The Horror of Rape on Cable TV:
Exploring Rape Narratives in *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*

Alicia Cross

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By: Alicia Cross

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Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Fenwick McKelvey

_____ Examiner
Dr. Yasmin Jiwani

_____ Examiner
Dr. Carrie Rentschler

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Charles Acland

Approved by _____

Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____

Dean of Faculty

Date _____

Abstract

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This thesis explores the representation of rape in two successful cable horror programs, FX's *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011-) and AMC's *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-). I first offer a contextual analysis of the American television industry, focusing on the economic specificities of cable television and the brand identities of FX and AMC networks. I argue that the building of a quality brand within the contemporary television industry demands the valuation of controversial and edgy content, which includes sexual violence. Next, I engage in a textual analysis of *American Horror Story: Coven* and the fifth season of *The Walking Dead.* Drawing on narrative theory and film theory on horror, I look critically at the construction of the rape narratives, their visual representation, and their relationship to the conventions and expectations of the horror genre. Overall, this thesis considers how *AHS* and *TWD* relate to rape culture, both as products of a particular industrial context that values rape as controversial—yet desirable—content and as texts that depict rape. While both programs articulate feminist understandings of rape, they also include patriarchal and postfeminist discourses. Moreover, through different representational strategies, both programs represent rape as horror. *TWD* resists portraying literal rape and thus denies any pleasure in watching rape, whereas *AHS* incorporates rape into spectacles of violence. By aestheticizing and commodifying rape, *AHS* represents a tension between challenging rape culture and reaffirming it.

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Introduction:
Television, Rape, and Feminism in Popular Culture

HBO's hit drama television series *Game of Thrones* (2011-) is undeniably a popular culture sensation. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, it is a "critical darling and ratings phenomenon" ("Game of Thrones") and the most successful show in HBO's history (Svetky et al.). Based on a series of novels by George R. R. Martin, the program depicts an elaborate and complex fantasy world in which multiple characters from various bloodlines struggle to obtain power over Westeros and claim the Iron Throne. *Game of Thrones* has earned critical acclaim and multiple awards for its writing of intricate political stories, as well as for its acting, cinematography, and visual effects. Rife with graphic depictions of violence and sex, the show has certainly not been without controversy.

In April 2014, *Game of Thrones* aired an incestuous rape scene between siblings Jaime and Cersei Lannister that sparked controversy for fans, viewers, and television critics. Fans discussed the scene online, while critics interviewed actors, producers, and even the director of the episode about their perspectives on the scene. The outrage was ultimately not due to the incestuous nature of the rape, since Jaime and Cersei's relationship was already well established by this point. Rather, the criticism concerned the ambiguity of the scene—whether the narrative acknowledged it as rape—and the overall frequency of sexual violence on the show. As highlighted by Debra Ferreday in her article "Game of Thrones, Rape Culture and Feminist Fandom" (2015), there were many different responses to the scene; some defended it as indicative of the fantasy genre (30), while others engaged in feminist critique (23).

Certainly, the *Game of Thrones* episode generated a moment where sexual violence in the media was the topic of conversation at multiple levels, from fan and viewer reactions to industry articles exploring the production of the show. Alex Graves, the director of the episode in question, caused further indignation when in an interview he declared that the scene "becomes consensual by the end" (qtd. in Sepinwall). Moreover, in the wake of the criticism received by *Game of Thrones*, even Michael Lombardo, the president of programming at HBO, made a statement, remarking that while he feels a responsibility not to air "gratuitous" sex and violence, the network also "[does not] want to be a censor that inhibits the authentic organic creative process by policing how many breasts should be on a show" (qtd. in Sweney). Indeed, we live in

a society where television, especially through a premium cable service like HBO, offers not simply nudity, but explicit depictions of sex, violence, and sexual violence. While our media culture circulates images of rape—sometimes ones that are graphic and some that are exploitative—discussions and debates of these images are also becoming more visible. As media attention is devoted to highly publicized rape cases and high profile trials, such as the Steubenville case in the United States and the Ghomeshi trial in Canada, sexual violence is often at the center of public discourse.

Ferreday conceptualizes that contention over *Game of Thrones* reveals how "media has become a site of struggle over sexual violence, both in reproducing rape culture and in resisting it" (22). Rape culture is a feminist concept that, according to Anastasia Powell and Nicola Henry (2010), refers to "the social, cultural and structural discourses and practices in which sexual violence is tolerated, accepted, eroticised, minimised and trivialised" (2). In the contemporary moment, there is certainly debate over the idea of rape culture. While the term has gained attention particularly in the context of campus safety, many are still skeptical of its validity and usefulness in sexual violence prevention. Nevertheless, since popular media produce cultural discourses that may reinforce rape culture or challenge it, the question of how rape is treated in media representations, such as the ones on television, is vital to our contemporary moment.

As described by *New Yorker* television critic Emily Nussbaum (2015), sexual violence is being dramatized on contemporary American television in a range of genres, and not just on fantasy television programs like *Game of Thrones*. Sexual violence is represented in dramas like *Scandal* (ABC, 2012-) and in comedies like *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix, 2015-). Nussbaum proposes that many of these rape stories are "skillfully handled" and indicate that women's lives are being taken seriously on television in a way that they were not in the recent past (Nussbaum). While this may be true, as with *Game of Thrones*, some genre series are more prominently known for their violent sexuality and sexual violence. For example, FX's horror anthology drama *American Horror Story* (2011-) has a reputation for its controversial mixing of sex and violence, and some believe that it has redefined the possibilities of the horror genre on television (Neel 11-12). After watching the first season, Gary Hoppenstand (2012) wrote that in its graphic depictions of horror, sex, and violence, *AHS* "has totally obliterated previous censorship boundaries altogether" (1). The program's most recent season premiered in October 2015 with an episode that included a violent anal rape scene. An article for *Entertainment*

Weekly, written before the episode aired, quotes *AHS* creator Ryan Murphy labeling the rape "the most disturbing scene [*AHS* has] ever done" (qtd. in Stack, "Inside 'The Most Disturbing Scene' in *American Horror Story* History"). For some, the scene elicited the question of whether sexual violence was used merely for shock value.[1]

The issue of the representation of sexual violence in horror is hardly new. As Mark Jancovich (2002) details, the sexual politics of horror has been central to the genre's scholarship (15). Horror has often been deemed misogynist, particularly as the site of sexualized violence against women (57). Many of these claims have been complicated by the feminist psychoanalytic film theory that developed in the 1970s and 1980s, when scholars such as Linda Williams, Barbara Creed, and Carol Clover examined the relationship between gender, violence, and the spectator. Although this thesis works outside of their psychoanalytic framework—emerging, rather, from cultural studies—it is greatly indebted to this feminist history. Today, an interrogation of depiction of sexual violence in horror has become crucial, seeing as many suggest that horror is flourishing on contemporary American television. Programs such as *American Horror Story* and AMC's zombie series *The Walking Dead* (2010-) have enjoyed high ratings, economic success, and even critical praise. Both have been crucial for their respective networks' success. Moreover, in the 2015-2016 season, AMC aired a *TWD* spinoff called *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-), and Ryan Murphy created *Scream Queens* (Fox, 2015-), another horror show. Other programs such as the teen vampire drama *The Vampire Diaries* (The CW, 2009-), the Hitchcock inspired *Bates Motel* (A&E, 2013-), gothic horror drama *Penny Dreadful* (Showtime, 2014-), and the recently cancelled *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013-2015) may not be as economically and critically successful as *AHS* or *TWD*, but nonetheless indicate that horror is in fact a trend on both cable and broadcast network television. It has been posited, however, that horror programs on cable television are in a position to be particularly appealing to audiences. FX CEO John Landgraf remarks:

> Television back in the broadcast-network era really had to censor this genre to the point where it seemed second-rate to what a theatrical film could put forth for fans of the horror genre […] But in the cable era, the networks can put pretty graphic stuff on the air that looks to sustain a story and a group of characters for longer

[1] See, for example, Erin Whitney's review for *ScreenCrush*.

> than a two-hour movie. The fans also want story and character development, and I think television right now is able to deliver that in the horror genre. (qted. in Umstead 15)

Landgraf's comments gesture to cable's perceived ability to offer quality television in terms of both aesthetic possibilities and narrative complexity. His claim that horror is well-suited to cable begs the question: if horror is thriving on cable television because both the medium and the genre invite graphic depictions of violence, how might sexual violence fit into this logic?

Certainly, there is no shortage of explicit sex on cable television. Since cable network programs are not bound to the same restrictions as those on primetime broadcast television, they can include adult content such as graphic scenes of sex and violence. It has therefore become possible (and necessary) to investigate the intersection of sex and violence on cable television, and the horror genre is a fruitful site for such an exploration considering it is full of both. In this context, *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead* are valuable objects of study. Given their high viewership and their status within the industry, they are significant and visible pieces of popular culture. Moreover, while this thesis is focused on American television, it is relevant in the Canadian context as well. Since *The Walking Dead* can be viewed on AMC in Canada, and on the Canadian Netflix streaming service, and *American Horror Story* is aired on FX Canada, their depictions of sexual violence do circulate in Canada.

This thesis examines what types of stories are told about rape in horror programs on American cable television and how they are the product of a specific industrial context. What kinds of rape narratives appear on horror programs, and what ideologies do they express about sexual violence? How explicit might the depictions be? What is their relationship to the conventions of the horror genre? How might the industrial standards of cable television affect the narrative's treatment of rape or sexual violence? This introduction has already begun to map out why this project is essential in our contemporary media culture. Next, I give a brief history of the feminist movement's struggles to fight the pervasiveness of sexual violence. This theorization will consider how feminist theory has shaped cultural understandings of rape. Such a theoretical framework is critical for locating the ideologies that emerge in popular culture texts like *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*. Finally, I will also outline my methodology and the structure of my thesis.

Redefining Rape: Feminism and Sexual Violence

Sexual violence has long been an important feminist issue, and it was a key concern in the 1970s feminist movement. Not only did feminist theorists and activists advocate for rape prevention and support for survivors, they also worked to profoundly redefine popular understandings of rape. Part of the feminist project was to conceptualize sexual violence as a social and political problem, rather than an individual one. As detailed by Powell and Henry, the feminist approach contrasted with other models of sexual violence, such as the public health model, which construes "sexual violence as an 'epidemic'" (1). In contrast, feminists argued that sexual violence should be seen as systemic and that attention should be directed to "the social structures that underpin the perpetration of sexual violence" (2). The term rape culture was introduced in order to describe the many different structures and institutions in which sexual violence is permitted and normalized (2). As a concept, rape culture highlights that "sexist attitudes and beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists do not exist in isolation but rather are part of a broader manifestation of gender inequality" (2). Many have questioned the media's role in the circulation of these beliefs, and have analyzed how media representations in popular television, film, and literature have eroticized and normalized sexual violence against women (2). Ultimately, according to Katie Edwards et al. (2011), in a feminist framework, sexual violence is seen as propagated by patriarchy and the gender inequality it produces (762).

An important step in this feminist redefinition of rape was to identify and challenge sexist attitudes about sexual violence. As described by Edwards et al., these views became known as rape myths and were first defined as "prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (Burt qtd. in Edwards et. Al 761). Some popular myths addressed by feminism include that women ask to be raped and lie about being raped. These myths are believed to emerge out of misogyny and serve to "deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway and Fitzgerald qtd. in Edwards et al. 762). Many theorists have chronicled the historical roots of these myths and how they have "sustained and justified" sexual violence "throughout history" (761). Moreover, rape myths do not merely exist at an individual level; they are perpetuated institutionally, such as in popular media or in legal contexts (762). For instance, Edwards et al. specify that both the media and legal system have maintained the

rape myth that women lie about being raped (768). Victims are often portrayed as liars by the defense, or are not taken seriously by police officers that believe their claims are untrue (768). People's perceptions about rape and rape myths are also affected by media representations, such as news stories. For example, Edwards et al. propose that highly publicized rape trials that suggest women are lying work to foster an impression that more women lie about rape than really do (768). Much research has been conducted that supports the idea that false rape claims are actually "highly infrequent" (767). This rape myth is still very relevant to our contemporary moment in Canada, as revealed by the 2016 trial of former CBC host Jian Ghomeshi, who was acquitted of charges of sexual assault in March 2016. Many were quick to discuss how the women were framed as liars and their claims as unreliable by the court, revealing how rape myths are still accepted and reaffirmed within legal proceedings.[2]

Sarah Projansky (2001) explains that feminists articulated "counterformulations" to such rape myths, many of which have been accepted into popular understandings of rape (8). Lisa Cuklanz (2000) considers the rape reform movement "long-lived, well publicized, and successful on many fronts," particularly in legal contexts (2). Terms such as "acquaintance rape, date rape, and marital rape" have become known in the mainstream and in legal proceedings, and challenge patriarchal assumptions about rape (Projansky 8). Indeed, the very idea of marital rape works against the rape myth that husbands cannot rape their wives. In order to evaluate how feminist rape reform ideas have been incorporated into the mainstream, many have turned to popular culture and the discussions of rape in such forms as news media or television. Projansky argues that by the 1980s, there was indeed "partial acceptance of some feminist arguments about rape" within mainstream popular culture (11). While some feminist ideas appeared in popular discourses, others circulated "in truncated and altered forms," and Projansky explicitly links this "negotiated acceptance" of feminist ideas to postfeminist discourses (11). As we will see, postfeminism is a term that has been widely used in feminist television scholarship, with many different definitions. In this next section, I examine some of the responses to feminist theory about rape, and how they relate to postfeminism and what has been called third-wave feminism, thought by some to be a movement that responds to some of the "impasses" of earlier feminist theory (Snyder 175).

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[2] See, for example, Angelina Chapin's 2016 article for *Ottawa Citizen* and Zosia Bielski's 2016 piece in *The Globe and Mail*.

Despite their importance to the feminist movement, some of the early feminist works on rape from the 1970s have been criticized, particularly for their lack of intersectionality. In *Women, Race and Class* (1981), Angela Davis explains that in "the early stages of the contemporary anti-rape movement, few feminist theorists seriously analyzed the special circumstances surrounding the Black woman as rape victim" (173). For instance, Davis posits that Susan Brownmiller's renowned book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (first published in 1975) ignores the experiences of women of color and perpetuates racist ideologies, particularly by mobilizing the myth of the Black rapist (198). The myth denotes the practice of fraudulently persecuting black men for rape, which has propagated a racist assumption that black men are more likely to rape than white men (Projansky 9). Davis observes that Brownmiller's defense of white women often comes at the cost of vilifying the black men who were falsely accused of rape (198). In response to this disregard for racial politics, some feminists have looked at the connection between racism and sexism. Many have identified racist rape myths, such as the myth that black women cannot be raped "because of their wanton, chronically promiscuous behaviour" (White, Strube, and Fisher 159). As described by Aaronette M. White, Michael J. Strube, and Sherri Fisher (1998), these racist rape myths originated during slavery but have contemporary relevance (159). It has therefore become crucial to look at rape as it intersects with sexism and racism, and how attitudes towards sexual violence can circulate at both personal and institutional levels.

Many of the types of critiques of early feminist work on rape can be illustrated through responses to Brownmiller's book. For example, in her introduction to *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller strictly defines rape as something perpetrated by men in order to dominate women, contending that rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (15). Such a claim has been criticized for the rigid classification (and consequent naturalization) of women as victims of rape and men as perpetrators. Problematically, Brownmiller attributes this relationship to biology, and many have subsequently remarked how Brownmiller's argument conveys rape as inevitable for women (Powell and Henry 5). Portraying rape as a biological inevitability often results in prevention strategies informed by victim blaming attitudes in which women must take responsibility for preventing attacks (5). Additionally, claims such as Brownmiller's have been interpreted as suggesting that women cannot rape; Steve Jones (2013) argues that Brownmiller "insinuates that

only women are affected by rape, and that only men commit rape" (141). In this context, it is useful to survey how feminist theory and gender studies began to challenge rigid notions of femininity and masculinity, thus challenging universalized ideas of women and, accordingly, women as victims.

In their review of the feminist rape prevention framework, Powell and Henry explain that a shift within gender studies deeply impacted feminist theory regarding rape. Affected by the turn towards postmodernism, "by the 1990s, feminist ideas about gender and violence shifted substantially to recognising the socially and culturally variable practices of femininities and masculinities" (Powell and Henry 5-6). Notions of gender were then explored in relation to race, class, and sexuality, thus acknowledging the diverse experiences of women within patriarchy and rejecting essentialist notions of woman. It is in this move within feminism that a conceptualization of a third-wave feminist movement emerged. In the context of rape and sexual violence, this practice questioned "societal constructions of normative gender roles and the notion that rape is an inevitable, or natural, manifestation of gender difference" (5-6), a stark contrast with Brownmiller's ideas. In addition, rape proclivity and acceptance of rape myths have been studied in regards to beliefs about traditional gender roles and the relationship between sex and power.[3] These examinations enable a discussion of how culturally produced notions of gender and power connect to rape and sexual violence, without naturalizing the role of woman as victim (or man as perpetrator).

Moreover, shifts in feminist ideologies regarding gender, power, and rape must be contextualized within a history of debates regarding female sexuality and pornography. The so-called feminist sex wars of the 1980s comprised of debates between what have been labeled anti-pornography feminists and sex positive feminists. Lynn Comella (2008) describes the sex wars as "a set of deeply felt ideological divisions about feminism's relationship to pornography, power, pleasure, and a range of 'deviant' sexual identities and practices" (202-3). In the 1970s, the feminist anti-porn position was visible in public discourse through figures like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. In her landmark book *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (1989), Linda Williams explains that anti-pornography positions see (heterosexual) pornography as representations of patriarchal ideology and the degradation of

[3] See, for example, Kristine M. Chapleau and Debra L. Oswald's 2010 article in *Journal of Sex Research*.

women, most obviously when it depicts violent sexual acts and rape (16-17). As she points out, many feminists—including Williams herself—would agree with this claim (22). However, Williams highlights that the anti-porn position has caused contention in its desire to censor pornography, and through problematic assertions like Dworkin's that pornography embodies the inherent violence of male sexuality in heterosexual relationships (17). Such logic opposes a naturally violent male sexuality with a naturally nonviolent female sexuality (20). Finally, Williams notes that this perspective erroneously accepts "a link between the imaginative fantasy of pornography and the reality of abusive practices" (16), epitomized by Robin Morgan's oft-cited saying: "Pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice" (qted. in Williams 16). Williams is ultimately critical of the anti-pornography position and believes that censoring pornography "offers no real solution to patriarchal violence and abuse" (22).

Many feminist scholars and activists felt that this anti-pornography feminist work on sexuality focused too much on "sexual danger, male aggression, and violence against women" and often collapsed sex and violence, therefore relegating women to the role of victim (Comella 202). The relationships between "sexual pleasure, choice, autonomy, and desire" were consequently left unexplored (202). Comella references the 1982 conference *Towards a Politics of Sexuality* at Barnard College as a crucial moment in which sex positive feminists contemplated these questions publically (205). Sex positive feminism emphasizes "sexual freedom, autonomy, and anti censorship" (205). According to Williams, sex positive feminism can also be called social constructionist feminism as it focuses "on social and historical factors in the construction of sexuality" and rejects the idea of any one natural, or "'politically correct,' ideal sexuality" (23). This debate relates to contemporary questions about and the sexualization of culture, which is another issue of interest to feminist theorists. First, however, the concept of postfeminism must be defined in order to fully engage with this conversation.

It is important to note that within feminist theory, postfeminism is a complex term with multiple meanings. In "Postfeminist Television Criticism" (2001), Amanda Lotz suggests that the term postfeminism was first used critically within academia "in the post-second-wave era" and was defined by Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey as distinguishing "an emerging culture and ideology that simultaneously incorporates, revises, and depoliticizes many of the fundamental issues advanced by second-wave feminism" (Rosenfelt and Stacey qtd. in Lotz 111). Many feminist media scholars, such as Sarah Projansky (2001), have since used the term in

this sense. Since postfeminism is a "versatile," "discursively produced concept," its discourses have the potential both to celebrate and reject feminism (Projansky 86). Postfeminist representations in popular culture often applaud the gains of feminism, for securing choice and equality for women, and portray the feminist movement as successful and, consequently, no longer needed (79). Other postfeminist discourses are more explicitly antifeminist. For instance, Projansky uses the term "antifeminist postfeminism feminist" to describe self-described feminists who advocate for "the 'death' of (another version of) feminism," such as a perceived victim feminism, while "articulating their own feminism" (71). Indeed, Projanksy's conceptualization of postfeminism as an ideology is particularly critical, an interpretation that many other media scholars have shared.

