Villains and Heroes: An Analysis of Outlander's Portrayal of Sexual Violence

by

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ABSTRACT

Using a critical textual approach and a feminist lens, this paper analyses the television adaptation, *Outlander*, and its depictions of sexual violence. The nature of adaptation and how the adaptation process can lead to incidental as well as intentional alterations in the storytelling are addressed throughout the paper. The analysis is done in two parts, the first exploring emergent themes such as the use of bodies' geographic location, scars, and nudity to depict messages about power, the impact of the adaptation's choice to promote Jamie's perspective, and the use of cinematic techniques as narrative devices. The second half of the analysis covers how notable characters and events are framed by the show to promote a division between pure evil (embodied by Capt. Randall) and the heroes of the story, Claire and Jamie, whose problematic behaviors are minimized or promoted by the narrative. Many of the scenes in the show can be read multiple ways, sending different or even contradictory messages. However, despite the positive critical response to the show, this paper argues that *Outlander* still reinforces the notion that female characters are natural victims, and undermines the trauma of their assaults, in contrast to the focus given to the rape of Jamie, the heterosexual male lead.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Entertainment media is key site to understanding contemporary discourses about gender and sexual violence. In addition, book to television adaptations are becoming increasingly common (Mittell, 2015). Although quantitative research such as content analyses have been performed to explore presentations of gender (Downs & Gowan, 1980) and sexual violence (Sink & Mastro, 2016) across cable television critical analysis allows one to explore the messages that a show is sending in depth. The nature of adaptation leads to both incidental and intentional changes in the storytelling, and this too can be examined through critical analysis of a text. This paper uses a critical lens to explore the STARZ show, *Outlander,* as an example of how the portrayals gender and sexual violence.

Televisions shows are increasingly being held accountable to cultural critics in regards to their depictions of sexual violence (Ryan, 2014), and this is especially true when the shows being critiqued air on subscription-based platforms, which allow for nudity. These scenes are often critiqued as being gratuitous in their depictions of the actual assault while also failing to present thoughtful narrative arcs surrounding the recovery process (Faircloth, 2015; Hill, 2015). In contrast, *Outlander* has largely been praised for its depiction of the rape of the show's heterosexual, male lead (Nagouse, 2018). This paper addresses both the positive and negative aspects of the show's portrayals of gender and sexual violence, including narrative choices and cinematic techniques.

CHAPTER 2

JUSTIFICATION

The first book of the *Outlander* series was published in 1991. The first episode of the show adapting *Outlander* aired twenty-three years later in 2014. The story follow a British woman, Claire, who goes on a second-honeymoon to Scotland with her husband Frank after the end of World War 2 where she had served as a nurse. On this trip, she falls back in time and lands in the 1740s, surrounded by Scottish Highlanders and the British troops sent to "keep them in line." Both sides are initially suspicious of Claire, a British woman alone in Scotland who seems to have advanced training as a healer, but eventually she is married to one of the young Scots, Jamie Fraser, and they face a variety of political and personal challenges in establishing a happy life together. The show remains faithful to the general premise and the tone of the books, including the major plot points, the shifting dynamics between the various characters, and even lifting the dialogue straight from the novels. However, some scenes are intentionally changed and others were necessitated by the adaptation into a time-bound, visual, medium. In particular this paper will discuss how these changes alter the way that sexual violence is portrayed for the audience of the television show.

Outlander is a notable site for the discussion of sexual violence due to its popularity. More than 25 million copies of the books have been sold in print, and the series has been published in 40 countries (Alter, 2014). In addition, new books are still coming out, with increasingly substantial contracts for the author, Diana Gabaldon. This implies the readers remain actively engaged with the series, creating a built-in audience for the adaptation into a television show. The assumption that a strong reader base would

translate into viewers for the show proved true when the pilot episode was made available for free in advance of the first season. The pilot was seen by 1.4 million viewers and is credited with drawing thousands of new members to Starz (Alter, 2014).

This viewership has only expanded as the series continues, making *Outlander* one of Starz' most viewed (and most promoted) shows. In the first season there were an average 5 million viewers per episode (Alter, 2014). "The economics of cable mean a premium channel can do much better by targeting specific, underserved fans than trying to make something for everyone" (Poniewozik, 2014, para. 6). Thus it is notable that while focusing on a female protagonist and sometimes marketed as a historical romance, the show retains a viewership that is estimated to be 40 percent male, making it an influence of audiences of varied genders (Rice, 2016). As its audience is engaged and growing, *Outlander* has "been credited in part with boosting Starz' subscriber base to a new high of 23.3 million, making it the second-most-popular premium network behind HBO" (Rice, 2016, para. 29). This accreditation of Starz recent success has also led them to order seasons far in advance, renewing the show for 2 seasons at a time.

Beyond the regular viewership, Outlander has also received a strong response from critics and various awards. The show currently boasts a 93 percent on Rotten Tomatoes and 96 percent of reviews on Google show that audiences "like" the show (Outlander – Rotten Tomatoes, 2018). In addition, Outlander has received the Critic's Choice Awards for Most Exciting New Series (2014) and the People's Choice Award for Favorite Cable Sci-Fi/Fantasy TV Show (2015, 2016, 2017), a number of awards from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror films (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) as well as nominations for various Golden Globes (2016, 2017, 2018) and Emmys (2015,

2016) (Outlander – Awards, 2018). Furthermore, *Outlander*'s comparison to other notable cable adaptations further emphasizes its place in pop culture and cultural dialogues. For example, in 2014 Buzzfeed labeled *Outlander* the "feminist answer to *Game of Thrones*," a sentiment which has since been continuously referenced by other television critics (Alter, 2014; Pera, 2015). This phrase is further notable as it refers to the conversation that was occurring when *Outlander* premiered in 2014. At the time *Game of Thrones* was facing criticism for its "punishment" of female characters and use of sexual violence as a way to shock viewers rather than to create a cogent conversation on the topic (Elizabeth, 2016; Penfold-Mounce, 2016; Rumburg, 2016).

Concerns about the portrayal of sexual violence in television and film is not a new phenomenon. The Fall 1985 issue of *Media and Values* explored issues of violence and sexual violence, including an interview with UCLA media researcher Neil Malamuth and an editorial by Maria Riley, the coordinator of the Women's Project, exploring the "added concern about the growing problem of media violence" especially noting that this violence exposes people to violence in their own homes that they would otherwise likely never witness in their lives. Then in 2000, Lisa Cuklanz wrote the book *Rape on Prime Time: Television, Masculinity, and Sexual Violence.* This conversation has not left the cultural consciousness. Rather, individual television shows are being held more accountable than ever for their own portrayal of sexual violence and rape storylines (Ryan, 2014; Faircloth, 2015; Elizabeth, 2016; Hess, 2017; Rumburg, 2016; Ryan, 2016).

Sexual violence has been a constant throughout human history, though the acknowledgement and discourse of these issues change. Currently, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center claims that one in five women will be raped and one in three

sexually assaulted at some point in their lives (Sexual assault statistics, 2018). Intimate partner and acquaintance rapes are by far more frequent than assaults perpetrated by strangers (Sexual assault: RAINN, 2018; Sexual assault statistics, 2018). Additionally, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (Sexual assault statistics, 2018) states that "Rape is the most under-reported crime; 63 percent of sexual assaults are not reported to police." The prevalence of sexual violence is reflected in frequent depictions of rape in cultural narratives such as television shows. However, the stigma that continues to shroud issues of sexual violence dissuades victims from seeking help or sharing their experiences (Sexual assault statistics, 2018; Victims of sexual violence: Statistics, 2018), which underlines the need for these stories to be portrayed responsibly (Elizabeth, 2016).

In recent years television has therefore become an increasing site for critique of normalized reactions to sexual violence. Screenwriter Katie Hagen, analyzed 45,000 unproduced films and found that of the 2,400 "associated with rape" over 70 percent were written by men and fewer than 30 percent passed the Bechdel Test (Lutkin, 2017). While this research was done on potential films rather than running television shows, these trends are indicative of a broader culture of men writing stories where women are victimized but have no other women to commiserate or build community with. As a result of the growing number of problematic storylines of sexual violence, a number of lists have been published establishing which shows have "good" or "bad" portrayals of violence, generally based on three main factors: whether the assault had narrative importance, if the story privileges the victim's narrative over that of a character secondary to the assault, and whether or not the show shows long-term effects of the violence (Elizabeth, 2016; Rumburg, 2016; Ryan, 2016). In particular, the conversation

of whose story is advanced by a rape narrative is increasingly visible in television critique. As there is a shift towards showing more graphic and "realistic" violence, criminologist Ruth Penfold-Mounce (2016) argues that these scenes remain as stylized and glamorizing as ever, making the scenes realistic but retaining the problematic effects of sexualizing and objectifying the (mostly) female victims. Additionally, some of these articles argue for increased inclusion of male victims to better represent the reality of male victims and mitigate the increasing portrayal of women as naturally sexualized victims (Hess, 2017; Ryan, 2016).

The network STARZ in particular has been noted as including many stories of sexual violence across its shows. Anise Strong (2017) argues that this inclusion is intentional, and that the network makes a point of showing both men and women as victims of many different forms of abusive sexual activity, both blatantly violent and coercive. Strong further argues that STARZ' agenda to portray sexual violence often and in detail, while retaining its audience, necessitates that these stories are shown to be serious and de-sexualized for their audience. Additionally, Strong states that "the use of rape in modern historical fiction to assert power and to demean both men and women" establishes historical fiction as a genre that allows for male characters to experience abuse alongside women and children, creating more realistic worlds and allowing for representation of male victims of sexual violence (p. 133). At a time when many television series are being strictly critiqued for their inclusion of unnecessary or graphic sexual violence, Outlander and STARZ shows as a whole have been able to avoid a majority of this negative attention.

Despite STARZ' status as a generally thoughtful network when it comes to portraying sexual violence, the broader culture remains weary of how to represent these stories. The executive producer of Fox's *The Exorcist*, Jeremy Slater, has called the use of rape for shock value that serves no narrative purpose "a plague on the industry" (para. 3) and Ray McKinnon, creator of *Rectify*, argues that violence against women has "just become a kind of pornography" (Ryan, 2016, para. 12). Others in the industry such as screenwriter for *Hannibal*, Bryan Fuller, have banned sexual violence from their storylines to avoid producing possibly harmful material (Hess, 2017). Even so, there has been a call for a greater number of executives to take responsibility for the way in which the shows that they create handle instances of sexual violence.

Ruth Penfold-Mounce (2016) argues that the onus of change is on the executives that are ordering the television shows and with the screenwriters to tell a good story rather than pandering to the expectations they presume audiences have to be shown violence. Other critics have appealed for specific changes to the way in which stories of sexual violence should be evaluated. One critic writes "First, writers, directors and producers should work to humanize victims by giving them strong voices, motivations and hopes beyond their assault. They should consult with experts who work with survivors, or with survivors" (Rumburg, 2016, para. 7). This idea is further supported by other television critics who state that shows should aim to have their stories "[promote] understanding rather than victim-blaming," be "told from the survivor's perspective… or move a conversation forward" (Elizabeth, 2016, para. 3). Academics Hunter Gardner and Amanda Potter (2017) support the inclusion of some controversial material in television, but warn that "to negate violence, it must be shown for what it is, a

horrifying, brutalizing, destructive, ingrained part of humanity" rather than glamorized or sanitized (p. 217). Thus, the conversation about how and when to show sexual violence "appropriately" continues.

This paper will utilize feminist and critical studies to analyze the portrayal of sexual violence in the television adaptation of STARZ' *Outlander*. First, the paper will discuss previous work on related topics of sexual violence in television and the way that these norms are then reinforced and normalized for their audiences. Initially, the analysis will apply the concepts defined in Jason Mittell's 2015 book, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, to explore the nature of adaptation and its effect on the structure and depiction of the sexual violence within the show, as compared to the original novel. Next, there will be a discussion of notable emergent themes within the show; such as, the use of bodies in storytelling, the relationship between gender and agency, the use of various stylistic and editing techniques and their impact on the imagery of the show, and the creation of a singular antagonist for the show. Each of these will include in-depth analysis of various scenes within the series. Then, this thesis will go on to provide a brief overview of *Outlande*r's place in the current conversation of sexual violence on television before moving on to critique the show and the way that it problematizes the depictions of what is essentially sexual violence within the primary romantic couple of the series by holding up their dynamic as flawless, despite the various situations where meaningful and complex exploration of sexual violence and consent could otherwise be employed. Finally, the paper will conclude with a discussion of the implications of the way in which *Outlander* has chosen to portray sexual violence to its audience.

CHAPTER 3

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Before entering into an analysis of Outlander's portrayal of sexual violence, this section of the thesis orients the current academic conversations about the depictions of sexual violence and gender on television. This chapter defines sexual violence and establishes the link between this concept and portrayals of gender. Previous research about representations of gender on television and the role of audiences in modern television viewing are discussed, the latter, in relation to social learning theory and the cultivation of rape myths. Finally, a review is performed of existing research on Outlander and comparable television shows.

Defining Sexual Violence

What "counts" as sexual violence is in some ways a very personal understanding, which requires one to know the intentions of all parties and understand the emotional consequences of the actions taken. To create order from these shades of gray, it is useful to apply definitions from trusted sources and establish a common understanding of what each term means. To discuss the portrayal of sexual violence within *Outlander*, it is necessary to first define this term. Definitions may vary, but comparing the definitions of a government agency and a survivor-centered non-profit group one will find that their definitions share the same major points. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines sexual violence as "a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent" (Sexual Violence: Definitions, 2018). This includes a wide range of actions, such as completed or attempted forced penetration of a victim, completed or attempted forced acts in which a victim is made to penetrate someone else

(these acts may or may not include alcohol or drug-facilitated intoxication of the victim), non-physically forced penetration which occurs after a person is pressured to consent or submit to being penetrated, unwanted sexual contact (also known as sexual harassment), or noncontact unwanted sexual experiences (Sexual Violence: Definitions, 2018). The Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) shares a similar definition, but also categorizes perpetrators into one of three groups: intimate partners, acquaintances, or strangers (Sexual Assault, 2018). RAINN also underlines that force may not be exclusively physical, but also emotional coercion, psychological force, manipulation, or involve threats to hurt the victim or their family (Sexual Assault, 2018). Each of the aspects of sexual violence can be seen in the first season of *Outlander,* underlining the breadth of the term sexual violence and the experience and portrayals of survivors.

While there is no specific definition required to distinguish male on male sexual violence from any other kind, RAINN notes that this dynamic may lead to different emotional trauma for the victims due to the stigma of male on male sexual violence. This additional stigma is due to the fact that being a victim of any kind, let alone of sexual violence is seen to define the survivor as a "victim," threatening one's masculine identity. While survivors of sexual violence often deal with feelings of shame, male victims may feel further stigmatized because the hegemonic example of a victim of sexual violence tends to be a young woman, insinuating that sexual violence against a man not only displays their lack of power but also emasculates them by treating them as women. The additional stigma faced by male survivors of sexual violence is central to the way that Jamie's rape is handled differently from the assaults on Claire in the first season of

Outlander. The difference in portrayals of rape and sexual violence towards men and women is central to explorations of sexual violence in the television adaptation.

It is also notable that individual instances of sexual violence (re)produce broader social patterns such as gendered violence and rape culture. "Gender violence" is an umbrella term that includes domestic, sexual, physical, and psychological violence (including isolation, use of children, emotional violence, or threats of violence and harm), harmful traditional practices, and socio-economic violence (Strengthening Health System Responses, n.d.). Gender violence can affect people of any gender, provided that the violence is tied to the victim's gender; not all violence against women is inherently gendered violence. However, gendered violence and rape cultures often overlap and invariably cause harm to the women in those cultures. In *Outlander*, gender violence can be seen in how women are viewed as chattel and in discussions about "disciplining" one's wife. Discussions of having to protect or discipline one's female family members imply that women and girls are not viewed as possessing full personhood, and thus violence enacted upon them is not equal to that done to men.

Burnett (2016) defines rape cultures as "cultures in which rape and other forms of gender violence are trivialized and normalized, tolerated as acceptable forms of sexuality" (p.2). However, the notion of rape culture is a contemporary conceptualization of gendered violence. In a piece of historical fiction such as *Outlander*, this inherently requires those crafting the television show to address that the modern audience members likely view social issues (such as notions of race and gender) differently than the characters in the show. For example, in choosing to be "historically accurate" and relegating female characters to positions subordinate to men a show reproduces that norm

to the modern audience. Thus it is important to question the choices made in the production of historical fiction such as *Outlander* to uncover what messages the show is sending about sexual violence and how these messages either reinforce or resist the prevailing cultural beliefs about said violence.

Television and Gender Representations

Content analysis is a common method used to gain a quantitative understanding of issues regarding gender and sexuality on television (Downs, & Gowan, 1980; Fowler & Thomas, 2013; Kim, Ahn, & Lee, 2016; Sink & Mastro, 2016; Lacalle & Simelio, 2017). These papers provide information on the frequency of different plotlines and types of sexual violence in the media, but provide limited insight into the implications of this content on the audiences of the shows addressed in the research. Thus, while there is ever-growing research on the effects of television media as a whole, more critical research will be useful in determining what specific messages are being sent through individual story arcs and how those messages are crafted.

In addition, research on book to television adaptations and plotlines involving sexual violence have not yet been broadly explored in regards to individual shows. Increased analysis of adaptations to television such as that of *Outlander* work to remedy this hole in the current literature by exploring how the same plot points can be presented differently based solely on the storytelling medium. For example, the change into a visual medium leads to the unavoidable question of "how much to show" when depicting sexual violence. Critiquing a specific show in depth can thus provide more thorough analysis about the implications of these choices. In addition, the choice to limit the scope of one's research to a single piece of media allows for the research to explore not only

depictions of sexual violence, but how these presentations interact with the show's broader portrayals of gender.

Much research has been done on how gender is being represented in television (Downs & Gowan, 1980; Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006; Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Sink & Mastro, 2016; Scharrer & Blackburn, 2017). Each of these has provided similar findings, reinforcing that traditionally female characters are seen as self-sacrificing while their male counterparts are aggressive and are expected to "avoid behaviors associated with homosexuality" (Fowler & Thomas, 2013, p.358). Sink and Mastro's content analysis of the depictions of gender on primetime television (2016) describes a hypermasculine ideal for lead male characters. *Outlander* subverts this ideal both its series lead, Jamie Fraser and its main villain, Jonathan "Black Jack" Randall, complicating hegemonic norms of traditional heroes and the conflation of masculinity with dominance. For example, in the framing of Jamie as a romantic ideal his more feminine traits are emphasized such as his caring for social Others and animals. In contrast, Randall is portrayed as artistic and as a figure whose threat comes more from his keen mind than from his physical prowess. Furthermore, the choice to have Capt. Randall rape Jamie further undermines the hypermasculine ideal by actively engaging both of the characters in a sexual act with another man, queering Randall by portraying him as attracted to Jamie and undermining Jamie's masculinity by framing him as willing to be victim (if only for love). Notably, Sink and Mastro (2016) link the lack of representation of male rape victims in primetime television to this focus on hypermasculinity, including the "acceptance of physical violence as an inevitable feature of male nature, hardened sexual attitudes toward heterosexual romantic partners" and

"[domination] of women sexually and interpersonally" (Sink & Mastro, 2016, p.7). This may account for the somewhat contradictory character of Jamie, who embodies an aggressive heroic figure and the softer ideal of a romantic lead in turns.

In addition to many television shows' propensity towards presenting distinct gender norms, Downs and Gowan (1980) explored the differences in reinforcement and punishment based on sex in prime-time television. They found that adult male characters were more likely to give or receive reinforcement or punishment than adult female characters or child characters of either gender. This exemplifies the norm that adult male figures are established as the central characters within primetime television since their actions led to more frequent and dramatic responses from other characters, affecting the show's major plot points. *Outlander's* prominent female protagonist may be seen to disrupt this norm. However, the overwhelmingly male cast of characters and the focus of the show's final two episodes on Jamie rather than Claire disrupt that argument. Thus, even "female-lead" shows must be examined to determine whether the female characters are afforded the same level of agency as their male counterparts.

Understanding the Audience

Beyond the depictions of gender on screen, Mittell (2015) and Wayne (2016) argue that the ideas of authorship and media consumption as identity are emerging as central to the modern television landscape. For example, Wayne (2016) performed semi-structured interviews to gain a better understanding of how audiences use television as cultural capitol based on a hierarchy of knowledge. The emergence of the "Third Golden Age" of television (2000-present) is largely attributed to increased technology for media distribution and has brought about a dramatic shift in how television is viewed,

transforming it into what is now seen as a "legitimate art form" as it becomes more closely aligned with film, literature, and theater (Mittell, 2015; Wayne, 2016). This is especially notable in the way that television's popularity was once assumed to stem from lack of objectionable material (Wayne, 2016, p.42), but many current shows are known for their scandals and shocking moments as much as for being "cinematic," "intimate," or an adaptation of another work. Wayne argues that television watching is no longer purely about the audiences' enjoyment. Rather, television viewership is seen as a form of self-cultivation wherein the shows one watches identify traits they value or possess such as diversity or intellect.

Furthermore, having more knowledge about the production of a show is seen as being more cultured (Wayne, 2016), leading to the increased focus on the showrunner as the "author" of a series, someone to be admired or blamed for the actions taken in a show (Nabi & Clark, 2008; Mittell, 2015). Participants in Wayne's study also described people who watched television at a simplistic level (for enjoyment only, without exploring the production of the show, and/or without seeking to find deeper meanings or hints in the episodes) as "bad fans." This emphasis on television as an art form to be dissected has placed more pressure on showrunners and cast members to interact with their fans and defend the actions taken by characters (Mittell, 2015). It has also encouraged audience members who hope to identify as fans not to accept these actions at face value, but to search for deeper meanings within the show such as themes or morals, ensuring that the messages the audiences take away from a show do not to go unexamined.

In particular, Mittell (2015) describes the role of the showrunner in both modern television production and consumption as central to the experience of dedicated fans.

The title of showrunner is not necessarily an official title. Rather, it is often ascribed to the creator/producer of a show who establishes the staff of writers for the show, performs rewrites of scripts, and determines the final edit of each episode. While unofficial, this role has become central to discussions of authorship in television; Mittell describes how showrunners are seen to "personify the program's creative vision" (2015, p.94). "Savvy viewers are well aware of television's collaborative production process and frequently use paratexts and forensic fandom to analyze who might be responsible for a given choice or outcome" (Mittell, 2015, p.114). Thus, the implied authorship of the showrunner places these choices largely onto them, especially when the showrunner embraces the authoritative side of the role as *Outlander*'s showrunner, Ron Moore, does.

Moore began creating commentary podcasts while working on *Battlestar Galactica*, and has since become known for framing himself as the singular voice that is responsible for "his" shows (Mittell, 2015). Thus, Ron Moore's role as showrunner informs the way that viewers interpret his commentary tracks and interviews, acting as a communication from an authoritarian figure (who is seen as responsible for overseeing nearly every facet of the show) to the fans. Discussion about the adaptation of *Outlander* into a television series raises questions about authorship, but Moore's posturing as the solitary leader of the *Outlander* television series ensures the importance of including his views about the depictions of sexual violence within both the books and the television show.

