmetic.”¹⁶¹ Essentially, given the pervasive power of contemporary rape culture and the current format of traditional beauty pageants, such pageants cannot be anything but anti-feminist, anti-women and pro-patriarchal control. They are a product of the beauty myth, conventional constructed beauty standard and rape culture, and they work to cyclically sustain these patriarchal fallacies.

¹⁵⁹ Poorna Bell, ‘Miss World Beauty Pageant Bans Bikinis (PICTURES)’, *Huffington Post*, June 10, 2013, accessed December 8, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/06/10/miss-world-beauty-pageant_n_3415087.html?ir=Canada+Style

¹⁶⁰ Brooke Magnanti, ‘Miss World bikini ban: why it's no victory for feminists’, *Telegraph* (London), June 7, 2013, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/10105935/Miss-World-2013-bikini-ban-why-its-no-victory-for-feminists.html>

¹⁶¹ Brooke Magnanti, ‘Miss World bikini ban: why it's no victory for feminists’, *Telegraph* (London), June 7, 2013, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/10105935/Miss-World-2013-bikini-ban-why-its-no-victory-for-feminists.html>

Section Four: Pageant Performance Further Afield and Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, there are numerous other beauty pageants both in Ireland and abroad. *Miss Ireland* and the *Rose of Tralee* are the two longest running competitions of this type in Ireland, while *Miss World* is the longest running international pageant in the world. As argued in the previous section, I believe that traditional beauty pageants such as *Miss World* and *Miss Ireland* serve to sustain hegemonic hetero-patriarchal systems of oppression, power, hierarchy and phallogocentrism. I would argue that although the *Rose of Tralee* festival does incorporate some aspects of sexist or misogynist belief, comparatively, it is not a wholly oppressive organisation. This does not mean that it is an appropriate or helpful institution for contemporary Ireland, and I personally believe that its blatant sexism outweighs any potential feminist attributes, but this research is using the comparison to examine the nuances present in such competitions to look at the full spectrum of component parts of rape culture.

Beauty pageants are changing somewhat to represent changing societal attitudes both nationally and globally. For example, the *Rose of Tralee* crowned its first openly homosexual winner Maria Walsh in 2014 and in 2016, *Miss Minnesota USA* had its first contestant to take part while wearing a Hijab.¹⁶² While Halima Aden did not win the pageant, she did make the final fifteen and had the chance to discuss the need for the normalisation of Hijab wearing in Western contemporary culture. This is particularly important given the anti-Muslim sentiment enshrined in the Trump administration in America. However, contemporary pageants continue to silence women, as seen with the 2016 Sydney Rose Brianna Parkins. They also shame women, with Miss Iceland 2015 Arna Ýr Jónsdóttir choosing to not compete in the *Miss Grand International* pageant in October 2016 after she was told to lose weight and eat less ahead of the final.¹⁶³ Such an example as this highlights the acceptance of body shaming within these pageants, and this body shaming is emblematic of the sexualisation and objectification of entrants that stems from contemporary rape culture.

¹⁶² Carly Mallenbaum, 'Pageant contestant wears hijab for all rounds of Miss Minnesota USA', *USA Today*, November 27, 2016, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/entertainthis/2016/11/27/miss-minnesota-contestant-halima-aden-hijab-birkini/94521240/>

¹⁶³ Bianca Britton, 'Miss Iceland quits pageant after being told to lose weight', *CNN*, October 26, 2016, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/10/26/europe/miss-iceland-arna-yr-jonsdottir-beauty-pageant-trnd/>

In recent years, pageants have come under increased criticism for their misogynist representations, and have declined in popularity as seen in the decreasing audience members for the *Rose of Tralee* final previously discussed. However, women and girls still enter such pageants annually. I would argue that these pageants are no longer relevant for contemporary women and need to drastically change their respective formats and criteria in order to combat patriarchal ideals that ultimately serve to oppress and commodify women while sustaining and supporting contemporary rape culture indefinitely.

Chapter Four:

Masterful Athlete meets Pageant Queen:
The Competitive World of Irish Dance

Section One: Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the performance and performativity of competitive Irish dancing in its contemporary form, with a particular focus on the performance of femininities and gendered identities in competition. This chapter highlights the performance of rape culture throughout contemporary dance competition.

Irish dancing is a traditional dance form that is intrinsically linked to notions of Irish heritage, Nationalist and Republican ideologies, and traditional Irish culture. The original governing body of Irish Dance, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* (CLRG), describe it as follows,

[It is] focused primarily on footwork, Irish dancing is performed either individually (step dancing) or by teams (céilí and set dancing), and accompanied by traditional Irish music played on a variety of instruments, such as accordion, piano, fiddle, flute or banjo. Timing and rhythm are of utmost importance and it is the intricate and fast paced footwork that has captured the imagination of the world outside of the Irish community.¹

As the name suggests, Irish Dance is a type of dance that originated in Ireland; but it is popular globally in the twenty-first century with non-Irish dancers now vastly outnumbering the Irish who take part. According to a 2014 report, “Currently, there are about 500 certified CLRG [An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha] teachers in Ireland. Outside of Ireland, there are more than 1,500.”² The success and popularity of Irish dancing within Ireland is largely due to the promotion of dance during the Gaelic Cultural Revival³ of the early twentieth century. Globally, its popularity can be attributed to the commercial success of the touring shows from the mid 1990s onwards. As stated by Frank Hall,

Two watershed events mark the history of Irish dancing in the twentieth century. The founding of the Irish Dancing Commission in 1930 was the first. [...] The second watershed event was *Riverdance* in 1994 in which, through the power of

¹ CLRG, ‘What is Irish Dancing and why is it so popular’, *CLRG*, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.clrge.ie/index.php/en/about-us/what-it-is.html>

² S.J. Velasquez, “Today’s Irish Dancers Step Away From Stereotype”, *National Public Radio*, October 27, 2014, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/10/27/358107719/irish-dance-steps-up-diversity>

³ The Gaelic Cultural Revival refers to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century revival of interest in the Irish language, sports, folklore, music, arts and culture. A founding institution of this revival was the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge), which was established in 1893 by Irish language enthusiasts. It was set up to promote the use of the Irish language in everyday life. The League grew to have over four hundred branches around the country. The first President was Douglas Hyde, who subsequently went on to be the first President of Ireland, and he was largely concerned with the ‘de-anglicising’ of Ireland. The Irish Dancing Commission was founded by the Gaelic League.

the media, Irish dancing exceeded the control of the institutionalised competitions and found a place in the world of commercial theatre.⁴

Before the Irish Cultural Revival what is currently known as ‘Irish dancing’ would have been referred to as ‘step-dancing’, “Step-dancing in Ireland became “Irish dancing” in 1893, the same year that [Padraig] Pearse cites as the beginning of the Irish Revolution.”⁵ This shift in naming highlights one aspect of the politics of identity associated with this dance form. As Hall notes,

Irish dancing is art made sport. The contest pits the bodily expressiveness of one dancer against others. One theme of that expression, inherent in the contest, is that Irishness itself is represented in body movement. The winner is not just the best dancer but the best *Irish* dancer. These two features – competition and nationalism – have shaped the development of the form, the actual use of the body, and the structure of experiences enmeshed in the world of Irish dancing.⁶

The links between Irish nationalism and the rise of formalised Irish dance teaching throughout the twentieth century shall be further discussed in Section Two of this chapter. With the popularity of Irish Dance post-*Riverdance*, Irish dancing is now recognised globally as a competitive art form that combines cultural history with modern athleticism and dance ability,

Irish dancing is many things: a social network, a cultural form, an expressive practice, and individual achievement, a family investment, a ritual drama, a national symbol, an endless series of entertaining events, and one of the most extraordinary and highly developed dance forms in the contemporary world – a classical tradition now in its own right.⁷

Although definitions of rape culture usually pertain to the physical act of sexual violence, or at least the threat of sexual violence, this chapter explores seemingly ‘harmless’ behaviours and performances, arguing that they implicitly support this culture. Laurie Penny discusses rape culture, saying,

Telling young women that we are not allowed to make the same mistakes, have the same fun or take the same risks that young men do – risks like getting drunk, going out adventuring or travelling alone – may offer us some protection from predators in the short term. But in the long term it just gives those predators more power. It gives them the power to control women’s behaviour, to keep us fearful, and to make sure we cannot have fun and take risks without the threat of sexual

⁴ Frank Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance: Art, Sport, Duty* (Wisconsin: Macater Press, 2008), 113.

⁵ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance: Art, Sport, Duty*, 27.

⁶ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance: Art, Sport, Duty*, 4.

⁷ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance: Art, Sport, Duty*, 4.

violence. That is what rape culture is all about, and rape culture is strengthened every time we tell young women to drink less or risk sexual assault.⁸

Penny is discussing the rules and limitations that are enforced on young women living in a rape culture. Such rules are nominally expected to stop these women from experiencing sexual violence. Rape culture uses these rules to create and sustain rape myths, victim blaming, and slut shaming narratives about those who do experience sexual violence. They are explicitly gendered rules. As discussed in Chapter Three, gendered rules begin at birth - with girls given passive dolls to play with while boys receive more active and aggressive toys from a young age - and continue throughout life. These rules indoctrinate women into the beauty myth, which is a component part of rape culture. This chapter argues that such rules and limitations are placed on the female dancing body, and as such, competitive Irish dancing implicitly supports rape culture.

Emer O'Toole discusses the effects of indoctrination into girlhood, "This stuff penetrated. I didn't realise it for a long time, but the constant adult commentary on the merits of my physical appearance, it penetrated. It taught me to value myself as others seemed to value me: based on being pretty and girly. And, as I got older, I lapped it up like honey."⁹ She continues, describing the move from girlhood to womanhood, in accordance with these gendered rules, "Seeing as so much of my social preparation for womanhood has been focused on my appearance, it was a logical extension to move from pretty to sexy [...] The problem was that the attention I was receiving now contained a sexual element."¹⁰ When young female children are expected to abide by the rules of conventional femininity, they grow up in a world where they are taught that their physical appearance dictates aspects of their life. This leads to the maintaining of the rape myth that it is for women to protect themselves from sexual violence through modifying their own behaviour. This is an important tool of rape culture. This chapter argues that the rules and limitations placed on the gendered dancing body implicitly sustain this aspect of rape culture.

The research is concerned with drawing parallels and connections with the visual aesthetics of the contemporary high-level Irish dancer and feminist theories on the body in performance, and the perpetuation of rape culture. It is also concerned with the gendering of Irish dance itself, how this form of dance was traditionally masculine, became almost exclusively feminised throughout the twentieth century, and was then somewhat reclaimed as a hyper masculine art form with the rise to fame of the original male lead in *Riverdance*, Michael Flatley. It links closely with Chapter Three of this

⁸ Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution*, 144-5.

⁹ O'Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls*, 18.

¹⁰ O'Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls*, 34-5.

dissertation through its analysis of the portrayal of the female body in performance and examination of the indoctrination of female children into hetero-patriarchal society and rape culture. It also links to Chapter Two and Chapter One through its desire to deconstruct contemporary rape culture by deconstructing the performativity of the costumed body, and through interrogating the constructed binary of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ in performance. This chapter is divided into several sections that examine varying aspects of Irish dance performance. Section Two provides an exploration of the history of Irish dancing in Ireland, with a particular focus on its revival and structural reform throughout the twentieth century in Ireland. Section Three discusses the history and production of *Riverdance* as an Irish dancing phenomenon that revolutionised and professionalised Irish dancing culture through spawning a multi-million euro industry that ignited international interest in Irish dance. Section Four examines the current rules and regulations of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha (The Irish Dancing Commission) regarding the appearance of dancers in competition. Section Five uses performance studies theory to analyse the 2017 World Championships for Irish dancing that took place in Dublin in April 2017. Through examining Irish dance through these topics, this research acts as a commentary on contemporary Irish dance competitive performance and its connection to and perpetuation of contemporary rape culture.

Before focusing on the research itself, I wish to elaborate on my own position within the Irish dancing community. In a similar manner to the analysis of the *Rose of Tralee* presented in Chapter Three, this chapter argues that personal experience allows for an experiential analysis with an insider knowledge and understanding of the sport. I first began dancing at four years of age in September 1994; three months after the initial *Riverdance* performance took place as part of the interval act for the Eurovision Song Contest. I have danced for three different dance schools between 1994 and the present day, namely the *Cora Cadwell School of Irish Dancing*, *Scoil Rince Orla Nic Conuladh* and the *Colette Cooke School of Irish Dancing*. I have competed both as a child and as an adult competitor, both all over Ireland and internationally. I have competed as both a solo dancer and as part of a céilí team. I have danced for the two largest Irish Dance organisations; *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* and *Comhdháil Na Muinteoirí Rince Gaelacha*. My first dance school is a member of *Comhdháil Na Muinteoirí Rince Gaelacha* while my other two schools are members of *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*. Orla Nic Conuladh has been a registered and practicing dance teacher since 1988. She was trained by her own mother Mollie Farrelly in the *Farrelly School of Irish Dance*, and her father, Séamus Mac Conuladh was the co-founder of the World Irish Dancing Championships, as well as the

Chairman of *An Coimisiún Le Rincí Gaelacha*.¹¹ With Nic Conuladh, I competed until the age of seventeen at Dublin, Leinster and All-Ireland level. I joined the *Colette Cooke School of Irish Dancing* as an adult and have competed on a national and international level with the school. Colette Cooke's school was also set up in 1988 and Cooke also trained under Mollie Farrelly. Nic Conuladh and Cooke were part of the same World Championship winning céilí team in 1987 and 1988.¹² In a similar manner to my participation in the *Rose of Tralee* festival in order to further my understanding of the competition, with over twenty years of experience as an Irish dancer and a competitor, I have a clear understanding of Irish dancing competitions and insight into the workings of competitive Irish Dance performance. With this in mind, this chapter comprises of academic and scholarly research combined with first-hand experience of Irish dancing since the inception of *Riverdance* until the present day.

Section Two: Twentieth Century Irish Dance History in Ireland

As mentioned, Irish Dance became formalised in Ireland with the founding of *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* (CLRG) in 1930.¹³ The title translates into English as the 'Irish Dancing Commission' and it was set up by *Conradh Na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) as, "a commission for the purpose of examining the organisation of Irish dancing as it existed at that time and to make recommendations as to how it might be better organised in the future."¹⁴ According to Aoife Monks, the CLRG,

Regulated the dance form and introduced formalised and aestheticised costumes, such as heavily embroidered velvet dresses and ringleted hair for the female dancers, and white lace collars and kilts for the male dancers. [...] In line with other cultural revivalist institutions such as the Gaelic Athletics Association, An Coimisiún began to regulate the form. They rejected certain dance styles, such as the minuet, as foreign, and homogenised what had previously been a regionally

¹¹ Orla Nic Conuladh, 'About Us', *Scoil Rince Orla*, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.scoilrinceorla.com/about-us>

¹² Colette Cooke, 'Home Page', *Colette Cooke Irish Dancing*, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.cookeirishdancing.com/index.html>

¹³ Not all sources agree that the CLRG was established in 1930. For example, Aoife Monks' 2007 pamphlet entitled 'Comely Maidens and Celtic Tigers: *Riverdance* and Global Performance' states that it was established in 1931 (see Page 12 of the pamphlet). Also, In *Irish Dance* (1998), Arthur Flynn says that the first year of operation of the commission was 1932/3 (see Page 47). However, according to the Official website for *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*, it was established in 1930.

¹⁴ CLRG, 'History of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha', *CLRG*, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.clrg.ie/index.php/en/about-us/history-of-an-coimisiun-le-rinc%C3%AD-gaelacha.html>

diverse dance form. They also introduced a range of innovations, such as greater focus on solo dancing, and a series of competitions, festivals and championships.¹⁵ Barra Ó Cinnéide also comments on strict rules and regulations that the standardisation of Irish Dance through the founding of the CLRG created saying it is,

Another non-profit organisation set up to regulate what was then considered a “lawless” Irish dance world, laying down strict rules in relation to teaching practices and standards, with emphasis given to solo competition. [...] The Coimisiún quickly gained control over Irish dance with its insistence that all dance teachers be registered with the organisation. It is now the controlling body with regard to all official Irish dancing championships, not just in Ireland but in North America, Britain and Australia where there are many major events among ethnic Irish communities.¹⁶

A link can be made between the reclamation and homogenisation of the traditional form of Irish Dance with the work of Lady Augusta Gregory and W. B. Yeats with the inception of The Abbey Theatre in 1904. When Gregory and Yeats founded The Abbey, they wanted to, “show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism.”¹⁷ The original statement for the theatre read, “We propose to have performed in Dublin in the Spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature.”¹⁸ Gregory goes on to say that, “I myself never quite understood the meaning of the “Celtic Movement,” which we were said to belong to.”¹⁹ This contradiction highlights the constructed nature of the Irish Cultural Revival; the ‘ancient idealism’ was ultimately constructed by and canonised by playwrights such as Gregory and Yeats.

In a similar manner to this, it can be argued that the CLRG constructed the history and tradition of Irish Dance through its homogenisation and regulation of the previously parochial art form. Dance was also historically linked to The Abbey through dance performances staged at the theatre in its early years, “Early in the century theatre dance formed an important part of programming at the Abbey Theatre under the stewardship of

¹⁵ Aoife Monks, ‘Comely Maidens and Celtic Tigers: *Riverdance* and Global Performance’, Goldsmiths Performance Research Pamphlets Number 1. (London: Goldsmiths University, 2007), 12.

¹⁶ Barra Ó Cinnéide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon* (Dublin: Blackhall Publishing, 2002), 32-3.

¹⁷ Lady Augusta Gregory, ‘Our Irish Theatre’ in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed., John P. Harrington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 402.

¹⁸ Lady Augusta Gregory, ‘Our Irish Theatre’ in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed., John P. Harrington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 402.

¹⁹ Lady Augusta Gregory, ‘Our Irish Theatre’ in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed., John P. Harrington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 403.

Yeats and Lady Gregory.”²⁰ While the development of Irish dancing costumes will be fully discussed in Section Four of this chapter, an examination of the traditional male dancing costume highlights how constructed this sense of Irish identity through dance was. Traditional male costumes of the twentieth century consisted of plain kilts and knee socks with a white shirt. This was to represent a form of traditional national costume. However, as John Cullinane points out, “There is no evidence that the kilts were ever worn by the Irish at any time prior to the 1890s. It appears that in the spirit of the Gaelic revival the need for an identifiable national dress led to the adoption of the kilts.”²¹ Just as Gregory and Yeats constructed a particular vision of Irish traditionalism using Irish folklore, adopting kilts as a form of traditional national dress for male Irish dancers ultimately constructs a narrative of Irish Dance and Irish masculinity.

There is relatively little known about dance history in Ireland pre-twentieth century. As Helen Brennan notes, “It is not until the seventeenth century that we have any real documentary accounts referring to dance. This is by no means confined to Ireland. Worldwide, dance scholarship in general is hampered by the lack of contemporary records pre-1600s.”²² It is known that there was a tradition of ‘dance masters’ travelling around the country before the twentieth century, living an itinerant lifestyle and teaching step dances to local children for weeks at a time. Numerous scholars have written on the tradition of the dance master in Ireland, with Brendan Breathnach stating that the dance master was,

A somewhat whimsical figure, pretentious in dress and affecting a grandiloquence not sustained by his schooling. Caroline hat, swallow-tail coat and tight knee-breeches, white stockings and turn-pumps, cane with a silver head and silk tassel – thus accoutred the dancing master was obviously a cut above the wandering piper or fiddler. He was a person to be treated with due deference by his pupils. Good carriage and deportment were his by profession. He considered himself a gentleman, conducted himself as one, and endeavoured to instil this spirit into his best pupils.²³

One major shift in the teaching of Irish Dance that came with the CLRG is the move away from male dance masters to registered female dance teachers. As part of its regulatory authority, the CLRG introduced an official diploma for teachers²⁴ who wished

²⁰ Barbara O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2013), 3.

²¹ John P. Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992* (Dublin: Central Remedial Clinic Training Unit, 1999), 39.

²² Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (Dingle: Mount Eagle Publications Ltd, 1999), 16.

²³ Brendan Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Dublin: Mercier, 1971), 49.

²⁴ The current rules of CLRG state that “to be eligible for registration with An Coimisiún as a dance-teacher qualified to teach both step-dancing and céilí dancing a person must first be a current holder of

to be a part of the CLRG and to send their students to CLRG competitions, “It was An Coimisiún which first established a standard for teachers, and later for adjudicators, of Irish dancing, published a handbook of Céilí dances, and established Oireachtas an Rince, as it was then known, as a separate event.”²⁵ The CLRG did not expressly insist on female dance teachers but the formalisation of the teaching process and the changing role of women in the public sphere from the 1930s onwards can be linked to the shift in gender of dance teachers. As Barbara O’Connor points out, the shift from male to female teachers on one hand, allowed women gain some semblance of economic freedom at a time when women’s place was firmly denoted as being in the home. However, O’Connor states, “it manifested the dominant ideology about women’s primary role, in so far as teaching was seen as an extension of women’s ‘natural’ maternal role of caring for children.”²⁶ Frank Hall comments that,

For the step-dancing, gender identity became another issue in participation. For reasons not yet clear, the activity was mostly male at the turn of the century, at least teachers (dancing masters) being mostly male, but became female thereafter. Perhaps the institutionalisation of the dancing as an activity gave it a status equivalent in some ways to a sport, but because it was open to girls, unlike hurling or football, dancing became the province of females. We can only speculate at this point, but the spurious identity of the kilt as traditional Irish dancing dress by Gaelic League enthusiasts may have played a role.²⁷

Hall argues that there are ‘unclear reasons’ as to why dancing, and dance teaching in particular, became a largely female pursuit. However, I would contend that a clear link can be drawn between this shift from male to female dance teachers and the agenda of the Irish Free State where the role of the woman as care giver and homemaker was enshrined in the *Constitution of Ireland*.²⁸ This is a clear example of the performance of the strict

the Teacher’s Certificate of An Coimisiún (T.C.R.G) as provided in these rules.” The full set of current rules updated September 12, 2016 for the CLRG are available on the CLRG website, <https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/CLRG-Rules-Update-September-12th-2016.pdf> The rule here quoted, 2.2.2, is on page 3.

²⁵ CLRG, ‘History of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha’, *CLRG*, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.clrg.ie/index.php/en/about-us/history-of-an-coimisiun-le-rinc%C3%AD-gaelacha.html>

²⁶ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 149.

²⁷ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance: Art, Sport, Duty*, 117.