Laura Harvey and Rosalind Gill (2011) describe the sexualization of culture as "the growing sense of Western societies as saturated by sexual representations and discourse, and in which pornography has become increasingly influential and porous" (53). Overall, feminist ideas about the phenomenon are divided; some contemporary positions recall those of the anti-porn feminists in the 1980s, while some third-wave positions emerged out of the sex positive feminism of the 1980s, and others see the sexualization of culture as related to postfeminism and its discourses of empowerment (53). Many have pointed out that *sexual* empowerment is a central discourse in postfeminism. Projansky theorizes five strands of postfeminist discourses within the media, such as a sex positive postfeminism that emerged in the popular media in the 1990s (Projansky 67). These discourses portray "feminism as antisex" and celebrate "individuality and independence" (67) with an emphasis on "consumerism, bodily display, and active [hetero]sexuality" (83). Indeed, empowerment has become somewhat of a problematic term in this context; Gill (2012) argues that it "has been taken up, emptied of its political significance" and used for commercial purposes (738). These sex positive postfeminist discourses, like postfeminism more broadly, have been critiqued for their emphasis on heterosexuality and white, middle class women (Projansky 87).

Conversely, some feminist theorists have conceptualized postfeminism in a less decidedly negative way. Lotz notes that Ann Brooks (1997) offers "a rehabilitation of postfeminism" in her definition ("Postfeminist Television Criticism" 113) which describes postfeminism as a result of "the conceptual shift within feminism" that came from the intersection of feminism with other movements and voices (Brooks 4). This distinction is

significant because, as we will see in the next chapter, postfeminism is a key concept in television studies despite debate over its meaning. Since many feminist media scholars have looked at backlash rhetoric and postfeminist discourses in the rape narratives within popular media, as will be surveyed in the next chapter, a precise understanding of each author's definition of postfeminism becomes crucial.

The terms "postfeminism" and "third-wave feminism" both emerged in the 1980s (Gamble 43) and, importantly, must be distinguished from one another. Third-wave feminism grew out of the sex positive feminism of the second-wave (Snyder 179). According to Sarah Gamble (2001), third-wave feminism differs from second-wave feminism through its acceptance of a pluralism that understands "that no account of oppression is true for all women in all situations all of the time" (43). It is precisely from this position of plurality that that third-wave feminism engages with many of the central issues of second-wave feminism, such as "the collapse of the category of 'woman'" and the sex wars (Snyder 175). Gamble moreover links third-wave feminism to a political activism that allows it to resist being just a theory (43). One prominent feminist figure that has been associated to third-wave feminism is bell hooks, who Gamble believes "has persistently challenged white bourgeois women's unthinking assumption of an oppressed subject position" (44). Angela McRobbie (2004) observes that in 1990 feminist theory saw self-critiques by post-colonial scholars such as Trinh T. Minh-ha and by scholars like Judith Butler and Donna Haraway who were interested in the "de-naturalising of the post-feminist female body" ("Post-feminism and popular culture" 256).

These shifts in feminist theory and gender studies have led to more intersectional explorations of women's lives, as well as more complex understandings of masculinities. As Amanda Lotz points out in *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century* (2014), the gains of feminism and subsequent changes in gender scripts have affected men too, such as in the contestation of "patriarchal masculinities" (24). For example, the term hegemonic masculinity was developed in order to account for the various masculinities within patriarchy. In her pioneering book *Masculinities* (2005), R.W. Connell explains that "'hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type" but "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position always contestable" (76). Drawing from Antonio Gramsci, she describes hegemony as "the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (77). Ultimately, there are varying masculinities within our culture, but not all are afforded the same positions of

power. While this theory is not specifically about rape, it indicates that the experiences of men can and should be studied through a feminist framework; as we will see in the next chapter, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been used frequently in feminist television scholarship.

Many scholars have begun to fill gaps in research regarding male rape and cultural attitudes towards it. For instance, various male rape myths have been identified, such as that "men cannot be raped" or "male rape is the victim's fault" (Davies, Gilston, and Rogers 2810). Michelle Davies, Jennifer Gilston, and Paul Rogers (2012) have studied how the acceptance of such male rape myths relates to beliefs about gender roles, homophobia, and female rape myths. Similarly, in "Male Rape Myths" (2008) Kristine M. Chapleau, Debra L. Oswald, and Brenda L. Russell explore how perceptions about gender and violence inform the acceptance of male rape myths. Importantly, in these works the feminist concept of rape myth is used to account for sexual violence against men and the attitudes about such violence in our culture. In her chapter on male rape-revenge films, Claire Henry (2014) notes that the term "gender violence" has become frequently used in academic and activist contexts in order to explore the relationship between constructions of gender, sexual violence, and the justification of that violence, as well as "remind us that people of all genders have the potential to be both victims and perpetrators" (112). Once again, I would like to emphasize the way in which feminist theory can reveal how both men and women are impacted by gender inequality under patriarchy, albeit in different ways.

In our contemporary moment, rape culture remains an important term and is often discussed in the context of campus safety. Yet, there is still some criticism of the concept. In an article for *TIME* called "It's Time to End 'Rape Culture' Hysteria" (2014), Caroline Kitchens disputes the use of what she calls rape culture theory by feminists in their anti-rape activism. She argues that "blaming so-called rape culture" for sexual violence incriminates "all men in a social atrocity" and "deflect[s] blame from the rapists truly responsible for sexual violence" (Kitchens). Ultimately, she presents feminist engagement with cultural discourses as an overreaction and as "declaring war" on men and popular culture (Kitchens). She moreover concludes that our culture already understands that rape is a "horrific crime" (Kitchens). In response to Kitchens' article, Zerlina Maxwell (2014) wrote a piece for *TIME* called "Rape Culture Is Real" in which she criticizes Kitchens for minimizing sexual violence and ignoring its pervasiveness in women's lives. Moreover, she rejects Kitchens' claim that our society already "despises" rapists by

pointing out how few rapists are actually convicted for their crimes (Maxwell). Kitchens' belief that feminist critique of rape culture is unnecessary recalls postfeminist discourses that believe feminist activism to no longer be needed.

Projansky argues that when rape narratives are used in the service of postfeminism, rape becomes depoliticized (12). While I return to her claims in depth in the next chapter, it is important to note that the depoliticizing of sexual violence prevents opportunities to examine how it is perpetuated institutionally. Furthermore, understanding rape culture as merely positioning all women as victims and all men as perpetrators of violence—as Kitchens claims in her article—oversimplifies the complex ways that gender intersects with race, class, and sexuality within patriarchy. Powell and Henry believe that feminist rape politics should aim to emphasize "an understanding of the gender relations and larger social systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and exploitation" (7). Consequently, men and women must both be understood "as bystanders and supporters of a rape culture" (7). Indeed, Powell and Henry's conceptualization of rape culture will inform this thesis. While feminist activism has made great strides in redefining rape and understanding sexual violence, some feminist ideas are still resisted. Claire Henry notes that many postfeminist writers like Camille Paglia and Christina Hoff Sommers have also critiqued feminist use of the term "date rape" and doubted its pervasiveness (188). Despite resistance to the idea of a rape culture, or perhaps because of it, it remains a crucial feminist concept.

Studying Rape on Television: Methodological Approach and Chapter Breakdown

Ultimately, the goal of this thesis is to explore how *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*, as texts and as the products of specific networks and histories, relate to rape culture. I investigate how the programs negotiate patriarchal, feminist, or even postfeminist understandings of rape. Before breaking down the structure of my thesis, I shall first contextualize my methodological approach. My project emerges out of cultural studies, a tradition detailed by Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz in *Television Studies* (2012). Works by theorists such as Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, and Antonia Gramsci look at the operation of ideology in our culture and "suggested that any society has a dominant ideology, organization of power, and systems of beliefs" (Gray and Lotz 37). Within this practice, the close and critical

analysis of texts, especially popular culture texts like television programs, is a tool for determining "a text's relationship to dominant ideology—its impact on and place in the culture and power networks that surround it" (37). The close analysis of texts emerges out of literary theory and film studies, and considers how a text's meaning is produced (31). Narrative theory, and its examination of narrative structure, is an important method in my inquiry. Genre is also a contextual factor in my analysis, as I consider how horror's conventions and expectations are deployed in *AHS* and *TWD*.

My analysis of *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story* reveals the ideologies that emerge in the rape narratives. My definition of rape narrative is informed by Projansky's in *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*; she defines it "broadly to include representations of rape, attempted rape, threats of rape, implied rape, and sometimes coercive sexuality" (18). As we have seen in the historical framework provided earlier in this introduction, mainstream culture has accepted some feminist ideologies about rape and resisted others. There is a tension, therefore, between patriarchal rape ideologies and feminist ones, and which are dominant in our culture. With this feminist lens in mind, I use narrative theory to study the construction of the rape narrative and its function within the larger story of each program. The analysis of characters and their perspectives, and of each program's main themes and motifs, is central to this undertaking. Once again, the generic conventions of horror are also considered, particularly conceptions of monstrosity and depictions of gore.

This thesis also considers the industrial contexts of cable television. In *Television Studies*, Gray and Lotz advocate for a contextualized approach to studying television in which the scholar considers at least two of programs, industry, and audience (25). In keeping with this strategy, my textual analysis accompanies an investigation of the industry that has produced *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*. My method is modeled on Amanda Lotz's book *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century*. In it, she begins by briefly reviewing the industrial factors of cable television, "the institutional specificity of cable" (*Cable Guys* 6), and then moves to textual analysis of various male-centered programs from the 2000s. Following Lotz, my focus on industry helps to situate culturally my readings of *AHS* and *TWD*.

The first chapter of this work ties together literature on rape from both media studies and film theory about horror. First, it tracks feminist media scholarship on rape narratives in primetime television series, in genres like the detective series and teen series. The second part of

this review focuses on how rape has been treated in film theory in the horror genre, paying particular attention to the intersection of the rape-revenge structure and horror. The goal of this chapter is to survey rape narratives that have been in popular culture since the 1970s as they relate specifically to the medium of television and the genre of horror. Moreover, seeking film theory on rape in horror allows me to explore how rape has been depicted visually, which is important since the industrial specificity of cable has, as FX CEO John Landgraf suggests in a quote cited above, allowed for graphic depictions that were once only available in film.

The second chapter gives a brief historical overview of the American television industry since the 1950s. Specifically, it considers the changes in technology, distribution, economic models, and marketing strategies that led to the rise of cable television and its new textual possibilities. I examine AMC and FX networks in detail, looking both at their histories as well as their current brand identities, as seen on their websites and in trade publications and popular entertainment sources. The meaning of quality television as it relates to marketing and branding is crucial in this analysis, particularly in the case of HBO. Indeed, AMC and FX have followed in HBO's footsteps in some ways, and *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story* figure into this process. This chapter argues that to understand the rape narratives of *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story* we must address what Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (2007) call "illicit" content (69) as it is demanded by the competitiveness of the contemporary television industry.

The third chapter provides a textual analysis of *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story*. Both programs were selected because their critical acclaim and record-breaking viewership make them highly visible, significant pieces of popular culture. I offer a close reading of one season of each show; season five of *The Walking Dead*, which is 16 episodes and was the first season of the show to explicitly use the word "rape," and *Coven,* season three of *American Horror Story*, which is 13 episodes long and is the most recent season set in the contemporary world as is *TWD*. In addition, both shows use the word "rape" in the very first episode of these seasons, which allows for a balanced tracking of the progression of the rape narratives over multiple episodes. In this chapter, an ideological analysis reveals the beliefs and attitudes that circulate within the narratives. Further, I attempt to understand the relationship between *how* the rape narratives are depicted. Finally, I conclude by connecting my ideological critique to the branding practices of the FX and AMC cable networks.

As a whole, this thesis contributes to contemporary discussions about sexual violence on television, and, more broadly, to debates about rape culture and the media's role within it. That is, I seek to understand not only how rape is portrayed on cable television, but also how those representations might be commodified and valorized in the service of marketing and network branding. In the pages that follow, I describe several scenes of sexual assault and violence in detail. In *Watching Rape*, Projansky describes "a feminist paradox between a desire to *end* rape and a need to *represent* (and therefore perpetuate discursive) rape in order to challenge it" (19). Indeed, I must negotiate this paradox; because I engage in the critical analysis of my texts, I further contribute to rape discourses in academic and public discourse. Ultimately, I do so in the interest of providing a feminist inquiry into the role of cable television—as an industry and the texts it produces—in a culture of rape.

Chapter 1
Reading Rape: Rape in Feminist Film and Television Scholarship

Representations of rape can be found everywhere within mainstream culture; they are "embedded in all of its complex media forms" (Projansky 2). The pervasiveness of these often graphic depictions has inspired scholars to examine how sexual violence has been portrayed in news media, primetime television, and film, and to investigate what kinds of ideologies about rape they might contain. These analyses of portrayals of rape are particularly urgent for feminist scholars in light of contemporary debates about rape culture and popular media. By studying the stories about rape that exist in our popular culture, we can begin to understand what Claire Henry has called "our society's capacity to understand and deal with the issue, the fears and anxieties it provokes, and the crises in gender, sexuality, and morality it can prompt" (141). Ultimately, representations of sexual violence have the potential to circulate patriarchal ideologies about rape, but they also have the potential to challenge them by making visible sexual violence as a major problem to be confronted. Importantly, a feminist lens has been crucial to scholarship on rape in television and film, though literature on each medium has handled rape differently. In this literature review, I consider the various approaches scholars have used to explore rape and sexual violence in feminist television criticism and film theory in the horror genre.

As Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz describe in *Television Studies*, "the slow turn" towards the serious study of television as a medium began in the 1970s at the same time as the second-wave feminist movement (47). E. Ann Kaplan (1992), however, suggests that feminist television scholarship really began to take shape in the 1980s as many feminist film scholars began to shift their attention towards television representations (249). Scholars from other fields with established feminist traditions, such as literary studies, also began to engage with television (250). In "Postfeminist Television Criticism," Amanda Lotz writes that feminist scholarship on television

> takes a variety forms including studies of female audience, traditionally "female" genres such as soap operas, representational strategies used in depicting women, femininity and feminism, production histories of women in the television industry, and political economy studies of women as television consumers. (109)

This chapter is concerned with feminist television criticism that engages in textual analysis and is interested in the representations of women, feminism, and feminist issues—particularly rape and sexual violence—on television.

Lotz outlines three main approaches to textual analysis in American feminist television criticism, which all locate "the ways television texts exhibit feminist ideas" (109). First, analyses often center on female characters, such as looking at the construction of "types" of female characters like the "new woman" or "unruly woman" (109). Susan Berridge (2015) identifies a similar trend of analyses of "heroine television" that focus on female protagonists and often result in debates about "the feminist credentials of individual female television characters" ("Empowered Vulnerability?" 93). A second method examines narrative structure in relation to the feminist issues that the program addresses (Lotz "Postfeminist Television Criticism" 109). In the third approach, the scholar considers "feminism as a theme, trope, or discourse" in the text (109). Lotz moreover distinguishes liberal feminism as the most common kind of feminism portrayed on American television (109). The works reviewed in this chapter follow mainly the second and third approaches in their examination of rape on television. Since both require attention to narrative, I will sketch narrative theory as a method in television studies.

According to Sarah Kozloff (1992), narratology, or narrative theory, is a key method of close analysis that was first used to study literature and has developed to account for the narratives in film and television (68). Kozloff notes that narrative theory is rooted in Russian Formalism, and as a formalist approach is concerned with "the text's intrinsic formal parameters" and, more precisely, "general mappings of narrative structure" (68). In the study of narrative, there exists a distinction between story and discourse; story is *what* happens in the narrative and discourse is *how* it happens (69). One may evaluate story by examining the structure of the plot (72) and looking at character types, functions, and relationships (76). In addition, one may analyze multiple storylines within a text and how they intersect, contrast or parallel each other and create "interest and complexity" (74). Studying discourse, how the story is told, can be done through analysis of narration and narrators (81), or the construction of sequences of events such as looking at flashbacks (85) or the difference between story time and discourse time (87-8). Then, the narratological findings may be used in an ideological analysis of a text (68). As we will see, the works in this chapter examine televisual narratives in order to identify ideologies about rape and sexual violence.

(Post)Feminism, Masculinity, and Rape Narratives on Film and Television

In *Rape on Prime Time: Television, Masculinity, and Sexual Violence* (2000), Lisa Cuklanz analyzes over 100 primetime rape-centered episodes that aired throughout the period of 1976-1990, most of which belong to the detective genre. These episodes, coming after changes in popular attitudes about rape prompted by the feminist movement, had the potential to incorporate feminist conceptualizations of rape and sexual violence. Indeed, looking at "how fully or marginally ideas of rape reformers have been accepted into the mainstream" (Cuklanz 2) allows us to explore how feminism and feminist ideologies about rape have been incorporated into popular culture. Ultimately, Cuklanz concludes that primetime television adapted to include some aspects of feminist views on rape, but included others slowly or not at all (3). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, rape narratives followed what Cuklanz calls the "basic plot" (6). Then, into the early 1990s, these narratives adjusted in order to include "complex, varied, ambiguous portrayals" of rape (6). For example, the basic plot depicted rape merely as an act perpetrated by a "brutal stranger" but then, as portrayals increased in complexity, rape plots explored instances of date or acquaintance rape (25). In addition, the victim in these new plots was never blamed for her rape, nor was her claim ever doubted (27), which corresponds to central tenets of feminist rape politics. Moreover, these new narratives dedicated more time to the victim, a role which had been limited in earlier episodes (27). However, "difficult and controversial issues" such as marital rape or the politics of rape trials were still not included in episodes (25). These new plots were still limited in their engagement with feminist rape politics, such as through their depiction of rape as a crime committed by "problematic individuals" rather than a broader social situation (156).

Contemporary detective programs on primetime television are still sites of struggle over feminist conceptualizations of rape and sexual violence. The program *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC, 1999-), for example, focuses specifically on rape and sexual violence, and according to Lisa Cuklanz and Sujata Moorti (2006), its plots represent "key elements of feminist understandings of rape" (303). *SVU* is a procedural crime drama that follows New York detectives in a unit that deals specifically with sexually related crimes. Cuklanz and Moorti believe that both main detectives, Olivia Benson and Elliot Stabler, "voice feminist understandings of rape, gender, and victimization" (307). In addition, storylines often work to

demystify rape myths through the incorporation of feminist approaches such as not putting the onus of blame on the victim, or making it clear that rape can happen anywhere (not just dark isolated spaces) (308-9). Moreover, Cuklanz and Moorti argue that *SVU* resists the objectification of victims of sexual assault through its "post-rape narrative strategy" in which the episode begins after the rape has taken place (307). Yet, "the feminist elements" of the show are limited to its representation of sexual violence (304). Its treatment of female characters more broadly indicates anxieties about women and female power, for example through the evocation of the myth of the monstrous mother (314). In this ambivalence to feminism in *SVU*, Cuklanz and Moorti see "a new brand of televisual feminism" which they call "misogynist feminism" (318).

Rosalind Sibielski (2010) notes that ambivalent and contradictory relationships to feminism in popular culture are also seen through backlash discourses which involve the "denigration" and/or the "distorting [of] feminist values and practices" within popular media texts (322). These representations "reduce" feminism, give feminism "negative significations," and reveal "patriarchal anxieties and stereotypes" about feminism (322). Backlash has been a central facet of postfeminism at least since Susan Faludi's influential *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* from 1992, prompting a response from feminist media scholarship. Faludi argues that in the 1980s the media propagated the idea that feminism has made women miserable, part of "a powerful counterassault on women's rights" (xviii). Clarifying Faludi's conceptualization of backlash in relation to postfeminism, Gamble notes that "For Faludi, postfeminism *is* the backlash" (38). More contemporary scholars who have written about backlash and postfeminism include Angela McRobbie, who complicates Faludi's ideas about backlash and postfeminism in "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture" (McRobbie 2004). McRobbie also writes about backlash in her book *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009), as does Susan J. Douglas in *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work is Done* (2010). A recent edited collection, *Feminist Erasures: Challenging Backlash Culture* (2015), includes work by media scholars such as Susan Berridge, who analyzes sexual violence in teen television series pilots.

