



FROM ZERO TO MY OWN HERO

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From Zero to My Own Hero: An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of the Woman
Superhero's Challenge to Humanity in *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones*

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Abstract

The image of women in the superhero genre has for many years been dominated by how it is produced as a mirror to the masculine. However, this image is now beginning to be disrupted by feminist attempts at diversifying representations. This paper aims to examine *Watchmen* and the first season of *Jessica Jones* as cultural representations and new voices of women which materialise the category as a transgressive, challenging force to assumedly fixed structures of gender, race and sexuality. As Jessica Jones speaks from a White feminist perspective, and Watchmen from a Black feminist perspective, we explore how the texts can be combined to expand the category of women. The texts show the discourses, regimes of truth, and forms of violence which seek to regulate women, and in exposing these tools of domination, the texts disrupt the fixed categories and definitions of women and question the limits of performativity. In spite of women being shown to be materialised beyond the phallogocentric economy of signification, the two series still limit gender to a biological determinism that assumes a normativity of social structures and relations of power. However, because the texts are voices of women, they are the first step of many towards a multitude of untold, endless possibilities of gender and racial representation.

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Introduction

Since *Wonder Woman* came out in 2017, it has led to a seeming revolution within the superhero genre, culminating with 2020 being hailed as ‘the year of the woman superhero’ in American popular culture (Bisset). And the men are already not so internally screaming at the prospect. The premiere of *Captain Marvel* (2019) saw an attempt at sabotage by internet trolls (Davis), *Birds of Prey* (2020) was criticised with misogynistic intent before it even hit the theatres (Leishman), and the actress playing Wonder Woman was deemed too flat-chested to don the armour (Child). However, while the intrusion into male spaces might bring cold sweat to the foreheads of many a male critic, the feminist cheer does not go unheard. For example, Davis claims that “[unlike] female-centered titles from past decades [...] there isn’t the risk of this year’s films getting lost in the marketplace—they *are* the marketplace for audiences seeking superheroes [...]”, giving the impression that feminine voices are finally heard and catered to, and in extension, that any representation is good representation.

However, when looking at the details and structuring of representation, the image of women becomes oversimplified, dependent on racial and ethnic tokenism, not to mention lacking almost entirely in diverse representations of sexual orientations and disabilities (Davis; Bisset; Ramos). Furthermore, creators of superhero TV series have heavily criticised the studios for their conditions when it comes to representations of women and girls, as Paul Dini has stated on the subject: “[That’s] the thing that got us cancelled on *Tower Prep*, honest-to-God was [...] ‘we need boys, but we need girls right there, right one step behind the boys’—this is the network talking—‘one step behind the boys, not as smart as the boys, not as interesting as boys, but right there’” (Dini qtd. in Pantozzi). Therefore, the manner in which these texts are meant to construct women is not based on an interest in materialising women as equal to men, but perpetuating a traditional gender role in which women are dependent on

and lesser than men. So as long as the studios prioritise advertisement strategies, consumption, and capitalist profit, it seems that all the salty men need not worry (Pantozzi).

Nevertheless, exactly because of all these differing perspectives and claims of either praise or criticism, the subject of women superheroes becomes worthy of further investigation because neither of these perspectives speak about these representations as complex productions. As Richard Dyer claims: “how anything is represented is the means by which we think and feel about that thing, by which we apprehend it. The study of representation is more limited than the study of reality and yet it is also the study of one of the prime means by which we have any knowledge of reality” (Dyer xxxiii). Thus, even the image of women within the superhero genre must be an example of the ontology of gender, which speaks of women in complex voices of regulation, limitation, and even empowerment.

Therefore, this paper will examine *Watchmen* (Lindelof) and the first season of *Jessica Jones* (M. Rosenberg) as cultural representations of how the superhero genre has begun to speak in the voices of women. From an intersectional perspective, we will focus on how gender and race are materialised, performed, positioned, and ultimately how they challenge, transgress, and disrupt seemingly fixed power structures and deterministic truths that are dependent on the struggle for humanity.

To do this, we will employ intersectional feminism, primarily using Judith Butler’s perspectives on sex, gender, and the body, and Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks’ Black feminism. By combining Collins’, hooks’, and Richard Dyer’s exposure of naturalised White ‘truths’, we attempt to reconcile the two branches of feminism within a third wave perspective for the sake of remaining critical of patriarchal regimes of truth, rather than the demonisation of specific groups or categories. We have chosen to employ these theories in combination with one another because, not only do they deconstruct and map the cultural identifications that we take for granted, but they question the very limits of the structures the identifications are placed within, and expose those dichotomous structures as constructed. Thus, we will utilise their terms to deconstruct the relations of power expressed through the

texts which will aid us in exposing those regimes of truth and disrupt otherness, as well as expanding the category of women.

Our first analysis, *Watchmen*, is divided into three chapters. The first chapter will focus on the main character, Angela Abar, and her intersections of gender and race. We will explore her relationship to her family and her job as a police officer, and how she negotiates her gender from her specific position. Furthermore, we will explore how the silencing of Black history is broken when she is reunited with her Black community.

In the second chapter, we explore how class, gender, race, and nationalism intersect in an American context, where ‘race’ specifically refers to Whiteness. This chapter is further separated into three sections: firstly, the lower class intersection which focuses on analysing police brutality and White terrorism, both of which show an entitlement to violence which sprouts from a perceived threat against Whiteness in an intersection which already feels their survival is threatened. Secondly, the middle class intersection, which explores two White ‘ally’ character, Laurie Blake and Wade Tillman, whose perspectives are limited by their Whiteness and individualism. Thirdly, the upper class intersection, as represented by the Tulsa police chief, Judd Crawford, and Oklahoma senator, Joe Keene, whose privileges motivate their striving for a supremacy that will leave them the only ones to speak. The third chapter of our *Watchmen* analysis will examine the manner in which White, capitalist, and patriarchal ambition is exposed as a wish to play God, and what happens when one attempts to achieve this position. The first section explores how humanity will always seek to return to a human position, even when practical godhood has been obtained. The section explores how the position of an Other is equally in danger of silencing the voices that are not her own. And the last section explores how the privileged position remains so blind to any perspective other than their own, that they become detached from objective reality.

In the second analysis, *Jessica Jones*, we take a point of departure in the privileged position that we finished our *Watchmen* analysis with: the God position. The first chapter therefore explores Kilgrave, the metaphorical representation of the God position and White patriarchy within the narrative, with focus on how he creates a binary gender relation through hegemonic discourse. The second chapter explores Jessica’s trauma and liberation from it. In the first section, we explore how her performativity is affected by Kilgrave’s gendered abuse

and how she renegotiates her gender in the aftermath. In the second section, we explore the intersection of gender and race, how she reclaims her sexuality in her interactions with Luke Cage, and thereby further exposes the series' handling of race through a colourblind lens. In the third chapter, we explore how patriarchal violence is not limited to masculine performativity, but can be executed by both men and women. With a focus on Jessica's childhood friend and adoptive sister, Trish, we further elaborate on how experiences of patriarchal violence are not isolated acts with a beginning and end, but have effects on relationships, how women may regress through an attempt at reclaiming control within a patriarchal truth regime, as well as how they may transgress from it. In the last chapter of the *Jessica Jones* analysis, we explore how feminine solidarity becomes the key to the materialisation of women's bodies outside a masculine self-sufficiency. We explore how spaces and performativities traditionally demonised as 'feminine' might be weaponised in order to break with a dichotomous value system, as well as how White patriarchy will see others fighting among themselves to avoid a delegitimising confrontation, which might unveil the constructedness of its hegemony.

Lastly, we have separated our discussion into two chapters. The first chapter covers a reflection on and comparison of the two analyses, exploring how they can be employed together rather than against each other. Furthermore, we explore how the two series transgress traditional feminine representation in the superhero genre. In the second chapter, we discuss in depth the two series' tendency to fall back on limiting binaries, and how the vigilante is the perfect trickster to question the structure itself.

Theory

Meta considerations

In this chapter, we build a foundation for our perspective and method. Given our objects of analysis, we are especially concerned with how to speak about the category of women. More specifically, we are concerned with whether or not we are even allowed to speak for and about people who are different from us, people who are considered Other in the greater power

structure, and further, what issues might arise when speaking for and about people who are seemingly like ourselves. According to bell hooks, Black American feminist, author, professor, and social activist, people within the dominant group should never speak about and on behalf of groups usually categorised as Other:

I am waiting for them to stop talking about the ‘Other’, to stop even describing how important it is to be able to talk about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak . . . Often this speech about the ‘Other’ annihilates, erases: ‘no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself [...] And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now the center of my talk’ (hooks qtd. in Wilkinson and Kitzinger 11).

Thus, hooks posits two main reasons for only speaking for yourself. Firstly, all speaking for and about the Other is taking up space that does not belong to the speaker, which results in silencing and colonisation of the Other, “[...] as colonialism has not involved simply the use of physical force and military might; it has also involved the construction of representations or discourses of the oppressed which serve to justify and legitimate the oppressor” (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 5). This view leaves absolutely no room for anybody to talk about anybody but themselves, otherwise it is considered oppression, even when done with good intentions. Secondly, Otherness is constructed by a dominant group to function as a mirror in order to present themselves as ‘naturally’ more powerful, perfect, and valid than those who are different, however arbitrary and constructed those ‘naturalised’ differences are (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 8-10).

However, ‘speaking only for yourself’ can be equally damaging, as this strategy often leads to an overrepresentation of a White, middle-class perspective because these positions are already privileged and dominant in the field of feminist academia, and therefore this ‘solution’ can further silence and erase the Other (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 12). For example, it can be used as an excuse for intentional exclusionary practices which help to maintain rather than disrupt social hierarchies and conceal accountability for the erasure (12, 19-20).

Another issue is placing the boundaries of speaking and the act of homogenisation: “can we (the authors) speak on behalf of *all* women, or only all white women, all white middle-class women, all white middle-class childless lesbian women, all white middle-class childless lesbian British women?” (12). In our case, though we tick off most boxes within the dominant group, for example, White, Western, and cisgender, we are also childless, Danish, poor, women, and students. If we could not study and listen to people who live different lives than us, with different experiences and opinions, this would not only limit our studies, it would limit us as people, and in this case, we would be unable to act as allies and fight for a more equal world, but, through any potential political passivity and willful ignorance, only maintain our own limited perspectives. This, in turn, would be damaging for many groups and only serve to uphold binaries, dominant power structures, and oppression. In short, if we acknowledge that we are a part of the problem, we must also be a part of the solution.

However, difference and Othering are not necessarily the same, as difference is not always permeated with social significance and relations of power, but Othering always is (Carabine 165-66). Thus, not acknowledging differences sometimes equals not acknowledging cultural categories. Furthermore, according to Audre Lorde, African American writer, feminist, and civil rights activist, difference can be a strength and any fear towards it is a patriarchal ploy to keep us divided (Griffin 101).

Thus, this ‘damned if we do, damned if we don’t’ situation is difficult to solve; we want to acknowledge our privileges and be respectful, listen, and not overstep any boundaries, but it is also possible to justify incorporating people often constructed as Other into our studies, though we do not insist that our solution is right or acceptable for all. One possible answer is “working the hyphen” which acts to interrupt Othering:

“Self and Other are knottily entangled [...] When we opt, as has been the tradition, simply to write *about* those who have been Othered, we deny the hyphen . . . When we opt, instead, to engage in social struggles *with* those who have been exploited and subjugated, we work the hyphen, revealing far more about ourselves, and far more about the structures of Othering . . . By *working the hyphen*, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the

contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are multiple in all those relations” (Fine qtd. in Wilkinson and Kitzinger 16).

Thus, we must bring ourselves into the study, not as an act of empathy, which further constructs the Other as an object of pity and salvation, but to depart from an understanding that ‘we’ are also constructed, and only by examining ourselves can we disrupt the us/them dichotomy and come together (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 2-3).

A text is a text is a text section

We follow the perspective of the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, as we are interested in the value of popular culture, found in the context of texts by “examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power” (Bennett qtd. in Walton 19). In other words, because cultural productions always comment in some way on the cultural context in which they are produced.

Donna Haraway, White American professor of the History of Consciousness and Feminist studies, calls a text an agent, something alive rather than passive and limited: “[actors] come in many and wonderful forms (591). Accounts of a ‘real’ world do not, then, depend on a logic of ‘discovery’ but on a power-charged social relation of ‘conversation.’ The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favour of a master decoder” (Haraway 593). This is not to deny that the text has been produced with intention and has an encoded message. However, because consumers of cultural productions are no longer viewed as passive receivers, what the text says and how it speaks to us is forever changing through context and we therefore reject the objective of the ‘treasure hunt’ (Haraway 593).

Watchmen and *Jessica Jones* are obviously cultural productions and not autobiographical representations, but the question whether or not authors are allowed to represent the Other still stands, especially when taking into account that *Watchmen*’s showrunner, Damon Lindelof, is White, and four out of twelve writers are White men - the rest being Black and/or women (Braxton). However, while we cannot know the precautions and the processes they have used, we assume that they have worked with the solutions of

“listening” and “dialogue”, using the voices of real people for “[...] comment, feedback and evaluation [...]”, as well as the interplay between researcher and researched to create a dialogue based on equality (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 16, 17,18). For example, Regina King, who portrays the character of Angela Abar/ Sister Night in *Watchmen*, has stated that Lindelof made sure to integrate aspects of herself into her character (Kay-B).

Thus, we treat the texts as speaking subjects that are speaking to everyone, not just specific cultural categories, though they might have different things to say to different people, and Black and White audiences might receive them differently.

Situated knowledges

Donna Haraway’s article “The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (1988) problematises analysing and making claims, as it is often done with a tone of ‘truth’ that disguises the very mechanisms of naturalisation, whether it is done deliberately or with ignorant ‘good’ intentions. Haraway states that no vision is free of subjectivity, nor of notions of power and powerlessness. She deconstructs claims of truth and objectivity and seeks to find a middle-ground between two polarised positions – radical social constructivism and “feminist empiricism” - within feminist interference into the question of objectivity in order to form a new ideal for feminist positions in science (Haraway 577, 579).

According to her, objectivity is problematic because it prefers the unmarked privileged position of man and White which falsely refers to a universality of knowledge and infinite vision – the ‘god trick’ - that leads to hierarchies of power (Haraway 580, 581, 582). She states:

I would like to insist on the embodied nature of all vision and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere. This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the un-marked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation (Haraway 581).

In other words, vision is coloured by sensory systems, or more tangibly, life experiences, gender, race, class, and so on that no one can simply rid themselves of, and therefore, no perspective can claim pure objectivity. So, when analysing and interpreting the world, it is done from a position of ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway 581):

“So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision [...] Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway 582-83).

However, danger also lies in claiming to see from the perspective of the unprivileged, not only because that brings us back to notions of speaking for and on behalf of, thus romanticising and appropriating the vision of the Other, but because this perspective is not exempt from falling victim to the god-trick either and must therefore also be treated with a critical eye (Haraway 583-84). Thus, This answerability should not be confused with disclaimers of ignorance that releases one from responsibility, but is rather an awareness of being critical of one’s findings and acknowledging the specific location of one’s knowledge.

The White Elephant in the Room

In this section, in order to ‘work the hyphen’, we will theorise how Whiteness becomes a raced category as a method to disrupt Othering.

According to Richard Dyer, a White British Academic, “[racial] imagery is central to the organisation of the modern world”, not only how we judge people’s worth face to face, but how institutions and laws operate (1). It is so embedded in both micro and macro levels, in our “cultural non-consciousness that we all inhabit” that it is always a factor, even when it is supposedly not (Dyer 7). However, Whiteness is not considered a race which causes both great privileges and severe marginalisation. Racial imagery and its social consequences only apply to non-White people while Whiteness is seldomly in White people’s consciousness; it is

invisible and not used to describe White subjects, even when the focus is race (Dyer 1, 2). This invisibility is a strategy that serves to give White people the power to speak for all of humanity: “[there] is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that - they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race” (Dyer 2). Thus, Whiteness is such a ‘non-issue’ that it acts as a neutral base from which all of humanity is measured against and judged, making the commonality of humanity White, and White people the only ones who can speak for and represent everybody, as they can be “[...] variously gendered, classed, sexualised and abled”, but never raced (Dyer 3).

Furthermore, Dyer argues that it is paramount that Whiteness becomes raced if we are to disrupt Otherness: “[the] point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges, and sufferings in its train, dislodge them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world” (2). If Whiteness becomes a race, becomes marked, White people will be pulled from their pedestal and no longer be privy to the privileges belonging to that pedestal; grammatically, they will become equal to other raced groups. Furthermore, they will be reduced to only speaking for themselves, and learn to see themselves as limited, particular, and strange, as this is the only way to disrupt white hegemony and create a world of hybridity and multiplicity (Dyern 4,10).

Our texts exemplify White privilege in the portrayals of race, but we have not chosen *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* to highlight their differences and pin them against each other. Rather, because they portray the narratives of Black and White women protagonists, they allow for our perspective to widen beyond privileged positions. Thus, rather than praising one for what lacks in the other, we will be able to explore how they expand the discussion of race and the category of women together. Yet, we cannot ignore the difference of racial portrayals in the two series; in *Watchmen*, race is undeniably central to the plot, following the ‘organisation of the world’ in order to disrupt it, while *Jessica Jones* renders race invisible in spite of its token Black characters, but still plays on and villainises tropes of White masculine privilege and colonisation.

Feminist Theory

As our primary location of intersection is gender, the following chapter explores feminism. First, we will explore the American feminist waves and position ourselves in relation to these. However, as the waves assume a linear temporal set of movements only, the universality of the assumption hides other feminist movements taking place parallel to and in response to the waves. We, therefore, explore Judith Butler's theories of sex and gender in order to deconstruct the idea of gender as essentialist and dichotomous, before moving from purely White feminism to Black feminism.

As a movement, Black feminism arose in the 60s and 70s as a critical response to second-wave feminism's focus on 'White' issues, which therefore excluded the voices and experiences of women of colour (hooks "Feminism: A Movement" 50-51; Collins "The Politics" 322, 328-29). Within this White fight, patriarchy alone was regarded as the cause for women's oppression, and therefore, the goal for all women became gender equality which was criticised by bell hooks, among others, as this goal completely ignored the fight against racism that, in addition to sexism, negatively affected the lives of women of colour (hooks "Feminism: A Movement" 50-51). Thus, as a critical oppositional stance against mainstream feminism, hooks defined Black feminism "[...] [as] a struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives" (hooks "Feminism: A Movement" 53). Thus, hooks sought to shatter any rigidity and hostile binary structures because solidarity with men of colour was paramount to the fight against racist oppression; the fight to end sexist oppression meant not just gaining equality with men, as this would not change the systemic discrimination that favoured White men, but was "[...] a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires" (hooks "Feminism: A Movement" 51).

The third wave arose as its own wave in the early 1990s, encompassing deliberate strategic notions of feminism to distance itself from the Second wave, most prominently the disruption of the homogenised category of women, a lack of definitions, and a reliance on all of the diverse personal voices that this entailed (Snyder 175-176). One consequence of this is the focus on ‘choice’ as the main driving force behind feminist thought and action: “[for] third-wavers, feminism requires not a particular set of choices, but rather acting with a ‘feminist consciousness,’ defined as ‘knowledge of what one is doing and why one is doing it’” (Snyder-Hall 256). Because everyone is supposedly free to make their own choices, no choice can be considered wrong which, in theory, implies inclusivity, pluralism, and non-judgment, consisting of multiple voices, ideas, struggles, and fights, sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradicting (Snyder-Hall 255, 258, 259). The third wave thus emulates Black Feminism in many ways and is inherently inclusive and urges for women to take action in coalitions to fight shared battles. Nevertheless, choice has been accused of erasing women who are incapable of making entirely free choices, stagnating political action, and ignoring the negative impacts that a personal decision can have on others, for example, regarding overall gender relations (Snyder-Hall 256; Snyder 189). Indeed, the third wave has been deemed post-feminist by many critics:

“Post-feminism is distinguished by the depoliticization of feminist goals and an opposition to collective feminist action. A post-feminist perspective is grounded in the assumption that women’s material needs have mostly been met and that a feminist movement is no longer necessary. Post-feminist rhetoric often acknowledges the positive effects of feminism and incorporates some of the language of the feminist movement such as ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice’” (K.J. Anderson 2).

Thus, there is a danger that choice only empowers the individual, and that freedom for one equals oppression for another. This criticism mirrors Black feminists’ criticism of White feminism during the Second wave because, as they claim, when ‘the personal is political’, “[...] the individual constitutes the primary unit of political action and personal advocacy on one’s own behalf constitutes the highest form of politics” (Collins *From Black Power* 138). However, the rapid expansion of the internet and social media platforms has seen a surge in

activism online that is rediscovering the third wave's pillars of inclusivity and pluralism, and perhaps further erases the division between Black feminism and White feminism (Munro 22, 23). For example, The Women's March movement, the Body Positivity movement, the Body Hair movement, the #MeToo movement, the Black Lives Matter movement, and its offshoot Trans Lives Matter, are all examples of how personal stories and choices can bring people together across race, gender, sexuality, and nationality to engage in activism and legitimately change laws and lives, no matter if they themselves are a part of the oppressed group they are fighting for or not. These movements operate mostly through protests and online through:

"[...] a 'call-out' culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged. This culture is indicative of the continuing influence of the third wave, with its focus on micropolitics and challenging sexism and misogyny insofar as they appear in everyday rhetoric, advertising, film, television and literature, the media, and so on" (Munro 23).

For some, the use of the internet necessarily calls for a new wave, as it has changed how feminists distribute feminist knowledge, partake in activism, and are aware of language use, which in turn has entailed new problems, for example, that the internet often divides old feminists from the young (Munro 22, 23, 25). For others however, the use of the internet is not enough to claim a fourth wave, especially because it is not a given that online activism produces change, and there is a risk that online activism can lead to the same passivity as choice (Munro 23, 24). Similarly, we do not agree that this is enough to claim a new wave either because the fourth wave's other characteristics still build on and use the characteristics and theories of the third wave (Munro 22). For example, one of the major concerns of activism today is the contestation of gender binaries and visibility and rights of non-binary, trans, and homosexual identities, as seen in the movements mentioned above, which most prominently have been theorised by third wave feminist Judith Butler (Munro 23). The wave metaphor is based on an understanding that the waves are extensions of each other, the end of one wave means the beginning of a new, however if Butler does not end with the rise of the fourth wave, neither does the third wave.

Like Black feminism, the third wave is intersectional, however, given the criticism of feminism before the third wave, we must credit the inherent intersectional nature of Black

feminism for this development. The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, African-American scholar of race theory and civil rights advocate, as a way of theorising the complex oppression of people of colour using the example of how violence is experienced when several identity markers are taken into account at once:

The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite - that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, mentally because the violence that many women experience is often by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class (Crenshaw 1242).

She criticises identity politics because the homogenisation of the category of women ignores that personal identity and experiences are created simultaneously by several other social categories, and therefore, they become relational and inseparable, so, for example, a White woman will experience oppression differently than a Black woman (Crenshaw 1244). Thus “[...] the intersections of racism and sexism factor into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (Crenshaw 1244). Therefore, we must find these intersections and examine their complex intertwining in order to gain a more rounded understanding of a specific group and their needs and create a platform where their voices can inspire others.

However, intersectionality has not been able to evade criticism, and we, ourselves, remain critical of the way it relies on a naturalisation of dichotomies, which her crossroads metaphor relies upon (Dhamoon 232). However, rather than dismissing the theory and its language use, we suggest instead an expansion of the crossroads metaphor; we use social categories to make sense of the world, and we would not be able to say anything about anything if there were no language to express it. However, as stated above by Crenshaw, there are discrepancies and diversity within every category, and furthermore, “[...] [the rigidity] is contrary to her conception, which was premised on a dynamic notion of intersectionality, whereby the roads emerged from various histories, became politically relevant because of historical repetition, and were constituted through movement that affected people and existing structures” (Dhamoon 232). In this sense, a specific identity is not made up of two or more

intersecting roads, but a map in which a car - which can be any colour, brand, size, and with different people and luggage inside – drives through those intersections. The intersections are therefore not rigid and essential but do not disappear either when the car leaves them. This, however, leads to further contestation, as intersectionality is further criticised for focusing too much on only the intersecting location, rather than the reasons behind oppression which “[...] shifts the gaze from the Othered identity and category of Otherness to a critique of the social production and organization of relations of Othering and normalization” (335). According to Dhamoon, using a model of called a ‘matrix of domination’, a term coined by Patricia Hill Collins, would allow people to examine differences and systems of power in a way that treats categories as relational and inseparable rather than functioning in isolation (237, 236). In this way, focus will remain on the interactive processes and structures that produce and reproduces privileges and penalty (Dhamoon 238). Thus, without a focus on these systems, oppression will not be disrupted, however, in this way, if individuals can be used to expose these systems that negatively affect a whole minority group, the few can indeed speak for the many.

Judith Butler

In the following sections, we will specify our perspectives on sex, gender, and the body. To do this we will employ Judith Butler’s critique of the sex-gender and form-matter dichotomies, followed by her exploration of gender as a series of performative acts. Following this, we will explore the limitations of Butler, as a bridge leading away from purely White feminist academia.

Gender and Sex

For as long as feminism has sought to battle the limitations on women, for the rights, visibility, and legitimacy of women, the central question to feminism as a movement, a philosophy, and a political ideology, has been how to define what it means to be a woman; where do we set the border, and which perspective do we view gender from? In other words,

the question has been which epistemological tools do we utilise to claim the power to produce, regulate, and 'protect' the social category of women? As Judith Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*, this assumes there is such a thing as an "unproblematic unity of 'women'" (9), for the sake of gaining representation of women as political subjects.

However, while the fight for gaining political status as subjects has been central to women and feminists, above remaining the objects of discourse, regulation, and power, Butler argues that even the subject may not be the ultimate position from which liberation may be achieved (Butler *Gender Trouble* 4). She points to Foucault's deconstruction of the juridical systems of power, and how they produce the subjects they represent, and specifies that "[...] the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 4). In other words, feminism itself is part of the defining power behind what it means to be assigned one gender or the other, where the limits of being a woman worthy of feminist activism go, and whom feminism will allow itself to exclude when its goal is centred around fighting for the term *women*, where "[...] it denotes a common identity" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 6).

When the focus is women as an essential identity, feminists have run the risk of not simply moralising the 'correct' practices of women, which enables them to benefit from the privileges feminism has fought for, but it also enables practices of exclusion. Orientalism and racism have at times intersected with White middle-class feminism, which has enabled western feminists to reproduce ideas of non-Western barbarism through the subtle claim that gender oppression in countries outside the West is a product of a lack of White, feminist civility (*Gender Trouble* 6). Another example, is bell hooks' critique of the White preferences of the first and second waves of feminism in the United States:

In many ways they were following in the footsteps of their abolitionist ancestors who had demanded that everyone (white women and black people) be given the vote, but, when faced with the possibility that black males might gain the right to vote while they were denied it on the basis of gender, they chose to ally themselves with men, uniting under the fabric of white supremacy (hooks *Feminism is for Everybody* 56).

Thus, when we fall for the essentialist fiction that there is a single clear way to be a woman, and that all women *are the same*, feminists run the risk of reducing the voice of feminism only to those whose other intersecting identifications - class, race, etc. - are already privileged, leading to exclusionary practices which have had severe consequences for groups lacking those same privileges and that very voice.

That is not to say, however, that feminists have not recognised and attempted to avoid the very essentialism of traditional, heterosexual gender constructions. French feminist Simone de Beauvoir's theory on separating sex and gender has been used especially to avoid the essentialist notions of 'biology-is-destiny', a theory which posits that "[...] one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" (Beauvoir qtd. in Butler *Gender Trouble* 12). Through the idea that only sex is fixed in our biology and gender is a cultural construct, gender is set free from being bound to the biological:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorised as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (Butler *Gender Trouble* 10).

In other words, she argues that even if we take the heteronormative gender as a point of departure, revealing gender to be independent of sex ensures that gender can be re-written independently of the significations of sex. However, while Butler continues down a queer path of rejecting an assumption of a pre-discursive heteronormative gender construction (as we will see), Beauvoir stops here, and suggests that the subject is always the masculine, whose very definition depends on its exclusion of the Other - the feminine. This act ultimately limits the feminine to a body, while the masculine "[...] fully disavowed, becomes, paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 16).

However, when feminism accepts the 'truth' of compulsory heterosexuality, the 'universal person' - that is the masculine subject - renders the binary inexistent, as the

feminine, thus, ultimately becomes the only 'sex'. "To be male is not to be 'sexed'; to be 'sexed' is always a way of becoming particular and relative, and males within this system participate in the form of the universal person" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 144), suggests that the masculine can never be reduced by this linguistic discrimination, which dominates and regulates through its categorisation of the Other, which, in turn, reduces it to a body whose meaning has been inscribed upon its surface. And thus, 'sex' becomes another inscription independent of the body, but dependent on the cultural interpretation of the body. In other words; "[...] there is no sex/gender distinction along conventional lines; gender is built into sex, and sex proves to have been gender from the start (Butler *Gender Trouble* 144).

Form and Matter

Since the sexual distinction is not pre-discursive but linguistic, the significance, the meaning with which we give matter to bodies and to gender ultimately has its own history and its own significance in the way we materialise gender. As Butler states:

To speak within these classical contexts of *bodies that matter* is not an idle pun, for to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what 'matters' about that body, its very intelligibility. In this sense, to know the significance of something is to know how and why it matters, where "to matter" means at once 'to materialize' and 'to mean' (*Bodies that Matter* 7).