²⁸ As quoted in Chapter One, Article 41.1 and 41.2 of *Bunreacht Na hÉireann: Constitution of Ireland* state: “In particular the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home”

Bunreacht Na hÉireann: Constitution of Ireland, ‘Article 41.1 and 41.2’, October, 2015, 164, accessed February 6, 2017, http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/Bunreacht_na_hÉireann_October_2015_Edition.pdf

hetero-patriarchal gender binary in Irish culture that helped lead to the creation of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ behaviours and to rape culture through the strict classification of ‘appropriate’ behaviours based on gender. The performative power of such classification implicitly effects how males and females feel that they should behave, and can lead to the creation of rape myths, victim blaming, and slut shaming narratives.

When discussing the impact of assumed gender roles, Emer O’Toole comments on the impact of video games, “To an outsider observing, looking at three children watching cartoons or playing computer games, it might seem that my brothers and I were having similar experiences. But we were not. The boys were learning that they were the protagonists, and I was learning that I was the understudy. Or the house maid.”²⁹ This strict gendering is culturally constructed, and O’Toole’s point serves as another example of how males and females are expected to behave. This can implicitly lead to the sustaining of rape culture through the repetition of such narratives. This aspect of rape culture focuses on the control of females through imposing assumed gender roles onto them. As Laurie Penny points out, “To live in rape culture is to balance the possibility of being at less risk of sexual violence if you dress conservatively, don’t go out and have fun, don’t travel alone and don’t ever upset your partner against the certainty that you will live a smaller, sadder life. It is not about protecting women. It is about controlling women.”³⁰ This research contends that the move to reinforce the hetero-patriarchal gender binary through insisting on female dance teachers is one way in which such gendered roles are imposed on women. Such impositions lead to a reaffirming of the beauty myth and the implicit maintaining of rape culture.

The shift to female teachers also arguably influenced the numbers of males enrolling in dance classes as, “there was greater potential for the expression of masculinity on the sports field than on the dance floor.”³¹ As highlighted by Frank McCourt in *Angela’s Ashes*, a boy taking part in Irish dancing throughout the twentieth century risked his reputation as the hetero-normative gender binary imposed strict social rules on who could dance,

He wants to know why I’m dancing, that everyone knows dancing is a sissy thing and I’ll wind up like Cyril Benson wearing a kilt and medals and dancing all over with girls. He says that next thing I’ll be sitting in the kitchen knitting socks. He says dancing will destroy me and I won’t be fit to play any kind of football, soccer,

²⁹ O’Toole, *Girls Will Be Girls*, 29-30.

³⁰ Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution*, 146-7.

³¹ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 149.

rugby or Gaelic football itself because the dancing teaches you to run like a sissy and everyone will laugh.³²

Not only does this quote demonstrate the strict gendering of Irish society in the twentieth century, but it also highlights the socially accepted constructed ‘inferiority’ of both females and supposedly ‘female pursuits’, such as dance. This is a stereotype not confined to Irish dancing alone, but also seen in perceptions of other dance styles such as ballet. The stereotype makes no allowance for the athletic ability of dancers, which arguably rivals the athletic ability of sports participants, and it ensures that women remain in a subordinate and oppressed social position as it deems dancing to be ‘sissy’ and less challenging than other sports activities. This leads to the creation of ‘toxic masculinity’, because, as discussed in the Introductory Chapter, using feminising sentiments as insults on a male’s ‘masculinity’ directly sustains the performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ and the binary hierarchical gender binary. It sustains the constructed fallacy of ‘feminine as other’ and subsequently ‘feminine as lesser’. This allows for the proliferation of rape culture as ‘othering’ women and seeing them as ‘lesser’ often leads to objectification behaviours.

Separate from the implied gendering of the teachers and the dance students, there has also been a distinct gendering of the parents involved in supporting their children through dance classes in contemporary times. The idea of the ‘dancing mother’ is a common feature in contemporary dance performance. Helena Wulff has defined ‘dancing mothers’ as,

Mothers of dance students and sports students, who take a special interest in their children’s activities, are a familiar phenomenon in dance and sports communities. This is, as should be clear by now, certainly the case in the community of Irish competitive dancing as well. Mothers of Irish dancers are said to monitor their children’s dancing either because they never got to do Irish dancing themselves, or because they did and now they want their children to have the same experience themselves.³³

This stereotype of the ‘dancing mother’ who is pushy and aggressive in her pursuit of her child’s success is perpetuated in such contemporary reality television shows as *Dance Moms* [Note 6], *Dance Mums with Jennifer Ellison* [Note 7], *Toddlers and Tiaras* [Note 8], and Irish Dance documentary series, *Jigs and Wigs: The Competitive World of Irish Dance* [Note 9].

While only one of the shows here listed is solely concerned with the world of Irish Dance, the stereotype of the ‘dancing mother’ is perpetuated throughout all of the various

³² Frank McCourt, *Angela’s Ashes* (New York: Scriber, 1996), 143.

³³ Helena Wulff, *Dancing at the Crossroads, Memory and Mobility in Ireland* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 101.

series. It is a constructed trope that transcends specific dance forms and is widely recognisable in contemporary dance performance. An application form for mothers to have them and their child featured on the seventh season of *Dance Moms* plays on this trope through asking such questions as, “Which mom(s) on Dance Moms do you feel you most relate to, and why?”, “Which mom(s) on Dance Moms do you think you would butt heads with, and why?” and, “How would the other dance moms at your studio describe you?”³⁴ The form also insists on attaching a photograph of the child, the mother, and one of the mother and child together.³⁵ Such an unquestionable focus on the role of the mother as opposed to the father, or guardian, in a child’s dance career highlights the gendered expectations associated with contemporary dance performance. Arguably, such a stringent gendered expectation can be linked to wider societal expectations of the mother as primary care giver. While the ‘dancing mother’ may be seen as a contemporary construction within the dance community, and is therefore not explicitly linked to the historical regulation of Irish Dance in Ireland, the fact that such a notion has been constructed and is now widely accepted as normative in the competitive dancing world can be linked to the gendering of dance as a whole as feminine historically.

It is also important to note connotations behind the phrase ‘dance mother’. It is often regarded as an insult because the mother is seen as overly pushy, too demanding of her child and as though she is living her own dream through her child. Reality shows such as *Dance Moms* deliberately rely on such negative connotations in order to create a dramatic television programme. The mothers on such a programme constantly fight with each other and with the dance teacher, portraying stereotypes associated with ‘toxic femininity’. The construct of the ‘dancing mother’ as an insult is another way to delegitimise and negatively feminise dancing, adding to the construction of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ and striving to perpetuate the hetero-patriarchal gender binary, which allows for the proliferation of contemporary rape culture.

This strict gendering of the Irish dancing body throughout the twentieth century was furthered by the CLRG through the production of dance manuals that clearly defined male and female dance roles within céilí dancing. Such rules continue to the current day with the rules for both the céilí dancing and figure dancing championships at the 2017 World Championships dictating that, “A ‘mixed’ team means four boys and four girls. It is not permissible to dance a girl as a boy or vice versa.”³⁶ Not only does this type of

³⁴ ‘Dance Moms Season Seven Application Form’, *Dance Moms*, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://form.jotform.com/61936400340144>

³⁵ ‘Dance Moms Season Seven Application Form’, *Dance Moms*, accessed March 13, 2017, <https://form.jotform.com/61936400340144>

³⁶ CLRG, ‘An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha, 47ú Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2017 (The 47th World Irish Dancing Championships 2017) Syllabus’, *CLRG*, accessed March 8, 2017,

gendering serve to perpetuate the normative gender binary in dance, but the CLRG also went a step further in gendering the type of dance moves appropriate for male and female dancers. As O'Connor points out, "From the early dance manuals we saw how dance regimes were gendered, with the rules for the appropriate movement of male and female dancing bodies, of a dancing style encouraging lightness and grace for women and strength and complexity for men."³⁷ The exact rules and regulations for contemporary CLRG competitions will be discussed in detail in Section Four, but it is important to note that the consequence of denoting 'lightness and grace' as idyllic for women and 'strength and complexity' as the ideal for men, as such stereotyping ultimately supports the patriarchal binary. It implies that these are the 'correct' and normative ways for men and women to behave, and to aspire to perform both on stage and in everyday life. Such an idea relies on binary gender stereotypes that lead to performances of 'toxic masculinity' and 'toxic femininity' in contemporary culture, as discussed in Chapter Two. The CLRG continues to control and regulate Irish Dance form through its revising and reissuing of its original dance manual form the 1930s,

One of the important tasks undertaken by the early pioneers of An Coimisiún was the publication of a handbook of ten Ceilí Dances in 1939. In subsequent years two more handbooks were published, and all three were later combined in one volume, the study of which has become a requirement for persons aspiring to become teachers of Irish Dancing. In 2014 An Coimisiún commissioned a complete revamp of this publication, and produced a DVD to illustrate the entire thirty dances. This publication will become the official handbook for all events from September 2015 onward.³⁸

Such a level of control has a significant influence on the production and performance of Irish Dance all over the world.

The overt gendering of the Irish dancing body is also connected to the notion of 'Woman as Ireland'³⁹ put forward by those involved in the Irish Cultural Revival and

https://www.clrge.ie/images/World_Syllabus_2017_Layout_1.pdf Céilí Dancing Championships 2017, Rule 3, P,9, Figure Dancing Championships 2017, Rule 9, P,12.

³⁷ O'Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 149.

³⁸ CLRG, 'History of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha', *CLRG*, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.clrge.ie/index.php/en/about-us/history-of-an-coimisiun-le-rinc%C3%AD-gaelacha.html>

³⁹ In Part One of Section Two in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the name 'Aisling' is historicised and contextualised in relation to its use in Murray's and O'Donovan's play *Oh! What a Lovely Rose!*, and its connection to the concept of 'woman as Ireland' in Irish literature and iconography. The phrase 'woman as Ireland' denotes the use of a woman or female character as a symbol or representation of Ireland. One example of this can be seen in *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* where the character of the Old Woman seeks help from the local young men in order to 'reclaim her four green fields'. When the male character agrees to leave with her, she is transformed into a beautiful young woman. This is symbolic of young men fighting for Irish independence. It is a patriarchal construction to entice men to fight and die in order to protect women. It is deeply oppressive to women as it removes their agency and subjectivity in

solidified by the work of Gregory and Yeats on *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.⁴⁰ As O'Connor writes, "the young female dancing body became the object of the public gaze and valorised as symbolic of Irish national identity."⁴¹ Such a construction of 'woman as Ireland' highlights the clear agenda of those involved in the Irish Cultural Revival and the Irish Free State as females were routinely oppressed and objectified in a bid to further the political aims of a violently hetero-normative patriarchy. As Walsh points out, "In the context of Irish culture, the category 'woman' has long constituted a charged locus of political struggle."⁴² The perfect image of the idealised 'Cathleen' of Gregory's and Yeats's work was mass produced in the body of the idyllic Irish dancer while the Catholic Church and the State colluded in the abuse and demonisation of young Irish women who 'failed' in their dutiful femininity through becoming pregnant outside of marriage. As Gabriella Calchi Novati points out while quoting Tom Inglis,

The Catholic Church promoted the Virgin Mary as the unique archetype of the new national Irish woman: 'the chaste, modest and humble virtues of Irish women and mothers grew apace with their penitential devotion to the Our Lady [...] an ideal-type figure that was fecund and female and yet remained virgin and pure.'

This analysis illustrates the oxymoronic coupling of virginity and motherhood.⁴³ Throughout the post-Independence decades in Ireland, females living in Ireland have been classified according to the Madonna/Whore binary where those who took on the image of the subservient 'comely maidens dancing at the crossroads' [Note 10], have been heralded as morally superior to those who do not. Walsh argues that, "While Irish manhood may have been cursed by impotency within a colonial imaginary, Irish womanhood was shaped by restrictive norms measured against the Virgin Mary, Mother Ireland, and Eamon deValera's fantasy of happy maidens."⁴⁴ As Calchi Novati remarks, "Irish Law constructed the image of woman as living embodiment of the newborn nation and the dichotomised depiction of woman as either mother or virgin."⁴⁵

Meanwhile, women who defied the strict moral code of the chaste woman, even if they were not consenting adults, were abused, vilified and tortured by the Church and State alike. One of the most prominent examples of this comes from the mass incarceration of unmarried mothers at mother and baby homes across the country, where women were

favour of viewing women as emblematic of Ireland. The trope of 'woman as Ireland' precedes the fight for independence in the early twentieth century but came to great prominence in this period.

⁴⁰ Lady Augusta Gregory, William Butler Yeats, 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan' in *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*, ed. John P. Harrington (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 3-11.

⁴¹ O'Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 149

⁴² Walsh, 'Homelysexuality and the 'Beauty' Pageant', 197.

⁴³ Calchi Novati, 'Challenging patriarchal Imagery: Amanda Coogan's Performance Art', 182.

⁴⁴ Walsh, 'Homelysexuality and the 'Beauty' Pageant', 197.

⁴⁵ Calchi Novati, 'Challenging patriarchal Imagery: Amanda Coogan's Performance Art', 182.

routinely separated from their children and treated inhumanely while often their babies were sold to America or maltreated until death. On March 3, 2017, mass unmarked graves were revealed at the site of one such mother and baby home in Tuam, Co. Galway that was operational between 1925 and 1961, where the remains of 796 babies and toddlers were uncovered in two septic tanks, “Human remains of a significant number of babies and infants up to three years of age have been found on the site of the former mother and baby home in Tuam, Co Galway, it has been confirmed.”⁴⁶ Such a practice of abusing and incarcerating women continued until the closure of the last Magdalene Laundry in 1996.⁴⁷ Arguably this demonisation of women in Ireland is still present in the lack of access to full reproductive health care for women as of 2017, with the continued existence of the Eighth Amendment to the *Constitution of Ireland* that effectively bans abortion.⁴⁸ With all of this in mind, it can be argued that the war on women in Ireland, that has raged from the time of Irish Independence until the present day has historically used the image of the idealised female Irish dancing body as a continuation of the trope of ‘woman as Ireland’, and as a propaganda tool for the oppression of Irish women.

O’Connor goes on to link this gendered performance with the potential for objectification of the female body, “the dance performers, who were at one and the same time objectified by the public (male?) gaze while actively participating in a pleasurable and powerful activity.”⁴⁹ This objectification and link to Laura Mulvey’s theory on the construction of the ‘male gaze’ will be furthered discussed when analysing the costumes of contemporary Irish dancers, but it is important to note how such a form of female objectification and misogyny has been woven into the history of Irish Dance since the founding of the CLRG.

While the historical misogynistic confined role of women in Ireland and the use of Irish dancing to further oppress and demonise certain women has been argued, it is also necessary to examine how traditional dance in Ireland as a distinct art form has historically been repressed. This has happened either through colonial rule and invasion, or oppression

⁴⁶ Elaine Edwards, ‘Tuam babies: ‘Significant’ quantities of human remains found at former home’, *Irish Times*, March 3, 2017, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/tuam-babies-significant-quantities-of-human-remains-found-at-former-home-1.2996599>

⁴⁷ Gary Culliton, ‘Last Days Of A Laundry’, *Irish Times*, September 25, 1996, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/last-days-of-a-laundry-1.89388>

⁴⁸ *Bunreacht Na hÉireann: Constitution of Ireland*, Article 40.3.3, October, 2015, 154, accessed February 6, 2017,

http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/Bunreacht_na_hÉireann_October_2015_Edition.pdf

“The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.”

⁴⁹ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 149.

by the Catholic Church. As Flynn points out regarding international forces that impacted on the development of Irish Dance,

Like most cultures, Ireland has a strong tradition of dance. Unfortunately, there is little written evidence of the national dances of Ireland in earlier centuries, as Viking invaders in the eighth century destroyed most books of this period. The English authorities introduced stringent laws in an attempt to suppress the Irish people, their customs, language, dance and music, in particular the draconian Statutes of Kilkenny of 1366.⁵⁰

When examining how the Catholic Church has oppressed traditional Irish Dance, the performance style itself can be analysed. Traditional Irish Dance performance involves a very definite and distinct style of carriage where the legs of the dancer move athletically, and somewhat balletically, while the upper half of the body remains rigid and controlled. Hall states that this particular style of movement is part of the reason he decided to study the art form, “And quite honestly, I wanted to know why the Irish dancers I saw were so amazingly dexterous with their feet while so frozen above the waist.”⁵¹ The exact reasoning for this development in Irish Dance is unknown, but numerous myths surrounding it focus on the restrictions placed on dance in Ireland historically. Hall contends that,

There are stories and explanations offered to account for the remarkable posture. One author traces the style to a ruling by a priest in Donegal who said that hands on hips gave the appearance of haughtiness and suggestiveness. Several consultants have explained that since the Catholic Church disapproved of dancing in earlier times, people developed the style of keeping the upper body still so that a priest passing by and glancing in the window could not tell if people were dancing. Another explanation is structurally similar, with hedge schools in penal times as the setting, and British soldiers the disapproving authorities fooled by the non-dancing posture.⁵²

The physicality of contemporary Irish Dance performance will be further discussed throughout the chapter but it is important to note here how the dance has been so intrinsically linked historically to a performance of nationhood and repression from both British colonial rule and the Catholic Church. As O’Connor argues, “The predominant stereotype of the Irish dancing body for much of the twentieth century has been a negative one of a rigid upper body where nothing moves but the feet, frequently seen as a reflection

⁵⁰ Arthur Flynn, *Irish Dance* (Belfast: Appletree Press Ltd., 1998), 9-10.

⁵¹ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, xi.

⁵² Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 15.

of a repressed and constrained body, fearful of touch and sensuality.”⁵³ It is clear from reading the works of academics such as O’Connor, Hall, Monks and Flynn that modern Irish Dance analysis must comment on the influence of both the Catholic Church and the Irish State on the construction of the CLRG and control of the art form.

The CLRG is no longer the sole governing body for Irish Dance both in Ireland and internationally. As previously mentioned, in 1969 a break-away group of teachers formed the second commission, *Comhdháil Na Muinteoirí Rince Gaelacha* (CNMRG). Flynn writes on the formation of this body, “Over a period a number of policy differences occurred within the commission resulting in a split in the organisation. The breakaway group of dancing teachers set up their own organisation called *Comhdháil Na Muinteoirí Rince Gaelacha* in 1969.”⁵⁴ CNMRG is the second largest governing body for Irish Dance and there are currently twenty-eight branches of the organisation worldwide [Note 11]. There have been numerous other Irish Dance bodies set up both in Ireland and internationally. These include the *Irish Dancing Network* (IDN) [Note 12], the *Celtic Association of Irish Dance* (CAID) [Note 13], *Cumann Rince Náisiúnta* (CRN) [Note 14], the *World Irish Dance Association* (WIDA) [Note 15], the *National Irish Dance Federation* (NAIDF) [Note 16], the *Irish Dance Teachers Association of North America* (IDTANA) [Note 17], *Cumann Rince Dea Mheasa* (CRDM) [Note 18], and the *Festival Dance Teachers Association* (FDTA) [Note 19]. The CLRG and CNMRG are referred to as the ‘big two’⁵⁵ in the Irish Dance community as they are the largest and farthest-reaching organisations.

While there are numerous organisations currently operational around the world for Irish dancers, there are several reasons that this research focuses predominantly on the CLRG. As previously mentioned, it is the original governing body for Irish Dance and it has the most global influence on Irish dancing of any of the various governing bodies. While the CNMRG in particular is a significant body, and has hosted its own annual World Championships since 2012, the organisation is mostly focused in Ireland and Britain. In juxtaposition to this, the CLRG hosted the original *Oireachtas Rince Na Cruinne* (World Championships) in 1970, and currently has up to five thousand dancers from all over the world now competing at the event annually.⁵⁶ This makes it the largest Irish Dance

⁵³ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 10.

⁵⁴ Flynn, *Irish Dance*, 48.

⁵⁵ ‘Home’, *Feisbook*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://feisbook.weebly.com/knowledge.html>

⁵⁶ This figure is stated by the narrator of TLC’s Irish Dance documentary entitled *The Big Jig* which originally aired on the TLC network in November 2012 and follows five American Irish dancers as they prepare for the World Championships that took place in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 2012. The documentary was produced by Sirens Media with executive producers Rebecca Toth Diefenbach and Valerie Haselton. The full documentary was published to YouTube by user ‘saoirse4280’ on 10

competition in the world. As Wulff says when discussing the World Championships, “Since 1970, the Irish Dancing Commission has been responsible for arranging the annual World Championships in Irish Dancing. The World’s is the biggest competition in Irish dancing, and the only one that requires that competitors qualify.”⁵⁷

As will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter, *Riverdance* has had an enormous impact on Irish dancing throughout the world. The two leads of the original *Riverdance* performance, namely Irish-Americans Jean Butler and Michael Flatley, both trained as CLRG dancers. Most of the other thirty-eight dancers who took part in the Eurovision performance of *Riverdance* were also members of the CLRG. Butler and Flatley are also World Champion dancers, with Flatley becoming the first ever American World Champion in 1975.⁵⁸

The CLRG is historically significant in Ireland, as previously discussed and it remains the trendsetter for Irish dancing costumes, regulations and dance moves. The CLRG has created and sustained the accepted ‘tradition’ of Irish Dance. As Richard Schechner points out, “What rules are to games and sports, traditions are to ritual and conventions are to theatre, dance, and music.”⁵⁹ So the CLRG has essentially created the standards to which all dancers must conform. This is comparable to beauty pageant institutions in creating and sustaining ‘normative’ standards through repetition and rules. With regard to the actual style of dance, the CLRG is responsible for dictating that the ‘Southern’ or ‘Munster’ style of dance has become the most commonly known and accepted form of modern Irish dance. The two other main forms of Irish Dance are the ‘Sean Nós’ style of dance mostly associated with Connemara in the west of Ireland and the ‘Festival’ style or dance that is prominent in the Northern province of Ireland, Ulster. On discussing these three varying forms of Irish dance style, Brennan notes that the ‘Munster’ style was,

the only style to have been codified and systematically taught. It forms the basis of the style used by the modern Irish dancing schools, albeit in a “heightened”, or as they describe it, a “developed” form. It also is the origin of the stepping to be seen in *Riverdance* and other stage shows, since the choreographers and dancers in these shows are the product of the modern dancing schools.⁶⁰

November 2012, and is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiyGb_EY4PU (Accessed March 14, 2017).

⁵⁷ Wulff, *Dancing at the Crossroads, Memory and Mobility in Ireland*, 93.

⁵⁸ Shane Hegarty, ‘A Dancer Left Reeling’, *Irish Times*, March 8, 2003, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/a-dancer-left-reeling-1.351505>

⁵⁹ Richard, Schechner, *Performance Theory*, new ed. (Oxford: Routledge Classics, 2003), 13.

⁶⁰ Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, 165.

