The Role of Social Media and the Criminal Justice System in the Perpetuation of Rape Culture in * Asking for It* (2015) and * Unbelievable* (2019)

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Abstract
Rape culture has become normalised at all levels and in all aspects of society, and its discourses, fallacies and myths have been institutionalised and entrenched on the basis of its patriarchal values, causing many state apparatuses to hold them as main reference. This dissertation attempts to examine the role of the Criminal Justice System and social media in the perpetuation of rape culture and all its mythology. By means of a critical analysis centred on Gender and Cultural Studies, Unbelievable (2019) and Asking for It (2015) are to be explored in order to prove that the two state apparatuses aforementioned are used as instruments to propagate all those hegemonic and patriarchal discourses belonging to the rape culture and to exercise monumental violence on its victims. Likewise, through their protagonists it will be demonstrated the impact these discourses have on victims and how these cultural products challenge them through their work and from a feminist perspective used to raise awareness about the harsh reality of the situation.

Key words: Rape, Rape Culture, Hegemonic Discourses, Criminal Justice System, Social Media
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Introduction

Historically, women have been victims of constant violence and aggression. Abuse, torture, humiliation, exploitation and slavery have been just some of the things that women around the world have been forced to endure since the beginning of time (Kaithwas and Pandey 2018). What is worse, this gendered violence has found its way into practically all current existing cultures and societies. Notwithstanding the reality that there are several forms of violence against women, this dissertation centres its attention towards one of the most controversial and pernicious: rape and its normalisation in contemporary cultures, which is referred to as rape culture. More specifically, the perpetuation of this crime has invaded every strand of society, leading to “the institutionalisation of patriarchal values” (Rozee and Koss 2001, 296) that are still deeply rooted in all state apparatuses. Consequently, this paper will focus on two of these apparatuses (Criminal Justice System and social media) to exhibit how both demonstrate an essential role in the perpetuation of rape culture.

In order to conduct a proper analysis in relation to all these aspects, two cultural products have been chosen to serve as a basis for the analysis. Firstly, Unbelievable (2019) is a mini-series that belongs to the Netflix digital platform. It was released on September 13th and its co-creators are Susannah Grant, Ayelet Waldman and Michael Chabon. The drama is based on real events detailed in the Pulitzer Prize-winning article “An Unbelievable Story of Rape” (2015) and tells, in a very faithful way, the story of Marie Adler (Kaitlyn Dever) addressing issues such as the misconception of rape victims related to the importance and presence of rape culture in the Criminal Justice System. Since its premiere, the mini-series has achieved great success and, in fact, it became one of last year’s most acclaimed series. Asking for It (2015), on the other hand, is a novel written by Irish author Louise O’Neill. Making her debut with Only Ever Yours (2014), O’Neill won the prize for the best new writer at the Irish Book Awards and Asking for It was awarded in December 2015 as best book of the year by the BGE Irish Book Awards. The novel concentrates on an invented rural village in the south of Ireland called Ballinatoom and explains what happened one night to Emma O’Donovan at a party that would suppose a huge turnaround and change in her life. Mixing traditional values and discourses with new technologies, the book deals with the destructive effects of rape and the impact that public shaming, enhanced by social media and its participation in the rape culture, has on victims.

The methodology used to develop my critical analysis is largely based on Gender Studies, as it will be developed from a feminist and gender perspective. Additionally,
the analysis will be also conducted from the Cultural Studies, as its main focus are two state apparatuses such as social media and the Criminal Justice System and how the cultural practices that form them contribute to the perpetuation of rape culture. For all these reasons, the Unbelievable series and the book Asking for It are perfect examples of how the Criminal Justice System and social media are used as a medium for disseminating the hegemonic discourses of rape culture and as instruments of violence against its victims.

