PUNISHMENTS, PRISONERS, & PRAGS:
A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF MALE PRISONER RAPE ON HBO'S *OZ*

by

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ABSTRACT

MYASIA SAITTA BURNS. Punishments, prisoners, & prags: A narrative analysis of male prisoner rape on HBO'S OZ. (Under the direction of DR. RACHEL PLOTNICK)

This analysis examines the symbolic rape narratives of *Oz* and the cultural contexts in which they exist. It confronts visual images of male rape within the show to uncover considerations of masculinity, sexuality, and gender identification in a prison setting. For this study, I used a narrative analysis of the three functions identified in the text: rape as contrast, rape as cliché, and rape as plot device.

Through the analysis conducted, *Oz* displayed some disarmingly untraditional gender role reversals through scenes of male rape, negotiating male homosociality where other shows typically only explore heterosociality, especially with regard to sexual assault. Previous studies on rape representations posit that regardless of the individual characteristics of the storyline, rape narratives typically reinforce a dominant patriarchal ideology by positioning victims as weaker characters than the heroes.

Oz cannot be classified as either wholly reinforcing patriarchal norms or defying them, as the show negotiates both options. With regard to media studies and social change, we cannot say for sure whether *Oz* engineered or spurred ideas of prison rape reform, which is a movement that consequently took place during the initial broadcast years of *Oz*. However, it was timely with its graphic depiction of the act, ultimately giving viewers a grisly visual representation of male prison rape. Overall, *Oz* presents a model for those wishing to understand how media representations gesture toward issues of societal concern.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A quick examination of television shows will certainly uncover representations of rape dating back to the 1970's (Cuklanz, 2000). These shows typically depicted heterosexual rape, with a trend of focusing on heteronormative, patriarchal ideology (emphasizing the importance of masculine identity). However, in *Oz* (HBO; 1997-2003), notably graphic depictions of male homosexual rape in primetime television are presented. A quote from the show's narrator, Augustus Hill details how rape works on *Oz*:

> "Bitch, herm, maytag, shim… Here in Oz, we call 'em prags. I don't know where it comes from, but you make a man your prag, he's your prag for life. It's like the old days, when people didn't get divorced. The only way out of marriage is death. 'Till death do us part." (Season 1, *Oz,* 1997)

Before *Oz*, homosociality had not been explored in long-form serial programming to this extent. As the first paid premium primetime serial drama, *Oz* disrupted this form of programming. Dramatization of rape on *Oz* is premised on exploring dominance and violence within male-male relationships as a means of social control within the context of a highly hierarchical social structure. Even as an unusual representation of male rape in prison, *Oz* sometimes still falls back on heteronormative depictions of the act, while also queering the genre at other times through explorations of identity, sexuality, and retribution.

Of particular interest, *Oz* debuted on the heels of the 1996 initial introduction of a joint project from Mariner & Human Rights Watch, called *No Escape: Male Rape in U.S. Prisons* (2001). Although the final comprehensive project was not published until 2001, several smaller studies were published along the way. These studies provided horrifying statistics regarding the prevalence of male rape in prisons, a previously severely underreported and largely unknown occurrence. *Oz* provided a visual accompaniment to brutalities explored in this report, setting the agenda for public discussion of this issue. The show is vastly known for its hyperviolence, explicit sexuality, and portrayal of racial tension. Since the premiere of this gritty show, the ability to tell stories on television has dramatically expanded on viewers' screens with the explosion of primetime dramas on premium networks.

Previously, television studies literature has examined ways to move textual analyses of storytelling on television into broader, deeper social commentaries (e.g. Warner, 2002; Livingstone, 1996; Fiske, 1987; Byerly, 2012; Miller, 2010; Cakir, 2014; Parrott & Parrott, 2015; Brown & Kraehe, 2011; Trier-Bieniek & Leavy, 2014; Bignell, 2004). Scholars have conducted several studies with regards to the cultural value and prominence of *Oz* (Hames-Garcia, 2011; Sealy, 2007; Claude Guilbert & Locoge, 2007; Leverette, Ott, & Buckley, 2008; Meiners, 2007; Rapping, 2003; Sepinwall, 2013; Yousman, 2013; Eigenberg & Baro, 2013; Stemple, 2007;). Currently, there are several studies of rape representations on primetime dramas with regard to cultural context (e.g. Cuklanz, 1998; Projansky, 2001; Moorti, 2002; Boyle, 2005; Magestro, 2015), so through this project, I hope to add to existing literature by studying *Oz*, a television show that aired after the conclusion of previous studies. It introduced the opportunity to discuss

representations of homosexual rape in broader terms of heteronormative representation. The project will confront visual images of male rape within the show to uncover considerations of masculinity, sexuality, and gender identification in a prison setting.

A show like *Oz* that includes these images cannot exist on network or cable television, due to strict censorship regarding nudity, violence, and language. However, the Federal Communications Commission has little control over what content is aired on networks like HBO, resulting in more graphic and brutal representations of rape acts than what has previously been available. Indeed, "as a subscription-only channel, HBO enjoys relative independence from commercial and governmental pressures. This allows the network greater freedom to air shows containing levels of sex, violence, and swearing that would prevent them from being produced by or shown on other channels. The brand identity of HBO is heavily masculine, emphasizing its distance from 'feminizing, consumerist, emasculating, massified' television…" (Ross, 2012, 176)

This show merits attention because of the sheer uniqueness of the subject matter. Before *Oz* aired, dramatic shows that examined criminality for entertainment typically ended at the doors of the prison. Thematically, no show had gone inside the prison and certainly not to the dehumanizing extent that *Oz* portrays. The amount of graphic rape scenes in this show alone is of great cultural significance, not to mention the show's grappling with themes of identity (sexuality, masculinity, companionship, etc.) and punishment (suffering, revenge, torture, and humiliation). The extreme brutality of the rape scenes is especially noteworthy, as these scenes are some of the mildest that *Oz* offers. *Oz* operates as a soap operatic exercise, with much focus on male suffering. Rape narratives are just one example of how this extreme suffering plays out on the show.

Importantly, the show does not only depict misery. The show also examines relationships built on love and affection. Of course, many of those relationships are destroyed then re-built, only to be destroyed again. However, it is important to note the contrast, as this is where *Oz* adds dimension to its genre and creates a unique storytelling structure.

On television, rape is popularly presented along the following lines: (1) by contrasting major themes of power and identity, such as domination/submission and masculinity/femininity (Knowles, 1999; Stemple, 2007); (2) by focusing largely on the development of the hero, overshadowing the development of the victim (Cuklanz, 2000; Magestro, 2015); and (3) by focusing more on the nature of the rape itself rather than the character development of the victim (O'Sullivan, 2004; Meiners, 2007). Within the rape narratives on the show, *Oz* does reinforce some of these existing norms, but it also diverges from them often, creating fluidity in terms of how *Oz* considers and portrays male-male relationships.

Examining each male prison rape narrative on *Oz* and comparing them to the three functions previously mentioned provides a thorough examination of whether or not the show embraces heteronormative portrayals or not. In terms of contrast, *Oz* at times completely relies on heteronormative contrasts of power and identity through representations of rape, but at other times it queers the genre by interjecting love, affection, desire, and other emotions into otherwise brutally violent storylines. Regarding the unevenly explored hero/victim dynamic typically introduced in rape storylines, *Oz* completely embraces this narrative function. Lastly, *Oz* attempts to further explore male

rape in prison by directly contending with prison myths about the act, at times adding layer and depth to the myths and at others failing to do more than depict the act itself.

Deconstructing this text builds on existing literature in two ways. First, it strengthens scholarly understanding of the dynamics of male prison rape and how these acts can be demonstrated through representations on television. Additionally, as longitudinal studies of rape representations on television and their links to social change through 1990 have already been completed, this project will add to a list of shows that have been studied, thereby enriching the sample. Studying *Oz* also continues to build on previous inquiries about heteronormativity in representations of rape. Premised on these studies, this project will specifically analyze *Oz* to further contribute to existing relevant literature that focuses on television studies, previous representations of rape in the media, literature on *Oz*, and experiences of male rape in prison.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Male Rape in Prison

To understand the context of how male prison rape representations interact with the prevalence of this issue in real life US prisons, studies of statistics, accounts of prisoner experiences, and documents canvassing public perception may be of use. This topic has become a hot-button issue for scholars of communication, sexology, and criminal justice. For example, in 2004, the US Department of Justice released a short statement regarding the current state of research on male rape in prison: "There have been only a few studies on the prevalence of sexual assault within correctional facilities. These studies are typically small in scale, covering only a few facilities, and generalizations to the national correctional population are not appropriate. The magnitude of sexual assault among prisoners is not currently well understood" (1). Scholars are in the beginning stages of trying to understand how and why sexual assault broadly, and male rape specifically, occurs in prison.