This style is recognisable through its positioning of the foot as the dancer remains high on the ball of their foot. Brennan writes, “The most prominent feature of the southern style is that the dancer is poised on the ball of the foot. The foot does not drop on to the heel except on rare occasions. The basic foot position is feet side by side with toes pointed outwards, but not exaggeratedly so.”⁶¹ When commenting on the ‘Sean Níos’ and ‘Festival’ styles of dance, Brennan notes how these styles resemble more of a walking movement. In ‘Sean Níos’, “The foot position is more as in normal walking in that the dancer is not primarily positioned on the balls of the feet as in the Munster style.”⁶² ‘Festival’ dancing, “features prominently a form of heel-and-toe stepping which distinguishes both these styles from the southern tradition which rarely uses the heel in its step patterns.”⁶³

While the ‘Munster’ style of dancing has become the standardised form of dance internationally, the ‘Sean Níos’ and ‘Festival’ styles of dance are popular in Ireland but not widely internationally. As Ó Cinnéide points out regarding the proliferation of the ‘Munster’ style of dance internationally, “The modern dancing school style can be distinguished from the traditional style by the standardisation that the dance schools have introduced as a result of competition regulations. So, audiences have come to accept modification and “elaboration” of the Munster style as “real” Irish dancing.”⁶⁴ For all of these reasons presented, the CLRG is the most important and influential Irish dancing governing body hence, this research focuses predominantly on the CLRG.

The reason for examining how exactly the CLRG have controlled and enforced one particular style of dance is because of how it highlights how one particular strand of a narrative can become the most dominant. Historically there have been several forms of Irish dancing that developed regionally through teaching and practice, each as valid as the next. In the CLRG choosing to promote one particular style as the pinnacle or ‘normative’ form of dance, a hierarchy is constructed where Irish dance becomes homogenised, and what would have been regarded as just one form of the dance has become the most accepted form. Almost ninety years on from the founding of the CLRG, the ‘Munster’ style of Irish dancing is unquestioned as the normative form of dance. There is no significant reasoning for this other than that it was promoted by the CLRG. This act of constructing a hierarchical narrative of dance is comparable to the construction of the hetero-patriarchal gender binary. There is no real reason – biological, physical, intellectual or other – to have contemporary society facilitated through a strict gender binary. The binary is a construct of patriarchal control. Rape myths, victim blaming, slut-shaming,

⁶¹ Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, 166.

⁶² Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, 168.

⁶³ Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, 171.

⁶⁴ Barra Ó Cinnéide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon* (Dublin: Blackhall Publishing, 2002), 35.

‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ are constructed through this patriarchal control. This control is cyclically sustained and perpetuated through the acceptance and performance of these constructs. The CLRG is historically a patriarchal body that has formed a narrative based on subjective opinion and this narrative is now accepted and unchallenged by the dance community. Dance organisations separate to the CLRG do now exist, but the dance style perpetuated throughout remains largely uniform. While the privileging of one dance style by the CLRG is not an act that specifically supports and sustains rape culture, the acceptance of its exertion of patriarchal control in dance style serves as an example of how cultural constructs become embedded in society. Also, arguably the CLRG does use its patriarchal hierarchy to sustain contemporary rape culture through its rules on costume for dance competitors, as is further discussed throughout this chapter.

Section Three: The *Riverdance* Effect

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, two cultural events that took place in the twentieth century in Ireland transformed Irish dancing from a casual pastime, to a regulated global art form, to a professional industry. The first event was the effect of the Cultural Revival and the subsequent founding of the CLRG in the early twentieth century. The second event was the neo-Revivalist explosion of *Riverdance* in the mid 1990s. The influence of *Riverdance*, and the subsequent commercial success of the various Irish dancing touring shows it spawned, have been far beyond any aims of the original seven-minute dance performance. As noted by Hall, “Irish step-dancing on the eve of *Riverdance* was in some ways unknown in Ireland itself, or known only as a spurious tradition, though practiced avidly by those who taught and competed beyond beginning levels.”⁶⁵ As quoted by Kristina Varade, Dublin based Irish dance teacher and costume designer Ronan McCormack, “goes so far as to define Irish dance as an art form as being either “pre-*Riverdance* or post-*Riverdance*”: he observes that as a result of global dissemination, “Irish dancing in nations that were involved in competitive Irish dance pre-*Riverdance* had already become standardised post-*Riverdance*”.”⁶⁶

This section will give the history of *Riverdance*, and its relation to contemporary rape culture, and discuss its influences on Irish dancing both stylistically and aesthetically as it effectively rejuvenated Irish interest in the dance form, took it to a global stage and ‘sexed up’ the performance of Irish Dance. As Aoife Monks points out when discussing

⁶⁵ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 118.

⁶⁶ Kristina R. Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’: Changes in Irish Dance Costume in the New Millennium’, in *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 19, Number 3, Autumn 2015, 60.

the influence of *Riverdance*, “The innovations in the dance form, such as the dancers’ use of their arms, the sexing up of the female costumes, the substitution of trousers for kilts on the men, and the Busby Berkeley-style dance formations, produced a modernist shock of the new Irish popular culture.”⁶⁷ It will also comment on the main rival show spawned by *Riverdance*, namely Michael Flatley’s *Lord of the Dance*, as this show proves more explicit in its sexualisation and objectification of ‘sexed up’ female dancers, and Flatley performs ‘toxic masculinity’ both through his onstage character and his offstage choreographic choices.

Riverdance was first performed as the interval act at the thirty-ninth Eurovision Song Contest [Note 20], held in the Point Theatre in Dublin, Ireland on April 30, 1994.⁶⁸ Barra Ó Cinnéide argues that although this interval act is accepted as the inception of *Riverdance*, its roots can be traced back to 1992, “it is undoubtedly possible to trace the immediate roots of “Riverdance” to the presentation at the Irish pavilion during the World Fair held in Seville, Spain in 1992. This theatrical production was a fusion of flamenco and Irish dance styles, the music for which was developed by Bill Whelan, the composer of “Riverdance”.”⁶⁹ Ireland has had unprecedented success at the Eurovision Song Contest with a total of seven wins between 1970 and 1996 [Note 21], including Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan winning in 1994 for Ireland with the song *Rock ‘n’ Roll Kids* the same year that *Riverdance* was first performed.

It is fair to argue that even though Ireland won the contest in 1994, the song was largely overshadowed by the interval act, “this interlude item overshadowed the result of the song contest – the winning of the award by an Irish entry for an unprecedented third time in succession.”⁷⁰ Theorists argue over the number of people who saw the performance live on the night. Arthur Flynn writes that, “It was transmitted to an estimated 300 million viewers world-wide.”⁷¹ Aoife Monks says that it was, “Watched by one hundred million viewers live on television, the filler piece ended up eclipsing the main event.”⁷² However, Barra Ó Cinnéide says that, “It is claimed that over 300 million viewers tuned in, worldwide, to the 1994 Eurovision broadcast at some point during the three hour schedule. [...] It is likely that no more than 10 per cent of this number, i.e. 30 million viewers, saw

⁶⁷ Aoife Monks. ‘Comely Maidens and Celtic Tigers: *Riverdance* and Global Performance’, 2.

⁶⁸ ‘Eurovision Dublin 1994’, Video Link to original *Riverdance* performance, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://riverdance.com/the-show/the-journey/> Published on official *Riverdance* website. First performed April 30, 1994 as *The Point Theatre*, Dublin. Choreographed by Michael Flatley, Original Score by Bill Whelan, Produced by John McColgan and Moya Doherty, Lead Dancers Jean Butler and Michael Flatley.

⁶⁹ Ó Cinnéide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon*, 62.

⁷⁰ Ó Cinnéide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon*, xiv.

⁷¹ Flynn, *Irish Dance*, 61.

⁷² Monks. ‘Comely Maidens and Celtic Tigers: *Riverdance* and Global Performance’, 2.

the interlude, live, on that particular Saturday evening.”⁷³ Regardless of the audience number for the live event, *Riverdance* proved popular enough that it was subsequently produced into a full two-hour long show that premiered on February 9, 1995, “*Riverdance - The Show*, the first Irish dance show ever, opens at the Point Theatre, Dublin for a sell-out five-week run, with tickets reaching record sales of over 120,000.”⁷⁴ It subsequently premiered in London on June 6, 1995, New York on March 13, 1996, and Oberhausen, Germany on July 4, 1997 before going on to tour to over four hundred and fifty venues worldwide.⁷⁵ Bill Whelan won a Grammy Award for the *Riverdance Album* for the best Musical Show Album on February 26, 1997.⁷⁶ More than twenty years since its first performance, *Riverdance* remains popular throughout the world with it travelling to Ireland, America, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands in 2017.⁷⁷

The reason for commenting on the commercial success of *Riverdance* is to highlight the global cultural impact of the show. Its continued popularity means that it remains influential to child dancers who aspire to perform in it. This means that the perpetuation of rape culture throughout the show, as is discussed in this section, not only affects its audiences, but also influences aspiring child dancers. As previously mentioned, the performative power of rape culture in Irish dancing lies in its implicit reinforcement of gender stereotypes. These stereotypes lead to an indoctrination into the beauty myth, and rape myth narratives. In Part One of Section Three of Chapter Three, the inclusion of children as ‘Rose Buds’ in the *Rose of Tralee* was discussed. As argued, this inclusion of children in an adult pageant acts as a powerful mode of indoctrinating young female children into the beauty myth and rape culture from a young age. In a similar manner, child dancers who see *Riverdance*, and want to one day perform in the show, are undoubtedly influenced by its portrayal of rape culture. In this way, the ‘sexed up’ conveyance of dancers in *Riverdance* acts to indoctrinate child dancers into the rape culture where women are often sexualised and objectified.

Just as the Irish Cultural Revival is linked to ideas of nationalism and republicanism, *Riverdance* is inextricably linked to notions of ‘Irishness’, ‘Irish identity’ and capitalism. Academics such as Barbara O’Connor have commented on how,

⁷³ Ó Cinnéide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon*, 63-4.

⁷⁴ ‘The Journey – Opening Night at The Point Theatre, Dublin’, *Riverdance*, March 15, 2017, <http://riverdance.com/the-show/the-journey/>

⁷⁵ ‘The Journey – Opening Night at The Point Theatre, Dublin’, *Riverdance*, March 15, 2017, <http://riverdance.com/the-show/the-journey/>

⁷⁶ ‘The Journey – Opening Night at The Point Theatre, Dublin’, *Riverdance*, March 15, 2017, <http://riverdance.com/the-show/the-journey/>

⁷⁷ ‘Tours & Tickets’, *Riverdance*, March 16, 2017, <http://riverdance.com/tours/>

“*Riverdance* is very closely associated with the Celtic Tiger.”⁷⁸ For this reason, its performance and perpetuation of rape culture has direct implications for the portrayal of rape culture in contemporary Irish society. In a similar manner to the constructed nature of Irish ‘traditionalism’ through regulated Irish Dance as a result of the formation of the CLRG, *Riverdance* furthered and elaborated on such culturally constructed identities for commercial gain,

While *Riverdance* can be seen as a continuation of the tropes and paradoxes of the cultural revivalist movement, it can also be seen to operate as an extension of the tourist practices of Irishness around the world. *Riverdance* operates as a kind of self-Orientalizing mode of Irishness that is sold to the global market of Irish expats and emigrants, and as a brand to the rest of the world.⁷⁹

The link to the motives of Irish Cultural Revival is evident in the performance of *The Countess Cathleen/Women of the Sidhe*⁸⁰ routine that forms a part of the full show. The six-minute piece begins with six female dancers performing a slip-jig in traditional light shoes [Note 22]. They leave the stage and the lead female dancer appears dancing a similarly balletic slip-jig. She moves around the stage and does not make significant eye contact with the audience. The stage then darkens as she adopts a fearful facial expression and runs off stage. Three male dancers appear with a change of music and perform a war-like dance. The lead female subsequently re-appears with the other female dancers, all now wearing hard shoes, and they perform a loud hornpipe while the lead female commands the stage as a newly empowered dancer. The female dancers leave the stage; the lead female dancer then directs the three male dancers off stage and finishes the piece alone in the centre of the stage. She does this while making direct eye contact with the audience, with a dominant and strong performance that differs greatly from the more balletic light dance from the beginning of the piece.

This piece is quite clearly a re-telling of Gregory’s and Yeats’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. In re-telling this story, the show maintains a distinct link to the Nationalist and Republican ideals of those involved in the Cultural Revival. As Fintan O’Toole notes, “Irish showbiz like “*Riverdance*” owes as many regards to W.B. Yeats as it does to Broadway. [...] “*Riverdance*” suggests that Irish popular culture is now so adaptable that it can put together almost any number of contradictory influences and elements.”⁸¹ *Riverdance* has capitalised on the ideas of the Cultural Revival and turned them into a

⁷⁸ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 127.

⁷⁹ Monks. ‘Comely Maidens and Celtic Tigers: *Riverdance* and Global Performance’, 13.

⁸⁰ *Riverdance*, ‘*Riverdance*: Countess Cathleen 1995’, *YouTube*, March 16, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8czqsOGyVs>

⁸¹ Fintan O’Toole, *The Ex-Isle of Erin* (Dublin: New island Books, 1996), 150.

monetary venture. In this way, the show ‘self-Orientalises’ through using its history, both real and constructed, to create a piece of light entertainment.

The Countess Cathleen/Women of the Sidhe routine simultaneously showcases a very specific performance of limiting, constructed femininity that can be interpreted as a perpetuation of the hetero-patriarchal gender binary, and exemplary of the trope of ‘woman as Ireland’. The lead female dancer’s performance at the beginning of this piece is that of a meek, shy and vulnerable young woman who magically transforms into a strong, defiant and fearless leader by the end because male dancers have come to support her. This is not an actual depiction of a character on a developmental journey, but rather a binary performance that serves to portray the woman as a representational symbol rather than as an actual woman. In this way, the show reduces the lead female to a vehicle to further the story rather than a character with her own story to tell.

Once the female lead is objectified in this way, it becomes easier to sexualise her, as her agency is taken from her. This is an example of the proliferation of rape culture throughout the show. As argued in Chapter Three, the portrayal of rape culture in contemporary society is not solely linked explicit narratives of sexual violence. Instead it exists on a spectrum, and the reducing of a lead female character to an object for plot development is an example of rape culture implicitly affecting contemporary society. So among the performances of nation and identity throughout *Riverdance*, and its modernisation of Irish cultural heritage, rape culture is also featured. This highlights how rape culture has become so routinely and problematically ingrained in all areas of contemporary society and, in order to deconstruct it fully, its pervasive power and influence needs to be fully uncovered.

Due to the international success of *Riverdance* many dance students returned to, or joined dance classes for the first time. Both Brennan and Wulff note that, “After *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* [Note 23], registrations in Irish dancing schools more than doubled.”⁸² Flynn notes that, “One of the main contributing factors to the revival of Irish dance in recent years has been the world-wide success of the stage shows *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*.”⁸³ Not only did the popularity of such shows increase interest in attending dance classes, but it also produced television shows focused on learning Irish Dance, “Step dance enjoyed an increased visibility on Irish television too, as in the reality show *Celebrity Jigs and Reels*, as the title implies, this was a step-dance competition between celebrities (but danced to non-traditional music) made for RTÉ.”⁸⁴ *Riverdance*, and the subsequent dance shows, not only increased the popularity of the dance form itself,

⁸² Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, 156.

⁸³ Flynn, *Irish Dance*, 12.

⁸⁴ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 124.

but it also influenced contemporary costuming for Irish Dance performance, “Other aspects of presentation were also influenced by *Riverdance*. The female dancers wore short black dresses and black tights, accentuating *bodily contours*. The sole male dancer wore plain black trousers and a black shirt.”⁸⁵ This was previously unheard of in Irish Dance performance and O’Connor further contends that, “both male and female bodies were sexualised by the combination of soft materials, simple and figure-hugging costume design, and the dramatic effect of the colour black.”⁸⁶ As previously mentioned, the notion of men wearing kilts while performing Irish Dance was constructed by the Irish Cultural Revival and the CLRG, but this had become the dominant mode of dress for male dancers. *Riverdance* changed this as it, “Had a major influence in making the long trousers more acceptable for the male dancers.”⁸⁷

Many writers have commented on the ‘sexing up’ of Irish dancing through the costuming of *Riverdance* and Ó Cinnéide notes that, “‘Riverdance’ brought Irish dance back closer to what it had originally been, putting back the missing ingredient of sex that had been distilled out of Irish dance by a mixture of Victorian piety and nationalist purity.”⁸⁸ Hall writes that, “*Riverdance* made Irish dancing “sexy”, according to some Irish media critics, presumably because the costume was more flattering and the lead dancers moved their arms and turned their heads to make eye contact.”⁸⁹ The short and tight-fitting dresses adorned by the female dancers in *Riverdance* were in stark contrast to the rigid and more traditional dresses that were largely worn by female dancers until that point. The velvet material of the *Riverdance* dresses was more sensual and provocative than the heavily embroidered materials historically worn. The shiny nature of some of the fabrics used in *Riverdance* can arguably be linked to the rise of sparkling accessories worn by female dancers. As John Cullinane writes on dresses post *Riverdance*, “In recent years also we have seen the introduction of, and subsequent enormous increase in, the amount of applique as well as increasing amounts of diamantes, rhinestones and sequins not only on the dress and shawl but also on the headgear.”⁹⁰

Just as the lead dancer in *Riverdance* wears a more elaborate costume than the ensemble dancers in a bid to stand out and be easily recognised on stage, female dancers

⁸⁵ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 138.

⁸⁶ Barbara O’Connor, ‘Riverdance’, in *Encounters with Modern Ireland: A Sociological Chronicle 1995-1996*, eds., Michael Peillon and Eamonn Slater (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), 53.

⁸⁷ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992*, 43.

⁸⁸ Ó Cinnéide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon*, 75.

⁸⁹ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 123.

⁹⁰ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992*, 49.

competing at a high level moved away from wearing only traditional class costumes that identified the school they were as a student of, in favour of more heavily embroidered and elaborate solo costumes. The vast changes in contemporary dance costumes for female dancers can be linked to a performance of ‘toxic femininity’. The ability to succeed in dance competitions is no longer solely based on dance competence, but is now linked to the costume worn on stage. Each female dancer tries increasingly to stand out aesthetically from her competitors and, in doing this; she embodies tropes associated with beauty myth in increasing the amount of stereotypically feminine embellishments worn.

For the male dancers, *Riverdance* popularised the idea of wearing trousers and shiny shirts. Flatley appeared on stage in the original performance wearing an open shirt and leather trousers. The use of these materials sexualised the dancer’s performance through Flatley exuding his own sexuality. Flatley also embodied a performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ through his behaviour and style, as will be analysed in relation to *Lord of the Dance*. All in all, the dancers performing as part of *Riverdance* were highly sexual and sexualised in their aesthetic performance and this was revolutionary for Irish Dance at the time. This sexualisation supports the hetero-patriarchal gender binary, and expectations of femininity and masculinity as it deliberately plays into them. Female dancers wear short dresses while the men exclusively wear trousers in *Riverdance*. This is a break from what would traditionally be worn in dance performance and re-affirms the culturally constructed binary of how men and women ‘should’ dress. Gavin Doherty, arguably the most sought after and influential costume designer currently for Irish dancers,⁹¹ stated in an interview that, “I like the boys when they go on stage to look like boys, not to look like it’s the bodice of a girl’s costume.”⁹² This statement reinforces the idea that boys should dress one way and girls should dress in another way. Given that Doherty is the leading costume designer for contemporary Irish dancers, his opinions have a significant impact on how dancers choose to dress. In his opinion re-affirming the strict hetero-patriarchal gender binary within the aesthetics of dance performance, performances of femininity and

⁹¹ Gavin Doherty is a Belfast based dance teacher and dress designer. He is the leading designer of male and female costumes for dancers in the CLRG, and among other dance organisations. He has designed costumes for numerous successful dancers and world champions including six time World Champion Claire Greaney. His costumes will be discussed in more detail in Section Five of this chapter, but it is fair to argue that his designs are leading and creating trending fashions among the dance community. His costume stand had the largest and most visible stand at the World Championships in 2017 and during the championship, there was a competition running where the top prize was a custom made costume of his. His dresses are so well known and sought after that the dance community refers to each costume as ‘A Gavin’. He reveals his new styles at the World Championships every year and other designers then follow his designs. His influence over trends in Irish dancing costumes cannot be understated.

⁹² Gavin Doherty speaking in *Jigs and Wigs* documentary, Series One, Episode Six, ‘Feisonistas’, Produced by Stirling Film & Television Productions for RTE. First aired April 10, 2014, Available at, <https://rincepop.com/2014/04/13/watch-jigs-wigs-series-here/> (Accessed March 1, 2017)

masculinity remain staunchly defined and normalised within the dance community.

Riverdance not only supports the gender binary through what the performers wear, but also through its representations of masculinity and femininity. While Irish dancing had been historically lauded as a female activity throughout the twentieth century, *Riverdance* ‘re-masculinised’ the dance form through Flatley’s performance. There was a distinct difference in the form and steps carried out by the male and female leads and the steps choreographed in *Riverdance* influenced the development of steps for the CLRG. As Varade notes when discussing the dance steps in *Riverdance*, “Some of these standardisations were noted in Michael Flatley’s use of syncopation and the implementation of elaborate, so-called “masculine” footwork, as well as in the dancing style of Jean Butler, which embodied balletic lifts and athletic lightness.”⁹³ As will be discussed in Section Four of this chapter, the CLRG’s rules for male and female dancers based on their gender are strict and binary. Arguably, the staunch difference in dancing styles between the original male and female lead dancers for *Riverdance* leads to a constructed ‘justification’ for such gendered rules as male dancers ‘should’ dance in a particular way that differs from female dancers who ‘should’ also dance in a particularly gendered way. The gendered element of the dance steps relies on culturally constructed binary gender norms in which males are seen as strong, aggressive and powerful, while women remain weak, conventionally beautiful and delicate.

As *Riverdance* has toured and developed, the costumes have become more sexualised and less traditional, particularly for female dancers; as the necklines have lowered, the hem lines have shortened, and there is more pressure put on female dancers to maintain a particular physique, “Stories also circulated about girls who got kicked out for doing cocaine, and of the increasing emphasis on thinness and the increase in anorexia and bulimia among dancers.”⁹⁴ This emphasis on thinness and a sexualised aesthetic takes focus away from the athletic mastery of Irish Dance as an art form and instead forces female dancers to ascribe to the culturally constructed ‘beauty myth’.

Riverdance is now a stage show and the costumes worn as part of it are not the same as those worn by girls and women in contemporary Irish dancing competition. However, the clear influence of the show on contemporary Irish Dance performance highlights how dangerous it can be for young female dancers to feel the need to ascribe to unattainable beauty ideals in order to be considered the best dancer. As stated by contemporary dress designer Shauna Shiels, “It’s not just about dance, it’s about how they

⁹³ Kristina R. Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’: Changes in Irish Dance Costume in the New Millennium’, in *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 19, Number 3, Autumn 2015, 60.