However, matter is never recognisable without its form, whether that form be figure, appearance, gesture or grammatical form (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 8), a distinction which Butler traces back to those very classical contexts, to Aristotle, who categorises matter as masculine and form as feminine (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 7); then through Foucault, who reminds us that the body is a historical ideal which is trained and cultivated as part of its materialisation (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 9), to Irigaray's critical reading of Plato. For Plato, the dichotomies of feminine-masculine and form-matter work together, but are not entirely the same; instead, the feminine is a receptacle, that which form has to pass through in order to matter. However, as a result, the feminine must become an impossibility, something that has neither form nor matter to give form and matter to something else: "[she] must always be

called the same, for inasmuch as she always receives all things, she never departs at all from her own nature [...] and never, in any way or at any time, assumes a form [...] like that of any of the things which enter into her” (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 14). Thus, the feminine cannot take a form or be a body at all; in the moment the feminine were to change, she would have gained a form, she would have begun to matter, and thus she would no longer be the impossible inexistent, and the ability to receive without influencing would be lost (*Bodies that matter* 16). And here, as Irigaray suggests, is where matter becomes “[...] the site at which the feminine is excluded from philosophical boundaries” (qtd. in Butler *Bodies that Matter* 10).

Irigaray further insists that because the feminine is the “[...] impossible necessity that enables any ontology” (qtd. in Butler *Bodies that Matter* 13), because it cannot participate or exist, it survives as a receptacle, a mirror which only exists to reflect back the masculine (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 13). The feminine body, therefore, becomes inscribed only with masculine signification without contributing anything of its own, and it therefore works to uphold an economy of masculine self-sufficiency, a phallogocentrism which produces the (false) idea of a masculine-feminine dichotomy (13), but in which only the masculine truly signifies.

According to Butler, this is the very exclusion of the feminine which produces the masculine as human (*Bodies that Matter* 17). She insists:

There is no singular outside, for the Forms require a number of exclusions; they are and replicate themselves through what they exclude, through not being the animal, not being the woman, not being the slave, whose propriety is purchased through property, national and racial boundary, masculinism, and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 24-25).

By dematerialising other bodies, the masculine finds no boundaries, no limitations, and no regulations. Thus, the disembodied body might even evade becoming the subject of power in such a way that the masculine might be credited with the privilege of origin, that narrative of a pre-discursive existence which we must all strive to train, shape and cultivate ourselves towards, but that only the masculine might reach, as only it exists within the boundary of the historical ideal. However, it is only a narrative, a discourse of the pre-discursive, and thus the

masculinist institution is only the effect “[...] of that very prohibition, fundamentally dependent on that which it must exclude” (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 24).

In other words, the body is nothing more than a signifier (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 6). Whether it be discursively categorised as masculine or feminine, it is defined by normative gender ideas and ideals. Without discourse, we cannot talk about the body or understand it, and thus the body materialises gender the moment it enters the world. However, by deconstructing the shape, figure, appearance, gestures and grammatical forms that render the body recognisable, by redefining them and by giving them new significance, the body might become anything. Butler insists that if the excluded were to begin to speak, to give significance to themselves, they would be able to shatter the foundation on which their exclusion was built. In other words, they might reveal that the truth regime, which depended on their exclusion, was constructed with practices the excluded do not need to repeat to gain new significance: “[in] this sense, radical and inclusive representability is not precisely the goal: to include, to speak as, to bring in every marginal and excluded position within a given discourse is to claim that a singular discourse meets its limits nowhere” (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 25)

While Beauvoir insists that women’s liberation must come from the feminine body itself (Butler *Gender Trouble* 17), Irigaray and Butler recognise that because the feminine is the product of the phallogocentric, and because the phallogocentric depends on the feminine never changing, never being named, liberation cannot come from the feminine as it is defined within that economy of signification. Instead it is the very potential of its change, of its gaining a form and gaining a body, which becomes the threat to the human status of the masculine. And there lies the threat of its deformation; there, too, lies the threat of the White man’s deformation, for as Richard Dyer further insists: “[white] people need to learn to see themselves as white, to see their particularity. In other words, whiteness needs to be made strange” (10). Thus, by its very definition, the privileged position of man and/or White, of raced and gendered humanity, will find its loss at the hands of the feminine, or the raced, gaining a voice of their own, so that they may never again simply reflect back that privileged economy without revealing its inhumanity.

Gender Performativity

If gender is not separate from sex, nor an essentialist destiny defined by our bodies, then it must be something else. According to Butler, gender must not be understood to have a core, but as a stylisation of acts, which can be read through repetition of our “bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds”, which produce a narrative of that very essentialist core (Butler “Performative Acts” 519-20). She states: “[significantly], if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of believe” (Butler “Performative Acts” 520). In other words, it is essential to the narrative, the illusion, that the actors and their audience all believe that what they see on the stage is neither an act nor an illusion, but that there is no fourth wall between them; that gender is real, natural, and pre-discursive.

Thus, the act of gender is not simply a social communication or production of identity, but “[...] an object of *belief*” (Butler “Performative Acts” 520). To be a woman is therefore, as Beauvoir suggested, to have become a woman, but not because womanhood is simply a product of social construction, but because one has compelled their body to “[...] conform to an historical idea of ‘woman’” (“Performative Acts” 522). The body is, as stated above, a cultural *sign* which we materialise in obedience to that historical idea, to an ideal, but as a result, “[one] is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well” (Butler “Performative Acts” 521). Because the body is neither a product of a single person’s ideals, nor an embodiment of a core, nor the conscious workings of a structure; the body instead becomes a site of inscription, which *does* the gendered scripts it has inscribed upon it. As a result, actors will have inherited scripts from their predecessors, conformed it to their own ideals, and that new, slightly altered script, will be inherited by the next to enter the stage. Thus, it is not gender we embody, but a set of possibilities (Butler “Performative Acts” 521).

More specifically, when we do gender, our performance needs to be repeated, otherwise it would become an arbitrary act, and its meaning, its form, would not be recognisable. Or to

put it another way, “[...] the various acts of gender create the idea of gender” (Butler “Performative Acts” 522). Thus, the form is created by the performance, but the performance needs to be repeated and accepted socially to gain meaning. The act of doing gender is therefore also always an experiencing of meanings which have been established socially, before us by the people around us, the wider world, which also perform their gender, and it is therefore not simply constructed by ourselves, but imposed upon us, inscribed upon our bodies. That is not to say, however, as Butler puts it, that the “[...] body [is] passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies” (“Performative acts” 526). Instead it is a social and cultural negotiation which provokes acceptance or punishments depending on how well it is performed.

This balancing act, this judgement and regulation of gender, takes place because gender has cultural survival at its end (Butler “Performative Acts” 522), and it is therefore imperative that direct and indirect sanctions for bad performance are in place. Transgression would reveal that gender is only the appearance of a substantial core, a fiction, and an accepted performance would continue the narrative, reassuring us that the illusion is real (528). However, because gender *is* performative it is not based on a pre-discursive, natural identity, there is therefore no truth on which to base the judgement of the performance.

To Butler, gender is just this; not a core, but an act: “[gender] is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy” (“Performative Acts” 531). Gender is performative, more specifically, a repetitive, reenacted, and re-experienced performance on a scene where the body’s meanings are already established and ritualised (Butler “Performative Acts” 526). However, that does not make the performance a passive product of structures of power, nor the actor a lifeless doll, prescribed with cultural codes, but it is continuously negotiated and renegotiated, as the actors on the stage change and adopt what those before them have already naturalised (Butler “Performative Acts” 526). In other words, gender is what is put on invariably and always under duress, it can cause pleasure or anxiety, and if we assume that it is natural or pre-discursive, we relinquish the power to redefine it (Butler “Performative Acts” 531)

Critique of White Feminism

While Butler expresses a critical awareness of privileged feminine positions and encourages an intersectional reading of traditional texts to avoid a continuation of a binary hegemonic normatively (“Performative Acts” 530), that comes across as somewhat of a formality when she refers primarily to Western philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Irigaray and Beauvoir. She may criticise other feminists for “[their] efforts to colonise and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a ‘Third World’ or even an ‘Orient’ in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism (Butler *Gender Trouble* 6). However, when she herself employs, for example, Irigaray’s readings of Plato to deconstruct the linguistic constructions of gender, without marking it as Western, she ends up presenting her findings as universal, rather than as adhering only to eurocentric Western gender constructions. While she encourages inclusivity and new readings of Western philosophy from a marginalised perspective (Butler “Performative Acts” 530), by assuming only practices of studying Western Philosophy will lead to liberation, she adopts the same violent philosophical practices of exclusion and erasure that she herself so heavily admonishes.

That is not to say that Butler’s research practices are unusual, for as Richard Dyer states “[...] to say that one is interested in race has come to mean that one is interested in any racial imagery other than that of white people” (1). This has the consequence that in ritualised speech we find an assumed Whiteness of individuals, which is revealed in its unmarked opposition to the marked other (2). However, this suggests an epistemological void in the understanding of one’s own privileged position; that White people take their privilege and power so much for granted that it does not occur to them that they are creating a social hierarchy:

All white women in this nation know that whiteness is a privileged category. The fact that white females may choose to repress or deny this knowledge does not mean they are ignorant: it means they are in denial [...] No group of white women understood the differences in their status and that of black women more than the

group of politically conscious white females who were active in the civil rights struggle [...] Yet many of these individuals moved from civil rights into women's liberation and spearheaded a feminist movement where they suppressed and denied the awareness of difference they had seen and heard articulated firsthand in civil rights struggle (hooks *Feminism is for Everybody* 55).

In her critique of White women's activism during the Civil Rights era of the 60s, hooks reveals that ignorance is not innocent, nor is it passive, but an active choice of denial, for White women who had been inspired to raise their voices by the Civil Rights Movement were more interested in gaining the same privileges as White men, rather than continue to fight for and share female privilege across the racial intersection. Thus, having the status of human one is both privileged to speak for oneself and to be heard, but to erase, repress, and hinder the growing privileges of those who are not yet considered human.

This active erasure of non-Whites from the voices of humanity might help to reduce the overtness of white racism, but it does not limit the effects of it. While Whites today may claim they “‘don't see any color, just people’” (Bonilla-Silva 1), that is their own innocence, that very colourblind racism only excuses a white passivity to their own ears. When racism is ‘prejudice’ for most White people, but institutionalised for Blacks, Latinos and other non-whites (Bonilla-Silva 8), the audible White voice encourages a continuation of privilege and marginalisation, which changes no systemic inequality, or gives voice to those rendered mute.

Feminists subjects of White Academia

Furthermore, academic feminism has been criticised for its separation from social movements by Black feminists such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins. In her book *Feminism is for Everybody*, hooks maps the way women's studies was moved from mass-based consciousness-raising groups to the university classroom:

The institutionalisation of feminist studies created a body of jobs both in the world of the academy and in the world of publishing. These career-based changes led to forms of career opportunism wherein women who had never been politically

committed to mass-based feminist struggle adopted the stance and jargon of feminism when it enhanced their class mobility (hooks *Feminism is for Everybody* 10).

As a result, feminism in the United States became a tool of those women who already had the class status, which privileged them with access to university, to climb higher and work for individual achievement, rather than to reach for genuine social change on a mass basis. To this critique Collins adds that academic feminism is limited in its representation of social positions marked by race, class, and nation (*From Black Power* 185-6); that the focus has primarily remained on White women's personal experiences, so that 'women of colour' remained a homogenous Other which function as a backdrop to the texts speaking primarily to and of sufferings the feminine subject. So, when Butler states:

Clearly, it is necessary to reread the texts of western philosophy from the various points of views that have been excluded, not only to reveal the particular perspective and set of interests informing those ostensibly transparent descriptions of the real, but to offer alternative descriptions and prescriptions; indeed, to establish philosophy as a cultural practice, and to criticise its tenets from marginalised cultural locations ("Performative Acts" 530).

She might be suggesting a diverse, multicultural, queer reading of texts that have been read purely from a White, masculine perspective, but these types of readings which places the White 'human' subject at the centre or normativity do not speak of Black women's experiences or cultural productions, nor to them as subjects with voices of their own. One interviewee quoted in Collins' text states: "Feminism should have brought us closer to our mothers and sisters and to our aunties in the Third World. Instead it took us further away" (*From Black Power* 187). In other words, the normalisation of White history and philosophy as the key to understanding gender, helps to construct a White myth that all women are the same, and that white middle-class women can speak of and for all women without giving space to every other voice which has already been silenced.

Sticking to a formality of expressing the need for diversity in voices, of making readers aware of the academic's awareness of their own privileges and situated knowledges might be a necessity but it is not necessarily enough. The uses of Black examples and multiculturalism

in literature classrooms have long been confused on the White reader's complex and moral responses, rather than the humanisation of the radicalised Other (Dyer 3). In other words, simply by adding our awareness of our privileges and our feelings of shame and guilt on our part becomes an excuse to do lazy research and not include the perspectives of those who share our marginalisation as women, but whose gendered oppression intersects with that of a raced identity, a disabled identity, or the lack of class privileges.

Black Feminism

In extension of the critique above, we will on the following pages cover key historical and ideological points for Black Feminism as an activist movement in the United States, as well as its relationship to other movements whose perspectives and experiences intersect at points with Black women.

As Black feminism is inherently intersectional, fighting for gender equality as an extension of Black liberation, they neither segregate themselves from their masculine counterparts, nor remain uncritical of them. As a marginalised group, their influence has come through their social-justice militarism, community work and parenting, and they have remained critical of White middle-class academic feminism, while still drawing inspiration from it where it was deemed useful and accessible. Furthermore that influence has otherwise been expressed especially through Black feminine intellectualism; in writing and hip-hop culture (Collins "The Politics" 330-332).

Historically, Black feminism erupts as a response to two movements of the civil rights era; Black nationalism and White feminism. First, Black nationalism is based on the idea that the constructed realities of nations include cultural nations such as the Black cultural nation. As such, it places "the interests and needs of African people at the centre of the discussion" rather than focusing on analysing discourses on race in general (Collins *From Black Power* 99). Therefore, race came to be associated with concepts such as family and community (Collins *From Black Power* 108). However, several of the policies and ideals that followed as a result of these concepts were unacceptable to many Black women; because the idealisation of the family was mounted on the reproduction of the Black nation as a response to White

eugenics practices, the family became a heteronormative space, which sought to regulate the bodies of Black women (Collins *From Black Power* 108). Furthermore, women came to symbolise the nation, and as such Black masculinity hinged on the ability to protect 'their women' from both physical and White ideological influence (Collins *From Black Power* 146-7), which created a heterosexual value scale determining who was worthy of protection: "It is quite another to reject the role itself—namely, the heterosexual nuclear family under Black male leadership. The Actions of the individual woman are far less threatening than what her rebellion symbolises to the entire community" (Collins *From Black Power* 112). As a result, Elaine Brown, a leader of the Black Panther Party, expressed in her autobiography experiences of sexism which is mirrored in the personal experiences of other Black women activists of the civil rights era (Collins *From Black Power* 107).

Second, because of the hegemonic gender ideals of the civil rights era - gender ideals, which were thoroughly White in image and narrative - Black women were demonised as socially deviant for being incapable of living up to the image of the White middle-class mother, while at the same time being depended upon for the sake of continuing a White standard of living which was impossible without Black working-class women (Collins *From Black Power* 68, 71). However, even White feminists who defied those expectations and came to see the nuclear heterosexual household as the primary place of injustice for themselves tended to be incapable of seeing eye to eye with Black women and feminists who continued to fight for their communities and families (Collins *From Black Power* 138-139). Thus, a rift emerged between White feminism and Black feminism, as Black feminists saw White women as anti-family, and rejected it (Collins *From Black Power* 139). However, according to Collins, many polls show that Black Women support the same issues as global feminism: "[...] access to good jobs and equal pay for doing them; policies against sexual and domestic violence; a comprehensive reproductive rights agenda that provides women with quality health-care services; equal schooling for girls and boys; adequate family policies [...]" (*From Black Power* 177). Thus, as hooks insists, it is the requirement that privileged White feminists intersect their activism with race which becomes a necessity for Black and White feminism to work together on the same issues (hooks *Feminism is for Everybody* 55).

This rift between Black feminists and White feminists, and Black nationalists and Black feminists is not a conclusive one, however. A push-pull effect exists; demands of loyalties

dependent on the superiority of one cultural identification over the other do not just go away in everyday life, after all, and the heterogeneous opinions of Black people create discussions even on the terms of the political debates. One of the examples of this is the discussion on whether or not Black women ought to consider themselves feminists at all. Black women who lean more towards the Black nationalist philosophies reject feminism entirely as a purely White philosophy, and prefer the term 'womanism,' as it has a greater focus on pluralism and equity than feminism (Collins "What's in a Name?" 10-11). However, Collins also criticises this perspective as considering Black women as having already arrived at an ethical ideal (Collins "What's in a Name" 12). She argues that feminism is not simply an American political ideology but a part of a global movement, which works for political rights for women globally, and that using 'Black feminism' "[...] positions African American women to examine how the particular constellations of issues affecting black women in the United States are part of issues of women's emancipation struggles globally" (Collins "What's in a Name" 13). However, she further insists that neither Black feminism nor womanism are ideal terms, both of which are limited in differing areas - where Black feminism runs the risk of getting erased in universalist feminist agendas, womanism sometimes posits that heterogeneous Black women's communities are superior to others (Collins "What's in a Name" 16) - and as such, we have opted to employ 'Black feminism' here, merely because it is the term that our two primary Black women writers, Collins and hooks, employ to speak for themselves and other Black women.

Personal Identity Politics or Collective Identity Politics

Bonilla-Silva and Collins both remain critical of how colourblind racism has been infused with liberal ideals of individuality and personal responsibility. Traits such as "work ethic, rewards by merit, equal opportunity and individualism" (Bonilla Silva 7) have helped to reframe cultural ideas of human value in which discrimination and hatred might be hidden. Collins adds that this re-definition of social hierarchies have aided Republicans in "diverting attention away from structural causes of social inequality and toward personal failure as the cause of social problems" (*From Black Power* 169-170). As a result, social austerity has been

explained as flawed personal values and bad moral decision-making, rather than as products of systemic inequality.

Furthermore, this has the effect of masking and hiding White privilege. As a result the 'colour-less' status of Whiteness, as Dyer claims, has been defined 'only' in terms of individual achievement and moral character (9). He refers to Peggy MacIntosh' illustration of White privilege and argues that "It is intolerable to realise that we may get a job [...] because of our skin colour, not because of the unique, achieving individual we must believe ourselves to be" (Dyer 9). Thus, Whites are taught to believe that all that we do is a product of our own unique choices, yet, in spite of White individualism insisting on personal responsibility, Collins observes that "[...] racism was targeted not toward African American *individuals* but toward people of African descent as a *group*. Without changes in rules, laws, practices, and customs that routinely discriminated against African Americans as a group (*From Black Power* 128)." Therefore, White feminism was able to create a hierarchy of preference within political activism, in which women's gender politics aimed first and foremost at arguing for 'the personal is political' rather than encouraging community development activities.

As a result, the White feminist reading of Black women's community activism can be considered from both a positive and a negative perspective. Arguments of exploitation of women's reproductive labor usually comes from a partial perspective, which from a White feminist standpoint is often influenced by the housewife ideal produced by the American White middle class of the 1950s and 60s (Collins *From Black Power* 137-139). According to Collins, one needs to remain critical of how patriarchal assumptions of feminine labor might be exploited within the family and during community work, stating that: "Black ministers, sons and daughters, grandchildren, and partners rarely think to ask whether African American women who cook endless church dinners, provide free baby-sitting for their grandchildren, give money to their unemployed children, and show up for low-paying, dead-end jobs are exploited" (Collins *From Black Power* 143). However she also insist that when Black women remain critical of this perspective it is not because they are naively accepting of the social hierarchies that traditional family structures naturalise (Collins *From Black Power* 140), but because they are produced as such by the White feminism that might seek to 'rescue' them from their own oppression. While Black women remain critical of the communities they are part of, they also consider collective identity politics to be the right method of activism, as

they are aware that “[...] ’contemporary black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters’ (Combahee River Collective qtd. in Collins *From Black Power* 164). Thus, the personal politics of Black feminists is mitigated on an understanding that racism and sexism are tied together in oppressive practices, which remain such a pervasive force that collective activism of Black feminists, standing in solidarity with one another becomes the only consistent force working for their own liberation.

In spite of breaking from both organisations associated with Black nationalism and White feminism, many Black feminists considered themselves primarily dedicated to Black liberation, and viewed Black women as the backbone of that struggle (Collins *From Black Power* 130). As mothers, wives, churchwomen, and community workers Black women had a pre-existing social network and Black feminists’ activism shone through in those social arenas. Collins states that rather than fighting for themselves “Black women’s motherwork often emerges as a powerful catalyst for their activism” (Collins *From Black Power* 131) and “African American women have seen their fathers and sons lynched, lost children, and visited their brothers in jail. The personal suffering of their loved ones continues to function as a powerful catalyst for action” (Collins *From Black Power* 131). Thus, it was the personal experiences with racism that led most of these women to become empowered politically, whereas their fight for gender equality and feminine empowerment was one which was normalised through the examples their feminine relations set, and which they set for their children through their roles as protectors and educators in a radicalised society (Collins *From Black Power* 127). Being primary players in their communities and churches, Black women gained power and influence through their work in social justice, and it is the intersection of the two battles that helped them advance political agendas (Collins *From Black Power* 130).

This intersection not only functions as a catalyst for Black feminists in the fight for their own rights, but also aids to recognise the intersections of privilege: White men function as a sign and subject of privilege, and represent the ultimate status for men and women to become equal to. By being able to see through the ‘humanity’ of the privileged subject, Black women recognise the social, political and economic divide between Black men and White men and therefore do not see them as equal. Thus, Black women see sexist oppression not as a product of White men’s privilege and power over women, but as a product of non-White

men's powerlessness (hooks "Feminism: A Movement" 51). Many Black feminists, such as Frannie Lou Harner, therefore refused to separate themselves from Black men in a struggle for liberation, and saw more gain in working side by side with Black men than separate from them. They saw sexism and domestic violence within Black communities as an obstacle which had to be overcome first before they would be able to confront racism as a whole, and began to redefine equality as a matter for all people; that if only some groups were liberated, no one was free (Collins *From Black Power* 125). As Joan Morgan states: "'I needed a feminism that would allow us to continue loving ourselves and the brothers who hurt us without letting race loyalty buy us early tombstones,'" (qtd. in Collins *From Black Power* 196).

Black feminism has also come to be expressed through intellectual property, especially through writing, music, and hip-hop culture (Collins *From Black Power* 191). Writers such as bell hooks, Toni Morrison (Dyer 13) and the contributors of the text *Colonize This!* have explored the personal experiences of Black women through mediums such as the novel, the essay and autobiographical texts, which exist outside the academic sphere (Collins *From Black Power* 154). And exactly because many Black women have been denied access to academic texts on women's studies, their political ideology and activist thought have especially found expression through hip-hop culture, as it reaches far more listeners in spite of the demonisation of the medium from the White establishment: "The creation and persistence of this generational culture represents not only the resilience of Black and Latino youth. It also speaks to themes of alienation of a global youth population. In particular, rap music is a global phenomenon that transcends the provincialism of American academe [...]" (Collins *From Black Power* 191). And for many, that very mass media culture has become their classroom, on which they may learn literacy and politics.

Thus, feminism cannot be about the protection of middle class White women as this limits its reach and excludes based on imperialism, militarism, and classicism; instead, feminism ought to fight White, imperialist, classicist patriarchy which exists to limit and exclude not just women, but all marginalised people.

The Superhero Genre: More Than Just A Clusterfuck of Glitter and Spandex

Last but not least, we look at the representation of women superheroes; how they represent us as people and how they are embodiments of and comments on certain cultural currents and ideals. Because our project focuses on context, cultural issues, and disruption of power systems rather than textuality, we are not as interested in the genre's stylistics, cinematic techniques, genre conventions and tropes as such; instead of looking at the 'what's', we will examine the 'why's', as these expand our imaginations and perspectives on how things could be, would be, and should be (Thomas 4; Brown 5). However, as these 'why's' are sometimes found within and emphasised by textuality, making context and textuality a spectrum rather than a dichotomy, we cannot escape genre definition:

[...] the live action superhero can be defined, at its simplest, as filmed stories about costumed and/or super powered characters [...] who battle villains and defend the greater community. Numerous conventions and themes exist across most of the texts within this genre, for example colourful costumes, secret identities, and traumatic origin stories, but these features are symbolic narrative and visual tropes that enhance, but are not essential to, the genre. Moreover, the superhero genre, writ large, obviously exist and circulates in other formats including comic books and animated film and television (Brown 5).

This definition escapes rigid genre-specific boundaries, yet, it highlights the importance of characters and the genre as a transmedium. Furthermore, since the early 2000s, more superhero films have been made which has allowed the superhero film/television genre to be considered unique and distinct from science fiction and action films (Brown 3, 4). On the other hand, some maintain that the genre is a subgenre of speculative fiction which is inherently connected to *science fiction*, both highlighting an imaginative framework that is still familiar, scientific, and plausible, thus the science is considered logic though perhaps not available yet – though speculative fiction also includes fantastical elements (Thomas 15-17, 26; Svec and Winiski 38; Connors 165). But more important than the 'what's' are the 'why's' - why the genre uses fantastical or science fiction elements, to which the short answer is sociological experimentation, for example, hypotheses on ethics, what humanity would do or

think about things that occupy us in the real world if they had certain powers or lived in an alternative universe with different laws to abide by (Passell 60-61).

Superheroes become a way to explore these experiments, as they often embody the values and morals that resonate with us; even as they are reinvented to fit with the times and exist across different mediums, often simultaneously and as different versions of themselves, they are bound to their origins in name, powers, and myth (Fingeroth 20-22, 27). Initially, their function is to entertain in order to fulfil a need within us, for example, as an outlet for fantasies, as a respite from perfection, or to reassure us that good will always defeat evil (Fingeroth 21, 24). On the other hand, superheroes are not just meant for mindless entertainment or being unambiguously good and moral role models; they reflect the society and time in which they were created, thus providing a reading of cultural issues and political agendas (Fingeroth 93; Thomas 24; Passell 59).

Women Superheroes

For feminist criticism, it is paramount to examine how the superhero genre partakes in dominant narratives about the category of women:

[...] representations of superheroes—particularly ones who look like them and with whom they may more strongly identify—matter. They can perpetuate ‘traditional’ ideas about gender and sexuality and race by portraying stereotypes, such as, women are always weaker than men, or heterosexuality is the only acceptable form of a loving relationship, or people of colour are never as capable as white people [...] They can also subvert those stereotypes in ways that empower those who have been marginalized because of them. And they are currently doing both at the same time [...] (Cocca 1).

Thus, cultural productions function as power structures that hide the process of naturalisation behind a definition as entertainment. Whatever is represented through these come to matter in real life, as they become a part of our view of the world, not only reflecting the values and ideals that are, but shaping the values and ideas that should be. In this sense, representation

becomes paramount because of this power in telling stories: they determine what is normal, and therefore ‘correct’, and in extension, they determine the value of social categories and cultural identifications, and thus, it is not enough to just represent people visually as this does not disrupt these dominant cultural narratives (Cocca 6). Furthermore, because the genre mainly portrays cisgendered heterosexual people and theory often relies on differences between ‘male’ and ‘female’ superheroes, this makes it difficult to not fall into the pitfalls of the sex/gender binary. However, the body can be used as a location to disrupt that binary and what it means to be a cisgender woman - and by implication what it means to be a transgender woman or even a non-binary person - by breaking down stereotypes that results in disrupting and expanding the category of ‘woman’.

Women are still portrayed stereotypically within the genre, as “[...] more fearful, more supportive, more interested in romance, and more sexualised”, and furthermore, disproportionately White, cisgendered, heterosexual, middle or upper-class, and able-bodied, leaving women of colour with even fewer options to feel represented, least of all because those few portrayals that exist often portray them as Other (Cocca 4). Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of superheroes are unsurprisingly also White, cisgendered males, heterosexual, middle or upper-class, and able-bodied, and in 2016, only 7 percent of superhero television series had female leads and less than one-third of women had a speaking role in the 700 top-grossing films between 2007-2014, including those who only said one word (Cocca 1, 4). While these numbers have improved in the past few years, they continue to benefit men while women and people of colour are still grossly underrepresented (Ramos). Two reasons for this disproportion are, firstly, that representations are influenced “[...] by the ways in which they are produced for maximum relevance, and therefore maximum profit [...]” meaning that representations are used as a capitalist commodity, which is justified because it reaches a larger audience (Cocca 2). Secondly, it is expected that films with women in lead roles will not do as well, suggesting that men find it harder to cross-identify, perhaps because they have never been forced to. However, when films with men in the leading role do not do well, gender is never considered as being the reason (Cocca 13, 3).

The character Wonder Woman is an example of an embodiment of the contrasting dynamics of the third wave that problematises the state of representation:

“Created as a feminist character, she is a lightning rod for arguments over the meanings of feminism and the boundaries of gender. She conforms to ‘traditional’ cultural narratives of gender as an attractive, white, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class woman, but she also unsettles those narratives by representing a determined, astute, formidable warrior at the same time” (Cocca 17).

