

# Problematising 'Pro-Feminist' Depictions of Female on Male Rape: American Horror

## Story's 'Rape of the Monsignor'

### **ABSTRACT:**

*Dramatised depictions of female-on-male rape, in inverting the conventional gendered rape binary of male assailant/female victim, are commonly regarded as subverting gender norms, and are thus celebrated as pro-feminist. I present a Foucauldian problematisation of this rationale - arguing that, through a process of over-writing gender, inversion of the norm masks a reversion to the norm. To interpret this as pro-feminist, one must be distracted by corporeal gender in the superficial role reversal, and blind to the anti-feminist effects in operation. Critical discourse analysis of an example drawn from the popular US television show American Horror Story illustrates that such depictions operate in discursive space as the locus for a process of 'governmentalised recursion'. A close reading of the media text, and its audience reception is performed, methodological considerations in the intersection of feminist analyses and cultural criminology, vis a vis gendered lacunae and popular misinterpretation, are discussed, and the primacy of scenographic analysis is challenged via a focus on 'the arc'. This piece thus contributes an intervention in the discourse predicated on a Foucauldian triangulation of media texts, audience responses and institutional frameworks and practices, to comprise a 'history of the present' in a controversial and neglected area.*

**KEYWORDS** Male Rape; Female Sexual Offenders; Foucault; American Horror Story; Critical Discourse Analysis; Feminism; Cultural Criminology; Rape Myths; Narrative Arc; Governmentality

## INTRODUCTION

‘I want to see films about men getting raped by women...I want to see the camera linger on the look of terror in his eyes when he suddenly realises that the woman is bigger, stronger and far more brutal than he’ (Sullivan, n.d, cited in Brownmiller, 1975: 303).

Compared with the lacuna implied in the above excerpt, dramatised depictions of male victims of female sexual assailants are now frequently on our screens, in mainstream television and cinema,<sup>1</sup> with examples roundly claimed and celebrated by populist feminism as the ‘pro-woman commentary’ that Brownmiller and her contemporaries asserted they would be.<sup>2</sup> But contrary to this interpretation, I assert that this trend should not be welcomed. Commonsense tells us that female on male rape inverts the conventional gendered rape binary, and thus ‘turns the tables’ (Gavey, 2005) to undermine and subvert patriarchy<sup>3</sup> and disrupt patriarchal rape culture<sup>4</sup> - such that this has become emblematic of, and indeed

---

<sup>1</sup> Most commonly in comedy and horror genres, see XXXX, 2014. Beyond the many examples highlighted in that analysis, also resonant – and noteworthy due to their prime-time scheduling, mainstream distribution, and popularity in syndication and/or secondary media sales - are : TV F/M *Dollhouse*(2009-2010, multiple examples), *True Blood* (2011, female gang rape of Jason Stackhouse), *Desperate Housewives* (2009, rape of Orson by his ex-wife Alma), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1999, rape of Xander by Faith; 2000, rape of Riley by Faith); *Lost Girl* (multiple examples), and F/M sexualised violence and murder in *Scream Queens* (2015-2016) and *Ash versus the Evil Dead* (2015-2018); as well as F/M rape and/or sexualised violence/murder in the back-catalogue of various popular music artists, such as music videos for No Doubt’s ‘It’s my Life’ (2003), Britney Spears’ *Toxic* (2003), Pink ‘Please Don’t Leave Me’ (2008), Lady Gaga ‘Paparazzi’ (2009), Lady Gaga and Beyoncé’s ‘Telephone’ (2009), and Rhianna ‘Bitch Better Have My Money’ (2016). Interestingly, where F/M does occur in such forms, it tends to result in ‘repeat offending’ by artists and/or directors, pointing to popular reception of this theme and related tropes. A thematic trend of importance here, consistent with my previous findings, is the convenient use of rape-revenge logics as providing the recurrent framing, for a discussion of the implications of this, see xxx (2014).

<sup>2</sup> See analyses and discussion board responses to various iterations of female sexual violence against males in popular online feminist magazines such as: *Bitch*, *Feministing*, *Jezebel*, and the now archived *xoJane*.

<sup>3</sup> Understood in Foucauldian terms as a ‘regime of truth’ that produces an asymmetric power-effect tied to the existing apparatus of sexuality, and predicated on gender.

<sup>4</sup> Understood in Foucauldian terms as established knowledges (collective, taken for granted beliefs that are orthodox, commonsense, truisms) which result in normalization regarding the rape of women.

symbolic of, resistance; but one should question whether this is really the positive, pro-feminist intervention that it is commonly assumed to be. Indeed, from a Foucauldian positioning, accepting his triad of knowledge/power/individuation, one must. Thus, this piece will demonstrate that the supposed inversion here, in actuality, disingenuously masks a reversion to the norm, and as such, extends an invitation for feminist theorists to exercise ‘vigilance’ (Projansky, 2001) and the responsibility that this entails.<sup>5</sup>

As a Foucauldian<sup>6</sup>, I know that gendered knowledges underpin governmentality;<sup>7</sup> I understand that discursive power formations reproduce themselves, frequently through supposed rejection;<sup>8</sup> and I appreciate that superficial discontinuity belies an underlying constancy.<sup>9</sup> Foucault’s corpus indicts that power relations are comprised of a matrix of discourses and discursive practices, that are not enforced, but are dispersed throughout the social body; that these operate in complex and confounding ways, and that we are each complicit in their perpetuation. These are reified through social practices – be they ever so well meaning. In sum: I’m aware that the road to hell is paved with good intentions and I’m wary of (pyrrhic) victory. As Foucault cautions, ‘people know what they do, they frequently

---

<sup>5</sup> Projansky (2001, p. 3) cautions that ‘there is a need to be vigilant...about identifying and challenging depictions of rape’, not least in order to intervene in the discourse and to enable activism.

<sup>6</sup> Besides the relevance for Foucauldian analysis, it is also relevant for feminist analysis, and could be argued to lend itself to ‘somasochistic transformability’ a’la Chancer (1992), amongst others; however, such approaches are beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault conceptualises power as productive, operating in complex and confounding ways, with ‘the subject’ its vehicle rather than its target or point of application. Governmentality is an understanding not of the mentalities of governance per se, or a top-down configuration, but a recognition that power is ‘blind’ and ‘impotent’ (Foucault, 1996, cited in Lazzarato, 2002) and that we are all implicated in its dispersal and deployment. These are amongst the key points of departure for this theorist vis a vis his contemporaries. For a far more detailed discussion of this concept, its implications and resultant methodologies, see XXX (2014).

<sup>8</sup> Such that ‘irony’ was coined by Jock Young to characterise what is commonly regarded as the ‘post-modern turn’ in criminology (see Young, 2002). Informed by my own interpretation of Foucault’s works, I regard ‘irony’ simply as unintentional, negative consequences. This is an important running theme in Foucault’s corpus, and in my own work.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault (2001, p.226) cautions that changes in articulation are disingenuous in masking an underlying constancy. It is incumbent upon us therefore to appreciate that ‘to recognise a discontinuity is never anything more than to register a problem that needs to be solved’.

know why they do what they do, but what they don't know is what what they do does'  
(Foucault cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:187).

This thesis is progressed through three interwoven elements, constituting a Foucauldian Triangulation,<sup>10</sup> with a rebuttal of the popular assumption that 'inversion = resistance' forming the core. Instead, 'inversion = reversion' will be demonstrated. Contiguous to this central concern, a twofold misunderstanding that limits academic interlocutors in this area is identified and challenged: firstly, the privileging of 'the body' as the focus of analyses, with, secondly, the associated assumption that on-screen sexual violence is 'literalised' (Boyle, 2005: 138) and can therefore be adequately excavated through application of 'scenographic' analysis. In so doing, this piece acts as a contribution to feminist theory and to cultural criminology by extending and complexifying existing concepts and methodology. It also adds to the literature<sup>11</sup> at the cultural criminology/Foucault intersection, and contributes an original analysis of an example of a neglected phenomenon in criminology and related fields - on-screen female sexual offending against male victims.