Knowles (1999) highlights the nature of this act, with special attention to why blacks tend to rape more whites than any other groups. He examines the prison setting as a prime environment for such an act to take place, and then questions the general structure of a prison setting:

> "There are several factors in the social structure of the prison community which may be functional in producing deviant sexual behavior which include: (i) one-sex, non-heterosexual activity, (ii) tolerant attitude towards deviant sexual behavior, (iii) too much idle time, (iv) privacy is impossible, (v) no separation of sex offenders and homosexuals, (vi) decreased communication with the outside world (lack of identification with societal norms)." (p. 272)

From almost a completely different perspective than Knowles, Eigenberg (2000) explores the occurrence of male rape in prison from the standpoint of correctional officers, comparing reasons why they might attempt to prevent the act or fail to do so. Essentialist definitions of heterosexuality and homosexuality still prevail and can often play a role in an officer's desire to stop what they may consider to be consensual activity, despite the fact that consent is often misunderstood in these settings. Specifically, if an inmate feels forced to submit to a larger/more powerful/higher ranking inmate for protection, this does not count as consensual sex under the current legal definition of rape (US Department of Justice, 2004). However, if an officer disagrees with this definition of consent, she may fail to intervene in a situation similar to this. Trammell (2011) examines the definition of "prison wives," how these exchanges typically work, and whether or not traditional definitions of consent can apply. He finds that many prisoners do not consider an "agreement" that promises protection in exchange for sex to be rape (instead it is viewed as a necessary, voluntary survival tactic).

Robertson (2003) builds on this knowledge in what he terms a "predator calling card." (426). He explains that in the eyes of the correctional officer, once a prisoner has been raped, he might be deemed less worthy of protection than those who have not yet been subject to the act (426). Also in this study, he details that the public generally opines that criminals raped in prison are deserving of the act and not worthy of being

saved. Continuing in this vein of considering how the public views prison rape, Fleisher & Jacobs (2009) attempt to uncover a better cultural understanding of the prison myths that currently exist. In interviews with 564 inmates, they outline six typical sexual roles that can exist in a male prison setting: true straight, active, down low, queen, homosexual, and punk (67). The authors propose that prison sexuality is rarely static, and instead is dynamic. An inmate's sexual desires can encompass one, several, or none of these roles. Wolff & Jing (2009) add layers of context to this understanding by raising questions of practice that might contribute to the construction of these sexual roles (for example, cellmate selection, levels of supervision, etc.).

Lastly, with important regard to representation, Crewe (2014) examines structures of emotion and desire in order to better understand male relations in same-sex prisons. He concludes that masculine identity certainly does underscore the majority of both real interactions and representative performances meant for entertainment (television, film, etc.), but what most representations tend to leave out is the underlying emotional connection (or lack thereof) that exists in these relationships. *Oz* has attempted to more fully address the complexities of same-sex desire and affection through the show's central relationships. As previously stated, this is one of the more significant parts of the show's reputation, as this is uncharted territory with previous studies of rape representation.

Generally, the relatively recent studies on male prison rape have begun to help scholars constitute an understanding of the act itself and the corresponding prison culture. But, there are gaps between the rape acts in prison and their representations in the media.

With such little factual information, where do these images draw their foundation for existence?

2.2 Representations of Rape in Television

In 1998, Cuklanz explored how primetime serial representations of rape have changed over time (as a reflection of a shift in societal values), specifically in the late 1970's. According to the author, "These three years form a pivotal season of change and resistance to change in prime time's treatment of rape, but also because this change ultimately served to retard the dissemination of new ideas about rape" (426). This article set the stage for her later work that comprehensively examined the relationship between television and social change as well as the definition/significance of the concept of hegemonic masculinity. She finds that the nature of this relationship is correlational and that as feminist movements have progressed, television representations have demonstrated more sympathetic portrayals of rape victims, but these representations are limited by genre, medium, and precedent. Masculinity is still a central theme defining the episodic storylines, leaving less time to develop the overall rape narrative for the victim as most of the time is dedicated to developing the hero narrative. This study only focuses on dramatic programming from 1976-1990, so shows like *Oz* (1997-2003) are case studies of interest, as they provide further evidence to either support or challenge these notions.

Projansky (2001) builds on Cuklanz's ideas by examining the postfeminist narrative. Distinguishing her work from media effects studies, she makes an important clarification: "I am not arguing here that representations of rape are equivalent to the experience of rape, but rather that all representations of rape necessarily contribute to the

discursive existence of rape and that graphic representations do so in particularly powerful ways" (96). Her book focuses on the application of a postfeminist narrative to rape representations, and she analyzes whether these shows could be categorized as feminist, antifeminist, postfeminist, or something else entirely (based on the necessary but missing intersectional cultural experience of the nonwhite, lower class, and/or queer rape victim). Rather than answering these questions, she raises them for the reader to decipher in a highly suggestive context, hinting that decoding these messages correctly is essential to continue the progress of the feminist movement.

Moorti (2002) examines traditional primetime rape narratives and diversions from these traditions, finding that regardless of minor changes in plot, these narratives tend to enforce heteronormative, patriarchal values. She argues that no matter how rape is portrayed, the commercial nature of the medium prevents genuine critique of the narrative. Boyle (2005) attempts to invert rape representation studies by embarking on a study canvassing the scope of male narrative, stating, "It is a recurring male character (a lawyer, cop, private eye, sometimes even a medic) who most often propels the narrative forward (by seeking justice within or outside of the law), gives voice to feminist arguments and helps the victim – who is often resistant to these arguments – to make sense of her experience" (183). Here, Boyle echoes an important sentiment of a hero-based rape narrative, which emphasizes masculinity as the most important role, downplaying the importance of the victim's development to the rape narrative.

Focusing more on this detective/victim dynamic, Magestro (2015) directly updates work in this field, but with a limited scope. Magestro focuses entirely on police procedural dramas, eliminating the opportunity for a broader statement about a more

modern perspective on the representation of rape in primetime dramas. She constructs her analysis through an individual case study of nine shows, devoting a separate chapter to each. At the end of each chapter, she comes to a separate conclusion about each representation, but they vary so wildly, it would be impossible to generalize an overall finding for her study.

An understanding of previous scholarship about rape representations is the first step to constructing a space for this study. Even as rape narratives have progressed to a fuller, more detailed representation, the traditionally patriarchal perspective still seems to prevail as central to character development on primetime shows. How can we use this understanding of the masculine performance on primetime to better understand the narratives on *Oz* (specifically, the rape narratives)? The next step is to review previous literature on *Oz*, which will reveal the gaps of conversation about male rape on the show.

2.3 Studies of *Oz*

Sepinwall's chapter (2013) on *Oz* provides an introduction of show creator Tom Fontana's thought process in creating the show, focusing specifically on what he hoped to accomplish with this production. Notably, he directly tackles the brutal nature of the show, but explains that the brutality is simply a vehicle to tell a bigger story. According to Sepinwall, "If *Oz* had just been about the brutality, it would have been the best-cast exploitation film of all time. The violence was inherent to the setting, but Fontana had higher aims. He wanted viewers to confront the dehumanizing nature of the prison experience, but also use these criminals to talk about race, addiction, sexuality, religion, elderly care and any other hot-button issue he had on his mind" (27).

High-level cultural topics were addressed in detail on *Oz,* but it is hard to deny the hyperviolent environment in which they take place. Yousman (2013) focuses the overall themes of terror, dominance, and general unpleasant nature of the show. He evaluates the combination of the intense imagery with the racial tension both consciously and subconsciously displayed through the stories told. Interestingly, this dynamic is depicted with a sense of realism that completely disorients the viewer, providing a profoundly cold viewing experience. What is it that makes viewers want to continue to watch this masochistic form of entertainment? Hart (2007) believes that the show embodies the essence of neoliberal regimes regarding penalty, punishment, and imprisonment. He details the harsh "reality" of the show in its representation of prison as a "place where bad people go" and "if we're not careful, we can end up there, too" (45). The argument regarding the show's focus on realism is precisely one of *Oz*'s most popular conversational points. Is the show realistic or does it only depict a viewer's worst nightmare? Developing an answer to this question can help scholars understand the representational power of the show. Neither option subtracts from the influence of the show, but instead merely provides further understanding for the images we see on the show.

