

Rape Culture in the Society: An Analysis of Promising Young Woman

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Abstract: Literature is a mirror of society and is an imitation of human life that interprets human behavior that transforms real-life occurrences of reality into fiction. Film and literature provoked the acquisition to issues present in society specifically in rape. Rape is an unlawful activity that involves sexual intercourse. Rape culture is an environment where women sacrifice freedom, conforming women for the bare minimum which safely tolerizes abusers. This study identifies the rape culture prevalent in the society present in Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman* specifically in plot, symbols, themes, and characters. The analysis of this study is conducted through Formalist Theory and Feminist criticism. The findings of this study concluded that rape culture is prevalent in the society as presented in the movie. Moreover, blame shifting, slut-shaming, violating privacy, sexual objectification, rape jokes, denial, violating privacy, playing innocent, victim blaming, media pornography, and assuming perpetrator is innocent is found in plot. The symbols of the movie are preconception, anyone can be victims, disbelief, stifling women's growth, objectification, and healing. Also, negligence, preconception, rape response, silencing victims, scrutiny, effects of rape, rejection of relationship, loss of trust, society's support and discrimination are themes of the movie. Evidences of rape culture is found in characters such as sexual assault victim, rape victim, cat-callers, rape accomplice, acquaintance rape, protector of assailant, sexual perpetrator, and pedestal jockey. Furthermore, future researchers are recommended to examine plot through Freytag's plot structure to dissect rape culture in the events of the story. Based on the findings and the conclusion, the following recommendations are hereby offered for future research. The plot is examined through Freytag's plot structure to dissect the rape culture from each part of the events in the story. Examine the historical references of the symbols in the film and correlate them with the modern culture of rape. The theme is analyzed through the lens of real-life victims of assault to examine its impact. Character's psychology is scrutinized by means of lines, possible upbringing, and environment to determine the root cause of rape culture.

Keywords: culture, Fennell, promising, rape, woman.

1. Introduction

Literature is both a mirror of society and an imitation of human behavior that transforms real-life occurrences of reality into fiction (Duhan, 2015). In the twentieth century, the dominating modes of experiencing fiction are the visual form of films (Montgomery et. al, 2007). Films have served as an interactive platform for raising public awareness, it addresses

social issues like casteism, social inequality, discrimination, and particularly sexual violence (Sharma, 2018). Rape is one of the commonly addressed topics in sexual violence. As described by Barstow (2020), it is an unlawful activity most often involves sexual intercourse. It occurs when the person is against the act, threatened or forced, unconscious, mentally deficient, and intoxicated. It can happen to adults of either gender or a child (*"Rape and Sexual Offences - Annex A: Tackling Rape Myths and Stereotypes."*)

Rape Culture. Women's & Gender Center (2019) recounts rape culture as an environment where rape is prevalent and sexual violence is tolerated where misogynistic language and objectification of women are normalized, resulting in a society that overlooks the violence of sexual abuse. Rape culture as defined by an article for Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program is a stereotype of falsely believing and trivializing of sexual aggression. It estranges survivors and creates a pull for survivors to share their narrative and push back the idea of coming forward or reporting the act to law enforcement, and academic bodies in fear of acquiring the responsibility. Throughout the years, sexual violence has been normalized and excused in the media and popular culture. Thus, created a culture of women in fear.

Emerald Fennell's directorial debut entitled *Promising Young Woman* revolves around the 30-year-old Cassie Thomas, who dropped out of med school after a traumatizing event. Furthermore, this study investigates the rape culture presented in *Promising Young Woman* through the film's literary elements by closely examining the film and references under the same title. Hence, this study is conducted.

The chosen literature under study offers a comprehensive overview of the subproblems, which will serve as a springboard for analyzing the characters, conflict, and dialogue to examine the main problem that will discover the rape culture shown in the movie.

People usually claim that there are just a few basic plots in all of the literature. To define plot, it is an element of fiction, an 'outline of events', a 'skeleton of narrative,' and the underlying structure of events understood through the arrangements of the incidents and organization of its ' (Egan, 1978) It refers to the arrangement of events and organization of its elements (What is a plot of a story? - dreamers creative writing, 2019) of a story

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or narrative.

Its events play a significant role in the story as it contributes to the rising action, climax, and falling action, which leads to the story's ending. This proves that the plot plays a crucial role in structuring the story as it shows how the story will flow sequentially (Indah, 1970) through the process called causal completion. Aristotle's Poetics has the oldest plot structure diagram and dramatic structure. According to StudioBinder with the title *Plot Structure Tools to Help You Master the Art of Dramatic Writing* (2021) confirms that Aristotle was the first to state that a story, or a play, requires a beginning, middle, and end. Aristotle's diagram is in a basic triangle shape in which action reveals the character in a plot. Later on, Aristotle's plot structure was modified in the early 19th century (Elements of Plot: Structure and Elements, n.d). Gustav Freytag, a German author, presents a five-stage architecture for all stories (Chey et al, 2022). The figure below shows Gustav Freytag's *Pyramid*.

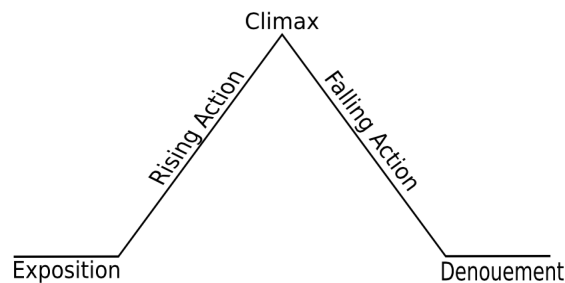


Fig. 1. Freytag's Pyramid

The elements of dramatic structure in Freytag's Pyramid are: Exposition is an element of the narrative structure where the scene, characters, and the seeds of conflict are introduced. Rising Action shows the triggering events and complications that occur. Climax refers to the highest peak and turning point of a story that presents the most significant tension between the characters. Falling Action is where the conflicts from the rising actions in this stage are solved. Lastly, the denouement is a French term for "ending" that wraps up the entire narrative, revealing the story's outcome.