A Foucauldian problematisation of the issue is performed, in seeking to 'think differently' about the predominant truth claim. This entails conscientiously striving to resist the established ways of seeing - rebelling against orthodoxies, conventions and taken for granted

---

<sup>10</sup> Foucault rejected the notion of three separate domains, instead recognising three types of 'relationship' that 'always overlap one another, support one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as a means to an end' (Foucault, 2001, p338). My triangulation is largely inspired by, and builds upon Mendieta's (2002) essay, and is delineated in detail in XXXX (2014, see p43, amongst others).

<sup>11</sup> In cultural criminology, the role of the media in normalisation is widely accepted. This renders media depictions of interest from a Foucauldian perspective, but there is surprisingly little published in this vein in Criminology - Mathiesen (1997), Gehrke (2001), McMullan and McClung (2006), XXXX, (2014, 2018) and Carney (2015) being notable exceptions.

knowledges that contribute to established norms and common sense, in an effort to destabilise the ‘regimes of truth’<sup>12</sup> that both draw from and perpetuate existing circulations of power. Discussion engages with feminist criminology and cultural criminology to comprise an intervention in both. It applies and extends aspects of Foucauldian thought for Criminology, notes resonance with existing works arising from Feminism, builds on the theoretical and methodological contributions in XXXX (2014, 2018 and 2020, forthcoming) and highlights the significance of ‘reel world’ male rape to a real world feminist ethic. In so doing, the significance of feminism to this, and of this to feminism, is sketched.

Before elaborating each facet of the argument in detail, the core contention will be scored for clarity: It will be argued that dramatised depictions of female-on-male rape<sup>13</sup> operate in discursive space as the locus for a process of what I term governmentalised recursion.<sup>14</sup> Such depictions should not be analysed at face value. There is no genuine role-reversal. Corporeal gender is overwritten by gender signifiers and gendered connotations, and as a consequence, the normative gender binary of male assailant/female victim remains intact. Any superficial inversion is but an illusion. Despite appearances then, or rather because of them, such depictions disingenuously conform to patriarchal norms, and serve to surreptitiously resuscitate rape myths, to the detriment of *all* victims. The caution here needs to be explicit:

---

<sup>12</sup> ‘Regimes of truth both prescribe and proscribe the conceptualization of a given “problem” and the parameters for its solution; in advocating particular ways of seeing and doing, they necessarily abjure others’ (XXXX, 2014, p10).

<sup>13</sup> It’s usual to use inverted commas when referring to male victims of coerced sexual congress by a female assailant, because in some legal contexts this is not necessarily recognised as rape. A discussion of gender-neutrality in law is beyond the scope of this article (see works by Rumney, 2007, 2008; and Rumney and Morgan-Taylor, 1997a, 1997b). I regard sex without consent as rape, and as such, I elect to omit the inverted commas and the trivialisation that they imply.

<sup>14</sup> Understood as akin to ‘writing back’ – a concept borrowed from postcolonial studies, denoting a counter-discourse that speaks to and challenges dominant ideologies. In my usage, it is modified through a Foucauldian lens to indicate precisely the opposite mechanism – a dominant discourse that, whilst seemingly disrupted, actually reinforces itself.

female on male rape depictions<sup>15</sup> fundamentally operate as anti-feminism. The popularisation and celebration of dramatised depictions of women raping men bolster existing discursive formations, rather than disrupting them, and as such, this supposed resistance to patriarchy actually bears its recuperation.

In the discussion that follows, a specific instance of supposed role-reversal drawn from my ongoing research will be presented: a single scenario from *American Horror Story: Asylum* (the rape of the Monsignor by Sister Mary Eunice, episode 10: 'The Name Game').

Triangulation<sup>16</sup> is performed, enabling exploration in depth via a critical reading, contextualisation with reference to popular audience (mis)understanding, a reflection of its situatedness within a concise disciplinary archaeology – thereby reflecting that 'truth is a thing of this world' (Foucault, 1980, p131), excavating its domains, discursive regularities, and its power-effects; and thus contributing a tentative 'history of the present'.<sup>17</sup> In so doing, this piece does not present a challenge to those fields or theorists with which it is concerned, it extends an invitation, that in exposing this 'truth', together, we might make it 'fragile' and 'thwart' it.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Hereafter F/M

<sup>16</sup> The aetiology of this is, of course, attributable to factors beyond that which I note in this piece. This is a problematisation which presents artefacts for triangulation according to Foucauldian domains of knowledge/power/individuation, in order to construct a 'history of the present' – these are necessarily exemplary and indicative, not inclusive or exhaustive.

<sup>17</sup> Whereby discursive regularities are revealed as predicated on contingent and subjugated knowledges. Foucault excavated these via archaeology and genealogy. Understood in the simplest terms as 'where we are' and 'how did we get here?', it is imperative to understand knowledges, and the resultant 'truths', as situated in time, space and place. Foucault's power/knowledge triad (not dyad) necessitates triangulation. For a detailed methodological discussion and illustration of Foucauldian Triangulation, see XXXX (2014).

<sup>18</sup> 'Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power...we must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and exposes it, render it fragile and makes it possible to thwart' (Foucault, 1998, p100).

## RECUPERATION IN 'RESISTANCE'

### **Mediated F/M Rape: the Trojan horse of corporeal role reversal**

It is a truism in the analysis of mediated forms concerned with rape and sexualised violence, that corporeal role-reversal enables the 'uncanny'<sup>19</sup> - that it makes strange that which we take for granted, and thus disrupts established logics and acts therefore as intervention. But this is overly simplistic. Clover (1987), introducing her concept of the Final Girl, observed that behaviours which characters exhibit encode them as male/female, rather than their corporeal gender. For Clover (ibid, p218), 'the same body does for both and that body is female ... it is gendered feminine even when played by a male'. It is the behaviour that is important, not the body per se. In her original analysis, attending to the behavioural tendencies in a similar fashion to Butler's (1990) notion of performativity,<sup>20</sup> Clover (1987, p212) noted that 'angry displays of force ... belong to the male ... [whilst] crying, cowering, screaming, fainting, trembling, begging for mercy belong to the female. Abject terror is gendered feminine.' Extending her line of reasoning, and that of Butler (ibid), we can have a 'masculinised' female aggressor and a 'feminised' male victim, because – for such theorists, behavioural gender signifiers are of far more importance than simple corporeal gender depictions.

Clover limited her concept and analysis to females encoded as males, but the observation is astute and it should stand for both. Besides XXXX (2014), this insight has not yet been applied to on-screen depictions involving males. Yet just as Clover's (1987) 'Final Girl' is

---

<sup>19</sup> Concept originally coined by Freud, now popularised in film analysis – particularly feminist approaches.

<sup>20</sup> Understood as behaviour genders the body, rather than vice versa.

masculinised, it should be readily observed that the vulnerable male is feminised, becoming a female proxy, substitute, or surrogate. This same principle also holds for the female sexual assailant, who it can be noted is invariably male. This principle, extended and clarified here in the form of 'gender connoted overwrites gender denoted', or simply 'overwriting gender', should therefore underpin criminological analyses of filmic depictions of female on male sexual/ized violence, rather than the present focus on corporeal gender. It should also be noted that understanding and analysing filmic depictions in this way enables one to reconcile male sexual victimity to a feminist framing, and recognise governmentalised recursion at work in the recuperation of patriarchy through supposed pro-feminist intent. Rather than being critical of feminism then, this indicates a critical role *for* feminism – after all, this conceptualisation does not scapegoat feminism, but speaks to the importance of feminist interventions in disrupting present circulations of power.

