

“WE’RE THE SAME! WE’RE THEM!”:

REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER

IN

THE WALKING DEAD

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for

the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN LANGUAGES, LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE

in the subject

ENGLISH STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Supervisor:

PROF. DC BYRNE

29 JANUARY 2021

Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of gender in AMC's *The Walking Dead*. The study of representations is important because it draws attention to underrepresented and misrepresented groups, affects how minorities see themselves, and impacts on relations between social groups. An established convention of the horror genre is that the monster threatens normality. This television show about the survivors of a zombie apocalypse depicts monstrous qualities in the human protagonists as well as their zombie antagonists. This deviation from the convention of only portraying monsters as antagonists situates the show as significantly innovative. My thesis analyses, challenges, and expands upon the current academic discourse surrounding the show. A range of representations requires diverse theoretical and conceptual approaches. I draw upon theories of masculinity, feminism, stereotypes, intersectionality, performativity, disability, doubling and embodiment to interrogate the portrayal of gender, identity, expression, and embodiment in the text. I find intersectionality is a useful analytical tool to explore oppression and discrimination and to help me explore how certain portrayals are privileged over others. I identify and interrogate trends, patterns, and character arcs through my textual analysis of the dialogue and visual representations in the text. I also include contextual, historical, and audience information to ensure a balanced and objective analysis. The first chapter examines the role of the hegemonic white saviour and antihero in the serial. In the second, a marginalised form of white masculinity is studied. The third chapter investigates the treatment of black males, while the fourth relates how white female characters' performances of femininity affect their chances of survival. The fifth chapter deliberates on whether black female characters can break through stereotypes, and, if so, to what end. In conclusion, I note that *TWD* reaffirms the societal hierarchy of white men occupying the highest echelons and black women at the base of the hierarchy.

Key Terms

Femininity, Gender, Intersectionality, Masculinity, Race, Representation, *The Walking Dead*, Zombie Studies

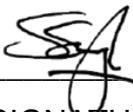
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Prof. David Levey for agreeing to be my supervisor. He had supervised my master's dissertation. More importantly, he was a trusted advisor and friend. He passed away before I could complete my thesis. I dedicate this thesis to his memory and invaluable friendship. I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to Prof. Deirdre Byrne for helping me to complete this journey. I am extremely fortunate to have had a supervisor of her calibre. My mother, Sabita, and sister, Shivani, have offered tremendous support and encouragement. I would not have been able to complete this undertaking without them. My late father, Rathilall, would have been proud of this effort. I am also grateful to the University of South Africa for partially funding my studies.

Declaration

Student number: 3325-211-4

I declare that “We’re the Same! We’re Them!”: Representations of Gender in *The Walking Dead* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that I submitted the thesis/dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



SIGNATURE

29 January 2021

DATE

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List of Abbreviations

ABBREVIATION	EXPLANATION
<i>Dawn</i>	<i>Dawn of the Dead</i>
<i>Day</i>	<i>Day of the Dead</i>
<i>FTWD</i>	<i>Fear the Walking Dead</i>
LGBTQIA+ (There are variations and truncations of this abbreviation, such as LGBT)	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Queer, Intersexed, Asexual (or Ally) and other
<i>Night</i>	<i>Night of the Living Dead</i>
S1	Season One
S2	Season Two
S3	Season Three
S4	Season Four
S5	Season Five
S6	Season Six
S7	Season Seven
S8	Season Eight
S9	Season Nine
S10	Season Ten
<i>TWD</i>	<i>The Walking Dead</i>

List of Characters and Cast Members

CHARACTER	ACTOR
Aaron	Ross Marquand
Abraham Ford	Michael Cudlitz
Adam Sutton (Baby)	<i>Various</i>
Adeline	Kelley Mack
Aiden Monroe	Daniel Bonjour
Alden	Callan McAuliffe
Alfred	David Shae
Alisha	Juliana Harkavy
Allen	Daniel Thomas May
Alpha	Samantha Morton
Alvaro	Carlos Navarro
Amanda Shepherd	Teri Wyble
Amy	Emma Bell
Andrea	Laurie Holden
Andrew	Markice Moore
Anna	Vanessa Cloke
Anne "Jadis"	Pollyanna McIntosh
Arat	Elizabeth Ludlow
Axel	Lew Temple
Barbara	Mandi Christine Kerr
Beatrice	Briana Venskus
Ben (Prison)	Tyler Chase
Benjamin (Kingdom)	Logan Miller
Bertie	Karen Ceesay
Beta	Ryan Hurst
Beth Greene	Emily Kinney
Billy	Eric Mendenhall
Bob Stookey	Lawrence Gilliard Jr.
Brandon	Blaine Kern III

CHARACTER	ACTOR
Bruce	Ted Huckabee
Caesar Martinez	Jose Pablo Cantillo
Carl Grimes	Chandler Riggs
Carol Peletier	Melissa McBride
Cheryl	Rebecca Koon
Clara	Kerry Condon
Connie	Lauren Ridloff
Cyndie	Sydney Park
D.J.	Matt Mangum
Dale Horvath	Jeffrey DeMunn
Dan (Claimer)	Keith Brooks
Daniel (Kingdom)	Daniel Newman
Dante	Juan Javier Cardenas
Daryl Dixon	Norman Reedus
David (Prison)	Brandon Carroll
David (Saviour)	Jay Huguley
Dawn Lerner	Christine Woods
Deanna Monroe	Tovah Feldshuh
Dianne	Kerry Cahill
Dr Caleb Subramanian	Sunkrish Bala
Dr Denise Cloyd	Merritt Wever
Dr Harlan Carson	R. Keith Harris
Dr Steven Edwards	Erik Jensen
Dwight	Austin Amelio
Earl Sutton	John Finn
Ed Peletier	Adam Minarovich
Eduardo	Peter Zimmerman
Eliza Morales	Maddie Lomax
Enid	Katelyn Nacon

Eric Raleigh	Jordan Woods-Robinson
Erin	Tiffany Morgan
Eugene Porter	Josh McDermitt
Ezekiel	Khary Payton
Francine	Dahlia Legault
Gabriel Stokes	Seth Gilliam
Gage	Jackson Pace
Gareth	Andrew J. West
Gary	Mike Seal
Gavin	Jayson Warner Smith
Glenn Rhee	Steven Yeun
Gracie (Older)	Anabelle Holloway
Gracie (Baby)	<i>Various</i>
Gregory	Xander Berkeley
Haley	Alexa Nikolas
Harley	J. D. Evermore
Heath	Corey Hawkins
Henry (Older)	Matt Lintz
Henry (Child)	Macsen Lintz
Hershel Greene	Scott Wilson
Jacqui	Jeryl Prescott Sales
Jared	Joshua Mikel
Jeanette	Sherry Richards
Jed	Rhys Coiro
Jerry	Cooper Andrews
Jessie Anderson	Alexandra Breckenridge
Jim (Atlanta)	Andrew Rothenberg
Jimmy (Farm)	James Allen McCune

Joe	Jeff Kober
Juanita "Princess" Sanchez	Paola Lázaro
Judith Grimes (Older)	Cailey Fleming
Judith Grimes (Baby & Toddler)	<i>Various</i>
Jules	Alex Sgambati
Kal	James Chen
Karen	Melissa Ponzio
Kathy	Nicole Barré
Kelly	Angel Theory
Kent	David Marshall Silverman
Laura	Lindsley Register
Len	Marcus Hester
Lilly Chambler	Audrey Marie Anderson
Lizzie Samuels	Brighton Sharbino
Lori Grimes	Sarah Wayne Callies
Louis Morales	Noah Lomax
Luke (Prison)	Luke Donaldson
Luke (Hilltop)	Dan Fogler
Lydia	Cassady McClincy
Maggie Greene	Lauren Cohan
Magna	Nadia Hilker
Marco	Gustavo Gomez
Margo	Jerri Tubbs
Martin	Chris Coy
Mary	Denise Crosby
Mary "Gamma"	Thora Birch
Meghan Chambler	Meyrick Murphy
Merle Dixon	Michael Rooker

Michonne	Danai Gurira
Mika Samuels	Kyla Kenedy
Mike	Aldis Hodge
Milton Mamet	Dallas Roberts
Miranda Morales	Viviana Chavez-Vega
Molly	Kennedy Brice
Morales	Juan Pareja
Morgan Jones	Lennie James
Nabila	Nadine Marissa
Negan	Jeffrey Dean Morgan
Nicholas	Michael Traynor
Noah	Tyler James Williams
Nora	Tamara Austin
Norris	Aaron Farb
O'Donnell	Ricky Wayne
Olivia	Ann Mahoney
Oscar	Vincent M. Ward
Otis	Pruitt Taylor Vince
Owen	Benedict Samuel
Patricia	Jane McNeill
Patrick	Vincent Martella
Paul "Jesus" Rovia	Tom Payne
Pete Anderson	Corey Brill
Philip "The Governor" Blake	David Morrissey
Rachel Ward (Child)	Mimi Kirkland
Rachel Ward (Older)	Avianna Mynhier
Randall Culver	Michael Zegen
Reg Monroe	Steve Coulter
Regina	Traci Dinwiddie
Richard	Karl Makinen

Rick "R.J." Grimes Jr.	Antony Azor
Rick Grimes	Andrew Lincoln
Rodney	Joe Ando Hirsh
Ron Anderson	Austin Abrams
Rosita Espinosa	Christian Serratos
Sam Anderson	Major Dodson
Sasha Williams	Sonequa Martin-Green
Scott	Kenric Green
Shane Walsh	Jon Bernthal
Sherry	Christine Evangelista
Shumpert	Travis Love
Siddiq	Avi Nash
Simon	Steven Ogg
Socorro "Coco" Espinosa (Baby)	<i>Various</i>
Sophia Peletier	Madison Lintz
Spencer Monroe	Austin Nichols
Tammy Rose Sutton	Brett Butler
Tara Chambler	Alanna Masterson
Terry	Brandon Fobbs
Theodore "T-Dog" Douglas	IronE Singleton
Theresa	April Billingsley
Tim	Lawrence Kao
Tobin	Jason Douglas
Tony	Davi Jay
Tyreese Williams	Chad L. Coleman
Virgil	Kevin Carroll
Yumiko	Eleanor Matsuura

