



# ASKING FOR IT

THE  
EVERYMAN

 LANDMARK

Bank of America  
Merrill Lynch 

**EDUCATIONAL STUDY PACK**







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# INTRODUCTION

“We hear stories like Emma’s whispered around,  
but never spoken out loud, never openly discussed.”

5th year student, Ballincollig

In the long and careful process that lead to the Abbey Theatre creating a project around this story one opinion was voiced by many different stakeholders - “Teenagers need to start talking about consent and sexual respect.” Understandably, we’ve also met wariness and concern but invariably those who work closest with young people insisted these issues have to be discussed - out loud and now. We wanted to extend the opportunity to have this discussion by creating a study pack graded to all levels of ability.

*Asking for It* was first presented at The Everyman Theatre in Cork as the culmination of an inspired plan by its director, Julie Kelleher, to bring Louise O’Neill’s provocative and seminal book to the stage. Co-produced by Landmark Productions and the Everyman, in association with the Abbey Theatre and Cork Midsummer Festival, directed by Annabelle Comyn and adapted by Meadhbh McHugh, in conjunction with Annabelle, it proved to be a huge success with long queues for return tickets. This enthusiasm wasn’t for an escapist comedy or celebrity casting but for a challenging and harrowing story of sexual assault performed by a largely unknown cast.

The Abbey Theatre now has the privilege of presenting this production in November 2018 and alongside it we will be partnering with six schools to deliver pre and post-show workshops on the play. As with all our education work the focus is on the craft of theatre and how drama is a way society can examine itself with rigour and honesty.

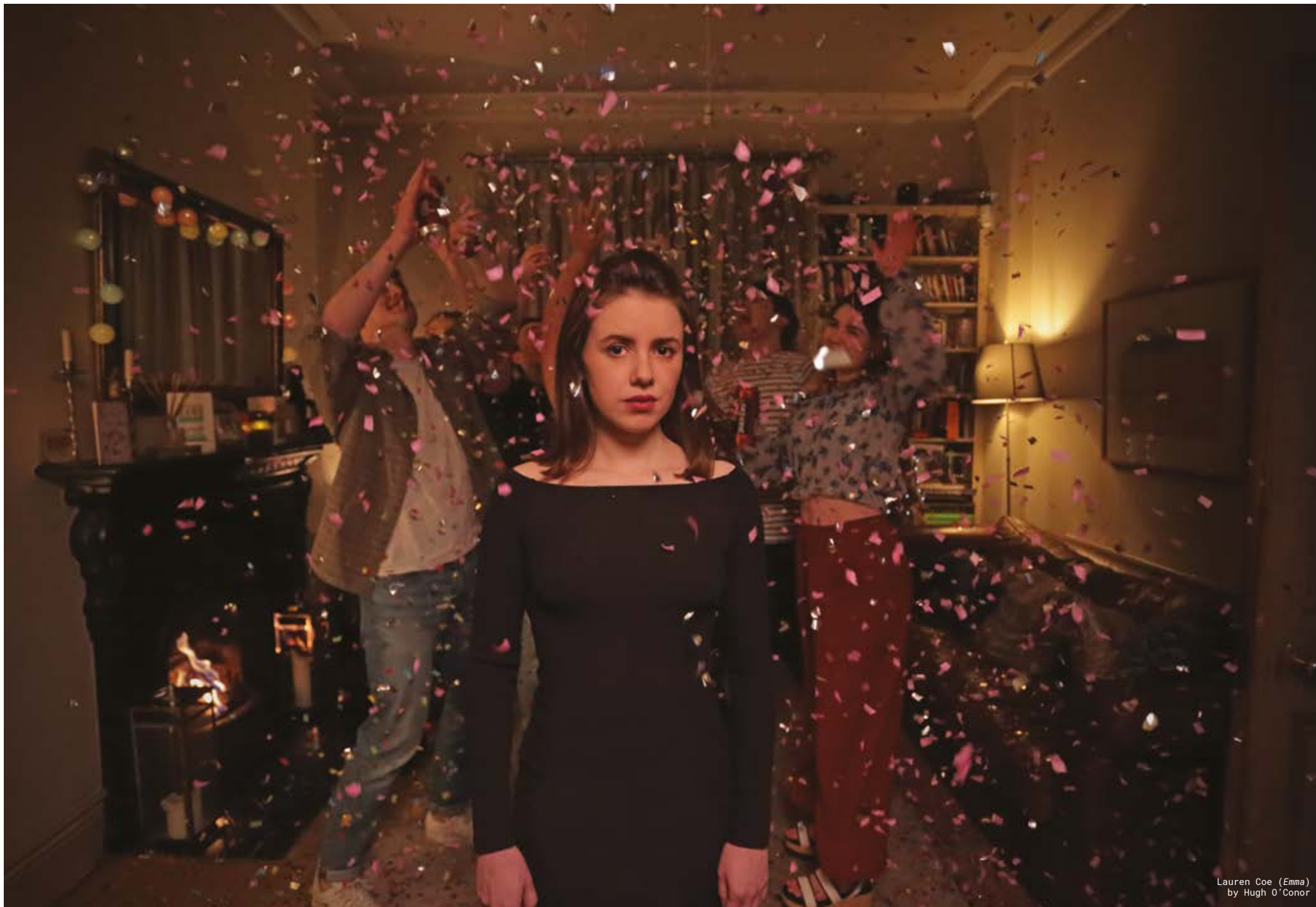
This pack contains a variety of materials for teachers to better inform themselves about the play and help guide the discussions it inevitably provokes. Written largely by the theatre-maker, critic and social activist Saoirse Anton we wanted the material to be clear but also unapologetically involved. Along with insights into how the play was created we have included the workshops we will be delivering around the country to Transition Year students. We have added wider discussions of the political, social and historical background to these issues and are especially grateful to pupils from Sudbury School, Wicklow and Coláiste Choilm, Ballincollig, Cork as well as writer and academic Hazel Larkin.

We believe this pioneering production of Louise O’Neill’s seminal novel will continue to provoke the self-awareness and change she intended. We hope this pack will support young people to stop whispering and say out loud what has so long needed to be said.

**Phil Kingston**  
Community and Education Manager

October 2018





Lauren Coe (*Emma*)  
by Hugh O'Connor



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# SYNOPSIS

**Like the original book by Louise O'Neill, *Asking for It* is divided into two overall sections, before the assault and after. In the opening scenes, we meet eighteen year old Emma O'Donovan, the protagonist of the story. Emma is in fifth year in secondary school, and the first portion of the play introduces us to her life. She is popular, with a wide circle of friends, though it soon becomes apparent that her popularity is tenuous, as her friends lose patience with Emma's often uncaring attitude. She does well in school, gets along with her family, and presents a confident character.**

However, this all changes at a house party after Ballinatoom win a big football match. At the party various minor dramas unfold, as Emma and her friends drink more and tensions arise within the group. Emma breaks away from the group and begins to flirt with Paul O'Brien, the captain of the football team. Though Paul is notably older than Emma and is engaged, he flirts back and gives Emma a pill. They kiss and go to a bedroom away from the rest of the party. Emma soon begins to feel uncomfortable from the effect of the pill and asks Paul to stop, but instead of stopping like she asked, Paul sexually assaults her. While Emma is still thrown by what has happened (and feeling the effects of the alcohol and drugs she has consumed), two others, Dylan and Sean come into the room. They taunt her and persuade her to take prescription drugs stolen from Sean's mother. Emma loses consciousness and the three men sexually assault her, though this is not revealed until Emma herself finds out later in the play.

The morning after the party, Emma's parents return to find her collapsed on their front porch, still in her clothes from the night before, severely sunburned and unwell. They are furious, reminding

Bryan, Emma's older brother who was left in charge while they were away, that "this is a respectable house, we have always been respectable people," and hurriedly bringing Emma indoors, fearing that the neighbours will see. Initially Emma's family and friends blame Emma for what happened, directing their anger towards her and believing that she had decided to have sex with the three men and calling her "sick" and a "whore." The tone quickly changes, however, as the "Easy Emma" Facebook page appears with images of Emma, unconscious, being assaulted by Paul, Dylan and Sean. Her family and some of her friends turn to supporting her, though many still lay the blame on Emma.

As we enter Act Two, we see Emma a few days after the assault. Conor has come to visit and it is quickly revealed that the Gardaí are involved and an investigation has started into the assault. Conor tries to talk to Emma about it, but she quickly becomes defensive, and the conversation dissolves. Act Two follows Emma through the next year as she tries to come to terms with what has happened. Her relationship with her family becomes strained as her father takes to staying away from the house as much as possible and stops engaging with Emma, and her mother develops a dependency on alcohol. Bryan tries to support Emma, to ensure that she is actually dealing with what has happened and trying to persuade her to return to school and try to move forward. Emma becomes more isolated and, rather than moving forward, engages in self-destructive behaviour and finds it harder and harder to cope with what happened.

The play ends ambiguously, providing little hope for the audience, as Emma decides that she is going to withdraw her complaint. Bryan tries to persuade her not to, and Emma herself wants one of her parents to dissuade her from her decision, but they do not, and the play ends on a note of agonising inertia.





Sean Doyle (Sean) and Lauren Coe (Emma)



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## CHARACTER PROFILES

# EMMA

"I wake in the middle of the night. I remember. I am pink flesh. I am splayed legs. All the photos and photos and photos. I cannot remember, so those photos and comments have become my memories. [...] I read about the Ballinatoom, Girl as if she's not me. Sometimes I almost wonder who she is, why she was so stupid, and then I remember."

The central character of the play, Emma O'Donovan begins the story as a character who, from the outside, seems to have it all; she does well in school, she seems popular (though her friends' patience for her sharp comments and competitive nature is clearly wearing thin), and comes across as confident in how she looks. However, all this changes after she is sexually assaulted at a house party. In the wake of the assault Emma has to come to terms with a new reality, as she stops going to school, loses contact with friends, and defensively retreats further into her own world. Emma is an interesting character as she does not conform to the classic victim/protagonist image; she is not a likeable character, she is flawed and, as Louise O'Neill herself says, she is "a mass of contradictions." By creating Emma as this very human, flawed character, O'Neill and McHugh prompt the audience to question the assumptions they may make about a "typical" victim of sexual assault.



Lauren Coe (Emma)





### **What has been the most challenging or interesting part of working on the character of Emma?**

Emma is such a gift to play and she's so fascinating to work on. Since the run in Cork has finished I've thought about her every day and how much deeper I can go with her. The aftermath of the incident, or Act 2 of the play, deals with Emma's trauma and depression and how her family try and fail to support her, which is a really vulnerable place to be in. As an actor it's so important not to generalise, and trauma is so multi-faceted. You really have to stay on top of what your character really wants and needs from every situation and not become indulgent with the emotion, even though she's often in a highly emotional place, which is challenging. Also, Emma's internal monologues in Act 2 are recorded voiceover rather than said aloud, so I have scenes where it's just me alone on stage doing action and thinking the thoughts while the audience hear them, which I find really tricky. You have to be thinking the thoughts at the pace of the recorded speech but also doing actions which have a completely different rhythm and letting both the action and the thoughts affect you - it's harder than it sounds!