Additional imagery and themes on the show that set *Oz* apart from other shows is its portrayal of male nudity and homosexuality. Some scholars state that *Oz*'s treatment of sexuality and masculinity were not only original in theory, but completely new to television. They argue that the brutal nature of the prison environment is potentially why the show's violence must be extreme, even with regards to sexuality (which might shed light on the reason for such graphic representations of male rape) (Hames-Garcia, 2011).

Other scholars debate the portrayal of masculinity on the show, arguing that regardless of the groundbreaking depiction of male homosexual rape, the representation still perpetuates heteronormative ideology (Gilbert & Locoge, 2007). Further unpacking this argument will help to examine the overall progression of rape narratives with regards to the feminist movement (as previously explored by Cuklanz, Projansky, Moorti, etc.).

Still, other scholars uncover additional reasons to regard *Oz* as truly original and groundbreaking. Santo (2008) acknowledges that the graphic violence and depiction of sexuality is worthy of attention, but equally revolutionary are the willingness to kill major characters during unconventional plot moments, a thematic focus on criminality, and a repositioning of the villain as somewhat likeable, heroic, and understandable. For all of these reasons, *Oz* exists as "para-television," in other words, mimicking and tweaking existing and recognizable TV forms, while still enjoying the benefits of being virtually uncensored (Marc, 2008). Is there a connection between para-television viewing habits and representations of rape in this unconventional format? Perhaps this new storytelling format lends itself to a shift in traditional imagery. Conversely, since this format relies on original television conventions from the prison genre to draw viewers in, perhaps they can still understand *Oz* by using heteronormative reading practices and traditional patriarchal ideology, despite the uncensored format.

Certainly, *Oz*'s contemporary departure from some established tropes and continued portrayal of others is worthy of further examination. Wlodarz (2006) looked specifically at the diversion from stereotypical homosexual tropes in television. Through this longitudinal series study, he finds that while the show grounds itself in perceived realism through violence, assumed masculinity, and homophobia, it also subverts the

prison genre by exploring a multicultural narrative and focusing on identity-based conflict. These subversions contribute to a new understanding of the "reality" of prison and therefore reimagine how we read the prison genre. According to Wlodarz, on why the show is culturally important: "The series is thus far more effective as a broader social critique than as a specific argument against the prison industrial complex" (60). This point lays the foundation for why studies of *Oz* are important and how they can contribute to relevant scholarship on a broader level than just textual analysis.

Continuing to debate the opportunity for social commentary from the show, Jarvis (2006) deliberates about the gender identities present in *Oz*, while considering the effect of body politics and intercultural/intracultural relations within the prison. He finds that despite *Oz*'s perceived realism, the show exceeds reality through excessive violence, ultimately preventing the show from complete salience and grounded social commentary. Stemple (2007) expands on this point, but feels that *Oz* has enriched viewers' understanding of prisoner rape. She notes that although *Oz* is not to be regarded as a true-life story, it does provide a space for discourse on feminist and gendered conversations, "far away from art theaters and research universities" (2). Meiners (2007) explains why a study of representations on *Oz* is not only interesting, but necessary:

> "With the active absence of other representations of prison life in the popular sphere, *OZ* functions as a teaching machine, offering dramatic ''real life'' representations about the site of prison, and subsequently offering de facto meanings about crime, punishment, rehabilitation, and criminal policies. Deconstructing contemporary representations of incarceration offers warnings and insights into the current landscape of public sentiment surrounding crime and prisons, and the production of racialized public enemies." (p. 26)

Oz shifts between traditional storytelling and determined diversions from stereotypical tropes often. Therefore, it is not surprising that scholars have continued to

debate the representational power of the show, as polysemy dictates multiple understandings of a text. Perhaps the representational power lies within *Oz*'s ability to explore themes in this unsettling way, constantly contradicting itself and never committing to a specific stance or theme. Certainly, an overall understanding of how television works to shape widespread perceptions help to further unpack *Oz* (and representations of male rape in prison).

2.4 Television Studies

Importantly, when analyzing media phenomena (specifically television) to learn about societal values, no studies have yet confidently linked media representations with behavioral patterns (Livingstone, 1996). Newcomb & Hirsch (1983) argue that instead of creating ideologies, television comments on ideological issues. Fiske (1987) echoes their thoughts: "Social change does occur, ideological values do shift, and television is part of this movement. It is wrong to see it as an originator of social change, or even to claim that it ought to be so, for social change must have its roots in material social existence; but television can be, must be, part of that change, and its effectivity will either hasten or delay it" (45). So, if viewing an image cannot be linked to direct action, then why study representations of rape?

Representation shapes our perception of experience (Cakir, 2014), especially with regard to gender and race, two cultural contexts with blurred lines and a multiplicity of meanings (Parrott & Parrott, 2015). For example, according to Brown & Kraehe (2011) in their textual analysis of *The Wire*: "What gets represented in visual cultural spaces is easily picked up and reproduced in and outside of the media space so it is strategic to target analyses of visual media because it touches the lives of many" (75). In this study,

the authors identified a strong correlation between representations of Black men and mainstream visual construction/imagination of the Black man. To add dimension to the concept of social construction, consider that television holds the unique power of normalizing emergent trends and lifestyle changes by including them along with stereotypical and traditional representations (Trier-Bieniek & Leavy, 2014). With these representations, a story is told.

By further understanding the importance of representation on television, we can lay the foundation for the importance of an understanding on a prevalent, but highly under-studied issue: male rape in prison. We can now confidently assert that these representations help viewers to mentally contextualize the act, so with regard to social change, it is of top priority to have a full understanding of the power of these narratives.

Overall, these studies on male rape in prison, representations of rape on television, *Oz*'s potential for social commentary, and the power of representation make a solid contribution by: (1) providing statistics and reports to establish understanding of male rape in prison, (2) highlighting studies of representations of rape that have already been conducted, (3) covering what has been said about *Oz* thus far, grounding the show in its rightful cultural significance, and (4) explaining the need for deeper analyses of television show representations (rather than textual analyses alone).

This show marks an important time period, as *Oz was* HBO's first original drama series. Research has shown that through studies of representation, we can see implications about gender, power, and identity (Newcomb & Hirsch, 1983; Projansky, 2001; Griffin, 1979; Ross, 2012; Media Education Foundation, 2002; Mulvey, 1989; Douglas, 2010; Erdem, 2014). Continuing on the path set by Cuklanz, Projansky,

Moorti, and Magestro, a narrative analysis (with regard to cultural context) will help to add depth to critical understanding of these representations of rape, specifically by focusing on male homosexual rape. Even by broadening the scope to include non-heteronormative representations, do we still continue to see that these depictions on television enforce a patriarchal ideology? This study is important because it zooms out to include more than just heteronormative representation, an important step in contemporary media studies.

2.5 Method

The purpose of this study is to answer the research question: how do rape representations on *Oz* fit into previous literature on rape representations on primetime television, specifically with regards to heteronormative ideology, perceived realism, and the prison industrial complex, placing the show into a broader cultural significance? To determine how these representations interact with dominant understandings of patriarchy and the masculine identity, this study employs narrative analysis to analyze the rape storylines within the television series. To conduct this analysis, I viewed the entire series of *Oz* through HBOGo, watching for overall themes. Then, I watched the series again for detailed notes, minor transcription, and cinematography details. I also read scholarly and popular reviews of *Oz* as well as audience forum posts and comments on social media websites and blogs. Several forms of immersion in the content afforded me the opportunity to engage with each rape representation individually and in the context of all other representations on the show, allowing dominant themes and ideologies to emerge through a grounded approach.

To assess *Oz*' treatment of rape narratives, this study compares each major male rape storyline on the show, including the following characters: Tobias Beecher, Vernon Schillinger, Chris Keller, Simon Adebisi, Peter Schibetta, Ryan O'Reily, Cyril O'Reily, Adam Guenzel, Franklin Winthrop, Richie Hanlon, James Robson, Wolfgang Cutler, and various unnamed members of the Aryan Brotherhood. Analyzing each narrative prevents a thick analysis of each independent theme, however, a thin analysis of the overall prevailing narrative functions seems more appropriate while exploring overarching themes on *Oz*.

2.6 Narrative

In considering methodologies for my study, I turned to Ross (2012): "Textual analysis, framing analysis, semiotics, ethnography, and social critique are among the most common methodologies in representational research. These approaches, according to Kellner (2011), enable scholars to "show how media articulate the dominant values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era" (5). Morley (1992) defines narrative studies as an appropriate method for analyzing cultural artifacts with overarching storylines and societal implications. For this study, I examined each narrative on *Oz* to learn more about how these representations of male rape in prison might reinforce, defy, or negotiate traditional hegemonic masculinity. The goal is to identify recurring themes, structural consistencies/inconsistencies, and efficiency of the narratives within the show, and to then analyze those patterns (or lack thereof) to understand a portion of the show's contribution to societal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (McGee, 1990).

