"Rape Me, I'm Irish": An Analysis of the Intersecting Discourses of Anti-Irish Racism and Sexual Violence

Jemma Tosh
Manchester Metropolitan University

Abstract

Well documented experiences of the Irish diaspora in England include humiliation, discrimination, and higher rates of suicide and psychiatric intervention (Hickman, 2000). However, the construction of the Irish in relation to rape has rarely been considered, despite the longstanding history of the term being used as a metaphor in the context of colonization (Sharkey, 1994). This paper examines intersecting discourses around anti-Irish racism and sexual violence through a genealogical tracing of the concept of rape in relation to men, women, and the discursive category of "The Irish." This historically situated, discourse analysis (Parker, 2003, 2014) includes contemporary material from microblogs (Java, Song, Finan, & Tseng, 2007). It reveals the construction of the Irish as passive recipients of sexual conquest (whether consensual or coercive) that implies sexual availability. Whether it is the popular "Kiss me I'm Irish" or the more aggressive "Rape me I'm Irish" "joke," the conceptual Irish body is positioned as an object for others to act upon. This analysis exposes the myth of white homogeneity and the relative invisibility of anti-Irish racism, particularly when combined with other axes of oppression such as gender and class. For professionals working with victims of violence, the complex relationship between colonialism, sectarianism, and racism should be considered beyond visible differences and black–white dichotomies.

Keywords: rape, racism, Irish, colonization, gender

Rape features within many discussions of racism (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1988), but racism features less often within discussions of rape. Moreover, when the intersection of racism and sexism is examined, it often assumes a black–white dichotomy (Friedman, 1995). Much like how some second-wave feminist theorists assumed that "all men" were in positions of power, so too do some feminists assume that all "white" individuals escape racism. However, while black feminists "talk back" (hooks, 1989) to a white-centred movement, the focus on racialization as skin colour silences other groups who remain unrepresented within these debates (Hickman, 2000; Howard, 2006; Popoviciu, Haywood, & Mac an Ghaill, 2006; Ryan, 2013). As McVeigh and Rolston (2007) highlighted,

> we know enough about racism now to realise that it is not a natural outcome of skin colour differences, but a social process that selects skin colour or some other real, exaggerated or imaginary characteristic as the

mark of difference. As a racial indicator, religion in Ireland acquired the rigidity which skin colour has had elsewhere. (p. 4)

While there is recognition of the "centralization of whiteness" in social work (Badwall, 2014), as well as the importance of interrogating and including colonial histories into social work theory (O'Connell, 2013), there remains a need to continue this critique by problematizing the concept of "whiteness" (Garrett, 2012). This paper[1] critically interrogates constructions of whiteness and examines how these discourses intersect with constructions of sexual violence. I use critical intersectionality theory (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991; Hill-Collins, 1998, 2003; LeFrançois, 2013; Meaney, 2011) in my analyses of racism, sexism, and classism. I use discourse analysis (Parker, 2003, 2014) from a feminist poststructuralist perspective (Foucault, 1990; Weedon, 1996) in a genealogical tracing of the way the Irish and sexual violence are constructed in the form of discourse. This provides the historical, colonial, and cultural context for an analysis of contemporary, archival material from microblogs that follows in the latter part of the paper. The aim of this paper is to counter the exclusion and invisibility of Irish experiences of violence and racism in anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory social work theory and practice (Garrett, 1998, 2002).

The Myth of Homogeneous Whiteness

White colonized nations, such as Northern Ireland, locate an interesting social and political position (Garrett, 1999) where individuals have experienced some aspects of white privilege as well as racism and slavery (Ó Siochrú, 2009; Ryan, 2000; Sharkey, 1994). For instance, during slavery the Irish were often referred to as "white chimpanzees" (Curtis, 1984, p. 61), "niggers turned inside out," "white slaves," and "white negroes" (Walter, 2001, pp. 66, 69, 110). However, they were not always positioned as white (Ignatiev, 2008) and the relationship between the Irish and whiteness is ever dependent on context, as current constructions of Irish as non-white illustrate (Howard, 2006). Prior to the mid-19th century the Irish were considered equal to (or lower than) black individuals, with the term "smoked Irish" used to refer to black people, indicating the similar perceptions of these two groups (Belchem, 2005, p. 149). This was further replicated in 1960s Britain, with signs stating "No blacks, no Irish" and "No Irish need apply" visible outside a variety of establishments. Furthermore, due to the financial investment of owning a slave, the Irish were often considered dispensable, as illustrated by Olmsted's (1856) observations on board a slave ship that, "the niggers are worth too much to be risked here; if the paddies are knocked overboard or get their back broke, nobody loses anything" (p. 551).

Therefore the Irish have been considered racially inferior for centuries despite their (recent, fleeting) whiteness (Rolston, 1999; Walter, 2001), and "perceived as occupying the lowest rung of Britain's ethnic hierarchy" (Howard 2006, p. 110).

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[1] This article is based on research described in the author's doctoral dissertation (Tosh, 2013).