Secondly, symbols represent and denote something, used to convey an idea subtly, and used to represent something abstract such as real-world circumstances or a force of nature (Symbols in literature: Definition and Examples, 2021). It can be an event, an object, a person, an image, or a place that triggers a feeling or thought. It is also a product of culture, values, and perception of things (Libretext, 2021). In the article written by Severson (2020), symbols are essential in filmmaking and literature because it provides depth to the story. Its usage allows writers and filmmakers to imbue other meanings to characters, objects, or events to tell a story further.

Thirdly, themes. Themes defined by the *Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Languages* is a subject of discourse. Letourneau (2014) described the theme as the binding factor between the character and the plot, the ideas carried by characters cultivated in the plot of the story are what

themes stand for. Additionally, Letourneau denotes the theme as the soul of a novel. The author further explained that the theme is a link that characters' morals and growth are what ties a protagonist to a reader. Heckmann (2021) wrote an article titled *What is Theme in Literature and Film* and expounded that theme is tricky due to broadly generalizing the term in everyday conversation like love, hatred, sacrifice, which are not themes but topics. The author concluded that themes should come with good filmmaking tactics and scripts written with subtexts to create a masterpiece.

Lastly, Characters, are the most significant element that moves the story through dialogues and character growth. Samuda (n.d.) wrote an article titled *The Importance of Supporting Characters and Cameos* and argued that supporting roles are as important as the major ones, no matter how minute a character is, the role will still add an element to the story. Because of its emergence, viewers can know more about the main character. 5 Important Characters To Have in Any Story (n.d) claims that every story is seen and felt through the character's view of the environment, and viewers experience the world any writer creates through the characters' interaction with the said environment. As characters are the driving force of a story, the author defined *characters* as the personification of the theme. In conclusion, the character's role is essential because they hold more significance than the plot of a story. After a long time, an audience or a reader may forget the plot. Nevertheless, a well-written character will never be forgotten.

As a result, the related literature discussed in this chapter specifies the use of plot, symbols, themes, and characters as means to show underlying messages and meanings in a film. Specifically, the elements discussed above are used to identify the rape culture present in the movie *Promising Young Woman* through methodical analysis with the help of the theories discussed.

Correspondingly, based on the study by Aubrey Weist of the Ohio State University titled *Rape Culture and Abuse Against Women in Past and Modern Literature* discussed how works of literature, fiction or non-fiction, can dismantle or perpetuate rape culture. The study defines *rape culture* as a reflection of society's minimization and contempt towards sexual assault; Weist states that rape culture extends its influence in many ways, but one of the means by which it is disseminated successfully is through the use of stories, a work of literature dynamic or simple can either help women's cause or harm them. The study compares stories of sexual assault and violence in the past, written explicitly in the 18th and 19th centuries, and contemporary stories were written within the last forty years; this comparison presents changes in how the world deals with sexual assault and violence against women over time through works of literature. Weist's study focuses on the struggle victims of abuse in the stories endure and how they fought back to look into the occurrence of changes in climate opinion towards women and rape culture.

Moreover, according to Kelner's study *The United States of Rape: A Theory of Rape Culture in American Public Policy*, rape is a crime in America. However, it is also one of the crimes that are mostly underreported. The crime of rape has low

conviction rates and law prosecution compared to other violent crimes. The study also mentions that the term "Rape Culture" refers to a society that minimizes the negative impacts of sexual assaults. Though rape culture is popularized in rape awareness propaganda, the level of social contempt attached to sexual assaults still reflects on the formal punishments- or the lack thereof, as enacted for its perpetuation. The study focuses on outlining the characteristics of the term "Rape Culture" and how the aspects are demonstrated at the federal level of laws through examining marital rape laws and sex; and welfare education policies.

Thus, the related studies enumerated show the existence of rape culture in society and its manifestation through shared behavior and ideologies about sexual assaults. The studies aforementioned aid in identifying the culture of rape in society through experiences and personal accounts from studies that are approved and published.

This study identifies the rape culture society present in Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman* as it focuses on the movie's literary elements such as plot, symbols, themes, and characters. This study is distinctive from other studies as it examines the rape culture hidden in the elements through the movie's plot, symbols, themes, and characters rather than focusing solely on the meaning of the movie.

In order to methodically investigate *Promising Young Woman*, the theories chosen for this study are utilized as the framework for an analysis of the plot, symbols, themes, and characters that will examine the main problem and identify the rape culture contained in the movie.

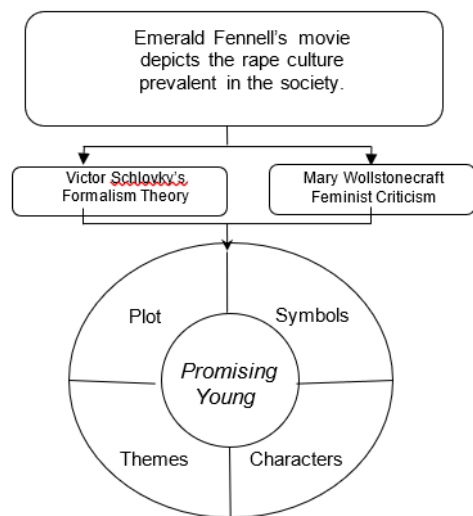


Fig. 2. Schematic presentation of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

Contextually, films present different ideas- politically, philosophically, and socially. These ideas are analyzed through the use of different theories. In this study, Formalist Theory and Feminist Criticism are utilized to critically analyze the film *Promising Young Woman*.

The first theory is Formalist Theory, it is a critical approach in analyzing a literary work. It isolates the formal elements and ignores all other aspects including the historical context,

biography of the author, or any philosophical and psychological issues. The formalist theory only highlights how literary works function as art (Gillespie n.d). Concurring, formalism is a theory that separates a piece of work from the external factors- the author, the era the work is written, and the environment it was written. It focuses on literary elements and literary devices to examine a text. Literary elements include theme, conflict, characterization, symbolism, setting, style, and tone while literary devices include metaphor, simile, imagery, symbolism, personification, hyperbole, and irony (A Definition of Formalism: Including Properties and Checklist of Formalist Criticism). These elements are closely studied to interpret the form and understand the meaning of the work.