### **If you had to pick three words to describe Emma, what would they be?**

Before the event Emma is wilful, provocative and ego-centric.

### **Emma is not an immediately likeable character, how did you find playing a protagonist who doesn't necessarily always have the audience on their side?**

To me, Emma is a teenager who created a 'mask' to live under to protect herself and to gain control. She became so intertwined with this mask that it's now hard to take off. She has so much to learn about how to be and is frustrated

with herself for not being better, and I really empathise with that. In the second act she actually is like a different person, a hollowed-out Emma. She can't compute who she was before this, and she believes what happened to her was her fault. She is suicidal as she sees a reflection of those photos in her family and friends' eyes - her father can't even look at her. I think then the audience really are on her side, because once her mask is taken off we see how young she really is, and how completely vulnerable and lost this situation has made her.

### **The play ends on an ambiguous note that doesn't instil much hope in the audience, where do you see Emma at the end of the play or beyond. Do you feel any hope in the character?**

I don't really think hope is necessary in drama, nor do I think it's the right message for this play to send out. Of course rape survivors can heal. Of course there can be light at the end of the tunnel. But it often takes years for victims to reach this point. Emma is left behind while everyone else has moved on. Maybe Emma will eventually go to college and be able to heal, but there will never be a real resolve for this.

### **If the audience was to take one thing away from the play, what would you hope it was?**

I think what people should take away from this play is how we fail victims in society - both within our justice system and our communities.

### **Describe the character of Emma briefly.**

When we meet Emma, she has just turned 18 and is about to finish her fifth year of secondary school. She's competitively academic and the queen bee of her friend group. She can be quite self absorbed and narcissistic. She has this desire for power and attention that makes her act provocatively, pushing jokes too far with her friends or acting cruelly. She hates being told who she is or how to behave because she knows deep down she's not the kindest person or the best friend, but she can't stop herself. She's addicted to the rush of being wanted by boys and uses sex as a means to try and gain the power she so craves.

She then undergoes a traumatic experience involving graphic photographs of her body being violated being posted on Facebook, and her life is turned upside down. She becomes a shell of herself, isolated and abhorred by her community.



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## CHARACTER PROFILES

# BRYAN

“Is ‘civil’ code now for shove it under the rug?”

Bryan is Emma’s older brother. He was angry with Emma initially as he was given part of the blame for what happened the night that she was assaulted, but once the full story emerges he becomes her most fierce supporter. Though he is away at university in Limerick, whenever he comes home he confronts the issues in the house and asks the difficult but necessary questions about Emma’s welfare. While his parents try to ignore the fact that Emma has essentially dropped out of school, has attempted suicide, is engaging in self-destructive behaviour and is becoming increasingly isolated, Bryan addresses it and attempts to help.



Lauren Coe (Emma)  
and Paul Mescal (Bryan)





**Bryan's response to what happened to Emma clearly takes a U-turn once he realises what has actually happened, where do you see this change originating from?**

The switch is when he fully understands the gravity of what happened. What's so interesting about Bryan is that he is very similar to those boys; he was brought up the same, he's a gaelic football boy. He's in that circle, so he sees these photos initially and just thinks his sister's the person who has been doing stuff. He doesn't even question the boys' behaviour initially. But the more he looks at the photographs and talks to his sister; I think that's when the shift happens.

**What effects do you feel the assault has had on Bryan?**

It has a profound effect. Again, what's so clever about the play and the story is that it puts Emma in the centre and focuses on her, but you get very clear insights into the other characters and the effect the assault has had on them. His relationship with Jen, who is the sister of one of the perpetrators, is gone. He can't socialise in town any more. He stops playing football. He stops looking after himself. He's seeing his family fall into disrepair which I think is the biggest thing, and the hardest for him to deal with.

**If you had to pick three words to describe Bryan, what would they be?**

Stubborn, supportive and loyal.

**If the audience was to take one thing away from the play, what would you hope it was?**

That people are made aware that consent is a really big issue in our society, and not just our society as in the 21st Century, I mean Irish society at this moment in time. And that they start to question that themselves on a personal level.



Paul Mescal (Bryan)

**Briefly describe your character.**

Bryan is Emma's brother. It's an interesting departure from the book in that we don't see the hyper-critical side of him directly after the rape that's in the book. I suppose the main focus he has is to provide support to Emma. The thing I find interesting in it is that none of the characters are equipped to deal with that level of trauma. Even Bryan, who has all the best intentions to support Emma, fails in how he engages with that. He becomes like a guard dog, which isn't the best way to deal with it, but it is with good intention that he tries to help her and support her through the case.

**What has been the most challenging or interesting part of working on the character of Bryan?**

The most challenging part is trying to get inside and play the trauma of the situation, especially in the dinner scene when everything comes to a head.



## CHARACTER PROFILES

# DENIS AND NORA

“I had the perfect family. A gentleman’s family. And so handsome, both of you. Everyone always said to me ‘you have the most beautiful family.’”



Frank McCusker (Dad) and Ali White (Mam)

Emma’s mother, Nora, and father, Denis, also change over the course of the play. From the beginning of the story, Nora is concerned with outward appearances, with maintaining their image as a “respectable” family. After Emma is assaulted, this image becomes both a burden and a lifeline for Nora as she desperately clings to appearances to persuade herself that she is coping. However, behind closed doors it is clear that she is not coping with the aftermath of Emma’s attack; her relationship with her family is becoming more distant, she

develops a drinking problem, and rather than facing her troubles and communicating, she tries to deny the effect the assault has had on all of their lives. Denis also undergoes a change, losing his close relationship with Emma and becoming more distant and disconnected. He takes to spending longer hours at work and staying out of the house, avoiding the problems the family is facing. Both of Emma’s parents approach the aftermath of Emma’s attack with a sense of denial, keeping up a front while allowing tension to build behind it.



## CHARACTER PROFILES

# ZOE, ALI AND MAGGIE

“Act like we like each other, girls.”

Zoe, Ali and Maggie are Emma's school friends. From early in the play it is clear that their friendship is often competitive and tense, with a sense of resentment building through the early scenes of the play, mostly towards Emma, as a result of her careless comments and her tendency to see herself as better than her friends. After the assault, they each react differently; Zoe and Ali are angry, while Maggie tries to be supportive. However, they soon disappear into the background of the play as Emma becomes more isolated.



Sile Maguire (Ali), Venetia Bowe (Zoe),  
Lauren Coe (Emma) and Amy McElhatton (Maggie)



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## CHARACTER PROFILES

# CONOR



“Conor emails. He’s sorry to hear my decision. He wishes he could have protected me. He wishes he could go back to that night too, he wishes he had kissed me, like he wanted to.”

Conor is a childhood friend of Emma’s, who has had a crush on her for a number of years. He is one of the few friends who supports Emma after she is assaulted. Even when she pushes him away, he continues to email her with updates from school, good memories from when they were children, inane but distracting news from Ballinacoom, and messages of constant support.



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## CHARACTER PROFILES

# PAUL, DYLAN, SEAN AND ELI

**“Priorities, lad. She’s gagging for it. Get a few more notches on the post that matters, mate.”**

Paul, Dylan and Sean sexually assault Emma at a house party. The three of them are considered “good boys” in the town, they play on the football team, their parents hold powerful or central positions in the community, and they are well liked. From the start of the play they demonstrate a lack of respect for women, through conversations in which they treat the women they know as purely sexual objects. Later in the play they are seen to have a lot of support locally and in the media, with hashtags trending on twitter, messages on the ‘Easy Emma’ Facebook page, and people making ‘Team Paul,’ ‘Team Dylan,’ and ‘Team Sean’ t-shirts. Eli is Maggie’s boyfriend. Though he was not involved in the assault, he was part of the earlier conversations, and it is implied that he may have attempted to take advantage of the fact that Emma was drunk and high that night.



Sean Doyle (Sean) and Darragh Shannon (Dylan)



## KEY THEMES

# COMMUNICATION

Throughout the play it is clear that there are many things that characters do not communicate to each other, from thoughts and judgements within Emma's friend group, to almost everything Emma thinks in Act 2. The lines delivered directly to the audience at different points in the play allow the audience to understand what is happening with every character, but no-one on stage has the full picture. As Emma changes from an outgoing character to one who is solitary and quiet and the relationships in the play become more strained, the characters conceal more and more, creating a difficult circle where the lack of communication creates tension between characters, and that tension in turn makes the characters even more reluctant to talk to each other.

In all of the interactions and relationships between characters the play explores the implications of communication or non-communication, and demonstrates examples of both positive and negative forms of communication. As an audience member we can watch the web of communication and connection between characters unfold as their actions influence each other.



Lauren Coe (Emma)

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What could have been different about the play if the lines delivered to the audience were actually said to other characters?
- Can you describe the different ways certain characters communicate with each other?  
Does Emma communicate differently to Bryan or her mother? How?
- What are the key parts of effective communication?



## KEY THEMES

# FAMILY

Prior to the assault Emma has a relatively good relationship with her family; her brother is a friend as well as her sibling, she gets along with her mother despite some terse moments, and is especially close to her father. However, after the assault this rapidly changes. Even though Emma becomes more confined to her house, spending more time with her family than she did previously, things become strained and distant. Her father spends less time at home and barely speaks to Emma. Her mother becomes stressed and resentful, developing a dependency on alcohol and often blaming Emma for the change that has come over the family. Her brother Bryan is her most staunch advocate and supporter, but even that relationship has changed as Emma cannot relate to him in the same way she used to, and blames herself for the breakdown of his relationship with his girlfriend, and his implied depression.

Throughout Act 1 and Act 2, *Asking for It* explores both supportive and destructive familial relationships, and how they can evolve over time, or be changed drastically by a traumatic event.



Ali White (Mam), Paul Mescal (Bryan), Lauren Coe (Emma) and Frank McCusker (Dad)

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- Why do you think each person in Emma's family reacted the way they did?
- What could they have done differently?
- How would you describe Emma's relationship with her family in Act 1, and in Act 2?
- What does family mean to you?
- What can family mean to different people?



## KEY THEMES

# FRIENDSHIPS

Emma's friendships are strained from the start of the play. Emma's closest friends, Maggie, Ali and Zoe are clearly tired of Emma's competitiveness and her thoughtless behaviour. There are many tense moments between them. When the assault happens they are initially angry with Emma, believing that it was her fault, but they later realise what has happened and some of them try to support her. However they soon drift away and are barely seen in Act 2.

Emma's other close friendship is with her neighbour Conor, who she has known since she was very young. Even though Emma is not always a good friend to him, he continues to work on the friendship and it is the most supportive friendship in the play. When Emma retreats further into solitude through Act 2, Conor continues to check in with her and remind her that there are people there to support her.

The contrast between these friendships demonstrates some of the countless different dynamics, both positive and negative, that there can be in friendships.