List of Seasons, Episode Numbers and Titles

Season	Episode	Title
1	1	"Days Gone Bye"
1	2	"Guts"
1	3	"Tell It to the Frogs"
1	4	"Vatos"
1	5	"Wildfire"
1	6	"TS-19"
2	1	"What Lies Ahead"
2	2	"Bloodletting"
2	3	"Save the Last One"
2	4	"Cherokee Rose"
2	5	"Chupacabra"
2	6	"Secrets"
2	7	"Pretty Much Dead Already"
2	8	"Nebraska"
2	9	"Triggerfinger"
2	10	"18 Miles Out"
2	11	"Judge, Jury, Executioner"
2	12	"Better Angels"
2	13	"Beside the Dying Fire"
3	1	"Seed"
3	2	"Sick"
3	3	"Walk with Me"
3	4	"Killer Within"
3	5	"Say the Word"
3	6	"Hounded"
3	7	"When the Dead Come Knocking"

Season	Episode	Title
3	8	"Made to Suffer"
3	9	"The Suicide King"
3	10	"Home"
3	11	"I Ain't a Judas"
3	12	"Clear"
3	13	"Arrow on the Doorpost"
3	14	"Prey"
3	15	"This Sorrowful Life"
3	16	"Welcome to the Tombs"
4	1	"30 Days Without an Accident"
4	2	"Infected"
4	3	"Isolation"
4	4	"Indifference"
4	5	"Internment"
4	6	"Live Bait"
4	7	"Dead Weight"
4	8	"Too Far Gone"
4	9	"After"
4	10	"Inmates"
4	11	"Claimed"
4	12	"Still"
4	13	"Alone"
4	14	"The Grove"
4	15	"Us"
4	16	"A"
5	1	"No Sanctuary"

5	2	"Strangers"
5	3	"Four Walls and a Roof"
5	4	"Slabtown"
5	5	"Self Help"
5	6	"Consumed"
5	7	"Crossed"
5	8	"Coda"
5	9	"What Happened and What's Going On"
5	10	"Them"
5	11	"The Distance"
5	12	"Remember"
5	13	"Forget"
5	14	"Spend"
5	15	"Try"
5	16	"Conquer"
6	1	"First Time Again"
6	2	"JSS"
6	3	"Thank You"
6	4	"Here's Not Here"
6	5	"Now"
6	6	"Always Accountable"
6	7	"Heads Up"
6	8	"Start to Finish"
6	9	"No Way Out"
6	10	"The Next World"
6	11	"Knots Untie"
6	12	"Not Tomorrow Yet"

6	13	"The Same Boat"
6	14	"Twice as Far"
6	15	"East"
6	16	"Last Day on Earth"
7	1	"The Day Will Come When You Won't Be"
7	2	"The Well"
7	3	"The Cell"
7	4	"Service"
7	5	"Go Getters"
7	6	"Swear"
7	7	"Sing Me a Song"
7	8	"Hearts Still Beating"
7	9	"Rock in the Road"
7	10	"New Best Friends"
7	11	"Hostiles and Calamities"
7	12	"Say Yes"
7	13	"Bury Me Here"
7	14	"The Other Side"
7	15	"Something They Need"
7	16	"The First Day of the Rest of Your Life"
8	1	"Mercy"
8	2	"The Damned"
8	3	"Monsters"
8	4	"Some Guy"
8	5	"The Big Scary U"
8	6	"The King, the Widow and Rick"

8	7	"Time for After"
8	8	"How It's Gotta Be"
8	9	"Honor"
8	10	"The Lost and the Plunderers"
8	11	"Dead or Alive Or"
8	12	"The Key"
8	13	"Do Not Send Us Astray"
8	14	"Still Gotta Mean Something"
8	15	"Worth"
8	16	"Wrath"
9	1	"A New Beginning"
9	2	"The Bridge"
9	3	"Warning Signs"
9	4	"The Obligated"
9	5	"What Comes After"
9	6	"Who Are You Now?"
9	7	"Stradivarius"
9	8	"Evolution"
9	9	"Adaptation"
9	10	"Omega"
9	11	"Bounty"
9	12	"Guardians"
9	13	"Chokepoint"
9	14	"Scars"
9	15	"The Calm Before"
9	16	"The Storm"
10	1	"Lines We Cross"
10	2	"We Are the End of the World"

10	3	"Ghosts"
10	4	"Silence the Whisperers"
10	5	"What It Always Is"
10	6	"Bonds"
10	7	"Open Your Eyes"
10	8	"The World Before"
10	9	"Squeeze"
10	10	"Stalker"
10	11	"Morning Star"
10	12	"Walk with Us"
10	13	"What We Become"
10	14	"Look at the Flowers"
10	15	"The Tower"
10	16	"A Certain Doom"

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Introduction

Monsters are meaning machines. They can represent gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality in one body. [...] Monsters have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, these novels make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual.

(Halberstam, 1995: 21-22)

The Walking Dead (2010-ongoing) is a zombie text that reveals monstrous qualities in its human protagonists instead of limiting monstrosity to its non-human antagonists. A key theme established by *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968), and which continues with current zombie narratives, such as *The Walking Dead* (hereafter *TWD*), is that monsters include both zombies and humans (Bishop, 2013).¹ A significant difference, argues Kyle William Bishop (2013), is that in the previous century, monstrous humans were presented as antagonists; however, recent zombie texts like *TWD* include monstrous protagonists. According to Jack Halberstam's definition, Rick Grimes, the initial protagonist of the show, symbolises normality and humanity, as he is a white, middle class, heterosexual male. However, his descent into monstrosity (portrayed over nine seasons of the serial) challenges Halberstam's assertion that monsters are the opposite of humanity. Given the convention of the horror genre as one in which "normality is threatened by the Monster" (Wood, 1979: 14), this situates the show as significantly innovative. In this thesis, I will explore how *TWD* represents and re-visions monstrosity. My analysis will therefore focus on the survivors of the zombie apocalypse. If "normal", unmarked humans are "white, male, middle class, and heterosexual" (Halberstam, 1995: 22), but are also potentially monstrous, what does that mean for the representation of "other" characters in the show?

TWD is a television show about zombies in a post-apocalyptic environment, based on the eponymous comic book series created by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard. Initially developed by Frank Darabont for AMC,² the show focuses

¹ I endeavoured to update my thesis as episodes were broadcast. By the time I completed my analysis for my thesis, *The Walking Dead* had almost completed its tenth season. The finale could not be broadcast as post-production was stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown (Hipes, 2020). Showrunner Angela Kang announced after the sixteenth episode that there will be an additional six episodes added to the tenth season, but these episodes would only be broadcast from February 2021 onwards (Acuna, 2020b).

² In 2002, American Movie Classics rebranded the network as AMC to reflect the company's new direction and expansion efforts (White, Saberito, Weiss and Tekle, 2002).

on Rick Grimes, a sheriff's deputy, and a group of survivors whom he leads. Set in Atlanta, Georgia, and later in Alexandria, Virginia, they struggle to survive in a post-apocalyptic world plagued by zombies (referred to as "walkers") and other dangerous survivors. *TWD* has become a global phenomenon, earning 74 awards and 207 nominations since its inception.³ In television studies, a series is distinguished from a serial. Each episode in a series "comprises a discrete and complete storyline, while with 'serials', the story continues across episodes" (Gunter, 1995b: 11). *TWD* is an ongoing narrative; therefore, it is a serial. *TWD* has evolved into various transmedia texts: aside from the comic book and television serial, there are novels, games, webisodes, a live talk show, *Talking Dead* (2011-ongoing), *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-ongoing), and *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* (2020-ongoing).⁴

It is challenging to compile a literature review of an ongoing serial, which forms part of a transmedia narrative. Critics work with different data sets; therefore, there is variance in which seasons of the television show they cover. There are also instances where only the comic series is analysed or it is discussed in relation to the television show. There is also divergence in which comic volumes are studied. *The Walking Dead* and *Fear the Walking Dead* (hereafter *FTWD*) can be discussed simultaneously. Some essays focus on a video game set in the *TWD* universe; there are many games, some of which include characters from the comics or television serial. This results in a plethora of material on *The Walking Dead* universe. Some critics do not cite previous research or rely upon non-academic sources. This is understandable to a certain extent as *TWD* is a popular cultural text upon which scholars are commenting simultaneously. Time differences between the submission of articles/chapters and their publication may also contribute to the inordinate amount of overlapping criticism. Virtually every analysis tends to focus on the same scenes and dialogue from the first and/or second season; inevitably, they also feature similar remarks about these incidents. Nevertheless, in the ensuing literature review, I endeavour to cover the major critical responses to *TWD*.

³ A comprehensive list of the show's awards and nominations has been compiled on the IMDb (Internet Movie Database) site (IMDb, 2019).

⁴ *Talking Dead* (2011-ongoing) is a talk show in which the host, Chris Hardwick, discusses the preceding episode with cast and crew members as well as celebrity fans of the serial. *Fear the Walking Dead* (2015-ongoing) is a spin-off television show and also has its own webisodes. There is also another spin-off television serial, *The Walking Dead: World Beyond* (2020-ongoing), as well as upcoming feature-length movies (Liao, 2019).