For example, she first appeared in print during World War 2 as a clever, strong, and independent woman in order to encourage women to work male jobs and to boost soldiers’ moral by teaching “[...] values of peace, love, and equality [...]” (Cocca 7-8, 26). However, when the war ended, Wonder Woman became even more feminised in appearance and began chasing marriage rather than villains, suggesting a post-war effort to get women back in the kitchen and a pushback to feminist progress (Cocca 7-8, 9, 10, 31, 32). In recent times, the reinvention of Wonder Woman has been influenced by gains of civil rights movements and a changing demographic of which the more diverse creators cannot ignore the wants and needs, leading to attempts at making her more feminist (Cocca 3, 49). In her first film appearance - *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) – Wonder Woman was portrayed more masculine, “[...] as a fierce and intimidating warrior—gritty, battle-scarred, and immortal (Scharf qtd. in Cocca 51). Though this can be seen as a feminist attempt at detaching gender from certain qualities, disassociating her from femininity undermines it as a strength and thereby as equal to masculinity, meaning that she as a character no longer critiques gender assumptions but conforms to a standard of masculinity, thus allowing perpetuations of stereotypes to continue (Cocca 50). This strategy is also referred to as the ‘strong female character’ (Davies). The newest instalment of *Wonder Woman* (2017) is both praised for being feminist (A. Rosenberg) and for missing some important feminist points (Cauterucci), but part of the original vision of Wonder Woman is back as the embodiment of truth, justice, and love, representing feminine power as a strength equal to her masculine counterparts which makes her considered by some as anti-normative, disrupting, and expanding of the category of ‘woman’ (Cocca 25).

Due to this embodiment, “[...] she is particularly resonant to those who have been historically underrepresented and stereotyped” (Cocca 25-26). There is an idea that because superheroes are superhuman, they represent everyone (Fingerroth 95), however, claiming

universality also allows all the privileges that she embodies to continue to dominate, and women and people of colour have often been forced to cross identify while White men have not (Cocca 3). This would not be a problem if the practice was well-balanced, as by seeing someone who looks “[...] nothing like you, it may be easier to imagine someone in that group being a hero too”, but not seeing people who are like you can negatively affect your self-esteem and make you not imagine seeing yourself as a hero (Cocca 3-4). The result of this lack of diverse representation puts extreme pressure on those few women superheroes there are, as “[...] each is overburdened representing women as a group” (Cocca 16). This makes it impossible for any one character or one film to live up to the different expectations of the masses, and attempts at progress will for some not be enough. For example, if a character is Black, independent, and skinny, she might be representative of a marginalised group and disrupt stereotypical gendered behaviour, but she can still be criticised for not being Chinese, Mexican, or First Peoples of the United States, and for not disrupting patriarchal ideals of the female body.

Critics may never agree on Wonder Woman’s feminist status and continue to criticise no matter how she is portrayed which undoubtedly is frustrating for those who resonate with her, however, her portrayal does raise important questions, such as, “[is] it a positive thing that women in popular culture are now allowed to be as violent and sadistic as men are? Or would it not be preferable for men to become kinder and gentler instead?” (Fingerroth 94). The answer may be the same as the answer to the question of whether Wonder Woman is a feminist icon or not to which the answer is ‘sometimes’ and ‘sometimes not’ (Cocca 25). Thus, the continued contestation is important in order to demand more - and more diverse - representations of women. The third wave demands pluralism and acceptance of all women, real or fictive, and therefore, we need to criticise in order for the category of women to include women of all colours and women who are feminine, masculine, both or neither, as no single representation can do this.

Watchmen Analysis: Who Watches the Watchers?

Angela Abar: The Black Woman who Fucked Over All the White Men

Watchmen is a series with a reputation for subverting tropes within the superhero genre, with the most obvious example being that its heroes are (mostly) human. Therefore, the science fiction elements do not become the focus of the story but the product of, and metaphor for, how human trauma, social position, and legacy drive people, produce identifications, and affect the world. The series takes place in an alternative version of 2019 in which the actor Robert Redford is president, Vietnam is the 51st state of the United States of America, squids fall from the sky, police officers wear masks, and superheroes are outlawed unless they work for the government. In the analysis below, we intend to illuminate how *Watchmen* produces the Black woman as an outsider to patriarchal regimes of truths, and how she is capable of constructing a new identity outside this hegemonic ontology. We will first explore how her vision enables her to see beyond those hegemonic ontologies, followed by how those fighting to keep their privileges objectify and reject her social category, and finally how the fight for the 'human' position is produced as an undesirable goal as an argument against remaining within a structure which superordinates and subordinates.

The Black Woman's Gender

Angela Abar is the protagonist of the series. In her civilian life, she is a wife, mother, and 'retired' police officer posing as a baker. However, due to an event known as the White Night, in which a White supremacist terrorist group called the Seventh Kavalry murdered most of the police force in their homes, she still works for the police force as her vigilante persona 'Sister Night'. This chapter examines how Angela's early break with her her parents, her primary connection to a heteronormative gender construction and Black community, influences her performance of her intersecting cultural identifications as a Black woman.

Angela grew up in Saigon, Vietnam, because her father was deployed as a soldier, as part of the occupational force after the Vietnam War. The one scene presenting her parents shows her father in full uniform and her mother in a red, white, and blue sundress with her hair up and pearls adorning her wrists, and a conversation between Angela and her parents follows :

Mother: "Show me".

Angela: [Presents a *Sister Night* VHS tape]

Parents: [Laugh in unison]

Father: "I told you she was gonna try".

Mother: "That you did".

Angela: "Please let me see it"?

Mother: "What did we tell you last week? And the week before that"?

Angela: "I have to wait till I'm grown up" (E7 03:10).

Her parents therefore present the perfect unified front in the practice of raising their daughter. They are the ideal middle class heterosexual couple, with a sweet, stylish, competent mother, and a well-articulated, loving husband and father, who protect their daughter's innocence from the terrors of adulthood that 'good parenting' teaches she is not ready for (Collins *From Black Power* 70-1). The mother's idealised feminine performance and the father's protector status suggest that they conform entirely to hegemonic gender scripts. Thus, when they die in a bombing organised by a Vietnamese resistance fighter, Angela's young age means that she is severed from the role models that would have taught her hegemonic gender conformity before she could fully internalise and embody it (E7 5:00). This blank slate of childhood is implied by Angela's gender neutral clothing in the scene; she wears small bows and ribbons in her hair, but is in a deep blue wide-legged jumpsuit, which has the visual effects of a skirt but is constructed of pants, nonetheless. This contrasts with her mother's dress, which is adorned with flowers and emphasises a curvy figure that is supposed to compliment the square, rigidity of her husband's military uniform. Thus, Angela's loss of her family is also a loss of those that would produce her as a mirror in a masculine self-sufficiency, and she

therefore never learns to produce her gender inside a phallogocentric economy of signification. In other words, she always existed beyond the mirror, had form, and mattered.

However, because she always signified that matter had to take a form, she instead produced herself in relation to four singular women that played a part in her life, for better or for worse: the headmistress at her orphanage, a woman police officer, her grandmother, and Sister Night. The headmistress, seeing Angela as a symbol of the American occupation of Vietnam, treats her poorly, with both physical and verbal violence (E7 20:00, 38:35), and thus, she employs her power as an adult to subvert the relations of power that would have otherwise resulted in Angela, as a part of a militant and colonial occupation, being part of the superordinate social category. The Vietnamese policewoman, Jen, aids in finding the resistant fighter that killed Angela's parents and afterwards gives Angela her police badge, giving her a goal to strive for in adulthood (E7 21:14). In adulthood, both women shape Angela's approach to justice: Jen comes to symbolise the execution style 'justice' that is the fate of the bomber, and this further shapes Angela's own sense of black and white morality. And she exercises this justice by projecting the headmistress' strict behaviour and violence towards those she deems unjustly empowered, as seen, for example, in her treatment of White Supremacist suspects (E1 32:50). Angela's grandmother, June, is her first connection to her Black community:

June: [Holding up the Sister Night cassette] "Oh. I remember this one! You do not want to fuck with Sister Night. This your favorite"?

Angela: "I'm not allowed to watch it".

[...]

June: "Lot's of movies out there, um... Why you carrying around this one"?

Angela: "She looks like me"?

June: [Holds up cassette to compare to Angela] "Know what? She does look like you. I reckon there's not a lot of... people here in Vietnam who do".

Angela: "No, ma'am".

June: “Tell you what. I have a VCR in Tulsa. We’ll watch this first thing”.

Angela: “Where’s Tulsa”?

June: “Tulsa’s in Oklahoma, honey. It’s where we’re from” (E7 39:40).

In spite of the film being a Black exploitation film, not only does June acknowledge the importance of raced children needing to be able to recognise themselves and finding role models in the media, and therefore teaches Angela for the first time that watching *Sister Night* is not an evil or unacceptable thing to do, but that feeling represented is something good she should have fun with. She also teaches Angela of her Black heritage and connects her, for the first time, to her historical place of origin, giving her a lifeline back to her Black community in Tulsa in the United States. Thus, June is her connection to her past and to her future, giving her an emotional goal that defines where she settles her home with her family and defines her identity as a police officer and vigilante. Women of colour are therefore her inspiration, her point of departure, and the ones who teach her how to construct her gender scripts from scratch without masculine influence. As a result, the series balances its portrayals of women in a subtle way; it never directly speaks of the feminine gender category as either a location of oppression or as an advantage of liberation, but neither does it demonise femininity or treat it as a problem solved. This allows for the female characters and their intersections to be performed as complex, layered, and many-faceted, never boiling them down to a homogenous category in which the sign of woman is their most obvious and important identity marker.

Transgressional Motherhood

The complex performance is exemplified in the contrast between her police duties as a detective and vigilante, *Sister Night*, and her practices of motherhood. As *Sister Night*, her performance is tough, angry, strong, and violent; she handles opponents much larger than herself, and is seen assaulting and using torture techniques, such as waterboarding during interrogation (E2 22:22, E1 32:50). Because the superhero is often masculinised, meaning that only the masculine is a non-issue (Cocca 6), her *Sister Night* persona makes her seem like a woman who has waived her femininity in order to make herself equal to her male

counterparts, to be one of the guys, or a ‘strong female character’ (Davies). However, this does not mean that she rejects femininity:

Angela: [To Emma] “Sweetie, I need you to go with dad and pick up your sister from school, okay? Don’t let him drive too fast. [Kisses her forehead]. I love you, sweetie”.

Emma: “Love you too, Mommy”.

Angela: “[To Cal]. I also love you” (E1 22:10).

Not only does the above scene naturalise a family in which the husband does domestic work and the wife has a job outside the household, but it also shows a clear contrast to stereotypes of resentment in a marriage. Instead, they both openly perform their genders through care and concern for each other and their family. Thus, as a Black woman, Angela is neither limited to White housewifery, in which she would have been taught to “glory in [her] own femininity” (Friedan 2), nor is she forced to reject it entirely, and she is therefore able to balance the relations of power within and outside gender norms. For example, she is the main breadwinner of the family with a ‘masculine’ job, and she is shown to protect her husband Cal (who is Dr. Manhattan, another superhero, in hiding) (E2 15:45), but she does so out of love and fear of losing her family. Thereby, rather than making Angela’s intersection of woman its own category of oppression resulting in her rejecting femininity in order to be liberated, her womanhood and femininity is created in the intersection of her childhood loss, feminine inspirations, as well as the separation from her Black community and experiences with racism.

Furthermore, her Sister Night persona and the adoption of three White children are results of the White Night, as the parents of the three children died during the White Night (E2 18:20). According to Collins (*From Black Power* 132, 130, 127), Black women’s personal experience with racism is the catalyst for social justice and political and communal engagement, especially through teaching their children, and those of the community, about White supremacy and protecting them from it, while at the same time preparing them for the realities of the world. In a conversation with her son, Topher, Angela says:

There are people in this world who believe that this world is fair and good—that it’s all lollipops and rainbows. I remember what happened to my parents. You

remember what happened to your parents. You and me, Topher, we don't do lollipops and rainbows because we know those are just pretty colors that just hide what the world really is. Black and white (E2 29:25).

Rather than attempting to protect her children's 'innocence' and have them grow up in a world of perceived bliss, she acknowledges their trauma and loss and treats those experiences as worthy of respect and acknowledgement. Thus, she sees herself in the children's situation and, thereby, she can make up for her loss through action for somebody else by becoming a mother, and being honest about the violence of the world is her method of motherly protection. Furthermore, her words show her cultural positioning as enabling her to see the unfairness of the world and the privileges that are a given to some people, and by ending her monologue on 'Black and White' suggests that that inequity is primarily based on race. This further suggests that, to Angela, Topher is as much a victim of the White Night as she was, and, in extension, that he too is a victim of White supremacy in spite of being White himself. According to Collins, Black women are often motivated to enter the political scene as a response to the sufferings they care about, and she states: "African American women have seen their fathers and sons lynched, lost children, and visited their brothers in jail. The personal suffering of their loved ones continues to function as a powerful catalyst for action" (Collins *From Black Power* 131). In other words, Angela is adopting Black women's cultural practices without discriminating based on race and thus extend the practice beyond its original barriers.

However, her motherhood remains contested because the children are White. When she refers to the children as "My kids" to her vigilante Partner Looking Glass, he quips, "Your kids?" (E2 12:55). It might be an innocent comment indicating that he does not see her as the motherly type, however, it does present issues of racial bias in transracial adoption. From a White perspective, Black people can only represent their own racial identification, and Black mothers are demonised for not living up to the idealised standards of White parenting (Dyer 2; Collins *From Black Power* 68, 71). Furthermore, Adjei and Minka suggest:

[...] despite the seemingly similar parenting practices across cultures, there are still cultural and racial differences in parenting goals, values, and behaviours that need to be considered when constructing the meaning of effective parenting in a

society. Ignoring this reality will imply that certain parenting behaviours considered to be effective and functional among one racial group will easily be construed as an aberrant behaviour by another group (512).

Thus, the institution of the family is White, but presented as the neutral, correct form which reveals the bias that White parenting methods are preferred and White parents are seen as more capable than Black parents. Therefore, even claims that any criticism pertains to the methods and not race still have colourblind racist undertones. This additionally suggests that even the innocent comment of 'your children' implies that because Angela is Black she could never be the 'motherly type'. In other words, the cultural interpretation of her race would not permit it. Additionally, because Angela's parenting style is direct and honest about social inequities, she goes against the colourblind approach of many White parents. From this perspective, she fails to protect the children's 'innocence' and give them what they need - the invisible benefits of their Whiteness - and, in extension, she teaches them to perform the 'wrong' culture (Bonilla-Silva 3). On the other hand, from a Black perspective, she betrays her racial community by not biologically reproducing and just repeating the history of Black women caring for White children (Collins *From Black Power* 146-147).

However, because it is her own choice to be a mother for these children based on her own trauma in Vietnam, the act of motherhood becomes a global act rather than one based only on American history, and through that, the experience of motherhood transcends American reproductions of race and is instead based on feminine solidarity and compassion. Considering that gender and other cultural identifications are constructed through performances and interactions, these children, though White, have not done evil things and therefore should not be punished. Thus, she recognises the manner in which privilege and culture are inherited, and breaking with it reveals the absurdity in the idea that families, racial identifications, and cultures cannot intersect for there to be progress. As a result, Angela works both to save people in her occupation as well as in her personal life, and her vigilante identity is not separated from her gender performance, but she is neither a superhero because of her gender, nor in spite of her gender. Furthermore, because she was never reduced to a mirror in a phallogocentric economy of signification, she is able to combine her gender performance with her disgust with for explicit White supremacy so that her primary goal becomes protection of any victim of White supremacy, and therefore, she can see past both

Black and White regimes of truth that attempt to limit her gender performance, as well as her ability to protect herself and others from oppression.

Race, blindness, and Community

In this chapter, we will explore how family further plays a role in how Angela begins to rewrite her cultural scripts through her relationship to her grandfather, Will Reeves; a relationship marked by the two contrasting concepts of lost history and transgenerational trauma (E5 22:45), as well as the differing effects of Jim Crow racism and colourblind racism. This is first made apparent when the narrative connects the rage Angela feels towards her formative experiences of injustice in Vietnam and her displaced sense of racial identification with her use of a vigilante mask, through a narration from a meta text portraying a stylised version of her grandfather's life which runs parallel to the central narrative:

Who am I? When I was little, every time I looked in the mirror, I saw a stranger staring back at me. And he was very very angry. What could I do with all this anger--hot vibrating electricity with no place to ground it? If he couldn't release his rage... Maybe I could help him hide it? I never felt comfortable in my own skin, so I made a new one. And when I slipped it on, he and I became one. His anger became mine, as did his thirst for justice. So, who am I? If I knew the answer to that... I wouldn't be wearing a fucking mask (E2 34:25).

Reeves' double consciousness (Du Bois 922) reflects Angela's loss of connection to her Black community and the rage that follows that confused sense of rootlessness. The narrative further frames the general interpretation of the mask within the series through the words of the character Laurie Blake, who suggests that people who have experienced an injustice become obsessed with justice and use the mask to hide the pain (E4 26:55). This suggests that Angela's trauma has been made a part of her identification by splitting her into two personas; the caring mother and the masculine vigilante. As mentioned above, the Black family is historically centred around Black identity politics and the idea of the heterosexual nuclear family under Black male leadership (Collins *From Black Power* 112). However, as a result of

breaking with White heteronormative regimes of truth, she searches for her racial heritage rather than a patriarchal gender construction that will fit her.

According to Foucault, truth and systems of power work harmoniously in “circular relations” to compose the effects of power and constitute a “regime of truth”, a type of discourse - techniques and procedures - with which statements become either true or false (“Power/Knowledge” 132-133, 131). In other words, power, which is a “multiform production of relations of dominations”, becomes legitimate when it operates within a regime of truth because the idea of a universal truth conceals power’s dominating structure (“Power/Knowledge” 142). Furthermore, in order to have power, one must create knowledge, defined as: “[...] the space in which the subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which he deals in his discourse [...], the field of coordination and subordination of statements in which concepts appear, and are defined, applied and transformed [...]” (Foucault “Archeology of Knowledge” 183). Thus, the subject must first of all be in a position to speak in order to produce knowledge and the subject must use a specific discourse to produce a specific form of knowledge. That is, knowledge must be sanctioned by a given society’s ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault “Power/Knowledge” 131). Thus, because Angela is empowered by gendered autonomy from the start, and has therefore broken with the circular relations of power and truth, she can break with oppressive norms where she finds them. Thus, her confusion and loss lead to rage and a double consciousness which her grandfather helps her to awaken from and thereby connects her completely to her Black history and community.

For Reeves, who, in the 1940s, was the first masked vigilante, the hood represents the conflicting relationship society has to his racial identification: after being attacked by members of the Ku Klux Klan, who were also members of the police force, and hanged from a tree with a hood over his face, he comes across a White couple being assaulted, and he chooses to come to their rescue (E6 19:30). However, terrified of another fearful White response to his skin colour, he uses the hood to mask his identity (E6 20:20). His addition of White make-up to this design further reflects his fear of White intolerance, this time from the White superheroes that were supposedly ‘inspired’ by his example, believing him to be White

— because “White men in masks are heroes, but Black men in masks are scary” (E6 35:00; E7 14:18).

Thus, the first hero’s hood becomes a symptom of the complex intolerance of the Jim Crow era, as well as the effects it has on Black people. Vigilantism becomes an act of rejecting laws and promotes the idea that an individual might do better than law enforcement, thereby redefining the meaning of the hood originally meant to smother him as both defiance and trauma. However, as he assumes he is still in need of White acceptance to achieve his goal of Black liberation, he is limited to redefining himself within a White hegemony (E6 24:30). Reeves’s experiences with Jim Crow racism functions as a contrast to Angela’s experiences with colourblind racism. Collins describes colourblind racism as a product of American nationalism:

This new colorblind racism is also highly nationalistic. A greasy changed global political economy has left America as the sole remaining superpower. In this transnational context, American national identity and nation-state policies (both domestic and foreign) have grown in significance. Within American politics, a series of conservative Republican administrations have redefined American national identity as de facto (White) nationalism that masks its own success (*From Black Power* 7).

Angela, who was born and raised in Vietnam grows up uniquely positioned as a privileged outsider, both oppressor and oppressed (E7 03:30). As she is positioned higher in a racialised hierarchy than the original Vietnamese population, but below the White American population, her cultural identity becomes a product of a self-Other construct, which is built on the American national identity as self, and the Vietnamese national identity as Other. Only when she is shown to return to Tulsa does she begin to learn and experience the consequences of her cultural heritage as Black American. Due to having been separated from her family (E7 05:00), she has also lost access to her history and her cultural heritage, and, thus, she herself is partially colourblind to her position.

The colourblind focus on idyllic diversity in Angela’s life is exemplified in the juxtaposition of the dinner scene in the first episode: an idyllic family come together over Vietnamese food between the Abars and the White the police chief, Judd Crawford, and his

wife. The first shot of the scene is framed from above, showing the extended family around a table, which is encircled by a white lamp hanging above them to emphasise the unity of the scene (E1 44:30). The scene centres around a discussion of a Black production of *Oklahoma!*, a musical from the 1940s which glorifies the constructions of the original states in Indian territory and “[...] is a timely refutation of the lie that America can be made great by turning back the clock to some immaculate America of the past” (Rich). In other words, the scene presents Blacks and Whites as getting along idyllically like family on top of two distorted representations of the United States as a great, beautiful nation; a family sitting on the bones of colonial conquest and exploitation, genocide and displacement. And, in doing so, the narrative suggests the history that gets lost when no one can ‘see’ race anymore.

However, the series weaves the concepts of transgenerational trauma into its central Black family, defining it as follows: “I read an article. There’s this thing... genetic trauma. Basically, if something really bad happens to your parents, it gets locked into their DNA [...] even though I wasn’t born until [much later] it’s like I inherited [my mother’s] pain” (E5 22:40). Both Will Reeves, his son, and Angela begin their journeys as uniformed officers, each of them inspired by different people and motivations; Reeves by a Black movie of a Black marshal, who stated that “[there] will be no mob justice today. Trust in the law” (E1 01:37); his son by the opportunities the US army seemingly provided (E7 39:30); and Angela by the Vietnamese police woman who saved her as a child (E7 20:00). And by walking in her grandfather’s footsteps, she repeats the cycle of starting as a force of the White hegemony, but rejecting it eventually (E5 52:45). Thus, the story suggests that history, even when it is not spoken and remembered by the next generation, is inherited biologically and, therefore, both rejects and supports the significance of biology in cultural identification.

Similarly, Reeves’ method of imparting Black history to Angela is one of science and biology. Allying himself with a scientist named Lady Trieu, he uses a drug of her invention called Nostalgia, which is described as harvested memories;

“They put [in] a little pill, you pop one, and you get to experience that shit all over again. It was supposed to be for older folks, you know, dementia treatment, but that limited the market because, you know, who wants to be in the present when you can live in the past? [...] people got hooked, dependency, ODs. So [president]

Redford and the FDA outlawed it and the company that made it had to stop” (E6 04:40).

Reeves, too, exhibits a certain level of addiction to the pills (E2 06:54) which contain memories of racial injustices: the Tulsa Race Massacre; the racial ‘intolerance’ of the Minutemen (E6 44:20); experiences of nearly being hanged (E6 17:00); the systemic racism of the New York police department; all the rage he expresses during these experiences; as well as the fact that he was responsible for hanging Judd Crawford, Chief of Police in Tulsa, for celebrating his family legacy within the Ku Klux Klan (E6 52:00, E2 38:55). Thus, it is not for the sweet nostalgia of the past he takes the pills. Instead, they imply the importance of not forgetting or forgiving injustices based on privileged intolerance, which might otherwise easily be swept under the rug in a colourblind culture. However, colourblind culture reframes the concept of somebody taking another person’s Nostalgia as ‘psychosis’ (E5 21:00) which suggests that Angela learning of her lost history and heritage is framed by privileged White society as evil and destructive. Angela herself rejects her grandfather even as she searches for her connection to him, telling him to “leave me the fuck alone” (E4 12:40). However, upon experiencing Reeves’ past and absorbing his experiences (E6 35:00), she is afterwards no longer blind to the unspoken things in society and the hegemonic frames distorting her cultural identification, as symbolised by how she unplugs her connection to the machine that would have drained her of her connection to her Black collective history (E7 37:25).

Thus, for Angela, family signifies both a source of solidarity and sanctuary, as well as a source of history and clarity. As a mother, she has reconnected to a Black feminine performativity which is not confined to her home, and as a daughter and granddaughter, she finds inspiration in the women, who came before her, and her history in her connections of trauma and injustice to the men. She is therefore neither trapped by regimes of truths nor does she continue to act to uphold them, and she becomes empowered by the knowledge and experiences her intersection as a Black woman provides her.

Nationalism and Class: Fragile White Men who Talk Too Much

This chapter explores how the privileged position responds to internal racism as projected upon Angela's Black body, and how that affects their attempts at redefining her, as well as their actions in relation to her and her racial identification. In the first section, we will analyse how the police and Seventh Cavalry define themselves and their racial entitlements in contrast to Black people. In the second section, we will analyse characters whose White privilege is compromised or challenged by other intersections which limits their status as allies, and lastly how White men in power construct the American nation and White race to legitimise their own power.

According to Collins, "[national] identity itself can become so compromised by such deeply embedded racial processes that it becomes difficult to conceive of national identity in terms other than racial" (*From Black Power* 33). She argues that the superordinate racial identity and the subordinate racial identities do not matter in their specificity, but that each role needs to be fulfilled in order to complete the structure of American national and racial identity (Collins *From Black Power* 36). She therefore maps this structure as a triangle that functions as a "template for American national identity" (Collins *From Black Power* 35), which consists of a superordinate White positioning and then two groups defined as external racisms and internal racisms, respectively. She states:

External racisms occur when powerful racial groups aim to remove less powerful groups from schools, jobs, neighbourhoods, regions, nation-states, or social spaces that more powerful groups perceive as being their property or birthright. As racisms of elimination or extermination, external racisms foster ideas and practices that exclude outsiders or 'others' from these spaces [...] such racisms aim to purify geographic or social space of the threat that inferior races seemingly represent [...] Internal racisms occur when powerful racial groups subordinate less powerful racial groups within one society, typically because they need such groups to maintain their standard of living. Practices associated with internal racisms typically exploit less powerful racial groups to benefit more powerful racial groups. As racisms of oppression and exploitation, internal racisms foster ideas and practices that partition society into distinctive racial groups and that

maintain social hierarchies through racialized group identities (Collins *From Black power* 32).

Thus, White American national identity has remained dependent on both external and internal racialised groups. The privileged position is both dependent on defining itself by excluding and exterminating, as well as exploitations and claims of inferiority of the Other in order to produce its own sovereignty (Collins *From Black Power* 33; Wilkinson and Kitzinger 8-10).

Historically, this began in a triangle of White-indigenous-Black groupings, however, as mentioned above, the positions adopted new racial categories as needed for the superordinate group to remain privileged. In *Watchmen*, Whites remain at the top of the structure, with Blacks as the internal group, and Vietnamese as the external race, both of which have been on the receiving end of colonisation, extermination and exclusionary racist practices in order to support a White national identity (Collins *From Black Power* 33). As mentioned, a Black American living in colonised Vietnam, Angela was still considered more of an American than the Vietnamese people, and therefore enters a privileged position as a result of her racial and national intersection. However, upon her return to the US that privilege is made hollow and lost.

The Lower Classes: Why do You Never See the Police Shutting Down the KKK? For the Same Reason You Never See Clark Kent and Superman in the Same Room

Police Brutality and Entitlement to Violence

According to Lynch, survivability discourse plays a huge part in the subculture of the American police force (34). The ‘truth’ that lives of police officers are always at stake, that they have greater value, and that they are always fighting the ‘good’ fight leads to a socialisation soaked in fear and the need for self-preservation (Lynch 34-5). As a result, “[...] police subculture embraces this notion of guardianship and entitled violence, officers that utilize ‘justifiable’ deadly force are awarded with the highest ‘merit badge’ within the subculture” (Lynch 34). The entitled violence and fearful self-protectionism have established

an us-them mentality, in which the police force is positioned as the ultimate ‘good’, faced with ‘everyone else’, the unknown danger of the outside world, whose actions are the causes of grief and death among the American police force. In *Watchmen*, that dangerous ‘outside enemy’ is represented as a White supremacist, terror organisation called the Seventh Kavalry.

The police force in Tulsa is represented as more dangerous to the outside world than the outside world is to them, through rigid regulations on use of firearms, as exemplified by the fact that officers need to “[...] believe their lives are under direct immediate threat” (E1 26:40), before their home office will give access to their firearms. However, initially the series does not seem to change the culture of fear and entitled violence within the police force itself, as the first episode shows a Black police officer being shot by a member of the Seventh Kavalry (E1 11:00). Furthermore, the organisation is represented as the catalyst of that fear of the outside, as it organised the White Night. This resulted in the Defence of Police Act, a series of laws which demanded police officers wear masks and hide their identities in order to protect them (E3 07:30). However, the series plays on cultural expectations that the police force act as White allies and protectors of Black people and therefore as the moral ‘good’ of the narrative and White supremacy as the ‘outside evil’, which makes them worthy of protection from that outside enemy. In other words, the subculture remains, but is dependent on constructing Black people as in need of protection, rather than as the cause of danger. Thus, the series reveals and subverts police rhetorics and ‘truths’ as constructed and produced for the sake of the institution remaining in power.

This feeling of always being in immediate danger results in an entitlement to violence. When the officers are shown to feel fear they respond with shooting down a paparazzo (E2 13:20), violently arresting whole neighbourhoods (E2 21:00), and using violent interrogation practices, such as waterboarding (E1 33:25). However, while the series suggests that this entitlement to violence and aggressive response to fear is a result of the White Night and the subsequent trauma and fear, the introduction of an outside FBI agent, Laurie Blake, suggests otherwise. Upon her arrival in Tulsa she witnesses the violent handling of suspects, and the following exchange ensues:

Blake: “Sir, I’m with the FBI. Are your civil rights being violated”?