Amy McElhatton (Maggie), Lauren Coe (Emma)  
and Sile Maguire (Ali)

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- How would you describe each of Emma's friendships?
- What do you think are the key elements of a friendship?
- How might the play have turned out differently if Emma's friendships had been maintained after the assault?



## KEY THEMES

# CONSENT

Consent, and the lack of it, is one of the main themes throughout *Asking for It*. In recent years consent has been a major talking point both within the media and at a more general level. Many schools and universities have introduced consent education in an attempt to combat the high levels of sexual assault across campuses. When the novel *Asking for It* was published in 2015, this conversation was just gathering momentum. Now, in 2018, this stage adaptation is potentially even more potent in the wake of the #MeToo movement in which stories of sexual assaults and harassment by Harvey Weinstein and other high profile figures were brought to light, and just months after the recent Belfast trial in which Paddy Jackson and a number of other rugby players were accused of sexually assaulting a young woman at a party. The accused were judged not guilty, but there was huge opposition to the result, due to the treatment of the young woman during the trial, and the refusal to admit certain key items as evidence in the trial. The story is remarkably similar to that in the novel and the play, but in *Asking for It*, Emma decides to drop the case before it reaches trial because of various pressures from family, the media and the community. This decision leaves the play on an ambiguous note, and opens up many questions around the issues of consent, sexual assault, and the process of reporting an assault.



Darragh Shannon (Dylan), Charlie Maher (Paul)  
and Sean Doyle (Sean)

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What do you think?
- What do you think the play says around the theme of consent?
- Why do you think Emma withdrew her report?
- What does consent mean to you?



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## A CONVERSATION WITH

# MEADHBH MCHUGH / ADAPTATION

**Meadhbh McHugh adapted *Asking for It* for the stage with director Annabelle Comyn. We talked to her about her role in the production and her thoughts on *Asking for It*.**

### **What do you see as the role of an adaptor?**

The role of the adaptor is to understand the book, or at least our interpretation of it, and then to try and be very faithful to the spirit of the book. I had to do a process of invention to capture how the book made me feel, but in a different medium.

### **Is it a different experience to writing an entirely new work from scratch?**

It's like a jigsaw, to make a play out of material you already have. If you're writing an original play sometimes you can get stuck half-way through with the storyline and plot, asking should this person be related to that person, should they know this person from before, and what happens? [With an adaptation] you don't have any of that, the material is already there. But actually, when we got down to it, we did have to write a new play. It's a really interesting process of trying to take in the entire book and regurgitate it in an entirely different form.

### **When it was published in 2015, *Asking for It* prompted a lot of conversation, what were your initial thoughts on approaching it and starting to work on it as a stage adaptation?**

It had a huge impact, and I think it really started a conversation about issues such as rape and sexual consent, so I felt a huge responsibility to Louise O'Neill's book. It is beloved by so many people; she has spoken in particular about how many young girls have

contacted her and talked to her about their experiences. There's a responsibility there when you're working with material that really resonates with people on a very personal and intimate level. Also, we were writing the play version after #MeToo and #TimesUp. While I was writing the play I was reading thinkpiece after thinkpiece about rape culture and how skewed our gender relations have become. I certainly felt a responsibility to the topic. It felt really timely, and we wanted the play to add to that.

### **Do you think that the stage adaptation will be received differently to the novel, three years on and in the wake of MeToo and other similar movements?**

Certainly. The parallels between the book and the Belfast trial are uncanny and extraordinary. The book (and most of the play) was written prior to the case, so it's not based on the case, but the parallels are chilling. I think there's no way that isn't in people's minds, if they followed the case, as they watch the play. Though it's not based on that story, what the case gave us is an insight into a male entitled culture. I think the play also gives us Emma's experience in a way that we didn't necessarily have in cases like the Belfast trial (thankfully!). It gives an insight into stories that are similar to Emma's, which we don't always get, and I think that is a privileged perspective the theatre can deliver.

### **Emma is not the most immediately likeable character. How have you found it working with such a difficult protagonist, and why do you think it is important that the audience might not necessarily warm to her immediately?**

It's one of the brilliant things about Louise O'Neill's book, to have such an unlikeable central female character in some ways. And I think that is really important, because it doesn't matter if she is a bitch, it doesn't matter if she is selfish, because none of these things mean she



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deserves to be raped. *Asking for It* can really challenge the audience to think about that because you might not like her and you might not think she's the most moral person in her own way, and yet none of those things actually mean that this act is in any way justified.

**In terms of adapting the novel – it's written in the first person, a lot of it is centred on interactions online and Emma's internal monologue. I'd imagine that style and content is quite difficult to adapt to the stage, how did you tackle those elements of the book?**

That was certainly the biggest challenge. Most novels are written from one perspective and you have this intimate access to their internal thoughts, and it can move around in time and space – it can go from a scene with her family then back to a memory, there's a lot of fluidity there in the novel form. It was mainly trying to tease out a narrative thread. In the first act it's building up towards the party and the catastrophic events that happen there, and in the second act the story is about the family and how they cope with the build up to the court case. I started pulling that out first, and then we felt part of the experience of the book is entering into Emma's head. So we came up with the idea of the monologues, and used voice-overs to see how her voice is retreating throughout the play. That was one of the theatrical devices we came up with to be able to enter into Emma's world as we see the family try to cope with this trial.

**If the audience was to take one thing away from the play, what would you hope it would be?**

What I hope the play can achieve is to prompt conversations. I don't know what those conversations will be, but we have seen in social movements in Ireland recently how productive open, honest conversation can be.



Lauren Coe (Emma)



## A CONVERSATION WITH

# PAUL O'MAHONY / SET DESIGN

It takes many different elements to make up a theatre production; it's not just about the words in the script or the movements of the actors. One of the key roles in any production is that of the set designer. The set designer creates the physical world on stage, whether that involves designing detailed painted backdrops, or creating a minimalist set that just hints at the setting of the play. Every set designer might work a little differently depending on what works for them, and depending on what show they are working on, so we sat down to chat to Paul O'Mahony, the set designer on *Asking for It*, to learn about how he works and how he created the set for this show.

### What does a set designer do?

"That differs from designer to designer," but for Paul, working on *Asking for It*, "It is a collective, collaborative thing. Because not all of it is in the words in the script. There is a visual language, and that is how we communicate. Rather than just saying this is the set, we can say, this is the production, this is how you tell the story."

### How did you approach this production?

"Last year I was asked by Annabelle to design *Asking for It*. So she lent me her kindle for the weekend, and I couldn't put the book down. I cried a lot that weekend, including when I wasn't reading the book. That's the thing about it, it has this after-effect; you're walking down the road or hanging out the washing and you're thinking about it. Right away I decided I absolutely wanted to do this, which is a dangerous thing to say when you know the adaptation hasn't been written yet! [...] So I had to start thinking about it before there was a draft and in some ways I think that was quite liberating. "

### Thinking Visually

"The book was full of visual metaphors, which I scribbled down into my notebook, which was really useful. For example, she talks about black oil spilling down the walls, and covering her ankles and knees, suffocating her. There's a lot of talk of suffocation, between the duvet, the roses of the duvet, the slurry pit that the boy died in. One of the other lines in the book is "the world gets smaller and smaller, wrapping around me." That became Act 2 - one of the early ideas was that this world should become contained, prison-like, claustrophobic. So I started in quite broad terms while I was waiting on the adaptation."

### Putting Ideas on Stage

"A lot of it becomes practical then, a draft comes in, and storyboarding starts, and you start thinking about what you need physically to stage a play, as well as the earlier conceptual ideas. Because the script was being worked on with Annabelle in tandem with the design process, they really thought about staging it, which kept it practical in a lot of ways. The production, in a sense, was being drafted along with the script. And it was never going to be complete until all the elements were there."

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What do you think the role of a set designer is?
- What visual metaphors do you see in the set of *Asking for It*?
- If you were designing the set for *Asking for It*, what would you do?







## A CONVERSATION WITH

# NIAMH LUNNY / COSTUME DESIGN

We asked costume designer Niamh Lunny how she approached the show and she replied that;

"There were no costume sketches for *Asking for It*. It was important that the show felt as fresh and as up-to-the-minute as possible, and creating a very contemporary show means shopping..... lots and lots of shopping. Instead I did mood boards to start the conversation with the cast about how they look, but they are not particularly indicative of what people ended up wearing."

Niamh has sent us some of these and emphasised they are a "tool for opening up a conversation with an actor about how we both feel about what story that character is telling the audience."

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What does Niamh mean by a mood board? How would you make one? Where would you find such an approach to visual thinking online?
- Can you see the connections between the mood boards and the costumes you see in the production photos throughout this pack?
- There are a few photos of the cast in their own clothes, what differences do you notice to their characters?
- What story do your clothes tell people about who you are?







Mood boards created by Niamh Lunny. Clockwise from top left: Mood board for Mum, mood board for Ballinatoon GAA costume, mood board for Dad, mood board for school uniform, mood board for Ali, Maggie and Zoe. Opposite page: Mood board for Brian and mood board for Emma.



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## A CONVERSATION WITH

# LOUISE O'NEILL / WRITER

Louise O'Neill is the author of the novel *Asking for It*, published in 2015. She has also written numerous other books, including *Only Ever Yours*, *Almost Love*, and a feminist re-writing of the Little Mermaid, *The Surface Breaks*. Though all of her books deal with feminist topics, *Asking for It* caused a national conversation around rape culture when it was published, and has since been the basis for an RTÉ documentary and, of course, this stage adaptation. We chatted to Louise to find out a little more about her and her work.

**Tell us a little about yourself as a writer. How do you approach writing?**

I'm quite an instinctive writer. When I sit down at the laptop or in front of the page, that is when I'm at my most honest. When I'm writing, what I'm consciously looking for is emotional honesty and truth, and a certain rawness. When it comes down to my writing process, each book is a little different, but I am a very disciplined, structured writer. Before I start a project I will have done a lot of work on main plot points, characters and character development. I need to feel as if characters are real, and I know them, what their thought processes are, why they act as they do.

**What prompted you to write *Asking for It*?**

There were a few different incidences that sparked it. The main inspiration behind it was two cases in the U.S., the Steubenville Case and the Maryville Case, which both happened in 2012. Both happened in very different parts of the United States, but the similarities between the cases were uncanny – small towns, where the local football

teams are treated like heroes, a party, a young girl passes out, she is gang-raped and photos are circulated. What I found striking with both cases was that the community tended to band together to protect the perpetrators and isolate the victim. And then, closer to home, I was at a party discussing the Slane Girl incident with this group of young men and seeing how deeply entrenched their ideas around victim blaming and slut shaming were. They expected women's behaviour to be very different to their own behaviour. I remember I was so angry leaving that night. I knew I had to write something about this.

**Do you think the response to the play and book will be different, after three years and in the wake of movements like #MeToo?**

The reaction to the play and book were always going to be different because they are different mediums. I do think that when the book was released in 2015 it felt like people were ready to have this conversation but it also felt quite new. Now we can see a difference in the way people are reacting to things like the verdicts of rape trials – there's definitely a feeling of weariness around deeply ingrained flaws within the judicial system which continue to erect barriers for victims seeking justice.