Frequently the television serial, comic book and video games are used to analyse or demonstrate a concept. For instance, an analysis of criticism demonstrates how the serial can be used to discuss theories about collective behaviour and collective action within social movement (Bescherer, 2019) or how the zombie embodies the past (specifically slavery in relation to *TWD*'s southern setting) (Lloyd, 2018). Other topics that are explored include adaptation challenges (Jenkins, 2013), bio-emergencies (Cantó-Milà and González-Batllebò, 2019), the environment (Branston, 2016; Murphy, 2018), philosophy (Dean, 2012; Travis, 2015; Wright, 2017), social imaginaries (Lavin and Lowe, 2015; Reed and Penfold-Mounce, 2015; Martínez-Lucena, 2017), space/place paradigms (Lukić, 2017), politics (Clark, 2014; Berk, 2015; Harper, Attwell and Dolphin, 2017), trauma (Smethurst and Craps, 2015; Hagman, 2017), existentialism (A. P. Williams, 2016), art (Wadsworth, 2016), violence (Tenga and Bassett, 2016), the CDC (Larsen, 2017), leadership (Schimmelpfennig, 2017), religion (Herman, 2014; Nuckolls, 2014; Shillock, 2014; Davis, 2015; Engstrom and Valenzano III, 2016), transmedia storytelling (Carse, 2014; Farca, 2014; Sulimma, 2014; Ecenbarger, 2016), fandom (Johnson, 2015), rhetoric (Barton, 2015), pedagogy (Neely, 2014), psychology (Dima, 2010; Schubart, 2013) technology (Kozma, 2013), the child (Heimermann, 2014) and monstrous humans (Bishop, 2013).

To date, there are five anthologies dedicated to analysing the serial (Lowder, 2011; Robichaud, 2012; Yuen, 2012; Keetley, 2014; Erwin and Keetley, 2018) and a monograph (Ziegler, 2018). Stephen Gencarella (2016) is critical of the first four collections, noting their focus on only the early seasons. His foremost concern lies with the tendency among some of the authors and editors of “[f]orsaking intellectual distance” as they admit to being fans of the show and focus on the accolades that have accrued to the show instead of engaging critically with it (Gencarella, 2016: 127). As Gencarella points out, Wayne Yuen thanks Robert Kirkman “for the fantastic comic book serial and television serial that makes [*sic*] this work possible” in his Acknowledgements (Yuen, 2012: ix). It should be noted that James Lowder, Christopher Robichaud and Wayne Yuen’s texts are aimed primarily at a popular audience. The editors’ exuberance and informal tenor is echoed in most of the authors’ contributions. The few (or no) references demonstrate that the texts’ primary audience appears to be fans of the serial. Dawn Keetley’s (2014) first collection (*We’re All Infected’: Essays on AMC’s The Walking Dead and the Fate of the Human*) examines the relationships between violence, humans and posthumanity in the serial; however,

the latest anthology is more relevant to the topic of this thesis. Edited by Elizabeth Erwin and Dawn Keetley (2018), it covers race, gender, and sexuality in the television and comic serial.

Most scholars and commentators are critical of how gender and race are represented in the serial: The main criticism is that the serial is conservative and supports white hegemonic masculinity (Greene and Meyer, 2014; Bennett, 2018; Christian, 2018; Ho, 2018; Wilson, 2019a, 2019b), and marginalises some men, women and racial minorities (Dunaway, 2018; Jionde, 2018; Kunyosying and Soles, 2018). Many of these critics argue that the show perpetuates hegemonic masculinity. Unfortunately, I believe, these critics have misunderstood and misapplied the concept of hegemonic masculinity. I will go into detail about these and other relevant articles in the body of my thesis.

Thus far, no scholar has analysed the relation between hegemonic masculinity, nonhegemonic masculinities and femininities. Furthermore, there has been no attempt to account for marginalised men and women assuming positions of leadership. In addition, the ninth and tenth seasons of *TWD* have not been examined as yet. This is significant, since previous arguments are predicated on Rick as the white male protagonist. No one predicted that Andrew Lincoln (Rick) would leave the show; therefore, my thesis explores the impact of his departure, which resulted in a collapse of the white hegemonic masculine structure of *TWD*. The objective of my study is to engage, challenge and expand upon current academic discourse on the show. I shall enquire:

- In the post-apocalyptic world of *TWD*, with the collapse of institutions, government and social class, does society regress or progress in terms of equality, or do new hierarchies form?
- How are gender roles, stereotypes and power dynamics between men and women portrayed in the serial?
- Moreover, do the reciprocities of gender, race, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability affect longevity, competence, leadership, and the portrayal of monstrosity among the characters in *TWD*?

Accordingly, this thesis analyses some of the prominent masculinities and femininities in the show. I recognise that multiple masculinities and femininities exist and vary across different time periods and cultures and even within a single television

show. The show spans a period of ten years, allowing for a high number of character deaths in a post-apocalyptic environment as well as character departures, making it impossible to discuss all the characters; therefore, I limit my discussion to individual main characters and the dominant patterns and themes that emerge in representations of a particular group. A range of representations requires diverse theoretical and conceptual approaches to the text. Accordingly, I draw upon theories of masculinity, feminism, stereotypes, intersectionality, performativity, disability, doubling and embodiment to interrogate the portrayal of gender, identity, expression, and embodiment in the text. I elaborate on the use of these theories later in this chapter.

There were no zombie television serials before *TWD*,⁵ but the popularity of the serial ensured the development of other zombie-themed television shows such as *Z Nation* (2014-2018), the *Z Nation* spin-off *Black Summer* (2019), *iZombie* (2015-2019) and *Santa Clarita Diet* (2017-2019). As the cancellation dates of these other zombie television shows indicate, the interest in zombies seems to be waning. When *TWD* premiered in 2010, it initially attracted 5.345 million viewers (Seidman, 2010).⁶ The serial grew greatly in popularity as it garnered 17.3 million spectators, which is the highest total viewership of any serial in cable television history (Baron, 2015). While these figures relate to American cable television ratings, the continued international appeal of the serial is also demonstrated by the fact that it was the most frequently illegally downloaded television serial in the world in 2018 (Ferreira, 2019). Nevertheless, at the end of the ninth season, the official audience averaged 4.95 million viewers (*TV Series Finale*, 2019). This downward trend continued with the tenth season's midseason finale plummeting to 3.214 million audience members (Metcalfe, 2019). Due to the pandemic, the season ten finale was delayed by six months. When the episode eventually aired, the ratings plummeted to a historic low of 2.7 million viewers (Anderton, 2020). AMC announced that, over and above extending the tenth

⁵ *Dead Set* (Demange, 2008) consists of five episodes and is accordingly categorised as a "miniseries", which is differentiated from a "television serial" (see page 2 of this thesis). A miniseries is a "long-form narrative that has a predetermined end as opposed to an open-ended, long-running series", consequently it cannot be compared to *TWD* (Friedmann, 2010: 226). In addition, I have not considered earlier television programmes that occasionally featured zombies as "zombie television serials". For instance, the original *Dark Shadows* (Swift, Kaplan, Sedwick, Sullivan, Curtis, Sullivan, Weaver, Jones and Kane, 1966-1971) is a gothic soap opera that included vampires, witches, warlocks, ghosts, werewolves, zombies, time travel and a parallel universe during the course of the television show.

⁶ The viewership numbers are sourced from Nielsen TV ratings. They claim to use meters to measure what a person is watching and how many viewers watch each programme, presumably, even "time-shifted" and recorded programmes (up to seven days after an original broadcast) in the USA (*Nielsen*, 2019).

season by six more episodes, the show would end with the eleventh season in 2022 (Adalian, 2020). The origin of the ratings decline can be traced to the seventh season premiere, which attracted 17.029 million viewers. However, only 12.455 million watched the following episode (*TV Series Finale*, 2017). The serial lost more than a quarter of its audience in a single episode and this downward trajectory has not ceased. The episode's brutal, almost pornographic, slaughter of two popular characters and the subsequent torture of the protagonist alienated fans. It was a costly lesson for AMC.

Television networks rely on quantitative measurements such as ratings; however, technology in the form of digital video recorders (DVRs), streaming services, piracy, and so forth complicate what constitutes a "view". In an interview, the President of AMC Networks, Sarah Barnett, revealed that she also invests in researching AMC viewership and mentioned an in-depth study that involved video ethnographies conducted over nine months (Brennan, 2020). Regarding the declining audience numbers of the seventh season of *TWD*, she said that the Negan storyline "became a little too hopeless for audiences" (Brennan, 2020). One may argue that the defeat, humiliation and submission of Rick Grimes, the White Male Western Hero, as well as the increasingly diverse cast, contributed to this "hopeless" feeling.

At the time of writing, early in 2021, white American masculinity is under siege. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* is described by its author Michael Kimmel as "a book about Trump's followers" (2017: 4). In response to social inequality, anxiety has given way to rage, manifested in white supremacist groups, men's rights activists, mass shootings and other activities (Kimmel, 2017). It could be argued that *TWD* taps into the need to see cathartic violence; the show helped to get Donald J. Trump elected (Bradshaw, 2016). Jared Kushner (Donald Trump's son-in-law) revealed in an interview that part of the campaign operation included mining data to target potential voters; viewers of *TWD* feared migrants and advertisements about this issue were shown during broadcasts (Bertoni, 2016). *TWD* is most popular in rural areas, particularly the Appalachian region, southern Texas and eastern Kentucky; these areas voted for Trump (Katz, 2016).⁷ Since Trump's use of misogynistic and

⁷ The Appalachian Region follows the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi (*Appalachian Regional Commission*, no date).

racist language helped him win the 2016 general election, it is likely that his supporters hold similar values (Schaffner, Macwilliams and Nteta, 2018).