This dissertation will start by providing a theoretical section in which the concepts of rape, rape culture and rape myths will be defined and explained as an introductory method for understanding the analysis to be carried out in the following parts of the study. Then, the analysis will focus on the Netflix mini-series Unbelievable and its protagonist to prove how the Criminal Justice System is an institution that has integrated the hegemonic discourses of rape culture and how this affects the investigation of rape cases and its victims. Something similar is intended to be carried out in the third section of this paper, this time focusing on Louise O’Neill’s book Asking for It and its protagonist, and shifting the focus on the new technologies and in particular on how social media are part of the rape culture, demonstrating how users perpetuate it and make it a tool for disseminating its hegemonic discourses.

**Theoretical Framework: Rape, Rape Culture and Its Myths**

The main aim of this section is to provide a theoretical background that explains what rape culture is, as well as its main or most important aspects. This is indispensable to understand the basis of this paper. Thus, this section will start by offering some definitions of rape for the better understanding of rape culture and its prevalence. Firstly, it is worth saying that “rape has always been part of human culture.” (Smith 2004, 9). The definition of rape, thus, has varied greatly throughout history and even today, it continues to lead to debate and confrontation. Although Rozee and Koss defined rape as “oral, anal, or vaginal penetration against consent through the threat of force or bodily injury or after intentionally incapacitating the victim with alcohol,” (2001, 296) Walby et al. claim to see a difference between the definition given by popular culture and the legal definition of this crime (2015), further stating that “discrepancy between popular and legal definitions of rape has consequences for the treatment of the victims of rape and for the conviction of rapists” (12). All these discrepancies mean that rape is often not taken as seriously as it should be because it
creates polemic in its aspects as well as supports in some way the normalization of this crime along with the creation of a culture specifically dedicated to it.

Taking all these aspects into consideration, then, what is rape culture? According to Phillips, “It is unclear who first coined the term “rape culture”, and there is some ambiguity to its definition” (2016, 5). However, many scholars agree and claim that the term “rape culture” was first created and used in the 1970s by the second wave of feminists [Harding 2015; Smith 2004; Dodge 2016]. This term was created precisely to designate all those social contexts, beliefs, stereotypes, myths and state apparatuses that normalized and enabled such a cruel crime as rape to exist. State Apparatuses such as the Criminal Justice System or social media are, thus, part of this culture, with patriarchal values serving as a basis for its perpetuation. It is precisely in these two on which this dissertation focuses, showing one that rape culture has long been established and another that it seeks new ways to perpetuate itself. While the Women’s Center institution in the University of Marshall defines rape culture as “an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture” (n.d), the renowned book Transforming a Rape Culture refers to it as “A complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and supports violence against women” (Buchwald et al. 1994, xi). However, these authors expand this definition and give it a more concrete meaning by stating that rape culture presents as the norm the physical and psychological terrorism exercised on rape survivors, making both men and women take sexual violence as an inevitable fact. (xi) In addition, the fact that the term “rape culture” contains the word “culture” in it implies that “the sociocultural supports for rape are structurally integrated in all levels of society” (Rozee and Koss 2001, 296).

The integration of supports for rape and rape culture into any aspect of society is carried out through a set of myths that allow their perpetuation. These myths are considered “the engine of rape culture” (Harding 2015, 30) and are defined by Lonsway and Fitzgerald as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (1994, 134). Therefore, they contribute to give a justification for a crime as damaging as rape and even normalize it, while being rooted on patriarchal and sexist discourses. Although anyone can become a rape victim/survivor, most of the messages that convey these myths are aimed primarily at women, giving moral lessons on how to dress, how to behave, or how to prevent it (Harding 2015). Furthermore, all of them
cause the rapist to be justified and the victim to be blamed, apart from guiding women into a life determined by constant vigilance and fear. As Grubb and Turner affirm, 

[the] acceptance or endorsement of rape myths has a significant impact on: 1) the way victims of rape are perceived, 2) the way victims of rape are treated, and 3) the propagation of a cultural acceptance of rape and a rape-supportive society. (2012, 445-446).