However, the Irish in England are positioned as "the same" as British (or English) whiteness but also simultaneously Othered (Hickman, 1995; O'Keeffe, 2003). Walter (2001) referred to this as "outsiders inside" (p. 82). She argued that the negative constructions of the Irish within England have been remarkably consistent over such a long period of time that they are "ingrained in British culture as to be barely recognizable for what [they are]" (p. 82). The denial of negative constructions of the Irish, or the assumption that the Irish are the same as the English acts to dismiss the racism experienced by those living in England (Popoviciu et al., 2006; Walter, 2001), which subsequently "has meant that discrimination and racism targetting the Irish community have gone relatively unnoticed" (O'Keeffe, 2003, p. 34). Forcing the Irish into a discursive category of "British" masks the experiences of the Irish living in England and erodes cultural differences into a myth of homogeneous whiteness and "British homogeneity" (Garrett, 1998, 2002; Hickman, 1995; Miles, 1993).

Colonization and the Metaphor of Rape

The myth of British homogeneity is aptly revealed in the historical accounts of violent conquest in the English colonization of Ireland. Sharkey (1994) observed that during the colonization of Ireland, the rhetoric of rape was often used when describing the "forced penetration of the virgin land" but as a positive phenomenon (p. 18). Rape, within this context, was an adventure that would be rewarded, "Husbandry by rape would … transform the barren wastes of virgin territories into fruitful English lands" (Sharkey, 1994, p. 14). The metaphor also worked to legitimize the colonization utilizing imagery of marriage, with the virginal female Ireland awaiting the union with the "John Bull" or England (Thapar-Björkert & Ryan, 2002). Sharkey (1994) highlighted how young Irish women were often referred to as "blank coins, white paper, wax or clay, malleable forms or clean surfaces ready to receive the authorizing male impression" (p. 16). However, Irish native men were framed as raping the land from English settlers, and as dangerous and violent. Consequently, within both discourses Ireland "looked to one group of men to protect her from the other group of men" (Ryan, 2000, p. 75).

The British colonization of Ireland began during the 12th century but was considered unfinished or unsuccessful resulting in further attempts during the 16th and 17th centuries. During this time British soldiers replaced Irish Gaelic with English and subsequently "wrote out" local civilians of their property (Sharkey, 1994), and seized 85% of the land, particularly in the Ulster region (Curtis, 1984). The war between the displaced natives and the Protestant settlers resulted in the deaths of many Irish men, women, and children as well as British soldiers and settlers. Oliver Cromwell is infamous for his legendary massacring of Irish natives, within a colonization strategy that aimed to "eradicate what they saw as the Irish race within a few generations" (Sharkey, 1994, p. 19) and by the time Cromwell had left, Ireland was in ruins (Curtis, 1984). Following a successful attack at Drogheda, Cromwell (1649, cited in Curtis, 1984) declared, "The enemy were about 3,000 strong in the town … I do not think 30 of the whole number escaped with their lives" (p. 25). He was also responsible for enslaving over 100,000 Irish individuals in the

Caribbean and America. Thousands of Irish natives were subsequently kidnapped and sold as slaves to Barbados as well (Curtis, 1984).

Ireland became a colonial economy with over £1 million being sent to England every year along with over a third of its produce. In addition, there were laws restricting Ireland from trading competitively with England. The infamous Potato Famine in the 19th century, during which over 1.5 million Irish people died, was not due to a lack of produce but a lack of money. Irish peasants sold their produce to pay rent to English landlords, and therefore both money and food were sent to England while many Irish died of starvation and disease. This was also the time when the largest mass immigration occurred, reducing the native population of Ireland further (Curtis, 1984). Williams (1990) compared the mass immigration after the famine as "forced movement" similar to the transport of enslaved people. The colonization continued until the War of Independence or the Anglo-Irish War (1919–1921) after which the Republic of Ireland separated from Britain as an independent country, and Northern Ireland remained united to Britain.

The conflict between descendants of Protestant settlers and Catholic natives remains a problem within Northern Ireland although usually framed as religious intolerance. English governments fuelled the sectarian division due to fears of contamination, such as the development of separate schools for Catholics and Protestants that remains in place at the time of writing (Hickman, 1995; Walter, 2001). Due to the similarity in appearance of natives (considered uncivilized and barbaric), Catholicism was the main method of distinguishing Irish natives from the English and Scottish settlers (Curtis, 1984). Furthermore, internal division and military resistance in the form of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) have compounded Northern Ireland's relationship with Britain. The renewed conflict during the 1970s resulted in an increase in anti-Irish racism for those living in England, with English police advising people to "Watch your Irish neighbours" (Walter, 2001, p. 171) much like the scrutiny of Muslim culture within the United Kingdom in response to constructions of Al Qaeda and discourses of "new terrorism" (McGovern, 2011). Despite the support of many within Northern Ireland for the union and their identification as "British," once in England even they are positioned as "Other" (Walter, 2001).