The analysis section examines three narrative functions individually (rape as contrast, rape as cliché, and rape as plot device), classifying each storyline within one or several functions. For each function, a presentation of how the device is relevant is introduced, followed by an application of the device to the narrative itself, and with a conclusion of how each storyline interacts with heteronormative representations of rape. This narrative analysis demonstrates that *Oz* neither rejects or accepts patriarchal ideology completely, instead depicting traditional themes of masculinity at times, while completely queering the hyper-masculine prison genre at others, presenting *Oz* as a disruptive combination of unapologetically traditional reliance on television tropes and nontraditional generic diversions simultaneously.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS

In the following pages, I provide a layered investigation that allows scholars to not only understand dominant ideologies as previous studies have done, but to place these shows into a broader cultural significance (Fiske, 1973; Miller, 2010; Kellner, 2011). Through this analysis, I will examine how rape narratives function on *Oz* through the following heteronormative traditions: (1) rape as plot device – rapes that exist for the development of a character other than the victim, (2) rape as cliché – rapes that exist to add a layer of "realism" for the viewer (in the case of *Oz*, by invoking prison myths), and (3) rape as contrast – rapes that exist to explore a theme by extremely contrasting it with its polar opposite. I will analyze these devices with specific reference to whether they reinforce patriarchal values through their execution or in some way challenge these ideas.

Oswald State Penitentiary (affectionately dubbed "*Oz*" by its inhabitants) is a fictional, maximum security prison that holds murderers, rapists, and other high-level criminals. *Oz* is also home to non-violent criminals (thieves, protesters, etc.), which provides an opportunity for interactions between the violent and the non-violent at almost any time. For example, *Oz* begins with a glimpse into the mind of an inmate entering the prison, Tobias Beecher. Beecher represents "the straight man" archetype in that through his middle-class stature, heterosexual identity, and general whiteness, he does not identify with the disorderly, chaotic, and violent nature of the prison.

Within his first few seconds of introduction, another inmate is stabbed in the seat next to him. This scene serves as both Beecher's and the viewers' introduction to *Oz*. Instead of telling, it shows viewers that they are in for an unpleasant viewing experience, and that is inherently as captivating as it is gruesome. Wlodarz (2003) explains more about the viewer's position: "Immediately, the viewer is positioned to share Beecher's horror as he is thrust into this hotbed of racial conflict and violence, presented here as alien territory for middle-class white men" (68). What will happen to Beecher? How will he fare in such a place? These are questions viewers ask themselves as the scene ends.

Continuing to delve into the first episode of *Oz*, the audience is introduced to many of the long-running themes for which the show is famous. To name a few: retribution, fear, regulation, sexuality, affection, and humiliation. Many of these themes are explored at the same time, but shot in direct contrast to each other. For example, *Oz* often explores an extreme show of domination by contrasting it with blatant interjections of tenderness and affection. This juxtaposition contributes to a sense of whiplash while watching the show. Viewers can root for heroes and villains the same, as a character can morph from one to the other within one episode with ease. According to previous literature, this sort of contrast can reify patriarchal values by celebrating dominance and punishing submission (Moorti, 2002).

In addition to its usage of contrast, *Oz* is well known for attempts on to portray a realistic depiction of life in prison (Yousman, 2009). However, the writers may have encountered difficulties when less than 1% of the US population is or has ever been incarcerated, and therefore has little knowledge of the prison system. A simple way to engage the clueless viewer is to rely on classic prison myths (Fleisher & Jacobs, 2009).

Prison stereotypes explored on *Oz* range from gays desiring sex more often than straight men all the way to prisoners offering protection to other prisoners in exchange for prostitution. Including these stereotypical narratives allows the viewer to further identify with the story in that she can feel that she now "knows" this is what "real prison" is like. Wlodarz (2005) outlines how the prison genre typically negotiates viewer ideals of prison and the realities of prison:

> "The promise of an unfiltered, raw, and realistic perspective on criminality, systems of authority, and the socially marginal is a trademark of the prison genre. Even exploitation prison films entice viewers by revealing what typically goes unseen in mainstream cinema, especially graphic violence, homosexuality, and eroticized interracial relations. Prominent themes of the genre include the resistance to an oppressive authority; an emphasis on the achievement and maintenance of "masculine" control; the promotion of idealized, heroic men; and the importance of "perfect friendships." (66)

Oz continued to deliver on this promise with brutal storylines and hyperviolent characters. This analysis will explore the use of these myths to determine if they can be identified as fictional realism or fictional exploitation.

With regard to storytelling choices, it is worth mentioning that oftentimes on the show, rape functions as nothing more than a plot device. While delivering the viewer's dose of "reality," a rape act also serves to move the story along. With some characters, the rape act was integral to their character development, while other characters were raped only for the purpose of perpetuating another's storyline. Previous studies on representations of (heterosexual) rape have shown that stereotypically, the rape victim storyline is secondary to the "hero" of the story. On *Oz*, this stereotype continues to play out in at least half of the rape storylines. Although the rape is homosexual, the rape victim still suffers the same backgrounding as in other outside rape narratives.

Do the narrative functions (rape as contrast, rape as cliché, rape as plot device) serve to underscore previous studies of rape representations? This analysis will explore the rape narratives in *Oz* to understand how the show operates on the existing timeline of rape narratives on primetime television dramas.

3.1 Rape as Contrast

Juxtaposing opposite themes is a common literary device used for exposition. On *Oz*, contrast is used in several different ways within the rape narratives of the following characters: Beecher/Schillinger, Schibetta/Adebisi, and Hanlon/Aryans. Within these narratives, themes of agency, sexuality, and love are explored by use of the contrast device, as further explained by Stemple (2007):

> "In *Oz*, as in reality, prisoner rapists like Adebisi and Schillinger are at the top of the prison hierarchy. They maintain their dominant position by subjugating others. Despite the fact that the predators are, by definition, the ones initiating the same-sex sexual contact, they remain heterosexual in their social roles and in their self-perception." (170)

However, it is not just within the individual rape narrative that the contrast exists on the show. On *Oz*, relationships that could almost be described as tender, loving, or affectionate are explored as well. Sometimes, these narratives play out in the same episode as a rape narrative, offering a complex investigation of what love, sexuality, and identification mean within the walls of *Oz*. Wlodarz (2005) further elaborates on this idea, specifically discussing the decision to include the juxtaposition of the Beecher/Keller and Schibetta/Adebisi storylines in the same episode:

> "*Oz*, in fact, uses the rape of Schibetta as a narrative counterpoint to the emerging Beecher-Keller relationship in order again to differentiate between rape and homosexuality. For in Beecher's first confessional scene in the episode, he describes his love for Keller to Sister Peter Marie (Rita Moreno) by distinguishing it from the "unloving, brutal" sex forced on him by Schillinger." (84)

Perhaps the most explored case of rape on the show lies within the love/hate triangle of Tobias Beecher, Vernon Schillinger, and Chris Keller (who doesn't arrive until Season 2). Upon arriving to *Oz*, prisoners are assigned cellmates that are at times based on ethnic background and other times, random selection. The crimes committed to land the prisoners at *Oz* have no bearing on assignments made, so it is quite possible that murderers will end up with tax criminals, rapists with thieves, and so on. In the case of Tobias Beecher, a nonviolent prisoner convicted of vehicular manslaughter, he is originally assigned Simon Adebisi as his new cellmate. Adebisi has been convicted of murder in the first degree. Portrayed as a hulking, threatening figure, one of his first lines to Beecher contains a direct warning: "'I won't be fucking you, prag. At least, not tonight." This warning leaves Beecher afraid for his life. Desperate to escape the situation, Beecher tries to think of a solution. Picking up on his fear and confusion, Vern Schillinger approaches Beecher and offers "free" advice and a solution: switch roommates. Beecher immediately goes to the unit manager, Tim McManus, and requests a new roommate. His request is approved and he receives Schillinger as his new cellmate. Although convicted only of aggravated assault, Schillinger is a fearsome murderer, a well-known fact amongst prisoners and prison officials alike.