TWD enjoys an international viewership. In South Africa, it is available on Netflix, Showmax and DSTV. It obviously contains elements that engage a diverse audience. The popularity of zombies resulted in many countries creating their own zombie films, such as South Korea's *Train to Busan (Busanhaeng)* (Sang-ho, 2016), and Australia's *Cargo* (Howling and Ramke, 2017), which attained international acclaim and success. Closer to home, *Last Ones Out* (Fyvie, 2015) is a small, independently produced film made on a shoestring budget of R50 000; as South Africa's first zombie film, it was sent to the Cannes Film Festival as part of the National Film and Video Foundation's showcase (Mavuso, 2016).

Another insight from the AMC study was disclosed when an interviewer asked Barnett whether AMC risks "horror fatigue" with audiences since there are *TWD* spin-off shows and upcoming films (Brennan, 2020). Barnett's response was that the study suggests that viewers do not "discriminate between genre and non-genre in the ways maybe critics do" (Brennan, 2020). Television genres influence both the formation and preservation of social hierarchies (Mittell, 2004). As Jason Mittell explains, "[s]ince genres are systems of categorization and differentiation, linking genre distinctions to other systems of difference can point to the workings of cultural power" (2004: 26). Genre can be used to formulate gender categories for audience members. Critics then theorise and analyse responses to programmes based on gender. The lack of zombie television programmes prior to *TWD* and the subsequent serials that have now been released means that this is a new area for academic exploration. Future examination of the genre may well focus on representivity.

Representations in visual culture and texts both shape and reflect power hierarchies. According to Stuart Hall, "[r]epresentation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture" (2013: 1, original emphasis). Representations take shape within the systems of language and media (Orgad, 2012; Hall, 2013). Hall explains, "[i]n language, we use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings" (2013: xvii). Hall describes language and culture as interconnected since language creates meaning and culture depends on shared understandings of concepts. The study of signs is known as the semiotic approach;

more recently, understanding discursive formations in culture has gained prominence.⁸ The semiotic approach is concerned with how language produces meaning, whereas the discursive approach focuses on the politics, or the consequences, of representation. Representation can have positive repercussions for dominant groups such as white men and negative repercussions for subordinate ones such as women, black people, LGBTQIA+ people as well as people with disabilities. Representation, for Richard Dyer, constitutes:

How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of [being] spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens. Equally representation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights.

(2002: 8)

Dyer emphasises that representations use codes and conventions, which renders it necessary to understand how the images function in a single instance, a narrative, a genre, and a matrix of other examples. Representations are not constrained to a single interpretation and do not directly reflect reality as reality has its limits and is more complex than any representation (Dyer, 2002). I agree with Dyer's assessment that how a person is viewed determines how they are treated and vice versa. Judith Butler famously notes that within politics, representation extends "visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects"; however, representation can also serve a normative or exclusionary function for the category of "women" (1990: 2). In other words, politics and language can be used to define the criteria for subject formation; therefore, representation can be limited or extended to what is considered a subject. Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Moira Gatens (1996), like Butler, argue against the idea of a prerepresentational body. However, they prefer to focus on the physical body in their discussions of representation. Theories of representation argue

⁸ See, for instance, Theodore Schatzki (2017), Allison Henward (2018), and Hanna Sjögren (2020).

convincingly that texts are part of a political and collective process and form the substrate of my analysis of *TWD* in this thesis.

Early research on representation dwelt on images of groups. Since the 1960s, stereotypical and negative images that promoted sexism, racism and homophobia have been critiqued by members of the aggrieved social groups as these images have real-life consequences. Research into media representations delves into dimensions of identity predicated on gender, race, class, sexuality and (dis)ability. Since the term “media” can refer to any type of communication, I shall focus specifically on television research. Barrie Gunter (1995) reviewed four decades of content analysis studies on television gender representations from the 1950s onwards; unsurprisingly, he reported findings of pervasive stereotypes, negative portrayals of women, and gender inequality, with men appearing more frequently and in a greater variety of roles than women. Most early research focused on female representation. Analysing primetime television programmes from the 1960s to the early 1970s, George Gerbner reported that three-quarters of the leading characters were “male, American, middle and upper class, unmarried, and in the prime of life”, including “types that dominate the social order”, and “characterizations that permit unrestrained action” (1972: 45). It seems “American” is code for “white” and “dominate the social order” anticipates hegemonic masculinity. The remaining quarter of leads were women, who were inevitably a romantic interest or wife; a female character who did not serve as sexual interest for the main protagonist was destined for death (Gerbner, 1972: 45). Researchers in the 1970s continued to explore the effect of representation on audiences, stereotypes, exclusions, and the way dominant groups were portrayed more favourably than marginalised ones. During the 1980s, the focus shifted to audience reception and oppositional readings of negative portrayals emerged. From the 1990s onwards, postmodern theorists, such as Jean Baudrillard (1994), Frederic Jameson (2003) and Angela McRobbie (1994), began to theorise how technology impacted upon culture and identity. Currently, identity is explored through the lenses of transnationalism and globalisation (Robertson and White, 2003; Vertovec, 2009; Lechner and Boli, 2019; Kebede, 2020). Recent studies on representation centre on LGBTQIA+ representations on television (Fujita, 2018; Vanlee, 2019).

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media is an organisation that addresses equity and inclusion in entertainment and media in the United States of America (hereafter, USA) through research analysing the representation of gender,

race, LGBTQ+, disability, age and body size (*Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media*, 2020a). The Institute's motto is "If she can see it, she can be it"; recently, it began to focus on masculinity with the question: "If he can see it, will he be it?". The organisation appears to have had an influence on representations: an independent study focusing on executives in content creation, development and production found that it had changed how girls and women are portrayed in film and television. In addition, creators are adopting different elements in their work to address gender balance, reduce stereotypes and create a variety of female characters (*Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media*, 2020b). While it may be argued that only people who are already interested in representation are making these changes, the study shows that research in representation can lead to real-world interventions.

The study of representations is essential because it draws attention to underrepresented and misrepresented groups, affects how minorities see themselves, and impacts on relations between social groups (Dukes and Gaither, 2017; Muniba, Wojcieszak, Hawkins, Li and Ramasubramanian, 2019). Walter Lippman coined the term "stereotypes" to describe the "pictures inside the head" that people hold of themselves and others (1922: 16). This explanation appears quite benign, but the consequences of stereotypes for an individual can be catastrophic. An individual's response to stereotypes may be different from the consensual meaning of the stereotype (Hamilton, Stroessner and Driscoll, 1994). A person develops beliefs about social groups over time and these eventually influence the individual's response to these groups (Stangor and Schaller, 1996). The individual approach is more "bottom-up", whilst the second approach offers the inverse explanation for stereotypes. The collective belief system of a social group influences the individual; a cultural consensus is imperative to understanding the phenomenon, since group values imply shared meaning (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds and Turner, 1999). Current concepts of stereotypes recognise that stereotypes are not necessarily negative, but even positive images may have negative effects since they may be patronising, restrictive or may justify keeping marginalised groups in subordinate positions (Cundiff, 2020).

On a television show, there are both individuals and groups who can reinforce, undermine, or eliminate stereotypes. It seems intuitively obvious that a diverse writing team would go a long way to ensuring better writing practice. The Think Tank for Inclusion and Equity (TTIE) is a group of television writers working to increase inclusion and improve working conditions for all writers. They produced their first report

in 2019, which surveyed working television writers in Hollywood. Building on their findings and recommendations, the 2020 report tracks representation among staff and writers as well as writers experiencing bias, discrimination and harassment (Carswell, 2020). “Underrepresented” writers are defined as writers who identify as Women / Non-binary, People of Colour, LGBTQ+, and People with Disabilities: “overrepresented” groups are defined as writers who do not identify with any of the above-mentioned groups (Carswell, 2020). The report identified systemic barriers that underrepresented television writers are forced to endure: for example, the low wages that accompany assistantships and fellowships, and unpaid development work. Of the underrepresented television writers surveyed, 49.2% were forced to repeat entry-level positions; 27.6% had to repeat additional titles⁹ as they progressed in their careers; 39.4% witnessed the erasure or stereotyping of underrepresented characters in the writers’ room; 33.9% had been asked to change the identity of a character to sell a project; 10.2% were fired when they spoke openly about their experiences in the writers’ room even though they were specifically hired for their expertise and background. In 2010, *TWD* began with a white male showrunner, Frank Darabont, and his writing team comprised exclusively white males (Robert Kirkman, Glen Mazzara, Charles H. Eglee, Jack LoGiudice and Adam Fierro). Ten years later, the current showrunner (Angela Kang) is a female of Korean descent, and her writing team has achieved parity in terms of men and women, but out of the ten team members only three of the writers are of an underrepresented ethnicity (Jim Barnes, Geraldine Inoa and Vivian Tse).

The underrepresentation of minorities extends to the cast members. In the first season, the main cast was comprised of white characters with the exception of Glenn Rhee, an Asian-American male. Out of the seven main cast members, there were only two women. At the beginning of the tenth season, there were eleven main cast members, of which seven were white characters. This figure was reduced to five after the deaths of Alpha and Beta. Michonne was a black main cast member who left during the season. Women are still drastically underrepresented in the show as there are now only two main female characters at the end of episode sixteen. In *TWD*, a more

⁹ The following list ranks television writer job titles from entry-level to the highest position: staff writer, story editor, executive story editor, co-producer, producer, supervising producer, co-executive producer and executive producer (Carswell, 2020). The study found that underrepresented writers were more likely to repeat titles at lower levels compared to overrepresented writers who benefit from the industry standard of title repetition at the co-executive producer level.

diverse writing staff led to a more diverse cast, but the decline in viewership suggests that this change was not welcome. This is not to suggest that the writers are purely responsible for these decisions; network executives, executive producers, producers, writers, and directors, sometimes with overlapping roles, form the production team of a television show. Even actors sometimes provide input on scripts and direction. This information provides context and background to my study. However, I do not explore representation primarily in terms of numbers. I am more interested in the quality of the depictions of the characters, analysing how those representations differ from one another, and deducing what that suggests about the social hierarchy of the show.