Communication Theories

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory posits that most behavior is learned observationally and states that children and adolescents learn from media. Factors that

increase the chance that the actions observed will translate into audience members' behavior include: role models' similarity to the viewer, the behavior being seen as realistic, and positive reinforcement of the behavior (Bandura, 1977). Thus, it is critical to acknowledge how framing is used to create distinctions between sexual violence coded as unacceptable and coded as normalized.

Various cinematic techniques and language choices are used to imply a *preferred reading* of the media. For example, showing the same scene in a movie with different background music can dramatically alter the tone of the scene, leading audience members to laugh or anticipate danger depending on their intertexual associations. Thus, the choices that a television show makes when framing various topics (re)produce messages about values and norms that audiences often take up within their own understanding of their culture. Therefore, audiences will learn from and recreate scripts they observe in constructed narratives such as those on television, underlining the importance of portraying sexual violence responsibly in stories that are shared broadly.

The impact of television viewership on cultural norms is central to cultivation theory, which explores how representations seen in media affect how people see the world. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969; Gerbner & Gross 1976; Gerbner et al., 1994) states that heavy consumption of television leads to the cultivation of a distorted view of the world based on the influence of the media they are taking in. Recent researchers have argued that not all television is created equal, and that genre of heavy viewership should be considered in research moving forward (Zhang & Krcmar, 2004; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Marron & Collins, 2009; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Custers & Van den Bulck, 2013; Wayne, 2016; Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018). While cultivation theory alone argues that

simply observing television will lead to a homogenous idea of certain cultural norms and expectations, other researchers have used this as the backbone to expand into more specific research. Gamble and Nelson (2016) found that audience members adapt cultural scenarios seen on television into scripts, which will then dictate their expectations for encounters in their own relationships and lives. This is even more likely if the messages the audience is receiving is one that they perceive to be "realistic"; generally these include situations that support or at least do not contradict the audiences' established sexual or gender scripts.

Kahlor and Eastin (2011) explored how television can cultivate rape myth acceptance and a culture of violence towards women. The study found that daily television viewing was significantly correlated to acceptance of rape myths and the idea that rape accusations are false. This, in addition to Brinson's 1992 finding that the average storyline about rape contained at least one reference to a rape myth and argument that "rape has become an acceptable conflict for plot development in dramatic programs" (p.364), shows the importance of depicting rapes on television responsibly and realistically. Custers and Van den Bulck (2013) have also explored how the stereotypes of an ideal victim and ideal perpetrator have created a distinction between "legitimate" victims. They argue that the portrayal of sexual crimes in television has reinforced these narratives and makes audience members less critical of the complexities of sexual violence in real life that contradict the model that they have seen on television.

In addition, cultivation theory has been used to describe the creation of a culture fear of victimization in which women become afraid of sexual violence while male viewers do not. Custers and Van den Bulck (2013) discussed the "shadow of sexual

assault," wherein women grow to self-identify as possible victims of sexual violence, creating a constant, low-level fear in their lives. Popovich, Jolton, Mastrangelo, Everton, Somers, and Gehlauf, (1995) found that women are more likely to identify with the possiblity of being a victim of rape than men are. Research has also shown that indirect experience such as knowing or hearing about instances of sexual violence is sufficient to feed this culture of fear, especially because women are portrayed as unable to prevent or defend themselves against an attack (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2013, p.105). Furthermore, Zhang & Krcmar (2004) found that audiences tend to construct frequency and probability estimates based on their most immediate stimulus, meaning that television plots can trump reality in one's perceptions of different sexual norms. Conversely, "knowing a rape survivor lowers levels of rape myth acceptance" (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011, p.216). This underlines how lack of representation can act as a vicious cycle, wherein the representation of sexual violence towards men as trivial reinforces the stigma that keeps male survivors from speaking out and contradicting these suppressed estimates.

Research on STARZ and *Outlander*

The issue of portraying sexual violence on television responsibly was handled in detail by Augoustakis (2017), Gardner and Potter (2017), Raucci (2017), and Strong (2017) who explore another show on the STARZ network, *Spartacus,* and discuss issues including the idea of heroes and heroism and the construction and use of social spaces within the show (Raucci, 2017), gender and sexuality (Augoustakis, 2017; Strong, 2017), and spectacle and violence (Gardner & Potter, 2017). Each chapter stands alone to discuss one fragment of the show such as how *Spartacus* uses space is used to visually

cue social hierarchies (Raucci, 2017) or how the show uses intentionally gratuitous and unrealistic depictions of violence to show how the gore of a gladiatorial arena was sanitized by its separation from the lives of the viewers (Gardner & Potter, 2017). Gardner and Potter specifically counter the notion of violence as gratuitous and unnecessary, arguing that to create messaging that is anti-violence "it must be shown for what it is, a horrifying, brutalizing, destructive, ingrained part of humanity" (p.217). One chapter specifically discusses how STARZ as a network sought to retain its male and female viewership by ensuring all of its shows would handle issues of sexual violence without sexualizing the encounters (Strong, 2017). Strong argues that *Outlander* "follows in *Spartacus'* footsteps… [by using] rape as a means of addressing the inherent oppression of a society," ensuring that the assaults "have lasting consequences for the characters involved" (p.136), and having sexual violence occur to both male and female victims.

The world of *Outlander* itself has also been explored in regards to race and gender, with essays written about both the books and the television adaptation. For example, two books are entirely comprised of academic articles about *Outlander*, one focusing on gender, race, and sexual orientation, the other focusing on fandom, genre, and the female audience. In the first of these, Frankel (2016a), Frankel (2016b), Kennedy (2016), Leach (2016), Lopez (2016), Phillips (2016a), and Solis (2016) critique both the novels and their adaptation in regards to questions of diversity gender and agency in the 18th century, and Claire as feminist, postfeminist, and anti-feminist. Notable themes integrated throughout the various authors' chapters include exploration of the depiction of "others" who are largely embraced by both Jamie and Claire (Frankel, 2016a; Phillips

2016a; Solis, 2016) discussion of the intricacies of Black Jack Randall's possible motivations and the objectification of Jamie throughout the series (Leach, 2016; Lopez, 2016; Phillips, 2016a), and noting the differences between the books and the show and how these changes affect the tone of a scene for the audience (Frankel, 2016b; Kennedy, 2016; Leach, 2016; Lopez, 2016; Phillips, 2016a). Many of the authors shared views on such ideas as Jamie's identification with "others" and continued victimization at the hands of Black Jack Randall being used to soften the character as a hypermasculine figure, making Jamie more approachable to both Claire and the audience (Frankel, 2016a; Leach, 2016; Lopez, 2016; Phillips, 2016a).

However, while the book contains some consensus across its various chapters, the authors of each chapter disagree on whether or not the changes of details from book to television show enhance or diminish the way the series depicts sexual behavior as a whole. Leach (2016) argues that the book's first person perspective best allows for the audience to understand how Claire is interpreting any instance of sexual behavior as positive or negative and allows the audience to explore her dynamic feelings towards a person or situation, creating a complex but generally positive message about Claire having agency over her own sexuality. Phillips (2016a) and Frankel (2016b) claim that the show lacks important details about Black Jack Randall that provide insight into the true depths of his sadism. However, these details being primarily from the second book/season they are not immediately relevant to the argument of this paper. Yet another chapter (Lopez 2016) posits that the transition into a visual medium allows for Jamie's character to be expanded, creating a more balanced understanding of Claire and Jamie's

sexual relationship and expanding how audiences can explore his assault at the hands of Black Jack Randall through his own eyes rather than Claire's.

Finally, Kennedy (2016) states that individual lines from the original book further blur the line of dubious consent between Claire and Jamie. Kennedy takes issue with various instances in which Jamie jokes about wanting to rape Claire, and notes that the book specifies that Claire is left with visible injuries after the "spanking scene." In addition, Kennedy specifies that the television cast and crew's referring to this scene as the "spanking" scene rather than the "flogging scene" – which is how Kennedy refers to it – is an inaccurate description of the scene, wherein Jamie beats Claire with a belt and minimizes the severity of Jamie's actions. However, Kennedy also argues that the book's first person perspective makes the problematic instances of Claire and Jamie's relationship less ambiguous, but Claire's acceptance of these events prompts the readers to normalize the couple's questionable consent as romantic. In the end Kennedy questions whether the series takes a nostalgic, rather than critical approach to history and the issues characters face in the 1700s and implies that the gender dynamics of *Outlander* are nowhere near as feminist as pop culture discussions might suggest. This once again highlights the tensions associated with depicting historical fiction without reinforcing outdated and regressive attitudes about gender and sexuality.

Another academic book about *Outlander* confronts some of these same questions, but focuses more on audience reception than on the choices made by the author and showrunner. McCarthy (2016) argues that *Outlander* is popular because it follows the traditional hero's journey, just from Claire's perspective. In other words, readers and audience members appreciate *Outlander* simply because it follows a popular narrative

structure and centers a female figure as the hero. This is expanded upon in Jones' (2016) chapter, which discusses the ubiquity of gender role reversal throughout the first book/season of *Outlander*. Most notable in the role reversal between Claire and Jamie as to who will embody the "damsel in distress" and who the "knight in shining armor" at the climax of the plot, this is furthered by Jamie's being raped and forced to take on the role of the subjugated victim to a somewhat effeminate perpetrator (Jones, 2016). In this way, Jamie takes on the feminized role of the victim and Claire the masculine role of the hero. Furthermore, Jones (2016) argues that Claire and Jenny being empowered to fight off their largest threat, Black Jack Randall, while Jamie remains passive during his assault makes *Outlander* a specimen of feminist media. However, it is notable that within these examples of "feminist" storytelling the implications about victimization as a feminine trait remain unchallenged.

Of course, other authors directly address the idea of *Outlander* as a feminist show by discussing the now-famous tagline that Outlander is the "feminist answer to *Game of Thrones*." While Phillips and Freund's chapter (2016) points out that the authors of *Outlander* and *Game of Thrones*, Diana Gabaldon and George R. R. Martin respectively, are friends who publically support each other and their works, Phillips (2016a) takes on the comparison by exploring not only the source material, but how controversial sex scenes and scenes about sexual assault were altered in their adaptation from books to television shows. Phillips argues that they are similar enough to be comparable, each of these book series being long running (*Outlander* was published in 1991, *Game of Thrones* 1996) and on-going, comprised of tomes (ranging from 600-1000+ pages each), and being adapted within 3 years of one another on similar subscription-based television

networks. Phillips concludes by asserting that while each story may be independently problematic, Outlander avoids the tropes of "rape amnesia," wherein a rape occurs which then has no effect on the characters or their relationships, "cumming as consent" and the idea that if the victim of sexual violence reaches climax then the assault was "consensual by the end" – as a Game of Thrones director Alex Graves described the rape of Cersei by her brother Jamie in Episode 403. In general, Phillips notes that one of *Outlander's* greatest strengths is the show's "narrative fidelity" to the books as opposed to three of the most controversial scenes of sexual violence in *Game of Thrones* which differed dramatically from their novels' counterparts. The choice to stick closely to the novels has been lauded by many; however, it is undeniable that adaptations inherently alter the way a story is experienced by its audience.

CHAPTER 4

NATURE OF ADAPTATION

Something that must be considered when analyzing an adaptation is that novels and long-form television series have different formats, audiences, and norms. In the transition into television, Outlander not only takes on an adaptation to a serialized format, but also from the written word to being shown on screen, and each of these changes impacts the storytelling. Thus, the adaptation must work to bridge the gap between audience expectations for these different mediums of storytelling. The show must attempt to retain the initial audience from the novels, as well as create a new audience who will not have read the books. As a result, adaptations tend to take on some of the norms of their new medium, and the narrative arc of a serialized story will differ from the single, extended arc.

One large contrast between these forms is that in novels, especially those written in self-contained narratives, most of the conflict in the plot centers around the main characters. In the novel of Outlander, the story is told in first person, past tense. This emphasizes the narrative focus on the protagonist, Claire, and her account of various events. In contrast, most television series tend to have a broader scope, including many smaller arcs distributed among a supporting cast, all of which are shown through the often third-person lens of the camera. Outlander's television adaptation retains the focused format of the novel, breaks from common television formatting and maintains a strict focus on only two main characters, Claire and Jamie, rather than promoting secondary characters into "regulars" (characters included in a majority of the season's episodes) as is common in book to television adaptations. Instead, the supporting cast

members are used to tell Claire and Jamie's stories, but do not appear onscreen to advance their own narrative arcs.

Additionally, audiences for books and television have different expectations about what level of danger their main characters will face over the length of the story. For example, the audience of the television shows tend to identify the shows' protagonists with the show itself, making it impractical to write protagonists or other popular characters off shows (Mittell, 2015; Nabi & Clark, 2008; Sink & Mastro, 2016). The level with which audiences come to identify with the series leads also makes it unpopular and thus uncommon to place the protagonists in a truly vulnerable position (Mittell, 2015). Consequently, conflict and danger is often transferred onto secondary or tertiary characters rather than the main cast, a strategy that has become so popular that fans of the show *Star Trek* have coined the phrase "red shirts" to describe this group of characters that are introduced only to be used as fodder for the show's sub-plots or minor narrative arcs. This emphasizes a danger that will act as conflict for the main cast without putting them in any real peril. In contrast, main characters have what is known as "plot armor," protection from any real harm which allows the characters to be maintained without much dramatic change over time (Mittell, 2015; Nabi & Clark, 2008). The infrequency of actual harm or death occurring to a television series protagonist is exemplified in the shock that *Game of Thrones* fans expressed as a result of the death of Lord Eddard Stark near the end of the first season, as well as the infamous events of the "Red Wedding" where many fan expectations were subverted as several fan favorite lead characters connected to key plot narratives were massacred.

In contrast to shows where plot armor is assumed to come with one's status as a series protagonist, novels are less likely to introduce large tertiary casts, and central characters are much more likely to die or face character-defining moments that fundamentally alter them moving forward (Mittell, 2015). This difference in norms is exemplified in the shock of audiences to its transgressions in the popular adaptation, the *Game of Thrones*. Book readers are less likely than their television watching counterparts to be shocked by these events as the medium through which they are digesting the story is more likely to include prominent characters' deaths. Neither the book nor the television adaptation of *Outlander* has yet dealt with the death of one of its protagonists, yet both iterations of the story place the romantic leads into much more compromising situations than a regular television audience might expect, retaining their central status as the direct drivers and subjects of the plot progression in the adaptation.

In addition to the general differences in expectations, television series which have been adapted from novels are seen as less responsible for controversial plot points than other shows might be, at least so long as the show is simply adapting the plot from the book and not adding new events and characters into the narrative. This is important given that one of the most controversial events in both the *Outlander* book and television show is the torture and rape of the male lead, Jamie Frasier. This plot point specifically crossed the line of audience expectations for television viewers and led to an abundance of shocked reactions (both positive and negative) as well as losing the show a significant number of viewers for the final episode of the season. Outlander's showrunner, Ron Moore, tends to take strong leadership in his shows and repeatedly claims that television production is "not a democracy" (Moore, 2014a), indicating that while he is often

absolved of any problematic plot points, Moore considers himself to be the highest authority within the production of the *Outlander* series. The contradiction of authorship in adaptation allows Moore to take credit for positive feedback and fall back on blaming the source material when facing critique (Mittell, 2015; Prudom, 2015a; Wayne, 2016).

This loophole is exacerbated by the format of subscription-based television. Since there are no ads in the middle of each episode, the shows do not need to prove that they are advertiser-friendly (Kim, Ahn, & Lee, 2016; Poniewozik, 2014). In fact, controversy can be used to gain publicity and viewership for the channel as a whole. In addition, viewers opt-in to subscription-based channels and shows, actively choosing to become audience members. This lack of "public broadcasting" allows the shows greater creative license and has led subscription-based channels to have a reputation for pushing the envelope in regards to violence and sexuality (Reineke & Paskin, 2011).

As noted above, the adaptation to a serialized structure on television requires an alteration from the long format of a novel into a more episodic arc of shorter stories while also maintaining an overarching narrative across the arc of the season (Gabaldon, 1999/2015; Mittell, 2015; Rice, 2016). In the case of *Outlander,* each season has corresponded to one novel, and the number of episodes differs depending on the needs of each respective story. The events of the first novel were adapted to create a 16-episode season, which is further broken into two chunks of 8 episodes for what is known as the US as the mid-season hiatus. This structure of a mid-season hiatus is a typical US television strategy used to maintain audience excitement by presenting two, smaller seasons (each with their own dramatic season finale) in one official season, spread throughout the year. It is worth noting that viewers may not have consumed the season in

this format in other countries where the mid-season hiatus is unfamiliar and uncommon. However, in the case of *Outlander*, the hiatus additionally allowed for new viewers and subscribers to hear about the show and catch up before the end of the first season. The ways in which the show chose to structure various plot points throughout these 16 episodes is also notable. For example, the show identified two major plot points by designating entire episodes to specific events, such as Claire and Jamie's wedding (episode 7) and Jamie's torture in Wentworth Prison (episodes 15 and 16). The implications of these choices are discussed further in the sections on The Wedding and Creating a Clear Antagonist respectively.

Another challenge that book to film or television adaptations face is that they must simultaneously serve audiences who have read the books and those who have not. Audiences do not differ only in amount of foreknowledge of the plot, history, or general expectations of events to come. Rather, depending on when the readers first encountered the series, the show is either viewed as modern or as firmly rooted in the 1990s, when the first books in the series were being published. Needless to say, conversations about sexual violence changed from the 1990s to the late 2010s when the first season premiered. One of the main tasks of an adaptation is to develop a common-ground for the various audiences and create a cohesive show that is comprehensible to all groups, though the audience may interpret the show differently based on their own experience with the series (Mittell, 2015).

Finally, it is important in discussions of depicting gendered violence, such as sexual assault, to consider who is creating or translating the depiction and how that affects the way that the stories are told. Of course the original author of many of these

plot points is Diana Gabaldon, and she writes from the first person perspective of her main character Claire, creating a symbiosis of female narration. Additionally, many of the darkest episodes in the season were written and directed by women. While the show-runner, Moore, had final say over how each narrative would play out and took charge in the editing room, some of the female writing staff asked to write certain scripts when they knew that particularly sexual content would arise in those episodes (Moore, 2014b, Prudom, 2015a). Notably Anna Foerster directed episodes 7, 8, 15, and 16, which include Claire and Jamie's wedding, the mid-season finale, and the two-part finale, making her primarily responsible for the portrayal of both the most beloved sex scenes in the show and the most violent attempted and successful rapes of Claire and Jamie. Thus, not only were a large number of the scenes of sexual violence written by women, they were filmed by a woman as well, which is uncommon due to the lack of representation women still face in television production.

The layered female authorship may be a factor in how the scenes of consensual sexual relations in this show have been lauded for their focus on Claire's perspective (Faircloth, 2014; Gay, 2014; Poniewozik, 2014; Rice, 2016; Ryan, 2014; Wilkinson, 2015). However, the criticism often fails to understand the larger issues of focusing only on the perspectives of the two leads while ignoring the issues with the representation of violence by characters other than Capt. Randall and the subtle messages created through the choices of the show's production team. The heavy involvement of women within the creation of these scenes may be one of the factors that has led to the supposed "female gaze" employed in presentations of consensual sexuality within the series. The "female

gaze" of the show is discussed at length later on in this paper in the section on the naked body and sexuality.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

This paper utilizes a textual analysis to identify themes and notable discourses that are present within *Outlander*'s portrayals of sexual violence. The textual analysis was largely performed through a close-reading of *Outlander* as a text, focusing on both the narrative structure of the show as well as the cinematic choices made in the construction of individual scenes. However, this process also included an analysis of the role of adaptation in driving both incidental and intentional change in the portrayals of characters and plot points, as well as an exploration of television critics' responses to notable events from the show. This layered analysis not only reveals how *Outlander* is portraying sexual violence, but also how these messages are crafted and interpreted.

Entering into this project, I had previous knowledge of both the television show and the book series that it is based on. I had already watched each season of *Outlander* multiple times and read all of the books published thus far. This familiarity with the television show and the franchise as a whole informed the way that I approached my research. This allowed me to consider the changes made in the adaptation process and use my knowledge about which events significantly impacted the characters and narrative trajectory moving forward in order to determine what events held "narrative weight."

Based on my previous knowledge of the series, I was aware that there are a large number of assaults that take place within the first season, and that *Outlander* includes instances of men, women, and children as victims of sexual violence. Thus, I was interested in exploring if and how assaults on members of these groups were treated differently. In addition, my understanding of Claire and Jamie's romance as central to

the series and my familiarity with the events of the season prompted me to contemplate how some of the scenes between this couple are tainted by issues of questionable consent. This lead me to pay particular attention to, not only instances of what is hegemonically understood to be unquestionably traumatic, such as attempted rape, but rather any event that would, under the definition discussed above in Chapter 4, be considered sexual violence. Understanding that this would lead to a long list of possible events to analyze, I limited the scope of my initial analysis to the first season of the television series.

Beyond my knowledge of the show itself, my background in cinematic and artistic analysis, feminist studies, and critical theory formed the foundation of my scholarly interest. Since sexual violence is understood as an expression of power, I borrowed from Foucault's notion of bio-power to explore how *Outlander*'s portrayals of sexual violence reveal social hierarchies within the world of the show. In addition, Judith Butler's notion of gender as performance informed the way that I view sexuality as a performance of power and gender. Although not directly discussed in the analysis, this concept shaped a question that guided my research: how do *Outlander*'s depictions of sexuality and sexual violence (re)produce hegemonic norms concerning power and/or gender? Along with these frames, I utilized tenets of non-verbal communication and methods from visual critique to perform a critical analysis of the show.

I began my research by re-orienting myself with the text. This consisted of re-watching the first season of *Outlander* and establishing the list of events for possible further analysis. Here I defined "questionable consent" as any instance of sexual behavior where no explicit, verbal consent was given. I used definitions from the CDC and RAINN to establish a broad scope, including noncontact sexual experiences and

events where coercion has been used to gain "consent." I listed each applicable event, noting: the victim, the perpetrator, a general description of the event, and in which episode the event took place. This left me with sixteen events throughout the sixteen-episode season.

Next, I applied my knowledge of the series to determine which of these events holds narrative weight within the show. My knowledge of the show translated into familiarity with the narrative arcs of the scenes and season as well as the overarching narrative arc of the series as a whole. Thus, I used this familiarity to determine which instances of questionable consent affected a character long term (as defined by being referenced at least once in subsequent episodes) or directly prompting a character to take significant action (where it is made explicit through explication or voice-overs that it was the event in question that lead the character to take a specific action which advances the plot). Employing emergent codings based on the impact of the event on the characters involved, as well as whether the assault prompted any action in the plot, I made analytic choices about what was relevant to explore further. I then cut two scenes due to the ambiguity of the events, the fact that they do not lead any character to take an action, and the fact that they were not referenced in any future episode.