**How did it feel seeing your novel adapted to the stage?**

Coming to it in the theatre I couldn't believe the impact it had on me. I had never come to it as an outsider. What was really striking was, when it was published people would say to me 'it seems slightly far-fetched,' but it was really interesting being in the theatre and seeing people react to certain lines. It was heartening, people weren't nonchalant; it was shocking them.



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**It's unusual to have a female protagonist like Emma, who is not always the most likeable character. Do you find that important in your writing?**

I never think she's that unlikeable, so I don't know! What's striking for me is how little room we leave for both female characters and for women to be complex. In a lot of my work I try to challenge gendered expectations where women are expected to be nice, likeable, pretty, quiet, and where they are not given the space to be fully rounded human beings. It was particularly important in *Asking for It* because it's not just expectations around how women should behave, but also around the idea of the 'perfect victim.' I thought it was important that the reader has a moment of feeling less sympathetic towards Emma than they maybe should, and to then have that moment of realisation that we are all capable of engaging in victim blaming, and how important it is to be vigilant about that.

**If the audience was to take one thing away from the play, what would you want it to be?**

I hope people leave with a kernel of empathy so that when someone comes to them and says 'I've experienced sexual violence,' they react with compassion. The second thing I would love the audience to leave with is a sense of anger. I think that anger can be a really motivating emotion. I want them to be angry and start really questioning why the system is the way it is, why we fail victims time and time again, and what we need to do change that. I hope that people will leave the theatre furious.



Venetia Bowe (Zoe) and Lauren Coe (Emma)



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# LIKE A DOLL: THE INFLUENCE OF CONSUMER CULTURE ON RAPE CULTURE

SAOIRSE ANTON

**“I belong to those boys now, as surely as if they have stamped me with a cattle brand.”**

Ideas of ownership, of value, and of possession are woven throughout *Asking for It*. It appears in small ways; Emma’s mother commenting on the difference in wealth between her family and the Hennesseys, Emma stealing a pair of expensive sunglasses from Ali, the way Emma speaks of the boys owning her after the assault. Though they may not initially seem connected, this sense of ownership, and consumerist mindset contribute to the widespread rape culture that led to the boys assaulting Emma at the party. In this short essay, I will discuss how consumer culture has influenced rape culture in the 21st Century.

Consumer culture refers to the way that we relate to the goods we buy, and the culture that has grown out of a global obsession with material goods. It refers to the social value we put on material goods, how buying and owning items gives a sense of status, how we measure success by possessions, and how consumption has influenced the way we live in the 21st century. As Steven Miles writes,

“consumerism appears to have become part and parcel of the very fabric of modern life. Areas of social life that were previously free of the demands of the marketplace, including religion, have had to adapt to a world where the needs and desires of the consumer are paramount.”

In this consumerist society, it is not only inanimate objects that are treated as goods to be consumed. People, and especially women, have come to be seen as goods to be consumed, through a process known as objectification. Objectification describes the way in which we sometimes view people as objects rather than as equal human beings. The objectification of women, in the sex industry, in advertising and in everyday life has been a serious factor in the development of rape culture. Once someone sees a woman as an object, they no longer see her as an independent person worthy of respect and this can lead to a disregard for women’s choices, a sense of ownership or entitlement with regard to women, and serious cases of violence against

women. This has also had an effect in terms of women’s self-objectification. The image of a hyper-sexualised ‘ideal’ woman has been sold as an image to work towards, making self-objectification seem like a positive, empowering choice for women. However, this also contributes to the issues I mentioned before. Women are pushed to make themselves into marketable objects, which then makes it easier for others to objectify them for their own purposes.

**“Women are pushed to make themselves into marketable objects, which then makes it easier for others to objectify them for their own purposes.”**



Before we look at this in the context of *Asking for It*, we will look at the influence of consumerism on rape culture more generally in our society. In her book *Girls and Sex*, Peggy Orenstein voices her concern about “the incessant drumbeat of self-objectification; the pressure on young women to reduce their worth to their bodies and to see these bodies as a collection of part that exist for others’ pleasure,” where women see their objectification “as a personal choice, something that can be taken on intentionally as an expression rather than an imposition of sexuality. And why wouldn’t they, if ‘hot’ has been portrayed as compulsory, a prerequisite to a woman’s relevance, strength and independence?” In that final sentence Orenstein sums up the issue with self-objectification; it is rarely, if ever, a true choice, but an extension of others’ objectification of a woman that she is then forced to conform to. Orenstein is writing about the influence of this on girls in their last few years of high-school and in university, where many of them feel pressurised to behave in certain ways to make themselves attractive to their male peers. Many of them are pushed to market themselves as though they were items to be consumed, objects to be judged and acquired, rather than as equals to their male peers. One American college student tells Orenstein “every girl knows that when you walk into a fraternity house, your most valuable asset is your sex appeal.”

This pressure to conform to unrealistic and dangerous standards by allowing oneself to be objectified, and objectifying oneself is not just something found in situations like the college fraternity party described in Orenstein’s book. It did not begin there. This level of extreme objectification of women comes from advertising and the consumer culture I mentioned before. If you walk outside and pick up a magazine, look at a perfume ad on TV, look at a billboard, chances are you will see an airbrushed image of a

**“Pornography presents unrealistic images of sexual relationships between men and women that regularly render women as mere objects to serve men’s sexual desires.”**

woman holding a product, acting as little more than a beautiful setting for the product. The old adage “sex sells” is the perfect summary of this. Why do car advertisements have a woman lounging across the bonnet of a car? Does anyone do this in real life? It looks pretty uncomfortable, and tells you nothing about the car. But the advertisement suggests that by buying this car, you could have other attractive things, like the woman draped across the bonnet. The woman in the advertisement is simply used as a pretty object to sell the car. These sorts of images, of static, airbrushed women are pushed at us constantly, creating a standard to which it is impossible to conform, and impossible to even attempt without objectifying oneself and performing an unrealistic image of ‘woman.’

This becomes even more extreme in the sex industry, where images of women are sold as objects for men’s pleasure. Pornography presents unrealistic images of sexual relationships between men and women that regularly render women as mere objects to serve men’s sexual desires. This creates a dangerous standard for sexual relationships between men and women as it lays an uneven foundation that favours male sexual desire over, not only women’s sexual desire, but their comfort and consent. Though it may seem unlikely that the porn industry would have



Venetia Bowe (Zoe)





Sile Maguire (Ali), Frank Blake (Conor)

such an impact on real-life situations, there are a number of examples of porn influencing people's attitudes, one of the best examples of which is trends in how people view pubic hair. As porn became more prevalent online, it quickly began to influence people's perception of 'normal' sexual practices. It soon became the norm in porn for women to have no hair on their bodies at all, and this changed men's expectations of women, and created a new pressure for women to remove their pubic hair. Salons began offering various types of waxing styles, and even programmes like Sex and the City joined in popularising this trend. Of course, this hair removal costs money, and

**"It is this casual objectification and sense of entitlement that allows Sean and Dylan to sexually assault Emma a few scenes later."**

things that cost consumers money make money for the businesses that provide them. The hair removal industry generates huge profits from this pressure on women to be hairless, and so they add to that pressure through their unrealistic advertising, and so the vicious circle continues. The porn industry profits from making popular videos that objectify women, the hair removal industry profits from the trends the porn industry set and further objectify women to increase this profit, and so women are faced with enormous pressure to conform to this objectification.

Now, you may be asking at this point, "what has this got to do with the play?" Well, if we look at the attitudes that both the young men and young women in *Asking for It* demonstrate, we see the direct effects of objectification in perpetuating rape culture. Two scenes in particular give a strong suggestion as to how the students in the play end up involved in such a horrific sexual assault. The first of these is the first scene in which we meet Sean, Conor, Eli and Dylan all together, away from the girls.

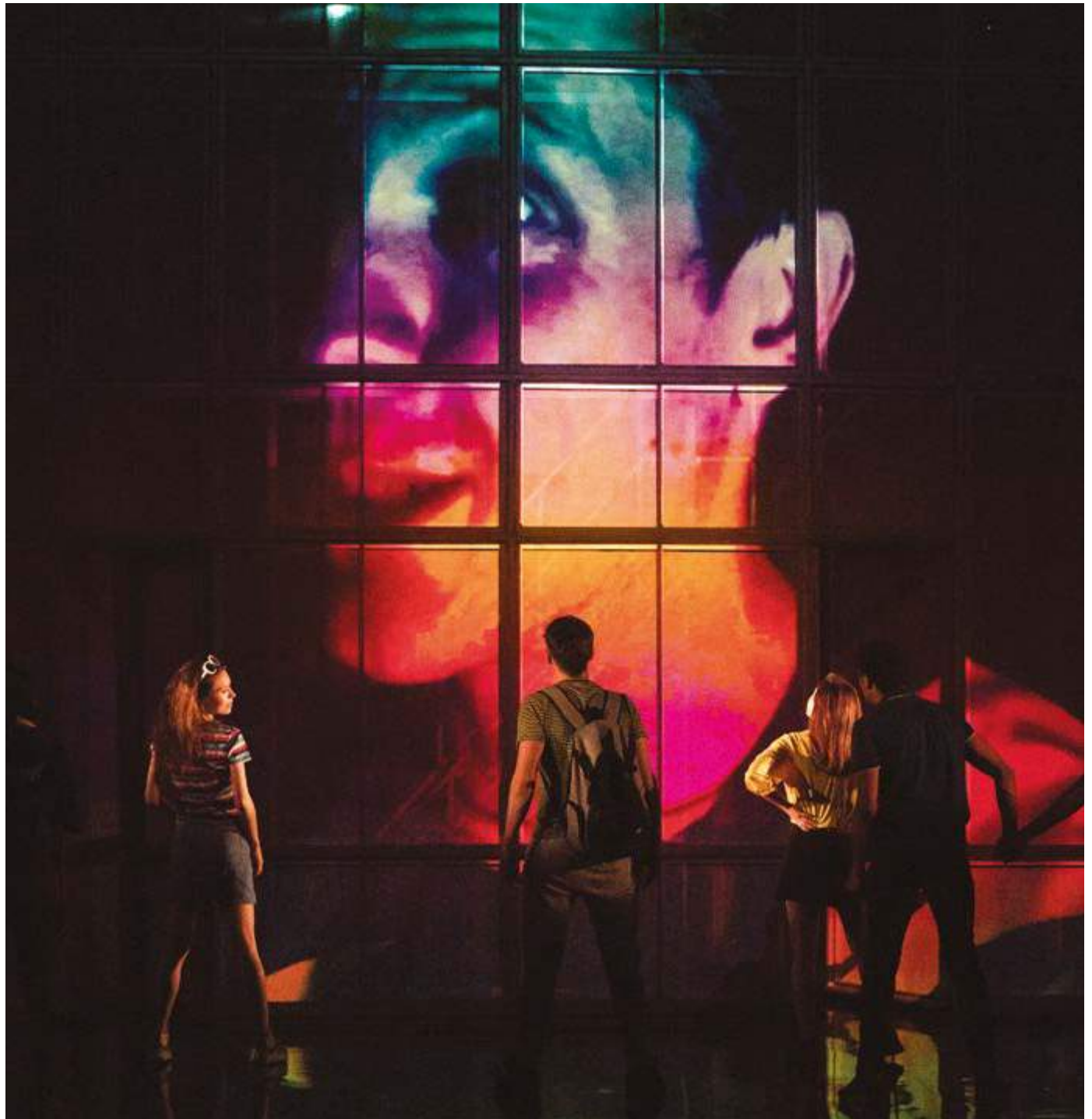
Sean, Eli and Dylan's conversation about girls they want to have sex with, and about other members of the football team's sex lives, is crude and clearly demonstrates that they are used to viewing women as objects, "notches on the post," possessions to be protected or won. The language they use is possessive and impersonal. For example, when they talk about a past teammate who moved to Australia and say "Did he have to go all the way to Oz to get his hole though?" The language they use reduces women to mere body parts, and suggests a sense of entitlement by using "his." Similarly, the discussion about Eli's sisters has a possessive note. Even though Eli