Gendered discourses do not just denote, they connote - they draw from one another and write back to each other to achieve mutual legitimacy. Whilst ostensibly constituting separate and distinct (gendered) repertoires, these forms actually constitute a single archive through which rape – its victims and its assailants - is 'known' (XXXX, 2014). Audiences might be presented with female on male, but they 'receive' male on female. In examination of the violated male body, and the female sexual assailant, there is not just the literal depiction to examine, there are in actuality two layers that deserve attention: gendered corporeal form, and gendered behaviour. Thus there are two registers for meaning-making, with audiences moving between the two according to whichever does the most 'work' in terms of providing the most convenient narrative, script or schema to facilitate understanding. The task of this methodological approach is to excavate the layers, to expose both registers to scrutiny.

The body, understood as a culturally mediated text, can be coded and decoded through gendered/gendering behaviours; it should be analysed likewise with sensitivity to signs and signifiers, not a blindness to them. What you see is what you get – but you ‘see’ far more than you think you do, and far more than literal, scenographic focuses on corporeal gender allow for. This will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow, but for now, it must be asserted that ultimately there is no genuine inversion - casting ‘women’ as eternal victims, and outside of the role of assailant; and ‘men’ as eternal assailants, and outside of the role of victim, leaves the normative gender binary intact. Asymmetric patriarchal power-relations are preserved and perpetuated in the very moment they appear to be undone, and as such, these are far from pro-feminist in their effects. Corporeal gender in this instance isn’t so much a distraction as it is a decoy – a Trojan horse. Beware of Greeks bearing gifts? No. Beware of film and television producers supposedly ‘turning the tables’.

### **Analysing Mediated F/M Rape? Raid the lost arc**

XXXX (2014) discusses the misperceived ‘need’ in popular consciousness to make the male – supposedly invulnerable to rape - understood and accepted as vulnerable: machinations to rationalise what I have come to refer to as the in/vulnerability paradox. This is frequently achieved by making his moral self culpable - rendering the male first and foremost as deserving of victimhood, and subsequently undeserving of victim status; whilst physically marking him as different to other men, most frequently through feminisation. In filmic depictions, it is important to note that this is serviced over the course of characterisation in pre-rape, rape, and post-rape scenarios. Where one fails to read a scene in its full context,

one might minimise or efface male sexual victimization altogether, and indeed, many have.<sup>21</sup>  
In analysing sexual raids against the male body, the arc is everything.

Alongside the imperative to situate violation of the male within its narrative arc, critical discourse analysis is particularly valuable in revealing meaning-making that goes beyond gender-denoted to elicit gender-connoted. Cardwell (2005) suggests ways in which the methodology of close textual analysis or ‘close readings’ can enhance the interpretation of visual mediated forms to produce rich and detailed examinations. Excavating the layers, involves watching as a naive viewer, watching with the sound on, the sound off; listening with the picture on, the picture off; using freeze-frame, an attention to the actors, the script, the cinematography, editing decisions, lighting, diegetic sound, sound effects, music etc. It includes transcribing the scenes, including dialogue and action, and – of course – repeating this process whilst undertaking to consciously swap the gender of the characters. This is an invested task that entails a significant commitment of time. The aim is not just to expose meaning-making within the ‘reel’ world, but also to expose one’s own framing at work and facilitate identification of where these have (unwarranted) gendered specificity.

Not only does this involve identifying relevant instances of rape and sexual/ised violence against the male, it also necessitates situating these in context in order to take into account character development and narrative arc. One must recognise that mise en scene (the techniques used in staging and use of visual elements such as colours, use of space, production design, cinematography and costume) is also an important contribution to the

---

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Gavey’s (2005) erasure of male sexual victimization in her analysis of ‘White Palace’. For a detailed critique of this, see XXXX(2014)

narrative, not least because these aspects draw on and/or subvert stereotypes, conventions and typifications - importing meaning for the viewer - and can be missed in a purely 'textual' analysis or in a 'literalised' one. Unfortunately these approaches dominate present criminological engagement.<sup>22</sup>

### **Overwriting the Corporeal and the Importance of the Arc: Sister Mary Eunice Rapes the Monsignor**

Rather than 'Turning the tables' (Gavey, *ibid*) then, the superficial 'role-reversal' inherent in F/M, is in actuality a discursive Trojan horse, which pivots on overwriting gender by transcribing gendered cultural, characterological, and behavioural norms onto the body, in order to preserve patriarchal gender-norms and perpetuate rape myths – thus recuperating patriarchy. This mechanism and the vehicle by which it is both enacted and concealed, the arc, will be examined in relation to the popular US television series *American Horror Story* (2011-present).

*American Horror Story* is an anthology horror series that has worldwide distribution across cable and terrestrial television channels. It is critically acclaimed, winning numerous prestigious industry and public awards – including accolades within the high profile Golden Globes and Emmys. It also comprises a proliferation of male sexual victimisation and female sexual assailants over the course of its run thus far. To date, I have examined over 40 hours of footage from this series, generating a wealth of relevant material in regards to instances of sexual victimization of the male, and their female sexual assailants. Not just isolated

---

<sup>22</sup> Discussed below in the section entitled 'disciplinary scape'

incidents, not just contained to a single episode, not even just restricted to a single season. For this series, sexual violence entailing male victims and female assailants is commonplace enough to be regarded as a narrative motif, and whilst there is now a small but growing number of academics delving into this television series,<sup>23</sup> the academy thus far prefers to situate this show as decidedly transgressive - providing sympathetic analyses from stances such as queer theory, critical race theory and feminism - a notion this piece steadfastly rejects.

For the purpose of this article, findings relating to a single scenario (wherein Sister Mary Eunice rapes the Monsignor)<sup>24</sup> and its reception in the public realm will be discussed. Critical discourse analysis across the full season in question, identified the framing at work in regards to instances of sexual victimization of a particular male (the priest, the Monsignor), and his sexual assailant (the young nun, Sister Mary Eunice). This entailed transcription and analysis of circa 10 hours of footage – an invested task that generated a wealth of relevant material.

The season in question is named for its primary setting: “Asylum”, of which there are two meanings: psychiatric hospital & sanctuary. The latter is particularly significant in its omission - all core characters in this season are in this Catholic Church run mental institution, Briarcliffe, in search of forgiveness and absolution, but instead of an inviolable place of safety and refuge, they find persecution and exploitation. Enduring Briarcliff can be read as an act of contrition, or perhaps as a manifestation of purgatory, with death granting salvation. Both the inmates and staff are tormented - in all senses of that word.

---

<sup>23</sup> See King (2017); Sevenich (2015) Le Blanc (2016), and Janicker’s (2017) edited collection, amongst others

<sup>24</sup> Season 2, episode 10: The Name Game

This setting provides a fulcrum for two popular horror genres and their related tropes and archetypes: the mad house and religious horror. In establishing these from the outset, the audience is primed to frame their understanding accordingly – and indeed, for the most part such expectations are satisfied, although not always in the way that might be predicted. This is a series whose hallmark is to simultaneously homage classic horror film tropes and to destabilise them, presenting a pop-culture bricolage replete with stereotypes, parody and pastiche - lovingly assembled, then frequently torn down. Complexity, irony and subversion are used to discomfort and distance the viewer, preventing them from easily drawing on narrative conventions and logics - heroes might turn out to be monsters and monsters might turn out to be heroes. This is a style that is self-aware and self-referential, it plays with tropes and with the audience. We should predict only the unpredictable. In style, form and content, this is a postmodern piece, and as such text and subtext, linguistic and non-linguistic communication, are all equally important.