Looking at the remaining list, it became clear that some of the individual scenes listed referenced the same events. Thus, I consolidated the list to reflect the number of actual events which took place by removing the repetition. Some of this repetition resulted from the show utilizing flashbacks of the same event on multiple occasions. In addition, in the initial list, Capt. Randall's rape of Jamie was listed as three different events, although it could have been broken down into even more. However, instead of

focusing on how many specific instances of coerced sexual activity took place, I chose to re-categorize everything that takes place in Wentworth prison as one distinct event. After applying this to the list, there were nine events remaining.

Using this new list, I determined significant topics to analyze directly. First, I noted that a majority of the events from both the initial and condensed lists were perpetrated by Capt. Randall, and that each of these held significant narrative weight. This, along with the repetition of his scenes in flashbacks and the distribution of these assaults throughout the season, lead me to establish the role of Capt. Randall within the television series as a distinct topic that I would focus on in my analysis. In addition, I found it significant that two of the remaining events of the list centered on the series' romantic leads. These events, The Wedding and The Spanking Scene each have narrative weight since Claire and Jamie's relationship is central to the series and these scenes are major turning points in their relationship. In addition, the complexity of these scenes in their presentations of consent (or lack thereof) and their role within an idealized romantic relationship established them as relevant to explore in depth. Thus, they too were noted as topics for directed analysis.

Moving forward, I re-watched the show once more, this time taking more detailed notes, alongside the full-length commentary tracks by *Outlander*'s showrunner, Ron Moore. I took this time to clarify my thoughts on the three topics I had chosen for directed analysis and began exploring how certain scenes from the book took on new meaning within the cinematic medium. This led me to add the impact of the adaptation process into the framing of my analysis. I looked for ways in which the adaptation to the medium of television facilitated a change in the storytelling in relation to issues of sexual

violence and trauma. Finally, I began loosely categorizing my observations into what would become the three emergent themes of my paper: the use of bodies in space, the taking on of Jamie's perspective, and the use of cinematic techniques as narrative devices.

With my preliminary thoughts on the show established, I then delved into academic literature. *Complex TV*, a book by Jason Mittell, a pre-eminent scholar on television analysis helped me to consider television as a medium with norms and patterns distinct from other forms of entertainment media. Mittell's book informed my analysis as I began to view television not as a stagnant text, but as an ongoing process of creation and communication between audience and production. I used this text as a primary text for information about the idea of authorship in television (and how this is complicated in television adaptations), as well as exploration about how television, as a serialized storytelling medium, uses the structure of the show to cue audiences about the importance of certain plot points.

Therefore, I sought out critical responses to the two scenes I had already identified as important for directed analysis, The Wedding and The Spanking Scene. I performed a basic Google search, using the episode titles and other keywords to find the most popular articles by television critics online. Then, I coded the articles for the tone of the article (positive, negative, or mixed) and identified each article's main arguments. I discovered that many of the articles shared the same viewpoints, with little deviation. This finding bolstered my argument about the preferred readings of these scenes, and informed my analysis of their respective scenes in Chapter 7.

Furthermore, the fact that the critics seemed so unified in their interpretations of what I considered complex scenes with multiple possible readings made me wonder about how they responded to the presumably controversial rape of the series' male lead in the Wentworth Prison. This led me to explore critics' responses to the two-part season finale of the show as well, a choice that was instrumental to the formation of the comparisons to *Game of Thrones* that I discuss in Chapter 8. In addition, these critiques reinforced the notions of rape amnesia and ownership of one's storyline as fundamental to determining whether a story of assault is a "good" portrayal of sexual violence or not, ideas that had been noted in my previous research.

At this point, I then returned to my analysis of the television series itself. Continuing to revisit the show, I worked to identify examples of my emergent themes, noting instances within *Outlander* where those themes stood out. I performed close-readings of these instances and began to analyze how these themes were made present throughout the first season. Throughout my analysis I considered the importance of adaptation in the creation of both incidental and intentional changes. As I continued to re-watch the show and structure my arguments, I also developed and clarified the sub-categories of each of my emergent themes. In some cases, it also became clear that examples from the second season would further support my arguments, and so the scope of my paper was adjusted to allow for the inclusion of those examples as well.

In addition to clarifying my emergent themes, I also re-visited my topics for directed analysis. This began with an analysis of the construction of the character of Capt. Randall. I performed this analysis while continuously considering the impact of the adaptation process, specifically how the role of Capt. Randall is impacted by the

adaptation's adoption of television norms. I did this by exploring the impact of visualizing the character, and analyzing the way that the character's scenes are distributed throughout the sixteen-episode season. Moving on to the two major scenes I had flagged for direct analysis, I performed close-readings of both The Wedding and The Spanking Scene. During this analysis I took note of the way that the scenes were shot (lighting, sound design, and who's version of events is told), as well as the actual content of the scenes, and what they signify for Claire and Jamie's relationship moving forward. I then compared my analysis to the gather responses of television critics, using their notes as a way of gaging the preferred reading of the text.

As with any project, the chosen methodology has benefits and limitations. By performing a critical analysis of a specific text, this paper is limited in its usefulness in exploring broader trends of television portrayals of sexual violence. However, this in-depth analysis allows for an exploration of how some of these common trends are (re)produced through the choices made in the production of the show. In addition, the inclusion of comparisons to the book series allows for discussion about how adaptation allows for different ideas about authorship and therefore blame in conversations about gratuitous violence when depicting sexual violence. Furthermore, the choice to use television critic's views about *Outlander*'s notable scenes rather than gathering audience responses (from fan sites or social media), privileges the voices of critics, and may include less diversity in viewpoints. On the other hand, the critic's responses not only act as a barometer of not only how the critics interpreted the scenes personally, but also how they relayed that meaning to their readers, reinforcing a preferred reading of the text.

All of this being said, in my analysis I discuss both themes that emerged throughout the various re-watchings of *Outlander*'s first season as well as the topics flagged for directed analysis from the initial list of events with questionable consent. Together, these analyses show how power dynamics are made evident within the world of Outlander, the complex nature of agency within the depiction of sexual violence, how the adaptation into television affects the storytelling of sexual trauma, and whose actions are viewed as villainous versus trivial and forgivable.

CHAPTER 6

EMERGENT THEMES

The three emergent themes were discovered during the analysis of this project are: the use of bodies, Jamie's perspective, and the cinematic techniques. These themes are notable in that they were discovered when exploring the ways in which the depictions of sexual violence within *Outlander* were altered by the adaptation into a televisual medium. The presence of these themes throughout the first season of the show (some of which even carry into subsequent seasons of the series), establish the norms of sexual violence, gender, and power within the world of *Outlander*.

Bodies

A literal embodiment occurs when adapting a story from a language-based medium into a visual medium. The following section analyzes the ways in which bodies are used to symbolize power dynamics within the show, *Outlander*. This includes the way that bodies are categorized as relatively safe or vulnerable to assault depending on who is in control of the geographic location which they inhabit at any given time, the way that scars are used to embody the impact of trauma on a person, and the use of nudity as an indicator of whether or not two characters are on equal footing (or if one of them is abusing their power over the other).

Bodies in Space

One of the notable themes *Outlander* features is how bodies and space intermingle to create physical maps for the narratives of violence in both the novels and the show. This is most clearly seen in how the physical geography of the characters determines the level of violence they are likely to face. Foucault and Miskowiec (1986)

argue that bodies are treated differently depending on the spaces that they inhabit. This is true in *Outlander* as well, where bodies are policed based on the categorizations of power. For example, within this series women are positioned as objects that require protection; if they are left unattended then they are categorized as "up-for-grabs." In addition, the political unrest in Scotland during the 18th century means that depending on whether the Scottish or British forces control a given area, all those within said space are under the power of that group. Thus, women in particular can be subjugated twice over, categorized first as women and then as women of either Scottish or British allegiance based on their family ties. This determines whether the men around a woman feel the need to protect her or if she will be viewed as an object that can be used to hurt the other side, with rape as a weapon of war. While more prominent in the depictions of women, the importance of location in determining which bodies are placed in positions of power versus peril is notable in many of the depictions of sexual violence within *Outlander*.

One of the spaces where power is manifest in relation to gender categorizations is the roadways. Men have power on the roads that women do not, and this public space is viewed as a male domain. This pattern is made explicit when Claire is assaulted by Capt. Randall just moments after she travels from 1945 to 1743. She is confused, not dressed for the 1700s, and the perception of a woman alone in the woods in nothing but a shift dress invites aggression from Capt. Randall. This scene takes place in disputed territory, placing neither Capt. Randall nor the Scottish insurgents in a clear position of power, but Claire's status as a woman alone, along with her shift dress, led both groups to initially identify her as a prostitute. With this categorization in place, Randall acknowledges her as British but views her as unworthy of respect and thus attempts to rape her. When the

Scottish men find her, they too assume that she is a prostitute but attempt to prove their moral superiority over Capt. Randall by stating that they will not hurt her. Although prompted by an exceptional circumstance, this sequence of events introduces the notion that women on the road, away from communities that know them or family who are willing to protect them, are inherently in danger of sexual violence in the 1740s Scotland portrayed in *Outlander*.

Few women aside from Claire are ever seen outside of a village. The notable exception is when Jamie's sister Jenny is willing to travel with Claire to find him when he goes missing in episode 14 to ensure that Claire is safe (not travelling alone). However, Jenny returns home to her husband, Ian, and their newborn child as soon as a suitable male companion comes to accompany Claire instead. This exemplifies how female characters in the show are constantly relegated to their homes despite their willingness to inhabit geographies that may put them in danger. However, the exceptionality of Jenny's actions also reveals how the majority of women in the series reinforce the hegemonic norms of the time by holding themselves to the implicit rules of the culture. Claire and Jenny's willingness to break with these norms (even if only for a few days) is used to note their uncommon bravery, which simultaneously reinforces that this behavior is not normal.

In addition, women's safety is determined by their status within the homes of men. Specifically, female bodies are endangered within the spaces controlled by men who view them as outsiders. The term outsider here refers to any woman who is not attached to a man within the community being discussed. In the case of Claire, she is designated an outsider due to her displacement as a British woman living with Scots.

Since men are categorized as the landowners and community leaders, they form a hierarchy within each town or village wherein women's status is dependent on their ties to men. Thus, women without any male ties are women without power. In episode four, a drunken Dougal McKenzie attacks Claire, and if Jamie were not there to help her escape she would have had no possible recourse, as she is being housed and held under suspicion in the McKenzie castle. The show uses Dougal's intoxication as an excuse for his brazen behavior, further establishing the entitlement that men in power feel towards controlling "unclaimed" women's bodies. Claire's position both as a woman and as the new but respected healer of the castle is threatened not only in the moment but also by her status as an outsider compared to Dougal's position as second in command of the castle. Though Dougal is often shown to be suspicious of and threatening towards Claire, this drunken assault in his own home is the only instance where he acts in a sexually aggressive way, highlighting the importance of this space (and therefore its inhabitants) being under Dougal's control. Both his position of power once back at the castle and Claire's status as a quasi-prisoner in this space embolden him to attempt to force himself upon her. In fact, it is this encounter that additionally establishes the danger that bodies that have been designated as criminal face and foreshadows the vulnerability that Jamie faces when he finds himself a prisoner, leading to his rape and torture in Wentworth Prison.

In contrast to the danger associated with the male-dominated domain of the public sphere and the position of an "outsider," there is an assumption that women should be safe within their own homes or town, surrounded by men who wish to protect them. However, even here female bodies can be threatened if a larger force of men seek to

claim a woman than her protectors can fight off. For example, Jenny is attacked by Capt. Randall while on her own family's farm when the redcoats come to collect supplies and Jamie (fourteen years old at the time) is unable to fight the men off. This encounter shows that even when women are on property that should lend them some protection, it is their proximity to men in power that truly determines their safety. The physically dominant male force claims power over the space, usurping and altering the categories and definitions of power at a local level within the larger system of power. Jenny is safe on the family farm only so long as her brother or husband can ensure the safety of the space that she inhabits. When Capt. Randall and his troops are able to overpower Jenny's protectors, this place is no longer safe for her. In each case, Claire and Jenny are endangered by existing in places where violent men are in power and able to control their surroundings. These female bodies are only viewed as safe if the men around them are able to fight off potential assailants and if the men who claim dominance of the space extend benevolence to them. Thus, they are safer in some spaces than others, but the predominant expectation is that women face danger in any and all spaces to varying degrees (Nussbaum, 2016). This messaging is common in historical fiction and indicates that women are subject to benevolent or aggressive masculinity at the whims of the men around them.

In the case of the assaults on male victims, the geographic locations are exceptional, allowing for the categorization these men as enemies, property, and/or less than human. This then repositions these bodies within the power hierarchy, placing them as subject to the whims of men in higher power positions. These circumstances provide a reason for these bodies, which are normatively less likely to face sexual assault, to be

vulnerable to the attacks that occur. Jamie faces his multiple assaults and eventual rape in a dungeon in Wentworth Prison. He is a Scottish prisoner, who is held by a British captain, a status which strips Jamie of his potential privileges and positions Randall as holding power over him. Thus, Jamie's body is subjugated, which allows for the circumstances of his victimization. Jamie's power as a man is undercut by the superior power of a military officer of the dominating culture and Jamie's categorization as a criminal. Similarly, when Capt. Randall assaults Fergus, Claire and Jamie's adopted son, in the second installment of the series, Fergus is a young boy in a whorehouse. A small boy on the street or safe at home would be nothing of note, unlikely to draw Capt. Randall's attention, let alone providing a situation where he would feel comfortable having his way with the boy and assuming that nobody would object. Fergus is victimized because he was vulnerable as a child within a sexualized environment. It is the space he occupies that endangers him because it defines him as the son of a whore, and as an object, less than human.

Finally, it is notable how the relationship between Scotland and England during the historical context of the narrative furthers these dynamics. Claire is an Englishwoman in Scotland, a "Sassenach." This is a colloquial Scottish term, meaning "Outlander" (hence the name of the series), which was often used to describe English people as outsiders. Thus, when Claire's fear of Capt. Randall causes her to side with the Scots, she is categorized in a somewhat liminal space, neither truly English nor truly Scottish. Her eventual marriage to Jamie is a direct result of this dynamic, allowing her to legally become a Scottish subject through marriage. Thus, she is Scottish by legal standards and therefore is no longer under Capt. Randall's thumb. Claire is shielded by

Jamie's oath to protect her as well as the goodwill of the community she comes to trust, embodying the protection of family and village support, but it is her legal status and categorization as a "Scot" that truly establishes her as outside of Capt. Randall's reach and thus as safe from him. While this alteration of her legal status is intentional and largely beneficial to Claire's safety it would be remiss not to mention that her status only changes because women's legal and social status was directly linked to their male kin. After their marriage, Claire can claim a Scottish clan but Jamie's status does not change. While historically accurate, this plot point does underline strict gender roles and power dynamics within the world of *Outlander*.

Each of these examples has shown how power relations within Outlander are deeply rooted in issues of gender and cultural heritage. Claire's once precarious position as an "Outlander" woman is altered by her marriage to Jamie, and while Claire was at one time constantly in danger of assault, towards the end of the season her position can be deemed relatively safe. In episode 14, the audience has reason to fear for Claire's safety once again when she travels on the road searching for Jamie. However, in contrast to the assumptions of Claire's perilous position, it is Jamie who is being held captive and facing torture. It is Jamie, stuck in Wentworth Prison, whose categorization as a prisoner has left him vulnerable to brutality in the next episode, subverting expectations of gendered violence. This shows that anybody and any body can be vulnerable to sexual violence in this version of history if they are categorized as a person without power. While the women of the series are more aware of their power categorizations, acknowledging that it is the men around them who hold the power to determine their fates, male bodies are also categorized by dominant men. It is the fluidity of one's power

categorization that underlines the importance of space as a factor in one's position, since whoever is dominating a specific area is given the power to redefine the categorizations of the bodies within that space endangering or empowering whomever they see fit.

Bodies as Space, Scars as Storytelling

In addition to bodies' physical orientation in space, *Outlander* uses the space of the body as a storytelling method. The use of physical characteristics as a form of storytelling has a history in both novels and television (Lopez, 2016; Donelan, 2018; Skerratt, 2018). The most blatant use of this in the television series is the introduction of Hugh Munro. Hugh is mute, using a rough form of sign language to communicate, and he carries a rather astonishing number of gaberlunzies, which are tokens that allow him to beg in various parishes (Gabaldon, 1999/2015, p.241). Jamie explains to Claire that Hugh was captured by the Turks while at sea. He was then sold as a slave in Algiers, where they cut out his tongue and doused his legs in burning oil in an attempt to get him to convert to Islam. While this story does little for the immediate narrative other than explain his injuries and establish an understanding of the historical context of the series outside Scotland, this scene establishes the direct line between past traumatic experiences and the physical scars that tell only part of the story. Although Hugh's story also serves to position Islam as aggressive and abusive towards the protagonists' culture and religion, this idea is not developed in either the book or the show, and this aspect of the scene is beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, the connection between past trauma and physical scars is similarly inscribed on and enacted through Jenny's husband Ian who has an amputated leg due to an injury from battle in France when he and Jamie were younger. Hugh and Ian's stories

also indicate that it is common in this historical period for men to make physical sacrifices in service to what they see to be some higher calling. Each of these characters' scars are emblematic of their sacrifice for what they value, religion and honor as a soldier respectively. Hugh and Ian's stories are also used to foreshadow the recovery process Jamie will go through after he is tortured and raped. Jamie will eventually face long-term physical consequences for giving himself over to Randall in exchange for Claire's safety. Thus Hugh and Ian are used to establish Jamie's empathy to those who have been victimized in the past, and prompt Jamie to argue that a man is still a man even after losing a part of himself, an argument Claire will use later on him.

Beyond this, Jamie's scars tell their own story. All of Jamie's notable scars are tied up in interactions with Capt. Randall. At the beginning of the series, Jamie carries only the marks from the lashes he took on his back. It is eventually revealed that in addition to the initial one hundred lashes he took for the theft he supposedly committed, Capt. Randall offered him freedom in exchange for sex and then, when angered by Jamie's refusal, Capt. Randall whipped Jamie one hundred more times on his open wounds. This flayed the skin to the bone in places and left permanent damage to Jamie's whole back. While this flogging is horrific, it is significant that it is a reflection not only of Randall's sadism, but also his commitment to extracting consent from Jamie before he has sex with him, even if this consent is coerced.

The link between Blackjack Randall's propositioning of Jamie and Jamie's refusal leading to brutality foreshadows the eventual rape scene in that it establishes Randall's interest in sexual coercion and violence and is the origin of Blackjack Randall's obsession with getting Jamie to "consent" to sex. These scars and their sexualized origin

are something Jamie is ashamed of and works to hide for most of the first season. It is common for visual mediums such as television to lean on visual cues to remind the audience of important information that will become relevant again later (Mittell, 2014; Prudom, 2015a) and while these scars are described in the book, the show leans into this aspect of the story further, maintaining all of Jamie's scars as subtle reminders to the audience about the trauma the characters have been through, and how it stays with them emotionally and psychologically even as they physically heal over time. While none of the scars are fabricated to serve the plot, the adaptation to a visual medium allows for Jamie's scars to act as a prominent visual reminder of the violence of Capt. Randall, which speaks for itself even in scenes where the scars are not addressed in the dialogue. This emphasizes the importance of both the scars and the trauma that they represent for the television audience, simply due to the fact that Jamie's scars are (literally) seen as a integral to who he is as a character as opposed to only being mentioned a handful of times in the book.

Later on, in Wentworth Prison, Jamie makes a deal that Randall will allow Claire to go free and Jamie receive a good death should Jamie "give himself over" and do whatever Randall asks of him. Randall has Jamie allow his hand to be nailed to a table to prove that he will be compliant, an injury which not only symbolically takes away his agency and ability to fight, but also acts as a reminder that Jamie's victimization was a direct result of his choice to allow this all to happen. The positioning of the nail into Jamie's hand also creates an intertextual link to Jesus' stigmata, and underlines how Jamie is sacrificing himself for Claire, acting as her savior. Thus, Jamie is framed as heroic and good, while at the same time Randall is presented as the embodiment of evil.

Similar to the scars on his back, these tokens of physical torture are often seen by others, though they show only the story of Capt. Randall's sadism, not the underlying sexual dominance that they represent to Jamie and to Randall, which remain invisible. While Jamie is hyper-aware of their sexualized origins and feels shame about the scars, this symbolism is lost on others who see no shame in bearing scars caused by what they assume is purely physical trauma. Thus, Jamie feels further isolated by the difference in how his scars are perceived and the meanings ascribed to them. Jamie fears that people can see the sexual trauma that has resulted in these scars while his peers fail to understand his shame.

Continuing this theme, Wentworth Prison leaves Jamie with one other scar, a spot on his ribs where he was forced to brand himself with Capt. Randall's official seal. The brand is once again a metaphor for the contradiction of Jamie's agency throughout his own assault, symbolizing the active role he played in his torture. Having Jamie brand himself underlines the many contradictions of this coerced "consent." Jamie marks himself as Randall's but does so to protect Claire. Furthermore, Capt. Randall asks him to brand his own face, and while Jamie is attempting to comply with Randall's request in the hopes of maintaining the bargain they struck, he brands his ribs instead. The trauma is not seen on his face, it is carried closer to his heart, symbolically mirroring the way that Jamie will carry the emotional ramification of Randall's violence in his heart always but not let it be seen publically on his face. The symbolic relevance of this scar re-emerges in the season finale, when Jamie is finally able to start working through some of his trauma. At this point he excises the branding of his body as he has his godfather, Murtagh, cut the seared flesh off, removing the brand and replacing it with a new scar. In

this way Jamie works to cut the memory of this event out of his body. He then throws the burnt flesh into a fire, obliterating any remaining claim Blackjack Randall might hold over Jamie's body and metaphorically freeing himself. This also makes the scar unrecognizable by obscuring the deeper meaning of the scar to anyone unaware of what happened in the prison.

The disparity between how Jamie views his scars and how they are perceived by others is underlined in the fifth episode, wherein Dougal exposes the scars on Jamie's back to various villages in an attempt to garner political unrest and anger towards the British troops, using Jamie's body as object and tool to gain funds for the Jacobite cause. While this action is completely non-sexual, Claire's recognition that this non-consensual exposure of Jamie's body is a violation of Jamie's agency is one of the moments that brings them together. This scene additionally works to maintain the centrality of Jamie's body and the story it tells as spectators gawk and gossip about his scars, although none of them associate his pain with Randall's sexual overtones.

In every case, the notable scars he acquires throughout this first season are reminders to Randall, Jamie, Claire, and the audience of various assaults by Randall on Jamie, a map of their journey from first meeting to darkest moment. And yet, to others in the series, the scars are simply a visual representation of the physical pain Jamie has endured. In this way, each scar is a reminder that sexual violence may not leave physical scars or be visible in the way that physical trauma can be visible, but these wounds are what continue to weigh on the characters throughout the series as scars that remain long after the physical wounds have healed. The regimes of control that are established within this world are embodied by the enaction of one person's power upon the body of the

other. As such, scars act as markers of underlying trauma, resulting from being defined and acted upon by others.