In this study, Formalism is applied to examine the formal elements of the film *Promising Young Woman*. Formal elements including plot, themes, symbols, and characters are independently analyzed such that no other outside factors can influence the study's conclusion. Ultimately, formal elements are deeply analyzed to underline the rape culture presented in the film.

The second theory is Feminist Criticism, according to Edward-Mangione (2020) in the article *Feminist Criticism*, emphasizes the role and representation of women in literature. It claims that patriarchy or the socially masculine-focused structure in society dictates gender norms for both sexes. Because of this masculine-focused structure, women are often undermined in films and works of literature and the oppression women experience economically, politically, socially, and psychologically is overlooked. This theory intends to expose misogyny in works of literature and films and examines it to reflect masculine ideologies that marginalize women and men (Delahoyde). It also looks into gender politics at works in literature and films and evaluates the social construct of masculinity and femininity. Feminist criticism deconstructs how a character's gender is written, read, and interpreted. It analyzes how a work of literature embodies or undercuts stereotypical gender norms. In conclusion, Feminist Criticism in its essence is the collective belief of people in every walks of life in gender equality (Feminist Movement Builder's dictionary - justassociates.org).

This study applies Feminist Criticism to examine the representation of femininity in the film. This study emphasizes the delineation of women through the use of formal elements particularly plot, themes, symbols, and characters, and how rape culture affects the portrayal of women in the movie.

The findings of this study give knowledge and benefits to the literature and sociology students, and teachers. This study may serve as reference material to guide and be relevant to future studies in the same field.

The scope of this study focuses on Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman* and the underlying rape culture presented in the movie. Analysis is conducted using the formalist theory and feminist criticism to examine the rape culture hidden in the elements.

This study limits the coverage of rape culture found in the sub-problems raised namely plot, symbols, themes, and characters.

Definition of Terms:

The terms are operationally defined based on how they are used in the study:

Rape Culture is a social attitude in a society or environment that encourages pro-rape actions. Its effects on sexual assault cases are not limited to slut-shaming, victim-blaming, and minimalization of sexual assaults.

Modern Society experienced industrialization and expansion that sets in or befits the present time.

Characters refer to a person who performs the actions and dialogues in a fictional or creative nonfiction literary work.

Plot denotes a literary device that writers use in structuring the series of events in a story, play, novel, film, or other literary work.

Symbols stand for a representation of a setting, object, character, or event in a story that carries abstract ideas more than its literal meaning.

Themes talk about the central message or abstract idea which contains deeper meaning of a written work.

2. Materials and Methods

This study utilizes a qualitative method, particularly discourse analysis approach. Qualitative method is an idealistic or humanistic approach to research. It is used to understand people's culture, interactions, and beliefs. Qualitative research provides an extensive understanding of a problem and in turn, provides advanced problem-solving strategies. In this method, obtaining exploratory and conversational communication is the focal point, and also explores the reasons behind people's thoughts and feelings. Discourse Analysis is the study of the use of language in a social context. It investigates the underlying meaning of human interactions whether orally, written, or visually presented. This method provides in-depth non-numerical analysis of the studied work. Through the use of this method, Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman* is examined and interpreted thoroughly, it distributes the data gathered in order to attain the purpose of the study and ratify its main problems and subproblems. Furthermore, this method will aid in providing feasible reasoning for the analysis of the study.

The primary data sources are taken from the movie *Promising Young Woman*, starred by Carrey Mulligan, written and directed by Emerald Fennell in association with Filmnation Entertainment under the LuckyChap Entertainment production. On January 20, 2020, it made its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, and on December 25, 2020, it was released to the public in the United States by Focus Features.

This study follows four phases.

Phase 1. Plot:

Phase 1 tackles the analysis of the plot. The plot is analyzed through formalist theory and with the use of Feminist Criticism. Both are used to extract the rape culture in lines and phrases through the methodical analysis of the beginning, middle, and end. Tables are used in this phase.

Phase 2. Symbols:

Phase 2 tackles the analysis of the symbols. The symbols are analyzed through the use of Feminist Criticism to identify the rape cultures contained in the film. Symbols are methodically

analyzed through applying the theory aforementioned and investigating the meanings extracted from symbols to identify the underlying rape culture hidden in the element. A table is used titled Symbols Analysis.

Phase 3. Themes Analysis:

Phase 3 tackles the analysis of the themes. The themes are analyzed through the use of Formalist Theory to identify the rape culture contained in the film. Themes are methodically analyzed through applying the theory aforementioned and investigate the underlying rape culture hidden in the element.

Phase 4. Characters:

Phase 4 tackles the analysis of the characters. The characters are analyzed through the use of Feminist Criticism to identify the rape culture contained in the film. Characters are methodically analyzed through applying the theory aforementioned and investigate the personalities of the characters chosen to identify the underlying rape culture hidden in the element. A table is used titled Character Analysis.

Data Analysis:

This study uses qualitative discourse analysis, the four (4) phases followed in the data gathering procedure uses Victor Shlovsky's Formalism Theory and Mary Wollstonecraft's Feminist Criticism to analyze the data gathered. The method presents non-numerical data and is not measured by variables. It probes the primary and secondary sources to gather information needed to answer the main problem and the subproblems of the study. The gathered data in phases 1, 2, 3, and 4 works as references to explain how the plot, symbols, theme, and characters portray rape culture in Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman*.

Ethical Consideration:

This study is qualitative and employs discourse analysis. This study follows ethical guidelines in conducting research and does not require participation from people and animals, nor violate or cause mental and physical abuse. No harm is being implied in the case of the researchers as well. The study purely focuses on literary works, with no affiliations with financing schemes or potential conflicts of interest, honesty, transparency, or the use of deceptive information in presenting primary data findings in a biased manner and does not overstate the objective of the study. Furthermore, this study recognizes and acknowledges the authors and studies by giving proper credit and appropriately referencing the related literature materials used.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the rape culture evident in Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman*. The data gathered presents the analysis of the plot, symbols, themes, and characters.