The main storyline is set in 1964, with flashbacks to the 1930s and flash-forwards to 2012. For the viewer, the horror is both literal in terms of physical assaults against the person, but it is also figurative, in terms of what might be regarded as attacks on personhood - with various modalities of difference constituting threats to the status-quo, and particularly the dominance of the church, discriminatorily targeted for castigation and intervention, for example homosexuality, inter-racial marriage and female sexual autonomy. This season situates these challenges to the church's relevance into a storyline that at one and the same time legitimises religious dogma (such that the Devil possesses a key character to take centre-stage in various narratives) whilst delegitimizing the religious institution itself as petty, corrupt and self-

serving, and challenging the notion of God full stop vis a vis conspicuous miracles wrought from an intermittent extra terrestrial presence (an alien abduction storyline dismissively termed ‘little green men’ by one of the key characters). This series is a jarring mix of horror, science fiction, history and social commentary, with a multitude of interweaving storylines and principle characters. The chaotic activity and frenetic pace make this a demanding piece to examine. But that really is the point. At its heart, this is a show that seeks both to challenge the viewer; and to wrong-foot the viewer. The rape is a scene that has attracted popular support online from a variety of sources, and as F/M, it has been widely articulated<sup>25</sup> as pro-feminist – an interpretation that stumbles under close examination. There is frequently significant dissonance between what the audience anticipates versus what actually plays out on screen, and yet the audience still utilises conventional tropes in order to make sense of the story, and of the violence.

### **Gendered Tropes and Gendered ‘Truths’**

Whilst the rape itself involves only the Monsignor and Sister Mary Eunice, preceding this, there has been some time invested in setting up two separate but interlocking ‘love’ triangles and related storylines that intersect in this scene. The first is between these two characters and a third: Sister Jude; the second is between Sister Mary Eunice, the Monsignor and Dr Arden. The common axis is Sister Mary Eunice. It is her positioning in relation to other characters that represents several corresponding archetypes and narratives that are ultimately subverted.

---

<sup>25</sup> Examples are elaborated in the section that follows entitled ‘audience reception’.

Sister Mary Eunice<sup>26</sup> is a young woman who is explicitly encoded as innocent and childlike in her appearance, behaviour, and her relationships with senior figures. She is the epitome of femininity and vulnerability. In her initial presentation, she appears to be a daughter-figure for Sister Jude<sup>27</sup>, the Monsignor<sup>28</sup> and even Dr Arden. She is subtly configured as the exploited child to Jude's wicked step-mother, the neglected child to Monsignor's absent father, and the attractive little girl to the Doctor's predatory step-father. Indeed, this last demarcation is emphasised when she is encoded as little red riding hood to Dr Arden's big bad wolf (skipping through the monster-infested woods, complete with cloak and wicker basket), then as Eve to Dr Arden as the Serpent (shyly accepting a bite of the proffered shiny red apple). The audience is primed to expect SME's victimization at the hands of three characters, an expectation that is never satisfied. When SME is possessed by the Devil, her role becomes perverted. In that dual capacity (possessed 'child'), she can be read as encapsulating the trope of the *Enfant Terrible* – the one trope that is otherwise conspicuous by its absence.

At the point of the rape, both the audience and the priest know that SME is the devil incarnate, and have witnessed her relish of sadism and her capacity for cruelty. This includes, but is not limited to: facilitating assault, wrongful imprisonment and torture; aiding abduction and rape; and committing murder in order to frame a competitor. She allies herself with Nazis, rapists and murderers, and is made grotesque when even they are repulsed by echoes of Nazi death camps in her use of personal effects from the patients to decorate the Christmas tree. The audience knows her to be callous and dangerous. By the

---

<sup>26</sup> Hereafter, SME

<sup>27</sup> Hereafter, Jude

<sup>28</sup> Hereafter, Monsignor

commencement of the rape scene, the kindness and compassion she performs cannot be regarded as authentic. It may be consistent with her superficial depiction as a nun, but it is just as much a costume as the nun's habit she sports, and is equally disposable.

Portending the rape, SME has already been overtly masculinised in behavioural and rhetorical tropes - she has engaged in overtly sexualised behaviour and sexualised aggression, including dancing provocatively in a red negligee stolen from Sister Jude, singing the lyrics from the song 'you don't own me' to her wall-mounted crucifix - taunting the impotence of God in His house - a scene that serves to move the narrative forwards and is regarded as exemplifying this character's pro-feminist agency. But SME's sexuality is decidedly sexual violence, and as such, it marks her as dangerous, not commendable. Successive scenes show her take pleasure in death and destruction – such as delighting in Dr Arden executing his experiments/patients. Indeed, the scene that leads into the rape is one of profound arousal for SME as it not only involves the infliction of pain and degradation, but it is targeted on Jude, the matriarchal figure regarded as competition in SME's 'Oedipal' quest for Monsignor. A quest that is satisfied in the sexual conquest of the 'mother' figure (Monsignor) and physical defeat of the father figure (Jude). Whilst Jude screams and writhes in agony, SME is clearly titillated. Her clearly drawn capacity for sadism and its fetishisation, functions not just as a terrible foreboding for the audience, it *should* function to frame their understanding.

### **Gendered Rape Myths**

In the analysis of F/M rape, one must attend to how the victim is constructed as vulnerable and violable. This is achieved on the one hand by feminising the character in a variety of

ways, but it is also done by tapping into various rape myths (both male-specific and female-specific) that designate him as deserving of rape and undeserving of victim status.

Determinedly cast outside of the ideal victim construct, there is no sympathy for the male rape victim. Thus, for Monsignor, the story arc as a whole exemplifies endorsement of victim precipitation and the just world fallacy. The intricacies of the troubling ‘asking for it’ rationale for the feminised Monsignor must be carefully unpicked.

Monsignor, as head of the diocese, is Jude’s boss and her spiritual leader. He aims to become New York's Archbishop, and ultimately, Pope. In order to do those things he needs to raise the profile of Briarcliffe. This scheme pivots on allowing Dr Arden (the resident ‘mad scientist’ and former Nazi) free reign, and involves him covering up various atrocities, including murdering a vulnerable woman, in order to facilitate ‘progress’. His unbridled ambition, his master sin, portends his downfall. In his rapid fall from grace, his final descent is to become the target of ‘Oedipal’ desire, with the rape casting him as a fallen ‘woman’; in his solution to his predicament, there is the rape of Lucrece. It can be no accident that Monsignor is first characterised by demonstrating the cardinal sin of greed and pride. His eternal soul is already assailed, the rape merely mirrors this in assailing his mortal form.

As sex without consent, there can be no doubt that what Monsignor experienced was rape. An examination of this narrative arc in full, drawing out pre-rape and post-rape scenes, as well as that concerning the rape itself, one notes what otherwise would be missed: that pre-rape scenes establish his physical and moral weakness, and prior victimization, whilst in post-rape, various tropes are used to emphasise and clarify the rape, including visible displays of trauma, a confessional scene, another encounter with his attacker during which he displays

absolute fear, his articulation of the rhetorical rape trope ‘don’t touch me’, and ultimately the satisfaction of a rape-revenge arc in his killing of SME. In the scene itself, aside from his recurrent articulation of non-consent, his physical incapacitation is also referenced by the character and emphasised by full camera framing. Visual tropes signifying rape are used, such as claustrophobic extreme close-ups that invade personal space to an uncomfortable degree, in order to emphasise violation. The male is also explicitly feminised in a multiplicity of ways in order to configure him as violable, and, using Clover’s (1987) core precepts in regards to this corporeal male, it can also be argued that he is overwritten as ‘female’ by displaying abject terror throughout, and ultimately by necessitating rescue by a (hegemonic) male, Dr Arden. In addition, various rape myths are referenced in order to clarify the acts as rape whilst at the same time diminishing it in seriousness by rendering the victim culpable. This includes problematic facets such as physical weakness or innate vulnerability being a necessary precondition for rape, that victims can precipitate rape and thus be negligent, that physical arousal can negate articulated non-consent etc. Myths and logics that – without fail - conspire to responsabilise the victim. In this sense, the rape of Monsignor is assuredly revalidating non-feminist knowledges around rape – problematic in itself, but especially when tethered to a feminised victim.