When backlash is involved in a rape narrative, as it is in the teen detective series *Veronica Mars* (WB/CW, 2004-2007), the consequences are significant. *Veronica Mars* is a teen/crime hybrid series that follows the life of Veronica Mars, a teenage outcast who solves

crimes as a private investigator first in high school and then in college. In "'Nothing Hurts the Cause More Than That': *Veronica Mars* and the business of backlash," Rosalind Sibielski maintains that the program's first two seasons had a "feminist friendly tone" but in its third and final season the narrative ultimately vilified the "feminist values" it had once supported (322). A rape plot was central to this shift. Sibielski notes that the treatment of Veronica's rape in the narrative did indeed align with feminist discourses of rape, particularly survivor discourse (326); the program acknowledges Veronica's rape trauma and emphasizes her "toughness" as a survivor (326). However, in the third season, Veronica investigates a series of rapes on her college campus and finds that the school's feminist group is behind them, as part of their revenge upon the campus fraternity. Rape discourses in this third season are antifeminist and used to attack feminist values (327). Sibielski argues that this depiction of the vengeful feminist comes from patriarchal ideology and serves as backlash discourse that endorses "the idea that feminism promotes violence and hostility towards men" by portraying the male characters in this plotline as "the helpless victims of feminist rage" (328).

Rape narratives have been productive sites for the tensions between feminism and postfeminism in popular culture, since, per Projansky, popular culture often constructs feminism through depictions of rape and postfeminist discourses (13). In *Watching Rape*, through an exploration of rape narratives in 1980s and 1990s film and television, Projansky concludes that from "the early 1980s, rape and postfeminism have been co-constitutive in U.S. fictional film and television narratives" (21)—that is, they produce, give meaning to, and are defined in relation to, each other. Projansky argues that the feminist discourses of rape in these texts are used "in ways that link those logics to postfeminist conceptions of white, middle-class, heterosexual women's independence and equality" (21). For example, many of the rape narratives that Projansky explores directly link women's freedom to their family life "and/or to an abstract equality to men" (94). In some films, rape narratives create "a postfeminist liberation narrative" (101) in which a woman is raped and as a result discovers her "latent independent identity" (100). This newfound independence is often used to protect her family (100). In other narratives, a woman's rape is the result of that independence and then she discovers her desire for family and romance as consequence (101). Both these narratives connect "women's independent behavior to rape in the service of protecting family" and so the experience of rape

allows a woman to enjoy both independence and family (97). This narrative structure is just one of many in which postfeminist discourses intersect with rape.

As demonstrated by Projansky, this contentious relationship between rape narratives and (post)feminism is not unique to television, but is significant for film as well. In her seminal text *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), Carol Clover theorizes that rape-revenge films have the potential to "repeatedly and explicitly articulate feminist politics" by offering deep "critique[s] of masculine behavior and attitudes" (151). Clover is specifically referencing rape-revenge films from the 1970s and early 1980s, and is particularly interested in low budget films such as *I Spit On Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978) and *Ms. 45* (Abel Ferrara, 1981). As pointed out by Jacinda Read (2000), these female-centered narratives, which engaged "with perhaps the quintessential feminist issue"—what rape is and how to respond to it—coincided with "the rise of second-wave feminism" (6). Clover elucidates on this connection, suggesting that rape-revenge films have been "authorized" by the 1970s feminist redefinition of rape (152). Despite the reputation of many rape-revenge films as a "low cultural form" (Henry 4), these early rape-revenge films have been conceptualized as productive texts for exploring the relationship between representations of rape and feminist politics in popular culture.

In *Revisionist Rape-Revenge: Redefining a Film Genre*, Claire Henry argues that a contemporary rape-revenge genre began to emerge "roughly post-2000" (49), which contains alterations from the 1970s films, such as "the postfeminist rather than feminist engagement with rape politics" (5). A common version of these modern films features "the castrating pubescent girl" who must enact her revenge "in a postfeminist cultural environment" that is, for instance, hypersexualized (58). Henry examines the rape-revenge film *Teeth* (Mitchell Lichtenstein, 2007), which depicts the life of Dawn, a teenaged girl with a *vagina dentata*—a toothed vagina—who is sexually abused and coerced into sex by multiple men in her life, including her boyfriend, her gynecologist, and her brother. Martin Fradley (2013), in his article about postfeminist teen horror films, also analyses *Teeth*, and it is worth comparing their opposing readings. In portraying so many different situations in which Dawn experiences abuse and sexual violence, Fradley believes the film produces "a sweeping indictment" of the misogynistic culture she lives in (218). Dawn's transformation within the film, as she learns to wield her *vagina dentata* as a weapon and fight her abusers, produces a narrative common to contemporary teen horror films in

which sexual violence becomes "a catalyst" for the "(re-)emergence of a feminist political consciousness" within a postfeminist culture (217).

While, like Fradley, Henry acknowledges that *Teeth* addresses important feminist issues, she also argues that the film downplays rape in two respects. First, "the horror of Dawn's rapes is usurped by the graphic castrations" that immediately follow her assaults (Henry 61). For example, though the rape by her boyfriend Tobey is clearly presented as such, her trauma following the scene is signified through flashbacks of the castration, not her rape (62). This fact works against a feminist representation of rape because "the impact" of the rape on Dawn is ignored (62). Secondly, other scenes are not as clearly marked as rape. Henry points out that the fact that Ryan gives Dawn drugs and alcohol before their sexual encounter is not "problematized" at all in the narrative; this scene, in fact, constitutes a date rape (63). Further, Dawn's bite in this case is not motivated by her knowledge of being raped but of the fact that Ryan made a bet that he could have sex with her (63). Henry argues that in this minimizing of rape, "the film contributes to postfeminist ideas about the ambiguity of rape" (63). Ultimately, Henry takes issue with the fact that in *Teeth,* Dawn's transformation suggests that growing up, and discovering one's sexuality, essentially means coming to terms with the inherent violence and coerciveness of sex (66); this is "contrary to a feminist politics of rape that seeks to draw a clear line between consensual sex and rape" (66). Henry concludes that while the film purports to be about female empowerment, its interplay of patriarchal, feminist, and postfeminist politics creates a "contradictory and murky postfeminist [text]" (59).

Ultimately, both televisual and cinematic rape narratives are important sites for the struggle over the meaning of feminism—liberal feminism, postfeminism, backlash against feminism—within popular culture. In feminist media scholarship, depictions of masculinity have been linked to a text's negotiation of feminism. In *Rape on Prime Time,* Cuklanz concludes that from 1976-1990, rape narratives have "provided a discourse of masculinity" and worked to shape a type of hegemonic masculinity that responds to the changes demanded by feminism (2). She further explicates that the narratives constructed this "ideal masculinity" in ways "that worked to contain feminist arguments" (5). The following section explores works that similarly examine the relationship between rape narratives, masculinity, and feminism.

The detective/crime genre has been conceived of as a particularly masculine genre, which for Cuklanz and Moorti means "that it cannot represent feminism or women in a complex

manner" even as more women are featured as main characters within it (Cuklanz and Moorti 304). As we will see, the masculine nature of the genre entails a focus on men and masculinity, even in narratives about women who experience rape. Accordingly, one way to explore the constructions of hegemonic masculinity is to trace the development of the male detective. In early episodes, as part of the formula plot, scenes that depict sexual assault highlight "the rapist's intense depravity" which is then criticized by the male protagonist and then contrasted with his own moral character (Cuklanz 6). Therefore, the rape narratives of such episodes in the crime genre served to contrast various constructions of masculinity with the detective's, which is "always firmly legitimized" (22). The detective is moreover positioned as the "good guy" who gets his revenge on the rapist, and this violence is legitimized through his "sense of morality" (6).

Significantly, Cuklanz mentions that by the late 1980s, more female characters were featured on the shows, often as detectives or police officers (25). Despite these positive changes, the genre continues to focus on "the performance and negotiation of hegemonic masculinity" (25). In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, for example, Olivia Benson is a detective and protagonist, and she does often promote feminist views on sexual assault (Cuklanz and Moorti 306). But, she does not get to form bonds with other women on the show (in her male-dominated workplace) (306). Moreover, when juxtaposed with her partner Elliot Stabler, Benson is cast as the postfeminist when she, for example, "is often the first to doubt women's rape claims" (307). So, while *SVU* offers a more "female oriented" (304) interpretation of the crime genre, it offers no female solidarity or consistent feminist ideology to truly challenge its masculine nature.

More than simply focusing on the male characters (and reaffirming hegemonic masculinity), these narratives cast the male characters as the ones who understand and espouse feminist politics of rape, enacting what Sujata Moorti (2002) terms "a crucial gender inversion" (140). In *Color of Rape*, Moorti devotes a chapter to representations of rape on primetime episodic television, where she examines twenty episodes of primetime television that "thematize" rape (116). The episodes aired between April 1989 and March 1992, and only one episode exists outside the crime genre. One of Moorti's central findings is that the male protagonists present the feminist views on rape while the women present postfeminist views (136-7). For example, in legal dramas like *L.A. Law* (NBC, 1986-1994) female defense lawyers "espouse a consciously anti-feminist stance" in order to defend their clients (141). Contrastingly,

the male characters "are critical of female postfeminist lawyers and are vocal in enunciating a feminist rhetoric of rape" (140). If a male lawyer must use anti-feminist discourse in the process of defending a client, he also conveys regret about doing so; it is made clear that he is does not really believe what he's saying (140). Significantly, this inversion creates "a masculinization of feminism" in which "the men in these shows 'do' feminism" (140). Moorti argues that through this gender inversion, "the narrative contains the feminist discourse that it introduces" (140). That is, the feminist politics that are introduced do not actually explore institutions of male power and are ultimately "skin-deep" (141). Clearly, the narrative focus on male characters and masculinity in the crime genre ultimately create a male-focused depiction of feminism as well.

In television programs of the twenty-first century, the use of the rape plot to legitimize certain conceptualizations of masculinity is not unique to the crime drama. In the primetime teen series explored by Susan Berridge (2011, 2013), narratives that deal with sexual violence also become opportunities for "the performance of ideal hegemonic masculinity" ("Personal Problems" 479). Such narratives center on the male protagonists that "defend and protect" the female characters from the rapists who are usually strangers rather than recurring characters (479). The attention to the heroic male character, and disregard for the male perpetrator of violence, works to limit "connections between dominant constructions of heterosexual masculinity and violence" ("Teen Heroine TV" 483). Berridge notes, however, that some female-fronted teen series challenge this trend because "central male characters can be positioned as perpetrators" which allows for a more complex view of the relationship between gender, sexuality, and violence (478). The focus on hegemonic masculinity in rape narratives obscures the relationship between gender, power, and sexual violence and depoliticizes rape; other ways that rape is depoliticized will be explored further in the next section.

Considering the important role of masculinities on television, it is no wonder that longer analyses of male characters have emerged in the past decade. Depictions of violence (and sexual violence) are successfully studied through the lens of masculinity. Just as Cuklanz and Moorti traced the effect of feminism on the male characters of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, in *Cable Guys* Amanda Lotz identifies the ways that male characters on cable television in the early twenty-first century "embody masculinities increasingly influenced by feminist ideals" (21). In her study of the men in male-centered cable shows such as the dramas *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) and *Sons of Anarchy* (FX 2008-2014), she locates the hegemonic masculinities

specific to each show's narrative world, using the term hegemonic "to indicate deployment of masculinities that are presented as 'natural' and that receive support within the narrative as acceptable or preferred" (40). Indeed, the hegemonic masculinities of these male-centered dramas are becoming increasingly feminist (21). While her work provides a critique of these televisual narratives, most strongly in relation to the homophobic anxieties that emerge in shows that depict men in "homosocial enclaves" (21), Lotz also highlights the great strides that have been made in terms of depictions of masculinities on television.

As demonstrated by Lisa Arellano (2015), an inquiry into the construction and negotiation of masculinities can also be useful for looking at the narrative's treatment of violence. In a series like *Dexter* (Showtime, 2006-2013), where the male protagonist is a serial killer, an analysis of masculinities can help explore the ways in which male violence is legitimated. In this crime/horror hybrid, we follow Dexter Morgan, a forensic analyst for the Miami Metro Police by day and serial killer (who murders other serial killers) by night. Masculinities in the series can be differentiated based on their relationship and attitudes towards violence (Arellano 135). The violence that Dexter enacts "is unlike the violence of the other men in his world" (140). Throughout the show's many seasons Dexter comes face to face with various male characters—friends, colleagues, killers—who are all "exceptionally violent" (140). These contrasting masculinities become relevant to rape narratives when, for example, in the fifth season Dexter searches for a serial rapist and killer, Jordan Chase. Moreover, Dexter forms an intimate relationship with Lumen, a woman who has been sexually abused by Chase. As he helps her plan and enact her revenge on her rapist, Dexter "concedes his capacity for violence" (145). The rape narrative in *Dexter* therefore complicates Dexter's relationship to violence and by extension the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and violence (145).

A major accomplishment of the feminist reconceptualization of rape was for sexual violence to be understood as a social, structural, and political problem rather than a personal one; it has thus been a major concern of feminist media scholars that rape narratives on primetime television have not consistently adapted their rape politics to this view. Cuklanz notes that even well into 1990, the issue of rape on television was blamed on "problematic individuals rather than on structural elements" like "socialization, pervasive violence…or patriarchal social structures" (156). Other scholars have reaffirmed Cuklanz's conclusions. In *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, for example, "individual 'sick' families" led by bad mothers are often

blamed for sexually violent crimes, rather than "larger institutions and social problems" (Cuklanz and Moorti 314). In various teen series examined by Berridge, aired between 1990 and 2008, sexual violence is portrayed as a personal event that the teenage girl must face instead of, once again, a larger political issue ("Personal Problems" 478). In her 2015 piece, she further identifies the "assimilation of sexual violence into dating discourse" which disconnects sexual violence from broader social issues and inequalities ("Empowered Vulnerability?" 99). When sexual violence is depoliticized in this way, discussion of it is limited and "the need for social transformation is rarely acknowledged" ("Personal Problems" 478).

Rape narratives on television are also used to highlight other issues, which obscures the focus on sexual violence as its own problem. In teen series, such as *One Tree Hill* (CW, 2003-2012), sexual violence is often used to create narratives of heterosexual romance. *One Tree Hill* follows the lives of a group of teenagers (adults in later seasons) in the fictional town of Tree Hill; in early seasons, it focuses on the rivalry between half-brothers Lucas and Nathan Scott, and their familial and romantic relationships. In a plot from an early season, Lucas and Brooke bond when they take care of their friend Peyton after she is sexually assaulted, which serves to strengthen their attraction to each other (Berridge "Personal Problems" 476). Peyton's trauma is secondary to this developing romance. Moreover, when Lucas interferes by physically threatening Peyton's attacker, he acts as her protector and demonstrates his "ideal masculinity" in contrast to the perpetrator (476); his use of violence is to defend the female characters rather than hurt them. Any investigation of the relationship between gender, power, and sexuality that might have led to Peyton's assault is neglected, in service of celebrating Lucas's masculinity and his romance with Brooke. As Berridge emphasizes, in such a narrative, "sexual violence functions primarily to highlight, rather than problematize, hegemonic ideals of heterosexual romance" (475). Further, the fact that Peyton has amnesia after her assault allows the narrative to ignore the trauma of sexual violence in subsequent episodes, and to concentrate instead on the heterosexual romance (476).

While scholars like Cuklanz and Moorti have considered the politics of choosing to show (or not show) the sexual assault onscreen, strategies for depicting rape on primetime television have obviously been limited by broadcast regulations. Content on American broadcast primetime network television is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in order to limit mature material such as graphic depictions of violence, sex, and coarse language. Programs

on cable television are not distributed on public airwaves and therefore are not bound to FCC broadcast regulations; they, therefore, can include much more adult or controversial material. Some scholarship has been produced on the sexual explicitness of cable television, such as Melanie Waters' essay "Fangbanging: Sexing the Vampire in Alan Ball's *True Blood*" (2012). Waters looks at the explicit sex of *True Blood* (HBO, 2008-2014), a horror program that follows telepathic Sookie Stackhouse as she becomes involved with vampires. Waters argues that *True Blood*'s representation of sex was perceived as shocking not merely due to its explicitness but for its "candid representation of sexuality as a species of violence" (33). However, while Waters acknowledges the violent nature of the sex on *True Blood*, and even mentions instances in which consent is ambiguous, she does not identify such moments as sexual assault. Since cable television programs like *True Blood* can (and do) show graphic depictions of rape, the kind that might have previously only be seen in film, I now turn to scholarship of rape in film.

Horror and Rape-Revenge in Film

This section on rape in horror focuses mostly on rape-revenge because, as some scholars contend, the genre is quite literally *about* rape. According to Henry, it is a "cultural key that can help to reveal and interrogate the meanings of rape and the political, ethical, and affective responses to it" (3). I consider rape-revenge as it intersects with the horror genre, as it offers the most intensified look at rape in the genre. Although many horror films feature sexual violence or sexualized violence, such as the slasher film, reviewing rape narratives that actually depict rape and sexual assault is most productive. In this section, I look specifically at how rape-revenge films utilize rape narratives and the generic conventions and expectations of horror.

The first thing I implied is that while sexual(ized) violence is prevalent in horror, rape is not. In "The Lady Van(qu)ishes" (2006), Eugenie Brinkema maintains that while "metaphorical and sublimated rapes" can be found throughout the genre, depictions of literal rape are not as frequent (33). Brinkema's explanation for this phenomenon is that rape is "an interior harm" that "works against horror's fierce, insistent need to expose its meanings" (38). Because the generic expectations of horror demand "photographic and bodily exposure" rather than just the suggestion of violence, "proof of the female's (harmed) interior becomes generically mandatory" (38). In order for the evidence of rape to be seen in horror, it therefore must "be expelled, taken

out, or refigured/projected onto the outside of the body" (39). Rape is ultimately "made visible through its conversion to violence" (39). This process, of making rape visible through violence, is particularly significant for the rape-revenge genre, as it is a genre in which the graphic depiction of rape is expected to be paired with other kinds of graphic violence.

Carol Clover originally grouped 1970s rape-revenge films with horror films. Since then, scholars have complicated this classification of rape-revenge as a subset of horror. Read, for instance, examines rape-revenge as a particular narrative structure that has created "a historically specific but generically diverse cycle of films" (11), though this conceptualization does not take into consideration rape-revenge films that emerged in the twenty-first century. Moreover, rape-revenge as a narrative structure is "limiting" because it does have what Henry terms its "discernable characteristics" such as "iconography," "stock characters," "key themes and conflicts," and its "standard two-part structure" (4). Therefore, it is more useful to think of rape-revenge as a genre that hybridizes with other ones, such as horror (4). Henry attributes the reemergence of rape-revenge films within Hollywood horror to the fact that it hybridizes well with the torture porn genre (30). Torture porn is a subgenre of horror that features "intense graphic body horror" (50), and, as its name suggests, has a reputation for being particularly misogynistic in its depictions of sexual(ized) violence.[4]

Since rape-revenge can be hybridized with horror and share some of its conventions and expectations, it is productive to look at how rape-revenge might function as a rape narrative in the horror genre. Brinkema postulates three narrative structures in which rape occurs in horror. In the first structure, the "reproducing rape," rape "produces horrible offspring" (Brinkema "The Lady Van(qu)ishes" 46). The second structure, termed the "wounding rape," deploys rape "as part of a reign of terror" (46). Finally, in the third structure, rape is "the motivation for horror" (46). Rape-revenge generally follows this third structure, since rape functions as the catalyst for the violence and gore that is demanded by the horror genre (46). A feature of the contemporary rape-revenge film is for the revenge to mirror the rape (Henry 55), and this mirroring occurs precisely in the process of the "conversion to violence" (Brinkema "The Lady Van(qu)ishes"

[4] Despite the prevalence of rape and sexual violence against women in torture porn, some have attempted to argue that it is not inherently misogynistic. Steve Jones maintains that because such sexual violence is "contextualized as sources of horror", and because men can be victims of sexual violence, it is unfair to classify torture porn as specifically, or only, misogynistic (Jones 130).