The Naked Body and Sexuality

Just as Jamie's scars may not seem to hold sexualized meaning to someone unaware of their origins, *Outlander* is notable in how it is not shy about including traditionally sexualized images, such as nudity, in completely non-sexual contexts, which makes nudity mundane within the context of the show. Studies have shown that viewing bodies as having value outside of their sexual potential lowers levels of self-sexualization and leads to better gender relations (Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Ward, Merriwether & Caruthers, 2006). Many series on subscription-based forums have recently been criticized for gratuitous nudity and sexual content that is unnecessary to the plot (Faircloth, 2015; Hill, 2015; Phillips, 2016a). However, *Outlander* is unusual in that the effect of this content is not to create shock value, or to objectify nude bodies, but to explore various power dynamics sexual and otherwise.

How to handle nudity is, of course, one of the issues that arise from adapting a novel into a visual medium. Experiencing nudity described in a novel is inherently different from visually experiencing nudity. Within the context of the novel, mundane and non-sexual nudity is frequent. As the story is told from Claire's perspective, her own nudity is incidental. Other times the eroticization of the nudity is minimized in the novel even when the scene is sexual. For example, Claire sometimes comments on Jamie's body in appreciation, constructing an active female heterosexual desire of the male body. However many scenes are ambiguous regarding the characters state of undress, which may suggest that Claire – and hence the reader - finds her own nudity and that of her

husbands to be natural and unworthy of note. This ambiguity cannot be replicated in a visual medium, and the adaptation uses the frequent nudity of its protagonists to show how comfortable they are with one another. In this way, *Outlander* uses nudity as a symbol of a balanced power dynamic wherein Claire and Jamie are nude to the same extent and in equal frequency. This subverts the common critique that female characters are far more likely to be naked than their male counterparts and implies that this couple does not feel the need to be ashamed of themselves in front of one another. Since the show is required to address the characters' level of dress due to its visual format, it works to establish a similar attitude towards nudity by showing nude characters in more than just the sexual contexts.

While a 20-minute sex scene may initially be seen as gratuitous, in reality sex itself is only portrayed in a fraction of the 20-minute sequence. The majority of these extended scenes are used to allow for real communication between characters before, during, and after the actual sex. Therefore, rather than using sex as a cinematic shortcut to show one specific relationship dynamic in isolation, the sex in *Outlander* is portrayed as an incidental, realistic addition to larger and more complex emotional moments for the characters. *Outlander* shows the ways that a couple may initiate sex, indicate consent, share stories in a safe space, and express their emotional states with one another in an intimate way. The framing of sex and nudity as a part of a broader experience of being intimate with a partner is also credited as a part of expressing the female gaze, in opposition to critiques of the male gaze which tend to sexualize the nude body and focus on the physical act as a form of conquest. Important plot points occur during these scenes whether they are showing positive or negative interactions, thus making *Outlander*

distinct from other series where sex is shown or implied with little context before cutting to black. Allowing these scenes to be extended to include discussion or action unrelated to the sex before and after allows for additional depth of character and multiple emotional beats.

Many of the most important scenes in *Outlander* where Claire and Jamie's relationship dynamic changes can be tied to the extended time being set aside to portray the characters' sexuality. The most notable example of this is episode 7, the wedding episode. The showrunner, Ron Moore, describes the inclusion of the three major sex scenes in this episode as representing rushed/inexperienced sex, exploratory/erotic sex, and loving sex (Moore, 2014b). Thus, the sex scenes intentionally show the progression of Claire and Jamie's relationship from tentative into a true budding romance. In addition, after they have been married for a while and Claire has revealed to Jamie that she had accidentally traveled through time, he takes her back to the standing stone circle at Craig na Dun, prepared to send her back through time to her first husband, Frank. However, the night before they arrive at the stones, when they are curled up next to a fire, Jamie engages in a "benevolent" form of sexuality, fingering Claire and enjoying watching her reaction to his ministrations. This too acts as a turning point in their relationship as the writers of the series discussed the inclusion of the scene as one where Jamie proves his love by engaging in sexual activity without the goal of reciprocation, thus symbolically placing Claire's wants and needs above his own. The next day, when Claire is offered the chance to return to her own time, she instead chooses to stay in the 1740s with her new love, Jamie.

Finally, it would be remiss not to mention the use of sexuality in the show's adaptation of the reconciliation after Jamie has spanked Claire for disobedience. Although this sequence is problematic in its own right, and the show's alterations of the events are discussed at length later on, this scene does show how sex can be used as a form of catharsis, allowing characters to enact their aggression upon one another and thus let go of tension or resentments that have been damaging their relationship. In each of these cases, the extended portrayals of sexuality show a wide range of many emotional and intimate dynamics between Claire and Jamie as their relationship changes over time.

Echoing the novel and its intent, the television series also features numerous examples of casual nudity outside of Claire and Jamie's bedroom, wherein the lack of clothes is contingent upon the context of the scene. For example, in the novel Jenny expresses milk in front of Claire, something totally natural for Jenny who had recently given birth. This scene was replicated in the television series, requiring a prosthetic chest piece to show the expression of milk and multiple discussions with the network. The executive producer, Ron Moore, fought to keep this scene in the series as a commentary that breasts are not inherently sexual, but described this as a difficult scene to get into the show as STARZ was unsure of how audiences would react to seeing breast milk being expressed (Moore, 2015a). The expression of milk and the nudity are incidental to the conversation Claire and Jenny are having at the time, and the scene is portrayed almost identically to the novel. As such the choice to include this moment is significant and serves to ground the world in a reality where new mothers' need to express milk is normalized. The expression of milk shown as natural, unworthy of overt comment (in the scene), and not stigmatized between women within the world of the show, implying that

the audience should also accept this behavior as normal (Bartlett, 2005; Gearhart & Dinkle, 2016). This scene once again acts as an example of nudity indicating a balanced power dynamic. Jenny is not exposing her breasts to exert power over Claire by shocking her, nor is she demeaned by Claire's seeing her body. Instead, the show presents two women who view expression of milk as a natural function of their bodies rather than as an embarrassing act to be hidden. Of course, it is only because no men are around that Jenny is able to take ownership of her body in this way, exposing herself without fear of being categorized as obscene, but the camera acts as an observer of this moment rather than as a voyeur and affirms the notion that expressing milk is in no way demeaning or sexual.

There are also numerous examples where the characters' lack of clothing is not eroticized but acts as a power display within the show. For example, Dougal uses the scars on Jamie's naked back to garner sympathy for his political cause, as discussed in the previous section. In addition, there are the various scenes where a woman's breasts are exposed in a display of dominance. While the act itself is a form of sexualized aggression, the show does not portray these displays as erotic. The women are used as objects by Capt. Randall but not objectified by the camera, sidestepping the common critique of television shows eroticizing sexual violence. In nearly all of these scenes, Capt. Randall is attempting to humiliate Jamie by victimizing Claire or Jenny in front of him, and he uses the exposure of the women's breasts do that. This action supports what many theorists have argued, that sexual violence is about power and dominance, not sexuality (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2018; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Nagouse, 2018; Strong, 2017). Randall uses the categorization of women's bodies as vulnerable as an

excuse to attack not only the women but also Jamie's identity as a protector. Yet, while Randall seems to gain some sexual gratification from exerting his power over those around him, the focus of the camera does not hold on these women, and the characters do not focus on the nudity either. In both cases Randall looks not at the girls but at Jamie, to see what effect Randall's actions are having on the person he cares most about. Consequently while this does objectify the women as props to harass Jamie, it is Randall who objectifies them, not the camera or the audience. Both the lens of the camera and the focus of the people on screen direct the audience's attention to the faces of the various characters and the emotional and narrative beats that are moving the story forward. In each case the women are scared and defiant in turns, while Jamie is angry or desperate and Randall is pleased with himself and his "control" of the situation. Throughout the show, *Outlander* uses its portrayals of characters' bodies to underline the importance of power categorizations, and nudity is employed to assist in signifying whether a relationship is equal and trusting or corrupt and abusive.

Taking on Jamie's Perspective

This section focuses on how the show expands the novel's first person perspective by taking on Jamie's perspective as well. While this emphasis on Jamie's perspective allows for a complex portrayal of his own rape and recovery, it also overtakes the accounts of some of the other victims of sexual violence. The framing of these events in regards to Jamie's actions and point of view (POV) establishes Jamie's agency within the narrative, but minimizes the agency of the women and children that he sees himself as responsible for. *Outlander* further promotes Jamie's agency in its construction of his own assault, where his is able to retain some level of control over his own victimization.

However, the complexities of gender and agency are revealed by the show's choice to position Jamie as the "damsel in distress" that Claire must save in the finale.

Fridging

Between the first two seasons, Capt. Randall assaults Claire, Jamie, his sister Jenny, and Claire and Jamie's adoptive son, Fergus. However, there is an interesting distinction between the level of detail the audience receives in regards to Jamie's assaults in contrast to the misunderstanding and ambiguity of what happens to the other characters, particularly in the television adaptation. The audience first understands Jenny's assault through Jamie's eyes as he recounts his version of events to Claire in episode 2. This plays into the trope of female characters being put through trauma only to serve the narrative of their male family of romantic partner, also known as "fridging." This term was coined by Gail Simone in 1999 to describe the list of female comic book characters that had been "killed, maimed, or depowered" to advance a male character's narrative arc (Simone, 1999), but is now applied across entertainment media. The fact that Jenny's assault is reported through the perspective of the lead male character also highlights how the assault impacts Jamie rather than the actual victim, Jenny. In fact, it is later revealed that Jamie's version of events is inaccurate to Jenny's account, which further underlines the impact of telling stories of sexual violence from the perspective of a character that was not there.

When Jamie describes this attack to Claire in episode 2, he is unambiguous about the fact that he failed to protect his sister from Capt. Randall and that as a result Randall raped her. This is important as it shows how this belief shaped his understanding of Randall and informed Jamie's later actions. However, it is not until episode 12 – a gap of

10 episodes – that Jamie and Jenny reunite and she recounts the events of the day to him that he and the audience become aware that Jenny was not actually raped. This undercuts Jamie's (and perhaps the audience's) assumption that Jenny is utterly helpless and requires his protection from Randall, as well as contradicting the trope of fridging by showing Jenny as an agent in her assault. While she was clearly assaulted and Randall did intend to rape her, it is revealed that she began laughing at him out of shock, and as Randall seems to only be aroused by knowing that he has power and control over others, this rendered him to be unable to complete the rape. Capt. Randall uses sexual violence as a tool to exhibit his power over others, and Jenny's laughter humiliates Randall to the point that he no longer feels in control of her, thus empowering Jenny to escape without further assault. This infers a level of fragility to Randall's position as a powerful villain, showing how Jenny's reaction gives her power to re-categorize him as laughable and thus strip him of his assumed power. Thus, although Jamie's initial description of Randall's assault on Jenny is an example of a male figure speaking for the true victim of sexual violence, Jenny's reclamation and revision of the events underlines the importance of promoting the voices of victims and survivors rather than allowing their stories to be appropriated by men.

In addition to Outlander privileging Jamie's version of Jenny's assault over her own account, in the second season, Fergus' assault is framed entirely to promote Jamie's narrative arc. When Capt. Randall returns in the second season and attacks Claire and Jamie's adoptive son, Fergus, the audience experiences the boy's assault through his own account. However, it is clear that the goal of the scene is not to understand Fergus' experience as a victim of sexual abuse but to further justify Jamie's mission to kill

Randall. In the book Fergus is nine years old, and while the actor was fifteen years old when portraying the character, he is still depicted as prepubescent in the adaptation. In both the book and the show Claire first realizes that Jamie has gone to duel with Capt. Randall and later comes to understand that Randall's assault of Fergus motivated this action. Claire finds Fergus crying at night and when she prompts him that "its just a dream," he reveals the truth of his assault at the hands of Capt. Randall. In the show, the depiction of Fergus' fear when recounting the events of the assault and his hesitancy to admit to Claire what happened are well-dramatized. In the flashbacks, Fergus is thrown onto the bed while Randall stands above him, but both remain fully clothed and a bedpost obscures much of the shot, keeping the specifics of the assault ambiguous (especially in comparison to the very explicit depiction of Jamie's rape). It is notable that in the novel, Fergus' assault is less ambiguous than it is in the show, and includes Blackjack Randall attempting to brand Fergus after the assault, a mirror to Jamie's own forced self-branding which ties these two events together for Jamie and for the audience. The show's choice to portray a more ambiguous version of events is likely due to Fergus' young age, and the notion that Randall's assault on Fergus is horrible enough to warrant Jamie's anger whether he brands the child or not, although it minimizes Randall's obsession with claiming ownership over others' bodies through branding and claiming consent.

In this one scene, the show does a reasonable job of depicting Fergus' assault with respect and showing that he is traumatized, but negates this as the episode progresses, focusing entirely on how the assault impacted Jamie and never returning to Fergus' account or recovery. In the show it is made quite clear that Randall does not know about Fergus and Jamie's connection until Jamie walks in on the assault and attacks him.

However, the fact that Randall has yet again attacked someone that Jamie loves gives the character license to break his promise to Claire and challenge Randall to a duel. The lack of narrative follows through given to Fergus' emotional well being implies that Randall's attack on Fergus is simply a device used to spur Jamie into action against Randall. The important point is not what Randall does but who he does it to, since Jamie views Fergus as yet another branch of his family tree that Randall has attacked. In this way, despite the fact that he recounts his own story, Fergus too is fridged, as the assault has little to no narrative effect on the child himself, but is instead included due to how it affects Jamie. Fergus' sexual assault is framed in relation to Jamie's reaction, minimizing the role of the actual victim and painting the assault on Fergus as a surrogate for another attack on Jamie.

In some ways, the choice to privilege Jamie's experience is understandable and serves a narrative function, since Jamie's interpretation of Capt. Randall's assault on Jenny cannot be set straight until he sees her years later and feeds Jamie's hatred of Blackjack Randall in the meantime. In contrast, Fergus is present and able to tell his own story which makes Jamie's ownership of this narrative is unnecessarily and belittling to Fergus' character. Within the television adaptation, Jamie's rape is the only instance of sexual violence that is depicted explicitly, which positions his assault as the most important and minimizes the experiences of the other victims of assault – echoing a wider social shock at the rape of a heterosexual man. Jenny and Fergus embody the categorization of "women and children," normalized victims of sexual violence, and their assaults are largely used to fuel Jamie's storyline rather than their own. This not only reinforces the notion that women and children are natural victims of sexual violence, but

also that their trauma is negligible compared to that of adult men like Jamie. By privileging Jamie's perspective over that of the secondary characters, Outlander falls into the trope of fridging and minimizes the experiences of women and children who are victims of sexual violence.

Jamie's Agency and Jamie as a "Damsel"

In contrast to the show's treatment of Jenny and Fergus, when Jamie is victimized he is not only given control over his narrative, but also given agency within his own assault. While Capt. Randall assaults Claire, Jenny, and Fergus without warning, he consistently seeks consent from Jamie. Although never mentioned, this implies that Randall sees Jamie as an equal while women and children are inherent victims and thus he does not require their consent. Furthermore, it is ensures that it is Jamie's choice to "give himself over" in exchange for Claire's safety. As previously mentioned, Jamie's previous refusal of Randall underlines how he is unwilling to submit to rape for his own sake, but he chooses to do so to protect Claire. Thus, Jamie's victimization is an act of martyrdom rather than a result of his own physical or emotional weakness. This framing provides Jamie some level of agency and allows him to reclaim his heteronormative masculinity after he has been raped.

While Blackjack Randall is holding Jamie prisoner in Wentworth Prison, Randall offers Jamie a "good death" in exchange for submitting to sex. Initially Jamie refuses, a mirror to his refusal of a similar bargain when Randall offered to spare Jamie the second flogging for his cooperation. However, when Claire comes to try and rescue Jamie, she is caught. Since Claire's safety is on the line rather than his own, Jamie accepts the offer. Thus, *Outlander* portrays Jamie's choice to give in to his torture as one of a savior and

sacrificial rather than a coward and succumbing to the pain. As such, while he is coerced into this behavior, the choice to make a deal for his wife's safety over his own gives him a level of bodily autonomy that no other victim has and reinforces his heroic hetero/normative masculinity. This is also exemplified by his choice to brand himself on the ribs instead of the face, an act of defiance even as he is being tortured. While he endures the worst assault, it is his choice to allow himself to be victimized and he actively engages in his own assault, underlining his agency, whereas Jenny, Claire, and Fergus are targeted simply because of their female or pre-pubescent bodies. Once again this reinforces the idea that feminine bodies are inherently endangered, and the contrast is drawn to Jamie's assault being an aberration.

Jamie's complicity in his own abuse renders him an unconventional victim. However, while Jamie's agency during his assault could be used in victim-blaming discourse, it is instead used to allow Jamie to retain a level of power over his own body even while being raped. Thus, Jamie is not like the other victims in the series as he is provided the ability to retain agency during his own torture. This allows Randall's attack on Jamie to act on multiple levels, emphasizing Jamie as a heroic and Christ-like figure willing to sacrifice himself for Claire, as well as representing the resilience of this heteromasculine ideal figure (Jamie) when confronted by the embodiment of sexual deviancy and sadism (Randall).

Counter-Reading: Randall's Attacks on Jamie's Agency

In the book, Claire is not there when Jamie is tortured, and due to the first-person account of the novel, the audience only knows what happened to him based on what Jamie is willing to tell her and the assumptions that Claire is able to make based on his

wounds. This gave the show freedom to take these scenes in many directions while remaining consistent with Jamie's level of physical and psychological trauma from the book. This creative freedom makes the progression of the assault of particular interest. As discussed earlier in the section on scars as storytelling, throughout their time at Wentworth Randall pointedly attacks Jamie's masculinity in a number of ways as the torture progresses from physical to psychological.

The show builds up to the true horror of Randall's domination of Jamie eventually violating his mind, body, and soul through the progression of the assault. First, Randall attacks Jamie's social status and identity as a husband, leading to Jamie's offer to be tortured and raped in exchange for Claire's safety. This is an emotional blow to Claire (who begs Jamie not to make the deal on her behalf) and to the audience, and establishes the doomed tone of the subsequent sequence. Next, Randall asks Jamie to prove his willingness to fulfill this deal by complying with Randall's wish to nail Jamie's hand to a table and then not struggle when Randall kisses him. Nailing Jamie's hand to the table is more than a simple act of violence, Jamie's hand is a symbol of his physical ability as a man since this injury continues to hinder Jamie's ability to do manual labor and fight moving forward, actions that are closely linked with his identity as a man. While the destruction of Jamie's hand is shown as gory, the kiss implies the increasingly disturbing content to come.

Later on, Randall removes the nail from Jamie's hand and cradles the younger man, a farce of tenderness and care. He exposes and caresses Jamie's scars from the flogging years before and Jamie allows a single tear to fall. Jamie's attempts to disassociate from this trauma by becoming a limp body (inactive), prompts Randall to

rape him brutally and tell Jamie to react, ordering him to scream. As the torture moves more into overt sexual violence, Randall threatens Jamie that his passivity is a violation of their agreement and that if Jamie does not react how Randall wants him too then Randall will not give him the good death that he was promised.

Thus, Randall demands that Jamie remain "with him" rather than dissociating from his pain and fear. In this way, Randall claims ownership over Jamie's mind. Randall then reinforces his domination over Jamie's body not only by raping him, but also by stimulating Jamie and drawing him to orgasm, stripping Jamie of control over his own body. Finally, when Jamie is delirious from pain and traumatized by his own complicity in these events, Randall asks Jamie to imagine Claire while Randall rapes him again, leading Jamie to profess his love. Thus, Randall claims ownership over Jamie's soul by corrupting his love of Claire. Jamie underlines the importance of these psychological attacks when he explains to Claire why he wants to die. He makes a distinction between saying that Randall raped him, and noting that Randall "made love" to him, that Randall has had Jamie "body and soul." This sequence of events underlines to the audience that although the initial gore of Jamie's hand being smashed may have shocked them, this is in fact the least of his torture. It is the emotional and psychological damage that is the most horrific and long lasting.

Gender and Agency

In the discussion of how agency is enacted in depictions of sexual violence within Outlander, it is also notable that the women and children who are attacked always fight back, while Jamie does not. Of course Jamie's circumstance is unique in that he has made a deal to go along Randall as he is assaulted, however, while Jamie bears lasting

trauma as well as physical scars, Jenny, Claire, and Fergus, all actively fight back. Whether they fight off their assailants alone or get help, they exit these encounters with no lasting physical or emotional damage. This (re)produces the idea that women and children are natural victims for whom rape should be less traumatic since they are "naturally" receivers of penetrative sex. It is implied that these survivors should "move past" their sexual assaults. In contrast, (straight) men are shown as unnatural victims whose trauma is worse than that of other groups. The redcoats' attack on Claire in the midseason finale is an exception in that she is momentarily traumatized by killing her assailant, but the assault itself is not brought up again as something to give thought to. It is her own act of violence rather than the violence enacted upon her is portrayed as troubling to Claire, further establishing that sexual assault is not inherently traumatizing to women and that women are essentially non-violent, reinforcing the "natural" differences between men and women.

Finally, it would be remiss to ignore how despite Jamie's agency in consenting to the assault (which assists him in retaining a semblance of heteromasculine identity and power), the show intentionally positions Jamie as a "damsel in distress" leading up to his torture. The showrunner, Ron Moore, describes how *Outlander* actively foreshadowed somebody coming to save Jamie from the gallows after Claire had been searching for him the entire episode, and then subverted the expectation that Claire would save Jamie by revealing that it was in fact Randall who saves him and then takes Jamie to Wentworth (Moore, 2015b). The addition of this scene is a change from the books, where the audience is only privy to Jamie's whereabouts and situation when Claire learns about them herself. This added scene does little to change the plot, but establishes Jamie in the

role of a damsel, reliant on Claire to save him. Thus, Claire's journey to save Jamie continues into the season finale, where Jamie is held captive by the season's villain and Claire must continue to search for and attempt to save him. In this way, it is only natural that these events take place within the two final episodes of the season, as Claire's rescue and rehabilitation of Jamie act as the climax of the season's arc. This positions Claire as the hero in her own right, working persistently to save the damsel of her story, Jamie.

Therefore, while Jamie is given more agency throughout his assault, it is the true protagonist, Claire, who performs the traditional heroic act of rescuing her true love from the villain, exhibiting agency in her own right. In establishing this version of events, the show walks an interesting line, wherein Jamie gets to play the hero by martyring himself, but Claire is the one staging a valiant rescue and who finally "beats" the series antagonist. In fact, the failure of Claire's first rescue attempt allows for her to prove herself in the finale, when she not only gets Jamie out of Wentworth Prison, but also uses her feminine skills (of empathy and nursing) to assist Jamie in his recovery. Thus, in some ways Jamie's assault is used to further Claire's heroic arc.