The very first scene of the new room assignment reveals a dark bait-and-switch: Originally viewed as Beecher's savior, Schillinger has malicious designs in store for Beecher. As Beecher enters his new cell, Schillinger automatically claims the top bunk. Beecher complies and begins making his bed (gleefully). Schillinger asks him if he is a "Jew" and Beecher makes a joke, implying that the answer is no. Schillinger removes his shirt and asks if Beecher likes his tattoos (revealing his Aryan Brotherhood affiliation to

the audience). Beecher doesn't seem surprised, but when Schillinger says they'll have to get him one (a tattoo), Beecher politely declines. Unfazed, Schillinger tells Beecher that he will also be branded soon. Beecher acknowledges that only livestock is branded. Schillinger tells Beecher that he is livestock and that Beecher now belongs to Schillinger. He then begins to fondle his face, stating, "Livestock. That's what you are. My livestock. Because now, Tobias, your ass belongs to me."

Interestingly, the cinematography of this scene further implies the power shift (from Beecher to Schillinger). The first portion of the scene in Schillinger & Beecher's cell is shot from the bottom bunk. We can see the side of Beecher's face, but we can only see Schillinger reflected in the glass after the reveal of his Aryan identification occurs, as he has jumped onto the top bunk. Beecher is now sitting on the bottom bunk. After the livestock comment, the camera flips to the top bunk, now looking down on Schillinger, and Beecher is partially obscured. The camera reveals the power switch to the viewer to further drive home this new dynamic.

As the relationship between Schillinger and Beecher continues to spiral downward, viewers witness graphic scenes of torture, humiliation, and extreme violence in the never-ending struggle for power between the two. During their time in Oz together, which spans almost a decade, Beecher is raped, forced to dress in drag, has his bones broken, one child murdered and the other kidnapped (all at the hands of Schillinger). In return, Schillinger is defecated upon, has two children murdered, suffers an injury to his eye, and effectively has his parole canceled (all at the hands of Beecher).

This storyline presents one of the qualities that continues to make *Oz* worthy of study: the soap operatic tendencies. Certainly, some of the plot points between Beecher

and Schillinger extend past fiction and possibly into a fantastic setting. According to Wlodarz (2005), though, this clash of generic and sexual norm is precisely what makes *Oz* worthy of study:

> "It is indeed the combination of elements from the prison genre (homosociality, male nudity, conflicts of manhood and racial identity) and the soap opera (deferred closure, multiple identification, heightened emotion, villainy, and victimization) that make the series's exploration of sexuality so unusual and unsettling. Soap traditions are particularly disruptive in masculine, homosocial spaces, and *Oz* heightens the queer erotic potential of both television and life behind bars by allowing melodrama to penetrate its prison walls." (62)

Further building on the soap opera norm, Beecher's great love interest, Chris Keller, is introduced during Season 2. Keller is a sociopathic serial killer who struggles with his own bisexuality due to a likely undiagnosed case of bipolar disorder. Well into Beecher and Schillinger's long battle, Keller arrives at Oz in time to play a major role in Beecher's ultimate dehumanization. Keller quickly is assigned as Beecher's roommate and after a brief initial period of distrust, they begin a new friendship.

As time goes on, Beecher discovers that he is not only sexually attracted to Keller, but falling in love with him, as well. During this episode, Beecher himself draws an interesting contrast between his relationship with Keller and that with Schillinger, saying, "I'm not talking about sex. I'm talking about love. I had sex with Schillinger. It was brutal, unloving. This is different." In the same episode that Beecher uncovers these feelings, Keller is revealed to be a longtime friend of Schillinger's, as they work undercover to unleash a major attack on Beecher's sanity. Once Keller reveals himself to be working with Schillinger, the three of them embark on a revolving journey for the rest of the show's existence, jockeying for power. During this time, they continue to negotiate multiple identities with regard to love/hate, agency/helplessness, and many iterations of

sexuality and gender. The importance of this narrative lies within the contrast of Beecher's romantic on again/off again relationship with Keller versus Beecher's hateful, violent relationship with Schillinger. The Beecher/Schillinger storyline is an age-old tale of being turned out in prison, while the Beecher/Keller storyline is a new look at homosexuality in an ultra-masculine setting. The Beecher/Schillinger rape narrative enforces patriarchal norms, while the Beecher/Keller romantic relationship disrupts tradition and essentially queers the heteronormative prison representation (Wachter, 2016).

Beecher, Schillinger, and Keller's story consisted of both physical warfare and mental anguish. Within the same episodes as the previous triangle, the relationship between Peter Schibetta and Simon Adebisi rapidly develops, consisting almost entirely of physical torment. Although their storylines revolve around each other for a full season, they do not interact onscreen until midway through Season 2. Adebisi is the leader of The Homeboys, who have a stronghold on the drug trade, while Schibetta leads the Italian gang, who handle the other day-to-day illicit operations of the prison. However, Schibetta wants to absorb Adebisi's business, but Adebisi is unwilling, which creates conflict. They resolve to kill each other (in *Oz*, most conflicts are solved with brutality).

In their first few scenes, Adebisi is seen to taunt Schibetta with faux affection, lust, and name-calling, and Schibetta typically responds with a weak insult about Adebisi's appearance or hygiene. As their feud escalates, Adebisi decides to poison Schibetta, which results in dishonor and embarrassment for Schibetta and his family name. In response to a family advisor, Schibetta resolves, "Christ. You tell them I'm gonna handle Adebisi. I'm gonna get my honor back. By the end of the day, either that

fucking moulie or me is gonna be in a body bag". Additionally, the show continues to foreshadow the sexual undertones of Adebisi's taunts, by eventually showing Adebisi teasing Schibetta by swinging his genitals at him after the lights go out in the prison.

In Schibetta's desperation to kill Adebisi, he concocts a half-baked plan to attack Adebisi while he is alone in the cafeteria. However, as mentioned before, Adebisi is depicted as being unusually large and powerful, so this attack results in both Schibetta and his partner, Chucky Pancamo being overpowered. Adebisi knocks both unconscious and locks Pancamo in the pantry. He then drags a feebly stirring Schibetta onto a nearby table and brutally rapes him, onscreen.

In terms of contrast, this scene of course portrays a physically weaker and smaller Schibetta losing power to a stronger, larger Adebisi. Importantly, their entire relationship has conveyed a sense of Schibetta trying to measure up to his family's name and reputation, but failing. Adebisi's role in this relationship was more than an aggressor and a bully. Instead, his role portrayed the pinnacle of power and masculinity that Schibetta repeatedly attempts to reach. However, as Schibetta is bested by Adebisi, this again portrays a contrast of weakness/strength. Additionally, fellow inmates tease Schibetta after this event, referring to him as a "prag" and a "bitch", further feminizing his character, while also strengthening the hyper masculine image of Adebisi. It should also be noted that Adebisi suffers no consequence as a result of this rape, while Schibetta loses control of the Italians, respect from his fellow inmates, and eventually his sense of self. This injustice carries over even to reception of the show, as Adebisi's "cocky, rebellious presence" made him a fan favorite, even after the rape occurs (Wlodarz, 2005).

Within the show, while Adebisi is not rewarded for the assault, Schibetta experiences only punishment for his role, underscoring the theme that there is no justice in *Oz*.

The last contrast to be examined lies within the character development of Richie Hanlon, another prisoner who suffers a terribly unfair fate. Almost a throwaway scene in the grander scheme of happenings within *Oz*, Hanlon is gang raped by a group of Aryans in Season 2. Initially, he is targeted because of his open sexuality, with the Aryans claiming: “You're a fag. You suck dick. So what's the problem?”. Although Hanlon refuses to service the Aryans, they beat him into submission and force him to perform oral sex on the group. Similarly to the Adebisi/Schibetta rape, this rape is contrasted through Hanlon’s weakness and the strength of the Aryans. The sexuality of the two parties is of interest, as Hanlon identifies as homosexual, while each of the Aryans identify as heterosexual (regardless of their homosexual rape).

In this instance, *Oz* contrasts homosexuality with heterosexuality, while juxtaposing those same parties’ weakness versus their strength. In using previous literature to discuss these representations, viewers also witness a contrast of femininity versus masculinity, as well (Knowles, 1999). Directly following this scene, Hanlon is propositioned by yet another inmate who witnessed the previous assault. Hanlon pushes him, and the unnamed prisoner ends up falling over the balcony and dying on impact. With that, Hanlon is eventually sent to Death Row for murder.

On its own, Hanlon’s story is not of much consequence to the examination of rape narratives as contrast, but Wlodarz (2005) outlines the importance of Hanlon’s short arc combined with other relationships on the show: “Again in season two, we see an ambiguous association of white supremacy with homosexuality through the Aryans’ near

obsession with sexual degradation, but here *Oz* also uses the melodramatic trope of romantic love to distance consensual homosexuality from nonconsensual rape."