### **Close reading: Excavating Inversion as Reversion**

The rape scene itself opens on what appears to be a disarmingly tender and intimate moment between the Sister and the Priest, both in full religious garb. She is gently changing his bandages, and exclaims when she thinks she may have hurt him. She is kneeling at his feet. Although just a few seconds of footage, this short piece draws on the tropes of Mother Theresa and Florence Nightingale, and in so doing, furnishes audience understanding and expectation in regards to establishing the female as a holy woman of virtue (which at one and

the same time is regarded as inviolate but violable), whilst signalling a story arc in regards to romance ensuing subsequent to the injured male being nursed back to health (the emasculated male remasculinised, claims his prize). Analyses that begin from this point might be misled. This scene is a deliberate and jarring break from the established arc within the series relating to these two characters, and needs to be read as such.

When SME touches Monsignor - albeit ever so gently, almost reverentially - the priest visibly displays discomfort and fear. He knows what she is, and we know that he knows. The intimacy from SME is decidedly unwelcome, and must be understood instead as invasive, proprietorial behaviour. Rather than signalling a romance arc then, this should be interpreted as portending sexual violence. Knowing her target's weakness, SME appeals to the priest's vanity by suggesting he will be canonized. When he moves to place his rosary on her forehead in an attempt to cast the devil out, it makes no impact. The camera dwells on her nonplussed response. In this ineffectual display of intent, he is impotent and exposed. His vulnerability is clear.

The only consequence is for SME to drop her pretence - becoming overtly masculinised in her behaviour: she becomes brash and cocky; her speech suddenly colloquial, irreverent, and scornful; and her voice, much deeper and hoarser. Her power over him is demonstrated in a single gesture which propels him with force on to his bed, prostrate, underwear exposed - defeated and humiliated, his positioning echoing SME's conquest of Sister Jude in the previous scene. He is terrified. She swaggers around to the foot of the bed and mocks him by reciting a dirty limerick, the coarse language clarifying for the priest and the audience that this is the Devil; the explicit sexualisation signifies hyper-masculinity and further humiliates and degrades the priest. It is also portentous.

Her subjugation of Monsignor is complete when, having tried to get up to challenge her, she escalates the violence against him. He is thrown once more, with significantly more force, and this time she also incapacitates him – his arms outstretched. This parodies Christ on the cross and recalls earlier victimization experienced by the priest, clarifying her role in it.

Crucifixion imagery is revisited once more, at her death, the culmination of the subsequent rape-revenge arc.

Monsignor is pinned. His powerlessness and terror writ large, as he impotently struggles at the restraint, fearfully glancing at each wrist in turn. His terror communicated in wide eyes, strained expression, and visible tremor. Her expression is imperious. She mounts the bed, immodestly raising her nun's habit to reveal her legs, complete with stockings and garter, an image draws on the popular trope: fetishization of the Sexy Nun - signalling the corruption of innocence. But in this instance, it is not her innocence that is at risk.

Reiterating the limerick, she raises Monsignor's robe to look at his groin, then begins groping him with aggression and malice. He is horrified. He redoubles his effort to struggle against her restraint. The audience can now be in no doubt as to what is intended, nor who has control. The priest explicitly articulates non-consent "stop it, please", turning his head away in shame. She continues to grope and, implying that the priest has become physically aroused, replies "No. Your body disagrees with you". She rationalises her behaviour for the audience by drawing on the general myths of veracity in physicality (that a body can betray desire) and of the insightful rapist (who knows your will better than you do); and the specific male rape myth of erection as consent. She begins to undress. His lack of consent is irrelevant for her.

Monsignor goes on to emphasise non-consent repeatedly and in various ways. He reminds her of his vow, but she dismisses this rationale for cessation by drawing on another rape myth (no means yes) “you don’t say that with much conviction”. He pleads with her “please. Please don’t do this to me”, and is enfeebled: plaintive, meek and weak. She places his hand on her breast; he fights this and she has to use force so that it trembles as he struggles. There is no agency for this male – this is something done to him.

It’s revealed he’s a virgin. He implores her again, again she dismisses this. His hands are pinned once more, and she appears to give him respite from her advance - caressing his face. He lies flat, panting, exhausted. It appears that the threat is over. She, gently, soothingly, using a much higher vocal register to implore “oh come on father”, and goes on to ask “don’t you want to feel what it’s like?” dropping her tone dramatically to become much lower, harsh and rasping “at least once, before you die”; and along with the implied threat of harm, there’s a renewed conviction in the timbre of her voice which emphasises the power differential here. This is coercion.

In penetration of SME, Monsignor has no control. She reaches down, out of the view of the camera - her movements and his horrified reaction suggest penetration is achieved. The assault is confirmed by his sudden gasp, eyes wide with fear and shock. She delivers her final taunt in a mocking line that has been much lauded in popular reception: “Does it feel like a warm, wet hug?” He turns his head away from her and the camera, indicating his shame and defeat, whilst she moves with more aggression.

What happens next has been regarded by commentators as pointing to a transformation of the priest from supposedly tenuous victim to willing participant, an interpretation that only holds in as much as one can draw on and legitimise the rape myth that ‘no can become yes’.

Monsignor closes his eyes and exclaims “God, no. You have...to... stop!” with his last word becoming a moan. She responds “Are you sure?” When she does stop, he exclaims “No!”

But this shouldn’t be regarded as late consent, besides the problems inherent in legitimising that rationale, as context clarifies, the ‘no’ refers to the priest’s anticipation of imminent ejaculation - which he does not wish to do, because this would be regarded as full consummation, and would thus irrevocably defile him. This is confirmed when she states “no, no...don’t do it yet”. This scene ends through interruption by Dr Arden who ‘rescues’ Monsignor by his very presence, and in doing so, emphasises the victim’s feminisation.<sup>29</sup>

Up to this point, the music has been fraught and tense, suspenseful and melodramatic, conveying horror. It stops suddenly and is replaced momentarily with silence, whilst Monsignor covers his face in mortification. When it recommences, it is to an incongruous, light, playful and comedic tune, underscoring the ridiculousness of the guileful SME’s mask of childhood purity being reinvoked for the sake of Dr Arden. A façade she attempts to ‘sell’ – all wide-eyed innocence - whilst still mounting her victim. This tune carries over into the next scene, a discordant interlude that contains the infamous namesake of this episode, the musical number: ‘the name game’ – a hallucination of another key character that serves both to underscore and dissipate the tension in the rape scene, and reiterate for the audience that the Devil is cruelly creative in her tailored design of hell on earth for all her victims.

---

<sup>29</sup> A’la Clover (1987), only ‘males’ rescue themselves. This small detail then is pivotal in encoding gender for the Monsignor, as to rescue is to masculinise; to be rescued is to feminise.

## **Audience Reception: Corporeal decoys, deflection and distraction**

I engaged with a variety of audience texts,<sup>30</sup> including blogs and discussion boards, in order to ascertain reception of this material. Television should not be studied in isolation, the intertextual nexus implicates viewers both as consumers & producers of their own texts (Boyle, 2005: 192). This aspect is important because it enables one to identify audience framing and meaning-making that can be understood, in a Foucauldian sense, as indicative of individuation; which, through the mechanism of the action of the ‘self-on-the-self’, is intimately related to reification and governmentality.

Audience reception of the rape scene by feminist commentators is predominantly positive, but this is a misread, as, in keeping with the tone and genre of the show, the scene *should* be regarded as subversive – not just superficially, in regards to its inversion of the traditional rape model, but fundamentally in terms of audience master constructs. So, by the climax of the rape scene, the two intersecting ‘love’ triangles have been duly destroyed and the predicted arcs have been derailed. Whilst feminist audiences might regard the literal subjugation of the male as indicative of female empowerment, marking this as a transgressive text, fans of the show and indeed of the genre should be well aware that this is far too simplistic. At the very least, the use of rape as a plot point, the demonization of the female lead, the use of various rape myths as explanatory and narrative devices, should give one pause. But does it?