47). Ultimately, in such a narrative, Brinkema argues that "the horror 'units' of the rape become the horror 'units' of the revenge" as "the female protagonist is 'allowed' her violence and revenge only in relation to how wronged she was during the rape sequences" (47). In the contemporary genre, with the hybridization with torture porn, the possibility for gore and violence in rape-revenge is very high indeed (Henry 55).

In the midst of this violence and gore, the rape-revenge genre has the potential to investigate important ethical or political concerns. For one, these films are often focused on the victim-avenger's transformation, his/her move to violence, which is explicitly motivated by the trauma of rape. Rape-revenge narratives are "in some measure about that transformation" (Clover 123). If the victim-avenger is a woman, this offers a female-centered narrative that explores the trauma of rape, which has certainly been lacking in television. This does not mean that all rape-revenge films are feminist; just because a narrative focuses on "a woman's experience on rape" does not mean that it will present "a particularly feminist response to rape" (Projansky 58). As we saw in a previous section, many films present conflicting (post)feminist rape politics just as televisual narratives do. The genre moreover has a popular reputation of being "exploitative" and "insensitive" in its portrayal of rape (Henry 113). Rather, my goal with this section was to provide a contrast to the analyses of rape narratives on television done by feminist media scholars.

Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Rape Narratives

Thus far, the literature I have reviewed has focused on narratives that depict women as the survivors of rape and that portray the experience of predominantly white characters. Next, I turn to scholars who have discussed the intersection of race and gender in rape narratives, before examining works on male rape narratives. Cuklanz describes that from the late 1970s to the early 1990s on primetime, there was "little discourse on the subject of how rape and race are related" (26). Some representations of interracial rape existed, and in an effort to create "a contradiction of the traditional racist ideas about rape and race" cast the rapist as a white man and the victim as a woman of color (26). While these narratives actually do represent the rapes of women of color that had been previously "invisible" (Moorti 115), they do not explicitly discuss race. In *Color of Rape*, Moorti identifies an overall failure of primetime television in the late 1980s and early

1990s "to explore the manner in which racialized subjects experience rape differently" (118). These rape narratives do not explore rape and race simultaneously, nor how gendered oppression and racial oppression might intersect (118). *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit,* a more contemporary crime show, also attempts to "demystify the black male rapist myth" and "render visible the victimization of women of color," which works against "dominant tropes" about "black male sexuality" and "black femininity in popular culture" (309-310).

In narratives that do examine how such racist myths and stereotypes affect the understanding of rape, male character's experiences are addressed while women's are "muted" (Moorti 147-8). Projanksy notes a similar silencing of women of color in rape narratives, in both television and film. She argues that Black women in particular are displaced, such as when their "experiences of rape" are portrayed as "a historical problem that is no longer relevant" or as a means to "reveal white men's villainous racism" (Projansky 162). When a Black woman is raped, even if her rape is central to the storyline, she is silenced and her trauma is overlooked (193). The suppression and displacement of Black women, and women of color generally, in texts about rape highlights the difficulties popular culture has in exploring the intersection of race and sexual violence. For Projansky, this highlights postfeminist discourses that universalize white women's experiences and consequently ignore the experiences of women of color (193).

Henry reminds us that in the rape-revenge genre in particular, the protagonist is usually a white woman; that this fact is not acknowledged in scholarship on rape-revenge "reinscribes the genre's exclusion of women of color" (79). *Descent* (Talia Lugacy, 2007), a film that is not usually included in the canon of the genre (80), features a Latina protagonist named Maya. The film begins by first portraying her experience as a woman of color in a university setting which involves mostly white students. Then, racism in the rape scene is made explicit through the rapist's use of racial slurs, and the film links the consequences of rape "to the impact of racism and specifically racial-sexual oppression" (81). A large portion of the film does focus on Maya's trauma, exhibiting "an effort to convey and understand the racial specificities of her experience" (84). Ultimately, however, "concessions are made to genre demands and expectations" (84). The eroticization of the protagonist in the revenge sequences is particularly problematic in this film as it evokes racist myths about the sexuality of women of color, particularly the Jezebel stereotype (97). The political potential of the film to explore the intersection of race and rape is thus limited through the genre's conventions, which end up "reinscribing old myths" (97).

In addition to the marginalization of people of color in rape narratives, male rape has been less frequently explored as well. Henry notes that the position of woman as victim of rape and man as the rapist "has been taken for granted" in both "the classic rape-revenge genre" and "feminist theory and literature on rape" (109). Since my textual analysis does involve sexual violence against men, it is crucial to examine the political consequences of narratives that depict male rape. Henry dedicates a chapter of *Revisionist Rape-Revenge* to exploring three rape-revenge films that feature men who have experienced rape, looking at the protagonists' relationships with trauma, shame, and revenge (109). Such narratives "have the potential to revise gendered assumptions about rape" that have often assumed women to be the victims of sexual violence and men the perpetrators (112). However, like the genre more broadly, male rape-revenge films do not always live up to this potential. For example, the Australian film *Acolytes* (Jon Hewitt, 2008) is a narrative about two male victim-avengers, Mark and James, who struggle to deal with the trauma of their childhood sexual abuse. While the first part of the film depicts their rape-revenge mission, later on the film shifts "to more familiar gender and genre roles" (123) when at the end, Mark is revealed to be a rapist himself. The film "returns to the spectacle of female victimization" (123) that in turn initiates a new rape-revenge plot when a female avenger enacts her revenge on Mark. Similar to the way that genre limits the discussion of race and rape in *Descent*, the possibility for male rape-revenge films to explore "gender-specific responses to rape trauma" (114) and homophobic anxieties (120) is often mitigated by the genre's conventions (123).

One film that challenges this concession to the rape-revenge genre's conventions is *The Book of Revelation* (Ana Kokkinos, 2006), also an Australian film. Henry describes it as "a victim-centered film" that dedicates most of its narrative to portraying the emotional and psychological effects of rape on the protagonist, Daniel, who has been raped by a group of women (128). In addition to representing rape trauma, the film also effectively explores Daniel's gendered experience, such as when he fails to be taken seriously by the police when he tries to report the crime (132); this scene references a reality in which men "face a range of rape myths and societal expectations that discourage reporting" (132). Henry notes that the film's deployment of the rape-revenge structure is unconventional (133). Daniel spends much of the film searching for his rapists, but it is not clear what he is going to do when he finds them (132). In the film's climax, he is triggered into a violent outburst and attacks an innocent woman who

resembles one of the perpetrators (133). Henry identifies this moment as "the delivery of the genre expectation for a more violent, direct act of revenge" though it is an act of "compulsive violence" rather than deliberately planned revenge (133). In the end, *The Book of Revelation* emphasizes the importance of male friendship in Daniel's healing process (134); when his girlfriend leaves him after his violent outburst, he is comforted by his friend Mark who is able to understand his violence (133). The film ends with Daniel finally being able to tell the story of his abuse, which signals that he is starting to confront his trauma (134). Henry believes that *The Book of Revelation* offers a significant "contribution" to the depiction of rape trauma (128).

In terms of televisual rape narratives, Cuklanz and Moorti point out that *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* has increasingly incorporated the experience of men who experience rape and sexual violence. The show has portrayed cases where both heterosexual men and gay men are survivors of rape. Significantly, these episodes illustrate how homophobia works to make men's experiences of rape and sexual violence "either invisible or sensational" (Cuklanz and Moorti 310). In addition, *SVU* has also portrayed women who rape men, such as in episode where a male stripper is raped by three women. While, as I addressed above, *SVU* deploys contradictory feminist politics—"misogynist feminism" (318) — Cuklanz and Moorti argue that *SVU* is "unequivocally feminist" in its "depiction of power imbalances causing rape" (310).

In summation, many of the rape narratives that have been studied by feminist media and film scholars deploy contradictory understandings about rape. This stems, at least in part, from a struggle with how to represent feminism in the texts. While, as is made clear in this chapter, rape narratives on television since the 1970s have certainly become more complex and have incorporated feminist understandings of rape, they have also engaged with postfeminist discourses and backlash rhetoric. Moreover, rape narratives have been used as plots to highlight other issues, such as heterosexual romance and constructions of hegemonic masculinity. It is crucial to remember that most of the feminist media scholars in this review, such as Lisa Cuklanz, Sujata Moorti, and Susan Berridge, have looked specifically at rape narratives that appear in programs on broadcast network television.[5] Since the 1970s, where Cuklanz begins her study, the television industry has obviously seen enormous shifts and changes such as the rise of

[5] Sujata Moorti in particular suggests that primetime broadcast television's ability to "critique[e] patriarchal ideology" is limited because it is "a commercial medium" (Moorti 115). While my review of feminist media scholarship has highlighted the complexities of televisual rape narratives and thus works against such a view of television, her claim is still worth noting.

cable television. As such, it is important to trace some of these major developments and how they have changed the narrative and representational possibilities of television. Certainly, these transformations have informed the production of *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*—two cable television programs. Accordingly, the next chapter will focus on the emergence of cable television. How have the industrial practices of television changed the kinds of narratives and ideologies we see on television in the twenty-first century?

Chapter 2
Cable, Controversy, and Quality: The Emergence of Cable Television

In *Television Studies,* Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz advocate for "a multifaceted and deliberately contextualized approach" to studying television (22). Even if one is primarily interested in the programs themselves, they remind us that "television programs do come from somewhere, and 'they' have names and motivations that can be explored and connected with the programs ultimately produced" (89). In keeping with their conceptualization of television studies, before engaging in a textual analysis of FX's *American Horror Story* (2011-) and AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010-), I first offer a review of the history and institutions that have produced them. Since both of these programs are on basic cable, it is moreover crucial to provide a brief understanding of the industrial specificities of cable television. Cable television differs from broadcast television in that it is not free and makes profit from subscription fees. Basic cable refers to a dual revenue system in which services are funded both by advertisers and by subscribers, whereas a premium cable service such as HBO is financed only through subscription. Both AMC and FX are technically basic cable systems, as they operate through this dual-revenue model. As we will see, cable's new economic models are crucial to the changes in what can be shown on television.

The major studies of televisual rape narratives reviewed in the previous chapter engage with programs on primetime broadcast television. In *Rape on Prime Time*, Lisa Cuklanz looks at episodes from the fifteen-year period of 1976 to 1990. Sujata Moorti, in *The Color of Rape*, considers episodes from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since 1976, there have obviously been enormous changes in the television's industrial norms in the contexts of new technologies, new economic models, and new forms of distribution, and in terms of new textual possibilities. In *Cable Guys*, Amanda Lotz emphasizes that the industrial changes in television in the late twentieth century resulted in new narrative potentials, as seen through the more complex depictions of men and masculinity on cable television (32). As cable television programs of the twenty-first century, *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead* have been crafted within these new industrial and textual realities. The purpose of this chapter is thus to explore the industrial shifts in American television in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, and then to consider

how these developments changed the kinds of texts that are possible on television in the twenty-first century.

What follows is a short history of the developments of the American television industry of the late twentieth century, focusing on the emergence of cable television and its industrial specificities. Like Lotz in *Cable Guys*, I emphasize the changes in technology, economic models, and distribution practices that affected the kinds of texts that can exist on television. I then contextualize discussions of quality television within this history, noting how this distinction of television programs relates to the branding of networks. Such discourses of quality in branding are crucial for understanding how graphic, edgy content has become not only possible on television but also desirable and valorized. My analysis of quality television moreover considers scholarly debates that have problematized the term. Finally, I look specifically at AMC and FX networks to understand how their histories, which include the creation and success of *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story* respectively, fit into this larger history and discourses of quality television. Ultimately, I am trying to understand the history behind how and why more explicit content, such as graphic depictions of rape, came to exist on television.

Television in the Network Era and Multi-Channel Transition

My brief history will be framed using Amanda Lotz's periodization, discussed at length in *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (2014) and condensed in the article "What Is U.S. Television Now?" (2009). Lotz explains that the periodization of television history is important, since "shifts in norms of operations lead to changes in textual production of the medium and its role in culture" ("What is" 50). To begin, I address the industrial standards that existed in what Lotz calls the network era, the period of the early 1950s to the 1980s (50). While scholars and industry people have used terms like "the cable era" or "the cable revolution" to describe subsequent periods of television, Lotz refers to the multi-channel transition (1980s-2000) and the post-network era (2000s) (50). While it is certainly tempting to use the term "cable era" in order to highlight the importance of the emergence of cable television, I defer to Lotz's terms as they encompass the various significant changes seen in the television industry up to the contemporary moment.

When scholars like Moorti refer to primetime television as "a commercial medium" (115), they mean that broadcast television has followed an "advertising-only economic model" that characterized the network era (Lotz, "What Is" 57). Since its inception in the 1950s, broadcast television networks depended on advertisers to finance their programs. In early television, programs were funded through a single advertiser, but by the late 1950s, "magazine-format advertising" became the norm (54). This advertising technique comprises of fifteen and thirty-second commercials from various advertisers, and still exists in contemporary broadcast television (ibid). In the network era, television was "a second-order commodity" as viewers did not pay directly for television, but rather paid advertisers when they bought their products (Johnson 37). Content on television was limited because it had to appeal to a broad audience in order to attract advertisers, who purchased advertising spots based on the promise of large audience numbers (Lotz, *The Television* 23). Indeed, Lotz points out that the network era was "the era of *broad*casting" (24).

The network era, according to Lotz, was primarily characterized by "minimal choice and control" for viewers (Lotz, "What is" 51). Content was limited by broadcast regulations by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which replaced the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) in 1934 as the "regulatory authority for electronic media" (Mullen 28). Primetime television was also limited to three national networks, the so-called "Big Three": ABC, CBS, and NBC (22). This oligopoly resulted from both "wavelength scarcity of analogue television" as well as regulations that had been in place since the 1950s (Johnson 16). Lotz notes "little differentiation" between the three networks who had no need to distinguish themselves through branding—as networks do today—since they were all trying to attract the same large audience ("What Is" 52). As we will see, the industrial shifts that occurred in the 1980s, forming an era Lotz calls the multi-channel transition, have changed this network era configuration.

In the 1980s, the American television industry underwent a number of developments in technology, economy, and distribution that profoundly transformed industrial norms; the rise of cable television was central to these changes. Lotz specifies that in the multi-channel transition, the industry transformed from "a competitive environment" of limited content where viewers had little control over what and when they could watch, to one with much more viewer choice and ever-growing control over when and where to consume content (Lotz, *Cable Guys* 29). Lotz points out that the "first disruption of dominant network-era production practices" occurred in

September 1971 when the government implemented the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules (*The Television* 98-99). These regulations were implemented by the FCC to create "a realignment of power between producers and distributors" and somewhat limit the power and control of the networks, and were only totally removed in 1995 (98-99). Then, in the 1980s, the American television industry underwent major deregulation. The FCC introduced broadcast policies that promoted competition by making it less difficult to run new stations, for example by simplifying application requirements and removing various commercial ownership regulations (Ferrall 24). These deregulatory policies allowed the creation of many new channels and networks such as FOX in 1986 (Lotz, *The Television* 25). In addition, as we will see, within this "broader deregulatory climate" cable television services would pose a threat to networks (Johnson 16).

Of course, cable television existed long before the 1980s. Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, cable was primarily used as "a broadcast-enhancement technology" which retransmitted broadcast signals to those who were unable to receive them (Mullen 2). Part of the reason cable was restricted to this basic function was that in 1965 and 1966 the FCC had imposed regulations that included "content and carriage restrictions on existing cable providers" (DeFino 31). These regulations, as well as daunting financial costs, prevented cable from developing (27). The FCC was similarly hesitant about the concept of pay television, and thus distributed very few licenses to pay cable services and limited their content (42). With the development of new technology such as communication satellites, and then "changes in policies" (Mullen 3) such as the deregulation implemented through the Cable Communications Act of 1984 (DeFino 62), cable was able to offer more than its previous basic function. Mullen (2008) notes that by the 1990s, cable television had become "a form of television all its own" (3).

Due to the proliferation of channels and programs available on television, and the more competitive environment, networks needed new strategies to attract viewers (Lotz, *Cable Guys* 30). Networks began to target smaller, niche audiences; MTV, for example, addressed youths, while cable networks such as Lifetime and Oxygen were aimed at a female demographic (Lotz, *The Television* 27). Niche targeting was a particularly useful marketing strategy for cable networks, since they were able to offer content that was distinct from broadcast television (Johnson 16-17). Cable's economic model does not depend solely on advertisers to fund their programming, since subscribers pay directly for the service. Cable networks were thus not under

pressure to develop the least objectionable programming—content that would appeal to the largest audience— and rather attempted to create distinctive content that would appeal to viewers enough for them to pay the subscription fee (ibid). Premium cable networks like HBO were not limited by advertisers at all, being only funded by subscribers (ibid). Cable networks moreover have fewer restrictions on content, since they are not governed by broadcast regulations (ibid). Today, the FCC regulates "objectionable programming," which includes obscene, indecent, and profane material (The Media Bureau 15). While obscene content cannot be broadcast at any time, indecent and profane material are only prohibited from being broadcast from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.—when it is most likely that children can view this content (15-16).[6] In this context, cable channels could appeal to niche audiences by offering programming that truly was different from broadcast fare. Premium cable in particular could include nudity, violence, and coarse language that could not be shown on primetime broadcast television. Although broadcast networks did try to adjust their programming in order to compete with the niche programming of cable television, their economic model still "relied upon attracting a mass audience" (Lotz, *Cable Guys* 29-30).

Cable television offered new textual possibilities both in its programs content and formal features. Lotz explains that the production norms of broadcast television established in the network era created a television season which comprised of 21-22 episodes that typically ran from September to May with reruns (Lotz, *The Television* 102-3). Due to its industrial context, cable did not have to follow the same production norms as broadcast television, and so networks produced fewer episodes—often 13—which cost less (102-3). Lotz also suggests that producing fewer episodes impacted the quality of the programs, since writers had more time to create their stories (103). Cable networks also deviated from the traditional "yearly network time frame" since they had no need to appeal to the largest possible audience every night (118). For instance, HBO's big night of programming is Sunday nights, as is AMC's, while FX's is Tuesday and Wednesday nights (118). In addition, cable could show programs over the summer (115). On a premium cable service like HBO, even episode length is different from a broadcast program because there are no commercial breaks (118). According to Lotz, the different television

[6] There are three requirements for content to be labeled obscene: it must engage with "prurient interests," there must be "a patently offensive" portrayal of sexual behavior, and it "must lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value" (15). Profane material refers more to offensive language, while indecent material specifies "patently offensive" portrayals of "sexual or excretory organs or activities" (The Media Bureau 15).

schedules first introduced by cable's industrial norms "expanded the types of stories that could be profitably produced for US television" (119).

New narrative possibilities emerge on cable television precisely because it is free from the restrictions of broadcast television and (sometimes) advertisers. Robin Nelson (2007) suggests that due to "their liberation from both advertisers and regulatory constraints" premium cable channels can air "edgy" content, rather than the "conservative" content of least objectionable programming (46). Indeed, in *Cable Guys*, Lotz suggests that the complex, "unconventional" male characters exist on cable of the twenty-first century because of "cable's ability to derive commercial success by narrowcasting to smaller and specific audience niches" (Lotz, *Cable Guys* 32). The potential for cable to create edgy or even controversial content has been linked to the possibilities for more artistic and even higher quality television. Nowhere is the link between cable and quality television more apparent than discussions of HBO.

HBO, Branding, and the Quality Television Debates

Many believe that HBO (Home Box Office) embodies the successful incorporation of quality television into a brand identity. HBO has marketed itself as "the home of quality television" (Johnson 29) through its original scripted programming. In my evaluation of the quality television debate, then, it is helpful to look at HBO in particular. Launched on November 8 1972, Dean DeFino (2014) describes HBO as "the first successful commercial venture in 'pay' television" (4). The network first began offering original scripted series in the 1980s and many networks have followed its example, including AMC (1984) and FX (1994) who both began offering original scripted series in the late 1990s (Shapiro 27, 102). As we will see, both AMC and FX have also tried to brand themselves as providers of quality television, like HBO. First, what is quality television and why is it the subject of debate in television scholarship?