Television Techniques as Narrative Devices

Beyond the narrative itself, the way that scenes are shot can send messages about trauma and sexual violence. In this section, two distinct television techniques are analyzed, focusing on how their use renders the emotional experience of trauma visible through coloration and camerawork. The first of these is the colorization of Jamie's flashbacks from when he was fourteen years old. These scenes are de-saturated, leaving the scenes predominantly gray-scale with only the red colors remaining, indicating Jamie's subjective memory of the events and highlighting the associations between the

British forces' redcoats, his anger, and the blood of his family members. Similarly, a hazy-camera effect is used in two of the most overt instances of sexual violence within the season, indicating the disorientation that is associated with trauma. In each of these cases, a distinct cinematic technique is employed to draw connections between scenes that are temporally separated for the audience but are thematically related. In this section, each of these cinematic techniques is analyzed to explore how they are employed and the impact of their use.

Coloration

Outlander deploys the clear use of such techniques to present key recollections of assaults that not only function to distinguish them from the present, but also serve to interconnect them. The first instance of this is occurs in Jamie's flashbacks, which are colored in only grayscale and red. These flashbacks include Jamie's memories from when he was fourteen years old and he saw Randall assaulting Jenny, and later when Randall flogged him. This clearly connects them as traumatic and emotional memories, and takes on new significance when it is revealed that the two events are causally connected, one leading to the other. Jamie is arrested and eventually flogged for attempting to save Jenny from Capt. Randall, which is deemed "resisting" British control. Then, when he rejects Randall's advances his is flogged a second time, once again for "resisting." Thus, the coloration of the events acts as a way of indicating to the audience how Jamie sees these events as temporally and thematically linked. In particular, it is clear that these scenes represent only Jamie's version of each event since they take on the same grey-scale coloration, while Jenny's later recounting of these scenes are colored normally, positioning them as the more accurate depiction of what took place.

The choice to show these scenes as visually distinct highlights their importance, and the use of red and gray coloration is effective in establishing Jamie's emotions regarding these past events. All of the other colors in these scenes have been artificially de-saturated in editing, creating a sort of POV shot, in which Jamie was in a haze brought on by adrenaline and pain, allowing him only to focus on the redcoats jackets, the blood in these scenes, and the blush of pleasure Randall gets from causing him harm. The dark, grainy nature of the scenes also works to visualize the way one might look back on memories from many years ago. Thus the show constructs a distant, grainy past in which Jamie can focus only on the redcoats and their symbolic their connection to his and Jenny's blood being spilt. In this way, although the camera does not literally take on Jamie's POV, the editing of the scene highlights the symbolic connections that the character makes and invites the audience to make those connections as well, associating the red of the British troops' coats with danger and blood.

Hazy Camerawork

Another set of scenes that are connected by a specific stylized look are the redcoats' attack on Claire in the mid-season finale and during Jamie's abuse in Wentworth Prison during the two-part finale which share a hazy, blurred effect. Each of these scenes is positioned as the most traumatic event to happen to these characters. The hazy camerawork underlines this by taking on the confusion and dissociation of the characters after their respective assaults, distorting the visuals to mimic the characters' POV and mirror Claire and Jamie's turbulent emotional states.

Both scenes show how the POV character is experiencing the events, panning quickly across the scene without truly focusing on anything. These shots are then

intercut with long holds on the POV character's faces, allowing the audience to view their expressions and see how they are taking these scrambled and blurry images in. In Claire's scene this visual is accompanied by a voice over, with her narration comprised of quotes taken from the description in the book. The audience hears Claire recounting this event, speaking with some distance about the trauma that they are watching unfold. The use of voice over in this sequence allows the adaptation to mimic the way that the book reveals Claire's internal thoughts, and the addition of this camera effect bolsters Claire's words by visually representing the fear and confusion that she describes. The director, Anna Foerster, is credited for asking to use this effect in episode 8, and then bringing it back when she was directing Jamie's assaults later in the season (Moore, 2014b; Prundom, 2015). The effect of this choice is that these events provide representations of how the characters feel at the time, and that the scenes create a mental parallel between this attack on Claire in the mid-season finale with Jamie's assault at the end of the season.

Furthermore, these two events are temporal mirrors in that they take place in the bookend episodes of the demi-seasons. Notably, these attacks are also the only two assaults that directly spur on specific plot developments. The first causes Claire to flee for the traveling stones in hopes of escaping back to the 1940s, resulting in her capture by the redcoats. The second is the narrative peak of the first installment of the series in which Jamie is overcome by the trauma he has experienced, and eventually determines that he must kill Capt. Randall if he is ever going to be able to move on (a goal which becomes a major plot point in the second installment of the series). In both cases, the POV character is unable to focus or act in their own best interest, making choices that

endanger them further such as Claire running off on her own and Jamie provoking Randall further. Claire goes into shock after having to kill her assailant to get away, and Jamie is in so much physical pain that he is unable to retain a grip on reality. In this way, the camerawork acts to excuse the characters for their behavior by highlighting that they are not able to consider the ramifications of their actions at the time.

The similar stylistic choices made in the depiction of these two assaults creates a mental link between these events. However, as noted earlier, in contrast to Jamie's actual rape and related trauma, Claire's assault is "attempted rape" and her trauma is attributed to her shock at having to take another person's life to escape. The book's descriptions of this incident is very ambiguous, and the show mirrors that ambiguity, but the end result remains the same; she kills one of the redcoats and then goes into shock. The voice over then describes how she continued to be traumatized by the fact that she (who identifies as a healer) had taken a life, but the trauma that may be associated with the assault is not mentioned then or in any subsequent scene.

In the book, Jamie's assault is similarly obscured, such that Claire looks at his physical trauma, understands how Jamie is emotionally traumatized, and compels him to finally tell his own version of events. The account the reader receives is Claire's memory of what she pieced together and what Jamie said to confirm those suspicions. Jamie's rape and torture is an important plot, establishing his character motivation for the second book and season of television. However, as mentioned in the section on Jamie's agency, it also acts as a device to allow Claire to rescue Jamie and use her feminine skills to help Jamie heal. Thus, it is not overly important for Claire to explicitly note for the reader exactly what happened to Jamie even if he did tell her. In the television series, Moore

decided that he wanted to show the scenes in the prison to make a distinction between "what he would verbalize and what he wouldn't" (Prudom, 2015a). In this way, breaking from a strict adaptation and allowing the audience to explore Jamie's torture through his own eyes allows the production to truly consider the portrayal of both Jamie's emotional arc during his assault well as the aftermath of the assault both immediately within the finale episode, and moving forward. This is important since it is this trauma that informs many of Jamie's actions and feelings throughout the rest of the series.

Foreshadowing

Finally, it is interesting to consider foreshadowing as a film technique and how it plays into the portrayal of an adaptation. Foreshadowing is often used to lessen the emotional reaction of shocking or difficult emotional beats within a show (Mittell, 2015). It has been considered that this is why some people enjoy "spoilers" or knowing what will happen in a show or book before they experience it themselves. This allows these people to use their foreknowledge to prepare for those strong emotions while also lessening the effects of suspense and shock value (Mittell, 2015; Matthews, 2016). Knowing that the audience may have read the book and could find any information on large plot points with ease online, the television show has to focus on making the journey to those points interesting, aware that the mixed audience requires context for the uninformed and detail for those who expect a loyal adaptation to still bring something new to the experiences of this story. Moore states "I think it's good to make the audience feel uncomfortable every once in a while. To make them wonder how they should be feeling and what they should be feeling… it keeps you alive as you're watching" (Moore, 2014b).

This seems to inform the way that events such as Jamie's assault are handled, being much more graphic that the book was, and telling the story in an uncomfortable way as the audience sits in that dungeon with Jamie for two episodes. Sam Heughan, the actor who plays Jamie, admits that "It's going to be challenging for people to watch. We spent a lot of time working on the scenes and the script and working out what we wanted the audience to see or not… Yes, it will certainly shock a few people, but it just makes the story even more interesting and affects Jamie and Claire's relationship so much" (Wilkinson, 2015). Yet, these episodes manage to side-step the traditional use of sexual violence as a moment of shock-value, having the physical torture fill that role and allowing the coverage of the sexual violence to become psychological rather than physical in nature.

Indeed, even as the show uses the added detail and length of these scenes to retain the attention of those who knew of the impending assault all season, they also created subtle foreshadowing for the new audience, preparing them for this finale. There are many elements that come together to foreshadow the finale. First, Claire is surprised by the sexualized way that Randall recounts flogging Jamie years prior. This interaction reveals to Claire and the audience alike that Randall did not view this incident simply as a way to hurt Jamie, but as a dominant show of sadistic sexual aggression that he enacts upon Jamie's body, leaving his mark. Additionally, knowing that Jamie was flogged for his refusal to have sex with Randall solidifies Randall in the role of a sexual sadist. Furthermore, the audience may note the way that Randall looks to Jamie rather than Claire or Jenny when holding these women hostage. This is a detail that was added during the adaptation process, and acts as a way of further preparing the viewing

audience with the understanding that Randall's obsession with Jamie is enduring and that Randall recognizes that he can use those Jamie loves to manipulate and hurt him. Each of these revelations, spread throughout the season, led the events of the finale to seem grounded in previous knowledge, and thus be less shocking or "out of the blue."

In addition, the audience members watching new episodes live are given a whole week to prepare for the finale as the deal between Jamie and Randall is made in episode 15 and not fulfilled until episode 16. This premeditation shows that Randall is a calculating sadist, rather than a hot-blooded opportunist, but it also affects the viewing experience for the audience. This timing builds suspense, but it also allows for emotional decompression. This foreshadowing, along with the warnings that precede these darker episodes, allows the audience to go into the finale with an understanding that sexual violence will occur or to avoid watching the finale if it should be triggering for them. All in all, the format of this storyline is given the time to breathe and tell the story of Jamie's emotional trauma in an uncomfortable but complex manner in which few other characters' trauma is handled. While Randall's assault on Jamie is the most extended, including physical and psychological torture, the way in which his assault is portrayed with so much more care than the various assaults on other characters reinforces the idea that male rape (particularly of a straight man) is more harmful than that of other victims.

CHAPTER 7

DIRECTED ANALYSIS

Within the initial process of re-watching and exploring the portrayals of sexual violence in *Outlander*, a list was constructed noting each instance where consent was either not given or blatantly defied. Based on the overview of the show that this list presented, it was immediately clear that Capt. Randall perpetrated a substantial majority of the assaults. Thus, a focused analysis is performed to study Capt. Randall's role within the show, how it is expanded from the books, and what effect the heightened status of his character has on the larger storytelling. In addition, two of the incidents on the list that did not include Capt. Randall stood out because they take place between the major romantic couple of the series, Claire and Jamie. Thus, the complexity of managing issues of questionable consent in scenes depicting a primary romantic couple was deemed significant to address through directed analysis. These two incidents are the consummation of Claire and Jamie's wedding (The Wedding from episode 7), and The Spanking Scene wherein Jamie flogs Claire with a belt, the scenes fallout, and the resulting reconciliation (from episode 9). The analysis of each of these scenes explores of how the show minimize the characters' transgressions of modern concepts of consent in service of presenting Claire and Jamie's relationship as the romantic ideal.

Creating a Clear Antagonist

It is impossible to discuss the sexual violence within *Outlander* without exploring the character of Capt. Jonathan "Blackjack" Randall. As previously mentioned, one of the changes made in adapting this narrative was to establish Randall as not only one of the challenges facing Claire and Jamie, but the central antagonist and a villain that was

equal to the main couple. Critics and scholars alike have called the character "evil" (Fretts 2015), "luxuriated in sadism (Hill, 2015), and a "goddamn psycho" (Faircloth, 2015). Thus, the season became more structured around sharing information about Randall to the audience at specific times, and Randall became an embodiment of sexual violence and abuse of power imbalances. Not only does he assault Jamie's entire family, he largely breaks the family unit that Claire and Jamie establish with each other in the show's second season.

Restructuring for Television

A normalized television structure requires shows to include a singular, consistent antagonist for each season (Mittell, 2015). The adaptation of *Outlander* into a television series incorporates this norm, and in doing so expands Capt. Randall's importance within the series. It is unsurprising that Blackjack Randall was chosen to fill the role of the main villain as he is the only external threat that appears throughout the first installment of *Outlander*. To better facilitate this, his appearance in the series is expanded from the scenes where Claire and Jamie interact with him in the novel to include flashbacks of his previous interactions with Jamie. While these flashbacks are consistent with their counterparts in the novel, they take on new meaning in the way they are portrayed within the show by making Randall more visible and underlining his cruelty as an ongoing danger.

In the novel, these scenes are framed as discussions between Claire and Jamie, providing insight to the dark character that will become relevant later on, but not providing the character of Capt. Randall with such a strong presence and characterization as he has in the television adaptation. Thus, while having these flashbacks play out on

screen reflects the genre and the (tele)visual components of the medium, it also shifts the action-orientation of Randall's narrative arc. This shift represents and re-presents these memories as actionable to the audience rather than historical, transforming Randall from a past figure to a more active and immanent and imminent threat. This takes on meaning for audience members who have read the books that the show acknowledges the importance of Capt. Randall moving forward, as well as acting as a form of foreshadowing to new audience members, hinting at the character's later significance.

Furthermore, the actor who plays Capt. "Blackjack" Randall, Tobias Menzies, also plays Claire's first husband, Frank Randall. The use of one actor to play multiple roles is a common device used in various storytelling methods. In *Outlander*, this works to express the contrast between the safety Claire feels with Frank and the fear she feels when confronted with Capt. Randall. However, while this device is initially used to explain Claire's confusion upon meeting Capt. Randall, who reminds her of her husband Frank, this physical similarity is then largely unaddressed by any of the characters throughout the rest of the novels or television episodes. Despite this, due to the visual nature of television as a medium, the connection between these characters also works to maximize Capt. Randall's role as the main villain of the series. This is due to the connection that audience members are likely to make between Frank and Capt. Randall, which underlines Capt. Randall's importance even when it is Frank, not the Captain being shown on screen.

In establishing Capt. Randall as the main villain within the first season of Outlander and bolstering the character's presence within the show, the production team chose certain episodes to use to feature Capt. "Blackjack" Randall to solidify him as the

first season's main antagonist. Capt. Randall is included in episodes 1, 2, 6, 8, 12, 15, and 16. The first two episodes establish him as a villain both to Claire (through present action) and Jamie (through memories of past deeds), establishing a connection between all three characters early on. Capt. Randall is then active in episode 6, brutally attacking Claire and creating the circumstances in which Claire is forced to marry Jamie to get beyond Randall's political reach. In addition, this episode shows "Blackjack" Randall's description of how he flogged Jamie. This once again demonstrates Capt. Randall as a physical threat to both protagonists as well as introducing the true extent of Randall's sadism as he describes his violence as art. Additionally, the mid-season finale (episode 8) closes on Blackjack Randall having captured and assaulted Claire, resulting in a cliffhanger in which Randall is the main antagonist. Each of these events is - on its face - true to the books, but it is the visual medium, the structure of these events throughout the season, and the use of editing (sound, lighting, etc.) that reinforce Blackjack Randall as the singular immanent threat that the characters (and thus the audience) should fear.

This intentional structuring of the story to promote Randall's actions as the paramount challenges to Claire and Jamie continues in the second half of the season. Randall appears in flashbacks in episode 12 where the writers remind the audience that he is the central figure to fear and root against. This episode allows the audience to witness the gore and inhumanity of Blackjack Randall's flogging of Jamie, a very different experience to that of reading about a flogging. Randall's threat finally comes to a head in episodes 15 and 16, which act as a two-part season finale. Capt. Randall has Jamie locked up in Wentworth Prison where he tortures and rapes Jamie. Jamie is eventually rescued, Randall is presumed dead, and Claire and Jamie literally sail off into the sunset

together having supposedly vanquished the season's main foe. Randall's status as the primary villain is solidified by his role in the climax of the season and the fact that it is his downfall that signifies the resolution of the first installment of the series.

Ultimately, this picture perfect ending fulfills the genre expectations of a romance novel, but simultaneously violates the traditional strategy for US television season finales. While this disruption of the norm of a season-finale cliffhanger might seem an odd choice for a show that hopes to retain its audience for upcoming seasons, *Outlander* used the trope of sailing into the sunset with the specific intent of indicating to audiences that the show would not retain the dark tone of the finale when moving into the second season. The two-part season finale delves unapologetically into horrifying imagery as Capt. Randall tortures Jamie emotionally, physically, and sexually, leading to Jamie having symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and becoming actively suicidal. This dark turn was given center-stage at the end with this picturesque image of hope rather than the note of uncertainty in traditional cliffhangers, signaling to the audience that they need not fear that all of season two would be a spiral further into despair and torture (Moore, 2015a). While book readers will know that Capt. Randall will eventually return, they also have enough foreknowledge that they would not worry that the second season of the show is only more gore and violence. Therefore, regardless of whether or not they read the books, audience members can end the first season of the show with an optimistic view and enjoy the couple's shock when Capt. Randall returns in the next season.

Captain Randall and the Abuse of Power

In addition to the way that *Outlander* spreads Capt. Randall's actions throughout the season to increase his presence and emphasize his role as the central antagonist, the

way that he abuses his positions of power underline the level of cruelty that this character embodies. Randall's deviancy is underlined throughout the series, with his obsession of power and control as just one of these factors. There is also an ongoing debate about Randall's possible representations of homosexuality/bisexuality as deviancy, pedophilia, and sadism (Gabaldon, 1999/2015; Frankel, 2016a; Lopez, 2016), however the extent of this conversation is outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the implications that Randall's position of social dominance cannot be separated from his interactions with the various characters that he assaults.

As touched upon earlier in the discussion of bodies in space, one factor that frames Randall's role as the villain of the story is his ties to the British military. Throughout the first season, the British act as an imposing, paternalistic force towards the Scottish clans who they see as squabbling and childish. The British forces in general paint the Scotts as less civilized than themselves. However, Capt. Randall uses this view of the clansmen as disobedient children needing to be put in their place to justify his own cruelty towards the Scotts he encounters, including men, women, or children. One example of this is how Randall calls Jamie "boy" throughout the show. Randall first encountered Jamie when Jamie was only 14 years old, when he was a boy. Yet even after years have passed and Jamie is clearly a man, Randall seeks to re-establish the power dynamic of being the adult, English military man propositioning and punishing the young, Scottish boy. Randall uses the word "boy" to harken back to that first encounter and further underline the power difference between them. It is also possible that Capt. Randall has a proclivity for young boys, as mirrored in his assault of Fergus who is a young boy when Randall assaults him at the brothel. In this case, Randall's continuing to

categorize Jamie as a child would allow Randall to maintain a sexualized view of Jamie even as he grew up. In either case, Capt. Randall clearly uses his position of power as an Englishman, a Captain in the military, and an older man to viciously enforce his will upon others.

In addition to the patronizing and aggressive way Randall, and by extension the English forces as a whole, treat Jamie, Fergus, and any boys who are not English themselves, *Outlander* shows women being consistently infantilized. Rape is generally accepted as a way of exerting power over someone wherein exposing one's vulnerability is the goal rather than simple sexual pleasure (Starr & Ferguson, 2012; Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006). Therefore, the culture of treating women as people in need of protection and unable to defend themselves that is established in *Outlander's* portrayal of the 1740s paints women not as equal to the men around them but as potential targets of violence. Since women are both infantilized and targets of violence, they too fall under Capt. Randall's continued abuse of power. However, it is important to note that neither of the two most affecting moments in which Randall sexually attacks women in the show are primarily intended to harm those women. Both Jenny's assault and Randall's attack on Claire in the mid-season finale are about exposing Jamie's vulnerabilities.

As noted earlier, when Randall attacks Claire in the woods in the pilot episode she is simply a target of opportunity, and his most personal attempts to hurt her (seen in episode 6) are largely physical. This is in response to encountering her as an unknown woman wearing only shift dress running in the woods, making the sexual violence opportunistic. However, the next time that they meet she is pleasantly dining with other

English officers and he must engage with her as an educated British woman whom his peers deem worthy of respect. When he maneuvers to speak with her one on one, she is once again in danger. Initially they share in a battle of wits as Claire attempts to ensure her safety by bluffing that she is politically valuable and he seeks to determine her true role in the conflict between the Highlanders and his own English forces. In this case, while he alludes to her sexual vulnerability, he does not disrobe or make sexual advances towards her. Rather, he slaps her, hits her in the stomach so that she doubles over, and forces a young officer to kick her while she lies on the ground. Each of the situations in which Randall engages in ongoing performances of sexual violence are those times when Jamie is there to witness and react to those actions.

In fact, it is the way in which Randall makes Claire feel helpless by forcing the young officer to participate in the violence against her that seems to bring Randall the most satisfaction. Production members from the *Outlander* show continuously refer to Randall as a sadist (Fretts, 2015, Prudom 2015a). This statement has been used problematically to side-step questions about representing cruelty and sexual aggression, and even pedophilia through a character often read as one of the only homosexual characters in the early parts of the *Outlander* series (Gabaldon, 1999/2015; Fretts, 2015; Patricia, 2016; Donelan, 2018). Nevertheless, it is an apt description of Randall's goals to conquer people through causing not only physical but psychological pain through abuses of power.

Randall's Actions Hold Narrative Weight

Randall's villainy is underlined given that assaults performed by other characters are not given equal narrative weight. The assault on Claire by the redcoats in

episode 9 is largely brushed past as a way to motivate her to escape to Craig Na Dun and back to the 1900s as opposed to it being its own crescendo. Due to her capture later on in the episode, her interaction with Randall, rather than her killing a man to escape further sexual violence is framed as the most dramatic scene of the episode. This is a change from the books, and creates narrative symmetry between Claire being captured by Randall in the mid-season finale and Jamie being captured by Randall in the last two episodes of the season. While this change does not alter any of the events of the scenes, the way that they have been presented changes the way they are perceived, ensuring the audience knows that Randall is the largest looming threat for the protagonists. Furthermore, while Claire herself is able to kill one of the nameless redcoats herself, she has to be saved from Randall on all three occasions where she finds herself alone with him. In this way, Randall is constructed as an inhuman force that Claire cannot fight off on her own. This further supports the show's characterization of Randall as a larger than life villain as opposed to the book's more realistic representation of a single cruel individual that happens to control the area where Claire and Jamie often find themselves. Thus, Randall is once again elevated in status to be the single true obstacle for the series' protagonists.

While Claire is not consistently shown to be helpless and demonstrates a range of agency throughout her various assaults, others do not always treat attacks on her equally. Those around her react to her assaults very differently based on who the perpetrator is. Claire's first interaction with Randall is interrupted by the Scots on principle of preventing the Englishman from attacking a woman on a Scottish road. However, as Claire is unknown to the men, it is not seen as a personal slight and is not discussed any

further. The anonymous redcoats enact perhaps the most actual harm against Claire in their assault, and their status as English soldiers attacking a Scottish man's wife leads Jamie and the other Scots to respond to the attack with violent anger and guilt for not better protecting Claire. They feel responsible for the attack, and actively take steps to "right" the situation, though these are more about revenge than about helping Claire deal with the aftermath of the trauma she has experienced. However, even this attack is not nearly as personal for Jamie as when Randall attacks Claire later on, leading to Jamie's willingness to attempt a rescue with little more that wit on his side. Although the redcoat on the hill comes closer to actually raping Claire in front of him, Jamie's repeated interactions with Randall led to a more dramatic response from Jamie. Not only does Jamie's familiarity with Randall indicate to Jamie that Randall may act more sadistically towards Claire than "just" raping her (which is seen later in how Randall tortures Jamie), but also there is a personal animosity for Jamie in regards to Randall that fuels his reaction when it is Randall assaulting his wife. In some ways, Claire being held in Fort Worth provides Jamie with an excuse to confront Randall and force him to pay for the past wrongs he has done to Jamie and Jenny. Therefore, Jamie reacts much more strongly when Randall is simply holding Claire than when a random redcoat is on top of her.