Not at all. Instead, what can readily be found is that the female audience in particular seem to appreciate, genuinely enjoy and derive pleasure from these scenes – this has troubling

---

<sup>30</sup> ‘Audience’ here is used to mean precisely that. My concern is to ascertain populist reception, not that of the ‘experts’. As such, this constituent part of the triangulation does not broaden its concern to the academy.

resonance to previous findings relating to a predominantly male audience's reception of classic M/F rapes (see Ebert, 1981). Indeed, amongst this audience, female on male rape is loudly celebrated, and proclaimed as pro-woman, pro-feminism, thus, in an online article that specifically espouses and advocates a feminist ethic to the series, Lepekas (2014) enthuses that 'the show also...introduces the rare female on male rape scene. *A game-changer for sure*' (italics added).

Explanations by online commentators posited to justify positive interpretations of these scenes are fascinating. Lapekas (2014) asserts that this series is a feminist work, simply because 'the rapists we meet on American Horror Story inevitably pay for what they've done' (Lapekas, 2014); Nair (2014) stresses that AHS has 'a pro-woman intention...[which] both supports and subverts misogyny and is...empowering'; whilst Herman (2013) regards it as nothing less than 'a takedown of the patriarchal male', and goes on to celebrate it as having 'girl-power' (ibid). Peterson (2013) is rather more circumspect, but still commends it for 'tread[ing] the knife-edge between feminism and misogyny'. The (populist) feminist response can be said to be wholly positive in appreciating this work as pro-feminist (see Davis, 2013; Emmanuelle, 2013).

Where the audience is split, is between recognising rape of the male versus denying 'rape' of the male – a distinction that is less frequently articulated in reference to legislation, and rather more in subscription to various rape myths, rationales that are given credence only because they are tethered in this instance to a corporeal male victim. A surprising number of analyses also rest their feminist interpretation almost solely on the Bechdel Test -<sup>31</sup> so, because AHS

---

<sup>31</sup> A threshold test in feminist media analysis, named after its author Alison Bechdel (see Davis, Dickinson, Patti and Villarejo, 2015)

has numerous female characters, because they talk to one another, and they talk about subjects other than men, for these reasons, this work is feminist? That really is a minimum standard. Worryingly, the very fact that female on male rape is depicted, is commonly regarded as de-facto feminist<sup>32</sup>.

But such depictions are not about equality, they're not even about equivalency, they are most definitely not about resistance; and they are most assuredly not what they seem to be. Such analyses invariably orient their gaze to corporeal gender only. They overlook the fact that this has invariably been overwritten by behavioural, characterological and rhetorical cues that signify gender (XXXX, 2014). At one and the same time presenting a feminised male victim, a masculinised female assailant, and a narrative that legitimises rape myths. I argue that orthodox rape myths are preserved and perpetuated *because* of the superficial inversion of the usual gendered binary; that the supposed corporeal transference is a misdirection, a falsehood, which the gender-signifiers betray.

Analyses sensitised to gender as connoted and signified cannot support the notion that these depictions are disruptive. Indeed, quite the opposite. Unfortunately, the pro-feminist interpretation is a leveller – across a variety of modalities that I examined, and discuss in the sections that follow, from the throwaway comments on twitter, to the fan-forums, the blogger sphere, news outlets and associated academic publications - the consensus was distracted by corporeal gender.

Interestingly, and of relevance here, the victim's point of view is used only twice, each before the rape: in the opening of the scene - when the nun tends his wound, and after he is first

---

<sup>32</sup> See examples in section entitled 'audience reception'

thrown; the rapist's point of view is used only once, also pre-rape, when the priest is first incapacitated. During the assault, the viewer is left as voyeur – this is a significant breach of film etiquette for rape scenes, and is likely linked to positive reception. It raises significant questions as to how the viewer is positioned. Instead of arousing empathy, this technique puts the viewer in a morally culpable position in emphasising their gaze. If the film makers have 'failed' to frame the scene as rape, the audience is left only to draw on their own prejudices and conventions. Given the wider Criminal Justice context, in which male victims of rape and female sexual offenders are marginalised and demoted in seriousness and priority,<sup>33</sup> perhaps it's not surprising that this scene is configured as positive in popular imagination. Not surprising, but all too damning.

Addressing the issue of whether F/M *can* or *should* be interpreted as 'resistance' is beyond the scope of this paper, instead, attention will now turn to the relevant discursive context. In order to close the circle on this brief 'history of the present', and provide a final vector for triangulation, an exploration is undertaken regarding how neglect of the male has arisen, and how the allied vortex of governmentalised recursion has gone unnoticed. The general terrain of the disciplinary scape, its territories and boundaries, will be scored; and critique of the methodological conditions that produce neglect of the male and blindness to recursion will be outlined.

### **Disciplinary Scape: cultural turn meets corporeal turn**

In line with a 'history of the present' is a necessity to raise the question - so this is where we are, but how did we get here? One could at this point draw on a range of institutional

---

<sup>33</sup> See Fischer and Pina's (2013) literature review in this area; note also Weare (2017)

knowledges and practices, including legal constructs, the criminal justice system, and the third sector, amongst others; but my concern is to shift the focus sharply on to our own academic discipline, and the two traditions that should be concerned with this problematique: Cultural Criminology and Feminist Criminology. An examination of our institutional frameworks and practices reveals several significant and productive ‘constraints’<sup>34</sup> in this regard. Presently, cultural criminologists prefer scenographic analysis, necessitating that only the specific relevant scene is analysed (epitomised in Young, 2010). But this is woefully inadequate in regards to on-screen sexual violence targeting the male - because it isolates instances of rape and other aggressions, and succeeds in artificially dislocating them. As illustrated in the preceding example, for F/M, scenographic analysis is simplistic & blinkered - the arc is everything. Unfortunately, feminist criminological analyses do not presently redress this limitation, indeed, they compound it by focusing solely on ‘the body’, and regarding this as innately gendered. For both, their analyses are oriented to and circumscribed by a focus on violence as literalised.

When I first sought to understand this set of circumstances, namely why media depictions of male rape by female assailants are commonly celebrated in popular culture and neglected in academia, I found the question especially perplexing considering that the context for this blind-spot involves those who champion the significance of mediated forms and complexity (cultural criminologists) and those who champion rape victims and gender-inclusive justice (feminist criminologists). This is where one could simply point ones’ finger and rail against the injustice, but I do not believe this to be a worthwhile agenda – not least because it would grossly misrepresent the priorities, prescriptions and proscriptions within the respective

---

<sup>34</sup> A’la Foucault (1980)

intellectual disciplines, and risk presenting the confluence of circumstance as intent, or worse, as conspiracy. It's neither that simple, nor that convenient. A genealogy<sup>35</sup> in regards to media analyses at the interface of cultural criminology and feminist criminology enables one to attribute the neglect of F/M on screen to a clash of two prevailing orthodoxies within the respective intellectual traditions: the cultural turn & the corporeal turn.

The 'cultural turn' in criminology (Carrabine, 2009: 486) pivots on complexity – not least in the recognition of an array of mediated forms, functions, effects and methodologies. What was once limited solely to news media (Jewkes, 2004), has now been broadened to embrace all 'visual art' (Carrabine, 2009), with film and television an important focus in the relatively new fields of cultural, popular and visual criminology (Hayward and Presdee 2010; Rafter and Brown 2011). Such depictions are recognised as important sites for cultural production (Ferrell, Hayward and Young, 2008) and for reproduction, within a crime/media/culture nexus (Ferrell, Greer, Jewkes, 2005). These representations are understood to affect the audience as spectator (Brown, 2009), constructing 'templates of victim, offender and circumstances' (Linnemann, 2015: 530), as well as 'constitution of victim, offender and other' (Linnemann, Hanson and Williams, 2013: 605) which 'haunt the social imaginary' (Fiddler 2013).