Quality television is not a term that is unique to cable television, nor was it first used to describe it. Lynn Spigel (2004) maintains that even in the 1950s, networks used the term quality to describe their programming and consequently "legitimize their oligopoly business practices" (Spigel 19). The quality label has often been deployed in order to gain viewers. Jane Feuer (1984) contextualizes her study of MTM Enterprises and quality television within a "crucial change" in 1970 where networks began to target specific demographics rather than a mass

audience (Feuer 3). The 1970-1 television season, referred to as the year of relevance, saw networks target their content to the most desirable demographic: young, urban adults (4). The Big Three enacted "a relevance drive" wherein they included "innovative" programming such as *All in The Family* (CBS, 1971-1979) for "prestige and youth appeal" (4). Consequently, the idea of quality television relates directly to what Feuer calls "the notion of 'quality' demographics" (4) and branding of programs and networks.

Television scholarship has been interested in not only what defines quality television, but also the politics of using quality as an evaluative term. Within academia, questions of quality television have prompted many to consider the relationship between power, the academy, and popular culture. Charlotte Brundson (1990) writes that "there are always issues of power at stake in notions such as quality and judgement—Quality for whom?, Judgement by whom?, On whose behalf? " (73). Brundson highlights that judgements (such as what constitutes quality) are the product of subjective factors, such as taste, as well as institutional ones (73). Ava Collins (1993) also examines "the issue of evaluation" in the study of television in her article "Intellectuals, Power, and Quality Television" (43). Collins considers how to study and teach popular culture within the academy. She references tensions within academia and pedagogy between different ideological approaches to studying television, which have typically centered on the oppositional viewing position of the intellectual and the so-called common viewer (37). The former position draws on "the rational discourse of intellectual tradition" for evaluation, while the latter is limited to subjective, "personal statement" (36) and "abstains from evaluation" (37). However, these two positions do not account for television's complexity, and so Collins introduces a third position in which the text appeals to the viewer by offering its own terms of evaluation (38). Collins concludes that television "provides the standard of its own value" (39). Moreover, scholars must be self-reflexive about their own viewing position in the engagement with (and evaluation of) television and popular culture texts (43).

More recently, Aniko Imre (2009) examines the transcultural gender politics of American quality television. Imre reminds us that within a globalized industry, American television is disseminated across the world but "critical and theoretical discussion" of quality television "has remained exclusive to an implied Anglo-American audience" (393). Imre engages in "feminist transcultural translation" (394) in order to show how the "gendered dimension" of a television program "is rearticulated and reincorporated in local cultures in often radically ways" (391). For

instance, she notes that *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) has been the subject of many scholarly debates regarding postfeminism and quality television (401). She observes that such academic discussion of *Sex and the City* "are conditioned on and take for granted previous, more or less influential, feminist waves" that many regions have not seen (402). In some contexts, the show is even of lesser cultural value because it is female-centered (401). Locating discussion of quality television outside "the Anglo-American cultural sphere" is, for Imre, an important feminist project (403).

While many television scholars, such as Sarah Cardwell, agree that "issues of value judgement and personal taste" are inextricable from discussions of quality television, the concept has come to denote certain textual qualities rather than critical praise or positive assessment (Cardwell 26). Cardwell explains that in terms of production, such properties include "high production values, naturalistic performance styles, recognized and esteemed actors, a sense of visual style created through careful, even innovative camerawork and editing" that "moves beyond a 'glossiness' of style" (26). In this sense, quality television signifies certain aesthetic features. Regarding content, Cardwell notes that these programs often "explore 'serious' themes" and give "reflections on contemporary society" (26). DeFino adds "verisimilitude, moral ambiguity, psychological realism, and narrative resolution" to the list of textual properties that roughly define quality television (DeFino 10).

These latter characteristics relate to narrative complexity, conceptualized as a particular narratological form by Jason Mittell (2006). Mittell's definition of narrative complexity emphasizes three aspects. First, and most importantly, complex narratives offer "a reconceptualization of the boundary between episodic and serial forms" (39). Rather than follow the traditional episodic mode of early television, in which plots were neatly resolved within individual episodes, complex narratives weave ongoing stories across multiple episodes and even seasons (32). In addition, narrative complexity often involves self-consciousness "about storytelling mechanics" as well as "intensified viewer engagement" (39). Complex narratives began to appear on television in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as in shows such as *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981-1987). However, in the 1990s the narrative innovations and experimentations introduced in the 1970s and 1980s were expanded upon and made more commonplace (33). Mittell identifies *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) as an early example of this particular narrative complexity in its long-form, creative storytelling (33).

Many connect quality television to television that resembles film. In "Quality TV Drama," Robin Nelson notes that historically, there has been a cultural hierarchy in which film is more valued than television. This distinction emerges from "an industrial hierarchy" in which films have higher budgets compared to television, which has diminished filmmakers' interest in working in television (Nelson 39). However, the development of certain digital technologies has allowed for higher quality production in television, blurring the distinction between television and film (43). In *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (1995), John Thornton Caldwell notes the emergence of "a film look in television" in the 1980s, which he calls the cinematic (Caldwell 12). He explains that "spectacle, high-production values, and feature-style cinematography" on television emerged from "Cinematic values" and gave television a "cinematic air of distinction" (12). The "process of stylization" and "display of knowing exhibitionism" that developed in the 1980s is part of what he terms televisuality (5), and these characteristics are "tactics" that the networks used to produce distinctive content within television's progressively competitive environment (10). Between such technological developments and the perceived artistic freedom offered by cable television, many established directors, writers, and producers have moved from film into television (DeFino 7-8). In some ways, quality television is valued for being more like film, or at the very least, different from traditional broadcast television.

HBO uses all of these discourses of cinema and distinction in its brand identity. Owned by Time Warner, it began as "a local pay-TV service in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania" and then went national in December 1975 "when it was put on satellite" (Shapiro 102). HBO began airing its first original scripted series, *The Hitchhiker* (1983-1991), in 1983 (ibid). As Dean J. DeFino highlights in his book *The HBO Effect* (2014), HBO, in its critical acclaim, has earned the reputation of starting "the wellspring of a new "Golden Age" in American television" particularly in the early 2000s with shows like *Oz* (1997-2003)*, Sex and the City* (1998-2004)*, The Sopranos* (1999-2007)*, Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), and *The Wire* (2002-2008) (2).[7] Mittell points out that many of these programs are narratively complex and have a degree of prestige that has helped HBO in its quality brand (31). Although in the contemporary moment, the mid-

[7] While DeFino notes that many have associated HBO with a new "Golden Age" of television, he is also quick to critique such discourse as a "fallacy" (16). Indeed, he suggests that terms such as "Golden Age" and quality television cannot be divorced of their economic (branding) contexts (17).

2010s, HBO is not quite so unique in its offerings of original scripted programming, it is still useful to explore HBO's association with quality television.

In discussing HBO's approach to branding, most will point to its infamous tagline "It's Not TV. It's HBO" that was introduced in 1996 (Edgerton 9). Nelson points out how HBO's name evokes discourses of "the cinema box office," and that the tagline differentiates HBO from the least objectionable programming of traditional broadcast television (Nelson 43-44). Indeed, calling upon cinematic discourses imbues HBO with a prestige that, up until more recently, has not been applied to television (a medium of the masses). DeFino notes that HBO's branding strategy has been to "distinguish itself from its competitors by offering what others could not" (5). What others could not offer, due to FCC regulations, was explicit content rife with nudity, violence, and coarse language. McCabe and Akass go so far as to argue that "courting controversy has been institutionalized by HBO" and has been crucial to its success (63). Moreover, in industry talk, there has been much discussion of the "creative freedoms" writers, producers, and directors find at HBO (66). The idea that explicit content should be associated with artistic integrity and creativity furthers the distinction that only HBO can offer quality television. McCabe and Akass argue that associating HBO content with creative and artistic freedom become "ways of justifying the explicitness of what can be allowed" (69). Further, "HBO takes control of the illicit" (69), or that which is deemed controversial and forbidden, "and encloses it within its institutional discourse of quality" (69). Indeed, HBO's marketing its explicit content as creative, quality television becomes important in my analysis, since other cable networks have followed HBO's example.

McCabe and Akass, writing in 2007, suggest that other cable networks, such as FX, have begun to catch up to HBO in terms of provocative content (75). In the preface to *Quality TV* (2007), Robert J. Thompson asks, "Who would have guessed 10 years ago that a basic cable channel like FX would be winning Emmy awards and critical acclaim with original programming?" (Thompson xix). As we will see, AMC and FX have indeed been praised for some of their original dramas. Moreover, they have created brand identities not unlike HBO's, thanks in part to *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story*. Both AMC and FX are basic cable channels, rather than premium cable channels, as they are funded both by subscription fees and advertisers. They are not as free to show explicit content as premium cable networks like

HBO, since they have to appease advertisers, but as we will see, they have still produced edgy and critically acclaimed original scripted series.

AMC, FX, and the Building of Quality Brands

AMC, American Movie Classics, was launched on October 1, 1984. It began as a premium cable network "that aired old Hollywood movies from the 1930s-1960s" (Shapiro 27). AMC's first original scripted series *Remember WENN* aired from 1996 to 1998 (ibid). In 2002, AMC transformed its brand identity into "a more general audience network" by adding more contemporary films and other kinds of shows to its programming (ibid). In that year, it also included commercials and thus became a basic cable service (ibid). Tim Appelo (2011) notes that 2007 was a turning point for AMC, with the release of the show *Mad Men* (2007-2015). *Mad Men* was AMC's first original scripted series to earn acclaim and compete with cable networks like HBO (Apello, "How AMC Became HBO's Nightmare"). Other programs that helped AMC build its reputation are *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) and *The Walking Dead*.

The first episode of *The Walking Dead* aired on Sunday October 31, 2010 at 10 p.m. Its sixth and most recent season began on October 11, 2015, in the 9 p.m. timeslot. Based on a comic book series of the same name, the series follows a large group of characters as they fight to survive the zombie apocalypse. While *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* brought AMC critical acclaim through Emmy and Golden Globe awards, *The Walking Dead* has brought AMC great financial success and unprecedented audience ratings (Lafayette 10). In 2014, before the premiere of the fifth season (which I will be examining), *TWD* "was the highest-rated drama on TV in the demo that's most important to advertisers, adults 18-49" (10). Because of the high viewership, ad prices for *The Walking Dead* are high; as of October 2014, "commercials on *The Walking Dead* are the most expensive for a scripted show on TV" (10). Moreover, the revenue earned from *The Walking Dead* is valuable to AMC because it can help the network build their brand and create more original scripted series, a particularly important task since both *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* have ended (10).

An examination of AMC's website reveals how it has branded itself through the success of shows like *The Walking Dead*. AMC's current slogan is "Something More", which is explained on the website through the claim that "AMC brings to its audience something deeper,

something richer, Something More" ("AMC"). *The Walking Dead* is central to this discourse, as AMC reminds us that the show is "the most- watched drama series in basic cable history and the number one show on television among adults 18-49 for the last three years" (ibid). "Something more" is clearly an attempt to differentiate it from other networks. In industry interviews, people who work for AMC make sure to discuss the creative freedom at AMC and the network's love of risk-taking. Mark Johnson, the executive producer of *Breaking Bad*, has said that "AMC took some real gambles," and that at AMC, one has "the freedom to have the courage of your convictions" (qted. in Appelo). According to Veena Sud, creator of *The Killing* (AMC, 2011-2013/ Netflix, 2014), AMC encourages "Brave, cool storytelling" (qted. in Appelo). These celebrations of AMC reinforce its brand identity: they are producing quality television, pushing boundaries, creating stories that offer more than other networks.

FX's brand identity functions similarly. Launched on January 1, 1994 by Fox Television, FX was, according to Shapiro, "positioned as a broad-appeal, advertiser-supported cable network" (80). While it was originally intended to compete with other cable networks like USA and TNT, it was not much of a competitor until the early 2000s, when it began to offer "quality, edgy programs" (80). *The Shield* (2002-2008) was FX's first original series to become a true hit, and helped establish "the legitimacy of basic cable original series" (Lotz, *The Television* 245). *The Shield* moreover helped FX create a brand identity (248). The show included graphic violence and coarse language that had not been previously seen on basic cable, and upset some viewers, groups, and advertisers (247). While many advertisers withdrew, many others then stepped in. Lotz positions *The Shield* as significant because it "indicated some advertisers' desire to be associated with distinctive content" (248). Other noteworthy original series on FX include *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-2014), *Justified* (2010-2015), and *American Horror Story*.

American Horror Story debuted on FX on Wednesday October 5, 2011 at 10 p.m., a timeslot it has kept for its five seasons. The show was created by Ryan Murphy, who is known for his other series *Nip/Tuck* (FX, 2003-2010) and *Glee* (Fox, 2009-2015). *AHS* is an anthology drama in which each season offers a new story world and new characters; the five seasons have included *Murder House, Asylum, Coven, Freak Show,* and, in the 2015-2016 season, *Hotel*. The show has been a major hit for FX, attracting high numbers of viewers and earning Emmy awards (Neel 10). *Variety* reported in June 2015 that the fourth season's finale allowed *American Horror Story* to set the network's record as the most-viewed program, beating even *Sons of Anarchy*

(Kissell). Along with its critical acclaim, there has been much talk about the graphic sex and violence depicted in *AHS*. In an editorial for *The Journal of Popular Culture*, for example, Gary Hoppenstand suggests that the show "has totally obliterated previous censorship boundaries altogether" (Hoppenstand 1). He goes on to say that the show is "the scariest ever seen on television" and "has completely destroyed any remaining limitations that television censorship has placed on the horror genre" (2). This conceptualization of the show as edgy and pushing the boundaries of what can be shown on television bodes well for FX's brand identity.

FX's brand identity can be summed up in one word: fearless. Indeed, as seen on the network's Facebook page, "Fearless" is FX's slogan ("FX Networks"). In interviews, FX CEO John Landgraf frequently discusses his strategy for fearless programming. In a 2013 article for *the New York Times* called "Shunning the Safe, FX Indulges Its Dark Side" David Carr praises Landgraf's supposed bravery and willingness to take risks in his programming decisions. Carr says, compared to FX, the rest of the television industry is "so busy living in fear that a creative risk seems out of the question" (Carr). The success brought by such edgy shows like *Sons of Anarchy* and *American Horror Story* are indeed attributed to Landgraf's desire to take risks with FX's programming, an impulse that Carr suggests is from Landgraf's frustration with broadcast networks. Before becoming CEO of FX, Landgraf was an executive for NBC, and found that network television limited creativity (Carr). Indeed, this discussion of risk-taking as a principal characteristic of programming choices, as well as the supposed edginess of FX's programs (as exemplified by Hoppenstand's comments about *AHS*), feeds into the network's "Fearless" identity.

As horror shows on basic cable television, both *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story* deal with the illicit in terms of graphic violence. That is, since gore and violence is a generic demand of horror, they have the potential to deliver scenes of violence that are more explicit than broadcast television. As indicated by Hoppenstand's comments, which were elicited in response to the show's "fetishism, gore, physical deformity, explicit sex, and extreme violence" (1), *American Horror Story's* controversial nature is in part due to its graphic portrayals of sex and violence. In our contemporary television landscape, explicit content is a tool to differentiate programs and networks from broadcast television. In my introduction, I mentioned that *Entertainment Weekly* ran an article about *AHS*'s so-called "most disturbing scene" which turned out to be an anal rape. In this moment, rape becomes part of the illicit and is

used as a marketing tool to create buzz for the show. This chapter has explored how my texts relate to the history of cable, branding, and quality television precisely to locate what kinds of interests other than narrative might lie behind graphic depictions of sexual violence. By addressing how the illicit is portrayed as the epitome of artistic integrity and quality as part of the network's branding strategy, I acknowledge the outside forces that demand its existence.

In this chapter, I have not spoken to the profound changes in the television industry in the 1990s and 2000s that have led to our contemporary post-network era. Lotz names the period of the 1980s to the early 1990s as the multi-channel transition, due to increased competition, increased choice for viewers, and a move away from television's public service function towards niche targeting (Lotz, "What Is" 57). I focus primarily on this era as it saw the emergence of cable television and many of the branding strategies employed by networks like AMC and FX. The twenty-first century has seen further changes in the television industry, from new technologies, new forms of distributions, and new advertising techniques. For example, the media conglomeration of the 1990s, the 1996 Telecommunications Act, as well as technologies such as the Internet and portable devices have had enormous impact on television's industrial practices. Lotz names the contemporary moment the post-network era, to denote the solidification of many of the changes introduced in the multi-channel transition (50). As Lotz suggests, television has become individualized; we no longer have to follow a linear schedule as we did in the network era, nor are we forced to watch television content at home on our television sets (57). All of these changes in technology, distribution, and economic models have informed the production and reception of *The Walking Dead* and *American Horror Story*. Keeping in mind the histories that have produced these programs, I now turn to a textual analysis of them.

Chapter 3

Rape as Horror in *American Horror Story: Coven* and *The Walking Dead*

While *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead* have enjoyed considerable commercial and critical success, they are by no means the first horror programs in television history. As Lisa Schmidt (2013) describes, "horror has had an extensive pedigree in American television" from early shows such as *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (CBS, 1955-1965) and *Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-1964), to more recent ones like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB-UPN, 1997-2003) (160), which has garnered substantial fan following and academic interest. Scholarly works on *Buffy* have ranged from feminist studies of Buffy herself, such as in *Buffy and the Heroine's Journey* (Frankel 2012), to edited collections like *Undead TV: Essays on Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Levine and Parks 2007), which considers the show's lasting economic and cultural impact. In fact, Schmidt argues that television's seriality is well suited to the horror genre, allowing an engagement with horror's melodramatic roots (159). Contemporary horror on cable television offers graphic violence and gore along with these serial narratives. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the new textual possibilities afforded by the industrial specificities of cable television exist in a context that celebrates controversial material. Such controversial, or what Janet McCabe and Kim Akass have termed "illicit" (69), content often involves the intersection of sex and violence. Considering the explicitness evident on cable television, how is rape and sexual violence being treated? Moreover, do these representations allow for a feminist critique or reinforce ideologies that contribute to rape culture?

This chapter explores the portrayals of rape in *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*. First, I examine the third season of *AHS*, *Coven,* which contains multiple instances of rape and sexual assault. Then, I move to the fifth season of *TWD*, which is the first season of the series to use the term "rape." An important point of comparison between these programs is that both utilize a version of the rape-revenge narrative structure. Broadly, this analysis focuses on the rape-revenge structure as it is deployed in each program's narrative, as well as the relationship between rape and discourses of vulnerability, empowerment, and, ultimately, survival. Finally, this chapter also considers the visual depiction of the rape scenes in relation to the gore and violence of the horror genre.

American Horror Story: Coven

Coven, the third season of *American Horror Story*, follows a group of witches at Miss Robichaux's Academy for Exceptional Young Ladies in New Orleans as they fight for survival and search for their next leader. While Cordelia Foxx (Sarah Paulson) operates the Academy, her mother Fiona Goode (Jessica Lange) is the Supreme witch—the true leader of the coven. Other members include the newly discovered Zoe Benson (Taissa Farmiga), arguably the protagonist of the season, the spoiled movie star Madison Montgomery (Emma Roberts), voodoo witch Queenie (Gabourey Sidibe), and clairvoyant Nan (Jamie Brewer). The coven faces threats that emerge from the struggle for leadership within their own group, from another group of witches led by the Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau (Angela Bassett), and from the male witch-hunters who aim to eliminate all witches.

In addition to its historical significance, the figure of the witch has been the focus of some horror scholarship. In *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), Barbara Creed notes that in horror films the witch is an "incontestably monstrous role…that belongs to women" (73). For Creed, the witch is an example of the monstrous-feminine, "an abject figure" that "threatens the symbolic order" (often a patriarchal symbolic order) ("Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine" 83). Creed contextualizes the cinematic representations of witches within the historical context in which women were persecuted for being—or suspected of being—witches. Significantly, the witch's supposedly monstrous sexuality has been central to historical and cinematic images. Creed observes that in the real-life persecution of these women, their "alleged crimes were of a sexual nature" (*The Monstrous-Feminine* 75); then, cinematic depiction of the witch in horror "continues to foreground her essentially sexual nature" (76). While this chapter works outside of Creed's psychoanalytic framework, her insights are valuable precisely because my analysis is interested in the intersections of violence and sex in *Coven.* Additionally, her conceptualization of monstrosity is still useful; the monstrous functions to "bring about an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability" ("Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine" 71). The protagonists of *Coven* are all technically monsters by virtue of being witches. As we will see, characters become portrayed as monstrous because they threaten the order of the coven, and thus must be expelled.