is acting protectively, he is assuming power and control over his sisters that is not his to assert. It is this casual objectification and sense of entitlement that allows Sean and Dylan to sexually assault Emma a few scenes later. The second scene that demonstrates the dangerous commodification of women's bodies as a result of consumer culture is at the party, when Emma asks Paul for a pill. His first question is "what are you going to give me in return?" It is immediately implied in this conversation that he wants Emma to have sex with him in return for the pill. Emma's body, and consent, are treated as a commodity (remember the quote from the college student earlier in the essay?). Paul feels entitled to sex because he gave Emma a pill, that she owes him it. This turns their relationship from a mutually consenting one, to one in which Paul holds all of the power. This objectification and commodification of Emma's body provides a detachment and sense of entitlement that lets Paul sexually assault Emma. There are similar, smaller examples throughout the play, as the girls play 'Would You Rather' and talk about



being "trophy wives," as we learn that Emma was voted Ballinatoom Queen and had her image put on a billboard in the town, as we hear that Sean took a picture of that billboard to keep for himself, as Emma's mother comments on Emma's appearance and attractiveness, as the Facebook comments objectify Emma, and as media commentators take Emma's story to use as an abstract idea to serve their own purposes. Emma, her story, and the other girls in the play are all treated as objects or commodities by the men (and often women) in the play.

Rape culture is undoubtedly a complex issue, and even within the confines of the play, consumerism and objectification are not the only factors that lead to Paul, Dylan and Sean sexually assaulting Emma, but they are a major factor. As the Steven Miles quote noted at the start of this essay, consumerism has penetrated every aspect of modern life, and gender relations and sexuality are no exception. In a consumerist society encouraged to view everything through the lens of the marketplace, it is unsurprising that women (who are already treated as second-class or as possessions in our patriarchal, male-dominated, system) have been objectified and treated as commodities. And it is inevitable that if women are seen as objects to be owned, played with, manipulated, or as commodities to be bartered with, then they will not be treated with the respect that should be afforded to any human being. If women are not seen as equal human beings, then it is all too easy for them to be stripped of respect and treated violently. Until women are seen as independent beings, equal to men, rape culture will continue to operate in our society. To prevent more stories like Emma's, we need to address the objectification and commodification of women in our society. We all need to make it our responsibility to notice it, to question it, to change it. It is our responsibility to make a difference.







Lauren Coe (*Emma*) and company

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# ASKING FOR IT PRE-SHOW WORKSHOP

Phil Kingston

This practical workshop introduces students to the basic principles of theatre as a way of preparing them for a visit to the play *Asking for It*. It is written as notes for what you might say and includes activities and reflections for each stage. The spine of the class is looking specifically at how theatre works through posture, movement, character, language and theme.

## INTRODUCTION

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We're going to look at how plays are made and particularly the one you're going to see.



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## WARM-UPS

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**Draw attention to how they're standing, first the postures themselves and then how these relate to each other.**

*What's the story? Make objective observations and conjectures about what this could mean, who's confident, who's shy, who might be friends etc...*

There's always a story behind how people are behaving. We're looking for those stories all the time and responding with our own behaviour. Theatre uses that instinct to tell specific stories. What's unusual about the play you're going to see is it's probably closer in ways to your own lives than a lot of other material you see in the theatre or the cinema.

How we stand and move reveals something of how we are feeling, how we think about ourselves and how we want to be thought of. It also says a lot about how we feel about the space we're in and about the other people we're sharing that space with.

*What are the stories about how you are standing? And how would you change your behaviour to tell a different story?*

This all works with movement too. But instead of discussing it let's do something actors do all the time, explore an idea by doing it.

*Walking around room*

*How is this different if you're - in your own home, your room, the kitchen, with siblings there, with parents*

*Then - in school, in the classroom, with older kids, with younger kids, at a GAA match (home/away)*

*How are they different? Why are they different? Do your bodies feel different doing it?*

*Split into two, watching other group - what's this like? What are you interpreting from their movements? What's it like being watched? Does it change how you move?*

*Now try walking as the other gender.*

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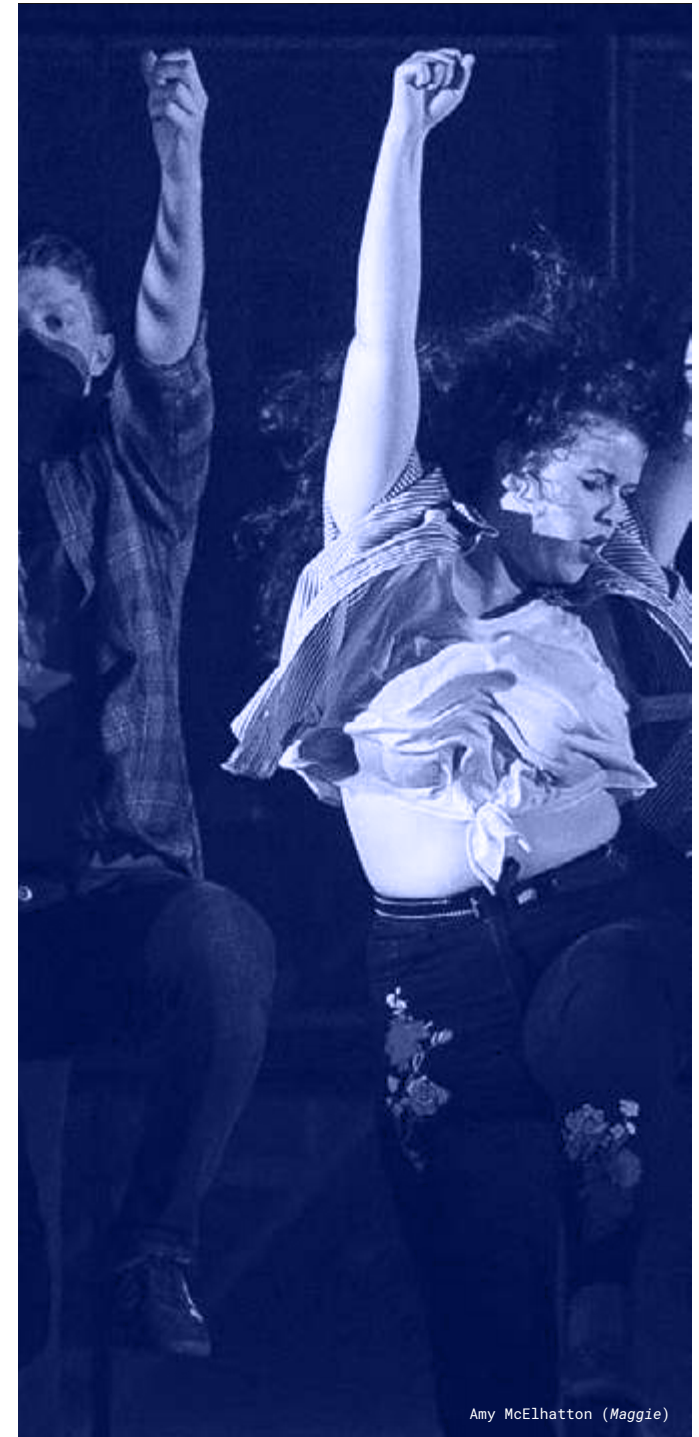
## CREATING CHARACTER [IF TIME]

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*How you walk is a way into different characters*

*Try walking from different centres of the body - the nose, the heart, the stomach...*

*It's like having a holiday from yourself, can get into someone's mind from the outside in.*



Amy McElhatton (Maggie)



# CHARACTER

*"Which would you rather be – attractive or clever?"*

If I change that to "pretty or clever" – what's the difference?

Characters in plays are always distillations of people, they could never be as complex and contradictory as real people are, we wouldn't have the time or patience to watch them. So often they have clear, distinguishing characteristics.

Also another way we define characters is how they behave in relation to other people.

There's two gender based gangs or groups in this play, one family and one person in a class of their own:

Emma O'Donovan  
Zoe  
Maggie  
Ali

Conor  
Dylan  
Sean  
Eli

Nora O'Donovan  
Dennis O'Donovan  
Bryan

Paul

The play is based around one central character.

Create a freeze-frame picture of the relations around a central Emma

From that create groups of four which convey the following:

- The most popular attractive girl and her three friends – what are the differences between them, how do they stand out?
- Boys the same age – two are in the local GAA team two aren't, one is slightly younger, how do they treat each other?
- A family, two children – Dad works in a bank, elder brother at university

Make a picture of them. How does this show the relationships? Hierarchies?

Try informal and formal pictures, selfies and a family portrait or shot for the local paper.



## REFLECTIONS

- How do girls behave together, how do boys?
- Do people play roles in gangs?
- How is the way you behave with your friends different from with your parents?
- When do our parents begin to be real people for us?
- What were they like when they were our age?

## CHARACTER QUOTES [IF TIME]

What can you tell about this person from just one line?

**Emma** – “Act like we like each other, girls.”

**Zoe** – “I’d rather be smart , makes heaps of money and buy a new face.”

**Sean** – “What’s your take on the game, man? I really hope we win this match.”

**Dylan** – “That’s beautiful, Sean. Can I use that line at the weekend.”

**Conor** – (of him by Emma) “Neighbour, family friend, the man I should marry and grow old with.”

## LANGUAGE

To learn about our characters and the world they are in we only have the script to go on.