Plot:

The table 1 shows an in-depth analysis of the exposition.

You know. They put themselves in danger, girls like that. If she's not careful, someone's going to take advantage and then she'll be the one in tears tomorrow morning.'

Also, Paul says:

'I'm sorry that is asking for it.

*You'd think you'd know better by her age, wouldn't you?
Where are her friends?
Fucked off somewhere and left her lying around for anyone
to pick up.'*

Table 1
Exposition analysis

Plot Structure	Lines or Phrases	Rape Culture
Exposition	'You know. They put themselves in danger, girls like that. If she's not careful, someone's going to take advantage and then she'll be the one in tears tomorrow morning.'	Blame shifting
	'I'm sorry that is asking for it. You'd think you'd know better by her age, wouldn't you? Where are her friends? Fucked off somewhere and left her lying around for anyone to pick up.'	Slut shaming
	Someone calls out "WALK OF SHAME".	Cat-calling
	'You don't wanna go home. C'mon.'	Violating privacy

The lines Paul delivered in the opening scenes are clear indication of rape culture. It shows blame shifting of abusers to the victims. Men thinking women who are in a vulnerable state is an invitation for abuse is a mindset that encourages perpetrators to blame the victim (Burnett 3). Cassie, in the opening scenes, may have been wearing seemingly decent enough clothes but this does not prevent Paul from slut-shaming the acting Cassie. Seeing the drunk woman slightly opening legs made the supposed-to-be gentleman say Cassie is 'asking for it'. Like in the previous scene, this mindset invites men to think that it is the responsibility of women to stay vigilant rather than the responsibility of everyone to be responsible (Hutton).

"walk of shame"

This line shows a minor issue if it is compared to sexual assaults and violence, which is cat-calling (Blackburn Center). The scene shows the same experiences of women being cat-called in public areas. Cat-calling explained by Beth Ellwood, Street harassment known as "catcalling" typically entails a guy making inappropriate sexual remarks, gestures, or whistling toward a random female stranger. This notion frequently focuses on a woman's physical features, creating the idea that they are a sexual object.

"You don't wanna go home. C'mon."

This line shows after Cassie turns down Neil. It exhibits an invasion of privacy.

Rape happens when consent is not given, no matter the situation, drunk or not, as long as the other party says no then an act should not be pursued (Whisnant). Practicing the acknowledgment of consent educates young men to know and respect boundaries which contributes to a community where rape culture is slowly abolished.

Table 2 shows the lines or phrases in the climax that contains rape culture.

Madison answered the question by putting the blame on Niña for being drunk at the party by saying:

"...Don't get blackout drunk every night and then expect people to be on your side when you have sex with someone you didn't want to!"

Madison also pointed out that Niña was known for 'sleeping around' and because of that it was hard to believe that Niña was

raped.

"...When you have a reputation for sleeping around then maybe people won't believe you when you say something's happened!"

I mean...it's crying wolf."

Both lines fall under victim blaming. This tells the audience that anyone could be complicit of rape culture even women. According to a study at the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences titled *"She Was Asking For It: Women Who Slut-Shame Rape Victims"*, social norms and values portrayed to women in a given place can sway the decision to side or condemn the woman who was sexually assaulted. The slut shaming and victim blaming Madison spewed, is one of the ways rape culture is perpetuated. When people doubt a woman reporting about a sexual assault because of past sexual relations, it excuses the crime committed and instead put the blame on the shoulder of women.

Table 2
Climax analysis

Plot Structure	Lines or Phrases	Rape Culture
Climax	'...Don't get blackout drunk every night and then expect people to be on your side when you have sex with someone you didn't want to!'	Victim blaming
	'...When you have a reputation for sleeping around then maybe people won't believe you when you say something's happened! I mean...it's crying wolf.'	Victim blaming
	'...None of us wants to admit when we've made ourselves vulnerable, when we've made a bad choice... and those choices, <u>those mistakes</u> can be so damaging and really regrettable.'	Blame Shifting
	'...What would you have me do? Ruin a young man's life every time we get an accusation like this?'	Victim blaming, Assuming innocence
	'...We had a guy who combed through their social media accounts for compromising information. Contacted friends and past sexual partners. It is amazing how much easier the Internet has made digging up dirt. In the old days we'd have to go through girls' trash. But now it's just one drunk photo at a party and you wouldn't believe how hostile that makes a jury.'	Slut shaming

"...What would you have me do?

Ruin a young man's life every time we get an accusation like this?"

This answer provided by the dean assumes that the perpetrator is falsely accused which falls under blame shifting, siding with the accused rather than the victim. Dean Walker also implied that the sexual assault that happened to Niña was a mistake, and that Niña shouldn't have been drunk and vulnerable around men. Dean Walker continued by saying:

"...None of us wants to admit when we've made ourselves vulnerable, when we've made a bad choice... and those choices, those mistakes can be so damaging and really regrettable."

This implication falls under victim blaming and assuming innocence, it again blames Niña for what happened. Victim blaming is when people does not empathize with the victim because of the fear of becoming vulnerable of the crime themselves, people distance themselves with rape to confirm the thought that it could never happen to them (Rape Culture, Victim Blaming, And The Facts).

"...We had a guy who combed through their social media accounts for compromising information. Contacted friends and past sexual partners. It is amazing how much easier the internet

has made digging up dirt. In the old days we'd have to go through girls' trash. But now it's just one drunk photo at a party and you wouldn't believe how hostile that makes a jury."

This statement implies that the amount of respect and credibility women receive is based solely on the image people are presented of the said woman which falls under the implication that a jury is easily swayed by a drunk photo reflects how slut shaming is prevalent and that women seen doing these acts are considered careless which makes it seem that sexual misconducts are mistakes committed by women.

Table 3 shows the lines or phrases in falling action that contains rape culture.