⁹⁴ O’Connor, *The Irish Dancing Cultural Politics and Identities 1900-2000*, 139.

feel. [...] Some kids just couldn't go up [on stage] in their normal clothes."⁹⁵ It is fair to argue that dancers feel the need to don a costume in order to compete, much like actors do when playing a character on stage. However, the fact that this costume includes heavy make-up, false tan and elaborate expensive costumes highlights how this constructed image of the dancer in competition is linked to stereotypes of the beauty myth, and what it is to appear 'conventionally attractive' on stage. The 'sexing up' of dance costumes in *Riverdance* has an undeniable influence on the need for children to feel attractive or 'sexy' on stage. In addition, for any young dancer who wishes to make a career as an Irish dancer, *Riverdance* provides one of few opportunities for dancers to dance professionally, "the opportunities for Irish dancers after and beyond competition have mushroomed."⁹⁶ With this in mind, it is logical that young dancers aspire to look like dancers from the show, hence the sexualisation of dancers in the show becomes potentially damaging for young competitors.

Riverdance was not the first time Irish dancing was broadcasted to a televised audience. As Varade notes, "in the 1960s, a group called the "McNiff Big Eight", named for eight older students who performed with Irish dance teacher Peter McNiff, appeared on several programs."⁹⁷ However, it is fair to argue that the original *Riverdance* performance at the Eurovision Song Contest had a much larger impact than any previously performed Irish dancing show. Not only did it spawn its own worldwide full length show that has toured for more than twenty years, but it also led to the creation of other Irish dancing shows. As previously mentioned, once Michael Flatley left the *Riverdance* Company in 1995, he launched his own *Lord of the Dance* show. This show continues to have a similar success to that of *Riverdance*. On the financial success of the shows, Hazel Carby notes that,

In economic terms the success of these dance companies has been measured in the millions of dollars. In the first two years of its run, July 1996-8, *Lord of the Dance* alone took in more than \$200 million in ticket sales, placing it in the top five shows worldwide. *Riverdance* has also been a financial blockbuster and both dance organisations make additional profits from the sales of video-tapes, compact discs and souvenir programmes.⁹⁸

While *Riverdance* undoubtedly added a sexual component to Irish dancing

⁹⁵ Shauna Shiels speaking in *Jigs and Wigs* documentary, Series One, Episode Six, 'Feisonistas', Produced by Stirling Film & Television Productions for RTÉ. First aired April 10, 2014, Available at, <https://rincepop.com/2014/04/13/watch-jigs-wigs-series-here/> (Accessed March 1, 2017)

⁹⁶ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 119.

⁹⁷ Varade, 'Dressing the "Feispora"', 60.

⁹⁸ Hazel V. Carby, 'What Is This "Black" in Irish Popular Culture?', in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2001, 327.

costumes, *Lord of the Dance* pushed the boundary farther, to fully objectify and sexualise its female dancers. As Varade notes when discussing the, “controversial sexualisation of Irish dance that has followed *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*, these shows blatantly disrupted the traditional narrative of Irish propriety and pushed the boundaries of so-called “Irishness”.⁹⁹ *Lord of the Dance* follows the performative power of hegemonic heteronormative patriarchy, “A fantasy of masculinity, of the aggrandisement of male sexuality, power and control, *Lord of the Dance* perfectly articulates the appeal of fascist spectacle.”¹⁰⁰ Carby goes on to say that,

Female sexuality is totally subordinated to and at the service of both good and bad masculine prowess and the performance of sexuality is increasingly reminiscent of [...] sexual politics as the show progresses. *Lord of the Dance* in all aspects of its staging, choreography, movement and sculpting of bodies, explicitly reproduces a form of mythology which reduces all social relations to a black and white dichotomy, a dichotomy which is, [a] patriarchal narration of the traffic in women.¹⁰¹

Carby is critiquing the patriarchal elements of *Lord of the Dance*, and the sexist stereotypes produced throughout the show strive to highlight Flatley’s performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ through his male privilege. He presents himself as superior to both the female dancers and all of the other male dancers through his clothing and behaviour towards all other dancers on stage, and the show produced is lauded with his own male gaze. This superiority began in Flatley’s *Riverdance* performance as Carby notes,

Despite the conscious attempt to present a modern and modernised Ireland the actual performance of Irishness is traditionally patriarchal for Michael Flatley, the lead dancer, consistently occupies a privileged position of masculinity. Only he is allowed to break and transcend the traditional conventions of form, moving his arms freely in stark contrast to the chorus of female and subordinate male dancers.¹⁰²

This performance of ‘toxic masculinity’ through hetero-patriarchal superiority continues in *Lord of the Dance* and is further highlighted in costume choices for the female dancers. When comparing the female costumes worn in *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*, Varade argues that *Riverdance* has, “short, monochromatic costumes”,¹⁰³ the female dancers in

⁹⁹ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 63.

¹⁰⁰ Carby, ‘What Is This “Black” in Irish Popular Culture?’, 338.

¹⁰¹ Carby, ‘What Is This “Black” in Irish Popular Culture?’, 341-3.

¹⁰² Carby, ‘What Is This “Black” in Irish Popular Culture?’, 333.

¹⁰³ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 62.

Lord of the Dance wear, “short and sexual charged costumes, often “blinged out” with bright colours, embellishment (applique, sequins, etc.), or reflective materials.”¹⁰⁴

There is a dance sequence in *Lord of the Dance* entitled ‘Breakout’. Marie Duffy, a choreographer who worked with Flatley on *Lord of the Dance* writes of her first encounter with the sequence, “I quickly dried off and raced to the phone in the bedroom. Ronan then played me a piece of music that would turn out to be ‘Breakout’, or ‘strip jig’, which was our pet name for it because it’s the dance scene where the girls whip off their skirts in the show. It was an appropriate piece of music at that moment given my state of undress.”¹⁰⁵ During the sequence, the female ensemble is on stage with the lead female dancer.¹⁰⁶ The women are wearing heavy shoes and traditional Irish dancing costumes. The costumes are ‘modest’ as they fully cover the women’s chests and fall just above their knees. They are embroidered with traditional Celtic symbols and free from rhinestones, glitter and heavy embellishment. The women perform a traditionally feminine dance as they repeatedly perform the ‘en pointe’ step [Note 24], a step that is never performed by male dancers. The lead female dancer wears either a gold or a white dress, with long blonde hair, symbolising her ‘purity’.

After two minutes of dancing, the female playing the role of ‘the temptress’ appears on stage and dances with the lead female dancer. She entices the lead female to feel her own body and shake her hair in a sexually suggestive manner. ‘The temptress’ then leaves the stage and the music changes dramatically. It becomes faster and more dramatic. This sequence is comparable to *The Countess Cathleen/Women of the Sidhe* routine in *Riverdance*, as it is a transformative piece for the lead female dancer. However, while in *Riverdance* the lead female dancer strives to embody the nominally empowered ‘Cathleen’ role, in the *Lord of the Dance* sequence, all dancers on the stage tear open their costumes to reveal a sports bra top and tight-fitted shorts underneath, as shown in [Figure 4].

They dance for several moments in unison while directly facing the audience and complete non-traditional dance steps such as shaking their hips and buttocks while running

¹⁰⁴ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Marie Duffy, Eddie Rowley, *Lady of the Dance: The Choreographer Who Helped Michael Flatley Conquer The World* (Dublin: The O’Brien Press, 2017), 134.

¹⁰⁶ Christiano Barbosa, ‘Michael Flatley Feet of Flames’, *YouTube*, February 10, 2013, accessed March 20, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qW9_-fCwc1c

This is a link to the ‘Breakout’ dance sequence in one of the first productions of *Lord of the Dance*.

Npabocnab’b Pacbi, ‘Michael Flatley – Lord of the Dance (1996) DVD’, *YouTube*, January 26, 2016, accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7TqtNnrEGk>

This is a link to the 1996 production of *Lord of the Dance*. The ‘breakout’ sequence begins at 27:17. There are slight differences between the costumes in both of these productions of the show but they are largely similar and the scene takes on the same motive of sexualising the dancers through their removal of their clothing.

their hands repeatedly up and down their bodies and through their hair. The scene is highly sexualised and the female dancers become the object of sexual desire for the audience. It could be argued that the dancers are transformed into empowered sexual beings, taking agency through performing their newly discovered sexuality, however, given the power and persistence of contemporary rape culture, this is not the case as the women become the object of the male gaze. The focus is drawn from their feet and dancing ability, to their performance of the sexualised female body. This scene has been adapted for more contemporary productions of the show and has become more objectifying of the female dancers. In more contemporary productions, the women dance the same steps but remove their traditional dresses to reveal smaller, bikini style outfits underneath, as displayed in [Figure 5]. They also wear see-through tights, as opposed to the previously worn opaque tights.¹⁰⁷

Arguably, the 'skimpy' costuming of the female dancers in this scene is not widely popular with fans, as *YouTube* commenters write, "Don't like this dance. Too skimpy. It's Irish dancing not a strip show," "I'm with a bunch of you who question how Irish dancing has turned into a strip show, or a pole dance without the pole. This is just a bit too tacky for my taste. Let's please stick with the original form of dress," and, "Everyone world-wide knows that Michael Flatley is a womaniser. This just proves it, as it was Michael himself admitted that he wanted more flesh. I want to watch the dance and their feet and not see underwear. This proves that more clothing is best."¹⁰⁸ Commenters also 'slut-shame' the female dancers with comments such as, "Keep your clothes on ladies or you're [sic] not ladies at all" and "Please stick to the original dress, the beautiful ladies were doing a perfect master piece until they took off their clothes; I was shocked, this is not the "Soul" of Irish dance, looks like a vulgar show in a strip club."¹⁰⁹ The reaction to this scene shows how the impact of the dance itself is lost in favour of commenting on the aesthetic of the performance.

The pervasive power of rape culture becomes more prominent than the carrying out of the highly technical dance steps. In this way, the show is actively promoting rape

¹⁰⁷ ZenaRU, 'Lord of the Dance (Michael Flatley) – Moscow 2013', *YouTube*, May 23, 2013, accessed March 20, 2017,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5OJ-HXmLkk>

This video shows a more contemporary performance of the 'Breakout' dance routine. Snippets of the current style of dress can also be seen in the trailer for the most recent DVD available of the show.

UniversalPlaybackTV, Michael Flatley's Lord of the Dance: Dangerous Games On Blu-ray & DVD, *YouTube*, October 30, 2014, accessed March 20, 2017,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t3y38LFLB0&feature=youtu.be>

¹⁰⁸ ZenaRU, 'Lord of the Dance (Michael Flatley) – Moscow 2013', *YouTube*, May 23, 2013, accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5OJ-HXmLkk>

¹⁰⁹ ZenaRU, 'Lord of the Dance (Michael Flatley) – Moscow 2013', *YouTube*, May 23, 2013, accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5OJ-HXmLkk>

culture as it falls into the stereotypical narrative of the sexualised and objectified female subjected to the hetero-patriarchal male gaze. This impact is heightened when Flatley appears on stage directly after the female dancers finish and he makes audible purring sounds at the female lead while kissing her neck. This behaviour is predatory, removes the agency and subjectivity of the female dancers and is a violent performance of 'toxic masculinity'. While the costumes and reactions of audience members have already dehumanised and objectified the female dancers in this sequence, Flatley's on stage actions are explicitly oppressive and exemplary of contemporary rape culture.

As previously noted, it could potentially be argued that these women are empowered through owning their own sexuality in performance, but the reaction to the sequence and the behaviour of Flatley directly negate this argument, and rape culture prevails. This behaviour continues throughout the next dance as Flatley conducts the male ensemble while continually walking over to the female lead at the side of the stage and embracing her in this manner.¹¹⁰ It is also important to note that when *Lord of the Dance* originally opened, Flatley was thirty-seven years old while the female lead, Bernadette Flynn, was seventeen years old. This means that she was legally a child. Throughout this dissertation, it is argued that a fundamental component of contemporary rape culture comes from sexualising and objectifying young women and children. This can be seen in Chapter Two with the protagonists in both Greer's *Petals* and Daly's *Test Dummy*, and in Chapter Three with the inclusion of females as young as sixteen in *Miss Ireland* and many international pageants. Also, the fact that Flatley was an adult preying on a child at the time supports the trope of the desirable young female partnered with the older male as set out by Wolf in *The Beauty Myth*.

Unquestionably, *Riverdance* changed the face of contemporary Irish dancing both in Ireland, and globally. The show's continued success opened up Irish dancing to a mainstream audience for the first time. It greatly increased the numbers of children taking part in Irish dancing lessons. It further regimented the CLRG's reign as the leading authority on Irish dancing through employing mostly CLRG trained dancers [Note 25], and performing mostly CLRG steps. It changed the way both male and female dancers dressed; with the popularisation of trousers for male dancers and shorter, more figure hugging 'sexed up' dresses for the female dancers. Since its inception, costumes for dance competitors have continued to evolve, as will be discussed in the following section, but arguably *Riverdance* was the dawn of this new era of dance costume. Not only did *Riverdance* influence dance competition specifically, but it also led to the creation of other

¹¹⁰ Npabocnab'b Pacbi, 'Michael Flatley – Lord of the Dance (1996) DVD', *YouTube*, January 26, 2016, accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7TqtNnrEGk> Flatley's behaviour can be seen from thirty-one minutes into this performance.

touring commercially successful dance shows such as *Lord of the Dance*, where dancing became more sexualised and objectifying for the female performers. Overall, such shows have had an undeniable monumental influence on how Irish dancing competitors dress and dance in contemporary times.

Section Four: Contemporary Rules and Regulations of the CLRG

Irish dancing is not easily definable. Arguably it is both an art form and a sport. As an art form, it seemingly cannot be separated from its performative and aesthetic qualities. Given the history of Irish dancing over the twentieth century and the emphasis on the costume of the dance performer from the inception of the CLRG, right through to *Riverdance* and the touring shows, it seems that Irish dancing will always be intrinsically linked to the costumed body of the dancer. As Varade writes,

Irish dance is, by nature, peculiar. Observers and dancers frequently debate the term that best suits its nature: a dance form? A hobby? A sport? Like competitive figure skating or Olympic-level gymnastics, it is both loved for its performative and competitive brilliance and vilified as gaudy spectacle. Irish dance pushes the boundaries of tradition and postmodernity. It causes people to ponder deeper questions of race and gender, nationality, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.¹¹¹

According to this classification, Irish dance is closely comparable to pageant performance in both how it operates and how it is publicly perceived. As argued in Chapter Three, a pageant, such as the *Rose of Tralee*, stimulates such questions of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. This research argues that pageants and Irish Dance performance are also inherently linked through a rape culture framework. Both types of performance strive to nominally promote female empowerment, but their actual aesthetics disprove this, and instead, proliferate behaviours of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’, and sustain rape culture. One of the ways this happens is through the costuming of both types of performance.

As this section specifically deals with the costume of a performer, it is necessary to note what a costume is. The official CLRG rules on dress code and costuming states, “That costumes or costuming be defined as any element of performance/presentation clothing worn by a dancer in the course of a competition, including, but not limited to, dress, waistcoat, trousers, shoes, headwear, capes, shawls, socks, underwear and make-

¹¹¹ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 58.

up.”¹¹² Taking this as an accepted definition, this section will examine the costumes of contemporary Irish dancers. It will make references to male dancers’ costume, but will have an emphasis on the rules and regulations imposed on female dancers in performance, and how these rules can be interpreted as misogynist or repressive.

Monks discusses the concept of the costumed actor and argues that, “When a costumed actor appears onstage, it is often very difficult to tell where the costume leaves off and the actor begins. When we speak of costume, we are often actually talking about actors; and when we speak of actors, we are often actually talking about costume.”¹¹³ This logic is applicable to dancers as well as actors and, it is fair to argue that the costume a dancer chooses to wear is inherently linked to their performance. This is particularly evident in the ranking system used for Irish dancing competitions. “To further regularise the process of adjudication and to standardise comparable results, categories of evaluation are specified with equal weightings: timing, 25%; carriage, 25%; execution, 25%; and overall impression, 25%.”¹¹⁴ Hall goes on to argue that,

The defining categories (timing, execution, carriage) ultimately give way to qualities that challenge if not defy categorisation. Impressions are, after all, holistic, immediate, and often ineffable. This category recognises what everyone knows: that human aesthetic evaluation is not subject to some sort of objective control. Yet this feature is couched within a system of standards.¹¹⁵

While Hall is arguing that the entire adjudication process is unavoidably subjective, this research contends that the allocation of a full quarter of the marks for ‘overall impression’ is the most subjective element of judging.

It is fair to argue that different adjudicators may have juxtaposing views of which dancer may have the best carriage, but they are ultimately applying a standardised mode of judgement to all dancers equally, as ‘good carriage’ is a definable and recognisable element of a dancer’s performance. It is true that at a high level of competition, The World Championships for example, the differences in carriage between many of the competitors will be miniscule and perhaps adjudicators will subjectively choose their preferred dancer. However, given that there are up to seven adjudicators at such high-level competitions, the margin for subjectivity is decreased due to the numerous judges present.

¹¹² CLRG, ‘CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016’, *CLRG*, accessed March 1, 2017, Section 4.4, https://www.clrge.ie/images/CLRG%20Presentation%20Rule_April%202016.pdf

¹¹³ Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 11.

¹¹⁴ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 59.

¹¹⁵ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 60.

It is fair to argue that even if one adjudicator shows some bias towards a particular dancer, the one subjective score is averaged out by the other adjudicators.¹¹⁶ Also, while training, adjudicators are marked on their ability to produce a similar set of scores to a main adjudicator at a dance competition, “The practical test in adjudication takes place in the setting of a competition in which the candidate’s results and comments can be compared with those of the official adjudicator. In this way An Coimisiún can evaluate the candidate’s ability to produce normative results.”¹¹⁷ However, when it comes to judging the ‘overall impression’ element, it proves to be more subjective and based on the aesthetic of the dancer. As Varade notes, “When the technical level of the dancers is so high as to be equally proficient, judges must often rely upon factors other than dancing to arrive at a final decision. It is there that costume and presentation come to the front of the stage.”¹¹⁸

As the Public Relations Officer for the CLRG said in a 2014 documentary on Irish dancing costumes, “Irish dance is a performance art, and the nature of it is that they come out in threes and stand for an eight-bar introduction before they start to dance. So a judge has a moment to look at the three dancers on the stage, and I suppose in any performance art, aesthetics are important.”¹¹⁹ While Lennon does not explicitly state that a winning dancer must be wearing a certain costume, the fact that the Public Relations Officer for the CLRG is implying that what a dancer wears is important to the adjudicators highlights how the CLRG condone the competitive element of costuming. This leads to a state where young dancers feel compelled to adhere to these standards.

American child dancer Grace Wright competed at her first World Championships in 2012 at ten years of age. When interviewed for an American documentary entitled *The Big Jig*, that focused on five American female child dancers in preparation for the World Championships 2012, she stated, “When you walk onstage you have to look fabulous, you have to have a bunch of makeup on, you have to have the crown, you have to have the ‘rhinestoney’ dress. [...] I have no idea why [dancers get spray tans] because Irish people are pale.”¹²⁰ Her comments highlight the pressure that young children competing at a high level of Irish dancing feel in order to feel confident onstage. Her observation that Irish

¹¹⁶ This is particularly true at the World Championships where all seven scores are announced, but the highest and lowest score for each dancer is removed from the final total. Each dancer is marked out of 100 and so the highest mark attainable is 500 overall.

¹¹⁷ Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 59.

¹¹⁸ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 64.

¹¹⁹ Dearbhla Lennon speaking in *Jigs and Wigs* documentary, Series One, Episode Six, ‘Feisonistas’, Produced by Stirling Film & Television Productions for RTE. First aired April 10, 2014, Available at, <https://rincepop.com/2014/04/13/watch-jigs-wigs-series-here/> (Accessed March 1, 2017)

¹²⁰ Grace Wright speaking in *The Big Jig* documentary, Produced by SVP Productions & Development for TLC. First aired, October 2012, Available at, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiyGb_EY4PU&t=2s (Accessed July 18, 2017)

people are generally pale, and so false tan is not applied in order to look ‘traditionally Irish’ showcases the constructed nature of the aesthetic norms. While the individual judges may have their own personal preference for particular styles or designs, the fact that the CLRG also rate the importance of costume proves how subjective style choices can influence the outcome of a competition that is supposedly based on dance ability and artistry.¹²¹ As Hall writes,

Even when two dancers are equal in performance, one in a fancy costume and the other in simpler one, and adjudicator would be under a certain pressure to reward the fancy costume, precisely because the fancy costume has become normative. To deliberately select against such a costume would be a radical departure, not something judges are trained or encouraged to do by the authenticating process of An Coimisiún.¹²²

This proves that a dancer’s costume is imperative to their success in Irish dancing competitions and this research now moves to discuss the rules and regulations regarding dress code imposed on contemporary competitions.

John Cullinane argues that, “The prototype of today’s female Irish dancing costume seems to have originated from the period of about 1915 or later,”¹²³ as, “having abandoned the Colleen Bawn/hooded cloak type of dress around the 1920s, female Irish dancers took to wearing dresses with large rectangular or square shawls, pinned at the front by Tara brooches.”¹²⁴ However, styles of dress for female dancers have changed immensely since the late twentieth century as,

The amount of embroidery on female Irish dancing costumes has increased about tenfold and must surely be near its limit. In recent years also we have seen the introduction of, and subsequent enormous increase in, the amount of applique as

¹²¹ The influence of costume designer Gavin Doherty is discussed in the previous section. His costumes are often recognisable on stage, particularly at the World Championships where his newest designs debut. Not only has Doherty designed costumes for a large number of world champions from around the world, he also designs costumes for his own students, many of whom are world champions. For this reason, his designs have become synonymous with success throughout CLRG competitions. It can be potentially argued that if a judge recognised ‘A Gavin’ onstage, they would be automatically drawn to the dancer due to the fact that dancers wearing his costumes are so often champions. This is one example of how adjudicators could prove to be subjective when it comes to judging how dancers are dressed. This increases dancers’ interest in wearing an eye-catching costume designed by Doherty, and so the indoctrination into what dancers ‘should wear’ becomes cyclical.

¹²² Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance*, 64.

¹²³ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992*, 29.