Reading in groups of four excerpts from the first scenes (see appendices)

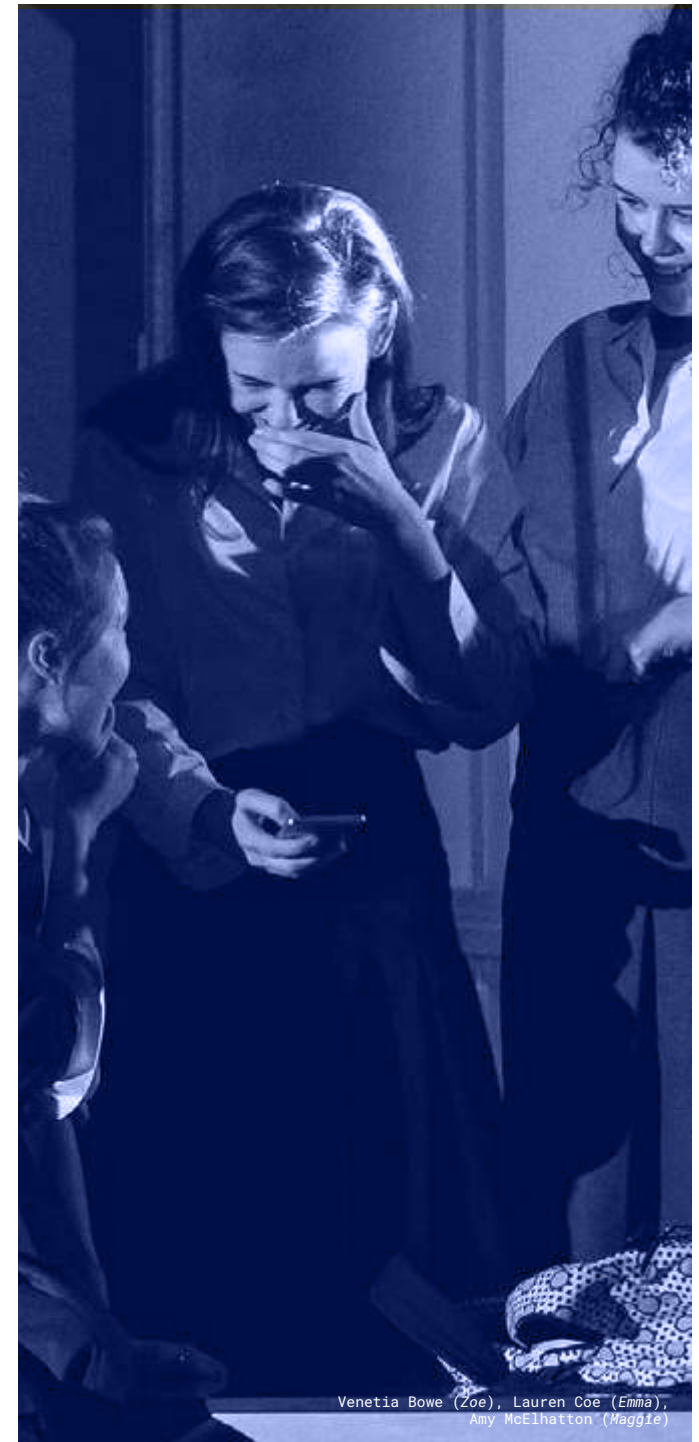
- Ask initial questions for comprehension - What’s going on? What do we learn about them? What are the dynamics of the groups?
- Then have a second group of four stand behind and voice what they really feel about the other characters and what isn’t being said.
- How might this affect how the scene is staged? How the characters move?

Then excerpts from the family scene -  
“There he is, the big man himself”

What are the tensions in this scene? What isn’t being said?

If you had a voiceover what would you say?

How would you stage this? What could the people be doing?



Venetia Bowe (Zoe), Lauren Cœ (Emma),  
Amy McElhatton (Maggie)





Lauren Coe (Emma) and Frank Blake (Conor)

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## THEMES

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Themes are what the play is about, the ideas behind the story.

They are hopefully what we talk about afterwards, the issues the play or film makes us think more about. It's why we have the arts in our lives because they're meant to help us reflect more on some of the timeless questions of being human.

It's why we can still identify with stories that comes from times and places that are either very different from us or didn't exist at all. In this case the world of the play is very close to ours so it can be harder to see what the themes are but from what you've read so far what do you think they might be?

We're looking for the following but work with anything relevant they offer:

- **Not communicating**
- **Family**
- **Friendship**
- **Consent**
- **How we behave at home and with our peers.**
- **Double standards between boys and girls on how they can behave.**

*Going back to your pictures of the groups and the family, create freeze frames that show some of these themes at work. Imagine you were trying to take a photograph that captured one of these ideas. Or a statue which communicates it for future generations.*

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## CONCLUSION

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Do you see how plays are made of behaviour in the same way that paintings are made of colour and shape? What's the difference between plays and, say, films?

*What questions do you have about the play you're going to see?*

If time, discuss the following two quotes:

*"Look, if people have to make up stories to make them feel more like men, that's not my problem."*

*"And if women have to make up stories to make themselves feel better about themselves, that's not mine."*



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# APPENDICES – SCENES TO WORK WITH

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## GIRLS SCENE

### Act One, Scene Two, Part Two

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*The bell goes for lunch, they eat.*

ALI Your sandwich looks so good.

MAGGIE It's just ham.

*Beat. ALI stares.*

Do you want a bite?

ALI I'm doing intermittent fasting.

*Beat.*

I might faint.

EMMA How long have you been fasting?

ALI An hour.

*EMMA laughs and is about to say something*

ZOE Ok, fat forever, or lose a finger?

ALI Which hand?

ZOE Why does that matter?

ALI If you were right-handed ...

ZOE Yeah, you could be trained to be left-handed.

MAGGIE They used to do that the other way around.

My dad was a citeog and they made him be the other one. Write the right way. Sort of abusive.

It's weird, like, what we think was OK to do back then. You know they say in 100 years we're going to look at eating meat in the same way we understand slavery now?

ALI Really?

MAGGIE I read that. We're going to have a different understanding of animals and look back and be shocked by how morally blind we were.

EMMA Please don't use phrases like "morally blind."

MAGGIE Why not?

EMMA Cos you sound like a loser.

I'm a vegetarian anyhow so no-one will say I was morally blind.

ZOE No, just attention-seeking. You always eat meat when you're drunk.

ALI I'd rather lose a finger.

MAGGIE Maybe you'd be happy being ... fuller and fully fingered. You could be a pianist, or a painter or a plus size hand model.

EMMA Maggie, stop being mature. You're ruining the game.

MAGGIE I'm not mature. I'm just *saying*.

ZOE Fully fingered is a really gross phrase.

EMMA Do you think Eli would be with you if you were, like, Ten-Tonne-Tessy?

MAGGIE I do. Not everything is superficial.

EMMA Sexual attraction is superficial?

MAGGIE No, but I heard that overweight people are the best in bed.

EMMA You wouldn't worry about him copping off with someone else?

*Beat.*

*(Dismissive)* Depends on what you're into, I guess. What kind of fetishes you have.

*Beat. MAGGIE rolls eyes.*

MAGGIE God, it's so hot.

EMMA Sure we're all going to fry, aren't we Zo?

ALI Snapchat story.

EMMA Act like we like each other, girls.

MAGGIE We do!



---

# BOYS SCENE

## Act One, Scene Three

---

DYLAN smokes. SEAN, ELI, CONOR hang around him.

SEAN Yeah but if Badger wasn't off in Sydney, we'd have that sorted. I'm just concerned that our backs are dodgy with Mitch in there instead.

ELI Dodgy. Mitch is solid.

SEAN Yeah?

CONOR Ballinatum are really fit right now too.

I see Paul O'Brien every night in the gym.

ELI Doesn't Paul O'Brien own the gym?

DYLAN And every other fucking thing in town.

CONOR Well, his Dad.

ELI Ciaran O'Brien: King of Ballinatum. Fair play to him.

DYLAN Fucking hell.

SEAN Yeah we're fit alright. *(To CONOR, slightly dismissive)*. What do you do in the gym?

ELI Have you seen Badger's Instagram? A lot of birds, by the looks of it.

DYLAN Fucking hell. Fucking badger, cleaning up.

SEAN Did he have to go all the way to Oz to get his hole though?

Could he not have thought of the team, the town?

Plenty of class ladies in Ballinatum.

DYLAN Girls are better looking down under anyhow, pardon the pun.

ELI Yeah, how so?

DYLAN None of this fake tan, fake eyelashes shit. Unless it's one of your sisters now, Eli. That'd be different. No need for fake tan on those beauties.

ELI Don't even fucking joke, Dylan. I'll point you so far in the other

direction.

DYLAN I know you would, man. Jokes. Chill.

*He laughs. ELI sort of does.*

ELI God, you're thick.

DYLAN *(To Eli, hitting him on the arm)* Jokes, man.

ELI I know, lad. But if you touch my sisters *(Hits him back a bit harder but still playfully)*.

*They really laugh this time. DYLAN surrenders.*

CONOR He'll disfigure you.

DYLAN *(Serious tone, suddenly, to CONOR)* He'll what?

No-one laughs.

SEAN Someone told me once the sky in Australia is much bigger than here. Like the size of the planet seems bigger when you can see all that blue.

DYLAN *(Sarcasm)* That's beautiful. Can I use that line at the weekend?

CONOR Sean, you were saying. The match.

SEAN That's how I predict the match'll go anyhow.

Not that I'm not shitting myself.

ELI Are you not always shitting yourself, Seaneen Og?

*ELI ruffles SEAN's hair playfully.*

DYLAN Did you not shit yourself during *(makes sex gestures)* one time?

*Lads laugh.*

SEAN Fuck off, Dylan.

*DYLAN keeps miming. He may even grab Sean and thrust at him from behind. Lads laugh.*

What are ya even talking about? *(Trying to laugh)* Get off me.

CONOR In Sean's defense, I never heard that.

SEAN That's not saying a lot. You haven't heard of much.

*Lads laugh. CONOR blushes.*



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# FAMILY SCENE

## Act Two, Scene Two

---

DAD enters.

DAD (*A performance*) There he is! The big man himself. Did you bring the weather from Limerick?

You're welcome home.

BRYAN Thanks, Dad.

DAD You brought your laundry with you, I see.

BRYAN I did.

DAD Good man. Your mother'll do that for you.

BRYAN Ah ... cheers. I was just saying to Mam –

MAM Oh yes.

DAD What's that now?

MAM There was a terrible accident on the road coming down, could have been a child injured.

*Beat.*

DAD Was there? I didn't hear that.

BRYAN Yeah.

DAD The rain I suppose. And imagine this time last year, it was...

*Beat.*

EMMA This time last year it was sunny. This time last year we were in the middle of a heatwave, waiting for it to break. This time last year, we were normal.

BRYAN I was also saying –

MAM (*To Dad*) You're delayed.

DAD Went through Kilgavan on the way home.

MAM Why?

DAD For petrol. It's a nice spin.

How do you reckon it'll go tonight, Bryan?

BRYAN Hah?

DAD The game.

BRYAN Oh, right. I don't know.

DAD C'mon now. Who'll take it?

BRYAN Haven't really been following, Dad, to be honest.

DAD Could have been you on the pitch one time.

BRYAN (*Dismissive, but lightly*) Ah, now. Not so much.

DAD You playing any football at all these days?

*BRYAN shakes his head.*

DAD You'll have to get back to it.

Well, we'll watch it together this evening. Yeah?

BRYAN I guess.