Compared to the rest of the world, studies of representations are no longer *en vogue* in the USA, which is concerning given the current political climate. The most powerful man in the USA (until he was voted out of office at the end of 2020), Donald J. Trump, is seemingly continuously faced with accusations of rape, sexism, racism, dementia, and corruption. There are numerous articles about Trump that cite his bigotry and misogyny (Matthews, 2016; Graham, Green, Murphy and Richards, 2019). Given the widespread division and the ongoing murders of unarmed black civilians by white law enforcement officers (Stellino, 2020), it is vitally important to discover why *TWD*'s representations of gender and race appealed to a conservative audience. Accordingly, I will now describe my research design and methodology.

Initially quantitative content analysis, which involves systematically categorising and recording instances of a topic to be analysed, dominated television studies. In response to the dominance of the quantitative method, Siegfried Kracauer (1952-1953) challenged its ascendancy. He viewed the repetition of a concept or word as less important than the consideration of an entire text; therefore, Kracauer proposed examining the range of possible meanings in a text. For this reason, I am interested in textual analysis as a research methodology. Alan McKee explains that "Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" (2003: 1). Textual analysis involves closely examining the content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse (Lockyer, 2008). "Text is understood in its broader, poststructural, sense as any cultural practice or object that can be 'read'" (Fürsich, 2009: 244); thus a television serial is a text according to this description. Elfriede Fürsich explains further the implications for scholarship, "Textual analysis allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions and omissions of a text" (2009: 244). A text is closely

associated with a novel, but anything that can be interpreted can be considered a text. This has been demonstrated in *Research Methods for English Studies*, in which Catherine Belsey (2013) pointedly undertakes a textual analysis of a painting. More recently, in Ethan Thompson and Jason Mittell's (2020) edited collection, *How to Watch Television*, a section dedicated to TV representations contains essays that combine close readings of a television programme with a theoretical position (see, for example (Alsultany, 2020)).

John Fiske and John Hartley ([1978] 2003), in *Reading Television*, originally proposed an approach similar to reading a literary text. *Channels of Discourse* (Allen, [1987] 1992) offers more textual methodologies (semiotics, narrative theory, genre, postmodernism, ideology, etc.). Fiske (1987) synthesises the ideas in these texts, as does Stuart Hall's essay, 'Encoding/Decoding in Television Discourse' (Hall, 2019). In this essay, Hall critiques the traditional model of communication (sender/message/receiver) since a message can be misunderstood or understood to degrees. The encoder (sender) uses verbal and/or non-verbal symbols that they believe will be correctly interpreted by the decoder (receiver). To account for this lack of symmetry between coding, decoding, and the non-linear nature of communication, he proposed a four-stage model that considers production, circulation, use and reproduction of a message. At the "use" stage, a message is decoded into denotative and connotative meanings by a recipient. An audience member can fail to understand a denotative message through not understanding the language, for example. However, the connotative decoding of messages depends on whether viewers operate within the dominant, negotiated or oppositional position. In the dominant or hegemonic position, messages are accepted as they were encoded; negotiated positions accept and reject elements of the message; and oppositional positions recognise the denotative and connotative messages but still decode the message in a contrary manner. Fiske (1987) also agrees that the audience can interpret a programme in a number of different ways. Since a text can be interpreted in a number of ways, questions about the validity and relevance of a textual analysis arise.

The application of a theoretical lens, avoiding presenting a single interpretation as definitive or conclusive, and being self-reflexive and transparent, mitigates the issue of validity and relevance (Creeber, 2006). Most qualitative researchers view theory as central to the process of interpretation (Collins and Stockton, 2018). I recognise the many meanings, or polysemy, that a television show offers and thus negates any

reading as complete or correct. However, polysemy does not equate to pluralism (Hall, 2019). Jeremy G. Butler observes that the power of polysemy rests in “conflicting meanings resid[ing] within the same program and facilitate[ing] the viewing pleasure of a broad range of individuals” (2018: 25). I will demonstrate how this contradiction plays out in terms of representation.

In the current age of complicating claims to objectivity, it behoves me to identify and specify my position *vis-à-vis* my study. I am a South African female of Indian descent. Some readers may question why I chose to analyse a show about zombies, which is made and set in the USA, instead of focusing on South African literature or analysing an Indian film. I have always been a fan of the horror genre and the USA has been the most prolific producer of this genre. When I was a child, I enjoyed watching good triumph over evil. However, I felt frustrated by the women in these films, who kept screaming, running, and falling over, either waiting for death or praying for rescue. I much preferred watching the male protagonist exercising self-control; he would outmanoeuvre and defeat the threat. Ellen Ripley in the *Alien* series (Scott, 1979; Cameron, 1986; Fincher, 1992; Jeunet, 1997) was the first female protagonist that I encountered who was not weak, emotional or incompetent. When I first began to watch *TWD*, I was naturally interested in the representation of gender. Initially, I assumed that since male characters dominated the post-apocalyptic genre, I would see a similar overrepresentation of male characters in the show. At first, the serial supported this view, but I soon realised that other factors, such as race, class, and sexuality, affected the portrayal of characters. When Michonne made her first appearance, I was elated that she was a woman of colour. Not only was Michonne able to defend herself and others, but she was also intelligent and courageous. Most importantly, rape was not used as a mechanism for female character development, as in several other shows. I hoped that this show would be different from the dismal depictions of women in the post-apocalyptic genre. I am an insider-outsider; I am a woman of colour, like the black and Asian women in *TWD*, and therefore I do not qualify for heroic status in popular culture texts. However, I have not lived in the USA, nor do I plan to move there, but I have visited the country. I did not experience racism or sexism in the USA, but I have unfortunately encountered it in South Africa. My grandparents and parents grew up in South Africa during apartheid. After having experienced racial discrimination, my family transcended a conservative patriarchal culture because they understood the importance of equality and treating people with

dignity. Since the USA has also undergone colonisation and racial segregation, there is a parallel between the traumas both countries have endured. My complex position as an insider-outsider qualifies me to offer an alternative perspective on the show.

Now that I have clarified my role as a researcher, I will discuss my research method in more detail. Television has undergone a drastic transformation in recent years. No longer ephemeral or confined to a box in the lounge, it can now be accessed and rewatched at any time and any place using a variety of electronic devices such as a laptop, smart phone, or a tablet. DVDs and streaming services have changed the way programmes are produced, distributed, consumed and studied. A precondition of textual analysis is the availability and collection of data (Mikos, 2018). I purchased DVDs of the first nine seasons of *TWD* whereas I viewed the tenth season on Showmax as the DVD had not yet been released. I took screenshots from the DVDs and images from websites for my analysis. Instead of transcribing the dialogue myself, I used two websites — “The Walking Dead Transcripts” (*Forever Dreaming*, 2010-2021) and “Springfield Springfield” — which contain the transcribed dialogue of each episode.¹⁰ Whenever I referenced a scene or dialogue from the show, I watched the scene, compared the verbal dialogue and captions to the transcript, and edited it if required, to confirm that my quotations were correct.

A close textual analysis of a television programme focuses on images, dialogue, characters, and plots (Gray and Lotz, 2019). I systematically examined the first ten seasons of *TWD* and noted episodes in which themes and patterns emerged related to gender, race, class and sexuality. I also noted the main cast members in the serial and focused upon episodes that centred on a particular character. As already established, a show can contain contradictory representations. Ten years’ worth of data could easily be manipulated to advance a certain agenda by cherry picking isolated moments to support a particular argument. I did not want to limit the number of seasons examined because I wished to demonstrate that the show’s representations have changed over time. However, I knew that, since depth is a requirement of qualitative research, *mise-en-scène* analyses also needed to be incorporated into my study. This type of analysis involves examining the choice, arrangement and employment of visual elements (*mise-en-scène*) such as set design,

¹⁰ Springfield Springfield (<http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk>) closed in early 2020. At the time of submission of this thesis, it was still offline.

lighting, décor, props, costume and behaviour of the characters within a space (Martin, 2014).

Due to the changing nature of television, “digital studies” has resulted in a plethora of industry-based research, which has led to a decrease in television programme analysis (Gray and Lotz, 2019: 77). While textual analysis is invaluable for providing a more in-depth study of a text, it excludes valuable contextual and historical institutional information and audience interpretation (Bignell, 2013). To address this imbalance, I incorporate production decisions apropos of representation in my argument, as well as pointing to viewer reception by including online articles and social media reactions. In terms of the context of the show, I included real life and political events that were relevant to the depiction of the characters in terms of gender and race. However, these activities will be done sparingly as my focus is on the characters in the serial.

Texts and representations are produced in a society and cannot be studied in isolation. Linda Lindsey (2016) offers a succinct explanation of societal structures: societies tend to have established patterns, structures and guidelines that govern social interactions; generally, people understand and follow these rules because they understand that there will be unpleasant repercussions for inappropriate behaviour. For instance, depending on the severity of the breach, a person could be avoided or imprisoned. Similarly, a person could be recognised and rewarded for exceptional behaviour or due to their connections (for instance, through nepotism). Within a society, inevitably, hierarchal structures form; a person can have multiple statuses depending upon their position in a family, work, social groups, and activities. This is referred to as a status set. Statuses can also be achieved and ascribed (in terms of gender, race, and class). Rank or prestige differs from status: for instance, the role of a surgeon might enjoy a higher prestige than a barber. A role is the expected behaviour related to a status and is guided by norms, which, in turn, determine privilege and responsibilities.