Despite the peace process, Good Friday Agreement (GFA), and the IRA ceasefire, the division of Northern Ireland into Protestant and Catholic areas has continued to increase (Geoghegan, 2010; McVeigh & Rolston, 2007). As Geoghegan (2008, p. 180) stated,

> although the dark days of the conflict have passed, the Falls and the Shankill [in Belfast] still exist almost independently of one another, with separate social and economic services, as well as separate anti-racist initiatives, indicative of the low levels of cross-community contact,

this is in addition to continued violence (McVeigh & Rolston, 2007). While immigration to Northern Ireland has increased, resulting in increased visibility of racism toward other groups and the perception of Northern Ireland as the "Race Hate Capital of Europe" (BBC, 2004, cited in Geoghegan, 2008), the problem of racism has

not replaced sectarianism, but added to it. As McVeigh and Rolston (2007) argued, responses to violence that relegate the issue to history "fail to acknowledge … that sectarian attacks are a product of a sectarian present rather than a blighted past, that they are in fact an integral part of the normality that is Northern Ireland" (pp. 9-10). They conclude that such discourses are "a form of denial" (McVeigh & Rolston, 2007, p. 10). It would appear, then, that the silencing of experiences of racism, oppression, and violence occurs within both England and Northern Ireland in different ways.[2]

Colonization and Language

The relationship between colonization and language has particular significance in the Anglo-Irish context (Balzano, 1996). As Spenser, an English poet and landowner in County Cork, stated, "For it hath ever been the use of the conqueror, to despise the language of the conquered, and to force him by all means to learn his" (Spenser, 1596, cited in Gray & Mazzon, 2011, p. 41). This "Anglicization" (Hyde, 1892) included hanging wooden sticks around the necks of children and placing a mark each time the child spoke Irish and at the end of the day implementing punishment (Curtis, 1984). The condemnation of native language and the forced acquisition of the colonizer's is an exhausting and distressing experience. As Ang-Lydgate (1999) highlighted, the continual need to evaluate the appropriateness of each communiqué in relation to colonial expectations is "a costly experience psychically" (Walter, 2001, p. 176). Boland (1988), a traditional Irish singer, described the loss of cultural history with the erasure of language as follows:

> I think the destruction of a language is devastating, because it is the use of symbols, something that the people built up over thousands of years and developed as a way that they would relate to each other, communicate with each other, and then that was just destroyed. It's a massive blow to destroy the common usage of symbols between people. (p. 72)

The Irish adaption of English is different beyond simple pronunciation. The Irish "accent" includes a particular sentence structure that is usually considered grammatically incorrect in England, but is due to the direct translation of Irish into English. The words have been exchanged, but the structure of the Irish language often remains (Boland, 1988). Walter (2001, p. 164) argued that these differences are "a reminder of colonial 'mastery'." Irish accents can also be a "sole trigger" for hostility, which has resulted in many Irish individuals living in England "[keeping] their heads down" for fear of being targeted (O'Keeffe, 2003, p. 35). This process can involve masking accents or performing "Englishness" (Byrne, 2007; Hickman, Morgan, Walter, & Bradley, 2005; Mann, 2011). As Nì Dhuibhne (1989) stated,

> The very word, small and plain as it is, rolled around my mouth, smooth as ivory. What a delicious English word it is: Bath. The a is a test, the trial

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[2] However, it is important to note that any account of history is highly selective, and within this paper I produce a particular account of colonization that counters the denial and silencing discussed by McVeigh and Rolston (2007).

that tells the sheep from the goats, the cultured from the masses, the old from the nouveau and, let me admit it, the English from us. (p. 146)

This "test" results in the identification of the individual as Irish and Other. Walter (2001) compared black "visibility" with Irish "audibility" and quoted from Kells (1995), "The thing about being Irish in England … is that they don't realize you are black until you open your mouth" (Walter, 2001, p. 163). However, there is also acknowledgement that particular physical features are associated with being Irish, or "Irish looks," such as blue eyes and black or red hair (Walter, 2008, 2011, 2013). Moreover, there are different reactions to variations of the Irish accent. For example, accents from the South of Ireland are considered attractive, whereas working class accents from Northern Ireland are more strongly disliked in England (Trudgill, 1983).[3] Consequently, the Irish become "a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1997, p. 86). This discourse of colonial mimicry, is an "elusive and effective [strategy] of colonial power" (Bhabha 1997, p. 85), which functions to encourage conformity to the English or British "norm."

Irish Diaspora

The experience of the Irish diaspora in England has been well documented and includes racial harassment, humiliation, and discrimination as well as higher rates of suicide and psychiatric intervention (Ghaill, 2000; Hickman, 2000). In Tilki, Ryan, D'Angelo, and Sales's (2009) report entitled *The Forgotten Irish*, the authors highlighted the disparity between suicide rates for the Irish in England when compared to other ethnic groups:

Rates of suicide among Irish people in the UK have been significantly elevated for over 20 years (Raleigh and Balarajan, 1992; Maxwell and Harding, 1998; Leavey, 1999). Irish women make up a considerable proportion of white women who attempt suicide (Bhugra et al, 1999a, 1999b). Some of the highest rates of suicide in the UK are among Irish men and women (Neeleman et al, 1997; De Ponte, 2005). Rates of male suicide, attempted suicide and undetermined deaths for Irish people in the UK are around 40% higher than for the English and Welsh population (De Ponte, 2005). (Tilki et al., 2009, pp. 33–34)

They conclude that two significant influences are the experience of being Irish in England and, for some, experiences of "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland. Unsurprisingly, the most frequent diagnosis cited for admitted Irish is depression "with rates between one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half times that of English-born women" and related suicides are "particularly high" for Irish women between the ages of 20 and 29 (O'Keeffe, 2003, p. 37). Similarly, O'Keeffe (2003) concluded that the "colonized" living within the land of the "colonizer" contributes to these negative experiences. These gender differences could be related to the more frequent anti-Irish racism experienced by Irish women in England (Walter, 2001).