¹²⁴ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992*, 45.

well as increasing amounts of diamantes, rhinestones and sequins not only on the dress and shawl but also on the headgear.¹²⁵

When commenting on the “Postmillennial Irish Dance Costume Trends”¹²⁶ for women, Varade states that dresses have become more lightweight in order to accommodate increasing balletic movement, they are shorter in length, and adorned more heavily with ‘bling’ and shiny materials. The dresses have dropped waistlines and match with elaborate hairpieces. The dancers use extensive amounts of false tan and makeup and the shawls on the back of dresses have become significantly smaller.¹²⁷

Some of the changes in both male and female costumes have been to facilitate an evolving dance style filled with more athletic and balletic dance steps. High ranking dancers in particular have evolved the dance form through developing and performing new leaps and jumps, and lightweight costumes for women, or trousers for men, makes these steps easier to complete. Until *Riverdance*, male dancers traditionally wore kilts but these, “limited the height of kicks and leaps due to their construction and weight,”¹²⁸ and so, replacing kilts with trousers allowed male dancers to move more freely. Similarly for female dancers, dance teacher and costume designer Ronan McCormack believes that the changes, “help to facilitate the movement of a dancer, as leaps continually become higher and steps increasingly become more challenging.”¹²⁹ While these legitimate reasons partially explain the evolving costume trends, this research argues that contemporary costumes and their rules and regulations, rely on misogynist hetero-patriarchal constructions that ultimately serve to perpetuate the sexualisation and objectification of women on stage sustain a contemporary rape culture narrative.

The full set of rules for the CLRG is available on the official CLRG website.¹³⁰ The rules include regulations for teachers and adjudicators, rules regarding registration, grade examinations, the Irish language component to teachers examinations, transfer rules for dancers who change schools, rules for dancing, the composition and dimensions of dancing shoes and costume rules.¹³¹ The rules are revised and republished when necessary, and as of 2017, the current set of rules dates from September 12, 2016. Although the full

¹²⁵ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992*, 49.

¹²⁶ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 68.

¹²⁷ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 68.

¹²⁸ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 63.

¹²⁹ Varade, ‘Dressing the “Feispora”’, 64.

¹³⁰ CLRG, ‘Rules for Registered Teachers and Adjudicators’, *CLRG*, September 12, 2016, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/CLRG-Rules-Update-September-12th-2016.pdf>

¹³¹ CLRG, ‘Rules for Registered Teachers and Adjudicators’, *CLRG*, September 12, 2016, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/CLRG-Rules-Update-September-12th-2016.pdf>

rulebook includes a section on costume and presentation,¹³² the CLRG also provides a separate document on their website entitled “Rules on Presentation”. There are currently two versions of this document available on the CLRG website; under the ‘Rules’ section of the website, there is a document dated October 2015,¹³³ while under the ‘Costume Committee’ section, there is a document dated April 2016.¹³⁴ The full rulebook includes the newest version of the rules on presentation. The reason for mentioning both is to allow for comparison between them, and to examine how the costume rules are changing and evolving as the CLRG see fit.

One example of the changing rules regarding costuming is found in the newest version of the rules where there is a statement on ‘male modesty’ included for the first time. Section 4.4.16 states, “Boys’ / men’s costuming must adhere to principles of modesty, and enable dancers to safely execute their movements and steps. Adjudicators who determine a costume to lack modesty may use the Costume Infraction (Tick Box) Program in order to flag the dancer and ensure the teacher is notified. (*New: February 2016*)”¹³⁵ Until this point, the CLRG rules for presentation never included reference to guidelines for male costumes. The rules had already included guidelines on female modesty as, “Female adult dancers [...] are required to wear **opaque tights** of a denier not less than 70.”¹³⁶ In addition to this, “length of costume must adhere to principles of modesty.”¹³⁷ Although this rule is not explicitly gendered, as it does not mention female dancers, it is implicitly gendered, as there is an assumption that only female dancers wear dresses. The inclusion of a new rule pertaining to male modesty can be read as redressing the balance towards gender equality as now it is not only females who can be defined by constructed modesty standards.

Nominally there is nothing sexist or sexualising about asking all dancers to adhere to basic principles of modesty. It is essential, particularly for child competitors, that there are strict rules in place to ensure no child is abused or exploited through genital exposure. However, the concept of ‘modesty’ is not a neutral issue, but rather is relies on subjective opinion. ‘Modesty’ is an ideological construct, a patriarchal value judgement, and inextricably linked to a shaming discourse and conceptual morality. ‘Modesty’ has numerous definitions that include, “Natural avoidance of coarseness or lewdness”,

¹³² CLRG, ‘Rules for Registered Teachers and Adjudicators’, *CLRG*, September 12, 2016, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/CLRG-Rules-Update-September-12th-2016.pdf> Section 4.4: Costume Rules.

¹³³ CLRG, ‘Costume Rules’, *CLRG*, October 2015, accessed March 1, 2017, https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/CLRG_Presentation_Rules_October_2015.pdf

¹³⁴ ‘CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016’.

¹³⁵ ‘CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016’. Section 4.4.16.

¹³⁶ ‘Costume Rules’, Section 4.4.15.

¹³⁷ ‘Costume Rules’, Section 4.4.1.

“Freedom from presumption, ostentation, arrogance, or pride”, “Humility before God”, and, “Shame, discomfiture.”¹³⁸ The use of the word is subjective because, what is ‘lewd’ or ‘shaming’ for one person, may not be for someone else. To link ‘modesty’ to ‘shame’ is inherently gendered and misogynist. In Chapter One, the concepts of ‘slut-shaming’ and ‘victim blaming’ are discussed as powerful components of rape culture when applied to women who have experienced sexual violence.

It is misogynist and sexist to only enforce these rules for females and so the new inclusion in the 2016 rules is a welcome advancement towards gender equality. However, arguably a balance has not been reached as there is only one point pertaining to male modesty and eight separate points regarding female modesty.¹³⁹ Also, separate to the rules on presentation document, there are diagrams published on the CLRG website to visually indicate appropriate underwear,¹⁴⁰ necklines¹⁴¹ and sleeves.¹⁴² These diagrams pertain to female dress only and use only female mannequins, as can be seen in [Figures 6,7,8,9]. No such diagrams are provided for male dancers. This highlights the strict rules in place for female dancers costumes while male dancers have but one vague regulation on modesty that is not explicitly defined in a comparable manner to the list of exacting standards female dancers must meet. So although costuming rules are becoming more equal, and the inclusion of a section on male modesty is a welcome change, female dancers remain held to a much higher standard of dress than male dancers. In this way, their bodies are more heavily policed in performance, reflecting the constructed nature of the beauty myth that exists in contemporary culture.

Many of the rules and regulations regarding a dancer’s presentation and appearance have been introduced in a bid to ensure that all dancers are safe on stage and that no dancer has any advantage because of an alteration to their costume or shoes. For example, for all major competitions, dancers must prove that they are not wearing an artificial carriage aid before they perform. Similarly, there are strict rules regarding the shoes that dancers wear.¹⁴³ For example, the heel and tip parts of hard shoes must not be made of metal, as this would increase the sound of a dancer’s steps and make any noises

¹³⁸ "modesty, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/120638?rskey=Y7TyMW&result=1> (accessed July 19, 2017).

¹³⁹ ‘CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016’, Section 4.4.1/2/3/7/10/11/12/15.

¹⁴⁰ CLRG, ‘Permissible Underwear’, *CLRG*, March 1, 2017,

<https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/Permissible%20Underwear.pdf>

¹⁴¹ CLRG, ‘Bodysuit Boat Neck’, *CLRG*, March 1, 2017,

https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/Bodysuit_boatneck_X.pdf

CLRG, ‘Bodysuit Scoop Neck’, *CLRG*, March 1, 2017,

https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/Bodysuit_scoopneck_X.pdf

¹⁴² CLRG, ‘Bodysuit Sleeves’, *CLRG*, March 1, 2017,

https://www.clrg.ie/images/downloads/Bodysuit_sleeves.pdf

¹⁴³ ‘Costume Rules’, Section 4.2: Rules Regarding Composition and Dimension of Dancing Shoes.

clearer, thus giving them an advantage over other dancers. The heels on hard shoes must also be of a certain height and may not protrude beyond the width of the leather of the shoe.¹⁴⁴ These rules are updated and revised when necessary. It is reasonable to argue that such rules protect the dancers and the ethics of dance competitions, and the CLRG clearly states that it will continue to be the authority on what is permissible in competitions.

The penultimate section of the rules on presentation states,

It is possible, indeed probable, that in the future new construction techniques for shoes will evolve and/or new materials become available which will require a review of these directives. However, at no time in the future should new materials other than those listed above be used in shoes, or any divergence from these directives is introduced without prior authorization being sought from An Coimisiún.¹⁴⁵

This section ensures that the CLRG remain in control of what dancers can and cannot wear. This is beneficial to dancers as some rules introduced are in the interest of fair play. For example, in recent years it had become popular for prominent dancers and world champions to have a globe or their name embroidered onto their costume. This meant that when competing, adjudicators were made aware of that dancer's success. This could lead to bias in judging as an adjudicator could assume a previous world champion was the best dancer in any given competition, regardless of performance on the day. The CLRG subsequently banned this practice to avoid such bias stating, "Costumes for both boys and girls should not include representations such as globes, medals or any other items symbolic of an award having been achieved,"¹⁴⁶ and, "All forms of dance school or individual identification, be it sign, shape, colour piece, logo or symbol, initial and / or name be banned from all solo costumes worn by any competitor in any competition."¹⁴⁷ These regulations promote fairness and objectivity.

However, when mixed with regulations insisting upon a certain level of opaqueness of tights for adult female competitors, the controlling power of the CLRG can be read as oppressive. While there is a legitimate reasoning for insisting upon anonymous costumes, forcing adult female dancers to cover their legs is oppressive and offensive. As Cullinane points out,

Since the 1980s there has been an almost universal change-over by dancers of all ages to wearing white socks of almost knee length size of the type that are known as "poodle socks". These are longer than ankle socks but do not reach knee length

¹⁴⁴ 'Costume Rules', Section 4.2.4/5.

¹⁴⁵ 'CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016', Section 4.2.6.

¹⁴⁶ 'CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016', Section 4.4.8.

¹⁴⁷ 'CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016', Section 4.4.9.

and they are of a rather thick nature and usually of a somewhat bubbled or undulated texture. It is only very occasional nowadays that older female dancers wear long black stockings or tights and when they do wear them it is usually for figure or group dancing and not so much for solo dancing.¹⁴⁸

This means that the modern ruling insisting that reads in full, “Female adult dancers participating in competitions entitled 'adult competition' and/or 'adult grade competition' (both solo and team) are required to wear **opaque black** tights of a denier not less than 70. (*Colour and denier of tights clarified September 2015.*)”,¹⁴⁹ is a break from traditional dress. This research argues that this rule is a reaction to the sexualisation of the female body in contemporary rape culture. As a result of the female body routinely marked as a sexual object, this rule polices the female body and is ultimately shaming for women. There is no reason for women to cover up in this way other than to remove the potential for their objectification. Should dancers want to cover their legs, they should have every right to do so but forcing them to is ultimately oppressive. In implementing this ruling, the CLRG are assuming that the female body is ultimately a sexual object. To include this rule alongside others that preserve the objectivity of competition is to equate the female body to the potential for champion dancers to gain advantage over others. It is a policing of the female body that is representative of the policing of the female body in wider culture and society. The CLRG hold the patriarchal power over the presentation of the female body and are using it in this case to police sexualisation of women.

Section Five: *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne* (World Championships) 2017

The largest annual CLRG Irish dancing feis (competition) took place in the Citywest Hotel Conference Event Centre in Dublin from April 9-16, 2017. Over five thousand dancers from the age of ten up travelled from all over the world to compete, having qualified through preliminary events throughout the year. The event was first held in Dublin 1970. Since then, it has taken place each year all over Ireland and in numerous different countries around the world. It was held outside of the Republic of Ireland for the first time in 2000 when it moved to Belfast. It left the island of Ireland for the first time in 2002, when it moved to Glasgow, and since 2009, it has been held in the Republic of Ireland only twice.¹⁵⁰ The inaugural World Championships took place one year after the

¹⁴⁸ Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992*, 57.

¹⁴⁹ ‘CLRG Presentation Rule April 2016’. Section 4.4.15.

¹⁵⁰ *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* website, “History of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha” <https://www.clrg.ie/about-us/history-of-an-coimisiún-le-rinc%C3%AD-gaelacha.html> (Accessed 8 February 2016).

CNMRG was founded by a breakaway group of teachers originally from the CLRG. Other Irish dancing organisations, such as the CNMRG, now have their own World Championships, but the CLRG's annual event is the largest and most competitive in the world.

This section uses the 2017 World Championships as a case study in order to interrogate contemporary developments in dance costume and performance. This research then moves to deconstruct the performance of contemporary rape culture, 'toxic femininity' and 'toxic masculinity' throughout. It draws comparisons between the portrayal of rape culture in traditional pageant competitions analysed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, and how contemporary rape culture influences Irish dance performance. It interrogates the authority of leading dress designer Gavin Doherty on contemporary costume fashion, and deconstructs the sexualising and objectifying influence such a designer has over young dancers. This section examines both the youngest and the oldest competitors at the 2017 World Championships. I attended the '10-11' and '11-12' competitions for boys and girls. I also attended the 'Senior Ladies Over 21' and 'Senior Men Over 21' competitions.

The hetero-patriarchal gender binary is clearly evident in the award ceremonies at the World Championships. Competitions are strictly divided into male and female groups.¹⁵¹ Dance competitions have always been separated based on gender, and male and female dancers have developed different dance styles accordingly. For example, only female dancers complete the 'en pointe' step previously mentioned. Male and female dancers wear similar looking heavy shoes, but their light shoes are different. While female light shoes are similar looking to ballet shoes, male light shoes, also called 'reel shoes', are heavy shoes without the fibreglass tips. This means that while dancing light shoe dances, males and female perform different steps. In this way, it would be unfair to compare the two in competition. So, it can be argued that dance competitions should be divided based on gender, as they are different dances. However, there is no practical reason that the award ceremonies for male and female competitions should be carried out in vastly different ways.

¹⁵¹ In a similar manner to beauty pageants, the division of entrants based on biological gender definitions is deeply problematic. The CLRG have no official policy regarding the inclusion of transgender dancers in its competitions. To the best of my knowledge, the CLRG has never had to make a ruling on whether or not a dancer can enter a particular feis based on their gender identity. Arguably, this will become an issue at some point in the future due to the increasing awareness of transgender children. Both the *Rose of Tralee* and *Miss Ireland* are critiqued in Chapter two for either ignoring or mishandling the issue of transgender entrants. The CLRG is also sustaining violent patriarchal culture through not acknowledging this potential situation. This is one example that exposes the performance of a staunch hetero-patriarchal gender binary within the CLRG.

At the World Championships, the top five competitors are presented with trophies, the top twenty dancers receive ‘Worlds medals’, meaning that they automatically re-qualify for the event the following year, and the dancers who place twenty-first to fiftieth receive a ‘recall medal’. This is the same for both male and female competitions. However, female champions receive a crown, while male champions receive a belt similar to that of a boxing champion. Also, the top five female competitors receive a sash with their place number on it, as shown in [Figure 10.] This sash looks like the sashes worn by competitors in traditional beauty pageants. The top five male competitors receive a belt with their place number on it, as can be seen in [Figure 11]. This belt is tied around their waists. There is no need to differentiate between male and female champions in this way. This differentiation is a clear example of the forced performance of the strict hetero-patriarchal gender binary for males and females. It implies that females aesthetically aspire to beauty pageant queens, while males wish to replicate boxing champions. When discussing the gendering of children’s toys, Natasha Walter remarks that,

Of course it isn’t a problem that little girls are dreaming of being little mermaids with sweet voices, or of going to the ball in a puff of silver. I wouldn’t want to deny any girls these pleasures – so long as they aren’t all expected to do it, and so long as it isn’t all they are expected to do, and so long as boys are not seen as being contaminated if they so much as pick up a pink wand. Yet right now it is often assumed that boys and girls will play in absolutely distinct styles.¹⁵²

The point is that the dissertation is not trying to argue that female champions should not be given a crown necessarily, but that giving a crown and sash to females, and a belt to males reinforces the idea that females and males ‘should’ behave in a certain way. If this happens from such a young age, then the constructed notion will be ingrained in these children. Even though male and female competitors have taken part in largely similar competitions, their celebration and rewards are highly binary and explicitly gendered. The award ceremony becomes a performative action where the stereotypes associated with ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ are routinely replicated indefinitely.

As Butler notes, “if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.”¹⁵³ So through the

¹⁵² Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago Press, New Edition 2015), 133.

¹⁵³ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 187.

dancers performing a strict gender binary onstage during the awards ceremony, they replicate notions of the conventionally ‘feminine female’ and ‘masculine male’, thus reinforcing the binary from which they come. Butler continues, “gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualised and reproduced as reality once again.”¹⁵⁴ This implies that the dancers who take part in, and perform the ritual of celebration, without questioning its gendered nature, are complicit in upholding the hetero-patriarchal constructions it comes from. The use of the word ‘complicit’ is deliberately provocative here as the majority of competitions contain children who arguably are unable to comprehend the gravity of partaking in this gendered ritual. This means that the adults involved in curating the process are choosing to support this binary and are indoctrinating children into it. This is comparable to the indoctrination of young girls into the beauty myth and rape culture through the Rose Bud process.

Young female Irish dancers are taught to want to win the crown, similar to the aspirations of beauty pageants entrants, while young male dancers are trained to want the winning belt, akin to those worn by boxers and Mixed Martial Arts fighters, in a field dominated by men and performances of ‘toxic masculinity’. Forcing children to take part in such rituals purely based on their gender ignores the multiplicities inherent in gender identities and it supports the idea that males must perform their gender in a hyper masculine way, while females must present as hyper feminine. This supports rape culture through implying that males are physical and ‘macho’, while females remain beautiful and aspire to pageantry. As Walter points out of children today, “This is a generation in which many boys are encouraged into a stereotyped masculinity at an early age; for those who resist, life can be uncomfortable.”¹⁵⁵ This is the very basis of contemporary performances of ‘toxic masculinity’ and is routinely perpetuated through these awards ceremonies. Emilie Buchwald contends that,

A child is born with a sex determination but without innate knowledge of what it means to be a woman or a man. Even before its birth, the preconceptions of the parents seal a child’s gender fate, and moments after birth the infant is swaddled in gender definition. Our self-image as a female or a male is a major force in creating the person we become. We exaggerate gender differences rather than celebrate what we share as human beings. Male and female are distanced from one

¹⁵⁴ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 193.

¹⁵⁵ Walter, *Living Dolls*, 136.

another, made into polar opposites, as if a division into yin and yang were mandated. We sunder brother from sister and create lifelong distrust.¹⁵⁶

The differentiating of female and male children in the awards ceremony process reinforces this strict gender divide and indoctrinates children into the beauty myth and rape culture as they are trained to expect to be treated differently based on their gender identity.

Every year at the championships, there is a ‘Vendor Village’ operating for the length of the competition. In 2017, this took place in a large room beside the main competition space. In the village, there were numerous food vendors, a shop selling official merchandise for the championships, stalls representing different international costume designers and stalls selling dance accessories such as shoes, wigs, socks, sock glue, false tan, head pieces and personalised water bottles. The most prominent stall in the village belonged to costume designer Gavin Doherty. It was the first stall on the way into the village and the only stall that could be seen from outside of the village. Doherty’s influence in the Irish dancing community cannot be understated. For the 2017 Championships, his costume company was the only ‘Platinum Sponsor’ Vendor [Note 26]. The back cover of the official programme of events for the championships is a full-page advert for Doherty’s costumes and features photographs of nine World Champions wearing his costumes with the slogan, “The Only Choice For Champions”¹⁵⁷ written underneath, as shown in [Figure 12]. The message is clear from the stall placing, onstage advertisements and series of World Champions; ‘A Gavin’ is the most desirable and sought-after Irish dancing costume for competitors.

Between August 2013 and May 2017, highly sexualised images of predominantly female children wearing Doherty’s costumes were available on the official website for ‘Eire Designs by Gavin Doherty’. In May 2017, the website was redesigned and no longer includes such images, but they are still visible on the official Facebook page for Eire Designs.¹⁵⁸ These images include young female children wearing Doherty’s costumes, with non-traditional headgear [Figure 13], such as fascinators and feathers, non-traditional footwear, such as high-heeled shoes [Figure 14], and sneakers [Figure 15], and heavy, clown-like makeup [Figure 16]. Many of these photos have the children placed in provocative positions, such as lying down on couches, beds and rugs, with blank facial expressions and legs bent in the air as demonstrated in [Figures 17, 18, 19, 20, 21]. The

¹⁵⁶ Emilie Buchwald, ‘Raising Girls in the Twenty-First Century’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 214.

¹⁵⁷ An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha, ‘47ú Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2017’ Programme, Back Cover Page.

¹⁵⁸ Eire Designs by Gavin Doherty, ‘Photos – Website Photo Shoot’, *Facebook*, August 21, 2013, accessed July 27, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/pg/eiredesigns/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10151797201361506

photos present the female children as sexualised and objectified dolls. Given that Doherty is the leading costume designer, it is highly problematic that he portrays female children in this way. As de Beauvoir points out in relation to young female children equated to dolls, “The little girl cuddles her doll and dresses her up as she dreams of being cuddled and dressed up herself; inversely, she thinks of herself as a marvellous doll.”¹⁵⁹

Doherty expressly presenting these children as dolls dressed up in his costumes sustains rape culture through reinforcing gendered stereotypes of the passive, ‘doll-like’ female, used as a prop for male advancement. In a similar manner to the indoctrination of children into the beauty myth and hetero-patriarchal gender binary through the award ceremony at the World Championships, and the Rose Bud scheme, these images indoctrinate female children into rape culture. They support the idea that women should be conventionally beautiful ‘dolls’ with no agency, open to sexualisation and objectification. In this way, it can be argued that the aesthetics of contemporary Irish dancing embrace rape culture through portraying female dancers as sexualised objects, devoid of their own subjectivity.

Contemporary fashions in Irish dancing are increasingly sexualised, objectifying and supportive of ‘toxic femininity’. On April 9, 2017, I attended the ‘10-11’ and ‘11-12’ competitions for boys and girls.¹⁶⁰ On April 15, I attended the senior ladies and men competitions. In comparing the age groups, it is clear that it is the younger dancers who are more concerned with advancing and adapting costume design. For example, several years ago, ‘Championship Length’ socks came to just below a dancer’s knee. Senior ladies are still wearing these longer socks, while younger dancers have reverted back to shorter styles. Also, older dancers are still mostly wearing the longer wigs made popular when wigs became normative post-*Riverdance*, while younger dancers have now changed to mostly wear ringleted bun hair pieces. Although these changes may not be explicitly linked to a performance of ‘toxic femininity’ at a glance, when coupled with other current trends, the link becomes apparent. At the 2017 championships, almost all of the younger dancers wore shoes adapted from the traditional styles. Some older female dancers also wore adapted shoes. The new trend is to have white shoelaces, as opposed to black, in the light shoes and to have a white ankle strap, instead of black, in the heavy shoes. The

¹⁵⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, New Edition, (London: Jonathan Cape Vintage Books, 2011), 306.