Suspected Kavalry member: “Uh... Yes, Ma’am. These people came into my place of business and they just grabbed me. They didn’t read me my rights or—“

Blake: “Okay. Sorry, I was just kidding. I don’t care” (E3 17:10).

Thus, the callous and selective handling of human lives and rights suggests that law enforcement officers overall view themselves as above the law, rather than as servants or subjects of it. The law becomes subjective due to the humans who employ it as enforcement and regulations of other human subjects. Furthermore, what legitimises their right to be above the law is their specific role as protectors of Black people, as those which guard their right to live or die. And thus, the ‘truth’ that the police force’s power hinges on is that Black people are in danger and in need of protection, and therefore are a subordinate group incapable of protecting themselves. Both the police force and the Seventh Kavalry therefore both define themselves in direct relation to a Black Other, both seeking to control the narrative of Black people and their cultural representation to legitimise their own existence. However, they produce themselves on two very different sides of the scale; whereas the police force are ‘heroes’ and ‘protectors’ of Black people, the Seventh Kavalry are ‘liberators’ of White people from the Black ‘threat’.

The White Terror of The Seventh Kavalry

The Seventh Kavalry is a combination of the real-life Seventh Cavalry and the Ku Klux Klan: “[apparently], it’s a Custer’s Last Stand thing, but who gives a shit. They’re just the Klan in different masks. They first popped up after the Victims of Racial Violence Act was passed” (E3 09:30). The original Seventh Cavalry was based on a belief in manifest destiny which justified spreading White supremacy as the true and correct way of life, and they actively participated in the extermination of First Peoples (Smail, Jenkins 149). Thus, through the use of both real and fictional examples, *Watchmen* demonstrates how racism permeates not only history but all aspects of American society. Furthermore, according to Inwood (580), “[throughout] US history when the US economy is in economic and/or political crisis, bourgeoisie capitalism appeals to the white middle and working classes to forestall change”. For example, Richard Nixon won the presidency aided by a crisis of civil unrest between

Blacks and Whites, and he sought peace by focusing his campaign on law and order which would inevitably stall Black progress (Mayer 350, 361-362). Thus, *Watchmen*'s representation of American racist practices exposes them as deeply entrenched in military and governing practices that incorporate them into such a fundamental part of national identity that it becomes crucial for White people to maintain them as such. This is emphasised by the White, working class trailer park, "Nixonville", which is centred around a statue of Nixon and is home to most of the member of the SEventh Kavalry (E2 21:10).

The Kavalry's ideology of White supremacy builds on creatively interpreted diary entries written by the vigilante Rorschach, the anti-hero of the original graphic novel and 2009 film. For example, in their message to the police in Tulsa, the Kavalry uses their own version of his words, stating:

"Cop Carcass on the highway last night. Soon the accumulated black filth will be hosed away, and the streets of Tulsa will turn into extended gutters overflowing with liberal tears. Soon all the whores and race traitors will shout 'save us!' And we will whisper... 'No' [...]" (E1 25:00).

In comparison, the original quote reads:

Dog carcass in alley this morning, tire tread on burst stomach. This city is afraid of me. I have seen its true face. The streets are extended gutters and the gutters are full of blood and when the drains finally scab over, all the vermin [will] drown. The accumulated filth of all their sex and murder will foam up about their waists and the whores and politicians will look up and shout 'Save us!' ... and I'll look down and whisper 'No' (Hoberek 67).

True to their rhetoric of racial cleansing, as made apparent in the statement 'the accumulated black filth will be hosed away', they connote the politicians of Rorschach's original statement as 'race traitors'. More specifically, the insult refers to President Robert Redford's liberal initiatives, such as gun control (E1 09:50), but most importantly, the Victims of Racial Violence Legislation, known as "Redfordations". This legislation provides a lifetime tax exemption for victims and direct descendants of racial injustices throughout America's history, such as the Tulsa Race Massacre (E2 24:25). The legislation is an example of

‘affirmative action’ which is a policy meant to better the situation of minority people by giving them preferential advantages that in theory will bring them up to the level of the privileged (Stein 29, 30). Because, “[...] if Black poverty was seen as being primarily due to an unequal distribution of wealth, power, and income, then it was important to promote redistributive measures, such as affirmative action, that would reduce that inequality and enhance the standard of living and quality of life of the Black community” (Stein 33). Thus, what triggers the rage of the Seventh Kavalry is the fact that Robert Redford has delegitimised racist truths of individual responsibility and, as a result, made White strange and thus a race. He has therefore removed their privileges of both visible and invisible advantages and at the same time visibly given advantage to Black people, doubling the insult.

When the police storms the impoverished Nixonville in search of Kavalry members (E2 21:10), it reveals a complex intersection of gender, race, and class; on one hand, the members, who are mostly men, have a “public and psychological wage” - White privilege, meaning they have social advantages and safety (Inwood 585-86). But, on the other hand, their poverty not only restricts access to material goods but causes anxiety and fear due to declining social power, uncertainty of the job market, and unstable income and lacking welfare support (Inwood 581). These are all things idealised masculinity is challenged by, and by failing these challenges, the Kavalry are stigmatised by their lesser masculinity which they seek to uphold in other ways: “[men] and boys who are denied full male privileges and status because of their race or their social class tend to still feel pressured to demonstrate extreme male behavior to overcompensate for their diminished social position” (Klein 48). Violence is then not just a way to prove masculinity but the psychological wage justifies any means to defend one’s position (Inwood 586). So, they do not believe that Whiteness, their ‘natural’ superiority, gives them the privileges they are entitled to because they are poor; they only see how unprivileged they are in the intersection of gender and class, which then becomes the whole. In this intersection, Black people are positioned as direct threats to the Kavalry Members as they are the ones who challenge their masculinity and are to blame for their financial struggles: “[...] because whiteness is positioned as being under threat from ‘others’ and whites are often positioned as vulnerable this perceived vulnerability means that when civil rights gains occur [...] these efforts invariably incur a ‘white backlash’ due to a perception that these benefits must come at the expense of whites” (Inwood 582).

However, because they feel marginalised in the intersection of gender and class, and because the upper classes represent themselves as the American Dream that anybody can achieve, it is easy to take advantage of their striving for privileges that their class position prevents them from achieving. Thus, the Kavalry members are used as literal cannon fodder in order to distract from the arrogation of power by the already powerful, as exemplified by a scene in which the police traces Kavalry members to a cattle farm, and a gun battle ensues (E1 34:00). The farm, the indifferent slaughter of the cattle, the weaponry, and the escape plane show that not all Kavalry members are poor, but it is the regular man who fights the war on the frontline while rich people like Keene and Crawford hide behind them. Thus, Kavalry ideology and practices suggest that, much like the police force, their rage and violence is motivated and legitimised by a fear of an outside enemy, and further, that White American masculinity intersected with poverty becomes a breeding ground for rage and hatred that is easily directed at the already vulnerable and exploited by the upper classes, so that in the end, it is not their own truths they give voice to, but the truths of those with deafening voices.

The Middle Class: Allies With Benefits

hooks claims that:

In many ways [white feminists of the civil rights era] were following in the footsteps of their abolitionist ancestors who had demanded that everyone (white women and black people) be given the vote, but, when faced with the possibility that black males might gain the right to vote while they were denied it on the basis of gender, they chose to ally themselves with men, uniting under the fabric of white supremacy (*Feminism is for Everybody* 56).

This is not simply a critique of White women's refusal to give up their racial privileges, but also suggests why. As their Whiteness intersects with marginalised positioning, they are not blinded entirely by the god trick, but fear losing what voice they have to the privilege defined by their marginalisation, and therefore ended up privileging their marginalisation over another group's marginalisation. This notion complicates Angela's relationship with seeming allies,

as well as sets a border for how far they are willing to step away from their privileged platforms to aid her.

Laurie Blake: The Little Girl who Threw a Brick at God

Laurie Blake is a character from the original *Watchmen* graphic novel known as the superhero Silk Spectre II. However, in her current position, she is an FBI agent whose job is to arrest vigilantes (E3 01:50). After establishing Blake as a tough, cynical, career woman, she is shown sitting in a Dr. Manhattan telephone booth telling a joke about how God decides the fate of her and her fellow members of the Watchmen: Nite Owl (E3 08:25), Ozymandias/Adrian Veidt (E3 14:55), and Dr. Manhattan (E321:55). God has condemned all the men to hell due to their perspectives on morality - Nite owl for being too soft, Ozymandias for being a monster, and Dr. Manhattan for being indifferent. The last fragment of the joke tells Laurie's own fate:

“All the heroes have gone to hell. His work done, God's packing up to go home and then he notices someone waiting. But it's not a hero, it's just a woman.

““Where did you come from?’ asks God.

“Oh I was just standing behind those other guys the whole time, you just didn't see me.

““Did I give you a talent,’ God asks.

““No, none to speak of,’ says the woman.

““God gives her a good long look. ‘I'm so sorry. I'm embarrassed. Seriously, this almost never happens but I don't know who you are’.

“And the woman looks at God and she quietly says, ‘I'm the little girl who threw the brick in the air’.

“And a sound from above, something falling: the brick. God looks up but it's too late. He never saw it coming. It hits him so hard, his brains shoot out his nose.

Game over. He's dead. And where does God go when he dies? He goes to hell.

Roll on snare drum. Curtains. Good joke" (E3 43:44).

This joke is a subtle introduction to her character and history, but also an allegorical mockery of masculine privilege. The original comic portrays Laurie as being a reluctant superhero, forced into the role by her mother, and furthermore, the character has been criticised for only being defined by her relationship to the male characters and having no real agency (Hoberek 7, 57, 130). The joke takes on the problem of how women are often overlooked due to the perception that they lack talent and importance by turning the misunderstood components of femininity into strengths. Timidity and invisibility become calculation and resilience, and thus, feminine performativity becomes a superpower all in itself, the reason for her being the last person standing. Thus, the joke plays on her old portrayal by having Laurie redefine her own fate outside masculine influence, giving herself due credit as the true hero of the story in which she silences a patriarchal god and wins against the men who have controlled her. However, her flat is filled with echoes of the past: a pet owl representing her boyfriend Nite Owl, who is hinted at being in prison (E3 07:55); a picture of the Watchmen (E3 08:15); and a blue dildo representing the genitals of her former lover, Dr. Manhattan (E3 44:15). Thus, there is a discrepancy between how Blake presents herself and how she feels, suggesting that she is longing for the past but has had a feminist revelation which forced her to reject the god trick. That she has had to stand in the shadow of men, so that now, rather than serve them, she uses the law to remain the last one standing.

The manner in which she represents herself to God in her joke further suggests that she sees herself as simply human, as the one most suited to end patriarchy, thus, making herself the ultimate feminist hero because she attempts to make the 'universal' woman human once again - striving for the privileged voice, but not trying to create a new position entirely. This status as a feminist hero is further exemplified by her experiences with gender based trauma: "Agent Blake's parents were the Comedian and Silk Spectre. They were both in the Minutemen [...] the Comedian sexually assaulted Silk Spectre [...] Agent Blake didn't find out till much, much later" (E4 27:45). This suggests that even 'superheroines' are not exempt from being reduced to vulnerability, and their vigilante status does not protect them from masculine objectification and assault. Thus, her rejection of the vigilante mask and subsequent alliance with law enforcement suggests that she uses the intersection of her

marginalised gender and privileged race strategically, so that the law functions as a shield for her on an individual basis. In other words, she allies herself with White institutions because the benefits she personally gains in challenging masculine privilege outweigh the moral implications of furthering racial inequality.

Having been sent to Tulsa under the pretence that a vigilante killed Judd Crawford (E3 07:10), she becomes Angela's personal nemesis due to their opposite stances on vigilantism. For example, Blake asks her, "[you] know how you can tell the difference between a masked cop and a vigilante? [...] Me neither" (E3 25:15). Her comparison between vigilantes and police officers suggests a criticism of the intersection of power structures and individualism. According to Hoberek, the original creator of the graphic novel, Alan Moore, glorified individual responsibility by criticising the political system as nothing more than an instillation of hope while not taking real action: "[it] is down to the individual. If individuals do not like the world that we happen to be living in--and who can blame them?--then I suggest it is up to them to change it" (Moore qtd. in Hoberek 156-157). In other words, for Moore, superheroes are symbols of change; of making the world a better place by breaking down the power structures and "[...] disperse power to ordinary people rather than maintaining it as the preserve of a privileged elite of political leaders, capitalists, and [...] superheroes" (Hoberek 157). However, the Keene Act, which outlawed superheroes unless they worked for the government, took them in and made "[...] them into agents of the state's repressive powers" (Hoberek 136). Thus, in Blake's comparison, vigilantes outside the system are driven by their own trauma and therefore their own sense of justice (E4 27:00), while 'legal' vigilantes and the police are often put on a pedestal as benevolent saviours without questioning their intentions and claim to power. This implies that power and abuse of power can be perpetuated freely, yet invisibly, revealing that laws are arbitrary and interpreted by those in power.

As a result, she shows disdain of Angela because her actions are an obstruction of justice which ultimately helps to secure the continued power of people like Joe Keene. Furthermore, making Angela and Blake opposites uncovers a dilemma of vision and privilege: Angela's story shows how people who are Othered do not have any other choice but to take action into their own hands, and from a Black feminist perspective, vigilantism thus becomes activism, if not as an organised effort, then in the everyday actions of individuals. However, benefitting from her White privilege, Blake reproduces vigilantism not

as activism, but as a transgression of the law and therefore evil, which speaks to her privilege of benefitting from the law.

Wade Tillman: Mirror Guy AKA Looking Glass

Wade Tillman is Angela's police partner and White ally whose main skill is interrogation. He is a White man and therefore a natural assumed opposite to Angela, however, his vigilante identity as Looking Glass reveals an unprivileged gender performance that challenges his masculinity as a privileged position.

Like Angela, Tillman's life has been shaped by trauma; he was a young Jehovah's Witness doing missionary work at a funfair when Adrian Veidt's attack occurred (E5 02:15). The Jehovah's Witnesses connote extreme group ideology based on religion and strict loyalty to rules and order, social structures, and truths so 'holy' they must not be disrupted by change or chaos. As the trauma he experiences from Veidt's attack coincides with a humiliating experience with a girl promising him sex, the experience disrupted those assumed rules of law. The squid is one of the most absurd elements of the series, seemingly ridiculous, yet, the devastation shown as Tillman steps out naked to find an ocean of bodies before him juxtaposes terror with a setting meant for joy, which leaves the audience with a feeling that the conventions of order - natural and man-made - do not in themselves have meaning and that no one is safe if not even the laws of nature are obeyed.

Blake confronts him about his trauma:

Blake: "I see you joined the force right after the White Night".

Tillman: "Justice needed to be applied".

Blake: "And once they let you yahoos put masks on, you had an excuse to wrap your entire head in Reflectatine" (E5 12:55).

Reflectatine is a material that protects against so-called psychic blasts which suggests that in opposition to Angela's double consciousness, the double trauma of being tricked and nearly killed led Tillman to suffer from severe post-traumatic stress disorder that, as a mental

disorder, challenges his masculinity. Men suffering from PTSD often attempt to perform with more masculinity as a form of avoidance behaviour, such emotional toughness, in order to avoid processing their trauma and to make up for what they believe to be lost masculinity (Elder et al. 198, 199). However, Angela is shown to save Tillman from harm (E2 22:22), Agent Blake bullies him by calling him ‘Mirror Guy’ (E5 11:45) and his ex-wife implies that women have control over him (E5 21:30), suggesting that Tillman’s intersection of gender and mental health places him in a partially unprivileged position in which his masculinity is always challenged, and that challenge, due to hegemonic productions of masculinity, is normalised and reproduced repeatedly. And he does not compensate his loss of masculinity by practicing hypermasculinity; instead he uses the mask as a form of avoidance behaviour, as the mask not only protects against physical harm but emotional harm, as people cannot confront him with his emotional issues if they cannot see his hurt; instead, they see themselves and their own emotions reflected while not seeing him at all. The symbolism of his mask thus becomes that of a protective shield, of self-protectionism that gives him control and a masculine sense of self as he can project a ‘truth’ that suits him. In relation to this, due to his double trauma, his ‘superpower’ is seeking the truth in others: as Tillman, he works as a market researcher (E5 08:00), and as Looking Glass, he is an interrogator and negotiator. His role in his partnership with Sister Night as the interrogator is to resolve issues verbally and implicitly, while she directly solves issues with physical violence. Thus, he works both sides of the propaganda machine which gives him the opportunity to do something to apply justice and make sense of the dangerous things that he otherwise has no control over at the expense of furthering class-based capitalist structures, through enhancing consumer experiences.

This focus on his own survival is exemplified by his negotiations with White supremacists: When Tillman is kidnapped and offered the truth about the squid attack in exchange for framing Angela for the murder of Judd Crawford, he chooses what best serves him, resulting in Angela getting arrested (E5 39:45, 52:25). Within third-wave feminism, choice is represented as something individuals must make for themselves with the “[...] knowledge of what one is doing and why one is doing it”, even if those choices go against other people’s opinion of right and wrong (Snyder-Hall 256). This, however, raises questions of morality when one’s choices directly affect other people in a negative way; even though Tillman seeks to avoid Angela being killed if he does not follow orders, the choice of

self-protectionism rather than solidarity is nevertheless a symbol of racial inequality. Whereas Angela's battle is a symbol of generational trauma affecting a whole people, Tillman's trauma is ultimately a personal one, and thus, he becomes a symbol of the White man sacrificing a Black woman on the orders of a White supremacist group, as his Whiteness allows for his moral code and choices to be self-serving and to act upon a wish for personal freedom without considering the moral implications.

Furthermore, as Bonilla-Silva (8) states, "[whereas] for most whites racism is prejudice, for most people of color racism is systemic or institutionalised". When Angela asks Tillman if he knew that the Chief of police was a racist, he retorts that "he was a white man in Oklahoma", and he only becomes sombre when she pulls out a Klan robe (E4 20:05). Thus, when racism is invisible, it is considered a non-issue while visible racism confronts White people with their privileges. This suggests choices of complacency and apathy can be equally damaging than direct acts of violence as they help to maintain the racial status quo without placing blame on the White people who, whether they know it or not, allow this structure to be maintained because they benefit from it (Bonilla-Silva 9). In other words, though Tillman is an ally in the greater battle for racial justice, he, like many other White people, chooses his own comfort and security when given an opportunity to confront racism. He chooses to base his actions and inactions on the structure that allows him White personal freedom, and in extension, he further aids Joe Keene and the Seventh Cavalry, and thereby the overall White power structures that seek to maintain the racial status quo.

Thus, while both Tillman and Blake are represented as seemingly allies of Angela, their intersections of privilege and marginalisation place their focus on protecting themselves rather than those with less privilege. As a result, they conform to White American nationalism, practicing internal racism to maintain their own standards of living and, in allying themselves with White supremacy, they rewrite Angela as somebody subordinate to themselves.

The Upper Class: Judd Crawford and Joe Keene - two guys, one terrorist organisation

In the following section, we will explore the characters Senator Joe Keene and Chief of Tulsa Police Judd Crawford, and their positions as White men, as they represent the leadership of the Seventh Cavalry, as well as the voices being heard, the voices that produce the 'truth' American society is built upon. That truth consists primarily of a 'good guy' narrative which gives them monopoly on moral representation and interpretations of actions and institutions. As rich, White men, Keene and Crawford's intersections are the polar opposites of Angela's intersection as a Black woman. Thus, there is a power struggle in their intersecting oppositions, as Crawford and Keene's cultural identification are of pure privilege, whereas Angela's is one of pure marginalisation. Keene, with his Southern charm implying trustworthiness and pleasantness, is a 'good guy', a performativity which Crawford similarly reproduces and weaponises.

Their connection is steeped in White privilege, White supremacy, heritage, and power. As fellow leaders of the Seventh Cavalry and American high society, they represent the manner in which people of a privileged position congregate in order to maintain their status. In his critique of colourblind racism, Bonilla-Silva (3) calls out White privileges born from segregation:

[...] advertising job openings in mostly white networks and ethnic newspapers, and steering highly educated people of color into poorly remunerated jobs or jobs with limited opportunities (...) Politically, although the civil rights struggles have helped remove many of the obstacles for the electoral participation of people of color, 'racial gerry pandering, multimember legislative districts, election runoffs, annexation for predominantly white areas, at-large district elections, and anti-single-shot services [...] have become standard practices to disenfranchise' people of color (Bonilla-Silva 3).

This is made apparent in Keene's personal connections to the police chief's family through Crawford's wife, and Angela's first introduction to him in the Crawfords' extravagant house which is filled with people wearing pearls and suits while piano music plays in the

background (E2 35:50). Thus, Bonilla-Silva's illumination of White networks, which exclude people of colour, come into play as we are introduced to Senator Keene, and his political power and connections are implied to have come from just this place of power. That power and influence extend beyond their immediate community to those people and institutions working below them. For example, after the first police officer is shot by the Seventh Kavalry, Crawford is shown to address the officers below him. As he begins to speak, the curtains are opened and light returns to the setting which resembles a church with its priest at its centre, whose only light comes from the one who speaks (E1 25:30). The image of a beloved and respected chief is also supported by the dinner scene with the Abars (E1 45:30). He is presented as a rightful patriarch of the extended family, the trusted protector of not just the Abar and Crawford families but Tulsa as well. And unlike all the people who work below him, he does not wear a mask, nor hide his identity in fear. Thus, he is the only police officer viewed as human, the ultimate 'good guy' in Tulsa; an individual who is brave enough to face those who put the other officers in such danger.

Additionally, Crawford's involvement with the Seventh Kavalry is one of complete control of framing the situation. Keene states: "I came down here to assume leadership of these idiots to prevent [the White Night] from happening again. And my buddy Judd did the same as chief of police. Each of us managing our respective teams so that we could maintain the peace" (E5 38:30). By saying they were 'preventing' the White supremacist group from killing more police officers, this once again suggests both Keene and Crawford as good people with good intentions; they are not terrorists, they are not really racists, either. They are just two men with power trying to maintain 'peace' - a peace which supports their privileged lifestyles and the White hegemony, as well as their monopoly on speech and representation. However, as it is made clear that Keene and Crawford were responsible for the White Night, the violence that both Keene and Crawford are responsible for is so obscured that it lends to the power of their cultural identifications without forcing them to be defined themselves (E9 36:50).

This 'good guy' narrative is repeated and weaponised on a much larger scale by Keene, through his political position and access to the media. After a staged hostage situation in

which he were saved by Blake and Angela, we see the following exchange at a press conference:

Keene: "I am not the hero. I'm only standing here talking to y'all right now because of the swift and fearless actions of law enforcement. They are the heroes. They kept me safe. And I'll be damned if I won't keep fighting to do the same for them."

Reporter: "Why do you think you were targeted by the Kavalry?"

Keene: "I reckon it's because nothing terrifies a terrorist more than someone they can't terrify [...] When they swore me in I promised to defend us from all enemies foreign and domestic. But I represent the people of the great state of Oklahoma, and the Russians ain't my problem. The goddamned Seventh Kavalry is. Right now, here is where the war's at. And I won't be leaving until the war's won. Good night and God bless" (E3 38:00).

Rhetorically, he commands the direction of the conversation and frames both himself and the police as heroes: The police are 'swift' and 'fearless', and he equates heroics with enforcing the law. However, he also constructs himself as a parallel to the law enforcement officers that rescued him; Keene is also fearless, because he is humble and willing to give himself up as a hostage, to not kneel to domestic terrorists nor to foreign enemy states. While the police are the protectors of the law, Keene becomes the protector of the United States as a nation, and the 'war' taking place in Oklahoma between the police and the Seventh Kavalry is a war between the United States and its enemies. Thus, Keene controls the narrative, discursively framing the nation without being questioned or opposed, and he continues the normalisation of White moral superiority.

Thus, Crawford and Keene are capable of reproducing hegemonic thought and systems by presenting themselves as following and protecting the law, and leading others towards morally acceptable goals. However, due to their positions they are also capable of redefining the law and the uses of it to keep a White and upper-class monopoly in power, no matter the ideological or physical violence he participates in. In other words, the subjectivity of the law becomes a White subjectivity, and the law itself becomes a tool of White supremacy, which

silences all minorities within the hegemony. However, Keene does not simply limit himself to speaking and controlling the narrative; in true super-villain form he is the seeming mastermind behind the entire struggle between the police and the Seventh Cavalry, and he only speaks of the full narrative to a grouping of other rich White Americans, all members of the Ku Klux Klan:

Thirty-four years ago, Adrian Veidt unleashed his monster on the world. No, not the giant one-eyed octopus, but his puppet president. First, he took our guns. And then, he made us say sorry. Over and over again. Sorry. Sorry for the alleged sins of those who died decades before we were born. Sorry for the color of our skin. All we wanted was to get cops in masks, take some power back, start ourselves a little culture war. And if we control both sides of it, then I could come riding up on a white horse, right into the White House (E9 28:10).

This exemplifies Marx and Engels' claim that "[the] ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (93). In other words, depending on who holds the power and whom they represent, society and its truths change. That very 'puppet president', Redford, who spent much of his career making up for White crimes upon Black bodies has constructed a truth in which White equals a race and Black people are as American as those who used to benefit from their marginalisation. To counter his advances, Keene intends to deconstruct that knowledge construction of America as the personification of the nation. Additionally, when both the police and the Seventh Cavalry are controlled by the same people, there is no difference between them, and the glorified illusion of the police fighting for Black people's civil rights reveals that they were both the instruments of White supremacy, and the war they wage is on the civil rights and power to speak reclaimed by Black people and people of colour.

However, while White men reproduce themselves as the normalised moral 'good' in the world, the narrative itself does not normalise White privilege, but frames the insanity of their ambitions and entitled actions. By presenting Keene and Crawford as leaders and instigators of racist organisations, as well as being of higher class status than the people they command, the series suggests that White Supremacy has its origin with those who benefit politically and

financially from redirecting poor people's rage at their own poverty towards Black people. Thus, while they are presented as the moral 'heroes' of the narrative at the onset of the story, it plays on our assumptions of White men. Thus, when Keene strives to become a god, by attempting to steal the powers of Dr. Manhattan (E9 31:20) for the sake of re-establishing White supremacy, the narrative slowly turns on its head and presents their attachment to power, their control of the law but disrespect of it, as absurd and constructed. In other words, as the show presents our assumptions of White cultural identification as good and normative, the show demonises that White identification and the privileges that come with it.

Ultimately, then, White Americans are represented as still clinging to their racial privileges, and the construction of their national identity which puts them above and ahead of people of colour. Whether they be partially marginalised through poverty, disability or gender, they ultimately continue to choose to fight for their racial privileges rather than to reconstruct the nation they are a part of entirely. Thus, rather than combatting the causes of their marginalisation, minorities and marginalised people, who intersect at Whiteness are also suggested to be squabbling among themselves for a chance at gaining the privileged human position, while the people in power are free to construct the truth of the nation around them, unnoticed and almost cherished by the people whose marginalisation they benefit from.

God Tricks: "God Snaps His Fingers and the Hero Goes to Hell"

Dr. Manhattan is the series' manifestation of a god-status, and just like Veidt, his powers are based on 'objective' scientific intellect. In other words, the two original adversaries of *Watchmen* are both a glorification—or in Blake's framing, a mockery—of the privileged position. Making the god trick not a trick but a reality - obtaining the power of not just a universal human, but of God himself - is the goal of many a character throughout *Watchmen*; Joe Keene and Lady Trieu quite literally. But even Adrian Veidt's goal was to obtain the power of God metaphorically through the influence of politics, through the ability to be the only one whose 'truth' is being spoken.

In the final chapter of our *Watchmen* analysis, we will analyse how the characters Adrian Veidt, Lady Trieu, and Doctor Manhattan represent the struggle to obtain the

privileged position, the individualist competition to clamber the mountain to the throne first, so that they may obtain the power already defined of a single White man who speaks his own truths only, so that they may maintain a hierarchy of subordination and superordination but with themselves at the top.

Adrian Veidt: The White Man who Got Sick of Playing God

In every practical sense of the word, in spite of being a mortal human, Adrian Veidt is as close to an engaged god of the *Watchmen* universe that it is possible to construct. First, he dropped a giant squid on New York and subsequently killed three million people, and then, he hijacked an election to make Robert Redford president of the United States:

“Here, in ’85 the end is nigh. Nuclear holocaust between the United States and Russia is imminent. Fortunately, I planned for this, too. And the only way to stave off mankind’s extinction is with a weapon more powerful than any atomic device. That weapon is fear, and I, Mr. President, am its architect” (E5 42:00).

Furthermore, he planned all of Redford’s major policies, which included gun control and the above-mentioned Redfordations (E5 44:00, E9 28:00). Veidt, helped by his wealth, thus has the power to construct truth and knowledge that changes how society functions and sees itself, while remaining invisible, the unseen god, who moves all of society through fear and influence. And though he does it with intentions of peace and progress, his methods are neither egalitarian nor do they change the hegemonic structures themselves. Most of the effects of his influence are represented as everyday parts of society, for example, his randomly located ‘squid-falls’; thousands of tiny ‘alien’ squids falling from the sky to remind humanity of their fear of outer space that most people wipe off their windshields like the minor inconvenience of snow (E1 20:30).