This no longer reflects a preoccupation with the discredited 'hypodermic' model of cultural transmission (Jewkes, 2004), instead there is now an appreciation of complexity in social constructions and the co-constitution of reality, best summed up in Ferrell's (1999: 397) description of 'a walk down an infinite hall of mirrors'. A complexity that can be seen to be reflected in recent moves away from distinctions between old media forms and the so-called

---

<sup>35</sup> Albeit rather concise, due to the constraints of this paper

‘new’ media, as well as works which appreciate the audience as both consumer and producer of mediated texts (XXXX, 2014). As a whole this pivots on an understanding of the media as contributing to what Ferrell, Hayward & Young (2008) termed ‘cultural normalization’, which underlies the importance of the media within criminology (Hayward & Presdee, 2010), and underscores the significance of the media for Foucauldian analysis.

This cultural turn in criminology has been influential and fruitful, however, its reach has not extended to analyses of mediated depictions of rape and sexual(ised) violence, where criminological analyses can instead be noted to prefer what Witz (2006) termed the ‘corporeal turn’ in feminist theory. Whilst it can be said that the (cultural) criminological gaze has diffracted in recognition of complexity; in stark contrast, the area of on-screen rape witnesses a laser-like focus on the body. For researchers engaging with this issue, the screening of the corporeal form is approached through a feminist understanding of ‘the body as a site of cultural representation and social power’ (Joy and Venkatesh, 1994), or rather, the innately gendered body as perpetuating patriarchal norms and values. For researchers engaging via this conceptual frame of reference, mediated texts demand attention for how they depict and reinforce normative gender roles (Evans, 2012), with an acceptance that these ‘taken-for-granted understandings of reality reinforce patriarchy’ (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010: 322).

Indeed, for feminist researchers, media texts have value in just one of two ways, as demarcated by Sellnow (2010: 98), either the examples might be of interest to feminism because they can be regarded as assuredly pro-feminist, being interpreted as ‘a site of struggle by challenging the dominant ideology about taken for granted beliefs or behaviours for men and women in society’, or they might be of interest to feminism because, in contrast,

they are obviously anti-feminist and thus ‘reinforce taken for granted beliefs and behaviours’ (ibid). Thus, whilst our epistemological approaches in the analysis of the media in the respective disciplines entail an appreciation of normalisation and complexification, in cultural criminology this finds expression in rape analysis as literalism & simplicity. Cultural criminology appears to have forgotten lessons from its cousins in media studies & literary analysis, and has cast aside lessons from Clover (1987). Besides auditory, visual and linguistic modalities, much is also conveyed through techniques of suggestion such as visual metaphor, auditory cues, juxtaposition and subtext – with so much quite literally unsaid, all may not be as it seems. Media depictions should not be taken at face value, as much that is communicated is not literal. The present misdirection is perhaps a legacy of ‘newsmaking as criminology’. Unfortunately, this is compounded by feminist media analyses within criminology that finds its expression bereft of Butler’s (1990) performativity, instead producing a simplistic pre-occupation with visual representations of ‘the body’, misunderstood as the innately gendered corporeal form. Intersectional feminist analysis has reinforced this focus on the literal corporeal form, but broadened the body as more than gender - be it also marked, for example, by race and sexuality.

These are the origins of our present myopia, but it doesn’t have to be this way. The corporeal turn can and should heed the cultural one, becoming reconciled in the criminological analyses of on-screen rape and sexual violence through the prism of gender-signified and connoted. Likewise, in this way, male sexual victimization and female sexual aggression can be held as of importance to feminism, and indeed must be – if one’s goal is to prevent recuperation of patriarchy.

At present, media depictions of male rape, particularly where the assailant is female, are neglected by the academy. One must wonder to what extent this omission is predicated on the one hand by a preference for scenographic analysis within criminology, which neglects the male's stealthy feminisation through the means of the arc; and on the other, the persistent literalisation of 'the body' which enables the populist feminist misinterpretation that depictions of male sexual victimisation, especially where at the hands of a female, constitute 'resistance' to patriarchal oppression and 'fingers up' to rape culture. Either way, this piece has illustrated that there are serious limitations in engagement with screened sexual violence, where subjectivities fall outside of the orthodox gendered rape binary of male offender/female victim, and has presented a way to compel taking these seriously.

## CONCLUSION

At best, taking F/M rape scenes at face value resurrects dangerous myths, scripts and schemas about rape victimity, tethered to the male victim. But, of course, it is rather more complex than that. There is a need to look beyond gender depicted, and attend to gender signified - stop being distracted by corporeal gender, else we overlook that despite, or perhaps even because of a superficial gender-role reversal, fundamental gender role norms, and indeed the traditional binary, are actually left intact. The inversion here masks reversion to the norm, and results not in transgression, disruption, or intervention, but recursion. To overlook this is to perpetuate a gross irony: that there is no resistance here, only recuperation; patriarchal rape culture is not weakened by these forms, it is these forms. Furthermore, the widespread lack of concern oriented to this blind-spot motivates the proliferation of such forms of our screens - rather than a burgeoning feminist ethic amongst media executives.

This discussion has demonstrated why the relevant criminological traditions should look a little closer at mediated depictions of F/M rape and sexualised violence, and in so doing, has taken the significance of this beyond equivalency arguments, and beyond notions of fairness or justice. Instead, these forms have been explicated as themselves of import to cultural criminology and feminist criminology – not least in defying simplistic, superficial, linear analysis, and in operating in discursive space as anti-feminism.

In closing, let us consider that Alfred Hitchcock (cited in Clover, 1987), in reflecting on the key to an effective horror film, and the contemporary constraints in his enacting this strategy, insisted “Torture the women!” The trouble today is that we do not torture the women enough’. Quite. Except that if we ‘see’ F/M but ‘receive’ M/F, then in actuality, we are still torturing the ‘women’, with renewed vigour, and with the express support of an abundance of pro-feminist commentators. Celebrating female on male rape as resistance? We really are all screwed now.

## REFERENCES

*American Horror Story* (2013) [TV], Season 2: Asylum, Episode 10: 'the name game', Dir.

Michael Lehman, FX, original air date 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2013, US

*Ash versus the Evil Dead* (2015-2018) [TV], Dir. Various, Starz, US.

**Boyle, K** (2005) *Media and Violence*, London: Sage

**Britney Spears** (2003) *Toxic* [video], Dir. Joseph Khan

**Brown, M.** (2009), *The Culture of Punishment: Prison, Society, and Spectacle*. New York: NYU Press.

**Brownmiller, S** (1975) *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Penguin: London

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1999) [TV] Season 3, episode 15 'Consequences', Dir. Michael Gershman, WB, original air date 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1999, US.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2000) [TV] Season 4, episode 15 'This Year's Girl', Dir. Michael Gershman, WB, original air date 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2000, US.

**Butler, J** (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, New York: Routledge

**Cardwell, S** (2005) 'Television Aesthetics and Close Analysis: style, mood and engagement in "perfect strangers" (Stephan Poliakoff, 2001)' in Gibbs, J and Pye, D (2005) *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, Manchester: Manchester University Press

**Carrabine, E.** (2012) 'Just Images: aesthetics, ethics and visual criminology' *British Journal of Criminology*, 52 (3): 463-489.

**Chancer, L** (1992) *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: the dynamics of power and powerlessness*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press

**Clover, C** (1987) 'Her Body, Himself: gender in the slasher film' *Representations*, 20: 187-228

**Davis, G; Dickinson, K; Patti, L and Villarejo, A** (2015) *Film Studies: A Global Introduction*, Abingdon: Routledge

**Davis, M** (2013) 'American Horror Story Treats Women Like Shit, So Why Do I Love It?', in *Jezebel*, [online] <http://jezebel.com/5978013/american-horror-story-treats-women-like-shit-so-why-do-i-love-it> (accessed 02/05/16)

*Desperate Housewives* (2009) [TV] Season 3, episode 13, 'Come Play With Me', Dir. Larry Shaw, ABC, original air date 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2007, US.