Further, some have argued that a narrative about witches is advantageous to feminist critique. Witches have been subjects of interest within feminist theory, and Rachel Moseley (2002) describes that many have understood "the witch as a metaphor for female resistance" (410). *Coven* offers a female-centered tale that follows the characters as they struggle with their own personal issues as well as the larger conflicts that threaten their collectivity. Fiona, for example, knows that she will soon lose her leadership to a younger witch, and throughout the season concocts various schemes to acquire youth and maintain her beauty and position as Supreme. Cordelia attempts to successfully run the Academy and become pregnant by her husband Hank, who turns out to be an undercover witch-hunter. The younger teenage witches, Zoe, Madison, Queenie, and Nan, learn to develop their powers, and deal with more traditional teen issues such as discovering their sexuality and finding romance. *Coven* moreover presents racial tensions through two separate but entwining storylines. First, the narrative addresses the conflicts between the white witches led by Fiona and the black voodoo witches led by Marie, and their struggle to work together in order to defeat the witch-hunters. Second, the story invokes the racist past of America through the character of Madame Delphine LaLaurie (Kathy Bates), who is ripped from the nineteenth century and living in the contemporary world. Certainly, *Coven* sets up a framework to explore important feminist political issues regarding gender and race.

In *Coven,* several characters experience sexual violence. In the very first episode, "Bitchcraft," Madison is gang-raped at a party she attends with Zoe. At the end of this episode, Zoe rapes one of Madison's rapists as an act of revenge and, I argue, of solidarity with her coven. Kyle Spencer (Evan Peters), a boy Zoe meets at the party, also experiences sexual violence when he is molested by his mother. Finally, an ambiguous moment suggests that Queenie is sexually assaulted, though the plotline is never resolved. My analysis reveals the ways in which these rape narratives fit into a larger story of female solidarity, resistance, and survival.

The intersecting rape narratives begin in the first episode, "Bitchcraft." Madison and Zoe attend a house party, where Madison is gang-raped by a group of fraternity brothers. Madison first encounters Brener, who gives her a drugged drink and then leads her to a dark bedroom where multiple members of the fraternity rape her. Many of the boys watch the assault, laughing, drinking, and filming it on their cellphones. After the rape is interrupted by Zoe and Kyle, a frat brother who was not involved, Madison quickly enacts her revenge. As the boys drive away from

the party, and Zoe watches them leave helplessly, Madison uses her telekinetic powers to flip their vehicle. There are only two survivors of the crash, and Kyle—Zoe's potential love interest—is killed. Though Zoe initially feels guilty about the accident, she soon becomes enraged when she discovers that Brener, the instigator of the rape, survived the crash when Kyle did not. The experience of seeing one friend raped and another killed triggers a transformation in Zoe; she realizes that she must embrace her witch powers, which in her case is a deadly vagina that kills her sexual partners. As he lays unconscious in the hospital bed, Zoe rapes him and, thanks to her powers, kills him in a gruesome, bloody scene.

"Bitchcraft" relies on an alteration of the rape-revenge structure in order to privilege Zoe's point of view. Most basically, this two-part structure requires a rape and a revenge (Henry 55). In many instances, as highlighted by Henry, there is also a transformation as the protagonist shifts from victim to avenger (49). But in "Bitchcraft," Madison needs no such change in order to get her revenge; because she is in control of her witch powers, she is already prepared to be an avenger. It is Zoe, rather, who undergoes a transformation and then serves as proxy in her revenge on Brener. Zoe's revenge is significant because it too is a rape; as Claire Henry reveals in *Revisionist Rape-Revenge,* in contemporary rape-revenge films female protagonists often get their revenge through sexual violence, such as when they castrate their rapists or rape them anally (52). Indeed, Zoe's curse recalls other castrating avengers, such as Dawn in the film *Teeth* (Mitchell Lichtenstein, 2007) who makes use of her *vagina dentata* for revenge. In true eye-for-an-eye fashion, Zoe rapes Kyle when he is incapacitated. Zoe's revenge challenges the notion that women cannot rape men, especially that the idea that a man's erection indicates his consent; Brener's arousal as a response to Zoe's touch occurs while he is unconscious. Zoe's revenge illustrates that rape is not only experienced by women, and that it is about power.

Zoe's voiceover at the end of "Bitchcraft" positions her as the protagonist of the story. In her voiceover, she contextualizes Madison's rape and its consequences within the story of New Orleans after Katrina, explaining that the disaster wrought "a sense of purpose and community," suggesting she has discovered a similar sensibility. Zoe believes that she needs to embrace her "curse" in order to protect her community: her coven. Zoe's revenge, as she reveals in her voiceover, is about her learning to embrace violence through her witch powers as an act of solidarity and of survival. Zoe, not Madison, is positioned as the hero, who avenges the rape of her friend, the death of her love interest, and vows to protect her sisterhood.

Her voice even carries over a scene in which Madison cries in the shower. The post-rape shower scene is, according to Sarah Projansky, "the most common way of representing a woman's perspective" in a rape narrative (Projansky 108). Yet, this shower scene is paired with Zoe's point of view, not Madison's. Specifically, through Zoe's voiceover, the narrative positions Madison's rape trauma in relation to discourses of vulnerability. As the camera observes Madison's post-rape shower, Zoe says: "That's what happens in a crisis: all the bullshit falls away, and what's left is just so raw and vulnerable. It's agony to let people see you so exposed." Madison's rape is therefore portrayed as having shown Zoe Madison's vulnerability, which contrasts with the somewhat unsympathetic behavior Madison has displayed early on in "Bitchcraft." Projansky notes that many rape narratives "depict the rape of an independent woman as making her vulnerable" (Projansky 30). Ultimately, it is Madison's vulnerability that in part empowers Zoe to use her witchcraft in order to defend her sisters. Thus Zoe's is the revenge in the rape-revenge structure; not only does her revenge complete Madison's attempt, but her transformation, coming to terms with using her powers for violence, is given precedence in the narrative. While Madison's trauma is represented in both the graphic rape as well as the post-rape shower scene, Zoe's feelings about Madison's experience are at the center of the narrative.

It is impossible to ignore the significance of Zoe being empowered through the use of her sexuality. In her voiceover, Zoe notes that since she will never experience "real love" (since she kills her partners and thus cannot have sex with someone she loves) she should use her powers for violence. She continues, "My mother was right. The world isn't safe for a girl like me. But maybe I'm not safe for the world either." Her voiceover suggests that through her curse, her deadly sexuality, she can unleash her strength into the world. As addressed above, empowerment is a central discourse in postfeminism; Henry describes a postfeminist "model of empowerment based on sexuality, maternity, and capital" (9). Projansky identifies a trend wherein "rape is the generative element of a postfeminist liberation narrative" in which a woman finally engages with her "latent independent identity" through experience of rape (100-101). Martin Fradley has also observed that contemporary postfeminist teen horror films commonly show "women who embrace violence as a refusal of victimhood" and often a woman's body, her sexuality, is "a form of retributive empowerment" (214). Zoe's voiceover certainly indicates that she views her curse as an opportunity to prove her strength. However, such a reading of these postfeminist

discourses of empowerment is complicated by Zoe's emphasis on collectively; that her transformation is in order to protect her sisterhood challenges the individualism of postfeminism. Ultimately, this rape narrative (which includes two rapes) provides a double function: to highlight the vulnerability of an already-independent woman (Madison) and to instigate the empowerment of another (Zoe).

The rape and revenge are addressed in subsequent episodes, where Zoe's perspective is once again privileged over Madison's. In "Boy Parts," Zoe and Madison discuss the crash. While Zoe feels guilty that Kyle was killed along with the rapists, Madison does not. Further, Madison suggests that if he had the opportunity, Kyle probably would have joined in on the rape. When Zoe denies her claim, Madison says, "Those guys were his frat brothers. It's guilt by association." Zoe replies that Madison is a bitch. This scene taps into anxieties surrounding the intersection of rape culture and fraternity culture, and is engaging with a postfeminist critique of rape culture. Madison's perspective, that all frat boys are rapists, calls upon feminist anti-rape arguments. Feminists have argued that "male-dominated environments" such as fraternities "encourage and sometime depend on violence against women" (Projansky 9). Fraternity culture has been central to contemporary conversations about rape culture and campus safety. Indeed, a criticism of the concept of rape culture has been that it views all men as rapists. Madison's discourse, that all fraternity brothers are rapists, embodies a postfeminist conceptualization of the more nuanced feminist anti-rape politics. Since Zoe is the victim-avenger in the rape narrative, and she relegates Madison to the role of bitch, the validity of Madison's claims are called into question; of course, her position as a "bad" character does not necessarily preclude the narrative (or viewers) from siding with her. And, at the very least, the connection between fraternity culture and rape has been established.

The consequences of this rape-revenge narrative in "Bitchcraft" are significant. The most important result is Kyle's death. Upon seeing Zoe's distress over Kyle's fate, Madison decides that they should use their witch powers to resurrect him by reassembling body parts (some of which are not his) and reanimating the corpse. It is suggested that Kyle's resurrection is not merely due to their spell, but from Zoe's kiss—the first indication that the power of Zoe's love shall transform him. Kyle reappears in the narrative as a zombie-like version of himself; he cannot speak and seems incapable of making rational decisions. Kyle's return prompts the second rape narrative. When Zoe brings Kyle home to his mother, Alicia, we discover that she

has been sexually abusing him. We witness two scenes in which he is molested. The second time, however, Kyle becomes enraged and beats Alicia to death. Rather than a scene of catharsis, this violent scene works to prove that in his zombie state, he has no control over his emotions or actions. Although this scene gives a sense of poetic justice, as with Madison's revenge Kyle's is not the deliberate act of a victim-avenger; that role is solely Zoe's.

Kyle's moment of revenge also emphasizes Zoe's centrality to the narrative. In the sequence where Kyle attacks his mother, the gore is not visible in the frame, and we just see Kyle's face spattered with blood. It is only when Zoe arrives at the scene that we see the graphic, gruesome results of Kyle's actions. Zoe moves through the silent house, calling for Alicia. When she enters Kyle's room, she finds Alicia's bloody corpse; her face is bloody, her head visibly bashed in by Kyle's blows, and there is blood spatter everywhere. Zoe is obviously frightened, and the music only heightens our anticipation of Kyle's arrival. When Kyle appears behind her suddenly, covered in blood, Zoe screams. In this moment, Kyle is portrayed very much a monster, inhuman. This scene begins the narrative arc in which Kyle regains his humanity through his relationship with Zoe. Indeed, in order to be rehumanized by love, Kyle must first be marked as a monster.

At this point, Madison and Kyle share many similarities. Both are established as survivors of sexual violence, and when Madison is killed in "Fearful Pranks Ensue" then resurrected in "The Axeman Cometh," both struggle with their semi-zombie status. In a voiceover, Madison explains how her resurrection has caused her emotional and physical numbness. She brings up the rape as the ultimate example of a painful experience; at the time, she had not appreciated the humanity of feeling pain. Now, in her resurrected state, Madison no longer has the capacity to feel such trauma and, thus, is no longer vulnerable. As Madison and Kyle bond over their shared experiences, having both experienced death and resurrection, a love triangle forms: Kyle is the object of both Zoe and Madison's romantic interest. Briefly, the narrative introduces a somewhat radical solution to the love triangle through a polyamorous relationship. At first, this seems like a way for all three characters to experience the love that they are seeking. However, because of the intensity of their feelings for each other, Zoe and Kyle push Madison out of the relationship.

After this rejection, Madison's unsympathetic characterization is heightened as she antagonizes Zoe and Kyle. In the final episode, for example, the witches go through a series of

tests to verify which one is the Supreme. Madison uses these tests as opportunities to humiliate Kyle and, in turn, Zoe. In a particularly cruel moment, she forces Kyle to kiss her and then lick her shoes in order to show dominance over him. Then, Madison tries to force Kyle to kill Zoe. This violence, of course, emerges out of her jealousy of Zoe and Kyle's relationship. But her manipulation does recall some of her earlier behavior, such as when she tells Brener that he will be her "slave" in "Bitchcraft." The difference is that now, Madison is affronting the protagonists rather than antagonists.

The love triangle is resolved in the final episode, "The Seven Wonders." When Zoe dies, Kyle is enraged with Madison for not using her witch powers to resurrect her. What results is a sexualized murder. Kyle pins Madison on the bed, and demands to know why she let Zoe die. Madison proclaims her love once more, but her attempts to seduce Kyle are rejected and Kyle strangles her to death. This scene is intercut with scenes of Zoe being brought back to life by Cordelia, suggesting that in order for Zoe to live, Madison must die. This moment is perhaps Kyle's ultimate revenge; for the pain Madison's actions have caused him since "Bitchcraft," in which he dies because of her; for the threat he has posed to his relationship with Zoe (which for him has been humanizing). There is a disturbing narrative symmetry in which Madison is raped on a bed by a fraternity brother in the first episode, and then strangled to death on a bed by the remaining brother in the last. The final scene of the episode shows the existing members of the coven—Cordelia, Queenie, Zoe and, notably, Kyle—opening their doors to a new generation of witches, emphasizing their collectivity and survival.

From the very first episode Madison exhibits unsympathetic behavior, but only becomes monstrous when it is directed at the members of the coven (including Kyle). Drawing from Creed, Madison is a monster because she disrupts the stability of the coven. Madison's rape in "Bitchcraft" worked to portray Madison as vulnerable in the eyes of Zoe, and that knowledge allowed her to remain aligned with the protagonists. However, when her behavior is directed towards the protagonists (Zoe and Kyle), it threatens the collectivity of the coven. Horrific acts are deemed acceptable when they protect the coven—such as Zoe's rape of Brener—but are unacceptable when they are for one's own gain, as is Madison's humiliation of Zoe and Kyle. Her self-interest is epitomized by her refusal to resurrect Zoe in order to keep Kyle for herself. There is ultimately no place for Madison in the narrative, because she is selfishly unwilling to put aside her jealousy in order to help her coven. The rejection of Madison from the narrative,

the portrayal of her as monstrous critiques a postfeminist mindset that celebrates individual empowerment over female collectivity/solidarity. However, that it is Kyle who kills Madison, rather than a coven member like Zoe, complicates a feminist criticism of postfeminist ideology. While it prevents further violence between women, Kyle's sexualized murder of Madison—which follows Madison's proclamations of love—emphasizes their love triangle, which shifts focus from the larger critique of her actions against her sisterhood to their own personal conflict.

Next, I turn to the rape narratives that are not given the same kind of narrative precedence as the ones involving Madison, Zoe, and Kyle (three white characters). Setting up a thread to be developed throughout the season, rape is mentioned in the opening sequence of the first episode, "Bitchcraft." The episode begins with a flashback to New Orleans in 1834, in the home of Madame Delphine LaLaurie. When she discovers one of her daughters making unwanted sexual advances towards one of their slaves, Bastien, Madame LaLaurie blames him. She proclaims: "We're gonna say he took you by force, like the savage he is." Her punishment of choice is an unusual form of torture; she cuts off the head of a bull and forces him to wear it as his own, turning him into a Minotaur. This flashback exposes a racist myth about the hypersexuality and sexually violent nature of black men, and how it was used to justify their persecution. Turning Bastien into a half-man, half-beast quite literally represents Madame LaLaurie's racist view of black men as animalistic. Part of the project of this season of *AHS*, and a location of the deep cultural critique it offers, is to use America's racist "past" as horror, and this first scene provides such a framework. Projansky notes that the myth of the Black rapist "identifies a cultural narrative used to structure race relations and maintain racist social and legal practices against African American men" (9). This scene thus works to reveal the way in which rape myths have been used to uphold racist ideologies.

Bastien, in his Minotaur form, returns to the narrative in the present moment, as a potential perpetrator of sexual violence. In the third episode, "The Replacements," Queenie comes face to face with Bastien, who was sent by Marie Laveau to kill Madame LaLaurie. Queenie tries to relate to Bastien, telling him that she often feels like the white witches in the coven treat her like an animal. She then attempts to seduce him; the camera runs slowly down her body as she lifts her dress and begins to masturbate, asking him, "Don't you want to love me?" Bastien goes behind her in what seems like a sensual moment, where he caresses her with one of his hands. However, the music climaxes abruptly as he uses his other hand to cover her

mouth, and Queenie lets out a muffled scream; the camera is close on her fearful face and his hand covering her mouth. The moment suggests that Queenie is about to be assaulted, but the episode ends without resolving the scene. Rather, the scene cuts to Kyle's revenge sequence. In the fourth episode, "Fearful Pranks Ensue," Fiona finds Queenie after the Minotaur has attacked her, her stomach clearly covered in blood. All Queenie says regarding the attack is that she was unable to stop Bastien and that he hurt her. When Fiona tends to Queenie's wounds, her actions are just out of the frame, obscuring what kind of injury she is treating. When the camera moves out a little bit, we see that Fiona has placed the towels under Queenie's lower body, under her spread legs. Fiona refers to an "attack" and Cordelia an "assault," and it is clearly suggested that Fiona is tending to wounds between her legs. Yet, it is never explicitly stated or shown whether or not Queenie has experienced a sexual assault.

This ambiguity's significance is twofold. First, the narrative uses Queenie's sexualized body to incite violence, and then uses her injured body as proof that violence occurred. However, Queenie's perspective about the attack is never shared, beyond her confirmation that Bastien hurt her. Queenie's experience is thus invisible, which recalls a history of silencing women of color in rape narratives in popular culture. Disregard for Queenie's perspective is indicative of a larger repression of the experiences of the non-white characters in *Coven.* To be fair, the season permits many of the black women moments in which they discuss their experiences as black witches. Queenie expresses her dissatisfaction with Fiona's coven, where none of the girls understand her. She discusses the roots of her culture with Marie, who explicitly explains that their voodoo practices have been appropriated and exploited by the white witches. In the narrative resolution of the final episode, however, there is no place for the viewpoints of the black characters. All of Marie's tribe has been killed in a violent scene where they are annihilated by the male witch-hunters. In the final scene of the season, Queenie is back with the coven, despite having expressed her unhappiness there several times. While the narrative purports to address racism, the resolution of the story depends on the disappearance of the black characters or their assimilation into the coven (now led by Cordelia). The final scene of *Coven* emphasizes the unity of the coven, but the survival of the white coven comes at the cost of the collectivity of the black women and their sisterhood. While we can appreciate the protagonists' triumph over the witch-hunters, the continuation of a racist community is perhaps part of the horror that *Coven* offers.

Second, the ambiguity of Queenie's assault scene has the potential to rewrite our original understanding of the show's use of racist myths. While Bastien is visibly violent, it is unclear whether Bastien is the perpetrator of sexual violence—what Madame LaLaurie falsely accused him of being in the very first moments of the season. Portraying Bastien as sexually violent potentially reaffirms the racist myth *Coven* originally critiques. Of course, this reading is complicated by the fact that his violence is clearly the product of the racism and white supremacy that had transformed him into the Minotaur in "Bitchcraft"—he is quite literally a monster created by Madame LaLaurie's racism. Nonetheless, there is a tension here between exposing racism and the torture of black bodies required to do so. In using Bastien for violence, and ignoring Queenie's experience of violence, *Coven* risks exploiting the very racism it attempts to describe.

Indeed, *Coven* does tell a tale of female resistance on two levels. First, the primary horror narrative depicts the women of the coven fighting for their survival and defeating the witch-hunters. More generally, the women also fight for their survival against men and, to a certain extent, against each other. Madison's rape proves to Zoe that they are not only being persecuted by witch-hunters, but by other groups of men such as the brotherhood of the fraternity. The vulnerability symbolized by Madison's rape and her trauma is what prompts Zoe to develop her powers in the first episode. Kyle's role complicates a simple designation of women as victims and men as oppressors, since he is clearly victimized by women (his mother and Madison); men too, then, are vulnerable. And, of course, Kyle does have a place within the coven, since at the end he works as a butler in the Academy; clearly, then, female solidarity is key to the survival of these women, and these witches, as is heterosexual love.