In fact, within rape culture, an image of a “real victim” has been created to agree on exclusive characteristics that rape survivors must possess in order to be considered as such and to gain some credibility from society. Any deviation from these characteristics leads to the victim being questioned or even harassed, which at the same time implies a constant revictimization and long-term trauma. As Harding claims,

As long as our image of a “real” rape victim is still naïve, sexually inexperienced, able-bodied, middle-class white woman conked over the head and dragged into an alley by a large, gun-wielding, brown man, other types of people who report rapes are at risk not only of being humiliated and degraded by invasive questioning and a general aura of suspicion, but of being charged with crimes themselves. (2015, 101)

This is precisely what happens to the protagonists on whom this paper is based on. In Unbelievable, Marie Adler is an 18-year-old girl who grew up in foster homes after a childhood shaped by rejection, and a rather problematic biological family. When she turns eighteen, Marie decides to move to Lynnwood, a Seattle’s suburb, in order to become independent and able to live on her own. However, shortly after moving in, a masked intruder would break into Marie’s apartment, raping her at knifepoint and even taking pictures of her after the crime. Despite immediately reporting it to the police, Marie is in a traumatic state, so it is hard for her to provide exact details of the assault. This fact, combined with a review of the files from her past and the perception of an overly relaxed and out of line attitude on Marie’s part, results in her being forced to declare that the assault was merely an invention, thus causing a domino effect and detrimental impact in Marie’s life. Accused of being a liar and an attention-seeker person by some of her closest affective relationships, she isolates herself from any feature of her previous life. In contrast, two detectives are investigating a series of rape cases three years after Marie’s case with which coincidentally share many characteristics, conducting an extremely thorough investigation in order to arrest the culprit.
On the other hand, Emma O’Donovan is the protagonist of *Asking for It*. Emma is a young girl of eighteen years of age born within an Irish family with traditional views and values. She is popular, beautiful and successful with boys, which implies that she has sexual experience and freedom. However, this sexual liberty clashes with the fact that Emma flirts even with her friends’ boyfriends – “Boys with girlfriends are [her] favourite” (O’Neill 2015, 99) – in a constant search for attention – “Was Eli looking? (I want him to have been looking)” (72) – and developing a certain reputation for herself. She is also shown as superficial – “He’s not enough. (No one will be impressed by Conor)” (105) – hypocrite and prone to bullying her peers, even excusing and trivializing the rape of one of her friends: “Let’s just pretend it didn’t happen, I told her. It’s easier that way. Easier for you” (O’Neill 2015, 94). This is the reason why when, at a party where alcohol and drugs did not do her much good and Emma is gang-raped and videotaped, no one in her environment seems to believe that Emma has been victim of rape but that she asked for it given her attitudes and reputation. It is important to note that O’Neill sought to introduce a protagonist that was not likeable, with whom the readers had trouble empathising and acknowledging her as a victim, and in which the readers questioned each of Emma’s decisions.

In consequence, Marie and Emma are not considered to be “real” victims because they break out of a mould constructed by a patriarchal society that normalises rape culture and its myths by allowing them to expand and adhere to all social and cultural levels.