*Desperate Housewives* (2009) [TV] Season 3, episode 14, 'I Remember That', Dir. David Warren, ABC, original air date, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2007, US.

*Dollhouse* (2009-2010) [TV], Dir. Various, FOX, US.

**Dreyfus, HL & Rabinow, P** (1982) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

**Emmanuelle (2013)** 'An American horror: a feminist look inside the asylum' in *Erma's World* [online] <https://astutolopez.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/an-american-horror-a-feminist-look-inside-the-asylum/> (accessed 02/05/16)

**Evans, K** (2012) 'Media Representations of Male and Female Co-offending' In *The Internet Journal of Criminology*, [online] [http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/Evans\\_Media\\_Representations\\_of\\_Male\\_and\\_Female\\_Co-Offending\\_IJC\\_Dec\\_2012.pdf](http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/Evans_Media_Representations_of_Male_and_Female_Co-Offending_IJC_Dec_2012.pdf) (accessed 02,05,16)

**Ferrell, J. and Van de Voorde, C.** (2010), 'The Decisive Moment: Documentary Photography and Cultural Criminology', in K. Hayward and M. Presdee, eds, *Framing Crime: Cultural Criminology and the Image*. London: Routledge.

**Ferrell, J., Hayward, K. and Young, J.** (2008), *Cultural Criminology: An Invitation*.  
London: Sage.

**Fiddler, M.** (2013), 'Playing Funny Games in The Last House on the Left: The Uncanny and the 'Home Invasion' Genre', *Crime, Media, Culture*, 9, 281–99.

**Fischer, N and Pina, A** (2013) 'An Overview of the Literature on Female-Perpetrated Adult Male Sexual Victimization', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 18 (1). pp. 54-61

**Foucault, M.** (1980): 'Truth and Power'. In C. Gordon (ed.): *Power/knowledge. Selected Interviews & Other Writings by Michel Foucault, 1972-1977*, Brighton: Harvester, pp.109-133.

**Foucault, M.** (1998) *The History of Sexuality: the will to knowledge*, Penguin: London

**Foucault, M** (2001) in Faubion, J.D. (ed.) *Michel Foucault, Power: essential works of Foucault 1954 – 1984*, volume 3, Hurley, R (trans.) London: Penguin

**Gavey, N** (2005), *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*, London: Routledge

**Hayward, K., & Presdee, M.** (2010). *Framing crime: Cultural criminology and the image*.  
London: Routledge.

**Hardin, M., & Whiteside, E** (2010). Framing through a feminist lens: A tool in support of an active research agenda. In P. D'Angelo, & J. Kuypers (Eds.), *Doing framing analysis: Empirical and theoretical perspectives*. London: Taylor Francis. Harper, S. (2014).

**Herman, A** (2013) 'American Horror Story Finally Perfects its Twisted Brand of Feminism in "Coven"' in Flavorwire [online] <http://flavorwire.com/421468/american-horror-story-finally-perfects-its-twisted-brand-of-feminism-in-coven/> (accessed 03/09/15)

**Janicker, R** (Ed.) (2017) *Reading American Horror Story: Essays on the Television Franchise*, North Carolina: McFarland

**Katy Perry** (2010) *Last Friday Night* [video], Dir. Marc Klasfeld

**King, A** (2017) 'A Monstrous(ly) Feminine Whiteness: Gender, Genre and the Abject Horror of the Past in American Horror Story: Coven', *Women's Studies*, 46 (6): 557-573.

**Lady Gaga** (2008) *Papparazi* [video], Dir. Jonas Akerlund

**Lady Gaga featuring Beyonce** (2009) *Telephone* [video], Dir. Francis Lawrence

**Lapekas, J** (2014) 'Rape as Narrative Device in American Horror Story', in *Bitch Flicks* [online] <http://www.btchflicks.com/2014/07/rape-as-narrative-device-in-american-horror-story.html#.VehcU6RRHIU> (accessed 03/09/2015)

**Lazzarato, M. (2002)** 'From Biopower to Biopolitics' *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, 13:100-111.

**LeBlanc, A (2016)** 'There's Nothing I Hate More Than a Racist: (Re)Centering whiteness in American Horror Story: Coven', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 35(3): 273-285

**Linnemann, T, Hanson, L and Williams, L.S (2013)** 'With scenes of blood and pain': Crime control and the punitive imagination of The Meth Project', *British Journal of Criminology*, 53 (4): 605-623.

**Linnemann, T. (2015)** Capote's Ghosts: Violence, Media and the Spectre of Suspicion, *British Journal of Criminology*, 55 (3): 514-533.

*Lost Girl* (2010-2015) [TV] Dir. Various, Showcase, US.

**Mendieta, E (2002)** 'To Make Live and Let Die: Foucault on Racism', paper presented at the meeting of the Foucault Circle, APA Central Division Meeting – Chicago, 25 April [online] [online] <http://www.sunysb.edu/philosophy/faculty/emendieta/articles/foucault.pdf> (accessed 11/09/2013).

**Nair, G** (2014) 'Exploring Bodily Autonomy on American Horror Story: Coven' in *Bitch Flicks* [online] <http://www.bitchflicks.com/2014/01/exploring-bodily-autonomy-on-american-horror-story-coven.html#.VehdR6RRHIU> (accessed 03/09/2015)

**No Doubt** (2003) *It's my Life* [video], Dir. David La Chapelle

**Peterson, A.H** (2013) 'The Exquisite Repulsion of American Horror Story: an essay on abjection' in Los Angeles Review of Books [online] <http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/deartv/exquisite-repulsion-american-horror-story-essay-abjection/> (accessed 03/09/15)

**Pink** (2008) *Please Don't Leave Me* [video], Dir. Dave Meyers

**Projansky, S.** (2001) *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*, New York: New York University Press

**Rafter, N and Brown, M** (2011) *Criminology Goes to the Movies: crime theory and popular culture* New York: New York University Press

**Rhianna** (2015) *Bitch better have my money* [video], Dirs. Rhianna and Megaforce.

**Rumney, P** (2007) 'In Defence of Gender Neutrality Within Rape' *Seattle Journal of Social Justice*, 6: 481-526

**Rumney, P** (2008) 'Gender Neutrality: Rape and Trial Talk' *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*, 21(2): 139-155

**Rumney, P and Morgan-Taylor, M** (1997a) 'Recognising the Male Victim: Gender neutrality and the Law of rape part one' *Anglo American Law Review*, 26: 198-234

**Rumney, P and Morgan-Taylor, M** (1997b) 'Recognising the Male Victim: Gender neutrality and the Law of rape part two' *Anglo American Law Review*, 26: 330-336

*Scream Queens* (2015-2016) [TV], Dir. Various, FOX, US.

**Sellnow, D** (2010) *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture: Considering mediated texts*, London: Sage

**Sevenich, R** (2015) 'Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are: Queering American Horror Story', *Gender Forum* 54: 2-3.

*True Blood* (2011) [TV] season 4, episode 1, 'She's Not There', Dir. Michael Lehman, HBO, original air date 26<sup>th</sup> June 2011, US.

**Weare, S (2017)** ‘Forced to Penetrate Cases: lived experience of Men’, *Baseline Research Findings*, Lancaster University: Lancaster University Law School [online]  
<http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/forced-to-penetrate-cases/files/2018/07/Forced-to-Penetrate-Cases-Lived-Experiences-of-Men-Project-Report.pdf> [accessed 16/01/2019]

**XXXX (2014)**

**XXXX (2018)**

**XXXX (forthcoming)**

**Young, A (2010)** ‘The Scene of the Crime: Is there such a thing as ‘just looking’” in Haywood, K and Presdee, M (eds) *Framing Crime: Cultural Criminology and the Image*, Abingdon: Routledge

**Young, J (2002)** ‘Critical Criminology for the Twenty-First Century: critique, irony and always unfinished in Carrington, K and Hogg, R (eds) *Critical Criminology: issues, debates, challenges*, Cullompton: Willan