¹⁶⁰ There were 150-175 dancers competing in both of the female competitions, as opposed to 40-60 dancers competing in the male competitions. This vast difference in the number of females and males dancing holds strong throughout all age groups, and in the senior competitions, there were 196 ladies and only 38 men listed to compete. This complete lack of gender balance highlights how, despite the ‘re-masculinisation’ of Irish dancing through *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*, competitive Irish dancing remains a largely female pursuit. This research focuses primarily on what the female competitors wear, but refers and comparison to the male competitions where relevant.

dancing costumes have also evolved, as most styles now feature a dropped waist, with a band across the natural waist.

All of these adaptations are focused on making the dancer look as small as possible. The white laces in light shoes make the arch of the foot look higher and more delicate. The white straps on heavy shoes make the ankle look smaller and the foot neater. The dropped waist on the dresses highlights the slight frame of the dancers, while the band across the natural waist accentuates a narrow waist. All of these emerging trends have one thing in common; they focus on making the female body look as small and conventional ‘feminine’ as possible.

The fact that the younger dancers are more quickly and readily adapting to these new trends highlights one way in which the indoctrination into the beauty myth and constructions of ‘toxic femininity’ begin at an alarmingly young age for female dancers. These new trends and developments come from the costume designers, such as Doherty.

Young children would not necessarily be aware of their own sexualisation, objectification and indoctrination into the patriarchal beauty myth. Adult costume designers are knowingly constructing performances of ‘toxic femininity’ through their emerging trends. As Walter argues, “Far from encouraging the view that children are born into their pink and blue boxes [...] children only learn to become masculine or feminine through the way they are treated.”¹⁶¹ In this way, it can be argued that these conditionally ‘feminising’ emerging trends among the highest level of competitive dancers serve to encourage and perpetuate a performance of ‘toxic femininity’ among current young female Irish dancers. The World Championships is the largest and most desirable stage on which the indoctrination continues.

Section Six: Conclusion

This chapter explores the construction of rape culture, ‘toxic femininity’, ‘toxic masculinity’ and the beauty myth in contemporary competitive Irish Dance. It charts the history and dominance of *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha* (CLRG), the largest and oldest Irish dancing organisation, and the impact this organisation has had on Irish Dance throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries both in Ireland, and globally. The chapter also examines the rise in popularity of Irish dancing due to the emergence of dance shows such as *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*. It analyses the performance of gender in contemporary Irish dancing competitions through using the 2017 World Championships

¹⁶¹ Walter, *Living Dolls*, 138.

as a case study. The chapter highlights the misogynist, hetero-patriarchal structures that support contemporary Irish dancing in a bid to expose its relationship to rape culture.

One of the main arguments throughout this dissertation is that contemporary rape culture is now prevalent in all areas of society. This chapter is explicitly concerned with examining how young child dancers are indoctrinated into this rape culture through the performances of gender identities, ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ in Irish dancing. When young female children are trained to accept sexualisation and objectification, and to perform their femininity in accordance with limiting, violent, culturally constructed conventions, rape culture is strengthened and normalised.

One of the main counter arguments for the existence of contemporary rape culture is due to the misinterpretation of rape culture as being solely concerned with normalising acts of sexual violence, predominantly against women. This is not the case. The term ‘rape culture’ encompasses a wide range of beliefs and behaviours linked to patriarchal control, social constructions of gender identity and misogyny. Chapter Three of this dissertation argues that the performance of contemporary beauty pageants serve to perpetuate and sustain rape culture indefinitely. As Walter argues when discussing how seemingly ‘harmless sexism’ leads to rape culture, “This is not to say that all sexism is equally serious, but there is a link between the sexism that values women primarily as sexualised objects, and the sexism that silences and ignores women who have been abused.”¹⁶² This chapter shows how it is not only beauty pageants that support such constructed ideals, but also children’s competitive dance. Just as the young Rose Buds are indoctrinated into the beauty myth and performance of ‘toxic femininity’ in the *Rose of Tralee*, children are also indoctrinated into this through partaking in Irish dancing competitions. Irish dancing can be defined as an art form or as a sport. This dissertation argues that it is both; and should be celebrated and practiced as such. However, due to the indoctrination of young females into rape culture through normalised hetero-patriarchal gender identities in competition, this dance becomes more about physical aesthetic than dance mastery. As long as this indoctrination continues, rape culture will remain a powerful, unchallenged entity.

¹⁶² Walter, *Living Dolls*, xvii.

Conclusion:

‘Nevertheless, She Persisted.’¹

¹ ‘Nevertheless she persisted’ is an expression that has been adopted by the feminist movement in 2017. It became popular when the United States Senate voted to silence Senator Elizabeth Warren’s objections to the confirmation of Senator Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General. When asked about the decision to silence Warren, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell defended the decision of the Senate and denouncing the actions of Warren in saying that, “She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted.” The expression went viral on social media platforms as feminists claimed it as a rallying cry, a mission statement and emblematic of the current fights fourth wave feminism and feminists are engaged in. It also relates to women's persistence in breaking barriers, despite being silenced or ignored. It is used here as representative of the power of reclaiming the speech act; as it was meant to criticise Warren but is now lauded as a feminist mantra. It is also symbolic of the fight against rape culture and the work of this dissertation as I strive to deconstruct such systemic oppression through this research.

The dissertation begins with Emilie Buchwald, Martha Roth and Pamela Fletcher's definition of a rape culture from their edited collection *Transforming a Rape Culture*. This book was originally published in 1993, thus proving that the concept of a rape culture has been in existence for over twenty years, long before the beginnings of the fourth wave of the feminist movement. As Andrea Dworkin argued in 1996, "We live in a rape culture. [...] We live under what amounts to a military curfew, enforced by rapists. We say we're free citizens in a free society. But we lie. We lie about it everyday."² However, this research argues that rape culture has become increasingly prevalent in the twenty-first century, particularly with vast developments in technology,³ which have led to widespread access to the Internet. Rape culture remains, "A complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women."⁴ It has always relied on culturally constructed 'rape myths', and 'slut-shaming' and 'victim blaming' narratives. However, this dissertation argues that the ever-increasing prevalence of 'toxic masculinity' and 'toxic femininity' in contemporary culture is heightening the effects of rape culture, and it is becoming demonstrably more prevalent, and dangerous at present.

This dissertation is about sexual violence, rape culture and issues of empowerment for women, and it is deeply rooted in feminist theory and feminist ideologies. It explores the wide spectrum of contemporary rape culture, including the performative power of seemingly non-related behaviours that serve to implicitly support and reinforce this culture. It highlights the prevalence of a rape culture narrative in contemporary Irish society. It explores a key selection of contemporary Irish plays, performances and cultural frameworks to pinpoint where and how rape culture is negatively impacting on wider society. It deconstructs rape culture – its causes, components and effects – in a bid to challenge how accepted and normative this culture has become. Rape culture is part of

² Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 116.

³ The rise of social media has had an immeasurable effect on all forms of contemporary discourse. *Facebook* was launched in 2004, *YouTube* was established in 2005 and *Twitter* was created in 2006. Technically, the first smart phone was produced in 1992; the Simon Personal Communicator made by IBM, but the first iPhone came to the market in 2007. Given the other advancements in technology by this time, the iPhone was heralded as a revolutionary product that has changed the way consumers interact with their telecommunications device. All of these developments have altered how we communicate with the world around us. This has many advantages as now we can consume international news from anywhere in the world instantaneously and communicate with people from all over the world. This has benefited the feminist cause as people from different countries can meet online and organise international events, such as the 'Women's March on Washington' that happened in January 2017 to protest the inauguration of American President Donald Trump. Protest marches were simultaneously held all over the world. It also has negative side effect as seen in the rise of online 'trolling' or the fact that Donald Trump uses his personal *Twitter* account to tweet policy. Regardless, the impact of technology in the 21st century cannot be understated.

⁴ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, (Eds) *Transforming A Rape Culture*, (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), P. xi.

systemic patriarchal privilege and power, and it ultimately works to maintain the oppression of women and the patriarchal order. This dissertation challenges that patriarchal order; and promotes female empowerment through examining both explicit, and implicit, performative actions of rape culture.

This research is a product of fourth wave feminist discourse, and it adds to the conversation fourth wave feminists are having in the second decade of the twenty-first century. As stated in the Introduction, in 2017, the ‘Global West’ is in crisis. This can be seen in the homelessness crisis in Ireland, Britain’s decision to leave the European Union, the refugee crisis, the increasing ferocity of terrorist attacks attributed to the ‘Islamic State’ and the War on Terror, the growth in white supremacy and systemic racism, the rise of the ‘alt-right’ stream of political thought, and the leadership of the supposed ‘free world’ by a racist,⁵ misogynistic,⁶ narcissist,⁷ Donald Trump. Many of these issues are the product of deeply entrenched patriarchy, and patriarchal governance.

In the revised introduction to *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender writes that, “A patriarchal society is based on the belief that the male is the superior sex and many of the social institutions and much social practice is then organised to reflect this belief: in one sense a patriarchal society is organised so that the belief in male supremacy ‘comes true’.”⁸ The largely unchallenged rule of patriarchal ideology has led to the prevalence of a contemporary rape culture. This rape culture operates in turn to support patriarchal authority.

The proliferation of sexual violence, the most violent result of rape culture, is an epidemic across the globe. It is impossible to know exactly how many people are directly affected by sexual violence, but it is reasonable to assume that huge numbers are. As stated in Chapter One, it is estimated that at least thirty-five per cent of women worldwide will experience some form of physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.⁹ Men do

⁵ Lydia O’Connor, Daniel Marans, ‘Here are 16 examples of Donald Trump Being Racist’, *Huffington Post*, February 16, 2017, accessed June 26, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/president-donald-trump-racist-examples_us_584f2ccae4b0bd9c3dfe5566

⁶ Claire Cohen, ‘Donald Trump Sexism Tracker: Every Offensive Comment in One Place’, *Telegraph* January 20, 2017, accessed June 26, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/politics/donald-trump-sexism-tracker-every-offensive-comment-in-one-place/>

⁷ Seth Davin Norrholm, ‘The Malignant Narcissism of Donald J. Trump: An Interactive Checklist’, *Huffington Post*, February 3, 2017, accessed June 26, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-malignant-narcissism-of-donald-j-trump-an-interactive_us_5893ea8de4b02bbb1816b8ef

⁸ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*, revised ed., (London: Pandora Press, 1990), 1.

⁹ World Health Organisation, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and

experience sexual violence, but it is predominantly women and children¹⁰ who experience such violence. This dissertation sheds a light on the proliferation of sexual violence in contemporary culture, with a specific focus on Ireland, while highlighting and simultaneously deconstructing contemporary rape culture. Until the vastness of contemporary rape culture – and the spectrum on which it operates – is exposed, it cannot be fully deconstructed.

The dissertation deliberately uses the words and ideas of female writers and theorists throughout as a radical attempt to aid the empowerment of women through promoting the female voice. Rape culture disproportionately affects women. The physical act, and the threat of sexual violence, also disproportionately affect women. As Jessica Valenti argues in *Full Frontal Feminism*,

When I was in college, a teacher once said that all women live by a ‘rape schedule.’ I was baffled by the term, but as she went on to explain, I got really freaked out. Because I realised that I knew exactly what she was talking about. And you do too. Because of their constant fear of rape (conscious or not), women do things throughout the day to protect themselves. Whether it’s carrying our keys in our hands as we walk home, locking our car doors as soon as we get in, or not walking down certain streets, we take precautions. While taking precautions is certainly not a bad idea, the fact that certain things women do are so ingrained into our daily routines is truly disturbing. It’s essentially like living in a prison – all the time. We can’t assume that we’re safe anywhere: not on the streets, not in our homes. And we’re so used to feeling unsafe that we don’t even see that there’s something seriously fucked up about it.¹¹

For this reason, many female writers and theorists write from the position of ‘lived experience’ of rape culture. This does not mean that male contributions are invalid or unnecessary in contemporary debate on rape culture, but deliberately promoting the female voice is a political decision to refocus the narrative as coming from those who potentially have a clearer understanding of such issues. This feeds into the point made by American feminist Roxanne Gay in the title of the Introduction, that outspoken feminism can be used to address hegemonic hetero-patriarchy, and to promote empowerment for

non-partner sexual violence, p.2. For individual country information, see The World’s Women 2015, Trends and Statistics, Chapter 6, Violence against Women, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015. - See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#sthash.QKsKQG3p.dpuf>

¹⁰ Although this dissertation specifically focuses on females, it does not discount the vast number of male children who experience sexual violence.

¹¹ Jessica Valenti, *Full Frontal Feminism: A Young Woman’s Guide To Why Feminism Matters*, (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007), p 62.

women. It also highlights the gender imbalance present in many other fields and it is a direct attack on patriarchal structures. As Spender contends,

While the power structure of patriarchy remains undisturbed, there is little space and even less credibility granted to the specific experience of women. Males, as the dominant sex, have only a *partial* view of the world and yet they are in a position to insist that their views and values are the '*real*' and *only* values; and they are in a position to impose their version on other human beings who do not share their experience. This is one of the crucial features of dominance; it is one of the characteristics of patriarchy, for it is the means by which one half of the human population is able to insist that the other half sees things its way. By this process alternative views and values are suppressed and blocked. Women's different experience is outlawed, is seen as unintelligible, unreal, unfathomable.¹²

This dissertation forms a direct attack on the false concept of 'post feminism' and uses radical female feminist voices and opinions to do this. As Dworkin argues on rejecting post feminism,

We have been asked by many people to accept that women are making progress, because one sees our presence in these places where we weren't before. And those of us who are berated for being radicals have been saying: "That is not the way we measure progress. We count the number of rapes. We count the women who are being battered. We keep track of the children who are being raped by their fathers. We count the dead. And when those numbers start to change in a way that's meaningful, we will then talk to you about whether or not we can measure progress."¹³

This dissertation looks at reclaiming power and agency focusing on emphasising the lived and real experiences of rape culture. This is done in order to examine constructive ways of producing a meaningful change to the rape culture narrative, and it champions the female voice as one way of doing this. Not only is it incorrect for men to present their personal experience as generalised '*real*' experience; it is also detrimental to discussions pertaining to patriarchal rule and contemporary rape culture. This dissertation is a marked attempt to address this issue and redress the gender balance. As Dworkin writes on the prominence of the male voice,

I have heard in the last several years a great deal about the suffering of men over sexism. Of course, I have heard a great deal about the suffering of men all my life.

¹² Spender, *Man Made Language*, 1-2.

¹³ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 106.

Needless to say, I have read *Hamlet*. I have read *King Lear*. I am an educated woman. I know that men suffer. This is a new wrinkle. Implicit in the idea that this is a different kind of suffering is the claim, I think, that in part you are actually suffering because of something that you know happens to someone else. That would indeed be new.¹⁴

This dissertation is a radical attempt to change the dominant patriarchal narrative indefinitely.

‘Toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ are defined in the Introductory chapter. ‘Toxic femininity’ is essentially the performance of destructive, socially constructed and normalised behaviours and actions by women, with the definite intention of supporting the hetero-patriarchal gender binary. ‘Toxic masculinity’, the progression of hegemonic masculinity, is this same type of performance carried out by men. The actual behaviours and actions of toxic femininity and toxic masculinity differ, based on whether a male or female is carrying them out. ‘Toxic femininity’ is concerned with ensuring that females adhere to the strict rules of the hetero-patriarchal constructed gender binary, while ‘toxic masculinity’ insists on males performing ‘normative’ masculine gender identities. The use of the word ‘toxic’ is not to imply that people have become toxic or inherently violent. Rather, it is used to highlight damaging behaviours that harm people of all genders. The dissertation explores these behaviours in a bid to recognise their association with rape culture, and to deconstruct them. As Laurie Penny argues, “One of the saddest things about modern society is that it has made us understand masculinity as something toxic and violent, associated with domination, control and savagery, being hungry for power and money and acquisitive, abusive sex. Part of the project of feminism is to free men as well as women from repressive stereotypes.”¹⁵ The reality is that gender is largely a performance, and it encompasses a set of performative behaviours. Gender identity exists on a spectrum, and to impose a binary structure on it is oppressive and repressive.

‘Toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ have been used in a deliberately singular form throughout the dissertation. This is because they are ascribed to specific performances and internalisations of femininity and masculinity. The terms ‘feminisms’ and ‘femininities’ are used throughout the dissertation because gender identities and performances exist on a spectrum. Juxtaposing the singularity of toxic femininity and masculinity with the pluralities present in feminisms and femininities highlights the

¹⁴ Andrea Dworkin, ‘I want a twenty-four hour truce during which there is no rape’, in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 15.

¹⁵ Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Lies, Sex and Revolution*, 75.

damaging potential of one singular or 'normative' mode of thinking or behaving. The word 'toxic' is linked to this singular performance because it enforces one negative idealisation of gender performance that is not applicable to many, if any, people.

The four main chapters of this dissertation cover widely varying aspects of contemporary Irish performance. This research argues that, although it may not clearly appear initially, there is an inherent link between the four main types of performance analysed – the performativity of language for women affected by sexual violence, contemporary Irish theatre, beauty pageant performance, and competitive Irish dance performance – the performativity of contemporary rape culture binds them together. Rape culture exists on a spectrum and it permeates all aspects of contemporary society and culture. The research highlights how rape culture operates both explicitly and implicitly. All of the component parts of rape culture need to be identified and demystified in order to deconstruct it. For this reason, the performances analysed cover a wide range of examples of contemporary rape culture that ultimately work to subjugate and dis-empower women by sexualising and objectifying them, while silencing their voices and autonomy. Chapter Three and Chapter Four highlight the ways in which women and children are sexualised and objectified in pageant and dance performance. Such performances become mainstream popular culture entities through the televising and promoting of such events. These performances promote a singular, constructed and limiting viewpoint of femininity. Chapter One and Chapter Two examine the extreme potential of contemporary rape culture, where acts of sexual violence, and the normalisation of sexual violence have a detrimental effect on the safety of women. All four chapters interrogate components of contemporary rape culture. Notions of bodily autonomy, agency, power, performative speech and identity are examined and explored throughout. Each chapter is concerned with female empowerment, or the reclamation of empowerment through fourth wave feminist theory and practice. This dissertation uses each type of performance to argue that women can never be equal in society as long as rape culture prevails.

As discussed throughout, there has been much backlash to feminism in recent years. Such backlash ranges from promoting post feminism, to increasing levels of abuse of women online and the rise of 'revenge porn'. This backlash is directly promoting the normalisation of rape culture. Rape culture is not solely the carrying out of acts of sexual violence. Sexual violence may be viewed as the worst, most literal and visceral, product of a rape culture, but, much like gender identity and performance, rape culture exists on a spectrum. It is ideological as well as physical. As the editors of *Transforming a Rape Culture* argue, "In a rape culture, women perceive a continuum of threatened violence that

ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself.”¹⁶ So violent language forms a part of rape culture. This dissertation has a large focus on the use of language and injurious speech acts.

Fourth wave feminists are denounced as ‘anti-male’ or ‘feminazis’ by online trolls or anti-feminists commentators. Alice Stride uses the following anecdote to comment on how injurious speech acts are used to delegitimise feminist concerns,

I had a conversation with a close male relative about feminism: why it is vital, and why I maintain my right to be furious about sexism and inequality, to keep pushing for a better world. He insisted that as things are ‘better for women than they used to be’ there was nothing to be fighting against any more. “The problem with *you feminists*,” he said, “is that nowadays I feel like I can’t say ANYTHING – even if it’s a *joke*. You just get *hysterical* about everything.” And there – in one fell, sexist swoop – he proved my point. Thanks for that, *dear*.¹⁷

As discussed in Chapter One, such speech acts serve to delegitimise the female voice and to maintain patriarchal oppression. As Spender points out, “The image of the ‘women’s libber’ as neurotic, disturbed, embittered, and, significantly, ‘unable to get a man’ is but another example of the forms of intimidation that are employed against women who speak out. They should be silent, and if they are not, there is a price they must pay. Their words – and their selves – can be dismissed.”¹⁸ This dissertation proposes the reclamation of language, and the speaking out against rape culture and oppressive hetero-patriarchal narratives. It argues vehemently against the normalisation of such culture. It supports Dworkin's argument that, “I’m here to say that the war against women is a real war. There’s nothing abstract about it. This is a war in which his fist is in your face. [...] We are living under a reign of terror. I want us to stop accepting that that’s normal.”¹⁹ This dissertation is concerned with tackling that war against women and ending that reign of terror through the deconstruction of the patriarchal system that supports such violence.

Chapter One examines language as performance, and as a performative act. This chapter most explicitly tackles contemporary rape culture as it deconstructs the language and speech acts that support it. Language can serve both transformative and performative purposes. This is especially true when applied to women directly affected by sexual

¹⁶ Buchwald, Fletcher, Roth, (eds) *Transforming A Rape Culture*, xi.

¹⁷ Alice Stride, ‘This is NOT a Feminist Rant’, in *I Call Myself a Feminist: The View From Twenty-Five Women Under Thirty*, eds., Victoria Pepe, Rachel Holmes, Amy Annette, Alice Stride, Martha Mosse (London: Virago Press, 2015), 79.

¹⁸ Spender, *Man Made Language*, 111.

¹⁹ Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 118-9.

violence. This chapter argues vehemently against the labelling of a woman who has experienced sexual violence by anyone but herself. In contemporary rape culture, the two words most often applied to someone who has experienced sexual violence are ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’. The research in this chapter argues that both terms are inherently flawed due to the inability to remove these terms from a connection to their culturally and historically constructed meanings. There is no one perfect word or term available for women who have experienced sexual violence, as all language implies constructed meanings. This means that women who have experienced sexual violence need to define themselves as and how they see fit. Their self-definition can change as seldom or often as is appropriate for them. When a woman who has experienced sexual violence is named and labelled by someone else, a violent speech act is carried out on her that forms a level of double disempowerment, potentially re-traumatising her experience. One of the main ways to deconstruct rape culture is to examine language and seek to be empowered through reclaiming or re-appropriating injurious speech acts.

Chapter One also interrogates the construction of sexual assault in Irish law. It links the legal situation to mainstream discourses of rape trials and investigations. The public perception of cases of sexual violence, coupled with the shortcomings of law, create and sustain ‘victim blaming’ and ‘slut-shaming’ narratives. These narratives in turn support contemporary rape culture indefinitely. The purpose of analysing the use of language, both legally and in popular mainstream culture, is to deconstruct rape culture through exposing its components as individually flawed.