Ultimately, the three rape narratives previously explored (Beecher/Schillinger/Keller, Schibetta/Adebisi, and Hanlon/Aryans) all run concurrently on *Oz*, contributing to a greater sense of contrast than just the themes in the individual stories. Using a feminist lens (Cuklanz, 2010; Moorti, 2002; & Projansky, 2001), the rapes themselves are mostly in line with previous literature on heteronormative rape representations, further following the ideology that regardless of the portrayal of rape itself, rape representations on television tend to reinforce traditionally patriarchal norms (strength equals masculinity, while weakness equals femininity). Cuklanz (2000) notes that these portrayals are problematic, as they reify concepts of hegemonic masculinity as positive, while anything that suggests the opposite is conveyed negatively.

However, it is again important to note the polysemic nature of this specific text. The prison genre is known to contradict itself while providing multiple scripts for viewers, as explained by Wlodarz (2005):

> "But while the prison genre unsettles norms by making the queer threat ever present and dominant masculinity constantly vulnerable, these elements are often narratively countered and safeguarded by a concentration on notions of innocence, resistance, heroicism, and forms of "redemption" that work to marginalize and demonize both queer desire and feminine identifications." (71)

The following commentaries will help to shed light on the polysemy of the text. The first, from Guilbert & Locoge (2009), references Adebisi's practice of rape in *Oz*:

> "We see here how raping men and having bitches actually still belong to the traditional masculine sphere, thus accentuating hegemonic masculinity…The act may be happening between two men, but the rapist remains a macho heterosexual (in his own eyes at least) using every means he has to project his desires onto a man." (59)

Oz can certainly be seen as reinforcing some heteronormative structures through sex acts, shows of force, and general beliefs held by prisoners. However, there are many readings of the show that contribute to a different belief, that *Oz* challenged many of these norms, allowing viewers a space to confront traditional ideas of sexuality, gender, dominance, and ultimately identity. Becker (2008) further expands upon ideas originally offered by Wlodarz (2005): "*Oz* offers viewers an image of male desire and sexuality that can potentially destabilize any easy equation between sexual identity and sexual behaviours and desires" (134). The two viewpoints do not need to exist in direct conflict, but rather suggest that *Oz* itself negotiates multiple identities through contrast. Scenes of brutal homosexual assault might reinforce patriarchal representations, but when contrasted with same-sex love and desire (sometimes in the same episode), *Oz* reveals its ability to offer a fresh critique on homosocial relations in prison.

3.2 Rape as Plot Device

Since the 1980's, scholars have examined the function of rape as a plot device in television. Sometimes, main characters are raped and their storyline blossoms as a direct result of the attack, while other times, the rape exists to explore a broader, more abstract theme of the show. Still, other times, rape can exist solely to move the plot along for another character. In other words, a main character's storyline might progress due to the rape of a secondary character, as defined by Cuklanz (2000):

> "The detective's sense of morality, and often his need for revenge on the criminal, thus culminate in a successful triumph of the "good guy," which is often accomplished through violence against the rapist. However, the further plight of the victim through the course of counseling or a trial are not included. In short, these plots are about the male avengers of rape rather than about the problem or crime of rape or the experiences and feelings of the victim." (6)

On *Oz*, this occurrence happens multiple times through the storylines of Cyril O'Reily/Schillinger, Adam Guenzel/Aryans, Franklin Winthrop/Aryans. In these storylines, the characters are raped, but they focus much more on another character's reactions and developments rather than the victims themselves. In this case, viewers are witnessing rape as a plot device to advance the narrative.

In the first example, Cyril O'Reily is brought to *Oz* in Season 2 because of a crime he committed for his brother, Ryan. In his first lengthy onscreen appearance, it becomes clear to the viewer that Cyril is mentally disabled. Viewers later find out that although his mental capacity has been diminished, he is still able to physically protect himself, but he must sense danger. Schillinger plays upon Cyril's mental disadvantage and innocence, claiming that he will take Cyril to go see Ryan. Schillinger then takes Cyril into a closet, overpowers him, and subsequently rapes him.

However, viewers do not see Cyril's immediate feelings following the rape. We see him sitting at a table eating with Schillinger in one of the next few scenes. In fact, there is no clear emotion from Cyril until he spots his brother, Ryan. He is overcome with joy and excitement. Ryan, of full mental capability, spots Cyril sitting with Schillinger and he inquires about the seating arrangement. Ryan is aware of Schillinger's reputation and immediately suspicious. Once Schillinger informs Ryan that he gave Cyril the "royal welcome", and Cyril sees Ryan's reaction, it is only then that Cyril acknowledges that he "thinks he did a bad thing". At this time, Ryan purposefully gets Cyril sent to AdSeg (solitary confinement) in order to get him away from Schillinger. We see Cyril's unhappiness with being separated from his brother, but he never acknowledges the physical/mental pain of rape on his own without input from Ryan.

In this example, Ryan acts as a savior for Cyril. He helps Cyril to realize that something has been done to him, while also saving him from the dangerous situation with Schillinger. This representation is very much in line with previous representations regarding hero/victim dynamics in rape narratives. Often, the victim's feelings about the rape are secondary or even invisible, while the savior's feelings are deeply explored. As we progress through the season, Ryan makes several references to Cyril's rape and how he wishes he could have prevented it, while Cyril spends his time watching television, following Ryan around, and being generally happy about his situation. This sort of reaction is certainly atypical of real life prison rape victims (Wolff & Shi, 2009). Ryan's character development continues to progress based on the predicament he has put Cyril in, while Cyril's story remains wholly stagnant over the course of his rape narrative.

The next two examples revolve around Tobias Beecher's character development. Two characters, Franklin Winthrop and Adam Guenzel, are brought to *Oz* in Season 6. The two characters are rapists, with a cocky attitude and an air of entitlement. By chance, Beecher happens to know Guenzel from outside, and determines that he will protect Guenzel and his friend, Winthrop. Beecher has been raped, himself, and knows precisely the plans the Aryans have in place for the two new inmates. Unfortunately, before Beecher can warn Winthrop, he falls victim to the same mistake as Beecher from Season 1: he thinks he is trading up from a black, menacing cellmate to the friendlier, less intimidating Aryans. Instead, he is doomed to the same fate as Beecher, being raped by the Aryans and subsequently turned into a "prag." As Beecher and Guenzel are talking about life in *Oz*, Winthrop is paraded out in drag, and the Aryans warn Guenzel that he is next on their list.

Viewers do not see a reaction from Winthrop about being raped. He seems slightly disgusted, but overall, there is not much development. Guenzel and Beecher have larger reactions to his new appearance than Winthrop himself, and Beecher's despair over another rape in *Oz* is the larger storyline. He resolves that the same will not happen to Guenzel. However, the Aryans declare psychological warfare on Guenzel and Beecher, with a determination to make Guenzel another "prag." Interestingly, the Aryans are not concerned with Guenzel himself, as he is just a pawn in the larger war between the Aryans and Beecher. This is another plot of Schillinger's against Beecher.

As a result of this warfare, the Aryans reveal to Guenzel that Beecher has not only been raped, but has taken on a fluid sexual identity, in which he willingly participates in sexual and romantic relationships with men. This ruins Beecher's credibility with Guenzel, a flaming homophobic, and distances the two beyond repair. After Guenzel tries to earn credibility by assaulting and taunting Beecher in front of a crowd, Beecher decides to retract his protection (through a deal with the Italians) from Guenzel.

Shortly after Beecher decides to no longer protect him, Guenzel is indeed gang raped by the Aryans. In this instance, viewers do see Guenzel's reaction to being raped. He is curled up, naked and alone in the cafeteria, sobbing incoherently about the attack. However, the scene instantly becomes about Beecher when Beecher enters the room and decides to comfort Guenzel. After this scene, viewers never get to experience further character development from Guenzel, but this is the turning point for Beecher. Throughout the seasons, he'd attempted to gain his power back by transforming into a character with blurred moral lines. As a result of Guenzel's rape that he could have protected, Beecher resolves to live righteously. Cuklanz (2010) further explores this

"justice" dynamic in her analysis of detective/victim relations, paralleling the scene of Beecher comforting Guenzel:

> "Sometimes, they discover the victims after they are raped and, finding them hysterical, incoherent, or in shock, cradle them and try to soothe them…These episodes portray a world in which connections among women are rare and in which the proper response to rape involves male caretaking of helpless victims as well as male concern with "justice" for what has been done to them." (77)

In these final two instances, Beecher undergoes a profound change of character, experiencing a complete shift in values. Winthrop and Guenzel are essentially secondary characters who at no point experience development of their own as a result of the rape. Additionally, at a point in both stories, Beecher even plays a role of savior (until he removes his protection). In terms of traditional rape narratives, this is directly in line with previous studies, with specific reference to Cuklanz (1998 & 2000), Moorti (2002), Boyle (2005), and Magestro's (2015) work on the detective/victim narrative, continuing to depict that the storyline of the feminine rape victim is less important than that of the masculine savior.