While his actions have provoked large portions of his plan, such as Trieu and Keene’s motivations separately of each other (E9 28:00, 43:00), Veidt’s primary goal throughout the narrative has very little to do with his actions of the past, and everything to do with getting off Europa, a moon circling Jupiter, where he was sent by his own request to Dr. Manhattan (E8

34:00). According to Hitchens, the human condition is one that pursues happiness but would abhor the reality of reaching that very paradisiac goal. He states, “[...] imagine a state of endless praise and gratitude and adoration, as the Testaments ceaselessly enjoin us to do, and you have conjured a world of hellish nullity and conformism. Imagine a state of bliss and perpetual happiness and harmony, and you have summoned a vision of tedium and pointlessness and predictability [...]” (25). Veidt’s hellish ‘paradise’ on Europa is a parodying act of the Garden of Eden in which Eve is a maid named Ms Crookshanks and Adam a butler named Mr Philips, devoted to their new master, created by a blue God who attempted to copy life, but modified it to put others first (E8 34:00), and subsequently ended up creating a mere imitation of humanity, with no free will, who revere and worship a single man in a large British manor house, without question, without choice. For every day Veidt spends on Europa, his every whim is met by his clone servants whether that is to entertain him with a play of his own devices, literally sing his praises, or be killed at his discretion (E1 44:00, E2 42:25). And Veidt spends much of his time murdering the two so that he may eventually use their corpses to write a message to Lady Trieu in the hopes that she will save him (E9 17:10).

Thus, while Veidt recognised the White supremacy of his own society and sought to combat it by going outside the human-constructed laws in order to create a progress towards equality, he himself becomes the universal human. His manner of changing society shows just how constructed and absurd laws can be; that they are not universal, nor objective, but created based on privileged positions and imperfect moral sensibilities of the people in power. Even when he attempts to step outside society, his word still remains law to the people who unknowingly worship him. However, in spite of living in this seeming paradise, he still considers his life living hell. To combat it, he attempts to generate a sense of having an opposition, intellectually and practically (E13 10:00), and he seeks back to Earth, where he might live a state of hermitage on Antarctica, but is not met with tedium and conformity. After all, identity is a performance, but a performance that develops, is countered and applauded, and always built on our interactions with each other. So long as Veidt remains on Europa, he is not a person with an identity, but something lesser, something Other. Thus, he represents the idea that humanity still strives to be human, that even to become a god is to become an Other, even if that Other has infinite influence over others. It is, perhaps, ironic,

then, that when his daughter, Lady Trieu, rescues him, she covers him in gold, turning him into a false idol as a mocking gesture (E9 17:50).

Lady Trieu: The Asian Woman who Did Things Better than the White Men

Unlike the Seventh Kavalry, Lady Trieu is not a typical villain posing an obvious threat; at first, she seems to stay in the background, only stepping forward to be an ally to Angela and Will Reeves. Furthermore, she is a self-made trillionaire whose company, Trieu Enterprises, is seen everywhere on the show, from advanced pharmaceuticals to advanced technology (E4 3:25) and she even operates the Dr. Manhattan booths (E7 46:15). Thus, she becomes a symbol of the looming capitalist and empowered woman who lives the American dream as a result of her own effort, her wealth seemingly conquering the oppression she might suffer in the intersection of race and gender.

This much-criticised feminist narrative of individual empowerment (hooks “Feminism: A Movement” 50-51; Collins “The Politics” 322, 328-29) is encouraged by her origin story which comes very close to the notion of ‘the Immaculate Conception’; born from the seed without the man, her mother, a Vietnamese refugee who was a cleaner at Veidt’s estate, stole his sperm and inseminated herself while reciting the words of Trieu’s namesake, the Vietnamese national hero Lady Trieu, who was a third century warrior and freedom fighter. She rode into battle on an elephant to fight the invading Chinese, and even though she lost, her legacy lives on as a national icon of heroism (E9 01:50; Waters). The “seed of her inspiration”, her father Veidt, dismissed her years later when she asked for financial aid, and to spite him, Trieu became a self-made woman (E9 09:05). In other words, Trieu is an individualist who, in her own eyes, is bound for greatness through her namesake, resulting in a fixation on legacy, the past, and memory which is further tied to her own generational trauma; as the daughter of a Vietnamese refugee, Trieu still deals with the implications of a colonised Vietnam implying that she refuses to be Othered by American definitions or let her humanity be stolen from her as a colonial object.

With no public apology or affirmative action legislations given to the victims of the Vietnam war, there is no justice for her people. In theory, an “[...] apology is a necessary prerequisite to forgiveness and that forgiveness in turn leads to recovery” (Regehr and Gutheil 425), and the act of apologising implies elements of public acknowledgement of the victim’s experiences, taking on social and legal consequences, and reassurance of the offence not being repeated (425). However, as is shown by the generational trauma shared by Angela and Will Reeves, apologies are also at risk from being “[...] merely a pawn in the power game, thus becoming part of another moral economy in which apology is used as a strategy” (Regehr and Gutheil 426), but it will not actually lead to healing even as it continues to be deemed a necessary step to move forward (Regehr and Gutheil 428, 429). By not having her trauma verified, by not being given restorative justice, and by not being reassured that her trauma will not be repeated, Trieu and the Vietnamese people still suffer and are implied to not be accepted as worthy of first class citizenship status in the eyes of the American government and are therefore still legitimately Other. As a result, her wealth does not resolve the oppression she experiences by being defined as an Other, even if that external racism is never visible and aimed directly at her as it is with Black People, but it does allow her to take action.

Due to her inflated sense of self and class status, Trieu believes that she can be the saviour of humanity:

My greatest [failure] was Nostalgia. I gave people the means to visit the past so they could learn from it, so they could evolve and transform and better themselves. Instead, they became fixated on the past on their most painful memories, choosing to experience the worst moments of their lives... Over and over again, and why? Because they were afraid. Afraid that, once unburdened by the trauma of the past, they would have no excuse not to move gloriously into the future (E7 35:38).

Trieu believes that the past is the key to the future, that people must face it, learn from it, and move on, but the very definition of the word ‘nostalgia’ relies on a longing for the past; as the future cannot be seen, people look to the past for answers which makes it difficult to separate from it. With the Redfordations, the society in *Watchmen* is in the middle of an upheaval of

‘truths’ about race and privilege, and as the Kavalry members show, unless people already have an awareness of their own privilege, the past often seems brighter than the future. Furthermore, the pills rely on individuals to better themselves, and even if her plan had worked, they would not necessarily reach out to their communities and change the societal structures that their traumas are based on, and humanity therefore seems doomed to fail. In relation to this, Trieu’s daughter Bian is revealed to be a clone of Trieu’s mother, who is being given Nostalgia drugs of her own memories in her sleep. After waking from a nightmare, Bian tells Trieu, “I was in a village. Men came... And burned it. And then they made us walk. I was walking for so long. Mom, my feet still hurt”, to which Trieu answers “Good” (E4 44:04). That Bian is a clone continues the notion of the Immaculate Conception, a continuation of the maternal bloodline without masculine interference, suggesting a strong bond between mother and daughter. Yet, it also proves that Trieu is not out of the loop herself; Bian becomes the project to prove that one can indeed become unburdened by the past, but she simultaneously becomes a nostalgic relic, because she would not be Trieu’s mother without the memories.

A part of Trieu’s new plan to help humanity move forward is the Millenium Clock. Trieu wants to harness the powers of Dr. Manhattan whom she blames for the suffering of the Vietnamese people and for abandoning humanity afterwards (E9 08:40). When agent Blake asks about the clock, she is told by Bian that, unlike other wonders of the world, which were not built to last, the clock will be “the first wonder of the new world”, and its purpose will be to tell time (E4 30:25). Bian’s rhetoric becomes an almost mockery of American history, as many saw Europe as ‘the old world’, outdated and lost in the past, and America as the new world, full of potential. But now America has become the old world, and, thus, she is painting the US as being no better than the ones they attempted to liberate themselves from; that it takes a colonial subject to break open the future once again. A new world suggests the destruction of an old world, that in order “[...] to move gloriously into the future [...]” (E7 35:38), the power structures of the old world must be annihilated and built from scratch. By becoming the god to do that, Trieu puts an Other on top of the hierarchy, which she sees as a necessary step to stop history from repeating itself, as if only the vision of the Other can see the truth.

However, all vision is partial and not without flaw (Haraway 583-584); in a sense, the new plan shows that Trieu has indeed learned from her past mistakes, but her fixation on revenge and legacy ultimately clouds her vision. For example, she passively allowed the Seventh Kavalry to steal her products because it would help her advance her own cause and this reveals her own flaws: she might believe that her actions are for the greater good which absolves her of the moral implications of her means. Yet, as the grandiosity of the clock shows, it is not merely a symbol of the inevitable reckoning with the past, but a sign of her own legacy as a god in the new world created in her own image, based on her own trauma - her altar to herself. However, in the end, like her namesake, she loses, crushed by her own ambition (E9 47:00). At first glance, this seems to be a patriarchal critique of female ambition, but when seen in context of Black feminist critique, it becomes a critique of individual success based on capitalism that might liberate one but oppress the many, rather than a demonisation of women.

In relation to this, Veidt and Trieu, as father and daughter, demand a comparison; with Veidt as the patriarch, the masculine, from whose seed Trieu is born, and whose ambition, narcissism, and god complex she has inherited suggest that her body might have been given form by her mother, but only matters because of her father (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 13). In other words, Veidt and Trieu share many similarities, for example, they are both eccentric trillionaires who built themselves up from nothing, and when they first meet, Trieu compliments Veidt on his successful use of the squids to stop nuclear war, which reveals that her morality is just as ambiguous as her father's (E9 04:30). In this sense, she becomes her father's daughter, a continuation of his legacy, who by default is defined only by the masculine. However, the category of woman is not a location for oppression or liberation in itself, as this always happens through experiences caused by other intersecting identifications. And therefore, a comparison between the two suggests that any gendered body can have the same characteristics, making them arbitrary rather than masculine or feminine, and therefore, any body can perform in this way. Therefore, she exemplifies that if there are enough women characters represented, they should be capable of embodying any role and performativity, and thereby not become a token for any one race, gender or ideal.

However, where they differ is in the expression and performance of those characteristics, as exemplified by Trieu's critique of Veidt's method of 'keeping peace':

Trieu: "Great, you stopped the clock, but what happens if you let it start up again"?

Veidt: "What happens is we're right where we left off".

[...]

Trieu: "If I can take [Dr Manhattan's] power, I can fix the world, disappear the nukes, end starvation, clean the air. All the things he should have done" (E9 08:42).

Her millenium clock is therefore a mockery of her father, a way of telling the old powers that she is defying them, reinstating time and moving forwards of her own power and volition, outside their structures. Thus, in their interactions and oppositions, Veidt becomes the relic belonging in the past, a conservative White man who wishes for things to remain the same, and Trieu becomes a representation of a new generation of progressive women, trying to move beyond fear and restriction, and living to the sound of her own structure. However, this contrasts both of them with Angela, as her narrative suggests that progress without history leads to the same continuation of hegemonic structures that conservative standstill would also reproduce.

Dr. Manhattan: With Great Power Comes Great Irresponsibility

Watchmen begins its narrative with a boyhood version of Will Reeves watching a film of a Black Marshal of Oklahoma right as the Tulsa Race Riots are beginning. The marshal, as the moral messenger in the midst of one of the worst racially motivated massacres in United States history, proclaims "[there] will be no mob justice today. Trust in the law" (E1 01:40). This frames fiction and media narratives within *Watchmen* as idealised versions of reality, as human constructions serving their own purposes in the discursive construction and reconstruction of society and culture. Even in Angela's time, the media serves as a parallel, idealised narrative with *American Hero Story* being a metatext which parallels Angela and

her grandfather's heroics (E2 34:25). In spite of the fact that 'heroes' are considered vigilantes, whose activities are treated as so transgressive that an FBI task force is assigned to regulate them (E3 03:15), *American Hero Story* is an example of the glorification of the vigilante heroes, which permeates American culture. With commercials on busses and airships, and speakers proclaiming that "The New York Times is calling it the most important television event of the new millenium" (E1 22:30), as well as the tv series' very title producing the almost religious awe of a nation, it is an example of how truly worshipped 'heros' are. And none is more worshipped than Dr. Manhattan.

Dr. Manhattan was a part of the original Minutemen, and is the only character with 'superpowers'. As Blake puts it in her 'joke': "Now, hero number three is pretty much a god himself. So for the sake of telling them apart, he's blue and he likes to stroll around with his dick hanging out. He can teleport. He can see into the future. He can blow shit up" (E3 22:10). Much like characters such as Captain America and the Hulk, Dr. Manhattan was a White man, who became a superhuman as a result of scientific experimentation (E7 00:48). The 'accident' transformed a man who did not meet the standards of traditional masculinity - physical strength and power (Milestone & Meyer 114) - into somebody physically capable and possessing the omnipresence of 'true' objectivity, which enables him to see everything at all time, but further to know all things scientific and employ that knowledge at will. Much as a god, then, and unlike characters such as Veidt and Trieu, he has all the physical power in the world. And like a god, people all over the world come to his altar to pray to him, to worship him - only, the altars are telephone booths, which, like a letter to Santa Clause, sends their prayers nowhere. Thus, he becomes the god within the narrative, a monotheistic existence within a postmodern world.

However, Dr. Manhattan, as originally a White man, also represents all the powers, privileges and colonial acts of White America, as exemplified by his role in winning the Vietnam war. More specifically, Dr. Manhattan functions almost as a nuclear missile, rising huge and imposing into the air as a giant and slaying all opposition, as well as being celebrated in popular culture in the US after the war (E7 01:00 & E7 01:10). A documentary on his life titled *Manhattan: An American Life*, asks: "[was] he the liberating hero who single-handedly ended the war, and delivered his country its 51st state? Or was he the cold blue conqueror who decimated an entire way of life?", right before zooming out on a video

shop in Saigon where the shelves and the streets outside are full of books, and masks and puppet shows smeared in Dr Manhattan's trademark blue (E7 01:10).

Thus, *Watchmen* suggests that Dr. Manhattan is a symbol of the cultural imperialism spread by American colonialism; the god becomes a representation of White American masculinity and nationalism; privilege beyond question and speech that silences all other voices, with little respect for where other cultures and peoples set the limits for White appropriation, as also seen when he literally adopts blackface by changing his physical appearance to that of a Black man (E8 26:30). This, the narrative itself points out as less than acceptable when Veidt comments that: "That's quite an interesting form you've decided to take [...] It's not the '80s anymore, Jon. This kind of appropriation is considered quite problematic now" (E8 26:30). The series hereby suggests the differences in cultural and social awareness of the two White men: even though Veidt's statement is a joke, it illuminates that Dr. Manhattan, with all the power of a White man, has only seen the world from his own position, and only listened to the individual voice of his own individual objectivity.

That is the power that Keene and Trieu are attempting to strive towards: not just the physical powers to change the shape of the world, but the social, cultural, and political power of the category 'human'. Keene, as a White man in a world in which Whiteness is beginning to become raced, attempts to turn back time to regain his White supremacy. And Trieu, as a Vietnamese woman, uses her class status to push the world towards a discursive 'truth' in which she remains the only one with a voice to speak. They are therefore trapped within a hegemonic truth in which the relations of powers are naturalised and unbreakable, but in which categories themselves can change position but where the positions remain where they are in relation to one another. Thus, rather than seeking true change they are simply squabbling for sovereignty.

But in the end, even God goes to hell, followed along by those who attempted to force their way to his power, with all the dramatic irony of a moral tale. Keene dies at the hands of his own ignorance (E9 36:30); Trieu at the hands of her own machine (E9 47:50); Dr. Manhattan dies sitting with his hands beneath his knees, passively letting things play out (E9 42:00); and though Veidt does not die, his 'worthy opponents', the ones who opposed him without acting on his influence, were Blake and Tillman, a woman and a man with PTSD.

And as he falls, clobbered over the head, with the promise of a fair trial for his crimes, it is to the declaration that “that guy talks too much” (E9 55:20). Thus, the era of the able-bodied White man’s ‘truths’ end, leaving silence for a new group of more diverse speakers to emerge. More specifically, it is the Black feminist character, Angela, who inherits the power of god at the end of the narrative.

As the series comes to a close, we see Angela and her family—her children and her grandfather—walking away from the wreckage of dead police officers, capitalists, and White supremacists (E9 57:00), suggesting that the Black family and the Black woman’s performance as part of that community was its real source of strength and survival. Angela is awakened to the truth of racial inequality, and has found her community. But those are all decisions of the past; when she realises she is capable of inheriting the power of a god, it is her grandfather who voices a different purpose through the regrets brought on by past passivity: “[Dr Manhattan] was a good man. I’m sorry he’s gone. But, uh... considering what he could do, he could’ve done more” (E9 59:00). By illuminating the passivity of those who had grown accustomed to their privileges, Reeves reminds Angela that with the power to speak comes the power to transform; to change ourselves and the world around us. Thus, by having a Black woman, who never internalised hegemonic, phallogocentric thought, obtain the privileged position of a god at the end of the narrative, the series does not humanise Angela, does not transform her into a person capable of possessing the white privileged position, but establishes a new position of privilege and voice, which changes the paradigm of relational power and promises that the future will not be a single new colour of the past.

Preliminary Conclusion

Watchmen employs hegemonic thought and ideas that are taken for granted as part of media storytelling, only to turn them on their head to reveal the absurdity and constructedness of these ‘truths’. White privilege and supremacy permeate society’s institutions, whether they be law enforcement or terrorism, and even White ‘allies’ often end up acting with the continuation of their own privileges as a priority. Contrarily, Angela follows in the footsteps of Black women activists. By never having internalised a White phallogocentric economy of

signification, she constructs her gender in the intersection of her race as she had been inspired to do by other women of colour. This enables her to see beyond hegemonic regimes of truth and reject the struggle for the 'human' position as a goal in order to establish a new position from which true change can spring forth. The solution of inequality and marginalisation is to move forward with awareness of the past. However, characters such as Lady Trieu, a Vietnamese American capitalist, represent the opposing argument that society needs to be cut off from the past to move into the future. Thus, their literal opposition becomes ideological, and as Angela is confronted by the inequalities produced by White and capitalist institutions, she rejects these structures and becomes a true vigilante, drops the mask, and obtains the power to change the future based on an awareness of the past. At the same time, Trieu becomes the true antagonist of the narrative, and in producing her as such, the narrative rejects the individualisation of oppressive ideologies and their activist oppositions, suggesting instead that White and patriarchal supremacy are tools for capitalism in a continued struggle for monetary and discursive power.

Jessica Jones Analysis

Jessica Jones is a narrative that follows the titular superhero in the aftermath of her emancipation from patriarchal abuse, and her struggle to liberate herself of the truths that she had internalised as a product of her abuse. To illustrate this journey, the story makes use of superhero abilities which even though they are materialised as part of the world, also function as metaphors for how the characters are manifested within relations of power.

In the first chapter, we will analyse the villain Kilgrave as a personification and product of White patriarchy. We will explore how he produces White and patriarchal discursive power through mind control, as well as how he depends on Others to maintain his masculine superiority. We utilise Kilgrave as a point of departure because he represents the god-like figure of this universe who motivates movement in society with all-encompassing, invisible power. From this, we will illustrate how characters, such as Jessica and Trish, transgress and challenge patriarchal hegemony, whereas others are brought further into it. As a result, the contrast between Kilgrave's power and the feminist solidarity that Jessica and Trish build,

shows feminist empowerment as the solution to patriarchy, as the liberation from the phallogocentric and the materialisation of the category of women.

Kilgrave AKA Murdercorpse AKA Snuffcarcass

Kevin “Kilgrave” Thompson is the main supervillain of the series who uses his power of mind control without any moral qualms over making people do his bidding, from compelling a man to give him his jacket to making people kill for him (E4 22:13; E3 41:10). In the superhero genre, villains and superheroes both work outside the law, however, while superheroes seek to restore justice, “[...] supervillains see themselves as required to appropriate sovereign power to overturn or invert the present legal system in favour of a new [basic norm] (or anti [basic norm]) that best serves their vision for how society should operate” (Bainbridge 383). However, the way in which Kilgrave seeks power is not by overturning the system as such, but to use the system of power as it is to his advantage, because the system that best serves his vision already exists. Simultaneously, he himself remains elusive and a constant looming threat, yet, his actions have real consequences for the people he comes into contact with.

By virtue of his power, Kilgrave can create knowledge and truths whether or not they support his society's regimes of truth. However, as gender is produced through performative acts, the use of language becomes gendered and helps to maintain hierarchies and distinctions (Butler “Performative Acts” 521-523, Cameron 281, 285). Therefore, when seen in context of how power is produced and produces, that Kilgrave is able to position himself as powerful so effortlessly means that his performativity is permeated with cultural meaning based on gendered truths, and he must adhere to the discourse pertaining to these to produce himself as masculine. For example, his power demands speech acts, and he most often uses the imperative mood which is direct, demanding, masculine, and evokes the ‘truth’ of gender differences in which masculine speech is naturalised as rational, neutral, and legitimate whereas women’s speech is dismissed as irrational and only pertaining to women (Cameron 285, 286; Philips 303, 304). In relation to this, when the parents of one of Kilgrave’s victims, Hope, explain why they took his advice, the mother states that “he had a nice accent, English”

(E1 33:52). Thus, a British accent connotes trustworthiness, and as this particular accent is stereotypically linked to Whiteness and the upper-class, the intersection of Kilgrave's social categories of male, White, wealthy, middle-aged, and British construct him as naturally dominant. This allows him to benefit from his male and White privilege, rendering him not only trustworthy but invisible, as even after being free of his control, they never realise that they acted upon his will rather than their own. In this sense, Hope's parents are an example of how people who follow the hegemonic perspective do not realise when the power structure pertaining to that perspective works against them; Kilgrave's power functions like the god trick, as the unquestioned universal truth that they are compelled to follow uncritically because it seems natural, even when they are no longer controlled. However, when Hope states, "he made me do things that...I didn't want to, but I wanted to" (E2 43:45), the truth is revealed as particular and oppressing because, as his victim, her social categories intersect in a way that differentiates her perspective, allowing her to see beyond the god trick, though without being able to act beyond it.

Another way in which Kilgrave uses language to adhere to an established regime of truth of White male privilege is how he produces the Other, as both race and gender are constructed as the opposite to the White, male dominant subject (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 8-10; Butler *Bodies that Matter* 13). Jessica's neighbour, Malcolm, who is a Black man and a drug user, is another victim of Kilgrave; prior to the start of the narrative, he was a young man who wanted to be a social worker, however, Kilgrave compelled him to become addicted to drugs and stalk Jessica (E5 39:20; E4 46:00). The question of whether or not people have a 'choice' is repeated throughout the series; Malcolm is especially influenced by the notion of individual responsibility and blames himself. He admits that, while he was being controlled in the beginning, he continued by his own free will once he became addicted to drugs which suggests that the constructions of knowledge and hegemonic mindsets that move people to act balance complexly between fatalism and indeterminism (E5 39:52).

However, Kilgrave directly shows how White speech affects the performativity of Black people by reducing Malcolm to a stereotype of the volatile Black junkie. That a single Black person speaks for all Black people produces knowledge of Black people as undeserving and incapable which justifies White dominance while concealing the racist structures that produces this hierarchy. That Malcolm blames himself rather than the structures that put him

in this position is reminiscent of how knowledge born of a certain truth becomes hegemonic so that the dominating structure of power is internalised and naturalised by those it disempowers. However, after he is freed from Kilgrave's control, he chooses to act upon a community based strategy he inherited from his Black heritage of solidarity by taking charge of a support group for Kilgrave's victims (E9 34:10). Another example is how Kilgrave uses Luke Cage, who is normally peaceful and only uses violence when he is directly threatened, to do his dirty work by attacking Jessica (E12 45:05). Luke is a large, muscular Black man, with superhuman strength and impenetrable skin, and by reducing him to the stereotype of the angry and violent Black man, Kilgrave is motivated by the appearance of Black people, as well as White expectations of that appearance, and he thereby continues to reproduce social constructs which benefit his own categorisation.

It is revealed that Kilgrave's power is a result of his scientist parents doing experiments on him in his early childhood to treat a neurodegenerative disease, and his power is a side effect of these experiments and is described as a literal virus which infects people he is in close proximity to (E8 30:25; E9 37:35; E10 06:15). Thus, the response to disability is negative, something to cure rather than to accept, and in doing so, his parents upheld a damaging binary of normal and abnormal in which the disabled individual has no control over their representation (Marks 64). Furthermore, disabled people are often stigmatised as victims and as being needy and dependent, but also sinful and impotent (64). In this sense, as Kilgrave has had no autonomy and has been rendered weak, and therefore feminine in the course of his treatment, he is shown to also be a victim of society's view on disability as well, and thus patriarchal ideals of masculinity, an experience he creates his own victim narrative around: "I have to painstakingly choose every word I say [...] I didn't have this. A home, loving parents, a family" (E8 29:27). Surely, men can also be victims, but the question of choice is raised yet again; Kilgrave justifies his actions by blaming his nurture, and his power thereby becomes a tool of revenge and taking back control of himself and his masculinity. However, as a stark contrast to Malcolm, who chose to take back control by helping others, Kilgrave's selfish agenda is a testament to his White, male privilege in which the naturalisation of individual responsibility explains why taking back control of oneself and overcome victimhood is often damaging to women and people of colour because of the

already unequal gender structure that his potential for control and power builds on (K.L. Anderson 1449-50).

His desire to control women is linked to his masculine identification, as the masculine must produce itself in the image of the feminine:

The construction of masculine identities through denying or denigrating qualities associated with femininity is very fragile because controlling men's experiences, as human beings, the very qualities they deny. For example, the demand for constant attention expressed by many of the controllers described by Stark reveals a need that is in direct contradiction to the masculine ideals of independence and aloofness" (K.L. Anderson 1446).

As the personification of the White patriarchal position, Kilgrave reduces both Jessica and Hope to stereotypical objects of male desire by compelling them to wear lingerie, dress feminine and please him sexually because he needs women as the perfect mirror image to establish his masculine superiority (E1 29:55; E1 32:25). However, the loss of Jessica is a loss of the mirror image which reveals the double standard of the construction of his masculinity; the injustice of the supposed true gender that allows the same traits to become gendered and read differently depending on the body. His subsequent obsession with Jessica thus reveals the fragility of his masculinity; that matter is nothing on its own, but he needs the feminine form to approve his 'natural' masculine traits of control and independence to be read as such, for without the mirror, his obsessions change into insecurity and obsession.

Jessica Jones AKA Superhero AKA Woman Detective Extraordinaire

Jessica Jones is a private investigator with superpowers who was aspiring to become a superhero. However, she was kidnapped by Kilgrave, and the series revolves thematically around the aftermath of her trauma of being controlled and raped. She now prefers a solitary life, and according to her client Jeri Hogarth, Jessica is rude, unprofessional, erratic and volatile (E1 03:50), thus, not only is she immediately distinguished from the normative

feminine ideal, but also expectations of the woman superhero. However, the way in which she performs her gender is a response to her trauma. Consequently, in this section, we explore how Jessica is affected by the ideals and dominating powers of the patriarchy before and after her relationship with Kilgrave, and how society seeks to silence and punish women who dare to challenge the status quo. We also discuss the treatment of people of colour in the series as an example of how Jessica is blinded by her own perspective.

Silence Woman!: Coercive Control and Gendered Abuse section

As mentioned above, Kilgrave's control over Jessica was based on a motivation to mold her into an ideal mirror image in order to produce him as masculine, and the abuse Jessica suffered at the hands of him is reminiscent of 'coercive control'; just like power becomes hegemonic on a macro level, a person who uses coercive control seeks to internalise the control in the victim by utilising a regime of truth of gender differences within a hegemonic binary gender system that legitimises masculine dominance (K.L. Anderson 1445-46, 1449-50). Within this binary, women are required to act feminine, and by challenging and criticising a partner's feminine identity and practices, men can control women "[...] because they recognize that they are held accountable for the performance of femininity and because their resistance leads to punishment (1447-48). When Kilgrave first sees Jessica, he is intrigued by her superpower, and he comments on how beautiful she is despite of her "[...] appalling sense of fashion, but that can be remedied" (E5 37:24), thus she becomes an object of his desire and curiosity, something he can possess and use for his own benefit rather than seeing her as a whole person. Once she is under his influence, she loses autonomy of her identity and emotions, as Kilgrave dresses her in feminine clothes, with soft makeup and hair, a stark contrast to her own preferences, and he furthermore dictates how she must feel, for example by telling her directly, "[cheers to] our anniversary. You'll love it", to which she repeats, "I will love it" (E1 32:20). In other words, her whole purpose in life becomes to change herself to cater to his needs, as coercive control seeks to halt women's sense of personhood and capabilities (K.L. Anderson 1449).

However, when they first meet, Kilgrave's discourse is not immediately recognised as controlling, for example, he compels her by saying: "There's a fantastic Szechan place around the corner. You like Chinese. Come on" (E5 38:16). Even though he uses the imperative, this demand reads more as a romantic and bold proposition of a charming person falling in love, and within the gender binary, this form of control is seen as masculine and therefore attractive for women because it appeals to their desire to feel feminine (K.L. Anderson 1447-1448). Thus, even when the control might be direct, women themselves do not immediately recognise coercive control as something negative because control is a part of masculine gender performativity in which masculine dominance reinforces feminine subservience as something positive and normal. Furthermore, it produces him as an actor, someone whose performance, while dependent on a feminine recipient, is about how well he performs his own gender in a romantic play rather than about actually charming her into action. By disguising control as romance, this 'truth' helps to give double meaning to Kilgrave's exploitation and to trap Jessica in an abusive relationship.