In the introduction to Chapter Two, Judith Butler is quoted, stating that, “gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.”²⁰ She also writes that, “gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.”²¹ Chapter One argues that this logic can also be applied to rape culture. Rape culture has existed for millennia because of long-standing patriarchal assumptions about women, female bodies and male entitlement to those bodies. So rape culture relies on the continued oppression of patriarchal ruling and governance. Simultaneously, one of the ways in which patriarchy remains such a dominant force in contemporary society is through the existence and proliferation of rape culture. Rape culture and patriarchy are cyclically linked and inherently dependent on each other. They are mutually sustained

²⁰ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 194.

²¹ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007), 190.

narratives. From the supremacy of rape culture comes ‘victim blaming’, ‘slut-shaming’ and ‘rape myth’ narratives that can be related to the performance of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ behaviours. These consequently feed into and sustain rape culture indefinitely.

Chapter Two analyses five contemporary Irish plays that have premiered since the year 2000. These plays are Gillian Greer’s *Petals*, Marina Carr’s *On Raftery’s Hill*, Mark O’Rowe’s *Our Few and Evil Days*, Abbie Spallen’s *Pumpgirl* and Caitríona Daly’s *Test Dummy*. Carr, O’Rowe and Spallen are established international Irish playwrights, with both Spallen and Carr winning the prestigious ‘Donald Windham-Sandy M. Campbell Literature Prize’ in 2016 and 2017 respectively.²² Greer and Daly are up-and-coming Irish playwrights, who have both been nominated for *The Irish Times Theatre Awards* in recent years.²³ These playwrights are diverse in terms of gender identity, generation and experience and all five of the plays analysed in this chapter include a narrative of sexual violence against women. The narratives vary and include child sexual abuse, gang rape, incest where a parent abuses a child, incest where a child abuses a parent and ‘questionable’ sexual violence. There is no such thing as a ‘questionable rape’, where it is unclear where or not the person raped gave consent to engage in sexual activities. It is very clear that all of the women in these plays who experience sexual violence either did not give consent to their respective rapes, or they were incapable of giving consent due to age, level of intoxication or vulnerable mental state. However, in writing rape narratives that could be construed as ‘questionable’, the playwrights deconstruct the rape myths that sustain the belief in contentious sexual consent. It is one of the ways in which the playwrights tackle and deconstruct rape culture as their plays can be read as mirrors of, or reflections on, wider society, where problematic consent law feeds into the public perception of rape cases.

The five plays are linked not only through their depiction of sexual violence against women, but also through their use of ‘toxic femininity’ and ‘toxic masculinity’ behaviours. The dissertation argues that such toxic behaviours can drive rape culture and the act of sexual violence in contemporary society. It could be argued that in dealing with

²² Since 2013, a small number of literary figures – eight or nine annually – have been awarded this prize as a way to recognise their contribution to literature. The winners are writers of poetry, fiction, nonfiction and drama. The prize is awarded by Yale University. Marina Carr won in 2017, while Abbie Spallen won in 2016. In addition to a citation and an award, winners are given an unrestricted grant of \$165,000 (€150,000). There is also a week long celebration of the writers and their work. For a full list of previous winners see, <http://windhamcampbell.org/recipients> (Accessed May 31, 2017).

²³ Gillian Greer’s *Petals* was nominated in the ‘Best New Play’ and ‘Audience Choice’ categories in 2015. Caitríona Daly’s *Test Dummy* was nominated in the ‘Best New Play’ and ‘Best Actress’ categories in 2017.

sexual violence, these plays do not deconstruct rape culture as they simply reproduce the rape narrative so common in contemporary media and culture. However, this dissertation argues that they do serve to deconstruct rape culture through the ways in which they depict sexual violence against women.

None of the plays analysed stage a fully physicalised rape scene. In *Petals*, *Pumpgirl* and *Test Dummy*, the respective woman who experienced the violence presents a reported action of her trauma and abuse to the audience in a monologue form. *Our Few and Evil Days* and *On Raftery's Hill* come closer to acting out a physical rape scene, but both stop short of showing the violence. In *Our Few and Evil Days*, the audience sees Margaret hallucinating or imagining her young son Jonathan coming down the stairs, as he did on the night that he raped her and was murdered by his father Michael. In the closing lines of the play, he calls out to Margaret, questioning why she does not love him. The play ends before he comes fully down the stairs and the audience never sees her reimagining of her rape. In *On Raftery's Hill*, at the end of Act One, Red can be seen threatening Sorrel and cutting her clothes off. As he throws her onto the kitchen table, the audience is under no illusion as to what he is about to do to her, but significantly, the stabs his knife into the table and the scene cuts to a blackout immediately, “Now **Red** has her down to her slip. He pauses, looks in satisfaction at his work. And you all the time prancin round like the Virgin Mary. (He pushes her across the table, cuts the straps of her slip.) Now, this is how ya gut a hare. (Stabs knife in table.) Blackout.”²⁴ In order to deconstruct rape culture, it is necessary to examine the behaviours and actions that lead to the carrying out of sexual violence. All five of these plays allow for that examination as they focus on how the violence occurred rather than the physical act of violence itself.

In all five plays, the audience is given insight into the act of sexual violence through the eyes of the female who experienced the violence. In the three monologue plays, this is explicitly as a result of the characters of ‘Girl’, ‘Woman’ and ‘Pumpgirl’ telling their own story. In *Our Few and Evil Days*, the audience sees a reimagining of Margaret’s rape by her, as her son Jonathan appears only as a ghost or hallucination to Margaret. In *On Raftery's Hill*, the audience sees a dramatic change in behaviour of Sorrel after her rape, her actions are put more to the forefront of the play’s narrative than her rapist father’s. Her shift in behaviour is comparable to Dinah’s behaviour throughout the play, as she has experienced the same sexual violence for twenty-seven years. In this way, the narrative of sexual violence is presented through the eyes of the women raped. In a

²⁴ Marina Carr, ‘On Raftery’s Hill’ in *Plays 2*, (London: Faber & Faber), 35.

similar manner to the deliberate privileging of female theorists throughout this dissertation, the plays were chosen specifically because they privilege the voice of the woman directly affected by sexual violence. This is a direct challenge to the power of rape culture, as 'victim blaming' and 'slut-shaming' narratives rely heavily on the ability to silence women, and maintain patriarchal oppression through relegating their experiences of trauma. For these reasons, the plays analysed each read as a defiant stance against contemporary rape culture, and seek to deconstruct it through their respective narratives. Without 'victim blaming', 'slut-shaming', 'toxic femininity' and 'toxic masculinity' behaviours, rape culture can be deconstructed and demolished, and these plays highlight how contemporary Irish theatre seeks to elucidate on, and ultimately eradicate this culture.

Chapter Three examines the performance of contemporary beauty pageants, with a particular focus on the *Rose of Tralee* festival. This competition has taken place annually in Ireland since 1959. While the festival takes place in Ireland, it is also influenced by global pageantry performances as it invites women of Irish heritage living all over the world to compete in the festival. In this way, the *Rose of Tralee* competition can be read as representative of the contemporary Irish pageant, while simultaneously influenced by an international discourse.

The *Rose of Tralee* is analysed in its contemporary format, and the chapter discusses the performance of gender throughout the process. The pageant is contextualised within a rape culture framework, and the research examines its portrayal of female agency, empowerment, sexualisation and objectification. In deconstructing the strict rules and regulations imposed on entrants for this competition, the chapter applies Naomi Wolf's theory on the 'beauty myth' to expose how limiting and misogynist these rules are in practice. The rules and regulations mimic patriarchal social constructions on what it is to be the 'perfect woman' deemed objectively beautiful by all. The reality is that the 'perfect woman' does not and cannot exist as the beauty myth relies on unattainable aesthetic goals for women. Emphasis on this need to become the 'perfect woman' enables 'toxic femininity' behaviours.

As previously mentioned, the act of carrying out sexual violence is the epitome of a rape culture narrative. This is an act that resides on the far end of a spectrum of rape culture. The beauty myth is enacted on a spectrum in a similar manner. On one end of the spectrum is the pressure placed on women to conform to unattainable beauty standards through the use of magazine and billboard advertising. On the other end, the literal rules and regulations placed on women who enter beauty pageants force women to conform to these patriarchal and oppressive standards, and these standards have come to determine

the beauty standards of everyday life through popular culture, hence supporting 'toxic femininity'. Undoubtedly, it can be argued that women enter beauty pageants of their own free will, but the fact that being a beauty pageant queen is deemed an aspirational goal for women and girls, highlights the negative construction of the beauty myth, where aesthetic appearance is seen as a privileged desire.

While Chapter Three does not deal specifically with the act of physical sexual violence, the sexualisation and objectification of women in beauty pageant performance is a component of contemporary rape culture. It is a form of ontological violence of patriarchal standards and constructed ideals of femininity and female body image. As discussed in Section Three, contemporary performances and perceptions of the competitions heighten the sexualisation and objectification of the women who take part in them. Even though recent *Rose of Tralee* contestants, such as Brianna Parkins and Maria Walsh, have tried to subvert and transform contemporary perceptions of the festival through their queering of the image of the subservient, heterosexual maiden, critics still denounce the festival as out-dated and sexist in nature. The refusal of critics to analyse the festival in any other way actually sustains the sexualisation and objectification of its entrants through silencing the work of women actively seeking to change the image of the festival. Rape culture relies on such silencing, and when it is imposed on pageants entrants, it serves to reaffirm the patriarchal construction of such pageants, and effectively sustains rape culture. This is then passed onto young female children who are indoctrinated into the beauty myth and rape culture through exposure to an event such as the 'Rose Bud' programme. Between some of the rules and regulations placed on the women who enter beauty pageants, and the unwillingness of critics and commentators to recognise the changing potential of such competitions, the entrants remain 'beautiful objects', devoid of their own agency in the public eye. This silencing of women is a direct component of contemporary rape culture and is perpetuated onto young children who go on to continue the cycle of rape culture perpetuation.

Chapter Four focuses on the Irish Dance performance and the construction of gendered identities within Irish dancing competitions or 'feiseanna'. It tracks the history and development of the dance form throughout the twentieth century in Ireland, focusing on two watershed moments for Irish dancing, namely the founding of the Irish Dancing Commission (CLRG) in 1930 and the initial performance of *Riverdance* as the interval act for the 1994 Eurovision Song Contest. Just as Chapter Three examines the rules and regulations placed on beauty pageant entrants, this chapter looks at the rules and regulations imposed on Irish dancers in competition. It uses the CLRG World

Championships in 2017 as a case study for examining current aesthetic trends and practices in competitive dance performance and exposing the influence of hegemonic patriarchy – through dress designer Gavin Doherty – on young dancers. The World Championships expose how rape culture has infiltrated the competitive performances of Irish dancers.

The main aim of Chapter Four is to highlight and deconstruct the gendered body in performance in contemporary Irish dancing competitions. It is the only chapter that explicitly and specifically looks at child performance – but it has parallels with the Rose Buds in the *Rose of Tralee* – and it critiques the overt sexualisation and objectification of children, specifically young girls, in Irish Dance. The socially constructed beauty myth not only affects women, but also female children, as they are indoctrinated into it from a very young age, as is seen in the increasing sexualisation of children’s costumes for Irish dancing, and the inclusion of Rose Buds to the *Rose of Tralee*. The normalisation of sexualised female child bodies is a component of contemporary rape culture as it directly supports and constructs ‘slut-shaming’ narratives. The young female protagonists in Greer’s *Petals* and Daly’s *Test Dummy* both experienced sexualisation and objectification from a young age and, as discussed in Chapter Two, this has partly led to the ‘victim blaming’ narratives they express in their respective stories of experience sexual violence. How they were treated as children has had a detrimental effect on how they view themselves and their performances of their own sexuality. Had these women not experienced such sexualisation and ‘slut-shaming’ from a young age, they would arguably not blame themselves for their various experiences of sexual violence. Although fictional dramatisations of the extreme potential of contemporary rape culture, the effects of sexualisation and objectification on these young females is comparable to the potential impact of the sexualisation and objectification of young female Irish dancers in competitive performance. For this reason, it is necessary to interrogate and deconstruct the rules and regulations placed on the female child while competing in Irish dancing feiseanna. This also links with the examination of beauty pageant competition in Chapter Three, as the overarching emphasis on and rules for the aesthetic of a performer or entrant is intrinsic to the continuing support of rape culture.

Patriarchal influence over the dance form comes through the authority of the CLRG, as the organisation has its roots in the misogynist, patriarchal and oppressive founding of the Irish State in the early twentieth century. This oppressive founding force is similar to the setting up of the *Rose of Tralee* by men who wanted to use the female body for commercial gain and as a symbol of conservative morality. This patriarchal

control, when coupled with the ‘sexing up’ of Irish Dance through the popularity of touring shows such as *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*, has led to strictly sexualised female child bodies on stage. The World Championships in 2017 provided much evidence of this sexualisation as normalised behaviour, and in this way, contemporary Irish Dance performance in its current form sustains and supports rape culture. The rules of the CLRG and the aesthetics of the touring shows have created the contemporary costumed body of the Irish Dance performer where gender identity is presented in a strict binary manner and becomes a globalised commodification of histories. In *Lord of the Dance*, Michael Flatley ensures that his female dancers are viewed as objects of sexual desire and intrigue as they perform a striptease during the ‘Breakout’, or ‘strip-jig’ section of the show. The excessive use of false tan, makeup and increasingly revealing costumes worn by children in competition highlights the growing emphasis on the aesthetic of the performer and this is heavily influenced by the popular shows. This focus on aesthetic is a component of rape culture.

Women in Ireland have made many strides towards gender equality since the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. Such gains have been referenced throughout the dissertation. However, women in Ireland, similarly to women all over the world, are not yet equal to their male counterparts.²⁵ This dissertation has specifically focused on women and the performance of femininities, but it is important to note that ethnic minorities and members of the queer community face even greater marginalisation and stigmatisation in Ireland. This can be seen in the prevalence of homophobia, transphobia and racism in contemporary Irish society. Unquestionably, such performances of discrimination deserve close study and analysis, but lie outside of the confines of this dissertation. As a result, this research focuses particularly on gender discrimination against women, using rape culture as the pinnacle of this kind of misogyny.

There can be no gender equality until rape culture is dismantled and utterly destroyed. As Dworkin argues,

Equality is a practice. It is an action. It is a way of life. It is a social practice. It is an economic practice. It is a sexual practice. It can’t exist in a vacuum. You can’t have it in your home if, when the people leave the home, he is in a world of his supremacy based on the existence of his cock and she is in a world of humiliation

²⁵ This can be seen in the continued ‘pay gap’ in Ireland, the persistent gender imbalance in Irish politics, the lack of access for women to full reproductive healthcare in Ireland and the fact that the words ‘mother’ and ‘woman’ remain interchangeable in the *Constitution of Ireland*.

and degradation because she is perceived to be inferior and because her sexuality is a curse.²⁶

Rape culture is the key building block of contemporary hegemonic patriarchal oppression. In order to move forward, we need to reflect on, and deconstruct the current rape culture discourse. A man who boasts of committing sexual assault should not be the President of the United States of America. A woman seeking justice for her experience of sexual violence should not be asked in a court of law about her previous consensual sexual history. Ireland must not continue to falsely imprison women seeking proper access to full reproductive rights. Dworkin, one of the central figures of second wave feminism, who exposed the proliferation of rape culture, entitled her essay featured in *Transforming a Rape Culture*, 'I want a twenty-four hour truce during which there is no rape'²⁷ and this dissertation speaks to that desire to end rape, and rape culture. This dissertation uses four varying types of performances to unravel the falsehoods, misinformation and prejudicial preconceptions that surround and support rape culture. All of these performances speak to the components of a contemporary rape culture narrative. The dissertation applies fourth wave feminist discourse to rape culture in order to continue, and build on the work of second and third wave feminists in this field. We are all complicit, we are all responsible, and this dissertation is one way to move towards destroying rape culture. This is the fourth wave fighting back.

²⁶ Andrea Dworkin, 'I want a twenty-four hour truce during which there is no rape', in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 19.

²⁷ Andrea Dworkin, 'I want a twenty-four hour truce during which there is no rape', in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 11-22.

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Appendix:

Note 1: *Alternative Miss Ireland* was an annual pageant that took place in Dublin on the Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, March 17 each year. It began in 1987 and then ran from 1996-2012. It was a queer event that was open to "men, women and animals". The winners were predominantly male Drag Queens. Irish queer activist and Drag Queen performer, Panti Bliss hosted the pageant. It was specifically concerned with raising money for Irish HIV/AIDS organisations and raising awareness of HIV/AIDS. For more information see, *dancing at the Crossroads: Glamour Rooted in Despair Alternative Miss Ireland 1987-2004*, (Dublin: Pony Limited, 2004).

Note 2: *Mr Ireland* is a male beauty pageant that has taken place in Ireland four times (2010, 2013, 2014, 2016). The winner of *Mr Ireland* goes on to represent Ireland at the *Mr World* pageant. *Mr World* is an international pageant that is sponsored by the *Miss World* Organisation. It was launched in 1996 and took place in 1998, 2000, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016. Mr Ireland 2010, Kamal Ibrahim won the *Mr World* pageant in 2010. The *Mr World* pageant describes itself as, "the search for the world's most desirable man." For more information on *Mr Ireland*, the official Facebook page is, <https://www.facebook.com/MrIrelandOrg/> (Accessed February 14, 2017) The official website for *Mr World* is <http://www.mrworld.tv/index.html#.WKQ1RxicYfM> (Accessed February 14, 2017).

Note 3: *Miss Universe Ireland* is a pageant that took place annually from 2002-2015. The Winner went on to represent Ireland at the annual *Miss Universe* pageant. Until *Miss Universe Ireland* was founded, the winner of the *Miss Ireland* pageant would compete in *Miss World* and *Miss Universe*. *Miss Universe Ireland* was set up in 2002 by former a former Miss Ireland and model agency owner Andrea Roche. In 1998 she competed at the *Miss Universe* pageant, placing ninth overall. The official *Miss Universe Ireland* website and Facebook page have been deactivated. For more information, the official *Miss Universe* website is, <https://www.missuniverse.com> (Accessed February 14, 2017).

Note 4: *Miss Bikini Ireland* is a beauty pageant that has taken place annually in Ireland since 2012. The winner goes on to represent Ireland at the *Swimsuit USA International* pageant each year. The focus of *Miss Bikini Ireland* is "promoting beauty with a healthy lifestyle" as the competitors compete in bikini swimwear clothing. For more information, the official website of *Miss Bikini Ireland* is, <http://www.missbikiniireland.ie> (Accessed February 14, 2017). The official

website for the *Swimsuit USA International* pageant is, <http://www.swimsuitusa.net> (Accessed February 14, 2017).

Note 5: The pageants *Junior Miss Ireland* (ages 10-14), *Miss Teen Ireland* (ages 14-19), *Ms. Ireland* (single women over 25), *Miss Collegiate Ireland* (women enrolled at university or higher education), *Mrs. Ireland* (married women of any age) and *Lady of Ireland*, all form part of 'Ireland Pageants'. Jennie Lynch set up this company in 2012. Lynch is a former pageant title-holder and owner of *Redhead Events* of Belfast, as the *Miss Teen Ireland* Pageant. Since 2012, it has expanded to include the other five pageants mentioned. It claims to be Ireland's fastest growing beauty pageant system and wants to provide pageants for females from age ten upwards who cannot compete in the traditional *Miss Ireland* pageant. All of these pageants have taken place on the same night annually since 2012, with the 2017 competition taking place on October 14. For more information visit the official Facebook page for the pageant company, https://www.facebook.com/pg/MissTeenIreland/about/?ref=page_internal (Accessed February 14, 2017).

Note 6: *Dance Moms* is an American reality television series that premiered on the *Lifetime*

Network on July 13, 2011. As of 2017, it is in its seventh season. The show focuses on the Junior Elite Competition of the *Abbey Lee Dance Company*. It was created by *Collins Avenue Productions* and is set in both Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Los Angeles, California. It follows the dancers and their mothers as they travel around America weekly to compete in various dance competitions, with each season culminating in their performance at the National Championships annually. The dance styles the girls perform include jazz, ballet, contemporary, musical theatre and hip-hop. The show is named after the mothers of the dancers as it predominantly focuses on the behaviour and actions of the mothers who routinely fight amongst themselves and with the main dance teacher Abbey Lee Miller over their own child's dance career. The women portray the negative stereotype of a mother who is overly involved and concerned with her daughter's dancing, with the children involved being as young as seven years old. For more information, the official website for the television show is,

<http://www.mylifetime.com/shows/dance-moms> (Accessed March 13, 2017).

Note 7: *Dance Mums with Jennifer Ellison* is a spin-off series of *Dance Moms* that premiered on the *Lifetime* Network on October 20, 2014 and ran for two seasons. In a similar manner to its American counterpart, it was mostly concerned with the

behaviours of the dancing mothers and with sustaining the negative stereotypes associated with the ‘dancing mother’. It was created by Shiver Studios and set in Liverpool, England, at Jelli Studios. The official website for the show is, <http://www.mylifetime.com/shows/dance-mums-uk> (Accessed March 13, 2017).

Note 8: *Toddlers and Tiaras* website <http://www.tlc.com/tv-shows/toddlers-tiaras/> (Accessed February 10, 2016). This show premiered December 12, 2008; Final show aired October 16, 2013 on the American television network *TLC*. Although there are no new episodes, *TLC* broadcast reruns of the show regularly. This show follows the personal lives of families of contestants in American child beauty pageants. Although not always, the show generally focuses on the mother of the contestant who insists on entering children as young as two years of age in beauty pageants and ultimately performs the stereotype of the ‘dancing mother’.

Note 9: *Jigs and Wigs: The Extreme World of Competitive Irish Dance* website <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06w0304> (Accessed February 10, 2016). This show premiered in 2013 as a six part documentary series for the BBC network. It was commissioned for a second six-part series airing in 2016. In a similar manner to the others shows here mentioned, it focuses not only on the actual dance performers, but also on the lives of the mothers often fulfil the stereotype of the ‘dancing mother’. The original series was produced by *Sterling Firm & Television Productions* for RTÉ.

Note 10: This is a well-known phrase in Irish culture attributed to Eamon de Valera’s St. Patrick’s Day radio speech of 1943 and is often used as representative of the subservient role ascribed to women in Ireland post-Independence. Barbara O’Connor claims that this is a misquote and that he actually referred to the ‘laughter of comely maidens’ as reported in the *Irish Press* the following day, while making no reference to dance. However, regardless of a reference to dance or not, the sentiment of the quote remains the same. De Valera believed that women have a very specific role within the Irish State and should remain in their predetermined roles to maintain the hegemonic patriarchy that allowed men such as himself to remain in power while dictating to Irish citizens, especially women, how they should live their lives. Deviation from a predetermined role risked harsh consequence such as incarceration for females who engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage, thus sustaining the ‘Madonna/Whore’ binary indefinitely.