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[3] This strong reaction to Irish accents is not relevant to the U.S. context, where speaking English was sufficient confirmation of "Americanization" (Walter, 2001).

However, this picture is specific to the Irish diaspora in England. As Walter (2001) stated, "Being Irish in the United States has not been, and is not the same as being Irish in Britain" (p. 75). This is particularly relevant for women, since constructions of Irish women in England are largely absent, whereas in the United States Irish women are celebrated as "Irish-American matriarchs" represented as good mothers, strong willed, independent, cheerful, and loveable (Walter, 2001). The construction of "Bridget" complements "Paddy" in the United States, both associated with the working class. However, within England Bridget (or any equivalent) is nonexistent despite the prominence of the drunk and violent Paddy image, although these constructions are context specific. In Keough's (2013) historical analysis of the immigration of Irish women to Canada, she described British discourses framing these women as "immoral, unproductive, and conniving" due to concerns that the tension between Irish and British communities would be transported to Canadian soil.

Contemporary Discourse: Microblogs

As "the concept of Irishness [has] attained a highly globalised visibility, accompanied by a high-tech media representation of Irish identity as a transnational phenomenon: Ireland seems no longer containable within the frontiers of an island" (Popoviciu et al., 2006, p. 171). The addition of online sources of material to an analysis of representations of Irish people, then, provides a global space where the Irish diaspora can communicate, and adds to previous research on gender and Irish identity within textual representations, and the co-construction of oral histories through social interaction (Walter, 2013). *Microblogging* is a space where information is shared to "serve a social function, reinforcing connections and maintaining social bonds" (Markwich & Boyd, 201, p. 147). It is the posting of short status updates or comments to an online social network of followers. Central to the function of microblogs is resending (or retweeting). As Marwick and Boyd (2011) observed,

> retweeted messages are often altered and may lose any reference to the original. Given the various ways people can consume and spread tweets, it is virtually impossible for Twitter users to account for their potential audience, let alone actual readers. (p. 4)

This is consistent with a discursive analytic approach, as it is "a form of analysis that addresses the ways in which language is so structured as to produce sets of meanings, discourses, that operate *independently of the intentions of speakers, or writers*" (Parker, 1998, p. 92, emphasis added). Rather than analyzing separate blogs, microblogs enable an accessible collection of brief but numerous naturally occurring texts. As described by Parker (1998), texts for discourse analysis do not need to be lengthy to be interesting or indicative.

Material was collected from Twitter that was qualitatively rich in relation to the merging of anti-Irish and sexually coercive discourses. The microblogs were collected over the course of three days (between 14 December 2011 and 23 February 2012) using key search terms to identify relevant material (e.g., "rape," "Irish," "sexual violence"). All tweets that contained the search terms were included in the analysis. Twitter has a limit of 140 characters per post and was one of the most popular microblogging tools at the time of writing, having launched in 2006 (Java et

al., 2007; Marwick & Boyd, 2011).[4] I continue the genealogical tracing by reflecting on the historical, colonial, and cultural context in which the microblogs occur. This analysis draws on Parker's (1998) analysis of very brief texts, showing that it is the richness (or quality) of the text rather than the quantity that is important in discursive analyses. Over 60 microblogs were included in the analysis, and their brevity is a key aspect of the analysis itself. Rather than state that this is a highly prevalent or representative discourse, I argue that this way of talking about Irish people *exists*. As this group of people can be excluded from discussions of racism, revealing these brief glimpses is important in giving voice to an issue that is often silenced.

The Irish

A discursive category of "The Irish" emerged with several connotations and associated meanings, most often discussed by those who did not position themselves as Irish (illustrated by their subsequent use of the words "they" and "them"). However, the term was quite distinct from the term "Irish" being used to denote national identity. The statements analyzed did not consider national identity, nor did they contemplate the complex meaning of *Irish* within the context of post-colonialism, dual citizenship, or the religious or political perspectives assumed to relate to "Irishness." The difference between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland did not once figure within this all-encompassing category of The Irish, which at times was also conflated with Irish travellers. Irish travellers, while part of a long Irish tradition of nomadism,[5] have developed unique customs within their communities such as the language of Shelta (Kabachnik, 2009). They also have a long history of being portrayed as animalistic, such as, "savages," cannibals, and "less than human" (Helleiner, 1998, p. 84). This is similar to historical constructions of "decentralized, semi-nomadic and tribal Ireland" as "savage," "uncivilized," and "barbarian" that were used to justify English colonization (McVeigh & Rolston, 2009, p. 3). McVeigh and Rolston (2009) noted, "The very origin of the word 'savage' betrays a prejudice at the heart of colonial expropriation. It derives from *silvaticus*, a man of the woods, a forest dweller" (p. 7).

Too Attractive to Rape

Constructions of The Irish as non-rapists portrayed Irish men as charming or sexually appealing and therefore any attempt at rape would be pleasurable and consensual. For example, "If Niall wanted to rape a girl he would just go in the

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[4] In the U.K. and U.S., 80% of Internet users have a social media account, and 18% of all Internet users have a Twitter account. As of 2012, the United States had over 22.9 million Twitter users and the United Kingdom had 6.6 million (GlobalWebIndex, 2012). Twitter users are more likely to represent highly populated areas and are predominantly men (although the number of users of other genders is significant; see Mislove, Lehmann, Ahn, Onnela, & Rosenquist, 2011).