Since norms are based upon societal expectations, gender roles are determined by the attitude and behaviour associated with each sex. Men and women occupy statuses in public and private spaces, but a woman’s status is associated with less power, prestige, and remuneration. In the 1960s, sociology students were taught that sex was considered biological and thus an ascribed status, whereas gender was socially constructed and an achieved status (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The

gender/sex binary was challenged by Judith Butler (1990); she contends that gender performativity is the way men and women conform in behaviour to fit societal expectations as a result of repeated behaviours that reinforce norms. Similar to Butler, Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman argue that, instead of men and women possessing inborn characteristics, their behaviour is reinforced to the extent that they appear natural; in other words, men and women are “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987). It is now generally accepted that sex is biological, and gender is social. Gender identity is a person’s own view of their gender and does not necessarily correlate with their sex; gender expression refers to the speech, behaviour, mannerisms, appearance, and interests that are associated with the gender categories of masculinity or femininity. Given individual variation in personality, likes and dislikes, as well as diverse contexts for gender identities, masculinity should better be understood as masculinities (Hearn, 2013) and femininity as femininities (Scharff, 2013). Contemporary debates centre on whether biological sex, like gender, is also socially constructed and exists on a spectrum. For instance, the editors of *Scientific American* announced that “[t]o varying extents many of us are biological hybrids on a male-female continuum” (DiChristina, Guterl, Lloyd and Rusting, 2017). This statement drew the ire of Jerry Coyne, a biologist from the University of Chicago, who questioned why the editors did not name themselves, disputed *Scientific American*’s claims and identified inconsistencies in the editorial (Coyne, 2017). Nevertheless, in the 21st century, gender-fluid and gender-nonconforming individuals openly express their gender identity. For instance, it is now more common to declare a person’s preferred pronouns on email signatures, social media profiles or even cast announcements for film and television projects. To date, in *TWD*, there has been a lack of representation of characters who identify as non-binary, transgender or intersex.

Race, like gender and sex, is also a highly contentious issue, with arguments about whether there are biological differences or whether it is also a social construct. Since the 1940s scientists (Baker, 1998; Smedley and Smedley, 2005; Ifekwunigwe, Wagner, Yu, Harrell, Bamshad and Royal, 2017; Antón, Malhi and Fuentes, 2018) have held that race is a social construct; there is more diversity within a group that distinguishes itself as a race than between groups that are identified as separate or different races. The term “ethnicity” was originally deployed to avoid using the term “race” (Gunew, 1997). The US Census Bureau divides the population into five racial

categories: White, Black, American Indian/Alaskan, Asian/Pacific Islander and Some Other Race; this information is used by the US government to make decisions about funding and laws (Doak, 2009). Since *TWD* is made and set in the USA, I use these categories and terms in this thesis, although I remain sceptical of the project of racial classification considering that this forms the basis of segregation legislature (such as apartheid and Jim Crow laws).

Gender, in concert with other categories of difference, demonstrates how power and inequality are created, reproduced, and perpetuated. The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989; however, Crenshaw’s work built on ideas already introduced by numerous other women of colour who are scholars and/or activists (for instance, Patricia Hill Collins, Chandra Mohanty and Gloria Anzaldúa). Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality is a qualitative theoretical framework for understanding how the combination of various aspects of a person’s political and social identities result in discrimination or privilege. Concepts such as privilege and inequality are difficult to quantify; therefore, a qualitative research methodology is best suited to explore its resonances. Crenshaw argues that there are three ways to interpret intersectionality: structural, political and representational. Structural intersectionality refers to the way existing social structures reinforce domination; political intersectionality refers to how feminist and antiracist politics lead to marginalisation; representational intersectionality refers to how texts depict groups and individuals in a society (Crenshaw, 1991, 1997). The theory of intersectionality has developed theoretically, conceptually, and empirically since Crenshaw; there are multiple approaches, applications, criticism, and debates surrounding intersectionality. While intersectionality focuses on marginalised groups, its obverse is the study of creating and sustaining power; my study will examine how interlocking systems of power, inequality and oppression operate among the main characters and social groups in *TWD*. I will investigate whether there are changes regarding superordinate or subordinate positions across the decade of the show. In a post-apocalyptic environment, is there a favoured gender or race that can be complex, lead, survive and procreate? What is the manner of the death or exit of a main character? Does a pattern or trend begin to emerge based on these findings?

Traditional zombies of the undead variety challenge the idea that gender is doing and performative. Posthuman zombies are self-aware, retain their former identities, and generally “pass” for human, even maintaining or establishing intimate

relationships with human partners (see *iZombie*, *Santa Clarita Diet* and *Warm Bodies*). The posthuman zombie tends to be considered “infected” and thus follows the “cure” narrative. The zombies in *TWD* are the living dead, in other words, resurrected corpses; therefore, the question arises: are these zombies gendered and raced? The short answer is that a zombie, through its otherness, can be inscribed with a multitude of meanings, but that its meaning can be narrowed down depending upon the context of a scene.

Zombies seem to occupy a prime position in the popular imagination. For some South Africans, zombies are real. In South African commissions of inquiry, the Northern Sotho word *ditlotlwane* is translated as “zombies” (Niehaus, 2005: 192). The isiZulu word for zombies is *imikhovu* and, like *ditlotlwane*, this word is linked to witchcraft (Hickel, 2014: 109). These beliefs have political and social consequences. South Africa has a history of xenophobia; on 11 May 2008, xenophobic riots broke out in Alexandra (part of Johannesburg, Gauteng). Residents attacked immigrants from other African countries; two people were killed and forty injured (*BBC News*, 2008). More xenophobic attacks have since occurred; from 1-5 and 8 September 2019, at least twelve people were killed and six hundred and eighty people arrested (Bornman, 2019). In Cato Manor (part of Durban, KwaZulu Natal), wealthy foreigners are accused of using *umuthi* (medicine used by witches) and bringing zombies to South Africa (Hickel, 2014: 110). Even more recently, on 12 October 2019, Khayelihle Nzimande stood accused of murdering his roommate, Simukelo Zondi, because he believed that Zondi was a zombie and practising witchcraft (Singh and Mabaso, 2019). It is not yet possible to resurrect the dead from a scientific perspective; however, this does not invalidate people’s belief systems.

Vampires are also creatures with a long and deep history in mythology and religion; however, zombies lack their rich literary history. Proponents of canonical literature may associate popular culture with “mass” or “low” culture; consequently, they view popular culture texts as having little or no value. Harold Bloom (2003), for instance, was horrified when the National Book Foundation’s “Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters” was awarded to Stephen King. Declaring it a “terrible mistake”, he also claimed to have “suffered a great deal” while reading the first *Harry Potter* novel (Bloom, 2003). The crux of Bloom’s (2003) argument is that “[o]ur society and our literature and our culture are being dumbed down”. Bloom’s diatribe is

condescending and alienating and is built entirely on a subjective view of what constitutes “high culture”.

Another implication of Bloom’s argument is that complexity is a necessary attribute of “high culture”. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu contentiously observes that difficulty engenders exclusion and “art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences” (1984: 7). For this reason, it is worth exploring what social differences *TWD* legitimises. The “popular” in “popular culture” suggests that it is enjoyed by many people. “Culture” can refer to “intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development”, “a particular way of life” or “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (Williams, 1983: 90). In its broadest sense, culture refers to “shared meanings” (Kidd, 2014: 12). Popular culture artifacts are designed and mass produced to appeal to a wide audience, leading to a culture created by people for themselves (Williams, 1983). While this sounds egalitarian, members of the Frankfurt School such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Leo Lowenthal criticised popular culture for replacing artistic concerns with materialism (Danesi, 2012: 40). Using Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, they argued that dominant groups gain consent from subordinate groups through the leveraging of mass communications (Danesi, 2012: 40). Television is arguably the most popular and powerful tool of mass communication, capable of disseminating the dominant group’s ideology in an instant. In the light of this, studying *TWD* provides an opportunity to examine a snapshot of the dominant ideology of the US in the post-2010s.

Television is a medium of mass communication and is thus subject to the criticism that it is an example of “low culture”. When Janet McCabe and Kim Akass organised a conference based upon “American Quality TV” in 2004, they received negative responses to their call for papers as well as from colleagues who believed that “quality television” was an oxymoron (McCabe and Akass, 2007: 1). The label was originally coined and widely used by US television critics in the mid-1970s, but it lacked specificity (Schlütz, 2016). Since the term is applied using one’s own sense of judgement and taste, Robert Thompson’s definition, “Quality TV is best defined by what it is not. It is not ‘regular TV’”, encapsulates this subjectivity (1996: 13). In terms of *TWD*, Dan Hassler-Forest notes the show’s “Quality TV credentials”, which he attributes to two seemingly contradictory modes of serialisation: the endless deferred

narrative and novelistic closure (2014: 91). Comics and the zombie genre are associated with low cultural forms, whereas novelistic closure is associated with high cultural forms such as literary and cinematic texts. However, Hassler-Forest (2014) notes that the HBO shows associated with Quality TV had limited episodes per season (like *TWD*), which required the audience to watch every episode to follow the narrative, like a literary text. An open-ended series has self-contained episodes, so a viewer does not have to watch every episode in a sequential manner to understand the plot. Since *TWD* will conclude in 2022, the show will receive novelistic closure.

Another reason not to relegate *TWD* to the pit of popular culture is that belief in zombies is not a rural or “developing country” phenomenon. Some US citizens also fear zombies. On 26 May 2012, Rudy Eugene brutally attacked a homeless man named Ronald Poppo in Miami, Florida. Eugene ate most of Poppo’s face, nose and left eye, in a frenzied attack until he was fatally shot by a police officer (Luscombe, 2012). The media referred to Eugene as the “Miami Zombie” and speculated that a drug referred to as “bath salts” contributed to his actions (Sullum, 2016). Subsequent cannibalistic attacks forced the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to deny the existence of zombies: “[The] CDC does not know of a virus or condition that would reanimate the dead (or one that would present zombie-like symptoms)” (Daigle qtd in Campbell, 2014). It was not the first time that the CDC had joined the zombie conversation; the Center has a section on its website dedicated to zombies, which uses the metaphor of the zombie apocalypse to prepare the public for a number of different types of hazards and disasters (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2018). The fact that the zombie terrifies members of the public to the extent that the CDC needed to deny its existence demonstrates the effect that the zombie has on popular culture and imagination, but also proves that it is a powerful teaching tool. Various pedagogical approaches utilise the zombie to teach a myriad of subjects, including international relations (Horn, Rubin and Schouenborg, 2016), mathematical modelling (Lofgren, Collins, Smith and Cartwright, 2016), and so forth.