The Walking Dead

Coven is in part about survival; *The Walking Dead* offers an even more direct survivalist narrative. Horror in *The Walking Dead* comes from the threat of zombies, what the protagonists term "walkers," as well as the fact that society and its institutions have collapsed in the wake of the zombie outbreak. Throughout the series, we follow Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln)—a Sheriff prior to the apocalypse—as he fights to survive and protect his family and friends. Stephanie Boluk and Wylie Lenz note that *The Walking Dead* makes use of the "classical

depiction" of zombies, which is largely influenced by George A. Romero's conceptualization of zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (181). In such portrayals, zombies are "reanimated corpses" who attack and feed off of humans, and whose bites kill and turn humans into zombies (181). In the world of *The Walking Dead*, human beings will turn into walkers not only if they are bitten; everyone is already infected and will turn when they die unless their brains are destroyed.

Apart from the threat of being killed by walkers, many of the major conflicts of the series come when Rick's group attempts to form communities with others.[8] The series begins just outside Atlanta, Georgia in the first season, and the protagonists remain fairly close to Atlanta until they head towards Washington, D.C in the fifth season. In their travels, the group meets other collections of people who either become friends or enemies—the latter often results from attempts to compromise Rick's authority. In addition, the series emphasizes a tension between Rick's leadership and the question of his humanity. As Katherine Sugg (2015) points out, his "ruthless capacity" for violence "serves as the clearest sign of Rick's natural leadership" (Sugg 804). At the same time, through these very acts of violence that protect his family, "Rick's leadership becomes more ambiguous" (805) because we wonder if he has gone *too* far. Further, as we will see in this chapter, the effect of such violence on one's humanity is a central question for Rick and other members of his group, particularly the characters Glenn (Steven Yeun) and Carol (Melissa McBride). These moral questions that emerge from the discourses of survival in *The Walking Dead* are particularly salient for my examination of the rape narratives.

In the fifth season of *The Walking Dead*, the protagonists spend time in three different communities, and these three somewhat distinct (but intersecting) storylines structure this analysis. Many of the characters begin the season imprisoned in Terminus, a small society of survivors located just outside of Atlanta. Mid-season, the characters must help 18-year-old Beth Greene (Emily Kinney) escape from imprisonment at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta. Near the end of the season, the surviving members of the group must figure out how (or whether) to assimilate into civilian life in Alexandria, a safe community near Washington, D.C.

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[8] The phrase "Rick's group" is quite vague, but throughout the five seasons many characters have died, such as Rick's wife Lori and his best friend Shane. For my purposes, the fifth season, Rick's group generally refers to his son Carl, his baby daughter Judith, Glenn Rhee, Maggie Greene, Beth Greene, Michonne, Daryl Dixon, Carol Peletier, Abraham, Rosita, Tara, Eugene, Tyreese, Sasha, Bob, and Noah.

Significantly, the first episode of the season, "No Sanctuary," marks the series' first explicit use of the term rape. In this section I examine the ideologies about rape that circulate through the narrative as it moves from society to society. I pay particular attention to Beth's experience in Grady, and how the main themes in that plotline move to Alexandria. It is important to note that the plotline in Alexandria does not address rape specifically, but domestic violence. Nevertheless, since the Alexandria story revisits many of the themes of the rape narrative in Grady—particularly the sanctioning of violence against women—it is an important part of this analysis.

At the beginning of the fifth season of *The Walking Dead*, in the episode "No Sanctuary," our protagonists are separated. Most of the group (missing are Beth, Tyreese, Carol, and baby Judith) is trapped in a community called Terminus, imprisoned by a group of cannibals led by a young man named Gareth (Andrew J. West). Although Terminus had been marked as a sanctuary by several signs made by its inhabitants, Rick and his group discover that it is not the safe-haven they had hoped. They are stripped of their weapons and resources, and promptly imprisoned in a train car. In this first episode, Rick's group must fight to escape and destroy Terminus. Interestingly, the episode begins and ends with flashbacks about the Terminus group, giving us their tragic backstory. When they had originally arrived at Terminus, they themselves were imprisoned and abused by violent people; led by Gareth, they vow to defeat their imprisoners and take over Terminus for themselves. Significantly, rape is part of the violence they endure. When, upon rescuing her friends, Carol confronts one of its leaders, the woman tells her: "People came and took this place. They raped, they killed, and they laughed… But we fought and got it back. And we heard the message. You're the butcher or you're the cattle." Gareth repeats this mantra, that you are either the perpetrator of violence or the victim, in the final scene of the episode. In this second flashback, the Terminus group is trapped in a train car. As the captors shine flashlights over the faces of petrified women, we hear cries of "not again!" Then, after a woman in his group has been taken away, presumably to be raped, Gareth repeats: "You're either the butcher or the cattle." This scene serves as Gareth's breaking point, highlighting how female victimization through rape becomes the motivation for revenge and violence.

The discussion of rape in this episode is without depth. We may watch the women's terror as they face the threat of rape, but we never hear from any of them about their experiences. Ultimately, rape is presented as horror that comes from being dominated. Rape serves as a

motivation for the violence onscreen, and moreover leads into question the circularity of violence (not unrelated to the rape-revenge structure). We know that these victims of violence become the perpetrators against Rick and his people. Moreover, since we have just watched Rick and his group destroy Terminus, and kill many of its inhabitants, there lingers the potential for the survivors enact their revenge upon Rick. Finally, there is also the suggestion that Rick and his people could follow a similar path; though they started as the victims of violence, could they become cruel perpetrators? Terminus is only the first of three encountered by Rick and his group; they spend more time in Grady Memorial Hospital and in Alexandria later in the season. In these communities, the institutionalization of rape and violence against women in relation to circles of violence, revenge, and domination as survival are more deeply considered. The reference to rape in Terminus serves to introduce some of the key themes that will be developed throughout the fifth season of *The Walking Dead*.

While Rick and his group fight to destroy Terminus, Beth Greene is not with them. In the fourth episode, "Slabtown," Beth awakens after being attacked by walkers, and discovers that she has been separated from Daryl Dixon (Norman Reedus)—with whom she been in season four—and is in Grady Memorial Hospital. She finds herself in a community that is run by cops. Dawn Lerner (Christine Woods), the cop in charge, informs Beth that they saved her, and for that she is in their debt. Beth discovers that the society at Grady works through a cycle of debt and labor; having used some of their resources, Beth must repay her debt through physical work like cleaning, laundry, and acting as assistant to Dawn and the local doctor, Dr. Edwards. Beth finds herself being mistreated by the people in power; Dawn physically assaults Beth several times in order to vent her frustrations, and Dr. Edwards manipulates her into killing a patient in order to save his job.

Rape is part of the exploitation of the (female) wards, as is made clear by an Officer Gorman who presents a sexual threat. Beth's three encounters with him in "Slabtown" comprise first of an uncomfortable verbal sexual harassment, then a more physical sexual harassment, and finally an attempted rape. Moreover, Beth learns that a young woman named Joan has escaped the hospital, after being raped by Gorman as part of a systematic raping. When Beth confronts Dawn about Joan's rape, she tells her, "In here you are part of a system. The wards keep my officers happy. The happier my officers are, the harder they work to keep us going." In Grady, for young women like Beth and Joan, sexual labor is part of the work demanded of the wards by

the officers in charge; rape is positioned as a crucial to the operation of their community. Dawn may not find such a practice just, but she tells Beth that it is a reality she must accept. Since she is not as physically as strong as the officers, she is deemed weak; Dawn's logic is that Beth's only value is her labor, part of which is clearly sexual labor. If Beth cannot offer her (sexual) services, she is not worth keeping alive. As we will see, the discourse of strong people—and strong women—becomes central to the rape narrative that runs through the Grady plotline, and leads into the Alexandria storyline.

Beth is thus in a society in which rape is institutionalized, and the subsequent plotline follows her attempts to evade Gorman's sexual threat and escape the hospital in order to reunite with Rick's group. Beth herself is not raped, but Joan is brought back to Grady by force after having been bitten by a zombie in her efforts to escape. Her arm is then amputated against her will in a gruesome scene, another moment in which her body is violated without her consent. In "Slabtown," Joan and Beth do get revenge on Gorman, and so we do dabble in a rape-revenge scenario. Beth finds Joan dead, after she commits suicide in order to avoid exploitation and rape. Gorman attempts to rape Beth, telling her, "Lucky for me, you're not a fighter." But she is indeed able to fend him off, and leaves him to Joan who, in her death, has become a zombie and chews into his neck. Gorman's death is less about Joan getting revenge, since she is not a conscious being, than perhaps a sense of poetic justice. But, in a perverse way, it is Joan's transformation into a zombie that allows her to be the victim-avenger and kill Gorman—revenge for her own rape and the attempted rape of Beth.

"Slabtown" ends with Beth and Noah, another young ward, attempting to leave Grady. Noah manages to do so, but Beth is caught. The narrative returns to the Grady plotline in the seventh and eighth episodes, "Crossed" and "Coda," where it is concluded in the latter. While Rick's group prepares their plan to save Beth, Beth learns more about Dawn and the survivalist ideology she uses to run Grady, which is governed by a strict definition of "strong" and "weak." Dawn's ultimate fear is that she will appear weak in front of her fellow officers. There is certainly a gendered aspect to her fear of weakness, since Gorman questions her authority to her face in "Slabtown" and O'Donnell, another male colleague, confronts her about her leadership in "Coda." Consequently, anyone who Dawn believes is weak is abused and devalued in this community. The wards comprise of young women like Beth and Joan, young men like Noah (whose leg injury impedes his ability to run and walk), and even the elderly. Dawn presumes that

these people cannot exhibit the traditional masculine strength of the officers, and are therefore have less value and can be exploited. Importantly, Joan's position as a woman of color further emphasizes a story of abuse at the hands of a white authority embodied by Dawn and Gorman.

For all its graphic and shocking elements, this storyline clearly examines ways in which exploitation—especially sexual exploitation—becomes institutionalized. Indeed, Dawn's discourse becomes Gorman's justification to rape, as revealed by Gorman's attempt to assault Beth in "Slabtown," in which he tells her she has been targeted because she is not a "fighter." Dawn occupies a particularly complex position within this rape narrative; she is portrayed as being sympathetic to Joan and genuinely disgusted by the male officers' actions. However, her own desire to stay in power and to be perceived as equal to those very same men takes precedence over her conscience. Her explanation that their system—which is based on the oppression of the wards and rape of the female wards—is for the greater good emerges less out of the belief that it is true and more out of fear of disrupting the system in which she has power. Dawn represents a genuine conflict between having the knowledge that a system is corrupt and exploitative, but complying with it in order to keep power. Of course, regardless of her emotional struggle, she remains an exploiter and a bystander to systematic rape.

Beth's role within this narrative is to disrupt the assumption that certain people, certainly young women, are inherently weak. Her character arc at Grady proves that she *is* strong and *is* a fighter. In this sense, the narrative engages and validates discourses of empowerment. However, Beth's story is short and unsustainable, and takes a tragic turn, since she is killed in the eighth episode, "Coda." In terms of the conclusion of the rape narrative, everyone involved—rapist, victims, and male and female bystanders—dies. Beth is somewhat unintentionally killed by Dawn, and Dawn is subsequently killed by Daryl as an act of revenge. By killing the victims and perpetrators, the narrative does not explore the trauma experienced through this storyline. It is unclear how the Grady Memorial community will operate under the new leadership of another female officer. After "Coda," Rick's group moves on and we do not revisit Grady again. As we will see, we move from an exploration of systematic rape in the first 8 episodes to a narrative about domestic abuse in the last five episodes.

The examination of the horrors of a society in which abuse of the weak is justified by discourses of survival and the greater good continues as Rick and his people discover the community in Alexandria. In the final stretch of the season, Rick and his group are invited to

Alexandria by its recruiter, Aaron (Ross Marquand). Alexandria is a gated community, and as is explained by its leader Deanna Monroe (Tovah Feldshuh), most of its citizens have remained behind its walls for the duration of the apocalypse. Most of them have not fought for survival like Rick and his group have; they have been protected from the walkers. Many of the people in Rick's group struggle to assimilate into a community that has not seen, or learned how to wield, the kind of violence they have. Deanna wants them to join Alexandria precisely because they have the skills to survive that her people do not. This divide between those who can survive through the use of violence and those who cannot lays the groundwork for the assumption of who is strong and who is weak.

While Alexandria is different from Grady in many respects, they do share important similarities that are crucial for the rape narrative established in "Slabtown." First, both societies are run by women. Second, both function on the willful ignorance of violence against women. Just as Dawn allowed the officers to rape the wards in order to ensure their contribution, Deanna overlooks the fact the local doctor Pete is abusing his wife Jessie (Alexandra Breckenridge). When Rick demands to know why he has never been punished, Deanna argues that as the town doctor he has been saving lives. Alexandria is another society in which violence against women is ignored and accepted through discourses of survival; Jessie's wellbeing is less important than the greater good.

In the episode "Try," Rick takes special interest in helping Jessie escape her abusive marriage. When Jessie rejects his help, and makes excuses for her husband, a frustrated Rick tells her, "If you don't fight, you die." He compares her situation, living with domestic violence, to life outside the walls fighting walkers. Despite his attempts to empower Jessie to leave her husband, his accusation that Jessie is just "wishing" the abuse away instead of fighting recalls discourses of victim blaming. Integral to the rape myth that women asked to be raped is the idea that "women are responsible for preventing bodily violations and that women who are sexually victimized are culpable" (Edwards et al. 767). In Rick's view, Jessie must become a fighter in order to stop the abuse, leaving Jessie responsible to prevent her husband's violence against her. Rick is not explicitly stating that Jessie asks for abuse by staying with Pete, but his comparison is inaccurate because Pete is *not* a zombie. This false association risks naturalizing violence against women by comparing Pete, the abuser, to a walker—Pete is not an animal or primitive creature driven by his biology to acts of violence. There is a fine line between sharing an empowering

message that says women *can* fight and an ideology which blames them for not fighting. As we will see, Rick's attitude towards Jessie's situation is indicative of the larger discourses of survival and domination he advocates.

Rick's outlook is essentially to embrace violence in order to survive and protect one's family. Unlike Dawn, who assumed people to be weak, Rick believes that anyone can be strong, no matter age or gender; their group comprises of men and women of different ages, races, and sexualities. When he realizes that most of the people in Alexandria have never had to engage in violence, he (and others in his group including Carol, and to some extent, Glenn) deem them weak. When he and his people realize that the citizens of Alexandria are unwilling to embrace the violence necessary to survival, they begin to question whether they deserve to govern their town. They decide that if the Alexandrians do not learn how to fight, how to become strong, then they will take over Alexandria for themselves. Indeed, Rick and his group have begun to adopt the very same attitude that allowed Dawn to maintain a system of exploitation: weak people cannot survive on their own and thus must be dominated by the strong.

Ultimately, the domestic abuse storyline is not about Jessie, her development, her trauma, or her agency. First, Rick's concern for Jessie is depoliticized by romantic interest in her and his subsequent desire to eliminate Pete. When she asks Rick whether he would be so interested in helping her if she were someone else, he says no. Rick's original outrage at Deanna for allowing the abuse of women becomes less of a political critique of institutionalized violence than his own frustrations regarding the obstacles that keep him from having a romantic relationship with Jessie. Moreover, the love triangle between Rick, Jessie, and Pete serves to contrast the violent masculinities embodied by Rick and Pete. Rick's violence, which is in the name of protecting his family and friends, is contrasted with Pete's violence, which harms his family. Rick's violence is rejected as uncivilized in Alexandria while Pete's is passively accepted, and the narrative works to critique this logic. However, Rick does not represent an *ideal* masculinity; indeed, throughout the fifth season his humanity is questioned over and over again. However, in the context of the apocalyptic setting and survivalist narrative, Rick's violence becomes *necessary*. Rick's masculinity is hegemonic not because it is moral or ideal, but because it will help them survive. Of course, this narrative goes beyond masculinity to questions of morality. Men and women alike are supposed to adopt Rick's moral code. However, by emphasizing his perspective through this domestic violence story, as well as the love triangle, there is an emphasis on the

particularly gendered aspect of Rick (and Pete's) violence. The domestic abuse storyline allows Rick to demonstrate that while his violence may seem excessive, perhaps uncivilized, in the context of their situation it will empower even those who are the most victimized to fight and survive.

Thus far, this analysis has been focused on Rick's function in Alexandria. Of course, many other characters in the group share his philosophy—notably Glenn, Abraham, Daryl, and especially Carol—albeit to varying degrees. Interestingly, like Rick, Carol is both a propagator of this conquering ideology as well as deeply invested in Jessie's relationship with Pete. However, Carol's interest comes from her own personal experiences in an abusive marriage. In "Conquer," she expresses her disdain for Pete when she tells him, "You are a small, weak nothing. And with the world how it is, you are even weaker." In contrast with Rick's approach, which suggests Jessie is weak and needs to become strong, Carol recognizes that the onus is on Pete for his actions. Her threat moreover suggests that with the collapse of institutions, his moral weakness will be the death of him; with Rick acting as constable in Alexandria, Pete's abuse will no longer go unrecognized. As it turns out, Pete does not survive the season, as Deanna kills him in the final moments of the last episode, after he accidentally kills her husband in a fit of rage. Deanna thus crosses the line she had drawn for Rick: they would not execute people. In the final moments of the last episode, appropriately named "Conquer," it seems that Alexandria will embrace Rick's violent methods.

Indeed, part of the horror of this season (and all of the seasons) of *The Walking Dead* is how one's humanity is affected by the need for survival. Rape becomes a systematic tool of domination, just as violence against women becomes overlooked in the process of survival. Beth works hard to challenge a system that automatically ascribes certain people as weak and thus exploitable. However, at the end of the season, Rick and his people move towards positions of power in Alexandria believing that *they* understand how to survive and thus should govern. Rick is clearly willing to kill anyone who will not follow his instructions and learn how to fight. I am not suggesting that Rick and his group will implement a system that rapes women. Rather, I am highlighting the potential horror that comes from the fact that the protagonists have begun to adopt an ideology that resembles so closely that of the antagonists they have defeated. To invoke Gareth's words, have Rick and his people become the butchers?

This chapter has explored the narrative function of rape in *American Horror Story: Coven* and the fifth season of *The Walking Dead*. While the rape narratives are obviously very different, they are similarly linked to stories of empowerment and, more broadly, survival. These larger narratives are about survival, as the witches in *Coven* must fight to keep their coven alive, and the protagonists of *The Walking Dead* must face zombies and other threatening groups like Terminus' cannibals. However, there is a particularly gendered aspect to these stories of survival, since sexual violence is portrayed as something that motivates women to fight. Facing rape and sexual violence, or threats thereof, women become empowered to fight through violence. In *Coven*, this is most obviously seen in Zoe's transformation that is prompted by Madison's rape. *Coven* emphasizes the ways in which the witches must embrace violence in order to ensure their coven's survival. In the fifth season of *The Walking Dead*, this is mirrored in Beth's arc in which the threat of rape motivates her to prove her strength to Dawn and the cops, as well as Rick's attempts to empower Jessie to fight back against her abuser in order to become the fighter she needs to be to survive the apocalypse. Of course, *AHS* includes men in this story of female resistance, as Kyle is both survivor of sexual abuse by his mother and symbolically aligned with the women of the coven in the final episode. However, because the larger narrative concerns the persecution of witches, Brener's rape and Kyle's sexual abuse do occur in a context that emphasizes the pervasiveness of violence against women. As such, the narrative displays a particularly nuanced understanding of rape that acknowledges firstly that both men and women can experience it, and secondly that women's experience of it occurs in a patriarchal context in which it is a symptom of gender inequality. Though *TWD* does not address men's experience of sexual violence, through its similarly doubled narrative—the fight against monsters and the fight against sexual violence—it also articulates a political understanding of rape as an institutionalized phenomenon.

Representing Rape: Horror and Spectacles of (Sexual) Violence

The final section of this chapter examines the visual depiction of rape in "Coven" and *The Walking Dead*. The main difference in the two programs' representational strategies is that "Coven" portrays sexual assault on-screen (with the exception of Queenie's ambiguous assault) while the sexual violence in *TWD* is off-screen. In order to explore these representational

strategies, I study two rape narratives: Madison's rape-revenge in *AHS* and the institutionalized rape at Grady in *TWD*. Recalling Eugenie Brinkema's claim that rape is "an interior harm" ("The Lady Van(qu)ishes" 38) that must be "conver[ted] into the visible" in order to "accommodate" the horror genre (39), this section considers how the programs use the conventions of horror to portray rape.