**Unbelievable: Rape Culture and the Criminal Justice System**

The concepts of Criminal Justice and rape culture are linked in a somewhat problematic way. Criminal Justice System refers to a series of institutions belonging to the government whose main purpose is imposing justice on all those who have committed a crime. However, its functions also include the rehabilitation of the criminals, the prevention of these same crimes for which it is responsible and providing moral support to the victims and families. These institutions are governed by a number of constraints and rules to ensure that the laws are enforced and applied correctly. In this way, criminal justice is a system dedicated to ensuring justice and maintaining security so that the inhabitants of their district or region feel safe. Despite this, this system and its institutions demonstrate many inconsistencies in dealing with and investigating crimes such as rape. Even if it is true that “rape is illegal in most places in the world” (Walby et al. 2015, 5), and that “there have been important improvements in the quality of
criminal justice systems in relation to rape” (128), the law governing cases of violation are truly inadequate and inefficient and even today they need reform, as their implementation rates are alarmingly low (5). Furthermore, statistics indicate that the level of rape reports that result in prosecution and the arrest and imprisonment of the perpetrators is extremely low, which is in direct contrast to the number of sexual aggressions that occur, the latter being too high. The main reason why this is still happening today is because of the “disbelief in police and investigation system” (Kaithwas and Pandey 2018, 52). The Criminal Justice System, along with all its institutions, has entrenched hegemonic and patriarchal discourses that enhance rape culture and its myths, and therefore these have been standardised and perpetuated, taking them as a reference when handling and investigating rape cases. In Unbelievable, the issue of the investigations of rape cases in connection with notions of rape culture predominates, with the authors creating a parallelism and contrast between the investigation of Marie’s case, the protagonist, and a series of cases that happen three years later in a different state, being the first a rape investigation carried out from the myths and discourses of rape culture and the other one performed from a completely gendered and feminist perspective respectively. It is worth mentioning that it has been decided to focus this section on the series as Louise O’Neill’s book does not deal deeply enough with the theme of rape investigations and the Criminal Justice System, so in this way each section has one of the cultural products and its most recurrent theme as the main protagonists.

The first step that leads to the investigation of a rape crime is the report made by the victim so that the investigation can be undertaken. These are her narrative of the facts, her statement of the assault, but rape culture makes women’s allegations about violation always dubious, exaggerated or even false. This first contact with the police is crucial and very sensitive in this type of case, as officers must take into consideration the priorities of the case but also the needs of a victim who has just been through a traumatic experience. As Smith affirms,

The behaviour of the investigating officer who may be the first person to interview a rape victim is extremely important to the emotional well-being of the victim and to the prosecutor who depends on investigating officers to conduct initial interviews and to gather evidence at the crime scene. (2004, 160)

Not only is it significant that they believe rape survivors, but they also must show attentiveness and respect for them and their story. In the series, Marie immediately calls the police to report the aggression that has just been committed against her. Even if it is
true that the police officer has the duty to ask her about the rape in order to obtain information for the case – “Can you tell me everything that happened? Everything you remember” (Grant, Waldman, and Chabon. 2019, Episode 1, 1:56) – it is also true, taking as reference Smith’s quotation above, that the way in which the police conduct the interrogation has a profound impact on the victim’s well-being, something that he completely obviates with respect to Marie. This lack of empathy and understanding leads to a series of very explicit questions – “Was the penetration with his penis or his fingers? (Grant, Waldman, and Chabon 2019, Episode 1, 4:19) – that force Marie to revive the aggression she has just experienced and even to picture further images of violence she may not have suffered but she can now imagine she could have: “Did he also penetrate you anally?” (Grant, Waldman, and Chabon 2019, Episode 1, 4:15). Thus, Marie is subject to a revictimization caused by the aggression itself and the violent interrogation she has to endure.

The attitude of the police officer who first interrogates Marie is contrasted in the series with the first encounter between Detective Duvall, one of the detectives in charge of the investigations, and Amber, a university student who is raped at gunpoint in her bedroom by a masked stranger. Detective Duvall handles the interrogation in a completely different manner. Taking the victim to an isolated and safe place, she tactfully asks Amber only those questions that are necessary at this point, always taking into consideration her emotional state and her availability to talk about it: “Take your time” (Grant et al. 2019, Episode 2, 9:32). Duvall also explains at all times the procedure that will be followed for the investigation. In this way, the victim feels supported and assisted by the authorities she has sought help from, apart from being believed.