Zombies are also used as analogies. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1983: 335), “The only modern myth is the myth of zombies”, which would explain the hold that zombies continue to have in popular culture.¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari later re-

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari use the analogy of the Haitian zombie to discuss death and capital: “mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason” (1983: 335). This analogy enables them to analyse the relationship between twentieth-century capitalist societies, the death-drive and schizophrenia.

emphasise that the figure of the zombie is a “work myth and not a war myth” (2014: 425);¹² however, Canavan (2011: 433) argues convincingly that the zombie represents both myths since it represents the Other which must always be isolated and/or eliminated, both in work and at war. The “Other”, as represented by the zombie, elicits attraction and repulsion, which is prompted by its liminal nature and abjection:

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border.

(Kristeva, 1982: 3, original emphasis)

The zombie offers an opportunity to interrogate the borders or differences between “us” and “them”. For instance, there was a memorable episode involving zombies on the television game show, *The Family Feud* (2013), hosted by Steve Harvey. As it is a game show, two contestants are asked a question. On the episode broadcast on 19 November 2013 (Schlosser, 2013), two contestants, Keri (a black woman) and Christie (a white woman) were asked by Harvey (a black man), “Name something you know about zombies”. “Us” and “Them” crystallised in Christie’s immediate response, “black”. Harvey responded, “They’re black. Ok.” While the audience laughed, Christie tried to explain her answer, “I don’t know if they’re white, or ... I just”. Eric Watts, within the context of Barack Obama’s presidency, describes the discomfort of this scene as a “moment of blackness” and notes its disruption of the postracial dream, “Her [Christie’s] (un)timely word association of black with zombie enunciated nothing less than the gap that the postracial struggles repetitively, constantly, to conceal; the race is always a living dead” (Watts, 2014: x-xi).

Race appears to be inextricably linked to zombies. An audience steeped in popular culture would be familiar with the concept that “a zombie is a corpse without

¹² It is not a war myth since mutilation is seen as a natural consequence of war.

a soul which people believe has been brought back to life by witchcraft or other supernatural means” (*Oxford English Dictionaries*, 2019). The association between witchcraft and blackness can be traced to the 1640s when the Devil was described as a black man in pamphlets distributed in England (Millar, 2017). In 1533, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa wrote *De Occulta Philosophia*, in which he distinguished between “pure, white magic of ancient magicians” and the “reprehensible, black magic of more recent necromancers” (Zambelli, 2007: 245). More recently, voodoo has been used to “signify the racist image of a devil-worshipping, black-magic wielding, and uncivilized tradition imagined by Western popular culture” (Moreman and Rushton, 2011: 2). Tracing the etymology of the term “zombie”, the *Oxford English Dictionaries* apprise us that:

zombie is a word of West African origin and it was first recorded in English in 1819. It's related to the words *zumbi* (meaning 'fetish') and *nzambi* (meaning 'a god') in the Kikongo language, which is spoken in Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and surrounding areas. The term *zombie* or *zombi* originally referred to a snake-god in the voodoo religion of West Africa. When these people were taken as slaves to Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean during the 18th and early 19th centuries, they brought their religious beliefs and practices with them. The idea of the zombie then gradually spread through the USA and Europe, fuelled in the 20th century by fiction, the cinema, and television.

(*Oxford English Dictionaries*, 2019)

So, while the CDC may declare that zombies are fictional, practitioners of the Vodou religion would disagree. The concept of the zombie was brought to Western audiences through occultist and explorer William Seabrook's *The Magic Island*"

It seemed (or so I had been assured by negroes more credulous than Polynice [a Haitian farmer who shared folktales with Seabrook]) that while the *zombie* came from the grave, it was neither a ghost, nor yet a person who had been raised like Lazarus from the dead. The *zombie*, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life — it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive.

(1929: 93)

Seabrook's story captured the imagination of film producers and audiences alike. Universal Pictures released a series of films adapted from Gothic literature, which included *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1931). Like zombies, vampires are folkloric creatures, yet there was no Gothic literary antecedent to draw from for an adaptation. The following year, Lugosi assumed the role of Murder Legendre, a zombie master, who turns a young white woman into a zombie so that a wealthy plantation owner could possess her in *White Zombie* (1932), inspired by Seabrook's text. In 1938, writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston journeyed to Jamaica and Haiti to conduct ethnographical research and chronicled her observations in *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (Hurston, [1938] 2008). Not only were black women subjected to racism, sexism, class discrimination and colourism in the Caribbean, but they were denigrated further to the level of animals in the types of labour that they had to undertake, such as breaking rocks and offloading coal from ships) (Hurston, 2008). The vodou religion afforded black women power and respite through the role of a *mambo* (priestess) (Hurston, 2008). Like Seabrook, Hurston explains that zombies are part of life in Haiti and provides a Haitian definition of "zombie":

This is the way Zombies are spoken of: They are the bodies without souls. The living dead. Once they were dead, and after that they were called back to life again.

(Hurston, 2008: 179)

Hurston's investigation of the phenomenon revealed that wealthy Haitians believed that zombies were a myth, but ordinary Haitians feared the creatures; hence she documented various cases that were presented to her:

A was awakened because somebody required his body as a beast of burden. In his natural state he could never have been hired to work with his hands, so he was made into a Zombie because they wanted his services as a laborer. B was summoned to labor also but he is reduced to the level of a beast as an act of revenge. C was the culmination of "ba'Moun" ceremony and pledge. That is, he was given as a sacrifice to pay off a debt to a spirit for benefits received.

(Hurston, 2008: 182)

In other words, the colonial zombie provided slave labour; the zombie is clearly of a lower class than either the landowner or the coloniser.¹³ Later, Wade Davis, another anthropologist who journeyed to Haiti, notes that the term *voodoo* “has come to represent a fantasy of black magic and sorcery” because of media; therefore, he employs the spelling advocated by other anthropologists, “*vodu, vodun, voodoo* and *vodoun*” to designate real Haitian religion (Davis, 1985: 11). The term *vodun* means “spirit” or “deity” in the West African Fon language (Guiley, 2008: 356). Priests are called *houngan*, but if they involve themselves in “black magic” they are known as *bokors* (Guiley, 2008: 358; 359). Thus, the facilitator in the gruesome business of raising zombies is a *Bocor [sic]*, who is frequently solicited to sell labourers or to exact revenge on an intended victim (Hurston, 2008: 182). Zombies are associated with Haiti; however, the link between cannibals and the Caribbean islands has been circulating since Columbus (Barker, Hulme and Iverson, 1998).¹⁴ Perhaps it is because of this overlap that zombies became associated with consuming human flesh in the popular imagination. In Haiti, zombies are marginalised, feared, despised, or dismissed as fantasy. *White Zombie*, as the title suggests, emphasises race; however, the plight of the native zombie is not where the true horror of the film lies. Rather, it is the prospect of the white protagonists “becoming dominated, subjugated, and effectively ‘colonized’ by a native pagan” (Bishop, 2008: 141-142).

As mentioned earlier, the contemporary, familiar, flesh-eating zombies first appeared in George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (henceforth *Night*). Romero did not actually use the term “zombie” in the film as he felt his creatures were different from traditional Haitian zombies (Robey and Romero, 2013). Romero was inspired by Richard Matheson’s *I am Legend* ([1954] 2007), which featured Robert Neville, apparently the sole survivor of a pandemic where the undead become vampires; in Romero’s *Night* the undead feasted on flesh (Romero, 1985: 6). Due to the popular use of the term “zombie” by fans, Romero conceded to its use in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) (henceforth *Dawn*). *Night*, like *White Zombie*, drew attention because of race. The protagonist of the film, Ben, was played by African American actor Duane Jones. Romero claimed that it was not an intentional choice:

¹³ While Marxist theory invariably invokes the figure of the vampire in relation to capital, Shaviro (2002) associates zombies with labour (the proletariat).

¹⁴ It is also perpetuated in popular culture; in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest* (2006), Captain Jack Sparrow and his crew escape from an island filled with cannibals.

Perhaps *Night of the Living Dead* is the first film to have a black man playing the lead role regardless of, rather than because of, his color, and in that sense the observation of the fact is valid, but we did not calculate that this would be an attention-grabber.

(1985: 7)

Given that the film was released in 1968, and the prominence of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA, this comment may be seen as disingenuous. In an interview, Romero clarified that he and John Russo (Romero's co-writer for *Night*) only heard that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated when they were attempting to find distributors for the film. Consequently, the film only then "took on the feel of a racial statement" (Robey and Romero, 2013). Regardless of Romero's intentions, the fact that the black male protagonist survives the onslaught of zombies, only to be killed in the morning by a white cowboy posse, was difficult for audiences to accept. Since then, subsequent black male deaths in horror, and other zombie texts, continue to draw criticism. The incessant screaming and subsequent catatonia of the other main character, a white female named Barbra¹⁵ (Judith O'Dea), typifies the trope of the "woman as victim" in horror; Barbra belatedly and briefly gains courage, only to be carried away by the undead. In this way, the "survivors" are also othered.