Because differing gendered perspectives learn to see oppression differently, with masculinity not being gendered and policed to the same degree as femininity (Cameron 286), and because Kilgrave is using his victims as part of his own gender performativity, he is blinded by his own perspective, and therefore seeks to fight against being confronted with his privilege:

Kilgrave: "We used to do a lot more than just touch hands".

Jessica: "Yeah. It's called rape".

Kilgrave: "What? Which part of staying in five-star hotels, eating at all the best places,

doing whatever the hell you wanted, is rape"?

Jessica: "The part where I didn't want to do any of it! Not only did you physically rape me, but you violated every cell in my body and every thought in my goddamn head"!

Kilgrave: “That is not what I was trying to do”.

Jessica: “It doesn’t matter what you were trying to do. You raped me again and again and again –”.

Kilgrave: “How am I supposed to know? I never know if someone is doing what they want, or what I tell them to”.

Jessica: “Oh poor you” (E8 28:50).

Firstly, this conversation reveals the gendered perspective of what constitutes rape and consent and thereby the expected gendered differences in behaviour and language. Kilgrave cannot understand how his behaviour can be regarded as rape because it was not his *intention*; however, his actions of distorting her willingness to have sex under the influence of his power as consent corresponds to the discourse surrounding rape which often benefits the privileged male perpetrator. According to Ehrlich (462), passivity implies consent because it is consistent with the cultural assumption of passive feminine sexuality, and often, only resistance defines what legitimises a rape victim, thus, a lack of resistance questions if rape really did occur and thereby undermines the victim’s credibility and narrative (Ehrlich 462, 459). However, Jessica takes back her agency by defining her experiences as rape and thereby redefines her narrative and everything it involves: that a seemingly conflicting narrative of willingness, lack of a ‘no’, and maybe even an initial interest in the perpetrator, does not automatically imply consent (Ehrlich 461). But even though Jessica directly tells him how his actions were perceived, and therefore that his intentions do not matter, Kilgrave seeks to manipulate her narrative and downplay his role by blaming her for not making it clear what she wanted, that her behaviour was ambiguous, and therefore, he could only act on how the sexual gender script is supposed to work. Within this script, women must be persuaded as a part of the binary sexual dynamic, and a ‘no’ does not really mean no because women are supposed to say no as part of the game, and thus, it makes no difference whether it is there or not (Ehrlich 458-59, 462, 466). Furthermore, Kilgrave implies that a sexual relationship demands an exchange of goods within the constitution of the active masculine and the passive, receiving feminine; that his spending of money gives him the right to possess her

body, and as she got something out of it too, he reframes the rape as an inevitable and natural part of their relationship. He even says to her, “I know you will feel the way I feel” (E13 41:30), as if the female body simply waits to be inscribed with meaning (Butler *Gender Trouble* 144), and the masculine has finally arrived to save her from her arbitrariness .

According to Chemaly, “[men] learn to regard rape as a moment in time; a discreet episode with a beginning, middle, and end. But for women, rape is thousands of moments that we fold into ourselves over a lifetime” (126). Jessica’s trauma shows what this damaging effect of rape, and in extension all loss of control, can do to a person; she suffers from severe PTSD, and states that she is never safe anywhere (E2 14:07), which results in flashbacks and visions of Kilgrave that often pertain to her sexual abuse. For example, in one vision, Kilgrave says, “you want to do it, you know you do” (E1 09:30). Thus, not only is the fear and the trauma always with her, controlling her thoughts and her life, but her visions reflect conflicting emotions as if she questions whether she has any complicity, and therefore, she is haunted by shame and the guilt of feeling responsible, a tactic used in rape discourse to shift blame to the victim (Ehrlich 457, 461). As a result, even though she is supposedly free, Jessica’s performativity a reflection of Kilgrave’s actions and control.

Because feminine performativity was a part of her abuse, Jessica now focuses primarily on performing her gender as masculine, for example, she wears no make-up and dresses in dark-coloured clothes that are dirty and unflattering. Furthermore, her behaviour is consistent with a masculine response to PTSD, such as self-reliance and emotional toughness (Elder et al. 199). For example, as Malcolm remarks, Jessica “[...] [uses] sarcasm to distance people” (E1 12:18), and though she tries to keep her PTSD under control with a mantra, “Main Street, Birch Street, Higgins Drive, Cobalt Lane” (E1 09:45), she also refers to the therapist who gave her this tool as a “quack” (E1 38:35) and refuses further help, choosing instead to live in solitude and drink copious amounts of alcohol on a daily basis. In a flashback of her life before Kilgrave, she dresses more feminine, and it is shown that she has always had a very direct and sarcastic personality, however, her sarcasm is employed as light-hearted teasing and she is otherwise extroverted and happy (E4 03:15). Thus, strategically using the same traits as aggression to push people away suggests a conscious decision to reject femininity in order not to be sexualised and deal with her trauma. This reveals that gender is a performance, imposed upon the body, but changeable, allowing the subject to constitute herself depending

on different social sanctions and taboos with a potential to break from them. However, because she is not outside the phallogocentric economy of signification, her behaviour is revealed to be damaging, not only in regards to her mental health but to her sense of self-identification, and by doing so, the series avoids portraying her as a “strong female character”, a stereotype that portrays women as unflawed and masculine in order to break with the patriarchal ideal of perfect femininity (Davies).

In another flashback to her life before Kilgrave, she is shown to use her power to help people (E5 37:50), thus, she was already awakened to a feminist consciousness and wanted to use her position as a person with means to extend her privilege from the individual to her community which, according to Collins, is a form of feminist activism through everyday actions (*From Black Power* 133, 137). However, her trauma has made her give up on being a superhero: “It’s better, being alone. It’s safer... With Kilgrave out there” (E2 06:15). Therefore, though she still acts on a wish to protect others, she chooses loneliness as her trauma makes her question herself and her abilities, whether or not she really is herself and acts on her own volition. As she tells Trish, “I was never the hero you wanted me to be” (E1 40:16). Instead, she uses her job to avoid dealing with her own trauma; working as a private detective reflects the way in which she has distanced herself from people because her job requires lurking in the shadows and not getting too close to people, as she states about her clients: “knowing it’s real means they gotta make a decision. One, do something about it. Or two, keep denying it (E1 02:10).

Thus, her own dilemma becomes discernible when she discovers that Kilgrave has kidnapped Hope. At first, she tries to literally run away from facing her trauma (E1 34:00), however, directing the above-mentioned ultimatum onto herself, she decides to ‘do something about it’. Her reasoning for this is her empathy: “My greatest weakness? Occasionally, I give a damn” (E2 48:28). She speaks of empathy and caring as a weakness because they remind her of how weak she felt when under the control of Kilgrave, however, her shield of masculine self-protectionism is crushed when facing another person in her community who needs help. Her attempt to perform masculine individualism is shown to keep her in a loop that only enhances her trauma, and her power of super strength, perhaps the most desirable masculine trait, is proven to be useless against her mental trauma, while her empathy and caring cause her to deal with her fear, push her out of her comfort zone, and drive her to take

action. Thus, empathy and caring, which are so often dismissed as ‘weak’ feminine traits, are revealed as her greatest strengths, shattering the regime of truth pertaining to the gender hierarchy. This further suggests that while Jessica has attempted to construct Kilgrave as dead or, at least, uninfluential in her life so long as she is outside his area of influence, she is still trapped inside a gendered ontology of his creation. This further suggests that while White individualism often encroaches on White feminism, individualism and physical strength do not in practice work well with feminist practices, and community and empathy are truer strengths of women, than what giving up those qualities would be.

However, when Jessica decides to put on the proverbial superhero cape once again to help Hope, and, in extension, her community, she is met with resistance and disbelief. In spite of special powers being a fact of everyday life in the *Jessica Jones* universe, even people who have powers themselves, as well as victims of Kilgrave themselves, are skeptical of Jessica’s claim, such as Jeri Hogarth, Jessica’s female employer (E2 10:00), and Luke Cage, who also has powers (E3 22:50):

Luke: “Maybe she’s nuts. You go into a bar any night of the week, you’ll find some crazies arguing with the voices”.

Jessica: “What if I believed her? Would that change your mind”?

Luke: “I’d believe that you believed it”.

Jessica: “Says the man with unbreakable skin”.

According to Chemaly, “[if] there is one thing that unites women across differences, it is the suggestion that we are ‘crazy’ for saying what we know to be true. If we display anger, we are even ‘crazier’” (196). Another example is how Hope’s father refuses to believe she has been kidnapped because she calls once a week even though she behaves out of character (E1 12:45). Thus, men do not recognise patriarchal control because it is a naturalised part of their own performativity, and therefore when that control is contested and exposed - by women - the claim is dismissed; because Jessica and Hope looked happy with Kilgrave, they must have consented otherwise they could ‘just’ have said no, and therefore, they must be to blame for their own oppression (K.L. Anderson 1447-48). Women are generally dismissed and silenced because their words go against men’s belief that “what women had to contribute to social or

cultural discourse in their point of view [is] different from that of men” (Philips 304). In other words, the perspective of women can be threatening to the hegemonic power that men hold; Jessica’s claim of the existence of a man who has such a power and uses it for malevolent purposes goes against the idea that (White) men are good, rational, and more specifically, not gendered which thereby allocates them a position of power (Cameron 286). By questioning this truth, Jessica reveals an uncomfortable lie that would either demand people to face their privileges or reveal that they have been deceived, and therefore, it is easier to question women’s sanity and ridicule them because their words are already less valued (Philips 304).

In extension of this, women’s anger and violent acts are seen as a part of their emotions: “[...] even when women and men commit identical acts of control or violence, these acts are more effective when perpetrated by men because they are more likely to be taken seriously and validated by their audience” (K.L. Anderson 1449). Thus, rather than taking Hope seriously and looking into her killing her parents from different angles, police officers and society at large dismiss her as insane and the case is easily ‘solved’ by throwing an innocent under the bus. However, silencing serves not only to forcefully stop women from speaking; when it becomes internalised, it harms women’s self-esteem which functions to make women silence themselves (Philips 304). For example, Hope wants to confess and do a plea bargain in order to end the narrative of her situation outside her control, as well as the emotional suffering this causes her, though she knows that she is right (E9 32:20). For Jessica, her anger is also tied to her emotions from an outside perspective; after Hope kills her parents, Jessica is questioned by a police officer, who reads her anger as ‘tense’:

detective: “You seem pretty tense”.

Jessica: “Wouldn’t you be”?

Detective: “I don’t know what I’d be. Hard to imagine” (E2 02:00).

Rather than listening to her, the detective twists her words to fit with his own perspective in which ‘tense’ is not an appropriate response to trauma, and thereby, he can manipulate to narrative and control her. In other words, he is acting on the assumption that Jessica’s ‘truth’ is not a ‘truth’ worth listening to because she is blinded by her emotions, and therefore, she is incapable of comprehending what has happened to her. Her claims are readily dismissed and

it takes for her to bring a severed head to the police station and indict herself to be taken seriously, which shows how women must go to greater lengths to be taken seriously (E7 36:10). Thus, the police are represented as a biased institution which speaks of itself as a neutral protector.

Race and Sexuality: White Woman Seeks Black Man

With no help from the law, Jessica is forced to work together with her ‘community’, consisting of Trish, Hope, Jeri, two White women, Luke and Malcolm, two Black men, and Simpson, a White man, an image that seemingly projects blissful racial equality. However, the way in which the series fails to acknowledge the struggles of minorities while using them for the benefit of its White characters makes the series an example of well-intended but damaging colourblind racism. In the intersection of gender, disability, and race, the first two categorisations work against Jessica’s claims to make them less valid, but on the other hand, Whiteness remains a non-issue until Jessica uses her powers for violence out in the open with little to no repercussions, which, in context of the experience of Black people being profiled to a higher extent than White people (BondGraham). This suggests that she is perceived as invisible and non-threatening exactly because of her Whiteness. As mentioned, she gets away with bringing a severed head into a police station without being immediately overpowered or held at gunpoint (E7 36:10), however, when Luke is compelled to anger, he becomes such a threat that he must be shot (E12 51:30).

Jessica's relationship with the characters Luke and Reva - Luke’s wife whom Jessica was compelled to kill by Kilgrave - are two examples of how a colourblind approach to Black people unfold. Her romantic relationship with Luke is portrayed as based on mutual attraction. Third-wave feminism states that any choice is valid, but when it comes to feminine sexuality, that choice continues to be contested as women struggle between feminist critique of patriarchal constructions of sexuality and their own desires, because “what women are taught to desire also denies them their freedom. The very substance of what makes a woman feminine is what holds her in bondage” (Marso qtd. in Snyder-Hall 256). Thus, because women superheroes have historically been designed around men’s pleasure, sexualising

Jessica seems to simply reinforce that tradition (Kim, Cocca 1). However, showcasing Jessica's sexuality breaks with these assumptions. As mentioned, she is not sexualised in her appearance or behaviour and thereby reduced to her sexuality.

However, rather than denying her a sexuality at all because she does not live up to the perfect feminine mirror image, she is taking back agency and control of her body. In context of her trauma, the masculine destroyed her by forcing her to conform to the subject position of compulsory heterosexuality in which she was 'sexed', particular and relative, which allowed Kilgrave to dominate and regulate her as an Other (Butler *Gender Trouble* 16, 144). But in her relationship with Luke, they are equals, as exemplified by how they initiate their relationship (E1 25:50):

Jessica: "[...] But you also like women. Temporarily, at least. And they like you".

Luke: "See, now that sounded like flirting to me".

Jessica: "Again, I don't flirt. I just say what I want".

Luke: "And what do you want"?

Their relationship might still rely on assumed heteronormativity, but they reverse the gender script in which Luke ought to persuade Jessica, who ought to let herself be persuaded (Ehrlich 458-59, 462, 466), but instead having her become the initiator, saying what she wants, and him being the listener, asking what she wants. Exactly what *that* is remains unsaid, but because she is not a passive receiver, the unsaid becomes a part of their humorous and flirtatious banter which builds up sexual tension rather than gender based expectations. Therefore, portraying her sexuality shows that feminine sexuality can be explored on a woman's own terms outside male objectification, and that it is neither weak nor shameful, cementing that her desire does not deny her her freedom. After all, while it was a man who broke her, it is not a man who saves her.

On the other hand, exactly because of this 'equality', race is erased as a social category that matters. Even though their sexual relation is portrayed as mutual and equal, it exists to establish Jessica as a feminist character who is taking back control of her life. However, Luke thereby becomes a commodity for Jessica to help solve her own problems while ignoring his,

though he directly states that he wants to stay out of trouble: “[...] I protect myself and what’s mine. That’s it. Being a hero just puts a target on your back ” (E3 04:58). It is worth noting that Luke is the protagonist of his own series, *Luke Cage* (Coker), and the show has been praised for how it deals with Black characters and Black lives, with the director claiming, “I’m not one of those people that says, ‘Oh, Luke Cage happens to be black [...] No, he’s black all day because I’m black all day’” (Coker qtd. in Knox). While *Jessica Jones* does not reduce Luke to a one-dimensional character, it does use his life and tragedy to propel Jessica’s life forward without acknowledging the Black life he leads all day, every day.

Furthermore, the only time race is mentioned is as a joke when Luke asks if the unsaid thing about their relationship is a “racial thing” (E3 21:27). Because the series follows Jessica’s perspective, race is not the focus in her perception of herself or others which transcends to how race is portrayed as the Black characters’ normative lives without ever acknowledging the oppression they might feel and how it affects their daily lives. This reveals the colourblind approach when White lives are the focus; that because White is not raced, Black should not be either, however this results in Black lives being eclipsed at the expense of privileged White invisibility. There are obviously other things than race occupying the lives of Black people, but, by only mentioning race briefly as a joke, the series makes it a way to acknowledge it without placing White people in an uncomfortable situation in which they have to confront their own privileges. Because whiteness is not considered a race, it is made invisible, and it is this failure to intersect race with other social categories that makes their relationship, and in extension, all Black and White relationships, unequal, so even though Jessica means well, Black people remain secondary to White characters.

This becomes especially evident in the utilisation of the character Reva. Reva was Luke’s wife whom Jessica killed under the influence of Kilgrave (E3 41:10). Because race is not a factor for Jessica, her guilt is not portrayed as White guilt but gendered guilt, as Reva was a fellow victim who died under the influence of Kilgrave. However, as the murder is a part of her trauma and guilt, and furthermore serves as the incident that frees her from Kilgrave’s control, Jessica only becomes empowered against a White patriarchal power by killing a Black woman. Thus, in Reva’s intersection of race and gender, she becomes nothing more than a plot device, a not fully realised character who is needed to push the plot forward for the White protagonist, a fate often awarded women, but even more so Black women

(Ryan). However, despite establishing the power of empathy, it is not Reva that drives Jessica to take action, but Hope, a White woman who shares the same trauma. Thus, even though Jessica's emotions are powerful enough to beat patriarchy and because she bases her actions from a colourblind perspective, she seems to be driven by empathy for all, however, it is not solidarity with a Black woman's oppression but the recognition of her own specific feminist fight in Hope's oppression that makes Jessica act. This corresponds with Black feminism's critique of normative 'White' feminist perspective that ignores the oppression of Black people (hooks "Feminism: A Movement" 50-51; Collins "The Politics" 322, 328-29). Thus, the series' attempt at diversity falls into some pitfalls of negative portrayals of people of colour in which White people benefit from their demise and otherwise stereotypical portrayals.

Trish AKA "Smile, Baby"

The following chapter expands to analyse the gender performativity of Jessica's closest ally, Trish, and how her journey reflects how patriarchal abuse and physical violence is shown to be performed by both genders, and how it is used to control and erase the feminine gender, reducing women's bodies to a mirror for the sake of masculine self-sufficiency. Furthermore, we will analyse how Trish represents a strategic reappropriation and subversion of patriarchal performances for the sake of empowerment, such as confinement and the use of physical force, which ultimately results in change, and therefore materialisation. And lastly, how women faced with overwhelming experiences of patriarchal violence will regress to a traditional gender performance to reclaim control of their bodies, but further how women's own definition of justice may empower them to cease that performativity all on their own.

It's Never OK to Hit a Woman, Strangle Her Instead: Victims of Patriarchal Violence

As a White, middle class woman with a career as a popular radio host, Jessica's adoptive sister, Patricia 'Trish' Walker, is empowered by her cultural identifications: she is always in complete control of her working environment, commanding the room and having others defer

to her (E1 36:30), and she lives in a large condo in the middle of New York, which, unlike Jessica's, is well furnished, well protected, and beautifully decorated (E2 13:50).

Furthermore, as a child star who grew from television icon to comfortable radio host, Trish has employed the contacts of her early youth, the White networks which are part of her racial privileges, rather than struggle in a city where housing prices are rising and the job market is rarely in workers' favour (Bonilla-Silva 3, E2 25:30). However, this is never directly addressed; the disparity between Jessica and Trish, though starkly contrasted to the viewer, is chalked up to individual choices between jumping from job to job, as Jessica did prior to meeting Kilgrave (E5 3:30), and focusing on a single goal and striving for it as in Trish' case. And, as a blonde, well-behaved, conventionally beautiful woman, Trish is presented as the traditional feminine ideal, whose gender performance conforms to society's norms, which contrasts sharply to Jessica's Otherness and non-conformity. However, unlike Jessica, Trish constructs her gender against perceived and reinforced notions of victimhood and weakness.

The culture of individualism and personal responsibility massively influences the discourse on victimhood in the United States, especially when intersected with gender in the form of violence against women: "[...] the usual guidelines [when it comes to preventing rape] put the full burden of prevention on potential victims, treating the violence as a given. There's no good reason (and many bad reasons) colleges spend more time telling women how to survive predators than telling the other half of their students not to be predators" (Solnit 29-30). When women are constantly encouraged to spend time on self-protection and to limit their access to the world, patriarchal violence, such as rape and domestic assault (Solnit 29), becomes a normalised part of gender performances for both genders, even when only some men assault some women. And when victimhood is treated with strategies of silencing and confinement, it becomes an individual experience rather than a collective one, which often leads to shame rather than anger.

Jessica Jones talks about victimhood, explicitly in terms of having your ability to *choose* stripped away from you. As mentioned above, Kilgrave personifies the power of discourse, speech acts, and the power to speak things into reality. He symbolises the way discursive constructions of knowledge and 'truth' are linked to power, and as a result, most of his abuse of that power leaves other characters victims of his actions. Most of the White characters in the show respond at first with self-silencing and shame, blaming themselves and

feeling that they have lost control even once his ‘power’ has been broken, which contrasts to the Black response, exemplified by Malcolm, acting on Black collective activist history, which pushes characters into action and reframes Kilgrave’s abuses of power discursively (E9 34:20). However, the series discusses patriarchal violence and the resulting victimhood in other ways as well.

Jeryn “Jeri” Hogarth, a White lesbian defence attorney, exemplifies one of two women whose gender performance includes domestic abuse. The narrative employs her battle to divorce her current spouse, Wendy Ross, to illuminate emotional abuse tactics such as silencing and isolation (E8 17:50), as well as a willingness to hire Jessica and use her superhuman strength as extended intimidation (E7 17:20). Thus, in spite of being a woman and therefore not having easy access to a physical advantage over her abuse victim, she still finds other ways to access physical violence. In bell hooks’ criticism of White feminism, she states that as feminists, we cannot overlook that patriarchal violence can also be performed by women, and that “[patriarchal] violence in the home is based on the belief that it is acceptable for a more powerful individual to control others through various forms of coercive force. This expanded definition of domestic violence includes male violence against women, same-sex violence, and adult violence against children” (hooks *Feminism is for Everybody* 61). In other words, Hogarth constructs her partners as lesser than herself in other ways than through gender in order to remain the one in power in the household. With Wendy, she uses silencing, humiliation, and isolation in order to do this, as Wendy is a medical professional at a prestigious hospital and therefore is otherwise an intellectual and class equal to Hogarth (E3 15:20).

However, with her new partner, a young woman simply named Pam, the power relations are intersected with class, as Pam is, in her own words, a “lowly secretary” (E6 21:28). When their relation ends up strained too, Hogarth employs her position of power in the relationship and begins to discursively reconstruct Pam’s actions in an attempt to control the situation. This is apparent after an incident in which Hogarth worked together with Kilgrave in order to coerce Wendy into signing her divorce papers, which ended with Pam having to save Hogarth and accidentally killing Wendy as a result. A conversation on responsibility follows:

Pam: “You did this”.

Jeri: “You told me to handle it. That’s what you said”.

Pam: “So you turn me into a murderer”?

Jeri: “I didn’t do anything. You chose to pick up that thing and crush her skull.

You did that”. (E10 24:20)

As the ‘sharkest lawyer in town’ (E3 15:20) Hogarth weaponises her work experience and employs every sentence in the conversation to discursively reframe the actions of the two. Whilst Hogarth’s own choices led to the confrontation with Kilgrave and Wendy, they were now under Pam’s orders, and Pam holds all the responsibility for what happened. Thus, she employs individualism to distance herself from the consequences and the guilt, leaving Pam powerless to defend herself on a rhetorical playing field where she was always at a disadvantage.

Another example is Trish’s mother, Dorothy Walker, who pushed her daughter into early stardom. Through emotional and physical violence, such as beating her with a People’s Choice award when she rebelled (E11 23:00) or forcing her to throw up if she ate fast food, she controlled her teenage daughter’s life (E11 40:30). By controlling what food was allowed to remain in Trish’ stomach, she had control over her actions or emotions, as well as her physical body, which expanded to the roles she had as an actress. Fan responses even into her adulthood, such as one man stating “I miss your red hair...” (E3 29:00), and another man saying “I learned a lot from Patsy [...] Patsy taught me how to hold a remote with one hand, and box the bald-headed bishop with the other” (E5 04:00), suggest the nature of her roles as sexualised in spite of her young age. Control of Trish’ body and autonomy therefore did not belong to herself but to her mother, and did not stop with stage performance or visual representation of it: Dorothy further allowed influential men in the industry to sleep with her daughter for the sake of furthering the ‘Patsy Walker’ brand (E7 26:15). Thus, she defined and regulated her daughter’s gender performance and body until it conformed perfectly to hegemonic standards of femininity. In other words, through patriarchal violence, she turned her body into the perfect receptacle to receive the masculine, erasing and removing any self-defining power, and because the image of ‘Patsy Walker’ remained in the media, an

unmoving, unchanging narrative of entitled masculine self-definition, those attempts limited her gender even into her adult life.

The Question of the 'Body': To Reclaim or not to Reclaim

However, the awakening to an awareness of patriarchal violence against her own body or the bodies of other women is not the end of Trish's journey, but rather, she is an example of how women begin to change and experiment with new, feminist strategies for the sake of redefining themselves outside a patriarchal epistemology.

Trish, as a former child star, is constructed both as a person with a body and as an image on a screen. Thus, she has both the potential to change and to remain confined to changelessness. In a study of the production of gender in popular culture, Milestone and Meyer state of practices involving the consumption of gender in magazines that:

Masculinity is about looking at women, judging them for their physical appearance and in attracting them in order to get sex rather than love or relationships. This link between the sexual identification and the sexual conquest of women manifests itself particularly clearly in that *Nuts and Zoo*, which saw their sales figures slump when they started using a of list celebrities (127).

In other words, Trish' male fans have consumed her image for decades in order to reproduce themselves as men who perform masculinity 'correctly'. As there is no actual interaction, Trish reinforces the mirror metaphor; she is only what they define her as, and, thus, her silent, still image reproduces the perfect woman based on their own values, and in extension themselves as perfect for mirroring themselves in her. However, by removing herself from film and television in her adult life and resorting to only appearing on her radio show, *Trish Talk*, she removes the image of her body for anybody to consume, control, or define. By confining herself to the radio booth, she subverts confinement as a weapon against the male gaze. Furthermore, as radio is only voice, only speech, she carves a path out for herself from which she is heard and cannot be silenced, and, thus, as the reinterpretation of her own name -

from ‘Patsy’ to ‘Trish’ - suggests, she is in the middle of redefining herself, changing, and reshaping her body outside her mother’s definitions and control.

However, Trish’s relationship with confinement is not as clear-cut as simply being a matter of redefinition or reappropriation. Her flat in the city is considered a ‘fortress’, with a security system consisting of video surveillance, a steel-reinforced door, bulletproof windows, and a safe room (E3 13:30) which suggests that, just as many other American women, Trish has learnt to associate femininity with vulnerability and fearfulness (Chemaly 125), and that the world is not safe for women thanks to the unequal gendered bias of sexual violence (Chemaly 133). But Trish employs her confinement in order to reconstruct her body and change her gender performance, as suggested in an early scene covering a phone conversation between Trish and Jessica:

Trish: [walking into kitchen] “I don’t need your protection anymore” .

Jessica: “I wasn’t protecting you”.

Trish: “You’re cutting me out so you don’t have to worry about me”.

Jessica: “That’s not—”.

Trish: “Yeah, it is, and, I’m telling you, don’t. I don’t need it. I don’t want it”.

Jessica: “Okay, well, in that case, do you wanna, you know, grab a drink or something”?

Trish: [A drop of blood falls from her nose and into a glass of water] “Uh... I left my trainer waiting. I’m exercising”.

Jessica: “Yoga’s not exercising, it’s stretching”.

Trish: “We’ll grab lunch later this week, okay? I’ll call you” (E2 45:25).

The scene plays on Jessica’s cultural assumptions about how exercise plays into feminine performativity and which types of exercise is appropriate for women, namely yoga. It even plays on the assumption that exercise appropriate for women is not ‘real’ exercise, as suggested by Jessica’s comment that “Yoga’s not exercising, it’s stretching”. However, the close-up of a drop of blood falling from Trish’s nose into a glass of water begins to break the

narrative and reveal the constructedness of the assumption, and by waiting until the last moment to reveal that Trish is in fact aggressively practicing self-defence techniques entirely shatters the image of expected feminine performativity for the audience. Thus, Trish's image and body is changed and, by the very fact of her change, she begins to matter. The combination of physical strength obtained through effort for the sake of changing one's self changes the signification of the physical violence implied in martial arts from something hegemonically masculine to a practice that can be obtained in White women's gender performativity without stigma. And, thus, calculated confinement can become a site of transformation for women, so that rather than the final station of their journey, it becomes a pupa from which something new and beautiful might emerge upon finishing their metamorphosis.

However, while Trish expresses contempt with some men and patriarchal practices in general, stating, for example, that "men and power, it's seriously a disease" (E4 11:40), this metamorphosis is not presented as an act of spite or revenge against men, but rather as a liberating act. Chemaly speaks of the response to realising personally that the feminine body has been reduced to a sexualised object that "[...] In response to learning to think of my body as a source of danger and vulnerability, I had come to feel it was not 'mine'" (127). Thus, by changing her body, by transforming and existing outside the phallogocentric economy of signification Trish is taking back her body without remaining blind to or forgetting the relations of power that constructed her body as significant only in relation to patriarchy in the first place. As a result, she is also capable of practicing patriarchal discourse, as suggested by her conversation with Jessica above, thus playing both the role of compliance and transgression. And since Trish, through reclaiming her body, is transgressing beyond hegemonic gender performance, she has to construct a feminist gender performativity which has yet to be clearly defined or constructed before her. As a result, the remaining section of this chapter and the following cover her regression into a patriarchal feminine performativity in her interactions with Will Simpson and rejection of patriarchal feminine performativity in her solidarity with Jessica.