Note 11: ‘Structure of the Organisation’, *Irish Dancing Org*, accessed march 14, 2017, <http://www.irishdancingorg.com/web/index.php/structure/organisatio> This is the official website for the CNMRG and it lists its branches as follows, Americas

(Branch of the), Australia, Belfast, Belfast Regional, Belgium, Channel Islands, Connaught, Cork, Derry/Donegal, Dublin, East European Slovakia, Finland, Israel, Japan, Laois, London & Home Counties, Midlands, Mid-Ulster, Newry, Scotland, South Derry/South West Antrim, South Leinster, Southern England Region, UAE, USA, Waterford, West Tyrone, Wicklow. In order for a teacher to join the organization, they must have either the Teastais de Comhdháil na Rince Gaelacha (TCRG) or an equivalent Teastais De Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha. So they may be trained by either the CNMRG of the CLRG.

Note 12: ‘Home’, *Irish Dancing Network*, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.irish-dancing.net/en/index.htm> Organisation Founded January 2007 to provide open forum dance competitions for dancers from all other organisations, Project Terminated November 2012.

Note 13: ‘Home’, *CAID*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.caid-irishdance.co.uk> CAID is an Irish dancing organisation set up in the year 2000 by Christina Sweetland. It began with four schools and currently has seventeen schools based in England and Scotland.

Note 14: ‘Home’, *CRN*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.crn.ie> CRN was founded in 1982 by Ita Cadwell, and eleven other dance teachers. It is an international organisation with branches in North America. It operates on an open platform where all dancers from any dance organisation are eligible to compete at its feiseanna. Since 2012, it has held an annual World Championships for its dancers.

Note 15: ‘Home’, *World Irish Dance Association*, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.irish.dance> Organisation founded January 2004 by teachers in Germany, now active in twenty different countries.

Note 16: NAIDF was an Irish Dance organisation based in Ireland that merged with WIDA

In 2013 to create a larger and more international dance organization. NAIDF no longer has its own website. For information on the merge with WIDA see, Christy Dorrity, ‘National Irish Dance Federation and World Irish Dance Association merge’, *Irish Central*, September 3, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.irishcentral.com/culture/entertainment/open-platform-irish-dance-organizations-merge-222266231-238252081>

Note 17: ‘Home’, *IDTANA*, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.idtana.org> The

IDTANA was established in 1964 when Mae Butler, Fedelmia Davis, Kevin McKenna, Peter Smith, Cyril McNiff and Anna O’Sullivan met at the Irish Institute in New York City. Their aim was to regulate and standardize teaching and adjudication in North America. It currently operates in North America, Canada and Mexico and is in partnership with the CLRG.

Note 18: ‘Home’, *CRDM*, accessed February 7, 2017, <http://www.crdm.ie/index.php/en/> Organisation Founded 2002 by eight Irish Dance teachers from Co. Dublin and Co. Meath,

Note 19: ‘Home’, *FDTA*, March 14, 2017, <http://www.fdto.net> The FDTA was originally Founded in 1971 as the *Nine Glens Association*. It was renamed the FDTA in 2002. Festival dancing is a form of Irish dancing that differs from traditional Irish Dance in its costuming and performance style. Dancers wear more traditional costumes that do not include the luminous colours or heavy embellishment of costumes worn in other organisations. The dance style is more lyrical and less rigid than the main form of contemporary Irish Dance. Festival dancing is most common in Ulster. The homepage includes a video of the ‘Parade of Champions’ from the Ulster Championships in 2016 and this shows the differing style of festival dance.

Note 20: The Eurovision Song Contest is a competition that has taken place annually since 1956. The original idea for the contest came from Italian television producer, Sergio Pugliese. It was approved by Marcel Bezençon of the European Broadcasting Union. It was based on the Italian Sanremo Music Festival and was designed to test the limits of live television broadcast technology. It first took place in Lugano, Switzerland on May 24, 1956 and included seven European countries. It is a competition where different countries compose a new song to be performed at an international event where all countries involved vote on their favourite entry to find a winner. It is hosted annually in the country of the reigning champions. There are forty-three countries taking part in the 2017 competition from all over Europe. In 2015, due to its international popularity, Australia was permitted to enter. Due to the growing number of entrants, the rules for qualification have been modified numerous times. The current qualification model in operation since 2008 is that two semi-final contests are held several days before the grand final where the top ten songs from each semi-final qualify for the Grand Final. The country of reigning champion automatically qualify for the final along with the ‘big four’ countries, namely France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. These four automatically qualify due to their large financial contributions to the European broadcasting Union. The 2017 contest will be held in Kiev, Ukraine with the grand

final on May 13. For more information, the official website for the 2017 Eurovision Song Contest is, <http://www.eurovision.tv/page/timeline> (Accessed March 15, 2017).

Note 21: Ireland's winning entries for the Eurovision Song Contest are as follows: 1970 Dana 'All Kinds of Everything', 1980 Johnny Logan 'What's Another Year', 1987 Johnny Logan 'Hold Me Now', 1992 Linda Martin 'Why Me', 1993 Niamh Kavanagh 'In Your Eyes', 1994 Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan 'Rock 'n' Roll Kids', and 1996 Eimear Quinn 'The Voice'.

Note 22: There are two main types of shoes worn by contemporary Irish dancers. 'Light dances' such as the reel and slip jig, are performed in shoes known as reel shoes/pumps/poms/soft shoes. For female dancers, these shoes look similar to ballet pumps but are generally black in colour, with no blocks in the toes and the laces run all the way up the foot and tie at the ankle. 'Heavy dances' such as the heavy jig and the hornpipe are performed in shoes known as heavy shoes/hard shoes/jig shoes. They are usually black in colour and look similar to American tap shoes. They have a block heel and a fiberglass tip on the front. They are designed to make particular sounds on the floor as they are danced in. Female dancers' hard shoes have a flattened tip on the front of the shoe to allow the dancer to stand straight on the tip of their toes as ballet dancers do. Male dancers do not have this flat tip but their heavy shoes otherwise look the same as female dancers hard shoes. Male dancers' reel shoes look like heavy shoes but do not have the fiberglass tip underneath the ball of the foot and so they make no noise when danced in. Contemporary Irish dancers wear the shoes described here, but these shoes have changed and developed over the past hundred years. John Cullinane gives a good history of the changing and development of Irish Dance shoes in: John P. Cullinane, *Irish Dancing Costumes, Their Origins and Evolution Illustrated with 100 Years of Photographs, 1892-1992* (Dublin: Central Remedial Clinic Training Unit, 1999), 61-7.

Note 23: In 1995, Michael Flatley left *Riverdance* due to 'creative differences'. He went on to create his own show, *Lord of the Dance*, that is similar to *Riverdance* but is more concerned with the narrative of the male lead (performed by Flatley for many years) and is designed for larger stadia and arenas than the *Riverdance* show. It was choreographed, created and produced by Flatley. Ronan Hardiman wrote the music. It premiered in the Point Theatre in Dublin on June 28, 1996. The story follows the 'Lord of the Dance' as he fights the evil dark lord 'Don Dorcha' to prevent him from taking over the planet. The female dancers take on the side story

of love interests where ‘Saoirse the Irish Cailín’ fights for the love of the ‘Lord of the Dance’ with the evil ‘Morrighan the Temptress’. The stories are based on ancient Irish folklore but the performance is fuelled by toxic masculinity, toxic femininity and hegemonic hetero-normative patriarchy. It remains popular internationally with two dance troops touring the world in 2017. The official website for the current production of *Lord of the Dance: Dangerous Games* is, <http://www.lordofthedance.com> (Accessed March 16, 2017).

Note 24: This step is similar to the step of the same name in ballet. Female Irish dancers in

heavy shoes stand on the tips of their toes, forming a straight line from their hips to their toes. In ballet dancing, dancers have rubber tips inside their shoes to help with this movement. This is not the case in Irish dancing as dancers balance on the flattened tip of their shoes. It is an advanced step for dancers to perfect and perform. It is viewed as a ‘feminine’ step and male dancers do not perform it.

Note 25: While most dancers in *Riverdance* are CLRG trained, there are numerous CNMRG dancers in the cast also. The first Festival trained dancer to take the lead role in the show was Lauren Smyth, who took over the leading lady role for the 2012 tour. While Smyth did forge a path for Festival trained dancers, she remains a rarity in the successful touring shows. This is partly due to the vastly greater numbers of CLRG and CNMRG dancers in existence, but is also due to the fact that the dance style of the shows largely suits this particular dance style.

Note 26: All vendors who wish to have a stall at the World Championships have to apply to the CLRG. There are five different packages available to the vendors. These are listed as the Platinum, Emerald, Diamond, Standard and Mini Vendor Package. There was only one Platinum Vendor Package available for 2017, at a cost of €7,500. There were three Emerald Vendor Packages (€5,000) and three Diamond Vendor Packages (€4,000) available. There were numerous Standard (€3,000) and Mini (€1,000) Vendor Packages available, dependent on space. The Platinum Vendor Package included; vendor fee, largest booth area, best premium placement in vendor area, advertisement on main stage screen, full page colour advertisement in program, acknowledgement at side stage and in social media posts and twelve month ad on CLRG website. ‘World Championship Sponsorship, Advertising and Vendors’, CLRG, accessed July 27, 2017, <https://www.clrge.ie/index.php/en/sponsorship/world-sponsorship.html#spon47>



Figure 1. Kate Gilmore in Gillian Greer's *Petals*. Image Courtesy of Gillian Greer.



Figure 2. Caitríona Ennis in Caitríona Daly's *Test Dummy*. Image Courtesy of Ste Murray.



Figure 3. (Above) Rose of Tralee 2016 Maggie McEldowney pictured wearing earrings in the shape of the number eight. Image Courtesy of *The Irish Times*.

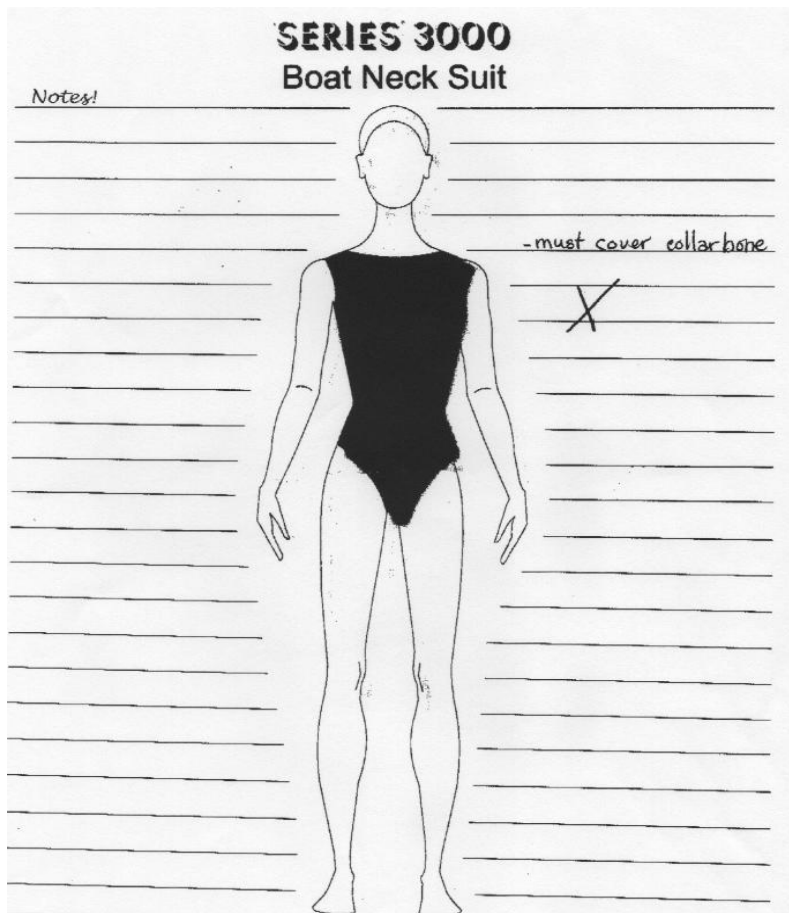
Figure 4. (Below) Still taken from original ‘Strip Jig’ sequence in *Lord of the Dance*. Image Courtesy of Google.





Figure 5. (Above) Still taken from 2013 performance of 'Strip Jig' sequence in *Lord of the Dance*. Image Courtesy of YouTube.

Figure 6. (Below) CLRG Costume Rules for Neckline. Image Courtesy of CLRG.



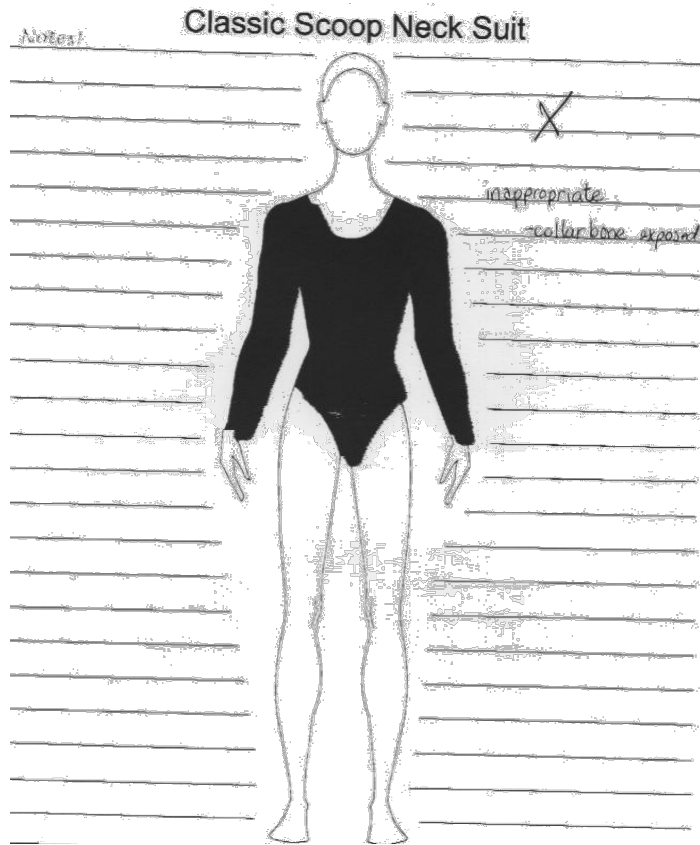


Figure 7.
CLRG
Costume Rules
for Neckline.
Image
Courtesy of
CLRG.

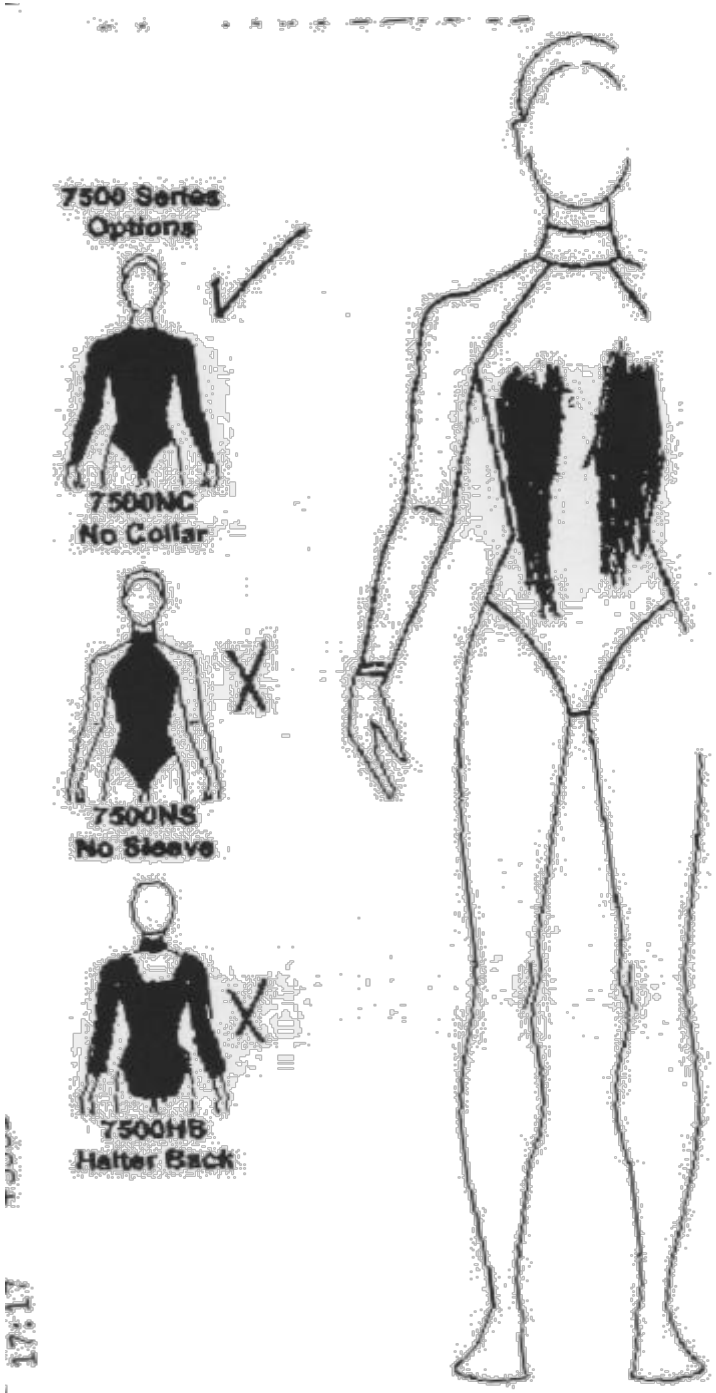


Figure 8.
CLRG
Costume Rules
for Neckline.
Image
Courtesy of
CLRG.

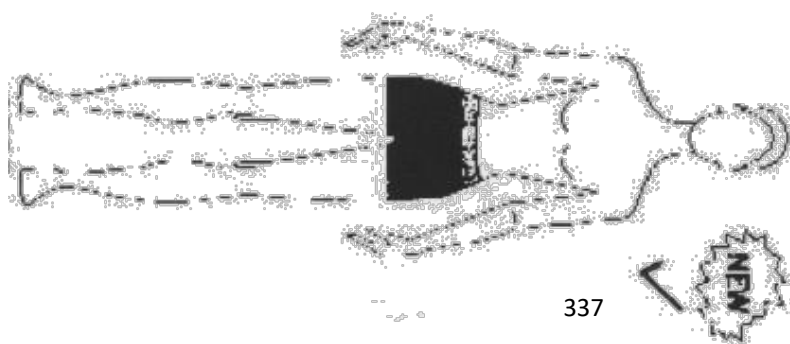
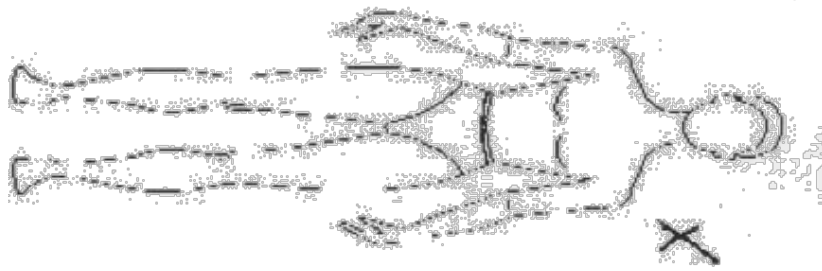
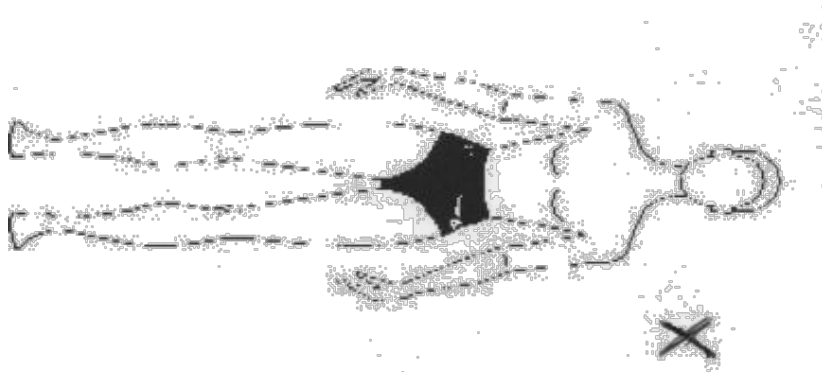
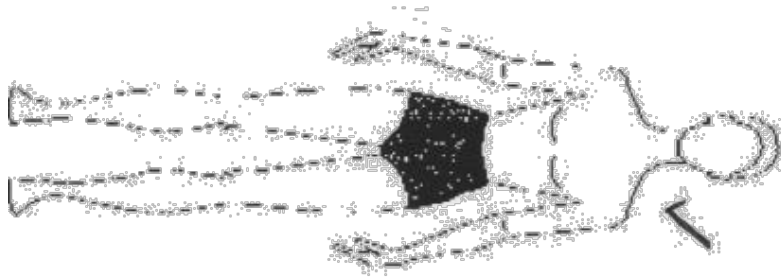


Figure 9. CLRG Costume Rules for Underwear. Image Courtesy of CLRG.



Figure 10. (Above) Girls 13-14 Presentation at *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne* 2017. Image Courtesy of Google.

Figure 11. (Below) Boys 13-14 Presentation at *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne* 2017. Image Courtesy of Google.





Figure 12. Advertisement for *Eire Designs by Gavin* printed on the back cover of *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2017 Official Programme*. Image Courtesy of CLRG.



Figure 13. Photograph of non-traditional headgear modelled by dancer wearing 'A Gavin'. Image Courtesy of *Eire Designs by Gavin*.

Figure 14. Photograph of high heeled shoes modelled by dancer wearing 'A Gavin'. Image Courtesy of *Eire Designs by Gavin*.





Figure 15. Photograph of non- traditional headgear and footwear modelled by dancer wearing 'A Gavin'. Image Courtesy of *Eire Designs by Gavin*.

Figure 16. Photograph of non-traditional makeup, hairstyle and footwear modelled by dancer wearing 'A Gavin'. Image Courtesy of *Eire Designs by Gavin*.





Figure 17. (Left)
Sexualised photograph child
dancer modelling 'A
Gavin'. Image Courtesy of
Eire Designs by Gavin.

Figure 18. (Below)
Sexualised photograph child
dancer modelling 'A
Gavin'. Image Courtesy of
Eire Designs by Gavin.





Figure 19.
Sexualised
photograph
child dancer
modelling ‘A
Gavin’.
Image
Courtesy of
*Eire Designs
by Gavin.*

Figure 20. (Right) Sexualised
photograph child dancer
modelling ‘A Gavin’. Image
Courtesy of *Eire Designs by
Gavin.*

Figure 21. (Below) Sexualised
photograph child dancer
modelling ‘A Gavin’. Image
Courtesy of *Eire Designs by
Gavin.*