[5] "The walking women" (or *mna siubhail*; Sharkey 1994, p. 16) were of particular concern to Spenser in his 1596 *A View of the State of Ireland,* which promoted the violent conquest of Ireland.

streets and yell 'I'm irish' then KA-BOOM. 984235865543846 girls surrounding him." This individual was referring to Nail Horan from the band One Direction, which debuted on the television program *The X-Factor* (Cowell, 2004). However, his attractiveness is not framed as part of his celebrity, but due to his Irishness. He is to yell "I'm Irish" not "I'm famous." Furthermore, in the tweet "Niall doesn't need to rape anyone, he's a sex god. Irish sex god to be exact," his Irishness is again emphasized as the attractive quality rather than his celebrity. The construction of The Irish as attractive is far removed from the historical portrayals of animalistic creatures often depicted in anti-Irish cartoons (Kirkaldy, 1986). However, it is closely associated with the "gift of the gab" portrayals of Irish men as verbally persuasive and flattering to women, which is consistent with changes in Irish popularity associated with popular music and entertainment (Walter, 2001).

This discourse frames Irishness as inherently attractive and therefore Irish men as having no need to rape. For example, "I want to rape the little Irish boy, mmm" was stated by a women microblogger and is one of the few instances where desire is mentioned (rather than as a form of punishment; see the anti-Irish rapism discourse later in this paper). This is emphasized by the "mmm" added to the end of the statement also. The statements, "Technically, it's not rape if you enjoy it. Who wouldn't enjoy sex with an Irish beauty like Niall?," "Why would that hot piece of Irish ass need to rape someone?", and "Anyways it be consensual, I mean look at that irish perfection" almost frame rape as an impossibility due to Irish attractiveness.

Anti-traveller Racism and Criminal Discourse

In contrast, quite infrequently, The Irish were constructed as rapists, for example in the tweet, "They'll [the Irish] pick your pockets and rape your daughters." There was also some focus on the problematic portrayal put forward by the television program *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* (Popplewell, 2010) particularly the contested "Irish traveller tradition of grabbing" (for responses from Irish traveller communities see Freeman, 2011, and McDonagh, 2011). This was considered "attempted rape, not 'courtship,'" and is incongruent with travellers' own accounts of conservative sexual values (O'Malley Madec, 1993). Portraying the Other as dangerous sexual aggressors is a common rhetorical strategy used to describe members of ethnic minorities or colonized nations in order to justify victimization of that community (e.g., Davis, 1988). Therefore in the postcolonial context of Anglo-Irish relations the scarcity of this construction could be said to be noteworthy.

The construction of The Irish as rapists tended to coincide with other constructions of Irishness, particularly in terms of criminality and deception. For example in the tweet, "They'll [The Irish] pick your pockets and rape your daughters," "An Irish male prostitute named [Shane] will rape people," and "The little leprechaun [will] rape my wallet." This crossover between constructions of The Irish as sexual aggressors with additional crimes such as robbery colludes with the "culture of crime discourse" associated with Irish travellers (Drummond, 2006; Hayes, 2006; Kabachnik, 2009) and Irish migrants within England (Hickman, 1998). Also noteworthy is the slang term "Paddy wagon" that has been used to describe a police van, again associating The Irish with criminal activity (Curtis, 1984). Kabachnik

(2009) stated that "Irish traveller culture is constructed as an insular, criminal group that is diametrically opposed to, and exploitive of, everyone else" (p. 55).

Within Ireland Irish travellers have been constructed as a "social problem" (Kabachnik, 2009, p. 52) and dangerous criminals (Helleiner, 1998); and they can experience anti-traveller racism (Hayes, 2006). Power (1988) described her personal experience as a traveller in England; she argued that the Irish can be more opposed to travellers than the English and explained how travellers are considered completely separate from The Irish population. The Irish settled population has been reluctant to acknowledge travellers due to the view that travellers comprise family groups displaced during the English plantations and potato famine (O'Malley Madec, 1993). This is consistent with descriptions of traveller beliefs, which resonate with descriptions of nomadic pagan Ireland (e.g., "the evil eye," fairies, the "Other World," etc.; see Derricke, 1581; O'Malley Madec, 1993). Power (1988) stated that

> you can't live the life you want to live, you know … it would be different if you had a site or something, or even if you could travel. But there's nowhere to travel, is there? And it's getting worse as the years go on. (p. 183)

This indicates that the pressure to assimilate to the culture of the colonizer continues to erode and eliminate aspects of Irish heritage, which is achieved through the reconstruction of travellers. The conceptual separation of nomadic Irish from settled Irish within Ireland not only suggests a consequence of colonization whereby nomadic culture was considered particularly problematic and a signifier of an uncivilized and barbaric culture (rather than as part of a dynamic culture responding to mass dispossession), but it also relates to an absence of discourses around class as travellers are often associated with poverty (Kabachnik, 2009; O'Malley Medec, 1993).