In contrast to the villainous Randall and the nameless violence enacted by the redcoats the show avoids ramifications for Dougal, who claims that he "dusna hold with rape" when he later harasses and assaults Claire on various occasions. In the current climate one must address the issue of the "good guy" mentality and its effects on perceptions of sexual violence. Dougal clearly sees himself as a good man. This is

evidenced by telling his men that he will not allow them to rape Claire and attempting to distinguish his men as good people after she has just been attacked by Randall soon after traveling through time. Dougal views Randall as a villain and an Other, he uses this difference to establish that unlike the redcoats his men would never do anything like that. However, when he "pursues" Claire, what he truly does is attempt to force himself on her. It is only his own identity as a "good man" that determines his actions as acceptable and Randall's as villainous. The lack of narrative weight given to these attacks by Dougal normalize this behavior, overlooking his assaults because he was unsuccessful and framing them as "misdirected" rather than malicious. While Jamie knows of these interactions and Claire is always shown as "capable of handling" Dougal (as evidenced by her hitting him over the head with a chair to escape him when he will not be dissuaded from his pursuit by Claire's rebuttals) Jamie never takes any steps to reprimand or attack Dougal for his actions against Claire. Dougal is excused for his "inappropriate behavior" by both Jamie and the audience because he helps Jamie and Claire to fight back against the "real villain" Capt. Randall. Each of these factors further defines Randall as the primary antagonist in *Outlander*.

Captain Randall as the Destruction of Jamie's Family

Another way that Capt. Randall surpasses all other antagonists within the show is the way that his character has a hand in dismantling both the family that Jamie grows up in and the one that he hopes to create with Claire. From the first time that Jamie and Randall meet, Jamie sees his sister attacked and associates Randall with harm coming to his family. Jamie's resistance during Randall's attack on Jenny leads to Jamie's imprisonment and his father's death (due to a heart attack as he saw Jamie being

flogged). Jamie's status as a criminal and his guilt about not being able to protect his family led him to stay away from his family home, and thus his sister, for years. As a result, Jamie blames both his father's death and his estrangement from his sister on Capt. Randall. Randall's continued use of attacks on Claire as a way of hurting Jamie further reinforce the notion that Jamie cannot protect those he loves from this man. Randall then causes estrangement and conflict between Claire and Jamie by invoking Claire while he rapes Jamie. Eventually, Jamie relies on the idea of building a family with Claire as a reason to go on living after Randall has raped him, but Randall is once again used as the character that comes between Jamie and his family.

Most explicitly, Randall assaults Fergus, Claire and Jamie's adopted child, in the brothel where Fergus was raised. This assault symbolically ends Fergus' childhood. Furthermore, this indirectly leads to the death of Jamie and Claire's first daughter, Faith, since Jamie and Randall duel after Jamie learns of Randall's assault on Fergus, and it is implied that the stress of this confrontation is what causes Claire to miscarry. Later, the military confrontation between the British and Scottish forces (manifestations of Randall and Jamie as individuals) collide in the gruesome Battle of Culloden. The British forces who have been occupying Scotland throughout the series confront the Jacobite rebellion in this battle, which *Outlander* frames as the final stand before the British stomped out Highland culture for good. In this way, the British military invades and violates that which is personal to the Scottish and eventually strip away their identity. This battle in particular is noted as "one of the most harrowing battles in British history" (Culloden, n.d., para. 1) where at least 1,500 Scottish Jacobites died, and the survivors were "hunted down and killed" (Castelow, n.d., para. 8). Thus, with a reasonable fearing for the safety

of a heavily pregnant Claire's, Jamie sends her back to the 1900s. In the books, it is referenced that Capt. Randall takes part and dies within this battle, but the show plays to audience expectations by constructing a direct confrontation between Jamie and Capt. Randall wherein Jamie finally kills his long-time foe. Even so, Claire has already gone through the stones and believes Jamie to be dead, leading Jamie's daughter, Brianna, to be raised in the 20th century by Claire and her first husband, Frank Randall, effectively replacing Jamie's role as a father with a member of Capt. Randall's family.

Therefore, while Randall never encounters Claire and Jamie's second daughter, Brianna, and has no opportunity to inflict personal harm upon her, he still manages to ensure that Jamie has no contact with his wife or daughter for the next twenty years. Through his attacks on Jenny, Jamie, Claire, and Fergus and his indirectly causing Jamie to be unable to watch either of his daughters grow up, Capt. Randall systematically harms each branch of Jamie's family throughout the first two seasons of the show.

It is also notable that while Capt. Randall actively breaks up Claire and Jamie's family unit, he is delivered a redemption arc that is firmly rooted in his loyalty to his own family and love of his brother. An important clarification here is that the goal of Capt. Randall's redemption arc is to excuse Claire's first husband, Frank, for sharing Randall's blood and his looks. When Capt. Randall's brother, Alexander, falls ill it is the captain's agreement to marry Mary Hawkins, the girl pregnant with Alexander's child, and raise the child as his own that acts as Capt. Randall's redemption. While Capt. Randall dies at the Battle of Culloden just days after his wedding to Mary, his willingness to act as a surrogate father and protect both Mary and the child through providing them with "legitimacy" under the eyes of the law shows the most human and caring side of Randall

in any of his appearances. Capt. Randall tears apart Claire and Jamie's family yet finds redemption in his own, something he has denied the two protagonists. This inequality may anger considered to be irredeemable villains (Mittell, 2015), but the additional scene in the following season where Jamie is allowed to directly confront and kill Capt. Randall addressed this concern. In conclusion, Randall's role in *Outlander* is expanded through the choices made in the structure of the show, and his role as the shows singular antagonist minimizes the problematic actions of others by comparing them to a ubiquitous villainous force whose actions affect three generations of Jamie's family.

Managing Questionable Consent in Romantic Scenes

In addition to the role of Capt. Randall, two scenes identified in the list of events exhibiting questionable consent were set aside for directed analysis, The Wedding and The Spanking Scene. These scenes are notable due to their focus on the series' romantic leads, Claire and Jamie. Although both The Wedding and The Spanking Scene do take place in the books as well, the television adaptation of *Outlander* alters the presentations of characters and plot points to fit the norms of this new medium, thus sending reinforcing problematic messages about consent within romantic relationships.

The Wedding

While Claire's very sexual relationship with Jamie is largely celebrated as one of the linchpins of the show, the show itself actively minimizes the issues of consent that arise between the couple. In fact, it is the collision of these two factors that makes Claire and Jamie's relationship so problematic in its portrayal of sexual violence. Issues of consent are repeatedly blurred when it comes to Claire and Jamie's relationship. And yet, these moments remain unchallenged by the narrative, which hold Claire and Jamie's

relationship up as the romantic ideal. More than the plot in the scenes themselves, it is *Outlander*'s lack of interest in addressing these issues that normalizes these problematic moments for the audience.

As discussed in the analysis of how Outlander's structure was altered to bolster the focus on Capt. Randall as the show's primary antagonist, it is not unusual for adaptations to change the emphasis and weight of events to manage plot and medium changes (Mittell, 2015). Indeed while the wedding is also a focal point in the plot of the novel, expanding the events of the single day and night of Claire and Jamie's wedding to encompass a whole episode clearly served to indicate to new audience members that Claire and Jamie's marriage would be significant to the narrative moving forward. However this slowing down in the plot progression also provided the opportunity for a "dramatic" production device that provided insight into the characters internal state, facilitating greater para-relational connection and building of the audience with the characters. The wedding contains minimal dramatic plot, but it is a turning point that fans of the novels were eagerly anticipating, and using this one event to fill a whole episode further helps the show to make the plot of episodes 1-8 fit into the half-season structure that is common in the United States while also artificially advancing Claire and Jamie's emotional intimacy with each other and with the audience at a pace much faster than that of the novel.

Episode 7, "The Wedding," made a splash with television critics as it was praised for its use of the "female gaze" and highlighting a female character's sexuality (Faircloth, 2014; Gay, 2014; Ryan, 2014). Truthfully, quite a few aspects of the wedding episode lend themselves to applause. Claire is older and more experienced than Jamie, who is a

virgin. This dynamic undermines the traditional gender roles seen in television where the men are experienced and women follow their lead (Downs & Gowan, 1980; Fowler & Thomas, 2015; Sink & Mastro, 2016). In addition, Claire is given leave to control much of how the evening progresses. It is by her initiation that each new step of intimacy is taken. Claire also takes a notably active role in appreciating these sexual scenes, even going so far as to openly objectify Jamie by asking him to disrobe and walking around him, touching him. While she later strips too, it is her agency and enjoyment that are the primary focus of the scenes. In addition, the way that these scenes allow time to build the couple's emotional compatibility by giving them time to talk and including Jamie's indirect inquiry for consent are elements of the episode that were praised in reviews (Faircloth, 2014; Gay, 2014; Ryan, 2014). This is discussed in the previous analysis of the depiction of nude bodies and sexuality.

Consequently, on the surface this episode holds it up as the gold standard for portraying sex in television. Indeed Roxane Gay wrote "This episode was perfect, poignant, and perfect" (2104, para. 1) and Maureen Ryan stated "I've watch a lot of TV, and I cannot recall any show that has done what this hour of TV did ever" (2014b, para. 44) in regard to how Claire's sexual desires were portrayed as valid, how the show objectified each body equally, and how the "realistic" sex in this episode were used to build a closeness and warmth between Claire and Jamie over the course of a whole night. However, even the most positive aspects of the episode are complicated by the lack of clarity regarding whether Claire was able to give consent.

The reason that the two characters spend all night talking is that "the newlyweds immediately set to drinking an astonishing quantity of alcohol, or at least Claire does"

(Gay, 2014). The audience later learns that "Claire was deeply hungover on the morning of the wedding and she remembers very little" though Jamie remembers everything in detail and recounts the events to her (Gay, 2014). However, while these critics acknowledge how much Claire drinks in the episode, none question the implications of this heavy drinking before sexual activity especially given that Claire's voiceovers make it clear that she drank to the point of losing memory. Claire's heavy (solitary) drinking in the build up to the wedding indicates her choice to distance herself from this wedding, and one wonders with how much she had to drink in the two days leading up to her wedding night if she was working preemptively to blur out those memories as well. Research shows that drinking and sexual activity are tied not because of some biological reaction to alcohol but because people think of being drunk as a way of avoiding taking responsibility for their actions (Bleakley et al., 2017). This can act as either to let people act with lower inhibition as an excuse to be more forward or it can but used to deny their actions as indicative of their desires (Bleakley et al., 2017). Thus, it is unclear whether Claire's drinking was meant to assist her in consummating her new marriage, to ensure she would not have to remember it, or both.

Another concern with the drinking in this episode is that Claire never acts drunk, but the voice over (VO) of Claire recounting the events of the day, which frame the episode for the viewer, directly contradicts this. Claire seems contained and self-aware throughout the episode, allowing her to make decisions about her own sexuality. However, the VOs that describe Claire's internal world state objectively how out of it she was. Though the VO never indicates any negative feelings about the events of her wedding night, they are written from Claire's POV many years after the occurrence, and

once again give an imperfect idea of her state at the time. In effect, Claire's account is simply a re-telling of what Jamie has told her of their wedding night, mixed with twenty years of romantic nostalgia, muddling the truth of Claire's experience at the time. What is known for sure is that after agreeing to a "marriage of convenience" that must be immediately consummated, she inoculates herself from this reality by drinking. And while the marriage may turn out to be filled with deep and abiding love, it is fear of what Capt. Randall will do to Claire, not affection, that presses Claire and Jamie to marry. Thus, even though both parties agree, the marriage itself is in many ways coerced, or forced, rather than by choice not consented to without coercion. She is not choosing Jamie; rather, she is effectively rejecting Randall.

Jamie is of course aware of what has led to his wedding, but still takes action to ensure that the wedding meets his romantic standards, treating the wedding as valid and a true relationship with Claire as inevitable. Although Claire is initially unaware of Jamie's actions, his initiative in establishing their relationship as romantic rather than simply transactional is framed as a way of setting Jamie up as an ideal romantic lead, avoiding the interpretation that he is taking advantage of Claire by portraying him as nervous rather than arrogant and having him ask for explicitly consent. Jamie's role as a romantic ideal is further solidified when he does not push her into any action on their wedding night, choosing instead to follow Claire's lead. And, when Claire suggests that they go to bed, he seeks clarification "To bed or to sleep?" In this moment *Outlander* provides an example of a lead male character explicitly seeking consent before engaging in sexual activity. But even this moment is flawed as Claire denies him an answer, withholding verbal consent.

The question of whether Claire's lack of verbal consent is countered by her behavior is further complicated by discourses that imply that silence is consent or that women who deny giving consent are simply acting coy or open to being persuaded. And yet, no matter Claire's reply, by modern definitions sex with Claire at this juncture would be considered sexual violence or rape. While the specific level of her intoxication is unclear, she has been drinking heavily on and off for a day and a half to the point of blacking out and she has been forced into a position where "consummation" is required for her own protection from a sadistic villain. There is no way to provide consent in such a context. This is of course complicated by the actress' portrayal of Claire in these scenes, who not only seems alert and conscious of the events taking place, but also actively attracted to Jamie and pleased to engage in sex with him a second and third time. The contradictory messages included within this episode allow for a number of dramatically different possible readings.

This raises the issue of how the audience reads this scene. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969) states that media representations affect how people see the world. In particular, Mittell (2015) argues that the pilot episode of a television show teaches the audience how to watch said show by including emotional cues through its lighting and coloring as well as by creating a template for future episodes to be compared against. This establishes a norm for how the audience of the show will interpret the show's content in collaboration with their understanding of other textual norms to construct the "preferred reading" of the media.

In the case of "The Wedding," *Outlander* sends the message that if Claire is active within a scene and there is no VO explicitly stating that she felt negatively within

that moment, the audience should find the behavior in the scene acceptable and even romantic. The choice of swelling music, the soft lighting of a fireplace, and the narrative aftermath all work to establish Claire and Jamie's wedding night as the beginning of a fairytale romance. While the show's romantic cues mirror Claire's nostalgic view of her marriage to Jamie and allow her character some agency to define her own boundaries regarding her sexuality, they also work to emphasize the romance of the couple over Claire as a character. As the first episode where Claire and Jamie have sex and are established as a couple on the show, "The Wedding" creates the norm for their future behaviors to be compared to, and even in this episode the show accepts and ignores that the lines of consent are blurred for the show's featured couple.

The "Spanking Scene"

The next occasion where consent is clearly an issue is two episodes later in the "spanking scene." While use of corporal punishment on one's wife or children is an established norm in the version of Scotland in the 1740s that Gabaldon created for Outlander (Gabaldon, 1999/2015), the show does not do enough to ensure that its modern audience does not normalize this behavior. Diana Gabaldon's *Outlandish Companion* (1999/2015 p.434) states "this is arguably the most controversial scene in all the books… that's one heck of a complex scene, emotionally, and could be read/performed in a lot of different ways." The complexity of emotion is shown through the actors' portrayals of the characters' layered reactions, but there are still two general reactions to this scene. "Most… find it hilarious, erotic, or simply very entertaining. A few find it absolutely unacceptable – a "good" man, they argue, would *never* beat his wife" (Gabaldon,

1999/2015 p.412). However, the impact of the scene is about more than quarrels over character motivations.

Claire acts as the audience stand-in for various aspects of *Outlander*. It is common for television series (especially those labeled "genre" television) to use their protagonist as a proxy through which the audience can view a new or strange world (Mittell, 2015). In the case of *Outlander*, Claire is a relatively modern character, which additionally works to provide a more contemporary lens to the historical content of the plot. As such, she exhibits concern when she realizes that an issue she thought was settled leads to her new husband planning to flog her with a belt. Though she is not a character from contemporary times, she does assume different gender norms than the 18th century men she is surrounded by. Though Jamie is notable for being quick to trust and value Claire's skills and show empathy to her, he is still a product of his own experience. The spanking scene is one of the first times that this difference in worldview between Claire and Jamie is highlighted. Thus Claire and the audience are equally taken aback by Jamie's actions. And yet, the show goes on to minimize these feelings of concern literally taking on Jamie's POV rather than Claire's by using VOs from Jamie's perspective instead of Claire's.

Establishing these events through Jamie's POV acts in two ways. First, it elevates Jamie's character by showing that Outlander is not only Claire's story, but Jamie's story as well. Secondly, showing the "spanking" and its fallout from Jamie's perspective minimizes potential anger towards his character. By sidestepping Claire's feelings of betrayal, the show frames the episode so that the audience is empathetic with Jamie's confusion and self-righteousness rather than resenting him for his actions against Claire.

While the showrunner notes this choice as a deliberate way to introducing Jamie's POV so that it would be less shocking when it is seen in the season finale, he also admits that the change keeps the audience on Jamie's side. Thus, the adaptation intentionally went forward with a change that minimizes the feelings of a woman who is flogged by her husband in an attempt to show that her husband is still a "good guy." This is deeply problematic and further reinforces the hegemonic idea that "good guys" are infallible and women who challenge them of wrongdoing are over-reacting. This attitude is also visible in the way that the cast and crew of the show describe the scene, as is discussed further in the section on the "spanking scene."

The dialogue of this scene is largely lifted from the books and the actual events of this encounter change very little from page to screen, but the adaptation process inherently takes the audience out of Claire's perspective and gives more credence to Jamie's argument. The way actor Sam Heughen portrays Jamie in this scene lends humor to the part, something that Gabaldon (1999/2015) cites as one of the reasons that Heughen was chosen for the role. This indicates that the author of the books found this representation of the scene was an accurate portrayal of Jamie's actions. However, the books are written from Claire's POV and therefore lend additional weight to her emotional reaction to Jamie's finding humor in the idea of flogging her. Not only does she narrate the flogging itself, but the readers also understand her ongoing resentment and sense of betrayal. She is not only hurt that Jamie flogged her, but also that he enjoyed it and did not show any sense of regard for her own distress. Furthermore, it is clear to Claire that all of their traveling companions are aware of what happened and she is embarrassed that they all seem to view her not as one of them, but as an unruly wife who

needs to be put in her place. They laugh at the fact that she fought back, and Jamie does not recognize what she feels he has done to her social status. Instead, in the show the audience listens to Jamie justify the beating as a way of saving his own social standing by disciplining his wife. The nuances of Claire's feelings are overlooked to emphasize Jamie's version of events.

In the show, Jamie receives more focus in the scene that Claire does. He is the actor and she the object acted upon. Additionally, Jamie openly acknowledges that he is planning to hurt Claire. When she protests that she will scream, something that in her own time period might deter such a flogging if only for propriety's sake, Jamie brushes it off saying "likely if not before, certainly during. I expect they'll hear you in the next village." He also places the blame of the ferocity of the attack back on Claire stating "This'll go faster if you just yield, woman," continuing even as Claire shouts that she'll never forgive him and calls him a sadist as she realizes that he is enjoying the fight. Famously, Jamie responds "I said I was going to punish you. I didna say I wasna gonna enjoy it." It is also notable that while the show clearly shows Claire fighting back, she fights back and screams loudly, showing more anger and pain than fear, downplaying the vulnerable position she is in. Still, the spanking is shot to show that she is truly in pain, and includes one shot close on her face with Jamie imposing, inflicting pain from behind her, a common visual trope in rape scenes (Strong, 2017).

In the books this scene is more clearly sexual in nature, but the showrunner, Ron Moore, lessened that aspect of the event in his adaptation (Moore, 2015b). He also dismisses the violence towards Claire by arguing that if she was a man her punishment would have been "much worse" (Moore, 2015b), meaning that women are spared harsher

treatment because the of the way that the culture infantilizes them. In other words, the culture portrayed in Outlander does not hold women accountable for their own actions, because they are not seen as complete or capable people. However, instead of critiquing this view of women, Moore implies that Claire is lucky to be viewed this way and lucky to receive this "spanking." The historical and cultural context of the setting is further used to excuse Jamie's actions by implying that he "must" flog Claire, lest the men that they travel with think him weak for not disciplining his own wife. Throughout the show, this storyline is crafted to best serve Jamie's character, and whether intentional or not, this choice excuses the perpetrator of the violence rather than allowing for audience to mirror Claire's later arc towards forgiveness.

However, the show's actions are not made without consideration, as Moore stated in his podcast, "choices will never be made without consciousness" when adapting a series (Moore, 2015b). It was also a conscious choice to draw out humor rather than tension in crafting the tone of the scene. Moore pushed back against women in the production team on set who wanted to play the scene darker by arguing that the show requires its audience to empathize with Jamie in order to maximize the impact of Jamie's later assault (Leach, 2016). This further emphasizes that the change into Jamie's perspective functions to protect Jamie from negative audience perceptions. Playing the scene humorously negates the seriousness of Jamie's actions, and in some ways references the trope of a charming romantic lead taming a wild or disobedient woman. Thus, Jamie's role as a romantic ideal is further solidified, despite the violence of his actions.

However, the humor of Claire attempting to fight back isn't acknowledged by Jamie alone. The whole troupe of Scots that Claire and Jamie are traveling with overhears, approve of, and laugh at the conflict occurring upstairs. They are aware of what Jamie is planning to do to Claire and chuckle, saying "Ah the lad's getting on with it" and "It sounds like Holy Hell up there" as they hear Claire's screams and protests from downstairs. This reaction (not possible in the strict perspective of the book) further isolates Claire in her view that Jamie should not flog her. Though both Claire and Jamie have reasons for their feelings in the moment, the show and its production the take Jamie's perspective more seriously than Claire's.

Not only do the Scots on *Outlander* normalize Jamie's behavior, they showrunner and cast do as well. Moore describes the conscious decision to call this the "spanking scene" rather than the "beating" scene because he thought it would negatively affect the show for its audience to associate with Jamie beating his wife (Moore, 2015b). Additionally, discourses surrounding spanking may be sexual or imply light disciplinary action, while discussions about beating one's wife are tied to implications of violent abuse. Notably, hitting Claire with a belt is by definition flogging (Kennedy, 2016) and the only other example of flogging in the first season of *Outlander* is Capt. Randall's flogging of Jamie. Thus the seeming innocuous way to which this scene is referred by production members, the actors, and even the television critics, reinforces the minimization of Jamie's actions against Claire. When Randall flogs the focus of his romantic interest, Jamie, and enjoys it, the audience message is that this shows the extent of his cruelty and sadism. However, when Jamie enjoys flogging Claire, it is minimized and played for laughs.