Regression: When the Patriarchy Just Won't Shut Up

Trish's heteronormative romantic relationship in the first season of *Jessica Jones* is to Will Simpson, a former member of the Special Ops unit of the United States military turned police officer. As a White man, he is a product of casual White supremacy in the narrative, speaking often of himself as a protector: "You know, I've spent my whole life protecting people [...] I did things in the line of duty, horrible things, but I have never wanted to kill an innocent woman" (E4 9:40). Thus, he expresses himself both in terms of masculine protector of women, the 'good guy' narrative, as well as in the rhetoric of entitled violence which is prevalent in American police subculture (Lynch 34). However, he has further adopted his own parameters for who is deserving of life and death, as implied in his assumption that doing 'horrible' things 'in the line of duty' is acceptable so long as it is to 'protect [other] people', in combination with his past as a soldier. hooks claims in her criticism of White feminism's relationship to violence and race that "[...] activists often failed to liken male violence against women to imperialist militarism. This linkage was often not made because those who are against male violence were often accepting and even supportive of militarism" (65). In other words, there is a connection between imperialism, militarism, and masculine violence, which intersect the privileged position's right to determine who is allowed to live or die as intersecting between gender, race and nationalism. Thus, Simpson's gender performance is influenced by his privileges as White, and the practices and entitlements he has internalised as an American soldier.

Much like the police force in *Watchmen* were presented as willing tools of the White upper-class, so does Simpson and Kilgrave's initial interactions suggest much the same. When Trish insults Kilgrave live on her radio show, and, as a result, challenges his discursive sovereignty, he orders Simpson to kill her (E3 36:00). According to Solnit:

Murder is the extreme version of authoritarianism, where the murderer asserts he has the right to decide whether you live or die, the ultimate means of controlling someone. This may be true even if you are obedient, because the desire to control comes out of a rage that obedience can't assuage. Whatever fears, whatever sense

of vulnerability may underlie such behaviour, it also comes out of entitlement, the entitlement to inflict suffering and even death on other people (26).

In other words, while Kilgrave's 'superpower' is the ability to control and compel others through speech, he is also capable of weaponising others into committing murder as a different means of control. Thus, though he does not seek to discursively control Trish, he asserts the very real power he holds over her life. And as Kilgrave represents hegemonic patriarchal power through discourse, and Simpson as part of the institution which upholds those relations of power, their violence is a response to women who question and attempt to topple that privileged position. And while this suggests that Simpson is an unwilling participant of Kilgrave's constructions of power, that he has not made a conscious choice to participate, his single loss of control over his own body starts an obsession which counters this interpretation. In his attempts to track down Kilgrave upon having his position as masculine 'saviour' challenged, he assaults Malcolm (E4 25:00) and kills detective Oscar Clemons (E10 13:30), both Black men, as well as attacking and attempting to kill both Jessica and Trish on multiple occasions (E8 15:00). His 'the end justifies the means' methods of violence are therefore represented as targeting only marginalised groups defined by gender and race, which indicates that as a White man, women and people of colour are less than human and objects to be knowingly sacrificed for a 'good' ending, as defined by Simpson alone.

With Simpson's introduction, Trish' gender performance begins to be expressed through placating actions and compliance. In order to avoid Kilgrave's attempt to kill her a second time after humiliating him on the radio, she gives a faux apology: "I made some flippant and disrespectful comments about a certain individual. I was out of line by belittling this man, and ignorant of my own limitations in challenging him. He is a very fascinating and powerful man, deserving of respect [...] I hope he forgives me" (E4 10:40). Though she expresses discomfort with the words and insists she does not believe them, this still suggests that women instinctively know how to embody traditional feminine gender through the performance of subordination and inferiority.

Furthermore, she eventually enters into a sexual relationship with Simpson both in an attempt to placate his wounded ego (E4 41:30) and as a way to reclaim the control of her body and its uses. According to Chemaly, more than half of the women killed through

intimate partner violence are strangled at least once, and that “[a] woman killed by a man she knows has, on average, been strangled seven times prior to her murder” (148). Mirroring these disturbing statistics, Simpson’s assault of Trish is thematised by strangulation, as he attempts to strangle her four times before Jessica manages to save her (E3 37:00).

Strangulation cuts off the air with which we breathe, but it also cuts off our ability to speak which suggests that this is also an attempt to silence her, to ensure she cannot again challenge patriarchal discursive supremacy and is therefore a battle of power as well as control.

Thus, when Trish enters into a relationship with Simpson, this suggests an attempt to regain that sense of power and control, specifically the power to reframe the assault. Interviews with various psychologists in an attempt to debunk rape myths during the Weinstein trials in New York suggested a tendency that a significant number of women keep contact with their rapist after the assault, some even starting relationships with them (Torres; Barr; DePrice). DePrice states, “[some] avoid the assailant at all costs. Others attempt to maintain a connection with the person who assaulted them, particularly if that person is a caregiver, loved one, or someone on whom victims are dependent”, and Jeglic states that “[if] they can now conceptualize this as a relationship, they can feel they have control, whereas before they didn't feel they had control” (qtd. in in Torres). Thus, as she has done in other aspects of her life, Trish attempts to weaponise practices of traditional feminine gender performance in a gendered struggle to reclaim control of her own body.

Where they differ is on the definition of ‘justice’:

Simpson: “Oh, Trish, some people need to be removed from this Earth, and Kilgrave is one of ‘em”.

Trish: “We don’t get to decide that. Killers decide that. That’s what makes them killers”.

Simpson: “That is naive—”.

Trish: “And idealistic, and futile, but I want justice for my friend. For that girl in prison. For you and me. I want Kilgrave to live long and alone and despised, until

he wants to die, but can't. Because that's justice, and I'll fight like hell for it" (E7 15:40).

Simpson, as mentioned above, feels an entitlement to violence and quickly dismisses Trish's arguments, reframing her as a person who 'doesn't understand the real world'. In other words, he reinforces stereotypes of women as sheltered, less experienced, and less intelligent than men in an attempt to invalidate her arguments. However, by agreeing but refusing to devalue herself, Trish further refuses to accept naivety and not accepting patriarchal violence as the finite state of society. As a result, she also refuses to abandon her motivations of feminist solidarity and insists that the system ought to serve everyone equally. Thus, she places Hope, Jessica, and her own and Simpson's autonomy, peace, and safety above a patriarchal entitlement to violence, which suggests that she recognises that patriarchy is harmful to both men and women. Trish is therefore empowered by feelings of empathy and solidarity like Jessica.

If Simpson were to agree with her and attempt to be an actual protector by aiding in saving Hope, he would further be abandoning his own privileges as he is still empowered by patriarchy. However, since his relationship with Trish reinforces his perspective on himself as a protector of 'innocent women', who also happen to be heavily objectified by general society, he would be compromising his gender construction from the perspective of hegemonic masculinity, and, thus, rather than separating from her, he attempts instead to convince her to internalise and practice patriarchal violence in his stead:

Simpson: "[Jessica] won't kill [Kilgrave]. It has to be you. The gun that I gave you—".

Trish: "You can't ask me to do that".

Simpson: "It's the only way" (E9 15:45).

In asking her to abandon Jessica's perspective on Kilgrave, and therefore Hope, Simpson frames individual action as opposite and above solidarity with others. His words suggest, once again, that sacrificing women's lives for the sake of maintaining patriarchal gender performativity is a perfectly normal thing to do. By framing his words as a request, Trish molds the order into something which she does not have to obey, as well as as a social and

moral violation, and in doing so, is immediately capable of rejecting his demands. By rejecting Simpson in this context, she is not simply rejecting him, but his hegemonic stance on gender, his framing of her gender as patriarchal, even if that patriarchal frame is one of violence rather than sweet compliance, and in doing so, she refuses to abandon her feminine solidarity and morality.

AKA Feminist Solidarity AKA Inspiration to Act: “I love you”

The following chapter explores two confrontations with patriarchal figures: firstly, the battle with Simpson as a rejection of the masculinist power and domination that comes from nationalism, militarism, and physical force; secondly, the battle with Kilgrave as a rejection of the masculinist power that comes from discourse, rhetorics, and the regimes of truth of the White, patriarchal upper-class God which justifies societal inequality. Furthermore, we further explore how feminine practices of acting on emotion and empathy are placed as morally superior, and how women working together can result in feminist empowerment and materialisation.

Jessica and Trish are brought together by abuse, but also separated by it. Initially, upon having been adopted by Dorothy Walker and discovering her superhuman strength, Jessica makes a pact with Trish not to change the status quo, “I don’t tell [people about your strength] and you don’t save me” (E11 23:40). However, as the girls grew and bonded, it was Trish who eventually insisted that Jessica attempt to act the hero, and Jessica who physically dragged Trish away from her mother (E7 25:20). Thus, the two women represent two different types of strength - emotional and physical - which enable them to perform their gender as contrasts of one another, as well as as supports of one another. However, as Jessica lack’s the emotional strength and support network that Trish has as a result of having rebuilt her life surrounded by people, when she is kidnapped, controlled, and abused by Kilgrave, the trauma drives her to isolate herself, which separates the two. Thus, the first season of *Jessica Jones* becomes a depiction of how abuse victims may be confined by their experiences even beyond their liberation from their abusers, and the kind of solidarity from others, which is required to truly find autonomy beyond the patriarchal gaslighting Kilgrave represents. The

following chapter therefore covers how Trish's experiences of stepping beyond the shattered mirror of masculine self-sufficiency becomes an example for Jessica to follow, and how solidarity between marginalised people is what truly challenges the constructions and institutions upholding the privileged position.

Solidarity as a theme plays a continuous role throughout *Jessica Jones*. Other than working with Luke Cage and Trish, Jessica is also motivated by her sense of solidarity towards victims of Kilgrave's control and voice, such as the case with Hope (E1 46:20). For example, she tells Jeri Hogarth:

Hogarth: "I don't know what else I can do to pay for my mistakes. I have bled for them, I have lost everything that I care about. [...] and my partners are forcing me out".

Jessica: "Don't let them".

Hogarth: "Excuse me"?

Jessica: "Fight them".

Hogarth: "Why"?

Jessica: "Because you are who you are. A sack of dark oozing shit in an expensive suit. Which makes you the best shark in town, and you're gonna represent Justin Boden pro bono".

Hogarth: "Who"?

Jessica: "Another one of Kilgrave's victims. He's gonna be charged with murder. Keep him safe".

Hogarth: "Why? Where are you going"?

Jessica: "I'll text you the info and this does not make us square. But doing something... good ... it helps with the self-loathing. Trust me" (E13 31:40).

Hogarth's intersection of gender, race, and class ensures that she produces her cultural identification as a merciless capitalist, which is further exemplified by her perspective on her

mistakes; mistakes are debts you pay for, and once you have paid your dues you no longer need to feel remorse for them. Instead of punishing her for her transgression of hegemonic feminine performativity, Jessica acknowledges her for who she is and challenges her single-mindedly. She further suggests that the solution to guilt is to go against her capitalist belief and do something good, thus, framing that mindset as 'evil' in contrast.

This mindset that 'doing something good helps with the self-loathing' permeates the series, and is exemplified and personified in an intersection of Black community building and feminine solidarity by characters such as Malcolm Ducasse and Claire Temple. Claire, a Black woman nurse, who helps Jessica and Luke Cage after the former is controlled by Kilgrave. By jumping in without prompting, saving Luke's life and aiding Jessica's escape from a hospital and a group of police officers, Claire's actions suggest that her gender performance is ruled by just that: action (E13 3:00). Furthermore, it suggests a disregard for institutional power and an acceptance of the Other which Luke and Jessica both represent as people with superhuman abilities: Whereas Simpson states "Jess can take care of herself. In fact, she can do that a lot better than we can [...] I see this now. Everyone wants to be the hero, but no I see that we can't be. Because there's us, and then there's them" (E8 20:40, Claire simply states "You're not my first [meeting with a vigilante], and you don't scare me" (E13 5:00). Simpson's response is influenced by his White masculine position, and the empowered Other is therefore a threat to his privilege, however Claire acts on solidarity and a refusal to be intimidated, insisting on an egalitarian perspective that all people are worthy of being aided and rescued without question or condition. Thus, Claire's performance as a Black woman is placed in direct opposition to Simpson's performance, implying the moral disparity in his actions and world view, whilst also representing the moral clarity of doing the 'right' thing independently of any individual motivation.

Just as for every other character in the narrative, Simpson, as mentioned above, battles with self-loathing after having been controlled by Kilgrave. However, as his self-loathing is based on losing value based on hegemonic masculine standards rather than a sense of moral guilt, rather than 'doing good', he eventually begins to numb the pain with medication, which stimulates physical strength and aggression. When Jessica confronts him with his guilt concerning the murder of Clemons, a Black detective, his only response is a wonder at the pills he had been given by the military to give him superhuman strength and the comment "I

didn't even feel that" (E11 35:00). Furthermore, the series defines the pills as follows: "[...] some kind of combat enhancement for wakefulness. To numb the pain center, push the adrenergic system for strength and stamina [...] You can grow someone's strength or power, but you can't grow a corresponding conscience. There's no pill for that" (E10 40:00). This suggests that he has numbed his emotions, the feminine opposite to masculine rationality, and the only emotions he allows himself to feel are rage and aggression, the only feelings 'real' men are allowed to feel (Chemaly 16). According to Chemaly (29), "[insults] are the most common provocation for anger because, whether we think about this or not, they generate social imbalances", however, in this sense, the offence does not stem from a production of social imbalance, because Clemons and Jessica were attempting to capture a character representing patriarchy, one who attempts to rebalance it, and therefore challenges the privileged position of traditional White masculinity. And, thus, Simpson's rage becomes part of an oppressive performativity, rather than a defensive one.

However, Jessica and Trish' fight with Simpson places Simpson in the role of the aggressor and Jessica and Trish in the roles of defending themselves. By staging the battle in Jessica's flat, in a home, it places it within a site connoting domesticity and confinement which is torn down as walls come down, windows are broken, bottles are smashed, and bookshelves destroyed (E11 36:00). Chemaly comments on domestic violence that "[the] most dangerous man a woman will encounter is the one sitting at her own dinner table, yet media continue to focus on the horrific crimes perpetrated by strangers and acquaintances" (140), a rather shrewd way of suggesting that part of women's confinement to the home is based on the culturally produced myth that the home is safe from violence. However, *Jessica Jones* by having Kilgrave bring Jessica back to her childhood home (E8 5:00); by having Trish's mother violently abuse her; by having Simpson assault both Trish and Jessica in their homes, places violence in the home on the forefront of the screen, picking apart the myth of domestic security that is supposed to protect women. By having Jessica and Trish combine their efforts to defeat Simpson, and by placing that defeat in the kitchen (E11 38:00), it suggests that sites associated with confined hegemonic femininity are arbitrary and can be rewritten as places of empowerment - especially when women are not confined and isolated to those sites.

Because the narrative represents Simpson as an unjustified aggressor and the two women as victorious defenders, the thematic discussion on justice introduced between Trish and Simpson presents Trish's perspective on justice as the winning argument, and thereby presents feminist solidarity as justice. Furthermore, as Trish consumes the same pills as Simpson, which stimulated physical strength and aggression, she metaphorically attempts to embody patriarchy. However, the side effects of the pills cuts off access between her brain and her lungs, and once again, patriarchy is presented as having a strangling and silencing effect on women (E11 40:00). Furthermore, what saves Trish from that strangling effect is a paramedic in an ambulance which Jessica called (E11 42:00), and as the ambulance is representation of medical institutions, the fact that this is what saves her suggests that Trish was right about victims of patriarchy being protected by the government and its institutions. However, as people have ended up paying between 3600 USD and 8400 USD for an ambulance trip to the hospital in the United States (Bailey), the protection remains one limited by class and racial privilege, one which remains invisible on screen in this instant, and is therefore represented as inexistent. Aside from this privileged intersection with her gender, the scene suggests that Trish was nearly killed for attempting to internalise patriarchy, her body rejecting it, which further suggests that Trish has fully stepped beyond the mirror and rematerialised her body outside the phallogocentric economy of signification, and the femininity she embodies became a feminist femininity which cannot reflect or embody patriarchy.

Where Trish's class and racial privilege is hampered by her intersecting gender, and institutional protection is not a certainty but a blessing, Kilgrave's privilege as a rich White man is complete, and represented through his command of police throughout the series. Simpson is the first example, but in two other instances does he use police officers either as weapons or as hostages (E7 40:45). In Jessica and Trish's last confrontation with him, he has them lined up to defend him against Jessica in case he cannot control her (E13 34:00). Much like in *Watchmen*, their seamless obedience to his voice reflects the obedience of law enforcement institutions to discourse of the privileged position, to White supremacy and patriarchy. And Jessica and Trish's use of punk music to drown out his voice is not just an act of rebellion, but a strategic rejection of institutions of power and patriarchal constructions of

knowledge; even if women are not immune to those knowledge constructions, they can actively take charge of how much they choose to listen to the voice of the privileged position.

However, as only Trish and Jessica are capable of countering his voice, and Trish is more vulnerable than Jessica, relying on technology as she does (13 37:00), every other person Kilgrave places in their path is still obeying his control. By ordering a crowd of people to fight among themselves, he reinforces two images of patriarchal power (E13 36:00): firstly, the constructed power of God to determine who lives and who dies. Secondly, that the privileged position might escape being made strange and inhuman, unnoticed and untouched, by having people fighting among themselves which distracts women fighting for emancipation in solidarity with people of other identifications. Thus, *Jessica Jones* suggests that discourse and knowledge productions, which lead to actions that are against our best interest and health, are the greatest threat to solidarity and change.

The battles with Simpson and Kilgrave therefore stand in contrast with one another: the battle with Simpson becomes a rejection of the masculinist power and domination that comes from nationalism, militarism, and physical force. The medication that both Trish and Simpson consumed in order to fight on equal level, were produced by a military organisation called IGH (E12 10:00), who attempted to create 'super soldiers'. The pills themselves were red, white, and blue, like the American flag (E9 42:40), making the battle not simply one of feminine freedom of patriarchal violence, but also a battle of the definition of American cultural identity, whether or not this definition will remain in the hands of the privileged position or in the potential of the many hands of marginalised groups working in solidarity. On the other hand, the battle with Kilgrave is a rejection of the masculinist power that comes from discourse, rhetorics and the produced 'truths' of the White, patriarchal upper-class God, which justifies societal inequality. While Simpson's goal was destructions of that which challenged his privilege, Kilgrave's was another: "My god. It's finally over. You're mine now. No more fighting [...] No more of these ugly displays. You'll be with me now. Look, after a while, however long it takes, I know, I know you will feel what I feel." (E13 41:20). In other words, he seeks to control the one person he could not control: he seeks both the monopoly of Jessica's time and attention, as well as fully believing he will be able to project his ideals of her onto her and that she will willingly embody them. Though the series goes out of its way to define both Jessica and Kilgrave as Gods, and in extension as Others, Kilgrave

intends to re-construct a hegemonic subordinating relationship between his own masculinity and Jessica's femininity. Thus, from a hegemonic perspective, the intersection of your gender does not matter so long as the dichotomous subordinating relationship can be maintained, and while Kilgrave attempts to speak it into existence as 'love', that is one performance that he cannot order out of another. Though Simpson is one of the characters to clearly frame Jessica as an Other, stating:

Jess can take care of herself. In fact, she can do that a lot better than we can, right? [...] Everyone wants to be the hero, right? But now I see that we can't be, because there's us [mimes a flat surface] and there's them [mimes a level higher]. And that's okay, but it just means we can't always help" (E8 21:00).

As Jessica was also an experiment of IGH, the organisation Simpson worked for, his response to this us-them mentality can be equated to an attempt to climb the stairs of godhood and challenge those he deemed unworthy, and just like Kilgrave fails in his attempt (E12 21:00). However, Trish, rather than trying to permanently climb the stairs of divinity, once she has seen the light of the sun from the top of the clouds, rejects what she sees and attempts to pull Jessica from that pedestal as well. When Kilgrave orders Jessica to "tell me you love me" (E13 42:00), Jessica turns to Trish and says "I love you" right before gripping Kilgrave by the chin, effectively silencing him, before snapping his neck (E13 42:15). The words 'I love you' doubled within the narrative as an indication of not being controlled by Kilgrave as well as frames Jessica's act of murder and silencing as motivated by her love for Trish and her sense of compassion and comradeship with all the people who had suffered at his words. Thus, where men become heroes as individuals, women become heroes in solidarity with one another, and by being aided by Trish, a woman who had already shattered the mirror and stepped beyond its reflections of gender, Jessica's body is materialised, full of flaws, mistakes and the ability to act on empathy and love, producing her gender as one who saves without the glory of being a saviour.

In the empty space god left behind, several voices still clamour to be heard as a new truth, and the one given most space is the voice of upper-class, Whiteness of Jessica's defense attorney, Jeri Hogarth. During a round of questioning at a police station, she has the following exchange with the prosecutor in charge of Jessica's case:

Jeri: "Jessica Jones didn't ask for this. She didn't go looking for it. This monster found her".

Prosecutor: "She killed a man with her bare hands, Jeri. And it's not the first death she's been linked to. Now we have witnesses".

Jeri: "All of whom will testify that he forced them to try to kill each other".

Prosecutor: "They were a bunch of drunken brawlers off a booze cruise".

Jeri: "Come on, Samantha. You must have tested their blood alcohol levels. Try this one. They were exposed to a toxic gas leak. Or there's something in the water, or subliminal advertising. I had dozens of justifications, I just didn't want to believe it. Even as more people were hurt... or killed. [...] I will have more than enough testimony to convince a jury that this man forced Jessica to snap his own neck".

Prosecutor: "That's your defense? He committed suicide"?

Jeri: "Guilt. The guilt was unbearable. He couldn't live with all the pain that he had caused. Either way, Jessica did not have a choice. She was compelled against her will" (E13 45:50).

Here, she redefines Jessica's actions. When she states that 'Jessica didn't ask for this', that '[she] didn't go looking for it', that 'Jessica did not have a choice, she was compelled against her will', she reframes Jessica as passive, as a woman who conforms to hegemonic gender performativity by refusing to act. Furthermore, in an attempt to remove her responsibility in the eyes of the legal system, she also removes Jessica's access to choice and free will. One might argue that this suggests she was attempting to save Jessica from an institution which still privileges the patriarchal position and remains deaf to feminine truths, however she reinforces and reproduces the idea that women cannot feel guilt, cannot be guilty. Chemaly states of the gendered relations between guilt and shame:

Women feel shame more than men, who are more inclined to say they feel guilty.
Guilt is the response to a person who feels he had some control but failed to

exercise it properly. Shame, on the other hand, reflects no expectation of control.

It is a feeling that you, your essence and being, are wrong (40).

Thus, the truth that Jeri voices, though useful in Jessica's immediate circumstances, is a double-edged sword: while it assures her her freedom now, it still reproduces her as a woman without control and suggests that, though the patriarchal god is dead, his ghostly whispers remain to confine women within a gendered culture that has yet to change.

Furthermore, as his defining power begins to fade, there is no other hero to claim it, no superior Other to fill the space with a silencing voice. Jessica holds on to her materiality and to her accountability, and in doing so she rejects a moral superiority which her powers might have given her, stating:

They say everyone's born a hero. But if you let it, life will push you over the line until you're the villain [...] Problem is, you don't always know you've crossed that line. Maybe it's enough that the world thinks I'm a hero. Maybe if I work long and hard maybe I can fool myself (E13 47:30).

If to be a hero is to have the power of god, of endless potential, because you are outside the regimes of truths which govern humanity, then Jessica acknowledges that universal potential. In other words, she rejects the relations of power, but acknowledges the limiting structures that push individuals into superior or subordinate cultural identifications. Thus, she acknowledges the limitations on people, and rejects the power to become a new North to a moral compass that keeps spinning, refusing in the end to either act or speak in order to fill the void.

But in the space without order, justice, or God, the voice we heard the clearest was Hogarths and people still clamour for Jessica's attention begging again and again to be saved (E13 49:20). The series therefore ultimately states that even if patriarchy dies, class still prevails to marginalise and hurt people, and race still privileges individuals arbitrarily, stealing their voices. And the patriarchy's ghost remains to whisper the truths of olde that should have been forgotten. Thus, class created hell and that is why everyone else searches futilely for a new god.

Preliminary Conclusion

Jessica Jones establishes and exposes the very real power of naturalised patriarchal relations of power, and especially of gender as constructed and therefore mutable. Kilgrave's power, entitlement, and actions are realised through discourse as coercive control, and because of the categories he targets and subjugates, his power becomes motivated especially by gender and race; and in doing so he defines these categories and thereby materialises them. As a result, patriarchy is represented as reproducing the categories it needs in order to exist itself, and, thus, they only exist insofar as they are defined in the image of patriarchy.

Furthermore, *Jessica Jones* is not a subjugation narrative, but a liberation narrative, and as such, it exposes these relations for the sake of breaking free of them. This is exemplified by Jessica's hero's journey, which represents how women are traumatised by gendered subjugation, but are not limited to it, and find empowerment in solidarity with other women, such as Hope and Trish. Simultaneously, the narrative represents other people's negotiations with patriarchal truths, and shows how there is not a homogenous response to patriarchy, and that feminist performativity is materialised in different ways.

However, *Jessica Jones* is also trapped in a liberal colourblind perspective wherein race and gender do not intersect, as Jessica and all the other characters are 'just human'. As a result, the idea of equality and similarity excludes characters of colour and reduces them to plot devices that only exist within the narrative so long as they are necessary to illustrate Jessica's inclusivity. Thus, the White self is defined by its goodness towards the Other, and the series therefore lives within a dichotomous understanding of cultural identifications. Similarly, gender and sexuality are reduced to their own dichotomies, where heteronormativity rules and women attempt to overthrow the masculine 'human' position, rather than break the structure entirely.

Discussion: To Hell With Dichotomies, We Choose Difference

When comparing two texts like *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones*, it is easy to fall into the trap of using their respective differences and focuses to criticise what lacks in the other, especially as the two series are divided into a Black and White Focus. However, we see them as a part of a greater conversation on how to construct and represent the category of women, a category which has been limited, denigrated, diminished, and produced within a phallogocentric economy of signification within the superhero genre.

The first chapter is based on finds from the analyses and is divided into two sections; the first section is a reflection on criticism and how to compare the two texts. The second section places the texts within the genre's contemporary representations of women superheroes with a focus on how the body and sexuality is portrayed.

The second chapter discusses the limits of the binary, the harm that it causes to the mental and emotional wellbeing of those deemed unworthy of the 'human' self, as well as how it motivates a migration from one position to the other rather than breaking of the binary structure itself. Furthermore, it discusses how the vigilante itself becomes a challenge to that structure and the truths it is built on, and therefore how narratives like *Jessica Jones* and *Watchmen* help to expand the space from which difference can begin to speak with many voices.

When Black Meets White: Reflection and Comparison

The two series do differ when examining the oppression the two women experience in the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. Angela's oppression revolves around the trauma that occurs when Whiteness intrudes and inscribes upon the body; how both individuals and the social structure itself seek to erase Black history, devalue past and present struggles, and force White practices upon Black bodies. As a Black woman, her gender oppression is

portrayed as an extension of her racial oppression rather than due to the category of women itself, and she already has solidarity with Black men, so her fight is focused on the White men and women within the White patriarchal power structure. However, Jessica's oppression focuses on the masculine intrusion inscribed upon the body, how women lose themselves when forced to conform to patriarchal an ideal hegemonic gender role. While Jessica's trauma is not exclusively a White issue, the lack of an explicit focus on her race makes Jessica's location of oppression lie only in the intersection of gender and sexuality, and the series thereby fails to consider and acknowledge race and White privilege, as well as how her specific trauma would differ from a Black woman experiencing the same sexual trauma. In this sense, the series portrays her trauma as universal while at the same time revealing it as very specific.

One might fall for the temptation in a comparison between the two, of valuing one above the other, claiming it to be more progressive and a better representation of women. While both issues are important within feminism, both seem to fight for the right to fill that tiny space which patriarchy leaves for women to speak from, and within popular culture, diversity has become a key issue within feminist critique, fighting the saturation of Whiteness and continued poor representation of minorities. However, as a result, popular culture has seemingly begun a popularity contest of who can 'correctly' represent the underrepresented. From this view, *Jessica Jones* seems to fail before it gets a chance to walk, and *Watchmen* wins the day as it ticks more intersections off the 'progressive' list. However, intersectionality is not a competition of who is more oppressed but a tool to examine specific locations and systems of oppression, so, while it is tempting to crown *Watchmen* the most progressive series of the two, dismissing *Jessica Jones* as less valid would be to fall victim to the god-trick: that there is one universal vision suiting all and that all minorities ought to speak in the same homogenous voice, which, in doing so, would erase, hide, and dismiss those traumas *Jessica Jones* makes visible.

That is not to say that our criticism of *Jessica Jones* does not have merit - indeed, its depiction of Black people problematically allows for certain values and 'truths' about Black people as Other to continue - but the series also emphasises a tabooed subject and gives voice to victims of sexual assault, even before the #MeToo movement came into existence. And as Butler insists, we must expand the category of women ("Performative Acts" 531), and

following this line of thought, one conversation in and of itself does not undermine or overshadow another, rather, it is exactly in the contrasts, contradictions, and similarities of different conversations side by side in which the category of women is disrupted, contested and expanded. Together, *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* offer just two voices and two representations, each specific and situated, but equally important for their own conversations while simultaneously reinforcing each other and enforcing the expansion of the space from which women are able to speak.

The problem is, as Cocca (16) suggests, that because there are so few representations of women superheroes, especially minority superheroes, they are all expected to represent women as a group, making it impossible to fulfill the wants and needs of everybody. However, criticising only the characters or the series as a whole shifts the focus away from the systems of oppression and structures of power that have allowed one conversation to take up space and speak for all while in reality excluding most. And if we keep fighting among ourselves for a small space, which the privileged position seeks to keep small for its own benefit, we do not disrupt anything. Of course, as our analyses show, criticising specific characters and series is a way to point out the the unfair systems that have made them possible. For example, while we as White women focused our criticism on the White characters in *Watchmen* because they are the obvious mirror to our own real-life racist systems of power, we have been more weary of critiquing the Black characters out of fear of forcing our White interpretation onto Black narratives.