3.3 Rape as Cliché

As mentioned previously, perhaps one of the themes that made *Oz* so brutal was its commitment to grittiness and violence (also a perceived reality of prison). However, most viewers had never been to prison before, which led to writers' reliance on stereotypes about "what it's really like" to frame what viewers were seeing. Instead of simply exploiting these themes, *Oz* attempted to use these experiences to add realism to the show while building depth and a sense of humanity for characters. Wilson & O'Sullivan (2004) interrogate *Oz*'s representational power: "But, in daring to show male nudity, male rape and predatory same-sex relationships, was *Oz* revealing some kind of

'truth' about prison, or has it just been a more sophisticated version of the 'don't bend over to pick up the soap', prison-rape 'jokes' that have come to characterize contemporary popular culture?" (148). However, for consideration, Meiners (2007) explores the possibility that even the most "realistic" representations might fall short, as audiences will always look for the familiar concepts in a storyline:

> "Film theorists suggest that for images to be politically effective, the representation needs to align with the prior knowledge an audience possesses about the subject. Ethnographic film theorist Cowrie writes that unless the representation conforms to the expectations of the audience, it will be judged to be unrealistic." (32)

Does this mean that regardless of how *Oz* portrays rape in prison, that the audience will mainly take away clichés and stereotypes from the storyline? Specifically, this next analysis will search to answer this question with reference to a possible reinforcement of heteronormative, patriarchal norms, or the potential existence of diversions from these traditional representations. An exploration of the storyline of James Robson/Wolfgang Cutler will provide the majority of the context to help discuss the question. In addition, a further exploration of Schibetta's storyline with a quick nod to Hanlon's storyline will detail the analysis even more.

Beginning with Robson in Season Two, the character is initially introduced as amoral with little need for sympathy or emotion. He is a lead member of the Aryan Brotherhood, carrying out punishment and acts of violence (beatings, rapes, and murder) as directed by the leader of the gang, Vernon Schillinger. He is seen as little more than a violent lackey, with a true lack of empathy for his victims. However, as the show progresses, his role expands. Through this expansion, though, we don't learn much of his character motivation, but we see him lurking around the prison, threatening other

prisoners, and carrying out his threats much more often. Perhaps, this role expansion serves as a prelude to his downfall in Season Five.

In Season Five, Robson is suffering from dental issues and subsequently goes to visit the prison dentist, Dr. Tariq Faraj. He is diagnosed with gum disease, and Dr. Faraj suggests that he pursue a gum transplant. In *Oz*, membership of the Aryan Brotherhood is based upon white supremacist beliefs, including "purity of the blood". Robson realizes that his new gums might threaten his membership in the Brotherhood if they are not from a white donor, and subsequently requests a meeting with Dr. Faraj. Dr. Faraj confirms Robson's fears and informs him that his gums are from a black donor. Unfortunately, this news gets out to the other prisoners, humiliating Robson and validating his fear: he is no longer "pure" in the eyes of the Brotherhood. Robson attempts to lie about the origin of his gums but the Brotherhood has already decided that to allow Robson to remain a member would be a threat to their existence, and therefore he must be expelled.

Due to his previous transgressions among other members in the prison, Robson believes he is a top priority enemy for numerous factions and is in severe danger. Without the protection of the Brotherhood, he fears for his life. He approaches multiple respected inmates for protection, and almost all of them refuse. One last prisoner, Wolfgang Cutler, tells him that the only way he will offer Robson protection is if Robson completely submits to Cutler as his master. Immediately, Robson declines, but privately begins to consider his options. Upon a visit to the resident nun/psychologist, Robson's character development drastically expands, as we learn that he was raped at a young age. On a surface level, he discusses with the psychologist his options for survival and comes to the conclusion that he has no choice but to submit. Robson returns to Cutler within a

few hours with a change of heart. Upon this submission, he is immediately raped with an inanimate object, and is subsequently "turned out" (Knowles, 1999). Over the next few episodes, Robson appears in full drag, in service (sexual favors, chores, etc.) of Cutler.

Besides the obvious storyline of getting turned out when males go to prison, Robson's story also includes the known occurrence of needing to submit to a larger, stronger individual for "protection". This arrangement is known in scholarly communities as "protective pairing" (Trammell, 2010). His membership to the Aryan Brotherhood was certainly revoked, but outside of general violence (which he experienced daily while still a member), there was no immediate need for him to seek protection. However, the stereotype goes that all men must either have or become a "prison wife" in order to survive prison. Generally, statistics provided state that of prison rapes that occur in male prisons, this is actually the type most likely to happen. But still, occurrences of this situation are generally low (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

In the overall narrative of *Oz*, the show relies on this rape to make the narrative seem more realistic, which is generally effective when compared against prison rape statistics and prisoner accounts. Additionally, through the deeper development of Robson's character, the story evolves from that of a cliché into a fully developed rape narrative. In a heteronormative narrative, Robson's character would typically have a savior and his rape would only exist to move the savior's storyline along, but instead, his own emotions and reactions are fully explored. This storyline seems to displace masculine values of physical strength and heroism, giving more of a focus to the qualities of his victimhood (will to live, negotiating a new identity, etc.). Additionally, this story

further grounds the show for the audience by relying on a more well-known prison myth to help guide their viewing.

In order to analyze another rape narrative that relies on perceived realism, we return to Peter Schibetta. After his character is raped in Season 2, he is transferred to the psych ward as a result of a mental breakdown and is rarely mentioned for several seasons to come. However, in Season 3, through Adebisi's brief character reform, we see Adebisi protecting Schibetta while there, but this storyline follows Adebisi's transformation, rather than Schibetta's downward spiral (also a minor example of rape as plot device).

In Season 5, Schibetta is said to have regained his mental capacities, and is returned to Emerald City. At this time, the Italians are at war with the Aryan Brotherhood, so Schibetta joins the war on the Aryans. In an attempt to gain respect from the inmates, Schibetta plots his first attack since being released. Unfortunately, this attempt is as half-baked as his previous attack on Adebisi, as he is outnumbered by the Aryans three to one. As an immediate result of this attack, he is again overpowered and raped.

In this instance, Schibetta's storyline follows that of realistic portrayal in that a previous rape victim is more susceptible to being victimized again. In *No Escape* (Human Rights Watch, 2001), statistics proved that rape victims are feminized and seen as easy targets for rape. Also of interest is Warden Leo Glynn's refusal to help Schibetta gain justice for his assault. Sister Peter Marie, the prison psychologist, comes to Warden Glynn, hoping to find support to find and hold Schibetta's rapist accountable. He refuses, stating that it is a form of social control for those that come into the prison thinking they are bigger, tougher, and more important than other inmates (like Schibetta). Beyond

television, Eigenberg (2000) identifies correctional officers turning a blind eye to assaults as informal measures of regulation as a main factor in prison rape.

For this case, Schibetta's storyline does reflect statistics about how rape often occurs in male prisons. However, Schibetta himself doesn't experience further character development as a result of this rape. With a more detailed examination, Schibetta is killed off in a few episodes, with the rape scene ultimately being his final noteworthy onscreen appearance. *Oz* focuses more on the rape itself than on the exploration of Schibetta's character after the second assault. This realistic representation of male prison rape manages to reintroduce heteronormative values by failing to add layers to the victim after his rape.

The final storyline that requires another look is that of Richie Hanlon, the homosexual prisoner gang raped by the Aryans on Season 2. It is important to again note the quote from one of the Aryans: "You're a fag. You suck dick. So what's the problem?". In this particular narrative, Hanlon is targeted only for his sexuality. When Hanlon is unwilling, he is beaten into submission and subsequently raped. Gay prisoners (or even just prisoners with traditionally feminine characteristics like long hair, fair skin, etc.) are more likely to be targeted for rape, and are often subjected to the assault on their first night in prison (Wolff, 2009). This parallels Hanlon's story as his introduction to both Emerald City and viewers is the scene where he is raped. Similarly to Schibetta, though, Hanlon's character is essentially disposed of following his rape. Serving only as a Death Row companion for Shirley Bellinger, Hanlon is rarely seen or discussed, and is killed off during Season 3. Hanlon experiences no real development following his rape.