Apart from that first interrogation, Marie’s revictimization continues when she is questioned several more times, forcing her to recount the events again, and culminating in Marie being charged with false reporting and brought to trial. As Grubb and Turner state, “negative responses from criminal justice workers have been described as a form of secondary victimization.” (2012, 444) In fact, the attitude of the Detectives Parker and Pruitt, the ones in charge of Marie’s investigation, proves to be sceptical from the beginning: “Sorry to interrupt. Uh, just to be clear, the blindfold and the condom were from this backpack, but the laces and knife were yours?” (Grant, Waldman, and Chabon 2019, Episode 1, 7:28). These reactions are precisely due to the influence that rape culture and its myths have within institutions of this type, affecting both their workers and the laws that must be applied in rape cases, causing at the same time that “the
credibility of rape survivors is examined more closely than other crime victims” (Rozee and Koss 2001, 303). This is a clear connection with the patriarchal ideas about women as liars and at the same time establishes a “habit of treating women as complicit in crimes committed against them.” (Harding 2015, 138) In fact, that negative responses from the detectives are aggravated when they start digging into Marie’s past and her declarations. Tempted by Judith, one of Marie’s foster mothers – “She has been a little needier. A little more acting out” (Grant et al. 2019, 29:40) – the lack of evidences and the inconsistencies in Marie’s statements, the detectives emphasize their scepticism and are driven by an entirely victim-blaming attitude. This is because this system’s workers do not make an effort to understand the violence and the trauma that this crime entails, so they do not offer the victim the possibility to come to terms with what has been done to her as well as provide space for confusion and inconsistency in her story without immediately consider her unbelievable. In fact, from their social records, they force Marie to say that she invented the whole story and that she was just looking for the attention she needed, instigating a psychological torture on the victim beyond the physical one that she has already experienced through manipulation and subtle threats – “And if your answer turns out to be a lie, I have no choice but to arrest you and put you in jail” (Grant et al. 2019, Episode 1, 54:24) – which results in the victim being punished and charged with false reporting for something that has been committed against her.

On the other hand, this tendency towards victim-blaming is never perceived by Detective Duvall and Rasmussen, who understand that each victim reacts differently to trauma, not involving that the victims are lying about the events. Detective Rasmussen, the other officer in charge of the investigations, while talking to one of the victims, explains that it is completely common not remembering certain details about the rape, as “It’s self-defense” (Grant et al. 2019, Episode 3, 10:03), emphasizing further that the victim does not need to apologise for being unable to be more helpful, as she did what she needed to feel as safe as possible in a hugely traumatic experience (Grant et al. 2019, Episode 3, 10:16). Conversely, and despite the lack of evidence, both detectives unite, and they even mobilize all the experts of any department to succeed in finding the rapist:

Rasmussen: So, here’s what we’re gonna do. We’re gonna merge our investigations. Today. Right now. You’re gonna move over to my joint. It’s no offense, but we’ve got better toys. We’re gonna bring in the FBI. We’re gonna bring in the CBI. We’re
gonna exploit every goddamn resource available to us, and we’re gonna find that sick motherfucker. (Grant et al. 2019. Episode 3, 48:02)

From this point on, the impact of Marie’s treatment affects the further development of her life and the relationships she maintains with those closest to her, as well as with society in general. Marie’s life changes completely, as every of her affective relationships (friends, foster moms, social workers and counsellors, etc.) give her up or stop granting her the help she needs. Nobody wants to be involved or connected to her, since she is perceived as a liar. All these attitudes cause victims to become disaffected with people, to lose trust in even the most loved and closest people to them and to find it hard to believe that this is actually a just world: “Cause even with good people… even with people you can kinda trust… if the truth is inconvenient… and if --- if the truth doesn’t, like, fit… they don’t believe it” (Grant et al. 2019, Episode 7, 49:49). However, as Marie’s life falls apart and she finds herself increasingly isolated, Detective Duvall and Rasmussen, despite all difficulties and through their thorough investigation, achieve to apprehend the serial rapist. However, the level of contrast between the development of the two cases culminates in the rapist being interrogated, confirming the incompetence of the Criminal Justice System in the vast majority of rape cases:

Well, it’s like anything. You know, the more you do it, the better you get. That first one, up in Washington? I left… all kinds of stuff behind. Hair, fluids. All I could think about was all that DNA, you know, all over the place. All they had to do was compare it to my military records. I was dead sure they were gonna knock on my door the next day and take me away. But nothing happened. And so you think… “Okay. Cool, I guess I can do this. (Grant et al. 2019, Episode 8, 29:25)

This excerpt is a valid proof that the lack of implication of the Criminal Justice System in rape cases and its treatment and development through traditional, stereotyped and patriarchal discourses (Kaithwas and Pandey 2018, 51) related to rape culture results in those who commit these crimes “act[ing] with impunity.” (65) If the laws created to stop cases of violation are insufficiently implemented is precisely because of the great influence that these rape discourses and myths have, which have been ingrained and normalised within these institutions and have become part of them.