Furthermore, Moore and the actors actively defend Jamie in interviews. Rather than explaining Jamie's motivations and condemning his actions, they justify the behavior along with his reasoning. For example, the actor who plays Jamie was described thus "While Heughen understood why the spanking scene might've been shocking or repellent to modern audiences, he was able to rationalize Jamie's decision… 'He has to punish her, whether or not he believes in it… he's trying to play the role [of a husband] and be responsible, and she keeps bloody messing with it' he laughed" (Prudom, 2015b). Moore states that "I realized it's really about justice.. it's not a scene about domestic abuse; it's not a scene about anger. These were the mores of the time. As he says to Claire, if she was a man, she would've had her ears cropped or something worse" (Prudom, 2015b). And yet, this explanation falls on the idea that Claire's physical pain could have been worse, completely side-stepping her emotional reaction to being hurt by her own husband.

Catrina Balfe, the actress who plays Claire, took a more ambiguous position, saying "We really wanted to give it the respect that it deserved, because it's not something that can be taken lightly.. not only has Claire suffered physical wounds from this, but there's been a great psychic wound" (Prudom, 2015b). However, even she calls Jamie's willingness not to hit Claire again "meeting her halfway," implying that it is some great favor for him to refrain from beating his wife like all the other men get to. Thus choosing not to beat his wife is yet another way that the show solidifies Jamie's role as a romantic hero. All in all, neither the show nor its staff are willing to unequivocally state that Jamie is wrong for hitting his wife repeatedly with a belt. Despite this, one factor that helps redeem the show's "spanking scene" is the way that Claire remains

disturbed by the interaction and that the show acknowledges her perspective moving forward (though regrettably this is done through Jamie's confused reaction to Claire's behavior rather than from her own POV). However, even the depiction of the fallout from this incident is handled questionably.

Reconciliation.

Claire's immediate reaction of dejection and resentment is an appropriate response to the "spanking" she has received. In fact, Claire and Jamie's behavior throughout the next episode further explores how differently they see his punishment of her. Claire does not simply forgive Jamie and move on. Instead she acts coldly toward Jamie, who is seen searching for ways to reconcile. However, the way in which reconciliation between Claire and Jamie is handled is perhaps even more problematic than the flogging itself.

The scene begins with Jamie justifying his actions, citing "tradition, custom, and ritual." Claire is standoffish and looks at him only through a mirror, refusing to face him. But Jamie's monologue turns towards questioning following family and cultural tradition to address his marriage with Claire as their own to shape. He states that he now understands that if they are going to have a happy marriage they must do things "their own way," regardless of what tradition dictates. Jamie's openness to defying the established gender norms of the era to placate Claire leads her to open up slightly, and she turns towards him as he kneels and pledges fealty and loyalty to Claire on his dirk (meaning a dagger of "Holy Iron"), promising never to raise a hand to Claire ever again. Even so Claire remains cold, and Jamie asks if his apology and oath are not enough to mend their relationship, offering to live separately. Claire admits that she fears she

should want to live apart, but that she wants to stay with him. It is she who makes the first physical contact within the scene, and her choice to stay. The reconciliation leads to Jamie exposing his growing feelings for Claire and eventually to the couple having sex on their bedroom floor by the fireplace.

Throughout the scene, Claire is seated, which allows Jamie to kneel to her while showing visibly that they are now equals, he is no longer above her but neither is she above him. The audience watches as Jamie acknowledges the pain he has caused and promises to change his behavior. While this could become a pattern of behavior, turning the event into an undeniable domestic violence plot, he does keep his word and thus the audience can see his repenting as authentic.

All of this sequence gives Claire agency, acknowledges her mistrust and conflicted feelings towards her new husband, and allows for each party to seemingly come to a resolution that the matter has been dealt with and that they will move forward to re-establish the closeness seen in the previous episodes. In addition, Jamie asks her explicitly for consent, which is verbally confirmed by Claire. However, the scene takes a turn as the sex becomes violent and the language changes from caring to aggressive and possessive. The scene is clearly meant to be "make up" sex, but the fact that it is a departure from the book makes the choice to include actively violent sex particularly noteworthy.

Claire places herself on top, metaphorically in the power position, but then grips Jamie by his throat and holds his dirk up to his neck, visibly frightening him. She then goes on to threaten him with a violent death should he ever break his promise to her. While superficially a "feminist" moment in which a woman who has been hurt by her

husband takes back control over both her sexuality and her relationship with him, the scene goes on to exhibit distressing language of ownership, in which Jamie claims Claire is his "now and forever" and flips her over onto her back as he states "I mean to make you call me Master." Though he later describes that while he is her master, she is his master in turn, and the violence of the scene melts into domestic comfort, violence or threatened violence against one's partner should not be normalized and portrayed as romantic.

Not only is the inclusion of Claire threatening Jamie completely fabricated for the television show, but the way that Claire and Jamie come to their reconciliation is altered in a way that diminishes the understanding between them, focusing instead on their sexual chemistry and Claire's need to physically defend herself. In the novel, the scene in which Jamie makes his amends and swears fealty to Claire happens on horseback as they are traveling, includes no sexual component, and includes a different order of events. Changing the scene to focus heavily on the couple's sexual chemistry implies that the intimacy in their relationship comes from their sexual compatibility rather than from open and honest conversation. Thus, each deviation from the original scene alters the way that the audience perceives the foundation of Claire and Jamie's relationship moving forward.

In addition, the change of setting for this scene is a dramatic departure from the novel. In the book, this scene takes place in the middle of a long day of traveling. In contrast, the show chose to set this scene in a small room lit by a fire, a cinematic shorthand for a romantic or sexual scene. Thus, the show implies that Claire may be forgiving Jamie because of their sexual compatibility or against her more sensible judgment, in contrast to the more calculated version of the conversation that is presented

in the book. Furthermore, the way in which Claire thinks about the decision to accept Jamie's apology is given weight in both the books and the show, but the order of events in the show undercuts this acceptance by having her threaten him after he has already made his vow.

In the book, Claire threatens Jamie should he ever raise a hand to her again. However, this is being stated from horseback, not as she holds a knife to his throat as they have sex. He responds by pledging his fealty towards her and promising never to hit her again, and the matter is settled when she accepts his vow. In contrast, in the television version, Jamie makes his vow, it is implied that Claire accepts this, but then she threatens him anyway, undercutting the supposed belief she has that he will keep his word. It is now Claire's threat rather than Jamie's promise that leads to her decision to trust him again. Claire believes that she is safe moving forward only because she has made a physical threat against her husband, not because she trusts him to honor his vow never to hit her again. Thus, the basis of their continued relationship if fundamentally altered from the dynamic portrayed in the novel. While the book emphasizes the way that Claire and Jamie talk through their various challenges as a couple, the show instead centers sex as a way to solve one's problems, undermining other aspects of their relationship.

While *Outlander* has been appreciated for not giving characters "rape amnesia" and letting instances of sexual violence have real and lasting effects on their characters, many of the instances in which Claire and Jamie's relationship walks the line of sexual violence are brushed off without consequence. Claire and Jamie are the only two characters that the audience follow throughout the first season and beyond, into the rest

of the series. Thus, these characters' relationship becomes the focal point of the series, providing the most esteemed moments within the show, regardless of the other difficulties the characters may be facing. As a result, any moral quandaries that might challenge the couple's status as an ideal relationship are minimized. Thus, the emphasis on Claire and Jamie as a couple take precedence over their individual trials and concerns. Whatever happens between those characters must therefore lead to a dynamic viewing experience but never threaten their status as a couple, forcing the show and its audience to underplay or ignore all together the fallout of Claire and Jamie's conflicts. All in all, this leads the show to (re)produce traditional cultural myths, including the idea that one can only be happy if they are a part of a classical heterosexual romance, and that any action can forgiven and any obstacle can be overcome in the name of "true love."

CHAPTER 8

CRITICS' RESPONSES: DISCOURSES ABOUT *OUTLANDER*

In general, the fan and critical reaction to both the novels and television adaptation of *Outlander* have been positive. As previously mentioned, over 25 million copies of the books have been sold in print (Alter, 2014), the Rotten Tomatoes score for the show is over 90 percent (Outlander – Rotten Tomatoes, 2018), and the popularity of Outlander has been largely credited in significantly boosting Starz subscription numbers (Rice, 2016). The strongest positive reactions have generally been responses to the sexual content between Claire and her husbands (Faircloth, 2014; Gay, 2014; Ryan, 2014). From the first episode of the series, Claire takes an active and enthusiastic role in her sexual relationship with her first husband, Frank. This behavior is then reinforced when she and Jamie become romantically involved, with episode 7, titled "The Wedding," expanding the roughly 24 hours of Claire and Jamie's engagement and wedding into a full 54-minute episode. *Outlander* does not shy away from showing Claire visibly enjoying sex with either of her husbands. Both scholars and television critics have praised this, describing the show as portraying sexuality from the "female gaze" (Faircloth, 2014; Gay, 2014; Ryan, 2014; Wilkinson, 2015; Jones, 2016; Lopez, 2016; Patricia, 2016; Phillips 2016b; Rice, 2016) through naturalizing the nude form, including foreplay, and generally framing sexuality as just one aspect of an intimate relationship.

In addition, these scenes are celebrated because they are given time to incorporate character moments and emotional beats within them. While other shows are criticized for using sexuality as a way of pandering to its audience or including violence for shock

value (Faircloth, 2015; Prudom 2015a; Phillips 2016a), *Outlander* has largely avoided these critiques because such scenes they typically advance the plot. As previously discussed in the section on nude bodies and sexuality, it is common for the sexual encounters in *Outlander* to be integrated into larger scenes about the characters' relationships and important plot points, minimizing the argument that they are included only for titillation. The inclusion of these extended scenes surrounding sex has thus been lauded as portraying a realistic and intimate view of sexuality, which the analysis supported.

In addition to critique of *Outlander* compared to general television trends, *Outlander* has been frequently compared directly to *Game of Thrones*. In particular the shows' similar format as 50-minute episodes on subscription-based formats that air on Sundays allows them to be easily compared by viewers. For example, Outlander's season 1 finale, episode 16 aired the same night that *Game of Thrones* aired season 5 episode 6, which has become infamous as the episode in which Sansa Stark marries Ramsey Bolton and is subsequently raped by him on their wedding night. While *Outlander's* in-depth portrayal of Capt. Randall raping and torturing Jamie was unpleasant and viewership dropped dramatically for that episode, many television critics appreciated the representation of men as possible victims of sexual violence, the show's emphasis on Jamie's state of mind, and the inclusion of real follow-through as the audience watches Jamie and those around him work to deal with the after-affects of his trauma (Faircloth, 2015; Hill, 2015; Prudom, 2015a).

Additionally, the writers of *Outlander* crafted these scenes from what is implied by the books, lending them some narrative fidelity. Since the book is written in Claire's

first person perspective, the adaptation process required the writers to determine not just what to show, but how much to extrapolate from Claire's impressions in the book. One reason that *Outlander* is viewed as having narrative fidelity in this instance is that the writers maintained the physical evidence mentioned in the book. For example, Jamie's smashed hand, his self-inflicted, coerced branding, and the evidence that he was penetrated are all noted in the book. As such, the show simply constructed a possible version of what events led to these injuries. The same can be said for Jamie's PTSD being triggered by lavender oil, something that he had never feared before, but which Claire smells on Jamie after he is rescued. Therefore, the events that the show presents taking place in Wentworth Prison are considered true to the books because they are reasonable assumptions of the events in the books based on the physical evidence and emotional reactions presented. The one exception to this may be the extent of the psychological torture that Jamie endures such as Randall asking Jamie to picture Claire, but even this arguably aligns with Jamie's behavior and dialogue in the books. This paper argues that the resulting message about the impact of psychological trauma excuses this possible embellishment.

In contrast, the show *Game of Thrones* has extended beyond the content of the novels both in how it takes liberties in its adaptation and in the creation of new storylines for its characters now that the show's narrative has surpassed that of the books. *Game of Thrones* has faced many critiques about its portrayals of sexuality and violence over the years (Bahadur, 2017; Blair, 2012; Fulfer, 2017; Kanayama, 2017; Kim, 2016; Loen, 2015; Orr, 2015; Robinson, 2015; Saraiya, 2014). One of these critiques is that the show alters scenes from the books in ways that render what were consensual acts in the books

more aggressive or explicitly non-consensual in the show. Phillips (2016) claims that one of the main differences between the controversy surrounding *Game of Thrones'* portrayal of sexual violence and that seen in *Outlander* is that characters in *Game of Thrones* exhibit what she calls "rape amnesia." This implies that when characters in *Game of Thrones* are assaulted or raped there is no effect on their character or their relationships, and they are expected to move on as if nothing has happened (Phillips, 2016 p. 176). For example, Phillips references the rape of Daenerys by her new husband, which takes place in the pilot episode of *Game of Thrones*. Daenerys' brother has sold her to a warrior king, Khal Drogo, and at the end of the episode Drogo claims Daenerys as his wife by raping her. Phillips describes how this is a change from the narrative in the book, where Drogo explicitly seeks consent and only moves to consummate their marriage after Daenerys agrees. This is notable in that Daenerys and her husband Khal Drogo form the primary romance plot of the first book and first season of the show. Thus, changing their initial sexual encounter from a hesitant but consensual act into a clearly traumatic rape problematizes the couple's eventual romance and reinforces the trope in which female characters fall in love with their rapists.

In addition to the various critiques arguing that the show *Game of Thrones* is unfaithful in its adaptation and adds sexual violence to the story without addressing consequences for the characters involved, the show has run out of content to adapt and must now fully create the narrative arcs for each of their characters. This has further complicating critiques of the show, as any material considered objectionable is blamed solely on the creators of the television series. As mentioned above, Outlander's finale aired the same night as season 5 episode 6 of Game of Thrones, where the character

Sansa is raped by her sadistic husband Ramsey. This led critics to directly compare the two episodes. While Sansa had been constantly victimized in the earlier seasons of *Game of Thrones*, *Outlander's* Jamie was seen as an unlikely victim of sexual violence. Furthermore, Jamie's fate was pre-determined by the books whilst Sansa had this plotline added to her characters' arc by the showrunners. Thus, the perceived narrative fidelity of Jamie's torture was contrasted to the addition of rape into Sansa's storyline, an event that in the books befalls a different character who does not appear in the show. One must also note that there is a gender issue here in that it is difficult to imagine that the showrunners of *Game of Thrones* would add sexual violence to Sansa's narrative if she were a boy, since male on male sexual abuse has not yet been tackled in that series and thus it would require intense justification, whereas it is not seen as equally shocking to include sexual violence in a female character's story. Therefore, Sansa's rape is not only unnecessary to faithfully adapt the story but also lazy writing, adding rape to the story of a young female character just to give her something to do.

The comparison between the two episodes also addresses issues of how to responsibly portray sexual violence. For example Jamie's assault is graphic, which may lead audiences to consider if they find the level of violence in the episode gratuitous but the assault as a whole is given its due weight in the time that is devoted to Jamie's recovery. In contrast, Sansa's assault is less painful to watch since it is less graphic and takes up less than 6 minutes of the larger episode. However, critics found the lack of time dedicated to exploring Sansa's subsequent emotional state disheartening (Bahadur, 2017). In addition, one of the most criticized aspects of Sansa's assault was that when she is being raped, the camera pans away from her face, her trauma, and settles on her

foster brother, Theon Greyjoy/Reek (Bahadur, 2017; Leon, 2015; Robinson, 2015). Arguably this is a technique applied to avoid claims of being gratuitous in portraying Sansa's assault, but audience members felt that this choice minimized Sansa's experience in favor of Theon's. While Theon is certainly also traumatized by being forced to watch the scene taking place, this choice emphasizes a male onlooker's experience of the events over the woman who is actually being raped. This is similar to *Outlander*'s fridging of secondary characters, but was compared by critics to *Outlande*r's choice to take on Jamie's perspective of his assault when adapting the scene from the book. Each of the shows had to decide how graphically to show their respective rape scenes, and although Outlander's version is far more upsetting to watch, many critics felt that it was a more respectful way of portraying sexual violence, depicting the true horror of rape (Faircloth, 2015; Fretts, 2015; Hill, 2015; Prudom 2015a). However uncomfortable it is to watch a beloved character go through such a trauma, the rape is presented as Jamie's story. The audience sees it through his eyes, a change from the books where it is presented from Claire's perspective. Where *Game of Thrones* is accused of frivolously adding rape into Sansa's storyline and then focusing the coverage of the event on Theon's trauma rather than her own, *Outlander*'s choice to switch into Jamie's perspective during his rape scenes and included extended scenes of his recovery mitigated some of the criticism that his assault was gratuitous or graphic just to be shocking.

While shock is certainly a natural response to witnessing violence, what makes a scene integral to the plot rather than simply a moment of "shock value" is that it has deep-rooted effects for characters in subsequent scenes. Mittell (2015) argues that television shows often work in loops to give the impression of growth while maintaining

the same character dynamics for years on end (seen particularly in situation comedies), recently dramatic shows have taken on the habits of literary and theatrical narratives by increasingly focusing on stories which fundamentally alter the characters involved. *Outlander*, as an adaptation of literary work falls strictly into the second category, especially as the show expands into further seasons, eventually becoming a multi-generational tale. Many television writers and producers are loath to truly alter their characters over the years because allowing for strong character development runs the risk of fundamentally changing popular character dynamics, thus losing support from fans (Mittell, 2015). This aversion to any dramatic or long-term changes to a character make it difficult to give sexual violence the narrative weight the heavy subject matter deserves unless it is one of the main storylines within the show. However, Mittell (2015) argues that other mediums of storytelling such as novels and theater are single, self-contained stories, and thus are able to emphasize dramatic character arcs without the need to have the characters end up reliving the same dynamics they held at the beginning of the story.

Thus, as an adaptation, *Outlander* has the benefit of basing its story on characters that change dramatically from season to season, changing as they live through different experiences and age. This is particularly notable not only in the trials that Claire and Jamie face within the first installment of the series, but also how these events build on one another. In the most recent season of *Outlander*, based on the fourth book in the series, the main couple has aged well into middle age, have lost and raised various children in the 20 years separated by time travel, and take on the role of grandparents. In episode 10 of this season, Jamie learns that his and Claire's daughter, Brianna, has been raped, and the two characters shares a moment during which she asks his advice about

how to move on after being violated in that way and feeling as if she should have fought back harder. This shows that although some of Claire's assaults are not given their due weight, any attack that includes penetration is framed as explicitly traumatic and holds narrative consequence moving forward for both the survivor and those around them. The (re)production of penetration as central to defining what is not deemed traumatic is problematic, but the depictions of recovery and continuing trauma in regards to what is deemed worthy a worthy assault are well crafted.

As for adapting books into television or film, shows are also responsible for considering "how much to show" in regards to both gore and sexuality. While *Outlander* has been able to avoid criticisms of "torture porn," Moore describes a process in which the goal of the production was to create a show that was actively uncomfortable for its audience to watch (Moore, 2014b; Moore, 2015a). In regards to Jamie's assault in particular, Moore and the cast have described how the whole production team was intent on not glamorizing the physical or sexual violence that Capt. Randall enacts upon Jamie (Fretts, 2015; Moore, 2015a; Wilkinson, 2015). *Outlander* took some risks in showing full-frontal male nudity during its rape scenes and especially in showing how when Jamie becomes delirious and starts to hallucinate that he is with Claire, he is brought to orgasm while Capt. Randall is raping him. Each of these choices is uncommon in television portrayals of rape, and adds to the discomfort of the viewing experience (Lopez, 2016). However, they also act to ensure that the assaults are neither glamorized nor romanticized by the audience.

Strong (2017) outlines many of the common choices that result in a depiction of sexual violence being seen as a sexy or glamorized version of events. These traits

include the positioning of the characters, what nudity is included, and the gaze of the camera. For example it is common to frame the perpetrator behind the victim, often bending the victim over a surface. This positioning places the perpetrator as a dominant force, literally bending the victim to their will. But, this position also allows for the exposure of the presumed female victim's cleavage or breasts to the camera. Simultaneously, this choice obscures the "vulnerable" male anatomy. Strong (2017) specifically notes the infrequency of showing the perpetrator as naked, or avoiding showing their genitals by panning the camera to above the attacker's shoulder, implicitly taking on the perpetrator's viewpoint. Thus, the inclusion of full fontal nudity in Capt. Randall's attacks on both Jenny and Jamie actively contradict this frame for rape. In the case of Jenny, the audience sees Randall stroking his flaccid penis, Jenny's shocked reaction (laughter), and how this causes Randall to grow embarrassed and leave without performing the intended rape. This is mirrored when Randall manually stimulates himself as he prepares to rape Jamie. In this case, the choice to include this visual undercuts the invulnerable, masculine figure that many cinematic rapes construct as a superhuman sexual ideal. As previously mentioned, the male gaze often frames sex as a conquest, and by framing the scene so that the victim is sexualized and the perpetrator is shown to be powerful and invulnerable, the rape is rendered sexy and sexual violence as a whole is glamorized. This too is problematized in *Outlander* as the gender-queering of Capt. Randall (who Jamie literally envisions as Claire) tarnishes the construction of the rapist as a masculine ideal. Therefore, although the gruesome images that *Outlander* present are shocking and uncomfortable to watch, they help to counter the (re)presentations of rape as sexy.

Beyond the comparison to *Game of Thrones* or *Outlander*'s standing as an adaptation, the more general viewing context for the show considers television as a format and the general canon of common themes and tropes in television. As previously discussed, this includes the way violence is spread throughout a show's season to create a tense, dynamic viewing experience without being gratuitous in the consciousness of the audience. In addition, male rape is underrepresented in television as a whole and has been used as a joke more so than a plotline, especially in comedies (Custers & Van den Bulck, 2013; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Sink & Mastro, 2017). Therefore, Jamie's horrifying ordeal is a drastic departure from many audience members' expectations, even more so in contrast to the naturalization of women as victims of sexual violence. Thus, despite the questionable portrayals of sexual violence against its female characters, including a serious depiction of a straight, physically imposing man as the victim of sexual violence is noteworthy. While reactions to a show are rarely unanimous, the consensus of many critics is that Jamie's assault in particular was handled very well on *Outlander* (Faircloth, 2015; Fretts, 2015; Hill, 2015; Prudom, 2015a; Nagouse, 2018). Reactions to Claire's treatment by the show are more varied (Faircloth, 2014; Gay, 2014; Ryan, 2014; Faircloth 2015; Fretts, 2015; Hill, 2015; Prudom, 2015a; DuPlessis, 2016; Jones, 2016; Kennedy, 2016; Leach, 2016; Lopez, 2016; Phillips, 2016b; Strong, 2017; Nagouse, 2018).