Class and Poverty

A frequent problem cited in anti-Irish literature is how The Irish resist work; this is despite the continual efforts by English Governments to enable Irish immigration to England because of their "much needed labour," which has supported English industry for centuries (Hickman, 1998). However, Helleiner (1998) acknowledged how Irish travellers were also contrarily constructed as relatively wealthy, through their apparent criminality. This appearance of poverty is framed as potentially deceptive, which functioned to reduce sympathy for the "poorer (if not the poorest) class within Irish society" (Helleiner, 1998, p. 80). In addition, the tweet, "that's just rape covered up with an Irish grin" intimates that deception on part of The Irish can fool or trick someone by disguising the true nature of an act through distraction or perhaps charm. Again, this is consistent with constructions of Irish travellers as scamming individuals out of money or property (McShan, 2007, cited in Kabachnik, 2009), Irish migrants as "scroungers" (Walter, 2001, p. 93) and "social security fraudsters" (Hickman, 1998, p. 298), and The Irish as a suspicious group due to terrorist activity (O'Keeffe, 2003). Altogether, it constructs The Irish as untrustworthy or a "suspect community" (Hillyard, 1993).

The intersection of class and criminal discourses is perhaps influencing the (unusual and infrequent) construction of The Irish as sexual aggressors, as this is

linked more strongly to constructions of the working class than of The Irish; although Davis (1996, cited in Walter, 2001) argued that the "racialization of the poor" is based on prior constructions of the Irish. Furthermore, Phipps (2009) asserted that the importance assigned to class within British culture influences the perception of sexual violence. A historical analysis by Bourke (2007) identified how men from lower socio-economic groups were more likely to be portrayed as sexual aggressors. In line with critiques of "black rapist" discourses (Davies, 1988), it is also likely that lower socio-economic classes experience increased monitoring and are more likely to be prosecuted for rape than men from more affluent communities. This is consistent with Phipps's (2009) review of feminist literature, which illustrated that "working-class defendants are more likely to be arrested, charged and convicted, and receive more severe sentences than middle-class offenders" (p. 670). Phipps (2009) concluded, "working class men are seen as more likely to rape" (p. 670). Parallel to hooks's (1993) assertion that sexual violence is a means for some black men to experience male privilege often denied to them, Phipps (2009) argued that rape is one way that working class men "demonstrate masculinity" and access status that is often denied to them. However, framing working class men as more likely to rape also functions to protect dominant groups much like the perpetuation of the black rapist myth (Davis, 1988), by detracting attention from the violence conducted by powerful white men (Phipps, 2009).

Humour and Humiliation

Irish accents are commonly used to humiliate The Irish, with Irish impressions being viewed as humorous. This is often due to the perception of Irish accents as an inferior form of English (O'Keeffe, 2003). Furthermore, "rape humour" evident in the microblogs is part of a wider cultural redefining of the term "rape," which is increasingly attracting feminist activist attention (e.g., Tosh, 2012). While rape humour is rarely meant literally, it is not benign. As Kramer (2011) stated, "The playful is political" (p. 137). Kramer's (2011) research analyzed online "rape jokes" and subsequent discussions. She found that those entertained by the jokes were more likely to appreciate "absurd" rapes, i.e., the more bizarre the rape, the more entertaining. The reasoning put forward for this by those involved in the discussions was that "unreal" rapes (those that were unrealistic) were funny, whereas those discussing actual rapes (and therefore "real rape") were not funny. This was identified as problematic as "something so prevalent and traumatic as rape renders it inescapably realistic" (Kramer, 2011, p. 143). Therefore, rape humour progresses from the myth that rape is a rare occurrence, despite feminist campaigning and research highlighting the contrary (e.g., Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987).

The tweeted joke "Rape me I'm Irish" plays on the infamous "Kiss me I'm Irish" slogan that circulates every year on St. Patrick's Day. However, the assumption that kissing an Irish individual will be lucky (or that you will "get lucky") stems from the legend of the Blarney Stone. Kissing the stone of Blarney Castle promises the "gift of eloquence" particularly with "the fair sex" that has such

powerful ability of persuasion and flattery that women would succumb without ever realizing they had been seduced (Windele, 1865).[6] The association with luck was due to the "gift of the gab" helping in any situation so desired, beyond the seduction of women (MacKenzie, 1875). However the "luck of the Irish" also has racist connotations, as successes on part of The Irish are often explained by luck rather than genuine ability; it assumes that the Irish are too stupid to achieve anything without magical intervention (Field, 1994).

Stupidity

The Irish were more often framed as non-rapists, either because they couldn't rape, or because they wouldn't rape. For example, when stating that someone was falsely accused of rape, an individual stated that "He's too Irish" to rape or "Too much of [an] Innocent Irish Cutie." Constructions of The Irish as incapable of rape included mocking The Irish (men) as too stupid to rape, illustrated by the microblog, "Woman: 'Help, help, an Irishman tried to rape me!' Cop: 'How do you know he was Irish?' Woman: 'I had to help him' #joke." Others have identified similar jokes about Irish rapists, such as, "Did you hear the one about the Irish rapist who tied his victims legs together to stop her running away?" (Curtis, 1984; Rossiter, 2007). This positions The Irish (men) as beneath rapists in the social hierarchy, because although rapists are demonized (Douard, 2007) they are portrayed as more intelligent than The Irish in these statements. They are also consistent with colonial rhetoric of Ireland as passive to the masculine England aggressor (Sharkey, 1994). However, this also dissipates the threat of a racial Other (Walter, 2001) and by mocking Irish stereotypes, encourages "cultural conformity" (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985).