Through the development of Marie’s case and how the detectives handle the investigation from a totally patriarchal perspective, taking as reference the rape narratives of rape culture, it shows that the Criminal Justice System and all its institutions have such narratives implanted, both by its workers and by applying them in
the laws that serve to deal with cases of violation. This is why, in contrast to the investigation carried out by Detective Duvall and Rasmussen, the series emphasizes the need to make visible and challenge these myths about women within rape culture in order to address these cases in a way that the victim is actually taken into consideration, protected and ultimately believed.

**Asking for It: Rape Culture and Social Media**

The rapid spread of new technologies has brought a new way of understanding communication. The “accessibility of information of any kind in the digital age has shaped the way in which both young people and adults learn and communicate” (Bluett-Boyd et al. 2013, 20). For young adults, the new technologies and the rise of social media are opportunities to interact with each other and to build an identity out of the pressure of face-to-face interplay. The anonymity that the internet and its sources grant an escape from their reality in some way and even allow them to feel more confident in communicating with each other. On the other side, technology, the internet and social media in a completely digital era mean that they are a vital component of every young person’s daily life, to the extent that “those without access to these resources may find themselves excluded or socially shunned” (21). Thus, the utilization of these technologies for young people “becomes an imperative rather than a choice” (21). However, even if these digital resources allow society to communicate much more easily and globally, when misused, they turn out to be a dangerous source of harassment and cyberbullying. In this way, “the relative anonymity of the Internet [is] also seen as facilitating harmful and abusive behaviour in which the perpetrators would perhaps not otherwise engage in ‘real life’” (21).

Although cyberbullying and harassment are caused by many factors, those are beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, this section will be centred in how the improper use of social networks is involved in the spread and normalisation of the rape culture and its myths. As Dodge states, “online sexual violence both reinscribes long-standing beliefs that support rape culture and changes the way that sexual violence and rape culture are experienced and perpetuated” (2016, 68). In this way, a social network page, such as Facebook, created by an anonymous person, has the potential to perpetuate a crime as serious as rape. This is exactly what occurs in *Asking for It*, where the protagonist is raped by a group of young athletes, older than her, using means such as drugs. Due to the ingestion of the latter, Emma does not remember anything that happened the night before. All she knows is that her parents
found her in the doorway of their house covered with her totally shattered dress and with burns and bruises all over her skin. It is days later that she discovers that page on Facebook under the name of “Easy Emma” (O’Neill 2015, 145). She is tagged in all the photos on the page and discovers, completely in shock and out of breath, the terrible scenes that were recorded by multiple people the night of the party.

Pale limbs, long hair, head lolling back on to the pillow. The photos start at the head, work down the body, lingering on the naked flesh spread across the rose-covered sheets.

It’s not me.

Dylan on top of that girl (me, me, that can’t be me, that’s not me) his hands over the (my—no, her) face, as if to cover her up. She has no face. She is just a body, a life-size doll to play with. (146)