CHAPTER 9

IMPLICATIONS OF ANALYSIS

Looking further at the messages that *Outlander* presents about gender and sexual violence, one must acknowledge the role that being an adaptation plays in determining how those messages are crafted. Adaptation of novels for television requires conscious choices in every step of the process given that even minor changes can alter the impact and implications presented to the audience and how they consume the adapted text. This is especially relevant for audience members who are familiar with and/or are fans of the original text, which is notable in the case of the audiences of *Outlander*. As discussed in depth in the analysis of emergent themes, the portrayal of bodies and their use in storytelling is a significant aspect of the shift from a written format medium to a visual medium, and these visual elements were found to be well utilized in the adaptation of *Outlander* to underline that the naked human body is not inherently sexual and that trauma (both physical and psychological) should not simply be written off, but instead have lasting impacts on the survivors. In the books, the audience is able to explore the Claire's various feelings about nudity and witness the extended impact of trauma through the first-person perspective of the narration. However, the television adaptation's voice-overs do not need to specifically emphasize these points since the switch to a visual medium allows for them to support these points non-verbally and concurrently with the verbal plot progression of a scene.

First, the ability to visually represent the gore and scars intrinsic to the narrative underlines the disparity between the physical trauma enacted upon a body and the emotional trauma of sexual violence (which is not visible). This difference establishes a

trade-off wherein the narration applied in the novel provides insight into a character's mindset, but the television adaptation allows for the visible reminders of violence to permeate scenes without drawing attention away from the advancing plot. For example, while the books make a point of underlining how one's own feelings about a physical scar may be tied to an emotional experience, such as only Jamie and Claire properly attributing Jamie's "bad hand" to sexual assault rather than some unfortunate accident, this message is far more prevalent in the television series because the audience can see Jamie's scars and be reminded of his trauma in any and all scenes moving forward in the series, mimicking the intermittent re-remembering of one's own trauma over time. The visual nature of the television adaptation allows for the images of Jamie's scars to stand on their own as indications of the torture that he has endured and Jamie's choice to provide exposition about them to Claire (or any other character) reflects the process of disclosure in real life.

The visual nature of the show is also used to show the emotional states of Claire and Jamie during various attacks. For example, the stylized coloration of Jamie's flashbacks and the hazy-camera technique employed during the redcoats' attack of Claire and Randall's rape of Jamie. These scenes exemplify how the team adapting *Outlander* worked to maintain a level of subjectivity when depicting highly traumatic events, using the visual techniques to reinforce the emotional tone of the book's narration. These choices, along with the emphasis on the lasting impacts of trauma (as seen by Claire and Jamie bonding over disclosing various traumas) establish that torture need not be physical to be effective. This is important because it shows that psychological trauma can be just as or more detrimental than physical trauma. In this way, the show implies that healing is

possible while contradicting the notion that victims should just "get over it." Thus, the comparison between physical and psychological scars creates room for survivors of sexual violence to heal at their own pace, and acknowledges long-lasting impacts of trauma as a natural part of the healing process rather than a moral failing.

The adaptation into a visual medium also acts to normalize the naked form. Although nudity is not wholly uncommon within television, it is often used as a cue that a character or situation is sexual in nature. By presenting nudity in mundane, humorous, and even repulsive ways, *Outlander* breaks down the implicit connection between nudity and sexuality. This is important because it establishes that within the world of *Outlander* sexuality is simply one facet of a relationship, just as sexuality is only one way of framing the nude form. Previous research has shown that self-sexualization has negative effects on self-esteem and body image (Starr & Ferguson, 2012). Therefore, media that undermines the understanding that one's own nude form as inherently sexual may be beneficial in mitigating these negative outcomes.

In addition to the importance of the adaptation process in providing visual stimuli, one must examine the implications and impact that the narrative itself expresses to its audience. Power imbalances in the *Outlander* series are established and maintained through a strict categorization of bodies within space. Women are portrayed as chattel, their position tied to that of the men who control the area in which the women's bodies exist. In contrast, the bodies of men and boys are only dominated if and when their bodies are in spaces that strip them of their assumed agency such as when Jamie is a prisoner at Wentworth or when Fergus is found in a whorehouse. The inclusion of male characters being victimized by sexual violence is commendable in representing the truth

that men and boys do face sexual violence, something often rendered invisible in entertainment media (Sink & Mastro, 2016; Strong, 2017). However, the categorization of female bodies as inherently vulnerable to violence while male bodies are not reproduces problematic hegemonic ideas about women as objects in need of protection. This message serves to normalize and perhaps even romanticize patronizing attitudes and behaviors for the modern audience.

On a positive note, the praise that *Outlander* received for its portrayal of Jamie's rape was not unfounded. The series unequivocally acknowledges that men and boys can be victims of sexual violence, and that this violence is not a joke. And, while the scenes are brutal, the overarching narrative shows that male victims are able to move forward in their lives and retain their masculinity (largely through their connections to family rather than through violence). For example, Jamie's suicidal ideation is understood but not accepted by his wife, and she works with Jamie to ensure that he knows that she does not see him as damaged after his assaults. This messaging is important as it not only provides representation for male victims of sexual violence, it also provides scripts that show these characters surviving the attacks, working through their emotional and psychological trauma, and eventually living full and happy lives with people who do not treat them with any level of blame or stigma. Furthermore, the inclusion of a scene wherein a rapist is intentionally trying to become erect contradicts the norm of the Rapist seeming all-powerful by showing this human and vulnerable moment. Both the degradation of the rapist as a masculine ideal and the focus on Jamie's recovery solidify episodes 15 and 16 of *Outlander* as revolutionary.

However, the depictions of sexual violence against the women in the series reproduce disappointing messages about gender. While Jamie's torture and rape show the horror of being a (male) victim of sexual violence, the violation of female bodies is portrayed as mundane. One of the supposedly feminist aspects of *Outlander*'s portrayals of sexual violence is that the show includes many instances where women successfully fight back against their attackers. This is important in that it portrays women as capable of being more than a passive victim. However, this phenomenon can also be read as problematic since this narrative choice minimizes the women's trauma, especially in comparison to that of Jamie. While Jamie's recovery is featured heavily in the season finale, neither Claire nor Jenny are afforded significant time to process their own assaults. In particular, after the show's added scene wherein Dougal attacks Claire and she has to fight him off with a chair, she does not exhibit any lasting effects, not even simple resentment. In fact, Claire barely acknowledges this assault despite the fact that she had to literally knock Dougal unconscious to escape his advances and she continues to be forced to live under his thumb. The choice to add this assault into an otherwise largely faithful adaptation and then not also add time for Claire to process the attack and its implications about her safety suggests that the showrunner or writers did not value Claire's fear in this scene as worthy of further screen time. Similarly, although Jenny is shown to be tense and terse when describing her assault at the hands of Capt. Randall, Jamie (and the audience) are so relieved to hear that she was not raped and made pregnant by Randall (as Jamie had been led to believe) that the trauma of Jenny's actual experience is diminished. Thus, *Outlander* implies that so long as one was not successfully raped, their response to the attack should be negligible, establishing a focus

on penetration as the distinction between what is and is not truly sexual violence. This supports rape culture by reinforcing the notion that sexual violence only "counts" if it is a brutal rape like what Jamie endured, trivializing and normalizing sexual violence as a whole.

Outlander further supports rape culture and minimizes the trauma of sexual violence by portraying "good men" as able to perpetrate or ignore gendered violence and face no consequences. For example, Dougal states that he "dusna hold with rape" as a way of indicating to Claire that he and his men are "good" people, but that same season of the show he tries to rape her. This contradiction of portraying oneself as understanding that women might fear sexual violence and then not acknowledging one's own role as a perpetrator shows the cognitive dissonance present in men who view themselves as good people, but who enact gendered violence. The complication of what Dougal means when he disavows rape is also brushed over. It is unclear whether he is denouncing the actions of perpetrating sexual assault in general, or simply arguing that in contrast to those he sees as unsavory (such as Blackjack Randall and the redcoats) he does not intend to use forced penetration as a tool to establish the dominance of his fighters. However, the fact that he draws this line does indicate that he views those who would "hold with" rape to be unsavory characters and that he identifies in opposition to that imagined group. Dougal and his men view rapists as "bad people," thus negating any of their own culpability by arguing that they cannot be rapists since they are "good men." Dougal, Claire, and Jamie are all aware that Dougal attempted to force himself on Claire, and yet none of these characters address this as a conflict moving forward. Dougal is on Jamie's side of the conflict with the British forces and thus deemed a "good

man," ensuring that he faces no consequences for his "transgression." His actions are framed as a momentary lapse in his self-control and are blamed on his level of intoxication.

While *Outlander* is set in the 1740s, this frame for examining who is a "Rapist" versus a good man that did a bad thing remains relevant to modern audiences. The historical setting of *Outlander* complicates discussions about gender and sexual violence since women were not viewed as full people and thus their violation was not viewed as equal to a transgression against another man. However, the way that Dougal and his men discuss rape and ignore subtler forms of sexual assault mirror discourses in contemporary culture. Therefore it is disappointing, especially in the time of the #MeToo movement, that *Outlander* presents these scenes while doing nothing to critique this pattern of thinking. Rather, when *Outlander* chooses to cut away from Claire's being flogged by Jamie and show their traveling companions laughing at Claire's protests, it ignores the implications of a group of "good men" hearing a woman cry out for help and making jokes rather than offering her assistance. These scenes let men off the hook, suggesting that so long as they are "good guys" (rather than a clear-cut villain) they do not have any imperative to hold themselves or their friends accountable for perpetrating sexual or gendered violence.

Furthermore, some of the assaults included in *Outlander* are not truly about the female characters at all. Instead, these events primarily act as a device to establish the brutality of Capt. Randall. While the attacks on Jenny and Fergus do provide the impetus for some plot points, the focus of these scenes is not in the portrayals of how the assaults affect Jenny or Fergus themselves, but how they affect the dynamic between Jamie and

Capt. Randall. Thus, these assaults can be interpreted as a "fridging" of these characters, traumatizing secondary characters (predominantly women) for the sake of men's character arcs. Thus, although Jenny's story does contradict Jamie's version of events, the narrative effect remains the same and the attacks on both Jenny and Fergus serve Jamie's story more than their own. This trope inherently reinforces the idea that women and children are not fully formed people; instead their value lies only in their connection to the heroic male figure. Strong (2017) argues that one of the strengths of a different STARZ show, *Spartacus,* is the commitment to having all the survivors of sexual violence (male and female) punish their own perpetrators rather than being saved by some outside figure or allowing the perpetrator to escape consequences. *Outlander* fails to live up to this same standard, and in doing so reproduces the image of the male heroic avenging the harm done to those around him, framing women and children as nothing more than pawns in a larger conflict between two men. Thus, Outlander reinforces notions that women and children are powerless to take their own revenge and that men are the sole arbiters of justice.

Returning to the notion that only monsters are rapists, the show's construction of Capt. Randall as a larger-than-life villain also (re)produces problematic conflations of queerness with villainy as well as the notion that holding the perpetrator of sexual violence accountable for their actions is selfish and cruel. Capt. Randall's obsession with dominance and his ambiguous sexuality have been seen as conflating homosexuality with sadism, and pedophilia (Gabaldon, 1999/2015; Frankel, 2016b; Lopez, 2016). Although that debate is not the focus of this thesis, the way that *Outlander* bolsters this character's importance ensures that these discussions are more relevant in the show that they are in

regards to the novels. By featuring Randall as the main antagonist of the show (until his death in the second season) rather than as a peripheral figure who unexpectedly returns to threaten the main couple, the television adaptation gives the character increased status within the narrative arc. This then also makes the discourses around the root of Randall's villainy more prevalent. Notably, the increased focus on this character renders the possible conflation of his queered masculinity and sadistic or pedophilic tendencies more prominent. The focus on Randall's obsession with Jamie is heightened to explain the ongoing tension between the two characters, and this paints Randall as actively pursuing Jamie rather than as an opportunistic perpetrator. Furthered by the lack of positive portrayals of queer characters within the *Outlander* series (until the introduction of Lord John Gray in the third book and season respectively), the show falls into the common trope of queer-coded villains, reinforcing the connection between homosexuality and cruelty.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Blackjack Randall's redemption arc, although primarily included to absolve Claire's first husband (Frank Randall) of his ancestor's sins, plays into the notion that victims of sexual assault should not "ruin someone's life" by holding the fact that they are a rapist against them. The fact that Capt. Randall seemed to care for his brother, Alexander, and the one selfless action he takes when he marries Mary Hawkins so that his Alexander's child will be taken care of after his death do not negate any of his previous actions. The audience is led to accept a lack of justice against Blackjack Randall for the benefit of his family and legacy. Thus, although drawn from the source material, the show's portrayals of Capt. Randall further problematize that character and discourses around who is likely to be a perpetrator of sexual violence,

promoting the association between queerness and villainy and minimizing the importance of attaining justice for survivors of sexual violence.

As seen in the attempted redemption of Blackjack Randall, *Outlander* largely shies away from portraying the consequences of questionable consent. This notably extends to brushing over the conflicts that arise in the telling of Claire and Jamie's romance as above reproach. Critics lauded the wedding episode for its use of cinematic techniques, especially the way in which the episode was shot, which is said to have promoted the female gaze, showing sex as just one facet of an intimate relationship. Yet, while the positive aspects of this episode are notable, they do not counter the problematic aspects of the episode. By presenting Claire as sober and proactive throughout the scenes, the show minimizes Claire's account of being extremely intoxicated and creates contradictory messaging between the action of events (where Claire is portrayed as a fairly sober active party) and Claire's voice over (which describes her as blackout drunk and thus unable to give consent). The inconsistency between the way that Claire describes her mental state and how she is seen on screen leaves Claire's ability to give consent ambiguous, which allows room for the formation of dangerous narratives such as that people who are blackout drunk are still aware enough to consent to sex, or that women will claim to have been drunk to avoid taking responsibility for their sexual behavior.

Beyond the wedding episode, the way that the show and its production team handled Jamie's flogging of Claire and their reconciliation further show an unwillingness to acknowledge any of the couple's behavior as problematic. The discourse surrounding the spanking scene is just one example of this, since arguing that the scene is about

"justice" rather than domestic violence is clearly intended to ensure that Jamie is viewed with sympathy rather than being condemned for committing violence against his wife. However, this choice normalizes the idea that violence against one's partner is acceptable or even necessary. In addition, the choice to have Claire threaten violence against Jamie in retribution promotes further violence as a viable solution to marital conflict. While conflict is a natural part of any relationship, the adaptation simultaneously heightens the conflict within these scenes and minimizes the narrative follow-through. The writers choosing to add in a scene where Claire holds a knife to Jamie's throat and then never again addressing that event exemplifies this. The scene was added to heighten the tension between the couple, but the show does not then address this behavior as having any impact on the characters or the plot moving forward. Since Claire's action has no narrative weight, the show implies that this behavior has no consequences. Instead of depicting the complexity of a true relationship, the show skips ahead to minimize the couple's time in conflict. In doing so, Outlander misses out on the opportunity to address the imperfections of its main characters and instead reproduces the idea that "true love" excuses any problematic behavior. As a whole, the show takes on a binary approach to morality, framing its protagonists as above reproach and (re)producing a false dichotomy between violence done by "real villains" and that by "nice guys." The show then condemns or ignores the same problematic behaviors based on who enacts them.

Taking on this superficially binary view or morality reveals the central flaw in Outlander's portrayals of gender and sexual violence. The show neglects to address the complexities and ambiguity that are inherent in interpersonal relations, painting the characters' actions as cruel or acceptable based on their role within the plot (protagonist,

antagonist, or "filler" character). Overall, *Outlander*'s portrayals of sexual violence can often be read as feminist (e.g. the women in the show all actively fight off their attackers) or as supportive of rape culture and problematic views of gender (e.g. women are natural victims of sexual violence and thus not see failed attempts to assault them as highly traumatic), and it is this ambiguity that makes the show an important cite to explore the choices made during the adaptation process as well as how these changes were perceived by critics.

Applying the label "feminist" to a piece of media is complicated by audience member's ability to read the same text in many different ways as well as by the lack of a singular definition of feminism. However, the adaptation of *Outlander* had the opportunity to address the complexities of consent with Claire and Jamie as well as exploring how anticipating and fighting off multiple instances of sexual assault can be traumatic. Instead, the show glosses over these issues, providing in-depth explorations of trauma only to Jamie in regards to not only his own rape, but also the various assaults of those around him. In this way, the supposedly "feminist" show fails in its portrayals of the most common forms of sexual violence, reproducing damaging messages about what "counts" as sexual assault and how women should "get over" the violence enacted upon them.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Outlander's presentations of gender and sexuality overlap in many ways, and the varied possible readings of the show do send some contradictory messages. For example, critics spoke positively about both the wedding episode, as an example of framing sexuality from a "female gaze" and portraying Claire as having sexual desire and agency (Faircloth, 2014; Gay, 2014; Ryan, 2014), and Jamie's rape, as a depiction of the horror of sexual violence (Faircloth, 2015; Hill, 2015; Prudom, 2015a). Each of these readings reflects the preferred reading of the show, but not the only possible reading. As the analysis has shown, *Outlander*'s depictions of gender and sexual violence often reinforce negative messages about female victims of sexual violence. This inconsistency between the preferred reading of a text and the possible critical readings underlines the importance of continuing to perform critical analysis of popular texts. While this paper established a focus primarily on the first season of *Outlander*, it could be beneficial to conduct research on how the themes and messages established in this analysis are reinforced or subverted in future seasons. For example, both the introduction of Lord John Gray (the series primary homosexual character), and the coming of age of the next generation of characters are rife with opportunities to explore how sexual orientation, race, religion, and class all complicate gender relations, sexuality, and sexual violence within the world that *Outlander* creates.

In addition, the increasing popularity of book to television adaptations, makes this a topic to explore further. While direct comparison of source material and adapted works can be an interesting cite for textual analysis, Simone Murray, in her 2011 book, *The*

Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation, claims that it would be beneficial to move away from purely compare-and-contrast analysis in favor of exploring adaptation as a business decision. For example, she argues that more research must be done on why certain stories are adapted and others are not as well as what makes some adaptations more successful than others. Although those topics are not explored within this paper, considering the multiple audiences of *Outlander*, including fans of the books, new viewers, and television critics, allows for discussion of the show as a piece of mass media and an acknowledgement that different audiences will understand the same piece of media differently. Therefore, employing a textual analysis while also considering the context of the media's adaptation works to investigate not only what messages are being sent, but how they are perceived, and the implications of these (re)productions in entertainment media across various mediums.

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APPENDIX A

SYNOPSIS OF OUTLANDER

The series opens as protagonist Claire and her husband, Frank Randall, travel to Scotland for a second honeymoon. They hope to become reacquainted after their separation during the Second World War during which Claire acted as a military nurse and Frank as a spymaster. The British couple travel the Scottish Highlands exploring Frank's genealogy with the help of a local priest and learn about one of Frank's distant relatives, Captain Jonathan Randall, who was one of the British occupiers in the time leading up to Scotland's Jacobite uprising at the Battle of Culloden. Claire expresses interest in some medicinal herbs she saw near Craigh na Dun, a stone circle when she and Frank were eavesdropping on a Wiccan ritual, and goes to investigate. When she touches the large stone in the middle of the circle, she is sucked through the stones into the 1740s.

Claire does not immediately understand what has happened, and ends up in the middle of a skirmish between British redcoats and Scottish Highlanders. She is attacked by Capt. Randall who she initially mistakes for Frank, and is eventually saved by the Scotsmen, who take her with them to a shack where she set the dislocated shoulder of a young Scottish man and earns the respect of the group. They decide to take her with them as they return to Castle Leoch, home to the Clan MacKenzie under Laird (Lord) Colum. While the Scots remain weary of Claire, wondering if she might be a British spy, she attempts to regain her bearings and plan an escape back to the circle of stones in the hopes that she can return to her own time. As time passes, Claire becomes integrated into life at Castle Leoch acting as a healer, and becomes somewhat close with a man who she helped heal, Jamie Fraser. Claire and Jamie bond over their shared negative experiences with Capt. Randall who Jamie recounts visiting his home years ago, raping his sister, and publically flogged Jamie almost to death.

When travelling on the road to collect taxes, Claire and Jamie are surprised to discover that Dougal Mackenzie, the Laird Colmn's brother, has been raising money to fund the Jacobites' political uprising that she knows historically will fail and lead to the eradication of the Highlander lifestyle. Meanwhile, Capt. Randall continues to be a menace, and after finding Claire and Dougal in the garrison with his troops, he exposes his true sadism to Claire by beating her, forcing a young redcoat to kick her too, and proudly recounting his when he flogged a 14-year-old Jamie near to death. This leads to an arranged marriage between Claire and Jamie with the intention that as the wife of a Scotsman she will no longer legally be English, and thus will be out of the political reach of Capt. Randall in the future.

After Claire and Jamie marry, Claire begins to settle into her life in the highlands. It is not until they are attacked on the road and Claire is nearly raped by a group of redcoats and has to kill a man in self-defense, that she makes another attempt to return to the 1940s. As she flees towards the stone circle she is captured by redcoats and is brought to Capt. Randall once again. Jamie and his men come and save Claire, but Jamie beats her for putting them in danger by "forcing" them to go rescue her. Initially, this leads to tension between Claire and Jamie, but Jamie apologizes, they make up, and the matter is settled, never to be mentioned again.

Later, Claire is with her friends, Geillis Duncan, a fellow healer who sells poisons and fake love potions, when Geillis is accused of witchcraft. Since Claire is also a healer and has been found with the accused, she too is captured and faces a witch trial. Jamie is able to rescue Claire, but asks if she truly is a witch, leading Claire to reveal the truth of her time-traveling adventure. Jamie believes her, but is horrified to realize that he

punished her for attempting to return home to her time and her first husband, Frank. He then brings Claire to the stone circle to allow her to return to her home, but Claire chooses to stay in the 1740s with Jamie.

Once Claire has chosen to stay in the 1740s, she and Jamie work to establish their new life as a married couple. Jamie takes Claire to the estate where he grew up, Lallybroch, and Claire meets Jamie's sister Jenny and her husband Ian. It is revealed that, in contrast to Jamie's previous account to Claire, when Capt. Randall attempted to rape Jenny years ago, she laughed at him leading him to knock her out and leave her untouched. Eventually, a disgruntled villager informs the redcoats that Jamie is in Lallybroch, and since there is a standing warrant for his arrest he is taken to be hung. Claire and Jenny hear of this and set out to find Jamie, but when Jamie's godfather, Murtagh, arrives to help Claire in her search, Jenny returns home to care for her newborn daughter. Claire and Murtagh search for word of Jamie, and eventually they find that he is being held in Wentworth Prison. Claire breaks into the prison to rescue him, but finds that he is being held and tortured by Capt. Jack Randall. Jamie makes a deal with Randall for Claire to be allowed to go free, promising to "give himself over" to Randall in exchange for Claire's safety. Claire orchestrates a distraction and returns with a small group of men, saving Jamie the next morning. However, by this time Jamie is deeply traumatized and suicidal. Claire brings him to a monastery to heal him and helps him work through his trauma. She and Jamie then board a boat to France and Claire reveals that she is pregnant.

Later on, in the second installment of the series, Capt. Randall is also in France, and assaults Claire and Jamie's adoptive son, Fergus. While this event does take place

during the first book or season of the show, it is included in the scope of this paper because it is significant to note this attack when attempting to meaningfully explore the dynamic between Jamie and Capt. Randall and series' inclusion of men and boys as victims of sexual violence.