

“We’ve Always Been above the Law, Adele”: *Dollhouse* and Contemporary Televised Rape Narratives

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With its complex and often disturbing exploration of themes of rape and human trafficking, *Dollhouse* fits within a relatively recent pattern in television of exploring women’s rape as a transformative event in their lives. In particular, series like *Dexter*, *Sons of Anarchy* and *Veronica Mars* share with *Dollhouse* an exploration of rape as an event that fundamentally alters a women’s relationship to the state and its laws. The prevalence of such narratives in contemporary television series reflects on and influences our understanding of rape and the law; in particular, these tales reflect a growing consciousness that our legal system is unable to address rape. Similarly, such common narratives influence our beliefs in the ineffectiveness of the legal system as they depict alternative, “outlaw” reactions to the crime as both more effective and more empowering.

In this paper, we will focus primarily on Sierra’s experiences of rape and disempowerment as they connect with the experiences of contemporaneous female characters (e.g. Lumen (*Dexter*), Gemma (*Sons of Anarchy*), Veronica Mars (*Veronica Mars*)) in order to explore how *Dollhouse* relates to and enriches the transformative rape narrative we see emerging across many television series.