This construction of The Irish as stupid or backward persists from constructions of The Irish as uncivilized. For example, the joke "Why is the wheelbarrow the greatest invention ever made? It taught a few Irishmen to walk on their hind legs" illustrates the positioning of The Irish as animalistic or unevolved (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985). However, jokes such as the infamous *Punch* cartoons of the 19th century that portrayed The Irish as apes and a Frankenstein-type creature, illustrate the "depths of anti-Irish feeling" in England at this time (Kirkaldy, 1986) and signify power and dominance on behalf of the joker (Curtis, 1984). Such jokes are strongly associated with The Irish, such as the popular phrase "taking the mickey," where "Mickey" is an alternative to "Paddy" (Curtis, 1984).

Racist Humour

Racist humour is often defended with the response "It's just a joke." In the context of microblogging the *#joke* tag communicates a similar distancing from "real" racism. This distancing can function to diminish racism and "promote the social acceptability of negative ethnic stereotypes" (Billig, 2001, p. 269). While rape jokes are theorized to be entertaining due to their perceived absurdity (Kramer,

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[6] Although, the stone was considered to have no effect on women as they were the passive receivers of flattery. Therefore, this construction is of Irish masculinity (MacKenzie, 1875).

2011), Billig (2001) explored the relationship between humour and hatred. Zillman (1983, cited in Billig, 2001) argued that pleasure is derived from directing aggression at the source of the hatred, and Billig's (2001) analysis of Ku Klux Klan (KKK) "joke" websites identified that the "recipients are meant to find it amusing to imagine a black person being insulted and frightened from the site" (p. 18). Therefore, the jokes posted in the microblogs incorporate racist humour and rape humour, both aimed at The Irish.

Billig (2001) highlighted the importance of context in analyzing racist humour, such as the historical role of the KKK and the lynching of black men and the use of historical photographs of hanged black men as jokes on the websites. The historical disavowal of The Irish and many aspects of Irish culture including the widespread massacre during colonization (Ó Siochrú, 2009), the rape of Irish women (Ryan, 2000), and the reported anti-Irish racism experienced by Irish individuals in England (Hickam, 1998; O'Keeffe, 2003) warrants close examination of Irish stereotypes and jokes aimed at The Irish. Nevertheless, there are several areas where our analyses diverge. While Irish jokes portray a stereotype of The Irish as stupid and drunk, they rarely explicitly joke about actual violent events, as the KKK websites joke about the lynching of black men. There are also no recognized organizations associated with such jokes, nor are there current organizations who explicitly target The Irish in such violent ways.[7] However, the jokes are "normalized" with no condemnation as opposed to the acknowledgement that jokes against black individuals is not "politically correct" (Billig, 2001, p. 21). It appears to be acceptable to humiliate The Irish without constraint.

Victims of Violence: Anti-Irish Rapism[8]

While The Irish were rarely described as the aggressors of sexual violence, they were persistently positioned as the victims of rape. This was a noticeably consistent feature of the microblogs. For example, "Oh, are you Irish? Please be

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[7] However, there have been several violent incidents by the English Defence League (EDL) and others (such as the North West Infidels; e.g., Kennedy, 2011) targeting Irish events within England. Descriptions of the EDL and other anti-Irish organizations' recent challenge of the remembrance of an influential Liverpool-born individual (Sean Phelan, who was involved in the war of Irish Independence) highlight the potential for violence. As one individual who attended the remembrance parade stated, "I never experienced anything like it in my life.… A group of about 30 yobs were allowed to walk beside the parade for at least a mile, shouting words like scum and murderers and 'f*** off back to your own country'" (McLellan, 2012, cited in Mulhern, 2012, para. 6).

[8] The purposeful use of psychiatric discourse in homophobia functions to highlight irrationality and stigmatize those who participate in the associated behaviours. Similarly, *rapism* is a vague term mentioned by few psychiatrists (e.g., Money, 1986), but not an official diagnoses. Here the *-ism* relates to a particular behaviour, such as voyeurism, exhibitionism, transvestism, sadism, masochism, and frotteurism (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Money, 1999). This is in contrast to the use of *-ism* in *sexism* and *racism*, which denotes discrimination. Therefore the term *anti-Irish rapism* utilizes a stigmatizing term intentionally to abnormalize the apparent "normality" of terrorizing The Irish by using sexually aggressive discourse.

quiet whilst I rape you," "I wouldn't mind an Irish person to rape," "Go rape extra hard for the Irish," and "Stop being Irish and wear[ing] nasty clothes so I wont wanna [want to] rape you anymore bitch," are just some examples. An accent was frequently cited as enticing sexual violence, such as: "I would rape [an] Irish accent," and "everyone knows an Irish accent for me = instant 'imma [I'm 'gonna'] rape you.'" Whether it is the popular "Kiss me I'm Irish" or the more aggressive "Rape me I'm Irish" joke, the Irish are positioned as sexual objects for others to act upon.