This passage of the book, apart from presenting the reader with a visual image of the photos Emma is staring at and introducing him to her thoughts, it also questions one of the myths about rape: the stranger rapist. In the extract, she names a boy called Dylan, who is one of the aforementioned young athletes who incite her to take drugs to rape her afterwards. This means that she recognizes the boys in the photos who are assaulting her, and not just one, but all of them. Although there is a myth within rape culture that reiterates that most violations are committed by strangers who suffer from some mental imbalance, the reality is completely opposite. In fact, in most rape cases, the victims knew their attackers and were even close to them (Harding 2015; Smith 2004). In Emma’s case, she is hurt to see the photos and who appears in them. One of the boys is Sean, who she has known since she was eight years old and who also confessed his love for her and how he wanted to marry her when they grew up. (O’Neill 2015, 147) Additionally, the fact that it is a case of what is entitled as acquaintance rape awakens a much more rape-supportive attitude in cases where victims had a relationship with the perpetrator prior to the events. (Hanly, Healy and Scriv 2009, 29) Not only does the fact of recognising their aggressors mean that it is an acquaintance rape, but it also exposes a gang-rape. Emma is describing as she sees the photographs of all of them, checking how they take turns in committing a crime against her. Even though Harding (2015) thinks that a crime such as gang-rape “should be the kind of assault that genuinely outrages and appals us all” (60), she also comments on how “it involves witnesses – it’s fundamentally a performance for other guys in the room, or
increasingly, anyone with an internet connection” (60). In this way, all those watching and recording the crime as it happens become active witnesses. In addition to that, these same people attribute to themselves the power to spread the crime on the internet and the social networks while also exposing the victim and depriving her of any kind of privacy.

Once the Facebook page is created and the photos are uploaded, the horror continues. The fact that these pictures are uploaded to a social network such as Facebook allows absolutely every person to see them, even beyond those who attended the party. Actually, it expands the range of viewing so much more than that, as a public page allows anyone from anywhere in the world to view the pictures. However, it is much worse the facility offered by a social network to give like and comment on the photos that are uploaded, transforming it into a double-edged sword. Although these digital platforms enable inappropriate content to be blocked or reported, “once something is “out there” on the web it is very difficult to remove” (Bluett-Boyd et al. 2013, 22). The author shows how these facilities, on the contrary, are used to perpetuate the rape myths and thus promote the normalisation of rape culture:

Someone has commented under the photo: “Some people deserve to get pissed on.” Five people have liked it.

Six. No, ten, twelve, fifteen. Twenty. Twenty-five. (O’Neill 2015, 149)

Comments like this are repeated throughout the novel. Despite being true that “the ability to read photographs is influenced by our pre-existing stereotypes” (Dodge 2016, 76), this is precisely why social media becomes a danger, as they allow people with these same stereotypes to participate in an enactment of rape culture, and at the same time, “social media sites become aggregators of online misogyny” (Rentchler 2014, 65). Turning tables and blaming victims for a crime that has been committed against them is another consequence of this type of act. Victim-blaming is one of the fundamental pillars of rape culture, as it derives from one of the most pernicious myths: she is asking for it. As Dodge claims, “Not through the lens of the camera alone, but through the lens of rape culture, these photographs bec[ome] tools for victim-blaming and slut-shaming, rather than evidence of sexual violence” (2016, 75).

‘Come on. No one forced her the drink down her throat, or made her take shit. And what guy was going to say no if it was handed to him on a plate?’ She laughs. ‘She was fucking asking for it.’ (O’Neill 2015, 154)
These ideas and sexist discourses in which the rape victim is blamed are based on a purely patriarchal society, simultaneously allowing them to become hegemonic. The worst part is that the fragment above is articulated by a girl, which is a proof and demonstrates that even women are involved in the perpetuation and normalisation of rape culture.

However, the nightmare is not over, as those comments and photos allow the case to expand to any kind of mean of modern communication. As people find out what has happened and those photos are forwarded and shared, the bullying that Emma receives increases: “People phone in to say that I deserved it. They say that I was asking for it” (O’Neill 2015, 187). The case is beginning to be discussed in the news, on TV, or in articles written in digital newspapers. People continue to comment, to give their opinions, to harass in some way Emma, being most of them inhabitants of the village where Emma lives and acquaintances –“They’d always thought I was a little slut who was just asking for trouble,” (206) – or –“that I was ruining those boys’ future, that I was an attention seeker, that I was embarrassing the town, that I deserved it, that they hoped I got AIDS and dies, that I was a dirty slut” (206) –. Apart from blaming her for what happened, they also threaten her and wish her death.