Parts of the representations discussed above add complexities to the occurrence of rape explored by Yousman (2013) and explained by Crewe (2014): “It is undeniable that the public culture of most men’s prisons is characterized by a particular kind of emotionally taut masculine performance, yet it is surprising how little attention has been given either to the interior emotional worlds of male prisoners or to the underlying affective dynamics between them” (396-397). Still other aspects suffer from the same issues common to narratives employing rape as plot device or rape as contrast. Although *Oz* makes an effort to explore contrasting themes of love/sexuality, dominance/subjugation, heterosexuality/homosexuality, etc., the show contradicts its generic violation of depictions of prison life by subconsciously encouraging patriarchal tendencies. Character development is a missing component of traditional (heteronormative) representations of rape. *Oz* often forgets that the victim’s development post-rape is equally as important as the rape itself.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

My analysis of rape narratives on *Oz* has attempted to add a complex case study to already existing studies of representation of rape on television. Previous studies on rape representations posit that regardless of the individual characteristics of the storyline, rape narratives typically reinforce a dominant patriarchal ideology by positioning victims as weaker characters, with no real agency or purpose outside of being raped. However, studies on male homosexual rape were lacking, so an analysis of *Oz*, a show where rape narratives focus almost completely on male rape, provides a thorough and useful exploration of this concept.

Through my analysis, I critique not only whether or not these heteronormative themes are present in the show, but also interrogate the broader picture they seek to create and whether or not the narrative is effective contextually (i.e., with reference to realism). As with any textual analysis, I am aware that my reading of the text is not the only way to interpret the show, but by providing contemporary statistics of male rape in prison, the representations on *Oz* are afforded a more concrete foundation of why these images might exist. Importantly, the analysis of all male rape storylines on *Oz* explored the use of three narrative devices: rape as contrast, rape as cliché, and rape as plot device.

In my examination of rape as contrast, I discovered that *Oz* uses both point by point contrast and subject by subject contrast through the concurrent storylines of Beecher/Schillinger/Keller, Schibetta/Adebisi, and Hanlon/Aryans. The individual scenes

of rape introduce heteronormative contrasts, such as domination/submission and masculinity/femininity. However, *Oz* purposefully juxtaposes scenes from each narrative depicting themes of heterosexuality/homosexuality, love/violence, etc. against each other. The overall effort to showcase these jarring storylines together successfully interrupts the prison genre by interjecting soap operatic themes. On *Oz*, rape as contrast works to both reify hegemonic masculinity and portray a resistance to ideas of prison being only a masculine setting where feminine qualities are not welcome.

While examining rape as plot device, I discovered that through the rape narratives of O'Reily/Schillinger, Winthrop/Aryans, and Guenzel/Aryans, *Oz* depicted representations that were wholly similar to heterosexual representations of rape on previous shows. Typically, in these representations, victims exist only to introduce the rape plot. After they are raped, victim storylines are not explored. Instead, a savior complex is introduced, in that the show's fixation on the hero's development eclipses the potential for a victim to change or even react to the assault. Through the narratives of the characters mentioned above, these stories follow the script exactly, implying that the feminized victim's reaction is unimportant, while the masculinized hero's story arc is tantamount. Here, rape as plot device is exemplified completely.

Lastly, I examined rape as cliché, as contemporary stories about prison rape tend to focus only on a masculine ideology (strength VS weakness, agency VS impotence, etc.) based in prison myths, leaving out important character developments and the opportunity to create multidimensional characters. Through this section of the analysis, I found that Robson's rape narrative explored the stereotype of protective pairing, while also providing an opportunity for Robson to expand his storyline and manage multiple

identities as a result of his rape. However, the rapes of Schibetta (repeatedly) and Hanlon did not prove as complex. While the rapes did provide additional insight regarding prison myths, Schibetta and Hanlon were not afforded the same character development opportunities as Robson. Therefore, on *Oz*, rape as cliché works fully to elaborate on prison myths for a general audience. However, the show fails to elevate some narratives from the heteronormative structures that audiences have come to expect from prison rape stories.

Over the six seasons of *Oz*, certainly, the depictions of violence typically escalate in gore, but the rape representations remain generally consistent. Upon examining the individual representations themselves, a broader context of these representations presents a foundation for conducting this study and future studies like it. Readings of *Oz* have ranged from deeming it a fantastic, ridiculous soap opera to a realistic glimpse inside the American prison system. Regardless of the reading, scholars agree that *Oz* presents a critique of the prison industrial complex, implying that the entire structure is hopelessly ineffective, corrupt, and dangerous for anyone behind bars. Wilson and Sullivan expand on the agenda setting power of *Oz*:

> "We would suggest then that although *Oz* represents itself as being formally agnostic on the origins of the 'prisons crisis' and the solutions to it, the show makes no sense if there is not some kind of problem to be addressed. If prison were a smoothly functioning, valuable social institution, then we would have no need to see it. The simple act of showing prison is an agenda setting intervention suggesting a problem in need of consideration." (154)

As discussed throughout this study, studies of representation are important because they help to decide what issues are important and how to talk about them. Although *Oz* cannot decide how viewers might feel about male rape in prison, the show can certainly offer ideology and critique previously inaccessible to viewers with no

knowledge about life in prison, providing a way for viewers to gain an opportunity think about these issues on a larger scale. Additionally, themes explored in *Oz* have the potential to significantly alter the way a viewer might already think of these issues. With specific reference to incarceration and its depiction on *Oz*, deconstruction of these images offers "warnings and insights" previously unavailable to the public (Meiners, 2007). For example, consider the grueling, completely hopeless and miserable nature of everyday life in *Oz*. Perhaps, viewers might never have considered how it might feel to live in such a setting for decades (as many of the characters on *Oz* do). Through the analysis I conducted, *Oz* demonstrates its power to introduce radical concepts and ideas through gritty storytelling (such as sympathy for prisoners, a non-heteronormative understanding of sexuality, and countless others).

Oz works well as a case study examining the potential link between social change and representation in television. At the time of *Oz*'s production and subsequent airing, a significant amount of work was being done by the Human Rights Watch (an international, nongovernmental nonprofit organization) to uncover the realities of male rape in prison. Not only did the show chronicle many of the themes expressed in these reports, but more importantly, the graphic nature and frequent displays of the act lent themselves to a higher awareness of this terrifying reality for US prisoners. *No Escape: Male Rape in U.S. Prisons* was published by Human Rights Watch in 2001. The report included the following sections: background, legal context, predator/victim analysis, rape scenarios, body/soul, the anomaly/epidemic debate, and deliberate indifference. *Oz* was not a documentary, but the assault on the senses through the visceral shooting style allowed the viewer an up-close and personal identification with the story. Many of the

themes explored in the study are present on the show. The study was not officially published until 2001, and the show ran from 1997-2003. I argue that this is not a coincidence. The show did not take themes directly from the study, nor did the study draw its findings from the show. As a result of increased visibility (due to circulating conversations about the phenomenon), the show was able to make a statement grounded in reality about the truth of male prisoner rape.

In conclusion, *Oz* cannot be classified as either wholly reinforcing patriarchal norms or defying them, as the show negotiates both options. The show opens a space for discussion on how power is assigned and gender is determined in a community with traditionally strict values and beliefs. With regard to media studies and social change, we cannot say for sure whether *Oz* engineered or spurred ideas of prison reform. However, the show certainly illuminated a rampant issue and drew public attention to a reality many viewers would never have to face. As almost a direct result of the report *No Escape*, the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 was passed for the protection of prisoners in the system (Smith, 2008, 10). *Oz* was timely with its graphic depiction of the act, ultimately transforming a nightmare into a reality. Considering the history of rape representation on television, *Oz* certainly was a groundbreaking show, dependent on visual storytelling and viewer emotion to create a cohesive message. Conversely, though the show broke boundaries with expansive themes and endless questions of identity, it certainly followed in the same vein as previous television shows with its deliberate representation of hegemonic masculinity through rape narratives. As conversations evolved to include male rape, *Oz* arrived with a powerful story to tell, revolving around male suffering and debasement.

Through cultural, physical, sexual, and gendered storytelling, *Oz* serves as a platform for a discussion of the male experience in prison. The agenda setting power of *Oz* dictates the societal importance of the issues of the prison complex. Overall, it presents a model for those wishing to understand how media representations gesture toward issues of societal concern. An analysis of other shows might present additional understanding (especially those not subject to FCC standards). If we can begin to understand the part that popular media plays in storytelling, then we can attempt to understand how to harness that power as a tool of social reform.

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