Table 3
Falling action analysis

Plot Structure	Lines or Phrases	Rape Culture
Falling Action	'A stupid video. It got sent round. I got sent it. We all did. It was just... at the time it was just gossip, you know?'	Media Pornography, Violating Privacy
	'Thought it was funny.'	Rape Joke
	'Look. You can have the phone, ok? You don't have to watch it... I really wouldn't watch it but... I don't know. Do whatever you want with it. Just leave me out of it.'	Violating Privacy
	I don't... I don't remember.	Denial
	We were kids...	Denial
	I wanna see her crawling out of here in the morning, Al!! She'd better not be able to walk!!	Rape Joke
	Leave some for us, man!!	Rape Joke, Objectification of women
	...I didn't do anything! We were kids!	Denial
	...It was a party! I mean... yeah we were all drunk, of course. But... she was into it!	Victim Blaming
	...I was affected too, you know? It's every guy's worst nightmare, getting accused like that.	Playing Innocent

From the table above, the first line describes the scene where Cassie meets Madison again. Madison tells Cassie about a certain video or tape explaining:

*"A stupid video. It got sent round.
I got sent it. We all did. It was just...
at the time, it was just gossip, you know?"*

This line falls under media/pornography which violates the victim's privacy. This shows the sexualization and objectification of Nina's body. According to Lyseng in the article *Pornography Plays a Role in Creating Rape Culture*, this offers the viewer the false notion that this is what "natural sex" looks like. A lot of porn is explicitly "rape porn," which sends the wrong message that rape is fun and sexual violence is acceptable.

"Thought it was funny"

The second line from Madison indicates rape joke. Making fun of the situation is clearly an example of rape culture where the viewer who saw the sexual assault on tape, considers the situation as a joke which is why the incident wasn't taken seriously (Yang).

"I don't... I don't remember"

People believe that denying the truth or situation negates the idea of sexual assault because people will refuse to acknowledge that such violence could occur in places they wish

to continue to see as safe and dependable, also because they are afraid of the repercussions if they speak out against violence (Salmona).

Later on, Ryan defends in the fourth line:

"We were kids..."

This connotes that Ryan refuses to acknowledge the harm of sexual violence and that the actions done in the video is not considered an assault since Ryan and the other men were just kids. Playing innocent does not defy the fact that assault and accusations are not true. Based on the article written by Jason Whiting, *How Denial and Victim Blaming Keep Sexual Assault Hidden* the majority of those who engage in sexual assault, domestic violence, or psychological manipulation are somewhat regular individuals. Moreover, the actions done, although Ryan denies it, still shows that perpetrators have the ability to make intentional decisions to regulate the behavior whatever age, class, or personality.

The fifth and sixth line belongs to the scene where Chip and Joe made a joke to a stripper for Al's bachelor party. Joe jokes:

*'I wanna see her crawling out of here in the morning, Al!!
She'd better not be able to walk!!'*

and

'Leave some for us men!'

This represents objectification for women and rape joke. This act showcases women as basically objects to be consumed. Rape jokes validate the perpetrator's behavior while mocking and objectifying women, it reinforces the mindset that thinks of women as sexual objects and enjoyment for men (Meyer).

The seventh line is one of Al's responses toward Cassie:

'I didn't do anything! We were kids!'

This line falls under the notion of playing innocent, emphasizing denial in rape culture which has the same act as what Ryan tells Cassie in the fourth line. On the contrary, young and adolescent males were proven to be perpetrators despite their age. A study conducted by Robert E. Morris and et. al, *Incarcerated Adolescents' Experiences as Perpetrators of Sexual Assault* examines the self-reported traits of past sexual assaults committed by minors in prison. The study shows that both male perpetrators (11%) and victims (13%) were men. Although the reported rate of 27.6% for male victims becoming perpetrators, findings of 30% for male victims were substantially equal to that number. This could be a result of the numerous additional risk factors that adolescents were exposed to, which affected their inclination to force sexual engagement.

In the eighth line, Ryan also justified by saying:

'It was a party!

I mean...yeah we were all drunk, of course.

But...she was into it!'

This denotes the notion of victim blaming, this act presupposes that the victim is equally at fault and is responsible for the abuse (Puntambekar).

Al continued saying:

"I was affected too, you know?

*It's every guy's worst nightmare,
getting accused like that."*

This line shows that Al Monroe is playing innocent. Playing innocent and toxic hyper-masculinity are also one of the reasons

why rape is still normalized because men think men are dominant to women and women's voices are not worth listening to (Toxic Masculinity and Rape Culture).

Table 4
Denouement analysis

Plot Structure	Lines or Phrases	Rape Culture
Denouement	...She trained with the Cirque Du Soleil. You can come on her face and her back at the same time.	Rape Joke, Slut Shaming, Objectification of women

Chip commented:

'She trained with the Cirque Du Soleil.

You can come on her face and her back at the same time.'

It is an unpleasant remark which represents the prevalence of rape culture. Making unwanted sexual remarks common creates a community which accepts that men are welcome to sexualize a woman (Boscamp).

Blame shifting, slut-shaming, violating privacy, sexual objectification, rape jokes, denial, violating privacy, playing innocent, victim blaming, media pornography, and assuming perpetrator is innocent are all indicators of rape culture featured in the plot.

Symbol:

Table 5 represents the symbols found in the movie that depicts the rape culture in society.