DAD Put a nice fire on, put the feet up ...

BRYAN Yeah, unless Emma would like to watch something else together.

DAD ... a few beers. Hah?

BRYAN I dunno ... Like a movie. *Michael Collins* is on.

EMMA No. I'm fine. I don't really want to see *Michael Collins*.

BRYAN Or, you could watch the match with us.

*Beat.*

DAD (*Not looking at her*) Emma doesn't like sport. Do you, Emma?

EMMA Not really.

DAD See?

*Dad starting to get annoyed now.*

*Beat.*

MAM Bryan brought champagne.

DAD For what?

MAM To celebrate the news.

DAD I thought we might have a night off from the news



A person with a backpack is seen from behind, looking out a window. The window is divided into several panes, and the view outside is a large, close-up mural of a person's face, specifically the eye and nose area. The scene is dimly lit, with the light coming from the window.

# ASKING FOR IT POST-SHOW WORKSHOP

Aoibheann McCaul and Phil Kingston

## INTRODUCTION

5 minutes

Who we are. Acknowledgement of any participants who are new.

Explain briefly we are going to continue our exploration of what theatre is, how it works and how to make it using their recent visit to *Asking for It*.<sup>1</sup>

## NOTES / INTRODUCTION

This workshop builds on the pre-show one using similar techniques and topics but seeks to extend the scope of the exercises.

<sup>1</sup>In some schools we may introduce the school's counsellor at this point to simply say they are available to talk further about any of the issues raised. We don't name what those issues might be to forestall suggestion.

## STATUES

10 minutes

In a circle. Show us in how you are standing:

- *How you felt going in to the play*
- *How you felt once you'd seen it*

Asking them to read each other, asking questions on what we can see in their 'performances'.

Use answers as a measure of their engagement. Look for contrasting views and welcome them.

## NOTES / STATUES

Reinforcing work on the physical language of theatre, that the actors' bodies convey as much if not more than their words.

There's an opportunity here to explore subtext or that the body can lie as much as words can. "I went in looking like this but really I felt like this."



# TABLEAUX RECAP

25 minutes

## PHASE ONE

In 6 groups make a freeze frame of six significant moments in the drama which recapitulates the story. Feed these prompts privately:

- When we meet the girls
- When we meet the boys
- The invitation to the party
- Emma deciding to go to the 'after' party (choose this group carefully, see below)
- When Brian arrives home
- When Emma decides to drop the charges

If there are spare people in the groups they can embody what other significant characters are doing at that moment elsewhere. Ask each group to identify what moment in the play is being shown and choose the groups in order so you they can recapitulate the plot to each other.

## PHASE TWO

Ask the groups to create a contrasting image of the outcome i.e. how their members are changed by the end of the event they are the start of. This will mean the end of the play for some, for others it's a shorter unit within that story.

- The girls at the end
- The boys at the end
- The end of the first party
- Emma outside her parents' house (you will need to specify this 'outcome' to the group)
- When Brian returns to uni
- The next morning at breakfast

Explore how they are changed, how the relationships have altered (e.g. most of these should reveal one character becoming more isolated from a bigger group)

## NOTES / TABLEAUX RECAP PHASE ONE

This section extends the previous exercise into their experience of the play and utilises the principle of applied drama to explore ideas physically first. Its also uses performance as the medium of communication. We then reflect both on the efficiency of that (how can we tell Emma is top dog in her gang or Brian is frustrated with his parents) and also how individuals can gain greater insight into characters by being them.

One useful tip here is the idea that actors don't judge their own characters (that's the audiences job) and need to find a way of understanding why they behave the way they do.

The outcome of this decision is the crux of Louise O'Neill's original novel and is never shown in either that or the subsequent play. See note below in [Phase Two](#).

You can make a call here depending on the maturity of the group whether to include this plot point or go back to the party scene and explore Emma's flirtation with Paul and her estrangement from Zoe.

## NOTES / TABLEAUX RECAP PHASE TWO

Here you are going to be touching on the rape at the centre of this story. My suggestion (left) as to what tableaux to do is deliberate as the actual outcome is too graphic. You can acknowledge this if the group is mature enough and discuss how the play (and novel) refers at one remove to Emma's humiliation by the use of the Facebook page. This could prompt a quick discussion on the differences between what novels and theatre can depict.

## PHASE THREE [IF TIME]

Is there a distinct point of change for these characters?  
Can you make a tableaux of that?



## WALK THE SPACE

20 minutes

## NOTES / WALK THE SPACE

Walk around the room keeping equidistant from each other first at slightly slower than your own pace then moving into a selection of different characters.

You are looking to explore their status, so suggest how they would walk in different points in the story. e.g. at the beginning of the play, after the party pictures go online, at the end

To save time you can call out two characters at a time and see who gets chosen and why.

- Emma / Zoe
- Paul / Brian
- Mum / Dad
- Dylan / Conor
- Margaret / Ali

This section reiterates the importance of movement in theatre with a focus on one of the main structures for storytelling – how people's status changes in relation to their wider social contexts.

In exploring the responses emphasise there is no right way to be Emma or Paul. The beauty of drama is the many possible interpretations.

## THOUGHT TRACKING [IF TIME]

5 minutes

5 groups make a tableaux of a situation where you aren't speaking your mind out loud

- Being given out to be a teacher
- At the cinema
- Looking at social media
- First date/ when you're trying to impress someone
- With your Mum and Dad

Then we ask other groups to go in and voice what the characters are really thinking

## LINES

10-15 minutes

## NOTES / LINES

Spread laminates of key lines on the floor.

**EMMA** Act like we like each other.  
**ZOE** I'd rather be smart, makes heaps of money and buy a new face.  
**SEAN** What's your take on the game, man? I really hope we win this match.  
**DYLAN** It's all ahead of you, you'll be pumping drunk girls yet.  
**EMMA** (Conor) Neighbour, family friend, the man I should marry and grow old with.  
**DAD** Emma, Emmie. Look at me, princess. Is this what you want?  
**MAM** I'm sure it won't. They're good boys really. This all just got out of hand.  
**EMMA** Maybe I did want it.  
**BRYAN** You can't want it, if you can't stand up –

Each group picks one and reproduces the moment when it happens. It's like a short extract with the only dialogue being the line but not a freeze frame.

Spare group members show how they reacted as audience members or play devil's advocate.

This section recaps the work on language from the pre-show. While the lines may seem initially unremarkable in their naturalism it will soon be clear how much more powerful a line in a play is due to its context. You can look at how important it is to both the plot and more generally in how it works in the scene.

By this point the group will be familiar enough with the techniques to use them to get to the heart of the themes of the play.



## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT [IF TIME]

10

minutes

Act out what you think happened next for all the characters.

Explore what would have happened if e.g.

- *Emma hadn't dropped the charges*
- *She hadn't gone to the party*
- *Her friends had supported her immediately*
- *If she'd been believed*
- *If they hadn't posted on social media*

## NOTES / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

N.B. Some students may find that if these alternative choices are made there isn't much drama left. This reveals how plays depend upon, that plays depend upon the drama being sustained by decisions that keep the stakes high.

Particular emphasis here on what would it have been like if Emma's friends had rallied round and why they didn't.

## REFLECTION

5

minutes

## NOTES / REFLECTION

If the group are really engaged, ask:

*Why did you get so involved in the story?*

If less so, ask:

*What will you take from this?*

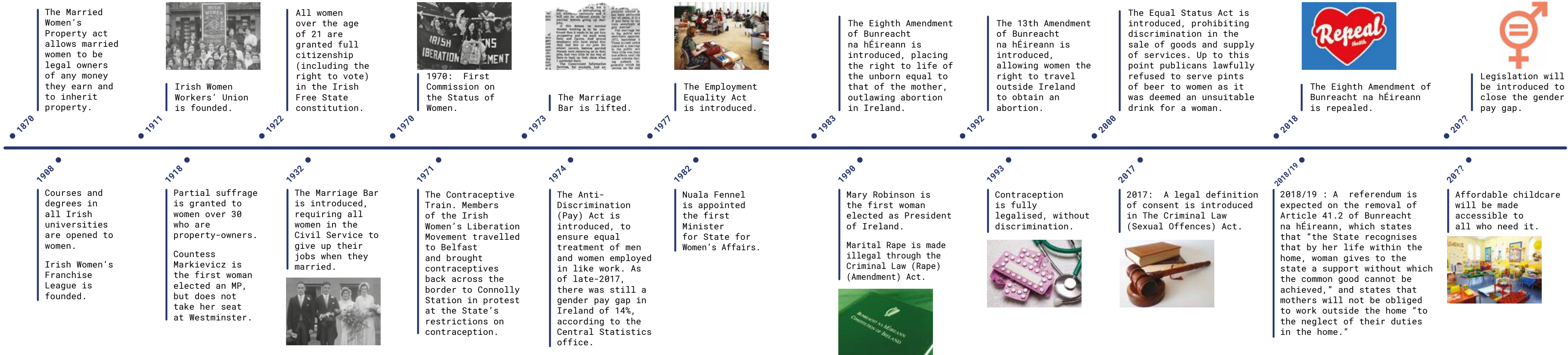
Thank you and goodbye.

This is a prompt for them to reflect upon the whole point of drama as a medium of exploration and understanding.

This is more for if you feel it's too soon for them to articulate the process they have been through. I gives them an opportunity to name any practical learnings they have made.

At this point the school counsellor would return to the room to remind the participants they are available if there is anything raised by the workshops that they would like to discuss further.





# A TIMELINE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN IRELAND

Ireland has made many steps forwards and backwards in terms of women’s rights and gender equality. Under Brehon Law, which was in place from around the 7th Century to the 17th Century, Irish women could maintain the right to their own property in marriage, could pursue education and have a career in whatever area they chose. Brehon Law also contained laws against various types of sexual harassment. This was eventually supplanted by English Common Law, and over the course of the proceeding centuries, many things have changed regarding gender equality in Ireland. This timeline is just a snapshot of the history of women’s rights in Ireland, and the timeline has a long way to go yet.

2018

20...

20...

20...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What changes do you think should be made? Add your own to the timeline above.



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# CREATING YOUR OWN CONSENT WORKSHOPS

Kashmira & Ishthara Larkin

The consent workshop, which was delivered twice in the past academic year, came about following a meeting of a group in Wicklow Sudbury School called the Welfare Committee. During the school year, anyone who is on the committee meets and discusses things they think would be beneficial to the school and the students. The topic of consent was something that frequently arose, since a few people, myself and my sister included, were very interested and invested in the topic. We considered it something very important for everyone to learn about. We decided that there should be two consent classes, one for under 12s and one for over 12s. We will focus on the over 12s class, since we helped more with the planning and delivery of it.

## PLANNING

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A group of students and staff volunteered to gather resources. We found different consent workshops online as a starting point, and to give us an idea of a possible structure. We then modified them to suit the school, Irish culture, and the age group. In design, we created space to allow for conversations and discussions to begin. The final activity from both years was a role-playing activity which many found to be the most engaging and fun. We also decided that it would be better to give the workshop ourselves, rather than have someone come in. This was on account of the somewhat delicate matter of the subject, and since the topics being discussed may have affected some people in the room. The community is very close, a lot of trust had been built up prior, which we think was a key factor in the class being so well received. Both times the workshop was planned and delivered by us two sisters, and another (male) student.