However, it is easy to forget that the series' showrunner is a White man, and four out of twelve writers are White men and a few more after that are White women (Braxton), and so, even though they have included People of colour in the writing room, the structure behind the story continues to be dominantly White. Thus, even though Hollywood is proving, through productions of series such as *Watchmen* (Lindelof) and *Luke Cage* (Coker), an awareness of necessary diverse representation, the act of production itself reads as a financially driven gesture for the sake of profiting on an untapped market rather than a wish to fundamentally change the structure (Ramos). Furthermore, despite revolving around Black representation, the series only prominently features three Black characters while having five White characters as main characters; on the one hand, this reflects a social reality because American society is represented as dominantly White, and therefore, the series mirrors a struggle of being a token,

an Other, in your own society, yet, rather than breaking this tokenism by having many diverse portrayals, the series risks homogenising Black people. Furthermore, the character of Lady Trieu exposes a blindspot, as Asian people are often ignored or forgotten in discussions about racism and equality; though she has a developed background story, she is also created through the persistent stereotypes of the high-achieving Asian and the ‘tiger mom’, and rather than unite the minorities as allies, she dies the villain, and once again the token Asian character is pitted against and sacrificed for the sake of Black liberation. However, if the criticism and the praise are allowed to speak in solidarity, several perspectives come into one to offer a complex and well-rounded vision. So, while we need to criticise in order to expose the underlying powers, we should not demand perfection from each representation but instead demand that the space be expanded and that diverse representation becomes the norm, rather than the exception.

The Roaring Twenties

The last few years have seen an influx of women superheroes, most prominently Wonder Woman who in 2017 became the first woman led superhero film since 2005, a gap which has been blamed on the general poor reception of feminine superhero films - and this in spite of how Hollywood keeps spitting out terrible Superman and Thor films (Spiegel). But when looking at this new army of superheroes, at the most prolific and visible ones in the pop cultural consciousness, such as Wonder Woman (*Wonder Woman* 2017), Supergirl (*Supergirl*, Berlanti and Adler), Batwoman (*Batwoman*, Dries), Harley Quinn (*Suicide Squad* 2016 and *Birds of Prey* 2020), Captain Marvel (*Captain Marvel* 2019), they are all still White, conventionally beautiful, cisgendered, able-bodied, and sexualised to some degree. It is more difficult to find minority superheroes in the mainstream - only secondary characters such as Gamora from *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and Valkyrie from *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) spring to mind as prominently featured superheroes (though *Birds of Prey* does have three people of colour in their main cast). Of course, those mentioned do not cover the whole spectrum, but this general imbalance makes you wonder how *Wonder Woman* (2017) has

been hailed a milestone (Spiegel), and how Captain Marvel has been praised as a progressive superhero who signals a new era of superhero diversity (Child).

On one hand, this ‘diversity’ that Captain Marvel emulates is a step forward; her full body suit means that she is less sexualised visually, her powers exceed her masculine counterparts, and she has been deemed flawed with a deep level of humanity to her, thus, she seemingly evades the criticism of the ‘strong female character’ trope (Child). However, on the other hand, for others, this is exactly what it becomes, even though she beats the patriarchy by beating those men who have gaslighted, manipulated, and humiliated her, a victory which undoubtedly resonates with many women: “The feminist-ish sentiment of ‘girls are just as good as boys’ defines and measures women's empowerment as it compares to men. Consequently, it devalues and trivializes feminine power in its own right” (Joho). Thus, for her, and all the other mentioned characters, it applies that “[this] is female empowerment, filtered through the male gaze [...] The truth is that as these women break barriers, patriarchy keeps reminding them that they can’t break *all* the barriers” (Darom). Captain Marvel might not show her skin, but her body, skin colour, and hair colour remain the feminine ideal and her feminism is nothing but White feminist individual empowerment. Therefore, this praise becomes nothing more than White heteronormative exultation when only gender has been taken into consideration while ignoring the blatant inequality of these representations. Exactly because the woman superhero has historically been created by men for the pleasure of the masculine consumerist gaze (Kim, Cocca 12-13), how gender, sexuality, and race are handled within these new portrayals become important in new representations are created.

The conversation that *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* take part in together is how they fit into this new army of superheroes, of whether they simply fit into the new ideal of the woman superhero, transgressing a little but not too much, or if they go even further in order to break the barriers built to confine women to a masculine self-sufficiency and shift the gaze. On the one hand, both series do stay inside heteronormativity, following the traditional binary division that men are men, women are women, and all are cisgendered with heterosexual desires, except Jeri Hogarth and her harem of lovers from *Jessica Jones*. While it is impossible to cram every representation into one main character, neither *Watchmen* nor *Jessica Jones* is a conversation about queer people, and it does not have to be, but the lack of

visual representation reinforces heteronormativity and suggests a belief that the audience will be incapable of handling more than one transgression at a time.

Especially the men are portrayed as stereotypical masculine and all stay that way until the end: Kilgrave dies telling Jessica that she will eventually feel what he wants her to feel (E13 41:20); Simpson goes from well-intentioned ‘nice guy’ to hyper-masculine monster; and all the bad men in *Watchmen* die believing they are superior, and the good men, such as Tillman, are never confronted with their privileges either. This, of course, creates drama and suspension within a genre that relies on a play of good versus evil, and it does help to accentuate and make tangible the very real but often invisible oppression that women fight in everyday life. However, even though the patriarchy dies in both series, men are not afforded the same opportunity for change which sends a deterministic message that men are in fact different than women. In this way, both series stay inside and keep reproducing the masculine-feminine binary, taking the middle ground by encompassing the complexity of women while simultaneously not transgressing too much, and thereby, the texts end up excluding as a result of binary thinking (Butler Gender trouble 6).

However, on the other hand, the refusal to conform happens within the traditional superhero tropes and archetypes as none of the protagonists conform to or perform their gender in accordance with neither the ‘damsel in distress’, the ‘femme fatale’, nor ‘the strong female character’ tropes. As mentioned, the narratives themselves only handle one explicitly marked position at a time; Angela’s main location of oppression is race, and gender is never marked as worthy of discussion. As she has never been forced into a hegemonic gender role, her struggle and subsequent punishment lies in her rejection of Whiteness and in extension, White gender performativity. Jessica’s oppression is explicitly gender based, as her failure at conforming to a masculine ideal leads to punishment which makes it important to highlight gender as a of struggle and liberation. Thus, the two series each offer a different solution to the handling of gender, something that is continuously contested in discussions of representation; according to Cocco, “[women superheroes] do the same things that male superheroes do. Still, and unlike male superheroes, attention is called to their gender both within the texts themselves as well as outside of them” (215). In line with this statement, highlighting gender does keep femininity within the binary as something different and Other to the naturalised and invisible masculine and as is important within intersectionality, we

must go beyond the location of oppression. So, by avoiding focusing only on women's struggle, which risks becoming an individual fight, *Watchmen* focuses on those who benefit from their invisible gender. Thus, instead *Watchmen* demands that we talk about women in a new way, as something that 'just' is and not as a site of oppression, which erases its socially sanctioned limitations and opens up for new conversations about women's potential. But, since these differences do have a social reality and women are continuously oppressed because of it, *Jessica Jones* takes the stance *Watchmen* does with race, that gender must be highlighted and confronted in order to be disrupted and pave the way ahead, because just as superheroes have historically reproduced gender roles, they can disrupt them (Cocca 1).

Despite the different intersectional focuses and solutions to the question of gender, *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* both represent women with similar characteristics that disrupt the over-sexualised and hyper-feminine superhero; they both incorporate masculine practices in their gender performances. They are tough, strong, direct, and rude, and their superpowers - Jessica's super strength and Angela's martial art skills - are the epitome of masculinity, cementing them as equal to their masculine counterparts, but subverting gendered expectations of what a feminine superhero is because their bodies do not clearly signify normative gendered ideals (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 6). In other words, rather than conforming to the masculine, both series avoid the 'strong female character' trope by not letting their bodies become an inscriptional space for the masculine, unintelligible except for what this masculinity signifies in order to uphold the masculine-feminine dichotomy (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 13). By having their masculine performativity being driven by a feminine desire to protect and empathise, the narrative sabotages the gendered categories' claim to certain practices and leaves them arbitrary once more. That is not to say that the masculine traits must pass through the feminine receptacle in order to matter, but that their bodies are no longer inscribed strictly with one or the other, and their performances therefore become deconstructed and women gain new significance, defined by themselves (Butler *Bodies that Matter* 14, 6).

Once their bodies are no longer inscribed with certain practices, the two series further establish Angela and Jessica outside phallogocentrism by redirecting the gaze and thereby the inscription of meaning on their bodies. According to Snyder-Hall, "[issues] of sexuality need to be understood in the context of the longstanding tension within the feminist movement

between the sometimes contradictory principles of gender equality and sexual liberation” (256). Because women superheroes have historically been sexualised and produced in the image of masculine pleasure, any form of sexualisation can be said to continue this practice, propping up the patriarchy and undermining the feminine as that of the passive receptacle. This notion is further accentuated by the fact that anything shown in a cultural production is for entertainment purposes when push comes to shove. Yet, in the context of the two series, in which the category of woman has been made something other than purely feminine, not showing feminine sexual desire could be read as Angela and Jessica no longer being worthy of neither having desire nor being desired. That unless they conform, the idea of their sexuality would be grotesque. In *Watchmen*, sex between Angela and Calvin (E1 51:38) is not an integral part of the narrative but something extra which initially seems odd as she is not otherwise sexualised, as in the scene in question, she wears a tank top to cover her body, and her costume resembles a nun’s habit. Though it is tight, it covers her whole body and does not accentuate any body part. Thus, visually the series draws attention away from sexualising her body through the male gaze, and therefore, the information given by this scene reads as a statement of feminine sexuality, that the gendered relation is based on equality, but that women control their own bodies and have sex for their own sake. In this sense, *Watchmen* treats sex like it does gender, it is simply there, not as a site of either oppression or liberation, but as a statement that Angela does not conform to any gender role because of outside influence, but further that she performs by her own volition. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the sex scenes in *Jessica Jones* show Jessica reclaiming herself through her sexuality. We do not need to see the horrible act of rape itself happening, as the aftermath paints that picture for us, and this redirects the focus to support the victim’s perspective and the severity of the subject matter, rather than using sexual trauma as a form of entertainment to titillate the audience. Thus, though the sex scenes themselves might be overstated as part of the entertainment aspect, the gaze is redirected to Jessica as a person having sex for her own sake rather than as an object to be gazed at and defined by an action done unto her body by the masculine, and this helps to disrupt the idea of feminine passivity and acknowledge the complexity of desire, liberation, gender relations, and power.

Thus, *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* utilise categories - gender, race, sexuality - that have been used to oppress and limit the category of women within a the masculine-feminine

binary to show that even though it is not absolved, it need not define them; Angela and Jessica show in different ways, through different conversations and locations of oppression, how the category of women can be expanded. By representing women as sexual beings but not *sexualised* beings, Angela and Jessica disrupt the foundation on which the woman superhero has been produced - through the male gaze, male pleasure, and the objectification of woman for the production of 'correct' masculinity in the 'actual' hero - and therefore, the woman superhero is materialised as a person with thoughts and emotions, whose sexuality is independent of the masculine. Through a feminist struggle for liberation, they reclaim their voices and autonomy to decide how their bodies are materialised, and thereby, they come to begin to render patriarchal signs and their meanings arbitrary once more. Thus, even though both series take a middle ground, their women superheroes are not produced as a mirror for masculine self-sufficiency like so many other women superheroes before them, but as representations of a feminist femininity which speaks in the voices of actual women.

In Critique of the Human Condition

Finding the power to speak and to represent women enables them to give meaning to themselves, to make themselves matter. However, that does not automatically result in a voice that speaks outside the phallogocentric economy of signification; to speak ourselves into existence, to define ourselves, and to give significance to ourselves does not automatically imply that the meaning we inscribe on bodies will be un-oppressive or new and better. In her reading of Silas House's speech "Our Secret Places in the Waiting World", hooks warns against paying homage to the Other if it is as the Other:

"When I read these words, the speech in its entirety, I affirm the spirit of difference and diversity evoked. Yet, I do not see us as representing a new Appalachia. What is new is our visibility, our speaking out without change, our solidarity. Yet this diverse Appalachia has always been and always will be. And we must be careful not to fall into the binary separations that simply re-articulate another version of us and them" (hooks "Call and Response" 122-3).

Much like Tulsa (*Watchmen*) and Hell's Kitchen (*Jessica Jones*), Appalachia in House's text connotes a place of difference and oppression, of poverty and pride in that difference which refuses to be extinguished and insists on speaking. In the case of *Watchmen*'s Tulsa, it is the Black communities that sprout in adversity, and in the case of *Jessica Jones*, it is the working class which keep their roots growing from the big city asphalt in spite of the calamities that befall their communities. However, by finding empowerment inside the binary House is speaking the language of the oppressors he is attempting to speak against. hook's supportive critique of his discussion unveils the manner in which subjects of the hegemonic dichotomy produce and are produced within that dichotomy, how they are "[...] subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures" (Foucault qtd. in Butler *Gender Trouble* 4). Thus, she unveils how the dichotomous structure itself becomes a discursive reproduction which benefits a power structure that already remains and has consequences for the subjects of that structure, the human self and all the others that define it.

As mentioned above, both *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* reproduce a normative assumption of the normative binary. In the case of *Watchmen*, it is the binary of the White self and the Black Other, and in the case of *Jessica Jones*, it is the heteronormative binary of masculine self and feminine Other. And while the binary is used strategically to illuminate the oppressive forces within the hegemonic structure and question the deterministic fixedness of the categories' positions within the structure, the binary itself is a historic construction with social and emotional consequences. Toni Morrison illustrates this in her foreword to her novel *The Bluest Eye*, in which she reflects on how her childhood friend's wish to have blue eyes was an effect of what happens when racial dichotomies intersect with gendered standards for beauty:

The Bluest Eye was my effort to say something about that; to say something about why she had not, or possibly ever would have, the experience of what she possessed and also why she prayed for so radical an alteration. Implicit in her desire was racial self-loathing. And twenty years later, I was still wondering about how one learns that. Who told her? Who made her feel that it was better to be a freak

than what she was? Who had looked at her and found her so wanting, so small a weight on the beauty scale? (Morrison IX)

The reflection shows how there is something at stake in the manner with which we discursively construct cultural identifications, something more than just the grammar with which we structure the world. Namely, the very real people who are affected by and defined through language, whose bodies are inscribed upon as wanting in some capacity. The White beauty standard that had been projected onto Morrison, her friend, and her community was an inevitable, impossible standard to meet because the eye which looked upon them and had given voice to their lack had identified them outside a position which would be considered beautiful. In other words: because of their race, they had already been defined as a homogenous group, whose perceived ugliness would help define the beauty of the self which reflected itself in them. Thus, the dichotomy does not become two voices negotiating between themselves for power and for spaces to be heard, but a single hegemonic voice speaking in multiple tongues so that it may better be able to hear itself speak.

Furthermore, as exemplified by Morrison's reflection, as well as by characters such as Laurie Blake and Jeri Hogarth, the assumption inherent in the binary is that one point of the binary is ultimately lacking or not worthy of holding on to, and, thus, the goal of struggling for equality becomes to strive for the opposite point of that very binary. By throwing away all feminine coded gender performances, and focusing on being an unempathetic career woman with an entitlement to violence or the sexual objectification of other women, both Blake and Hogarth have adopted a traditional masculine gender performance in order to empower themselves in a culture which scoffs at traditional femininity as both dangerous and severely lacking. Thus, they are striving from one position within the gendered binary to the other, but still moving within the structure itself. Furthermore, while Jeri Hogarth's character was originally male identifying in the source material (Bundel), the TV series does not manage to break the phallogocentric signifying economy which defines both genders, but rather has a woman reproduce the very grammar which constructs gender in the first place. In other words by unifying all genders within a single universal human performance, that 'humanity' might be perceived as being an expression of equality, but instead it becomes an act of erasure; the binary still exists, but one point is hidden, demonised, and censored.

At the intersection of gender and race, this erasure of one position in the binary is exemplified by the colourblind racism inherent in society's treatment, and especially Judd Crawford's treatment, of Angela: by speaking of racial inequality as over and acting on it on an individual basis, but simultaneously attempting to damage the cultural institutions which protect Black systemic empowerment, Crawford is hiding the difference which defines and—in his eyes—'legitimises' oppressive violence. Furthermore, by hiding the racial categories with which he defines himself and Angela, Crawford is hiding the very fact of his own race. Whilst he relies on it to define his White superiority, it also defines him as 'just human'.

That very humanity of straight White men, when placed in naturalised dichotomous structures, is what is so powerful and so dangerous. As Dyer claims: "There is no more powerful position than that of being 'just' human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that - they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race" (2).

In other words, the human voice has the power to speak for, define, and position all other cultural categories and identifications. Thus, the position of the 'self' in the dichotomy defines itself as 'human', and therefore what it means to be human is not universal but a defined position—the position with a voice to speak, to limit, to regulate, and to empower. However, what *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* further suggest is that when we think within the dichotomy, to strive to gain the human position means to strive to be White and to be male, to erase all other performances and to empower your own category at the expense of others.

Collins specifies the workings of the structure in her above-mentioned critique of racialised American nationalist identity. In her template of the structure, there are three positions: the superordinate position, which is propped up by excluding and exploiting two subordinate positions. Historically, the positions have been filled by White, native and Black categories, but Latinx people have filled all three positions, whereas Whiteness has remained the 'human' position within the triangle (Collins *From Black Power* 32-36). Collins states:

Historically, because the racial triangle of White, native, and Black lay at the core of American national identity, it neither disappeared nor radically transformed. Instead, the flexibility of racial meanings allowed it to shift shape but not essence.

For existing and immigrant ethnic groups alike, the process of becoming 'American' required jockeying for a position in relation to the racial reference points of White, native, and Black (*From Black Power* 35).

In other words, the structure itself remained, as did the positions within, but the categories themselves are capable of moving about between the position. The human subject, as Butler puts it, is therefore also "[...] formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 4) and the human subject is therefore "[...] itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics" (Butler *Gender Trouble* 4). Thus, White feminist characters, such as Hogarth or Blake, or White men with compromised masculinities, such as Tillman or Simpson, are capable of repositioning themselves as they negotiate for acceptance within the human position without questioning or challenging the structure which made that move necessary to begin with, and, thus, they continue to speak and signify not with their own voices but in a patriarchal voice that reflects the human position back at itself, reinforcing its power.

As speakers of that human category, characters such as Kilgrave and Hogarth's definition of others suggest how the positions of those categories are negotiated:

Kilgrave: "Jesus, you're a vision. Hair and skin. Appalling sense of fashion, but that can be remedied" (*Jessica Jones* E5 37:30).

And,

Hogarth: "There is a legal name for cases like [Hope's]. They're called losers, and I don't represent losers" (E2 10:40).

Kilgrave judges Jessica only on how she measures up to traditional standards of beauty, how well she will reflect back and legitimise his masculinity. And Hogarth judges Hope on whether or not she is worthy of being given a voice, and places that value in a juridical context. Similarly, law enforcement institutions in both series are represented as deciding whether or not racially marked (or unmarked) individuals have the right to live or die in correspondence with the manner in which White supremacy places value on such categories. 'Worth' and 'value' both connote monetary assets, unveiling the capitalist discourse and

‘truth’ that guides the negotiations between positions. Based on a capitalist truth, people, categories, groups, and practices are given or denied value based on how well they conform to the performativities that reinforce their identifications, and by extension reflects back meaning upon the human category.

The very act of placing value on a person objectifies them as a commodity. Thus, since the very structure of cultural identifiable dichotomies maintains itself and the subordinate and superordinate relations and negotiations, to deny those oppressive forces, we must deny the manner in which capitalist ideology places value on and regulates peoples, categories, groups, and practices in order to make visible the workings of the machine. What makes us matter needs to exist outside a value based structure. However, as cultural identifications intersect, so do the forces of oppression, and denying and making visible capitalist ideology needs to come hand in hand with a rejection of White individualism, and the glorification of the privileged Other—the god-like position of all-seeing masculinity, and the ‘human’ category.

As Collins claims, White patriarchal laws are assumed naturally moral as a result of their position and function within a juridical system which prioritises the maintenance of the privileged ‘human’ position (*From Black Power* 128). By denying and questioning this hegemony the vigilante’s existence and role questions and denies that very voice. Both *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* make visual the absurdity of the ‘objectivity’ of human and ‘natural’ laws: in *Jessica Jones*, it is human science which create god-like superheroes, and in *Watchmen*, it is vigilantes that break the all mighty ‘laws of nature’ in order to shape society. The fact that the law enforcement institutions of *Watchmen* co-opt vigilantism further suggests the manner in which vigilantism questions the universality of the juridical order, and the fact that it is the feminine identified category which questions that very universality, and perform their gender as part of being vigilantes suggests that women are beginning to see through the god trick of universal, objective law. Thus, the feminist activist embodying vigilantism becomes Haraway’s trickster:

There are, however, richly evocative figures to promote feminist visualisations of the world as witty agent. We need not lapse into appeals to a primal mother resisting her translation into resource. The Coyote or Trickster, as embodied in Southwest native American accounts, suggests the situation we are in when we

give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while that we will be hoodwinked (593-594).

By accepting the very mutability of the world, of cultural categorisations, and of personhood itself, feminist objectivity, as Haraway calls it, allows for difference, for change, and for natural progression in all things without becoming stuck, static in any one position. The world can change and we are not in control of it; and as the world changes, women change with it, and may begin to matter.

The voices and the space that women superheroes are beginning to claim in defiance of their limited and predetermined roles in a visual narrative dominated by the White masculine voice is a representation of that very change, and the potential we are beginning to speak of. By representing White women in morally ambiguous roles, Vietnamese women as villainous capitalists, survivors of patriarchal violence as the empowered, and Black women as heroes, narratives like *Jessica Jones* and *Watchmen* redefine women outside dichotomous structures that homogenise the feminine category, but achieves wider spaces and a greater expanse of representation from which women can speak, claim, and embody countless meanings.

If we are to materialise our own bodies, make ourselves matter, we must give meaning to ourselves outside the dichotomy, to strive towards difference other than uniform humanity. When Dyer (2) claims that “[the] point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/ us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges, and sufferings in its train, dislodge them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world”, it must not simply be interpreted as a call to drag Whiteness from its pedestal, but as a call to abandon the defined, regulated, and privileged humanity in the first place, which supports only one performativity and keeps those who have achieved it or seek to conform to it in one way or another fighting for supremacy. In other words, we must learn to speak in many voices, rather than just one.

That both protagonists of *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* do not speak at the end of their narratives, that we do not get to hear Jessica’s new definition or get to see Angela land beyond the precipice of a new future, therefore, is not a cowardly attempt at denying us the

flight of the future, but a reinforcement of their symbolic representation of the embodiment of endless possibilities. Haraway suggests that

“[...] feminist embodiment resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of differential positioning. There is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our visions. But the feminist standpoint theorists’ goal of an epistemology and politics of engaged, accountable positioning remains eminently potent. The goal is better accounts of the world” (590).

So it is not that to step outside hegemonic ontology we cease to exist, but that in doing so we begin to exist. In other words, the feminist subject must not be defined by what it is, or what it is excluded from; it must be defined by what it is *not*; not patriarchal, and, thus, everything else, indefinable and boundless. Thus, to embody a feminist gender means to embody endless possibilities, to stand in active opposition, to exclude that very value system that places social categories, practices, and people in general in binary positions of subordinate and superordinate. There is a path beyond existence, meaning starts with words, and if women are only *now* beginning to define ourselves, we have all the world ahead of us.

Conclusion

We set out to examine the woman superhero in *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* as examples of new trends in the complex minefield of feminine representation. We focused on how gender and race are materialised, performed, positioned, and ultimately how they challenge, transgress, and disrupt seemingly fixed power structures and deterministic truths that are dependent on the struggle for humanity. And based on analyses of and discussions on these two texts, we mapped how women superheroes have begun to speak in the voices of women - and not just White women, but women of various intersections, giving new life and voice to difference.

Our feminist goal was to look at these texts as working in combination with each other to add to this conversation, because when women speak in solidarity, the category is best

expanded. Furthermore, to counter our White vision, and the dichotomous blind spots and prejudices that entails, we employed theories such as Haraway's theory of vision, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and Collins' and hooks' Black feminism, in order to achieve an analysis wherein a Black and White text might work together rather than counter each other. So that we might paint a new picture of solidarity, rather than one of continued privilege and oppression. Furthermore, in order to better deconstruct hegemonic power structures pertaining to race and gender that we might otherwise take for granted, we have employed theorists such as Butler and Dyer, as they see beyond the assumed determinism of a 'human' category, which might otherwise blind us to the constructedness of 'normal'.

Because *Watchmen* builds its narrative on Black feminism, we have deconstructed the text primarily in relation to race with a focus on how gender plays into the manner in which Black people are discriminated against, rather than reading experiences of racial and gendered discrimination as two separate events. By taking inspiration in Black feminist activism, the series does not assume a White gendered paradigm, but instead constructs a feminine protagonist whose performativity is built on a search for meaning in her Black history, heritage, and community. That search is made into a struggle by her White environment, which seeks to erase and demonise Blackness. Its point of departure further enables the narrative to expose White men and capitalist moguls as acting on a god complex and a greed for power at the expense of anyone and everyone else. It is Angela's outside status, both as a Black woman and as a vigilante, which enables her to see past the power structures which attempt, always, to maintain a hegemonic invisibility.

Jessica Jones is not a subjugation narrative, but a liberation narrative that uses superpowers as metaphors that expose and highlight the discursive power of patriarchy. The narrative represents how women only exist insofar as they are defined in the image of patriarchy, and therefore that patriarchy is dependent on reproducing the categories it needs in order to exist itself. However, the series then disrupts this and portrays women as empowered victims that are capable of materialising themselves beyond patriarchal abuse and violence, so that feminist performativity becomes a matter of change, transgression, and defiance. Jessica's White privilege erases her race, and therefore produces her gender struggle as a singular and universal experience, and, thus, it highlights experiences of oppression which are in the spirit of White feminism; silencing, rape, and assault. However, the universal

experience also counters the idea of patriarchal oppression is an individual experience, the series offers solidarity as the solution, which implies that feminist performativity is materialised in the act of working together in feminine communities that may counter the supremacy of masculinity.

Finally, in the the discussion, we compared the two texts and found that they both complied with and transgressed other texts in the superhero genre. The narrative of both texts complies with a binary; there are only men and women, and when we speak of ‘the category of women’, it does not pass the limits of the binary, as the body is still understood as part of biological determinism. However, that biological determinism does not limit performativity; women are not limited to a specific feminine performance or a specific masculine performance, but are beginning to negotiate and disconnect the signs of gender and sexuality from their significance, which in turn leads to change, materialisation, and women’s narratives being spoken in the voices of women. Thus, we found that even though the binary is not disrupted completely, the two series portray women’s struggle and liberation from being materialised within the phallogocentric economy of signification. Therefore, the disruption of gender lies in the rejection of the structures of value that the binary constructs and projects upon certain cultural categories, and in extension a rejection of striving towards the ideal ‘human’ performativity.

When we strive towards a single humanity, we become blinded to the endless colours of difference. When feminists claim that superhero texts, such as *Wonder Woman* and *Captain Marvel*, are groundbreakingly diverse, they fall for the god trick, the idea that any representation is good representation, that small steps towards diversity and transgression are enough to call for celebration. And if we were to make the same claim concerning *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones*, we might also fall for the temptations in complacency and compliance, happy simply to see a step in the right direction. *Watchmen* and *Jessica Jones* are series that step in the right direction - speaking in the voices of women, addressing women with the stories that we need to hear, and disrupting the fixed ideals of traditional gender performance - but they are not the final step towards the materialisation of women, nor do they have the final say.

So when feminist critics hail these texts as peak feminist representation, as finally speaking with all the voices of all women, they betray a naivete and a complacency which accepts the status quo, the regulations and the limitations still confining gender. This is no more apparent than in B. Davis' claim that:

Ultimately, the importance of this turn towards women in comic book movies is not limited to what happens in Hollywood. Recent polls suggest that women might be the key voting block who decides the 2020 election. The ways that women are represented in many of Hollywood's top films this year—as heroes who wield immense power, whose voices matter and who are capable of changing the world—could reverberate with female voters. Media representations can have lasting consequences for audiences, especially when you see your own identity reflected back at you in new and inspirational ways.

On the one hand, Davis forgets that the identities 'reflected back at us' from the Hollywood screen are almost exclusively White, and that while the image has changed, it has barely expanded beyond that intersection of straight, White women. On the other hand, the optimistic reminder of democratic empowerment, and that representation does not end with popular culture, but rather that popular culture can serve as an inspirational force, reinforces the necessity of further demands on the genre. The superhero genre, fantasy, and science fiction are the perfect mediums to break the barriers of assumed possibility, to portray what we can achieve, to destroy myths, and disprove limitations. Therefore, we must demand more of the forms of representation of the category of women, the disruption of gender and the expansion of what it means to be human. After all, if meaning comes from our voices, erupting out of an arbitrary, chaotic void, then there can be no limits to the possibilities ahead of us, but an untold number of different paths to take.

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