This rhetorical victimization violates the conceptual Irish body, as statements most often referred to The Irish generally and rarely targeted specific individuals. The relationship between England and Ireland has often been described in terms of physical bodies, such as Carlyle's (1839, cited in Martin, 2004) description of The Irish as a disease infecting the body of England in the mid-19th century. Also, the metaphor of rape has been most often used to describe English colonization (Balzano, 1996; Sharkey, 1994). Framing Ireland as female and a "virgin land" awaiting English impression during colonization mirrors this positioning of The Irish as the passive recipient of violation. As Balzano (1996) stated, this conflict is played out over women's bodies. Women, particularly in colonized and post-colonial nations, often represent culture and heritage that needs protecting (Meaney, 1993; Balzano, 1996). Therefore, the violation of a woman by a racial Other or colonizer signifies a violation of the nation (Snyder, Gabbard, May, & Zulcic, 2006). Balzano (1996) and others (e.g., Meaney, 1993) have gone further and argued that this image is so powerful that women no longer exist; they are "purely ornamental, a rhetorical element rather than an existing reality" (Balzano, 1996, p. 93). This "dispossession" of women's bodies due to the reification of the feminine Ireland persona has resulted in Irish women seeming "invisible" and extends to the silencing of women's voices (Balzano, 1996).

Irish Women: Silent and Invisible

A noteworthy absence in the Twitter posts was the voice of the Irish themselves, providing some form of self-representation or counter-discourses. While the majority of tweets posted by those who identified as being Irish were related to creating awareness, particularly around newspaper reporting of rape trials or convictions, there was no discussion around how The Irish were constructed in relation to rape. This is somewhat unsurprising, as the Irish are often "invisible" within England (Walter, 2001; O'Keeffe, 2003), apart from the promotion of stereotypes such as "Paddy" and "Gypsies" (Curtis, 1984; Power, 1988; Walter, 2001). However, when this absence is considered in relation to tweets from within black communities, the difference is striking. While there were similar jokes related to "black rapists" (e.g., "What's black on top and white on the bottom? Rape" and "It's not rape, if she's black") many tweets from within the black (online) community either critiqued or mocked the construction of black men as rapists, particularly when accusers were white (e.g., "Woman Elaborately Fakes Her Own Rape and Blames…Guess Who? A Black Guy!" and "Two black Homestead High students are charged for rape of a 14 year old white girl. We all know what happened"). This illustrated the awareness of this myth, which has been extensively critiqued by black feminists (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Davis,

1988; Patton & Snyder-Yuly, 2007; Wallace, 1999), and a sense of community awareness that includes sharing support against media (mis)representations. This awareness, however, was lacking from Irish discussions as such constructions have yet to be acknowledged, and when other forms of humiliation have been addressed (e.g., Hickman & Walter, 1997) they have received further ridicule (e.g., "The All-Time Greatest Irish Jokes," 1994).[9]

While Irish women in England are "invisible" (Hickman, 1995; O'Keeffe, 2003), so too are their experiences of gendered racism (Walter, 2001). These discourses function to Other and subjugate The Irish further. The experiences of sexual violence of other colonized populations creates a worrying picture of the potential for sexual violence to remain an issue for the colonized living within the colonizer's domain. For instance, research has highlighted the frequent sexual abuse of Native American women by non-Native American men (Amnesty International, 2006), where 86% of reported rapes were by non-native men. This supports the premise that women from colonized nations are at particular threat of sexual violence when living within the colonizer's domain.

Positioning the Irish as "the same" (and thus subsuming them into the British or English category) functions to invalidate or mask experiences of racially motivated victimization, whereas their visibility or observed difference attracts unwanted attention that can be in the form of physical and sexual violence (McVeigh, 1990; McVeigh, personal communication, 25th June 2012). This victimization is not gender neutral. As previously stated, women experience anti-Irish racism more frequently (Walter, 2001), and the issue and metaphor of rape provides a specific form of violence in this context. Whereas victims of rape struggle to articulate their experiences for fear of not being believed, being blamed, or because of the shame attached to rape (Gavey, 2005), Irish victims living in England can find general conversation distressing, and therefore there is an additional barrier for Irish women when trying to voice their experiences. This encourages Irish women to stay silent, both in regards to their accent (which could attract hostility) and in relation to experiences of sexual violence.

Conclusions

Applying the rhetoric of rape to the relationship between England and Ireland (Sharkey, 1994) has continued relevance as it flourishes within a global communication medium. The concept of rape remains metaphorically applied to the discursive category of The Irish as another form of humiliation that builds on a history of violence and victimization (Ó Siochrú, 2009), which has been enacted over women's bodies in terms of war (Ryan, 2000), or the conceptual feminine Ireland (Balzano, 1996). The intersection of rape and race discourses therefore demonstrate that the victimization of Others goes beyond visible difference, and that colonial

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[9] When the Commission for Racial Equality announced the funding of an enquiry into Irish experiences of racism within England (Hickman & Walter, 1997), *The Sun* printed "the all-time greatest Irish jokes" (1994) and stated that such an investigation was "codswallop" (p. 9).

discourse is an important consideration when examining power inequalities and how this translates into violence. It is also an example of the importance of examining the intersections between racism and sexism in campaigning against rape. As Davis (1988) declared, "racism has always served as a provocation to rape" (p. 177). While racism has most often been associated with colour, the experiences of anti-Irish racism expose the myth of white homogeneity and the relative invisibility of Irish experiences of sexist and racist victimization. This analysis of online texts has also revealed the importance of including the experiences of Irish people, and of problematizing whiteness, in critical social work theory and practice (Garrett, 2002, 2012).

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jemma Tosh, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Blusson Hall, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6, Canada. Email: jemma.tosh@gmail.com