## DELIVERY

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When delivering the workshops, we first set out some content warnings and what they meant. This was so people could feel comfortable leaving before something they might find it distressing to hear was discussed, such as rape or sexual assault. Since this class was over 12s, the youngest person in the room was 12, and they felt much more comfortable being in the room with the content warnings in place.

Videos, such as the tea/consent video were shown, and then we had discussions surrounding main points brought up, and how people felt about them. It was flagged that this wasn't the space to discuss upsetting things that had happened to anyone in the room, as many people would find it distressing to learn that their friends had been assaulted. Details of resources – organisations and people (such as staff members) – were given in case anyone wanted to discuss something personal.



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# CONTENT

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Instead of the way subjects are taught in schools – with one teacher at the top of a classroom, bombarding students with information, the students sat in a circle. We then went around the circle, sharing what we already knew about consent. We also discussed what we already knew about sex. People shared what they had been taught at other schools about sex (if anything). Those who had been to other schools, and who had been taught about sex there, commented that it was all very heteronormative. This made some people very upset, because it gave them the message that their non-heteronormative sexual orientation was, somehow, 'wrong'.

Then we broke up into small groups and did myth busters in these groups. Re-grouping, we discussed things like victim-blaming, rape culture, different sexualities, respect, and other issues that arose organically during the small group discussions.

Forming small groups again, we worked pieces of Forum Theatre. One of the scenes we enacted was at a bus stop. The characters were an older man, a woman, and a third person of any gender. The man began hitting on the woman, pestering her to go to a party with him. One of the students then said 'Stop!' and replaced the bystander. The replacement bystander then asked the woman if she was okay, told the man to leave her alone – as she clearly wasn't interested. This was one of many scenes we created during the workshop in order to provide as many opportunities for everyone to take part, and to facilitate the students getting more and more comfortable challenging unacceptable behaviour. In each scene, there was a bystander (or two), a victim, and a victimiser. In each scene, the victim's consent was being violated, or they felt pressured, or uncomfortable. These situations ranged from being in someone else's personal space, to cat-calling, to unwanted touch, to requests for nudes.

One really important thing we have both learned is being confident in ourselves when saying 'no, or dealing with situations where we're uncomfortable. Other learnings included helping people feel comfortable with both the trigger warnings and not being too stiff while delivering them, allowing conversations to develop and even things such as making snacks like popcorn helped people feel as though it was more a flowing discussion than a strict class. This was hugely important for the reception of the workshop.



Charlie Maher (Paul) and company



# TESTIMONIALS

In May of 2018 a group of students from Coláiste Choilm in Ballincolig, Co. Cork met with *Asking for It* author Louise O'Neill for a Town Hall style discussion in anticipation of the play's opening in the Everyman Theatre a month later. After the event we reached out to some of the students to offer their thoughts on why teenage students should study the novel or see the stage adaptation. The words here are entirely their own.

## ASKING FOR IT IS A ONE-IN-A-MILLION BOOK.

It is so rare that a story fits so seamlessly into the social landscape of young adults. O'Neill's narrative bears a bitter truth about today's society, that needs to be explored and discussed by both adults and teenagers around the country.

While the graphic and disturbing nature of the book shocked many readers, it was how believable Emma's story what surprised me the most. The reckless behaviour of the characters is second nature for a lot, if not all teenagers today. We hear stories like Emma's whispered around, but never spoken out loud, never openly discussed.

Through Emma's dysfunctional surroundings O'Neill emphasises the need for a social reform. It highlights how the morals of today's teens are disappearing, how consent is a topic we cannot refuse to discuss, and how we need to stop judging the victim based on his/her outward appearance. We need to stop discussing were they "Asking for It" and start discussing how to prevent these disgusting acts.

By introducing *Asking for It* in secondary schools, we are taking a knowing step towards this change. We are taking the first steps towards a better future. A future where morals and respect for others are not forgotten. A future where young adults are encouraged to think about social issues happening around them, and not just be spectators or the 'problem'.

**Rachel Meacher, 5th Year**



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# WHY TEENAGERS SHOULD READ ASKING FOR IT

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As a 16 year old, I truly believe that all teenagers should read or see *Asking for It*. I studied the book in TY English and the discussions that followed were disturbing but extremely important. I was already aware of the types of things discussed in the book/play but after talking to Louise O'Neill herself with my fellow students, my eyes were opened to just how often it occurs. There wasn't a girl in that room who had not experienced some sort of unwanted touching or derogatory comments, and not a single boy could say that he hadn't heard them coming from at least one family member or friend. These discussions need to be had: we need to be educated, we need to be listened to. *Asking for It* is a perfect way to start these discussions. It tackles so many issues including consent, rape culture and cyber bullying. You can pretend all you want that these things don't happen in teenagers lives but it's becoming more evident everyday that they do. If the fact that a "rape list" of girls names was found in the boys toilets of a Mallow secondary school doesn't prove that this needs to be dealt with and dealt with now, I don't know what will! We still have a long way to go but books and plays like this one is a great way to start.

By Amy O Rourke, 5th Year

I am a 16 year old girl, and I believe that schools all across the country need to embrace the fact that we are finally getting better about opening up when it comes to the issues covered, sans the sugar-coating, by this book and its adaptations. These topics, albeit heavily stigmatised, need to be discussed and talked about without the awkwardness and fragility that everyone seems to associate with them. Sexual crimes are a real and prevalent threat in our world, and we can't shy away from that fact anymore. We need to start informing, advising, *explaining* to people the importance of staying aware regarding these problems. People should know that it's ok to say no. People should know that it's ok to speak up. People should know that it's ok to seek help. And we need to be the ones to tell them.

Jay Fitzgibbon, 5th Yr

The talk with Louise O'Neill was both a relieving and eye opening experience. Relieving because I realised just how many people in my school understood and would speak out against the problems we see so disturbingly in *Asking for It* and eye opening because I never realised that I had witnessed some of the habits and mistreatment everyday and not realised it. It was an important experience for me and I would hope that most students my age would get a similar eye opening experience. The problems addressed by Louise are problems the need to be woven out of the future, not ignored in the hopes of the problem just disappearing. Action is mandatory and must be taken now!

Louise Kelleher, 5th Yr





# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IRELAND'S CONSENT LAWS

Hazel Larkin

**1. If you have sex with someone who is younger than 17, you are committing statutory (legal) rape.**

**EVEN IF** the other person does not object.

**EVEN IF** you are both the same age. The law does not make exceptions. The only way it is legal in Ireland to have sex with someone who is younger than 17 is if you are married to each other. (Marriage is legal, between 16 and 17 years olds, provided both parents of both teenagers give their permission.)

**2. Sharing nude photos of anyone under the age of 18 – even of yourself – is illegal.**

It is considered filmed child abuse (also referred to – incorrectly – as 'child pornography'). If you photoshop a nude body of someone else onto the face of a person under the age of 18, this is also considered the making and distribution of images of child sexual abuse. It is illegal.

**3. Even if the person to whom you send the images is not offended or upset by them, their parents or guardians may well be.**

They may decide to make a formal complaint to the Gardaí, who will be obliged to act on the information / evidence.







#### 4. In 2017, the Irish law around sexual offences was amended to include very specific rules around consent. Consent is:

- **Freely given** – I.E. there is no coercion, or threatening, or bullying behaviour, or speech employed to convince a person to say 'yes', or to change a 'no' to a 'yes'
- **Obtained in advance** – you can't touch someone and then say 'is this okay?' you must ask before you touch someone if your touch is wanted. This applies to all kinds of touching.
- **Ongoing** – Don't assume that because someone is happy to kiss (meet) you, they will also be happy to have your hands on their genitals. You've got to check in with each other that what's going on is fine with both of you.
- **Enthusiastic** – there is a huge difference between someone who is not reacting and someone who is very definitely saying 'Yes!'
- **Possible to retract at any time** – even if you are in the middle of intercourse (which, of course, you would only be if you were both over the age of 17), and the other person asks you to stop, **YOU MUST STOP**.



#### 5. Consent cannot be given if the person:

- a) Is asleep
- b) Is intoxicated
- c) Is underage
- d) Is submitting to the act/s out of fear, because they have been forced, or fear they may be forced
- e) Is mistaken as to the identity of the other person (for example, if they are blindfolded, and think they are having sex with X, but Y is actually the person having sex with them)
- f) Agrees to one act, but another is performed (for example, if a person agrees to have vaginal intercourse, but anal intercourse takes place instead)
- g) Is living with a physical difficulty which prevents them from signalling, clearly, that are consenting (or not). An example of this would be an illness like Locked-in Syndrome
- h) Is being detained against their will at the time the sexual activity takes place
- i) Has someone else give 'consent' on their behalf. For example, if A tells B that C said they were happy to have sex with B, and B proceeds to have sex with C, B has committed an offence.



# BUT CAN CONSENT BE SEXY?

Hazel Larkin

**Actually, yes.** How sexy do you think it is when the person you're with doesn't assume that you're there to be touched as, and when, and where, they feel like it? It is actually quite sexy to consider the other person – and yourself – important enough in the proceedings to find out before touching each other, that it really is something mutually desired.

There is every chance that, if you're reading the non-verbal signals correctly, and in a position where consent is asked for, it will probably be granted. There again, it might not be – the response might be 'no', or 'not yet' or 'wait' but at least the other person has been consulted about what happens to their body. This is basic respect. It's respecting the person, and the personhood of the other.

Also, it's so much nicer to be asked for permission than to be in the situation where you have to stay 'Stop!' or 'Don't!' or push someone away. Obtaining, and giving, consent means that regrets after the fact are less likely to surface. Communication is key to everything in our lives, and communication around sex and consent is no less important than in any other area of our lives.

Let's remember, too, that sex and intimacy, and relationships, are about more than just penetration, more than just orgasm. Exploring your partner's body, and your own, and your sexuality, is a wonderful gift for both of you. It's great fun to explore how different parts of your body react to different types of touch. It's exciting to mine your imagination for ways to please each other without breaking the law!

Bear in mind, too, that about one in three people has experienced some form of sexual violence by the time they reach adulthood. There is, therefore, a possibility that the person you're getting intimate with has experienced abuse. It's hard to disclose abuse. Sometimes –



especially if it has happened over a period of time, and within the home – people aren't even entirely sure that what has happened to them actually is abuse. Talking about how your body has been violated can be a difficult conversation to start. It can be hard to know the words, or how they will be received.

If you can be the kind of person who shows respect for someone else by asking consent, then you are on your way to being the best kind of sexual partner there is.

The video above is one of the best explainer videos of consent I've ever seen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7Nii5w2FaI>















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# ASKING FOR IT STUDY PACK 2018

This study pack was made possible  
with assistance from the Arts Council

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