Table 5
Symbols analysis

Symbols	Meaning	Rape Culture
Crucifix Pose	Prejudice	Vulnerability
Clothing	Anonymity	Anyone can be victims
Cassie's name	"Cassandra" a cursed Greek prophetess	Disbelief
Movie title	"Promising young woman" evoking the phrase "Promising young man"	Stifling women's growth.
Vinyl nurse	Seduce a bachelor's party	Objectification
Cassie throwing the notebook to the trash bin	To forget	Healing

Cassie is introduced early in the movie in sitting position like that of crucifixion. The crucifix, other than its Christian meaning, also signifies violence (Pierce). Cassie's position symbolizes the prejudice that the victims of rape usually receive. In relevance to the Christian religion, crucifixion is a punishment served to a person who has done wrong (Crucifixion as Punishment in Ancient Rome). Similarly, it denotes the vulnerability of rape victims. Another notable symbolism in the movie is how Cassie dresses. Cassie's clothing varies from chic with cute nails, ponytails or braids, and light make-up, business casual to hot club girl. The choice of wardrobe depicts that no matter what dress a woman is in, a woman is still a possible subject to rape. Cassie's name is derived from the Greek prophetess Cassandra. In Greek mythology, Cassandra was a cursed prophetess who was never

believed when giving an insight of the future. This undoing was done by Apollo the god of prophecy after Cassandra refused the god's sexual advances (Cassandra in Greek Mythology). The fear of not being believed is one of the challenges when reporting sexual assaults. The protagonist's name was meant to embody the Greek prophetess, a woman telling the truth and not believed by the people, reflective of how society discredit women's narrative. The movie's title *Promising Young Woman* evokes the idea of the promising young man who when accused of rape is handled with care by the jury. According to Emerald Fennell in an interview with yahoo entertainment, it is unusual for people to label young women as promising unless they have been killed or died. Cassie, the protagonist of the film, is insinuated to be the top of her class in med school. However, ever since Nina's assault, Cassie's life pauses. This conveys the message that Cassie's once promising life is put on hold because of the trauma of the sexual assault. This event shows how violence against women affects other women's potential. (Effects of Sexual Assault and Rape). Lastly, the vinyl nurse costume, the costume symbolizes women who are living life as "strippers" or sex workers. Most of the time, sex workers are more prone to experience sexual harassment and sexual assault, and more likely to suffer sexual trauma (Fact Sheet-Sexual Violence Against Sex Workers).

The meaning behind the objects and abstract images that depicts rape culture are preconception, anyone can be victims, disbelief, stifling women's growth, objectification, and healing.

Themes:

This phase represents the theme of revenge and the sub-themes namely: societal response and the effect of sexual abuse on the victim, found in the movie that depicts the rape culture in the society.

Phase 3. Themes Analysis:

The theme of revenge isn't new in the world of films. Although frequently used in most movies, *Promising Young Woman* presents a bold depiction of a horrific tragedy for which any female college students encounter through the portrayal of Cassie and Nina's story. Cassie—the movie's main character explores how sexual assault in college is being handled, what traumatic response it leaves to the victims and the family, and more importantly, how society reacts to these cases. Along with Nina's assault, medical student Cassie becomes enraged at the campus' negligence. One of the sub-themes of the film *Promising Young Woman* is the societal response of the people with sexual assault in the movie. The movie showcases the responses from Niña's friend, school dean, lawyer, and colleagues. It aims to expose common societal responses towards rape in real life, the characters are meant to mirror real people and real-life situations. Niña's assault was not taken seriously, Niña's friend, Madison, blamed Niña for being drunk while Dean Walker quickly concluded that it was a mistake the victim was responsible for because Niña shouldn't have been drunk. However, that was not the case, Niña was drugged at the party based on Cassie later in the film. Because of the societal responses, Niña was silenced.

Disclosure about sexual assaults from rape survivors are often discouraged by means of slut shaming, victim blaming,

and discrediting the assault. A study by Courtney E. Ahrens titled *Being Silenced: The Impact of Negative Social eReactions on the Disclosure of Rape* determined three routes that silents rape victims; negative reactions from professionals about the disclosure, victim blaming from friends and family, and the scrutinization of people about the case that causes victims to think if the assault qualifies as rape. Therefore, victims are faced with the challenge of justice after an assault.

Another sub-theme the movie discussed is the effect of rape on the victim. The plot of the movie revolves around how Cassie has developed another personality because of the abuse. Cassie's frustration to avenge Nina's death has led to an alternate personality who seeks out "good guys" in bars making the men who were caught in the bait realize they are nothing less than a rapist who only wears a good boy facade. It is revealed that Cassie was a topnotcher in medical school. However, all of that was thrown to waste when Cassie cannot bear to attend school because of Nina's sexual abuse, it is noticeable that Cassie has lost connection with almost everyone. In the scene where Cassie's parents broke down, it is revealed that Cassie was no longer the daughter that the protagonist's parents had.

Cassie's rejection of any relationship is only a natural response of any victim of sexual abuse (Rape Trauma Syndrome). Most often than not, people who were sexually abused before see it hard to reconnect with anyone else because of the loss of trust in humanity.

In the themes—negligence, preconception, rape response, silencing victims, scrutiny, effects of rape, rejection of relationship, loss of trust, society's support, and discrimination are also found as indicators of rape culture.

Characters:

The table 6 is a list of characters in the movie who embodies the rape culture prevalent in the society.

Table 6
Characters analysis

Characters	Type of Character	Role	Rape Culture
Cassandra "Cassie" Thomas	Protagonist	Niña's best friend, vindictive	The Victim
Niña Fisher	Deuteragonist	Cassie's best friend, victim	The Victim
Paul	Supporting Character	Stranger from bar	Slut-shaming and Perpetrator
Construction Workers	Supporting Character	Stranger on the street	Catcalling
Neil	Supporting Character	Stranger	Objectifying Women
Dr. Ryan Cooper	Main Character	Cassie's lover	Rape accomplice
Madison McPhee	Supporting Character	Cassie's batchmate	Victim blaming
Dean Elizabeth Walker	Supporting Character	Cassie's school dean	Victim blaming
Jordan Green	Supporting Character	Al Monroe's lawyer	Protector of assailant
Al Monroe	Supporting Character	Cassie's batchmate	Perpetrator
Chip	Supporting Character	Cassie's batchmate, Al Monroe's friend	Pedestal jockey
Joe	Supporting Character	Cassie's batchmate, Al Monroe's friend	Pedestal jockey and Protector of assailant

Cassie Thomas as the protagonist in the movie and as Niña Fisher's best friend, Cassie's role is to seek vengeance against the perpetrator Al Monroe and the people behind Niña's rape case. Aside from seeking vengeance, Cassie is also a sexual

assault victim. Every night Cassie goes to bars and clubs pretending to be drunk in order to attract 'nice guys'. These men usually drag Cassie to their houses, force to drink or use drugs in order to sexually abuse Cassie's drunkenness state while Cassie pretends to be asleep or unable to agree, but then Cassie reveals to be as sober and confronts them when these men tries to take advantage of Cassie. One night when Cassie pretends to be drunk, a guy named Paul took Cassie home and gives Cassie a drink. Later on, Paul took advantage of Cassie's drunken state and pulled Cassie's underwear. Not only sexual assault happens to one man, but most men Cassie encountered while doing the dual characterization. This scenario proves that even a woman who's completely sober or not, sexual predators would still hunt and abuse women (Midling). Cassie's dual character also reveals how sexual predators manipulates and sexually abuse women. Also, it's a visual representation as well on what women usually encounter during vulnerable state.