The uploaded pictures, the spread of the case and its remembering by any means of communication, thus, causes revictimization. Maier defines it as “the blame and stigmatizing responses to victims […] and the trauma that victims experience following the rape itself” (2008, 787). If the issue of being raped is already a serious trauma for victims, the fact that it is replayed over and over again through social networks, the internet and the media causes the trauma to endure and become an even more long-term one. Having so much access to photos and comments prompts the victims to a constantly reviving of the assault they suffered and can produce a very dangerous rejection of themselves. In Emma’s case, not being able to remember the aggression and dealing with comments and threats makes her develop suicidal thoughts and even suicide attempts: “I am going to make it end.” (O’Neill 2015, 262), or “I wish I was dead. I hug the thought to myself” (271). Apart from these intrusive and highly dangerous thoughts, Emma also develops a rejection towards the people around her. Perceiving she cannot trust anyone as no one believes her, she locks herself into a world that does not go beyond the four walls of her room, or her house at most. According to Wolbert Burguess, R.N. and D.N.Sc, this happens because rape victims suffer “a numbing responsiveness to or reduced involvement with the environment” (1983, 103). As a matter of fact, Emma abandons any kind of communication with her friends and it
is not even able to return to school after the bullying she received and still receives. At the same time, she doubts herself, about what occurred, and she dehumanizes herself on several occasions: “I am a thing to be used.” (286), “Stop calling me Emmie, I want to say, I am the Ballinatoom Girl now” (280).

All these aspects develop a depression and an anxiety in Emma that makes her to only think about all this ending, so due to social pressure and the hegemonic discourses inserted in rape culture, she decides to withdraw the report that she had previously presented. In any case, the book does not have the happy ending that readers expect to find and is precisely executed on purpose. This, and all the issues developed throughout this section, demonstrate that social media become a danger when it is used to promote and normalise rape myths and discourses such as that women ask for it. By making it a method of dissemination, rape culture becomes even more established in society and also becomes an element of violence against rape survivors, revictimizing them and blaming them for the crime committed against them, often even taking them to deadly extremes.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, it could be argued that *Unbelievable* and *Asking for It* are fully feminist cultural products that address and attack the hegemonic discourses of rape culture. Although women have historically suffered many types of violence, rape has been one of the most harmful and contentious that exists. What is more, rape culture has entered and taken root in many institutions and state apparatuses that adopt its hegemonic and patriarchal discourses and perpetuate them. In the Netflix mini-series *Unbelievable*, the highlight is on the treatment of notions of rape culture within the Criminal Justice System, exposing in parallel two completely different ways of conducting a rape case investigation. In Marie’s case, the detectives exhibit a behaviour that is completely rooted in the discourses of rape culture, with the main thread being the myth about women lying about being raped. This guides them towards an investigation in which they display a great lack of empathy and tact towards the “problematic” victim, revictimizing her through aggressive questioning and threats and ultimately forcing her to lie and being charged with false reporting. In contrast, Detective Duvall and Rasmussen’s gendered perspective is much more focused on the survivors and their needs, demonstrating a high quality of investigation and empathy that leads them to solve the case. In the matter of *Asking for It*, the focus is on social media, and how it becomes complicit in perpetuating the rape culture’s discourses. Through a similar
pattern, the problematic victim and the myth that she was actually asking for it, the author shows how Emma is revictimized in numerous occasions through the pictures of the rape they upload on Facebook, which entails that they be shared and commented, and blamed for the crime that was committed against her. Guilt, shame and the fact that no one around her believes her, Emma ends up withdrawing the report. Taking all this into consideration it is safe to declare that the Criminal Justice System and social media are state apparatuses that have been and are being used as means to perpetuate rape culture and its mythology, causing it to be normalized and integrated into most cultures in the world and at all social levels.

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