In "Bitchcraft," Madison's rape is on-screen. Claire Henry explains that a common technique in the rape-revenge structure is for the revenge to mirror the rape (Henry 55). This mirroring is most obviously demonstrated by the fact that Zoe's revenge is also a rape, but it can be more complex. Eugenie Brinkema's theory is that since rape is "an interior harm" ("The Lady Van(qu)ishes" 38), sometimes in the horror genre it is "made visible through its conversion to violence" (47). Relating this mirroring to the moral economy of the rape-revenge genre, Brinkema suggests that "the horror 'units' of the rape become the horror 'units' of the revenge" as "the female protagonist is 'allowed' her violence and revenge only in relation to how wronged she was during rape sequences" (47). Bearing in mind the relationship between the rape and the revenge, it is important to examine how Madison's rape connects visually to Zoe's revenge.

First, the scene that leads up to Madison's rape frames it as a moment of horror. After Brener drugs her, he leads her down a hallway towards a bedroom; the red lights, tilted camera angle, and eerie music indicate that an act of horror is about to take place. The rape scene itself is disorienting, with quick cuts and many close-ups of Madison's face and the rapists'. These shots, however, do not offer a look at Madison's subjectivity. Rather, a more clear focus is on the rapists and their eyes—their gaze upon Madison. It is this emphasis on the rapists' eyes that allows Zoe's revenge to mirror Madison's rape, and points towards a conversion into horror. Zoe's revenge is also somewhat disorienting. During the rape, the camera takes three positions: it rapidly cuts between close-ups of Zoe's angry face, extreme close-ups of Brener's bleeding orifices, and medium shots of the rape obscured by the white hospital curtain. As the beeping of Brener's heart rate monitor quickens, so do the cuts. The horror of Zoe's revenge comes from the gore; in close-up, we see the blood ooze from his eyes and ears until the climactic moment where his heart rate flatlines and he dies. We might consider how the horror of the rapist's gaze is made visible in the violent punishment of that gaze in Zoe's revenge.

Another commonality between the rape and revenge scenes is that both contain a tension between a direct confrontation with and obscured view of the violence on-screen. I have

described how the dark lighting, close ups, and quick editing produce a disorienting view of Madison's rape. However, the soundtrack of her assault is startlingly simple; aside from a very quiet pulsing music—perhaps distant sounds of the party—we only hear the rapists' breaths, grunts, and quiet conversation to each other. Aurally, we are confronted with what Madison hears, though visually we are not afforded such a direct view of her rape. This tension is more pronounced in Zoe's rape scene; through the gore in Brener's death, the violence of Zoe's revenge is certainly graphic. But the violence in this revenge sequence is also quite stylized. For instance, in some shots the curtain hides a direct view of the rape, but it also exaggerates it through the shadows it casts on Zoe and Brener. By cutting between Zoe's face, Brener's wounds, and the stylized shots of the rape behind the curtain, we have both a direct and mediated view of the violent rape.

In *Revisionist Rape-Revenge*, Claire Henry cites Geoff King's work on spectacles of violence when she notes that rape-revenge films often deploy "distancing techniques" in order to make violence "palatable or pleasurable" (Henry 37). Quoting King, Claire describes that these techniques include "genre conventions, comedy, or 'the exaggeration and/or heavily-stylized aestheticization of violence'" (qted. in 37). The distancing allowed by the rapid cutting in Madison's rape scene does not make her rape enjoyable by any means. Rather, it allows her assault to be disturbing but not unwatchable. The fast editing of Zoe's revenge scene, which alternates between a direct perspective of the rape and the shadowy figure of the rape, produces a tension between our direct confrontation with the gore/violence and a more distanced view. In this sequence, this opposition articulates a need to represent the violence and gore in a way that we can enjoy, because in the context of the rape-revenge and horror genres, we *are* supposed to enjoy Zoe's revenge.

In contrast, *TWD* does not depict rape on-screen. Joan's rape is off-screen and happens before Beth arrives at Grady. However, just because there are no instances of on-screen rape does not mean that rape bears no relation to the gore and violence of the horror genre. Once again returning to Brinkema's theory about the conversion of the effect of rape into violence in horror narratives, I argue that the horror of Joan's off-screen rape is made visible through gore. Brinkema argues that in order for the effect of rape on a body to be exposed, "it has to be expelled, taken out, or refigured/projected onto the outside of the body" ("The Lady Van(qu)ishes" 39). We are privy to the scene in which Joan's arm is amputated. I argue that this

moment stands in for the horror of Joan's rape. This is an intense moment of gore, where Dawn and Beth hold down Joan as Dr. Edwards slices through her arm with a wire. We see a shot of her arm being cut and bloodied. The gore is emphasized in slow motion shot and follows Dr. Edwards' blood-spattered hands as they saw the wire deeper into her arm. This scene is also linked directly to her rape. First, Gorman, her rapist, calls her a "whore," sexually objectifying her in this moment. Joan also tells Dawn, "I'm not going back to him," clearly referencing her rape and her refusal to continue to be sexually exploited. Then, following the logic of the rape-revenge structure, Joan's revenge is allowed to be violent since her violation—her amputation—has been. In that sense, Joan's revenge mirrors the reconfigured rape; both are scenes of intense gore.

What complicates this reading is that Joan's amputation scene emphasizes Beth's perspective, not Joan's. The scene serves to highlight Beth's fear, particularly when the sound of Joan's screams and the wire cutting through her arm fades into a ringing sound, as if Beth's ears are ringing from the loud noises. Just as Madison's rape ultimately served to push forward Zoe's arc in *Coven*, Joan's violation reveals to Beth that they really are at the mercy of the cops and Dr. Edwards. Further, the fact that the narrative diminishes Joan's perspective for Beth's risks silencing the experience of a woman of color, as has often been the case in popular media texts (as I addressed in the first chapter, and then above in the context of *Coven*).

Beth's experience at Grady is narratively central, and the two moments in which she is assaulted by Gorman are indeed on-screen. First, Gorman assaults Beth in a sexually suggestive scene. In a brief conversation with Joan, after her amputation, Beth asks her, "What did he do to you?" and Joan refuses to reply. In the subsequent scene, Beth gets her answer. Gorman steals a lollipop from Beth and sucks on it. He ignores Beth when she says, "I don't want it," and continues on to force the lollipop into her mouth. "Yeah, that's right," Gorman taunts, until Dr. Edwards interrupts him. This scene presents Gorman as a sexual predator (forcing a phallic object into Beth's mouth) without depicting an explicit sexual assault. Moreover, the dialogue in this scene is evocative of a sexual assault, and then Dr. Edwards directly links Gorman's behavior towards Beth to his rape of Joan when he says, "You're not getting Joan back." This

scene represents Gorman as a predator even before direct mention of the rape, and it makes explicit the threat of sexual violence.[9]

Gorman's effort to rape Beth leads in to the revenge scene. In the attempted rape scene, she fights him off quite quickly. Gorman attempts to kiss Beth's neck and puts his hands under her shirt, but that is all we see. During this scene, the camera lingers on Joan's reanimating zombie corpse and the bloody mess she has created in her suicide; while we hear Gorman's threatening words, the visual emphasis is as much on Joan's corpse as it is the attempted rape. This serves to remind the viewer that Joan will soon become a zombie, but also to link rape to gore/violence. And, of course, the scene becomes the revenge scene, as Beth's fights him off and leaves him for Joan. Gorman's assaults on Beth serve to justify her own role in his death.

Through these representational strategies, both *Coven* and *TWD* depict rape as horror. The examples from "Bitchcraft" and "Slabtown" give a clear sense of how rape—both on-screen and off-screen—can be exploited by the conventions of horror. It is important to note that neither program shows female nudity in these scenes; in "Coven," all parties are clothed in both Madison's rape and Zoe's revenge (although we do briefly see the rapists' naked buttocks). *Coven* highlights these rapes as moments of the intersection of sex and violence, while *TWD* presents implied rape and reconfigures it into moments of extreme gore. This analysis demonstrates that rape can be used as a spectacle in horror both on-screen as an act of horror in itself, and off-screen as the motivation for extreme acts of violence and gore.

This chapter has revealed that the depiction of rape creates spectacles of violence, which can also be narratives of female empowerment and survival. The very existence of the coven in *AHS* relies on the witches' ability to protect each other from internal and external threats; Madison's rape reveals this reality to Zoe, and empowers her to use her sexuality as a weapon and use rape as a tool for violent revenge. In *TWD*, rape and gendered violence are dangers that women must fight; this battle against sexual violence is somewhat problematically likened to the fight against walkers. In this narrative world, to survive is to be strong, and to be strong is to be violent. While narrative time is given to Madison to address her rape trauma, no such time is afforded to Joan, Beth, or Jessie. Indeed, these programs only consider violence as response to

[9] In fact, the rape is only textually confirmed in the episode "Coda" when in a confrontation with O'Donnell, Dawn reminds him that he was "laughing with [his] buddies about that poor girl getting raped." Before this moment, Joan's rape is only implied.

rape, which reveals the limits of the horror genre in exploring rape. Firstly, there is the potential that the horror of rape will be lost in the increasing number of other scenes of violence and gore. Second, because many of the characters that experience (the threat of) rape die, including Madison and Brener in *Coven* and Joan and Beth in *TWD*, these narratives do not offer much of a look at what comes after sexual violence. While there is certainly narrative and visual emphasis in these stories of the horror of rape and its imminent threat, there is not much thought given to what it means to live through it beyond the need for violent revenge. Finally, as products of cable television, both *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead* clearly capitalize on explicit violence and gore. *Coven* brings sexuality into its depictions of rape, while *TWD* shifts the trauma of rape into moments of intense gore. What might this mean in the broader context of the brand identities of FX and AMC?

Conclusion:
Watching Rape, Branding Rape: Quality Television and Contemporary Rape Culture

In this thesis, I have explored the relationship between American cable television—its industrial practices and its programs—and rape culture. Specifically, I have examined rape in the horror genre as it appears on cable, through two massively successful television programs: *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*. I began by investigating the ways in which feminist theory has shaped cultural understandings of rape, and how rape narratives within popular film and television have both incorporated and resisted such feminist discourses. Next, I contextualized the industrial specificities that have produced *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*, particularly the brand identities of their respective networks. I highlighted how both AMC and FX have followed HBO's approach of developing a quality brand, and that FX in particular celebrates controversial—or "Fearless"—content. Finally, I analyzed the narrative function of rape in *Coven* and the fifth season of *TWD*, and their representational strategies, in order to address the ways in which these programs negotiate patriarchal, feminist, and postfeminist rape politics. I argued that both programs articulate feminist understandings of rape that are complicated by horror's generic conventions and by postfeminist discourses.

In "The Lady Van(qu)ishes" Eugenie Brinkema says that in horror, "rape as threat, as a horror, is everywhere. But not literal rape. And not visible rape" (34). *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead* have proven to be interesting case studies of these claims, given that both *Coven* and season 5 of *TWD* do address literal rape in their narratives. In individual episodes, rape functions as the motivation for graphic scenes of violent revenge and gore. Across multiple episodes, rape reveals the harsh conditions of the world and consequently empowers the female protagonists—but not the victims of rape—to embrace violence in order to survive. There is a crucial distinction between the stories of empowerment that these two programs tell. Because in *Coven* Zoe's access to violence comes from using her witch powers, her vagina, her empowerment is premised on wielding her sexuality as a weapon. In *TWD*, Beth and Jessie do not have to connect their power and violence to their sexuality. Consequently, *AHS* deploys particular postfeminist discourses of empowerment that *TWD* does not.

While both programs offer moments of feminist critique, specifically by acknowledging that sexual violence is pervasive in women's lives and even institutional, their discussions of

rape are very limited. Indeed, female victims of rape, like Madison in *American Horror Story* and Joan in *The Walking Dead*, have no place in the resolution of the narrative; both, at the end of their respective story arcs, have become monsters (Madison as a threat to her coven, and Joan as a zombie) and are eliminated. In these narrative resolutions, I see a struggle to maintain the feminist politics that each show introduces. Both programs articulate a feminist framework that acknowledges the pervasiveness of sexual violence against women. More broadly, both shows also represent a variety of female experiences. In *Coven* especially, the female-centered narrative emphasizes the gendered violence that threatens the witches, but also the racism faced by the black witches (both in the past and in the narrative present). The narrative further acknowledges a queer alternative to the heterosexual love triangle when Zoe and Madison agree not merely to have their own private encounters with Kyle, but engage in threesomes, working against heteronormative expectations. Consequently, I position *Coven* as postfeminist in Lotz's (2001) more positive connotation; it "explore[s] the diverse relations to power women inhabit," which is characteristic of a postfeminist text ("Postfeminist Television Criticism" 115). And yet, despite this complex depiction of women's lives, the cohesion of the coven at the end of the season demands the elimination of most of the black women and the reaffirmation of heterosexual love. Further, rather than explore Madison's own trauma, the rape narrative serves to empower Zoe and develop her romantic relationship with Kyle—postfeminist in a negative sense, as per Projansky. *Coven*, in both its rape narratives and larger stories, displays both an awareness of feminist politics as well as postfeminist ideologies.

In the case of *The Walking Dead*, Beth's narrative arc foregrounds the institutionalization of sexual violence and highlights the role women play as bystanders in a culture of rape. However, the female-centered Grady storyline is only three episodes long, and all parties in this arc—except for Noah—die. Then, the narrative returns to Rick, the program's main protagonist, and his storyline. Once the themes of the Grady arc are picked up by Rick, they return to a patriarchal form as they are in part used to highlight a heterosexual love triangle and characterize Rick's masculinity. That is, once the themes from Beth's female-centered arc are deployed through Rick's male-centered narrative, they are warped to fit his philosophy of domination. Indeed, while *TWD* might offer various female experiences, and include characters of various ages, ethnicities, and sexualities, Rick is the focal point of the show; as seen in the rape narrative and domestic abuse storyline, this fact limits the program's engagement with feminist politics.

Ultimately, while both *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead* offer significant critique of sexual violence—its perpetrators and bystanders—neither program follows through on an exploration of the effects and traumas of sexual violence outside of violence.

Significantly, *Coven* depicts literal rape onscreen, though *The Walking Dead* does not. Indeed, both programs accommodate the horror genre by making rape visible. *AHS* portrays both literal rape and violent revenge in its rape-revenge narrative, while *TWD*'s depiction of rape is off-screen and instead offers implied rape and graphic scenes of violence. The question remains: what does this crucial difference mean first in terms of the feminist critique the programs might offer, and second in terms of the programs' contributions to their networks' brand identities?

In explicitly portraying literal rape, *American Horror Story* exploits cable's freedoms along two axes: more graphic depictions of sex and of violence than would be allowed on broadcast primetime television. Indeed, this conveys FX's intent to be "fearless" in its pursuit of controversial, edgy programming. Recalling McCabe and Akass's use of the "illicit" (69), the depiction of rape in *Coven* makes use of what has been forbidden to primetime broadcast television: explicit sexual content and gore. Of course, the rape scenes contain only very brief nudity, and employ distancing effects that moderate our direct confrontation of the horror of rape. This tension articulates the desire to portray the illicit, but not in a way that would lose viewers; indeed, viewers likely watch *American Horror Story* for its controversial content, but for them to return the next week it cannot be unwatchable. In addition, this tension evokes the particular industrial specificity of basic cable—they have more freedom than broadcast television, but still must appease advertisers.

In addition, without it placing too much emphasis on authorial intent, I would be remiss not to mention Ryan Murphy's own conceptualization of *American Horror Story*. Murphy has been noted as a kind of television auteur. Labeling him a "sexual provocateur," one article for *Out* celebrates Murphy's professed dedication to pushing the sexual boundaries of television (Vargas-Cooper). Certainly, we can appreciate the role that series like *Glee* and *American Horror Story* have had in depicting complex, non-heteronormative characters and marginalized sexualities. It is important to remember, however, that I am not addressing sex but rape. When asked about the violent anal rape scene in *American Horror Story: Hotel,* actor Max Greenfield described the attitude on set: "Let's push this and let's see how far we can go" (qted. in Stack, "Inside 'The Most Disturbing Scene' in *American Horror Story* History"). He moreover

attributes this sensibility to Murphy's popular reputation for pushing the limits of violence and sex on television (ibid). When *American Horror Story* is touted as groundbreaking, edgy television, partly due to its portrayals of sex, it is also being celebrated for its scenes of sexual violence. Through this conflation of sex and sexual violence, there lingers the potential to commodify representations of rape by incorporating them into the distinctive, quality television brands.

The Walking Dead, on the other hand, only exploits the freedom to portray gore and graphic violence. Its use of rape as the means for graphic violence—rather than depicting literal rape as a horror in and of itself—aligns more closely with the way horror has traditionally approached rape, according to Brinkema ("The Lady Van(qu)ishes" 34). While such graphic violence allows AMC to maintain their claims of offering "something more," the resistance to portraying literal rape also avoids charges of using sexual violence for shock value—claims that have been made against *American Horror Story*. *TWD*'s representational strategy portrays the horror of rape while denying any pleasure in watching rape, something that *AHS* fails to do. Zoe's rape of Brener is particularly aestheticized, and the moral economy of the rape-revenge genre frames her actions not as morally right but as justified since she was avenging her friend. And while I do not wish to make any claims about how viewers have received this scene, it is clear that between the narrative context of rape-revenge and the aestheticization of the scene, the possibility for enjoyment is there.

In her review of Gaspar Noé's controversial film *Irréversible,* which contains a 9 minute rape scene, Eugenie Brinkema writes: "The problem with—indeed, the great lie of—most cinematic rapes is that they are too pretty, too sutured into the narrative, too watchable. They don't repulse us enough" ("Irréversible"). For Brinkema, the "honest and harrowing" depiction of rape as unwatchable in *Irréversible* "equals the most ethical and the most feminist" form of representation ("Rape and the Rectum" 54). Similarly, Claire Henry says that in the context of the rape revenge genre, "The failure to either induce or convey the horror of rape is both a generic and feminist political failure" (Henry 34). Certainly, the horror genre functions precisely to "shock, disgust, repel—in short, to horrify" (Bordwell and Thompson 340). Indeed, by virtue of their generic expectations, horror narratives that engage with rape-revenge structures possess the potential to depict the horror of rape in ways that genuinely shock, disgust, and repel the viewer. Of course, this conversation has predominantly concerned cinema. However, in

transposing this dialogue into the realm of cable television, an interesting question arises: can commercial television, even with the freedoms of cable, truly depict rape as unwatchable? I argue that while both *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead* expose the horror of rape, neither portrays rape as unwatchable. *TWD* does not do this, obviously, because it does not show literal rape. *AHS* presents more of an explicit failure because its representations of rape offer distancing effects that allow us to enjoy the violence of the rape.

Of course, these programs also contain multiple other sequences of sexualized violence, such as when Hank the witch-hunter first seduces a witch in a scene of explicit sex and then subsequently murders her in a graphic scene of violence in *AHS*. This moment intersects sex and violence in a less straightforward way than the scenes I have explored in this thesis, but nonetheless contributes to the program's edgy reputation. The most recent season of *American Horror Story*, *Hotel,* has contained similar moments of sexualized murder. Before the season premiered, *Entertainment Weekly* created buzz around pop singer Lady Gaga's involvement with the show, spoiling that she would be involved in a scene that begins with a foursome and ends in brutal murder (Stack "Mother Monster Checks Into Hotel" 24). These more ambiguously portrayed—or perhaps ambiguously received—moments of sexual violence are valuable for feminist inquiry, as highlighted by Ferreday's discussion of the *Game of Thrones* controversy to which I referred in my introduction.

In her conclusion to *Watching Rape*, Sarah Projansky writes that "feminist media scholarship needs to respond to, make sense of, challenge, and work against the insidiousness of rape representations" (Projansky 231). Seeing as Projansky's work has inspired my own, I would like to conclude by echoing her sentiment. This thesis has highlighted the complexities of our media culture; in contemporary television, feminist critique of sexual violence exists simultaneously with the aestheticization and commodification of rape, as revealed through my critical analysis of *American Horror Story* and *The Walking Dead*. This tension between challenging rape culture and reproducing it, exemplified by *AHS*, must be further teased out within feminist media scholarship. Indeed, there are a great number of television programs—across platforms, across networks, and across genres—rife with images of sexual violence, their intricacies ready to be unpacked and explored.

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