Niña Fisher is Cassie's childhood best friend and is a deuteragonist in the movie. Niña may not appear in the movie but the character greatly affects the entire plot of the film. As a medical student, Niña was raped at a wild party by a guy named Al Monroe while some of Al's friends are watching and enjoying the incident. Later on, Cassie withdrew out to care for Niña, who had dropped out of school after the rape incident. Niña, however, is plagued by trauma and tragedy, who eventually commits suicide. In *Promising Young Woman*, Fennell gently uncovers what happened to Niña, but it is evident that Niña was the victim of a system which favored the perpetrator over the accuser. As the best friend, Cassie is attempting to deconstruct the system, seeks vengeance to the assailant and the rape accomplice during that rape incident which is later revealed.

Paul is also one of the characters in the movie and is one of the sexual assailants of Cassie Thomas. In the beginning of the movie where Cassie was sitting on a couch pretending to be intoxicated, Paul and two other boys made a bet to approach and help Cassie to get home. When Paul pretends to show a good intention of helping, Cassie who's pretentiously too drunk, Paul easily swayed and gets Cassie home. As expected, as Paul assists Cassie in getting home, Paul then proposes that they will visit the apartment first. Following that scene, Paul tricked Cassie by wiping a smudge of makeup on Cassie's face and started kissing—and then proceeded to the bed, despite Cassie's being barely aware. When Cassie asked Paul "What are you doing, what the fuck are you doing?" That's when Paul discovers that Cassie's no longer intoxicated, but Cassie knows that Paul is also not a "nice guy" and the intention of helping out is a gateway of assaulting and abusing women who are drunk and vulnerable (*I Was Drinking When I Was Raped*).

Construction workers are also included in the supporting characters. In the movie, after Cassie left Paul's house and the assault incident, Cassie walked on the streets with last night's clothes wearing a short skirt, open buttoned white polo, holding high heels in one hand, smudged makeup, while eating a hotdog bun. The audience can see how Cassie looks remorseless, calm and cool as if the sexual assault didn't happen last night. While walking, Cassie walked past the construction workers and left

unpleasant remarks and catcalled “Walk of Shame”, some whistled when Cassie passed, while others laughed. Meanwhile, Cassie gazed at the construction workers and stared blankly. Later on, these workers got intimidated so Cassie went on eating the hotdog bun and continued walking. The role of the construction workers in the movie portrays how men react, catcall, or objectify women who are bypassers on the streets (Grove and Taylor), especially when women are wearing revealing or conservative clothes.

Neil is one of the men Cassie meets in one of Cassie’s nights pretending to be intoxicated. The scene introducing Neil starts with Cassie on Neil’s sofa seemingly drunk. Neil proceeds to shove cocaine in Cassie’s mouth while talking about women’s oppression even though Cassie is already acting drunk. Neil represents a man who acts to know the struggles of a marginalized group to appear sympathetic towards them. Neil uses his fake sympathy to attract potential victims, Neil’s supposed sympathy is to show that the man cares and that is one of the “good guys”. In an article written by Jill Filipovic at The Guardian, rapists are often caused by men in the same social circle, so the stereotypical image of a rapist who are dark scary figures is inaccurate. Neil exhibits actions that perpetuates rape culture, the fact that Neil invited Cassie to the house even though Cassie seemed drunk is already an action deemed inappropriate. In addition to Neil shoving cocaine in Cassie’s mouth, Neil also executed sexual advances on the supposedly drunk Cassie. Considering Cassie’s condition even though staged, what Neil attempted to do in the film was rape and Neil did it intentionally even though it was stated otherwise.

Dr. Ryan Cooper, an old colleague of Cassie in Forrest University, showed a different action/response on how people help in perpetuating rape culture. Ryan Cooper knew what happened to Niña, the film later revealed that Ryan watched while Niña was being assaulted via a video tape Madison gave to Cassie. Ryan Cooper stayed silent even long after Niña’s death while still maintaining friendship with Al Monroe (the person who assaulted Niña) and Ryan’s friends. When Cassie confronts Ryan, Ryan seemed to have forgotten the incident and said excuses like “we were kids”. In a recent study conducted by George Cunningham of Texas A&M University College of Education and Human Development, the researcher compared witnessing sexual assaults to witnessing racism stating that people often don’t do anything when witnessing such. Ryan expects to be absolved of any guilt or responsibility from what happened to Niña even though Ryan watched while the crime happened. This action or lack thereof, does not help victims of assault. Staying silent with sexual assault cases preserves this culture and encourages future perpetrators.

Madison McPhee is an old friend of Cassie and Niña back in college. Later in the film, Madison gives Cassie a phone containing the video showing Niña being raped by Al Monroe. However, Madison only provided this video after Cassie tricked Madison into thinking that Madison was raped. Madison agreed to meet Cassie at a restaurant where Cassie got the woman drunk. During this meet-up, Cassie confronts Madison about what happened to Niña which quickly made Madison uncomfortable. Madison then proceeded to slut-shame Niña

and pointed out that Niña was sleeping with a lot of guys anyway, and with this reason Madison concluded that it was easy to question Niña’s credibility. Madison, who was supposed to be Niña’s friend that time, doubted and blamed Niña for the assault. Madison portrays how women are also responsible in enabling rape in the society, women can also be as guilty as men in rape cases. Madison’s choice to blame Niña and question the victim’s credentials because of Niña’s actions that she deemed inappropriate, impose the idea that women have to earn the right to not be sexually assaulted which in turn perpetuate rape.

