

Final Written Report

Professional Development Grant

“The Silent Woman: Dramatizing Unreported Rape on *Rush*”
Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association
2018 National Conference
Indianapolis, IN

March 2018

Dr. Emily Hoffman

This final report addresses the results of a professional research project funded by an ATU Professional Development Grant. This report follows the instructions provided in the Guidelines for Professional Development Grants.

A. Title Page (see above)

B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

Abstract of conference paper presented: “The Silent Woman: Dramatizing Unreported Rape on *Rush*,” by Emily Hoffman, Associate Professor of English

The third seasons of two British police procedurals, BBC’s *Shetland* and ITV’s *Broadchurch*, each feature rape narratives. On *Broadchurch*, the season focuses on the rape of Trish Winterman and its impact on the investigative duo of Alec Hardy and Ellie Miller. On *Shetland*, the rape of D.S. Alison MacIntosh becomes entangled with the larger, ongoing crime narrative. Both shows’ rape plots are unique because they allow male detectives the opportunity to consider how men who rape stigmatize those who do not as well as wonder whether all men, including themselves, are capable of rape. However, these shows also follow a standard plot that features the victim reporting her rape so that she can then begin the process of physical and psychological healing through consultation with physicians and counselors in way that can provide reassurance and narrative closure to viewers. When they deal with rape, procedurals like these foreground its reporting for obvious reasons: no reporting equals no investigating. This paper will contrast the portrayal of rape on these two shows and their two sensitive, emotional male leads with the radical depiction of unreported rape on the Australian procedural *Rush*. In

Rush's final season, Sergeant Shannon Henry is raped while off duty. Rather than present the viewer the stereotypical and simplistic arc of reporting and recovering, Sgt. Henry never tells anyone about her rape and is not "better" by the series finale. While offering an incisive depiction of how not reporting rape can corrode a woman's professional and personal lives, it exposes the still intensely masculine environment of the police station, one that does not accommodate vulnerability. It boldly exposes a Catch-22: Henry has embraced the "one of the guys" persona needed to be accepted by her squad but finds herself effectively silenced when she becomes a victim of violence.

C. Brief Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I attended the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association national conference at the JW Marriott in Indianapolis, IN. I presented my paper at 4:15 PM on March 28, 2018. I drove to Indianapolis from Russellville on March 28, spending one night in Mt. Vernon, IL before continuing on to Indianapolis the next morning. I returned to Russellville on March 30, 2018.

D. Summary of Experiences

I teach courses in television studies and, at the time this proposal was approved, I was teaching a class on cops and crime drama. This paper, through its exploration of why *Rush* is unique among cop shows in its handling of a fairly clichéd story—female officer becomes victim of violent crime—allowed me to carefully develop my pedagogical approach to *Rush* in advance of introducing my students to this series and this storyline in particular. Although this series was not discussed in the class's textbook, it allowed me to extend its discussion of how television

portrays female officers and how male officers react in these plotlines. Further, preparation of this paper was an opportunity to carefully analyze the extreme eccentricities of *Rush*'s narrative style, ones that to my knowledge have no equivalent in a U.S. cop show. This analysis has the potential to become part of future television studies classes and even in future creative writing classes. Creative writing classes always grapple with narrative structure, and I am often seeking opportunities to incorporate visual texts into those courses. The presentation of my paper was a success. I received positive feedback from audience members. Although they were not familiar with the show, their interest was piqued by my presentation. Some suggested that I consider expanding my exploration of the topic to include other Australian TV dramas that deal with similar topics and character types, namely *Top of the Lake*

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

I believe that the timeliness of the presentation's subject matter offers an opportunity for potential publication should I develop this topic further, especially since the major studies of rape on television are growing older and do not reflect the deluge of programming that has become available—both domestically and internationally—thanks to streaming technology. Ideally, I would like to split the presentation into two separate projects—one dealing primarily with Sergeant Henry's storyline and one dealing with the highly unique narrative strategies *Rush* employs and how those situate the series in the post-*Wire* landscape of police dramas. Although I had also originally intended to discuss similarly unusual rape narratives on ITV's *Broadchurch* and BBC's *Shetland*, time constraints did not allow me to develop that aspect as fully for the presentation as I had hoped. I would like to return to it in any future extension of this conference paper.