Elizabeth Walker is Forrest University’s school dean where Niña and Cassie went to med school. Niña went to Dean Walker’s office after the assault the following day to tell what happened. Instead of taking legal action, Dean Walker made Niña think that what happened that night may have been an accident that was solely Niña’s fault. Dean Walker, like Madison, pointed out Niña’s drunkenness, putting the responsibility on Niña and absolving any responsibility of propriety from the men. Dean Walker starts to see the errors when Cassie uses the dean’s daughter in a ploy to make Dean Walker reconsider a previous statement about giving men the benefit of the doubt. Dean Walker’s reaction revealed the distrust the dean has on men which means that the reason behind the advice towards Niña’s assault was meaningless. The scene highlights the fact that people are only concern with women who are sexually assaulted when it happens to a loved one. Not standing up for other women who have been assaulted will not prevent nor diminish sexual assaults from happening to oneself or towards a loved one. In an article by UN Women titled 16 ways you can stand against rape culture, stated that one way to stop the culture of rape is to get involved when rape happens, the absence of enforcements is what perpetuate rape culture. Dean Walker’s inaction towards Niña’s case prolongs a culture that only hurts women.

Atty. Jordan Green, a supporting character who was Al Monroe’s lawyer, is a broken man who was haunted for being a lawyer. The film introduced the middle-aged man as struggling with mental issues due to heavy conscience the poor man brings with defending rape perpetrators and as such. When Cassie sought revenge for Niña, one of the people on the list was Jordan Green. Cassie came to Atty. Green’s house ready to mentally torture the man. However, upon bringing Niña Fisher’s name, Green showed remorse for what the attorney had done. The lawyer was clearly in total guilt for every case won and dropped that has freed guilty criminals, and for helping the perpetrators get away from the verdict of law. The attorney’s guilt stemmed from the inability to oppose the “culture” of defending “promising young men”, accepting bribes in order to drop the case. Cassie, who was in total shock, could not believe that there was a single soul who showed remorse for what had been done to Niña. Atty. Jordan Green symbolizes the few people who deeply realizes the fault of defending rape perpetrators, the lawyer embodies the guilt and conscience of an assailant’s accomplice. The society has long condemned victims of rape assaults and only few people do sympathize with victims without ever blaming or making the victims less

of a victim which is prevalent before 1992 where victims are being accused because of sexual background and being provocative (Victim Blaming). Moreover, Atty. Jordan Green also deeply represents the frontline defense from all sexual perpetrators. The lawyer personifies the protection that men receive from society and even the law (Vetterhoffer). The character of Atty. Green epitomizes the common practice of believing that all sexual victims are not a perpetrators fault but a fate that victims had to go through.

Another character the film has shown is Alexander Monroe. Throughout the film, Alexander or often tagged as Al, has been shown as the main assailant of Niña Fisher. Al is Cassie and Niña's batchmate in medical school and is pointed out as the one who did wrong to Niña. Though Al was barely shown in the movie, Al's character deeply symbolizes the typical assailant who was never expected by everyone in the community to commit the crime. Al Monroe is a promising young man who was socially loved and adored by most of the people, in contrast to Niña who was believed to be on the wild side. Though a lot of people have seen the crime that Al did, most of them sided with the young man as it was believed that Niña deserved what Al had done. Al typifies all the sexual assailants who got away with the crime because of the image of being a promising young man. The importance of Al's character is to establish that every man regardless of the status, social morale and type of job can be a sexual perpetrator (Sexual Harassment: A Severe and Pervasive Problem). Al's character also reveals the bias of the community on who to side with during the deliberation of the assault. Al's character reveals how society reacts with assailants and victims of sexual assault, every stereotype, every prejudices, and every injustice people have with assailants more so to the victim.

Another character is Chip. Chip is Cassie's batchmate and Al Monroe's friend who stood as groom's men during Al's wedding. Chip stood beside Joe during the wedding's reception and eyed a bridesmaid. In the few lines that Chip delivered, it is evident how the man easily objectifies women. Chip symbolizes the typical man who takes delight in making unnecessary sexual comments towards a woman even if the woman is in decent clothing (Kendall). Chip's character is an evidence that no matter what a woman wears in any occasion, some men will have something to say, and most often than not, the comments the supposed gentlemen have are sexual objectification.

Lastly, Joe. Joe is a supporting character who is Al Monroe's friend. Joe and Al have been with each other since medical school. Joe was also one of the people who witnessed the sexual assault done to Niña and did nothing to help the woman or give justice to what has done to the lady. Joe symbolizes every person who first-handedly tolerates rape and sexual assaults. Joe's character reveals the harsh truth that every man would rather be a friend who tolerates instead of a friend who teaches what is right. During Cassie's murder, Joe stood unfazed by the crime Al had committed, Joe deliberately comforted the scared Al and was the one who assured that Al did the right thing even if what Al did was to kill a woman. Also, Joe showed no remorse for burning Cassie's body in the river. Joe embodies

the harsh truth in the society that there will always be people who are not able to realize the magnitude of the crimes that have been done and would continuously make the assailants feel that what had been done is the best thing to do. Joe shows that sexual assaults can successfully penetrate in the society because there will be people who will easily tolerate the act and would go on the way without remorse when harassing people.

The characters in the film are interconnected with one another in the representation of rape culture since it portrays the victim, the assailant/s, and the complicit. The portrayals are necessary to further convey the message of the film *Promising Young Woman*. Through closely examining the character's role and lines delivered, it is found that the behaviors of the characters has shown contribute to the manifestation of rape culture in the society. Furthermore, the characters listed above demonstrates the rape culture prevalent in a society.

Found in the characters are the evidence of rape culture such as: sexual assault victim, rape victim, cat-callers, rape accomplice, acquaintance rape, protector of assailant, sexual perpetrator, and pedestal jockey.

4. Conclusion

In conformity with the findings, it is found that rape culture is prevalent in the modern society as presented in Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman*.

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