Despite this depiction, some critics (Harper, 2003; Grant, [1990] 2015) have debated that Romero progressively embraces feminism in *Night*, *Dawn*, *Day of the Dead* (1985a) (henceforth *Day*) and the remake of *Night* (Savini, 1990). Whereas Grant focuses on the transformation of Barbra's character in the remake, Harper engages with Fran, the protagonist of *Dawn*. Grant argues that the threat of the zombies in the trilogy is gradually eclipsed by the danger of "hysterical masculinity" (2015: 238). Harper asserts that the female zombies are ungendered and just as violent as their male counterparts; similarly, the living female characters are active and violent, as well as nurturing. Consequently, Harper disagrees with Grant, arguing that depictions of increasingly active women in the trilogy should not be equated with feminism; instead, he claims that Romero de-essentialises femininity by portraying the agency and nurturing abilities of women. Each critic concentrates on a different character so they both offer valid observations; however, I contend that Romero is not a feminist. Grant justifiably criticises the unlikely and unnecessary appearance of

¹⁵ "Barbra" (not Barbara) is the spelling that appears in the credits of the film.

Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in her underwear in *Alien* (Scott, 1979) and notes that Barbra does not appear undressed onscreen. He concludes that this subverts the film's sexual politics by denying the exploitative male gaze that is associated with female victims in the horror genre. It is more likely that this decision can be attributed to Tom Savini, the director of the *Night* remake. In *Land of the Dead* (Romero, 2005), Slack (Asia Argento), the main female character, serves primarily as the romantic interest for the protagonist, Riley Denbo (Simon Baker). He rescues her after she is thrown into a cage with a zombie for entertainment purposes; she tells him that she was forced into prostitution after the apocalypse and undresses in front of the camera. As her name suggests, Slack epitomises passivity in the diegesis. Given that a director has power and control over character depiction and development, Romero cannot be considered a feminist based on his decision to allow a woman character to serve solely as a romantic interest for the male lead.

Critics also focus on race in Romero's works. Richard Dyer (1997) argues that white people both signify and herald death in the horror genre. Referring to another liminal horror monster, the vampire, Dyer draws attention to the vampire and the victim's paleness. The vampire's bite has sexual overtones; white people fear unrestrained sexuality, but still desire it, and the metaphor is extended to explain that vampirism illustrates the threat of white society consuming and destroying itself. Dyer then turns his attention to Romero's *Night*, *Dawn*, and *Day* films. He suggests that the zombies are whites, since, in the first film, all of the undead are white and the latter two films are predominately white. In *Dawn*, the dead are paired with mannequins, which are all white. However, the most revealing detail, Dyer observes, is the absence of the heterosexual white male protagonist; in all three films the leads are black or form "coalitions": in *Night* the protagonist is a black man; in *Dawn* these roles are taken by an Irish man and a Caribbean man (who appear to be a couple) and in *Dawn* a black man and a white woman (1997: 211). In *Night*, images of white zombies devouring other white people or the final clash of the white vigilantes destroying the white zombies makes it hard to discern who is alive or undead. Ben, the black male protagonist, symbolises life when he survives the night through his courage and resourcefulness, only to be killed by white vigilantes the next morning. Dyer goes on to make similar arguments about the other two films.

Given the preponderance of black males and white females in Romero's films, the absence of romance between each "couple" is noticeable. Addressing this

deficiency, Justin Ponder (2012) observes how it is easier to notice the homoerotic undertones of the men in *Day* than it is to discern romantic interest between a black man and a white woman. Zack Snyder's *Dawn* remake offers an interracial couple; yet, when the pregnant white woman is bitten and turns into a zombie, the monstrous product of their union emerges, terrifying the other characters and the audience alike. Ponder believes this scene serves two nightmares for US viewers: the fear that the colonisers held for zombies in the Caribbean and the fear of the mulatto. The transgression between life and death is mirrored in the transgression of the boundaries between white and black. The mulatto zombie not only symbolises the death of hope but also the danger of miscegenation.

Robert Kirkman, the creator of *TWD*, was heavily influenced by George A. Romero, and paid tribute to Romero in numerous ways over the years (for example, a character is named Duane Jones and a character re-enacts a scene from *Day* (Romero, 1985a). When Romero passed away in 2017, Kirkman wrote:

To say these movies [Romero's] were an inspiration for what you're now reading the 171st issue of is an understatement. They're the true north of what I've done in this series. *The Walking Dead* simply doesn't exist without George A. Romero doing his movies first.

(2017: 22)

Unfortunately for Kirkman, the admiration was not mutual. Romero was not a fan of the serial, dismissing it as "a soap opera with occasional zombies" (MacKenzie and Romero, 2013). Given the timing of the interview, Romero's criticism seems valid. In the first and second season, one of the main conflicts in the narrative stems from a love-triangle; however, the longer format of television serials necessitates a narrative that focuses on the survivors as opposed to the zombies.

My thesis focuses primarily on the human survivors in *TWD*, who are, after all, the main characters in the serial. The first chapter examines the role of the hegemonic white saviour and antihero in the serial. I explore how Rick gains, establishes, and maintains his grip on power. In the second chapter, a marginalised form of white masculinity is studied. The third chapter investigates the treatment of black males, while the fourth relates how white female characters' performances of femininity affect their chances of survival. The fifth chapter deliberates on whether black female

characters can break through stereotypes, and if so to what end. I shall now turn to my examination of the White Western Hero.

Chapter One – The Western Narrative: Saviour, Anti-hero, and Martyr



Figure 1 Rick Grimes - The White Western Hero

This chapter begins my investigation of gender representation with the pinnacle of the hierarchy initially established in *TWD*: the human as a white, heterosexual, middle-class man. Rick Grimes is the former protagonist of AMC's *TWD*. In this chapter, I shall explore how Rick gains, establishes, and maintains his grip on power. Initially, Rick's identity is firmly centred upon his nuclear family and his role as a husband to Lori and father to Carl. Rick's pre-apocalyptic role as a sheriff's deputy informs his identity. When Shane Walsh, Rick's former sheriff's deputy partner, begins a relationship with Lori (Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye"), Rick's masculinity comes under fire. Even though this new relationship appears in the first episode of the first season, it is unclear how much time has elapsed since Rick's coma and subsequent abandonment in the hospital. Lori does not knowingly commit adultery as she is under the impression that Rick has died. Lori conceives a child, Judith,¹⁶ and claims to be uncertain about the paternity of the child. After the apocalypse, Rick briefly continues to wear his uniform, which imbues him with the authority to lead his family and a group of survivors. These aspects suggest the makings of a conservative narrative with Rick, as a white, middle-class, heterosexual man, exercising patriarchal power over a diverse group of men, women, and children. As the serial progresses, many survivors

¹⁶ Judith Grimes has aged from a baby to a young girl over nine seasons; therefore, she has been portrayed by numerous actors. Cailey Fleming (S9) plays a ten-year-old version of the character.

join the group, but some also perish, including Lori and Carl. Nevertheless, this is never portrayed as an example of failed masculinity as Rick's definition of family expands, and he finds peace and happiness with his new partner, Michonne. This chapter will explore how, over the course of nine seasons, Rick's performance of masculinity is affected by his vacillation between the roles of hero and anti-hero, and how these culminate in his departure from the television serial as a saviour and martyr. My original contribution stems from the fact that all previous criticism to date of Rick Grimes did not anticipate his departure in the ninth season¹⁷ or the death of Rick's comic book counterpart in the June 2019 issue (Kirkman, 2019: "Aftermath").¹⁸

Even though *TWD* has a contemporary setting, it is undeniably influenced by Westerns,¹⁹ which seems to be a common trait in post-apocalyptic fiction (Broderick, 1993; Combs, 1993; Mitchell, 2001). John Hay traced the term "post-apocalyptic" (2017: 7) to a 1982 film review of *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981). The *Mad Max* film serial (1979; 1981; 1985; 2015) centres on the titular character, Max Rockatansky,²⁰ struggling to survive in an Australian dystopia.²¹ *Mad Max 2* embraces the Western frontier theme by combining the typical plots of the "Ranch Story" and "Marshal". These plots encompass bandits attacking settlers who are then rescued by a brave lawman with a tragic past.²² Rick Grimes could easily have been modelled on Max Rockatansky: Rick is also a police officer who eventually discards his professional identity when the government and institutions become relics of the past; he also travels with a group of survivors, who attempt to settle but are also subjected to ongoing

¹⁷ Rick will not return to the television serial since the characters believe that he is dead. Instead, Rick will appear in a movie trilogy (Bishop, 2018).

¹⁸ The comic serial ended in July 2019 (Kirkman, 2019b: "The Farm House").

¹⁹ When referring to the noun or adjective relating to film, television, or fiction, "Western" will be capitalised following the convention established by sources dedicated to the "Western" genre (see (Slotkin, 1973, 1992; Tompkins, 1992; White, 2011)). In recognition that this convention is not universally accepted (see *The Oxford English Dictionary*), and to avoid confusion, the lower case for "western" will be used when referring to adjectives describing direction, geographical region, culture, or its historical sense.

²⁰ The character of Max Rockatansky was initially played by Mel Gibson in the first three movies and later by Tom Hardy in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015).

²¹ "Briefly, dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism" (Booker, 1994: 3).

²² Prolific Western pulp writer Frank Gruber (1967) listed what he considered to be seven types of Western stories. These are: Union Pacific (building the railroad, telegraph and/or stagecoach lines), Ranch Story (rustling and range war intrigue), Empire (essentially the Ranch Story, but on a grand scale), Revenge (going to great lengths to satisfy a quest for vengeance), Last Stand (cavalry versus Indians), Outlaw (Jesse James, Billy the Kid) and Marshal (dedicated lawman). Other critics have identified similar plots; for instance, see Wright (1975).

attacks. Jonathan Maberry, author of zombie novels such as *Rot and Ruin* (2011), offers the following judgement of Rick:

Kirkman's hero, Rick Grimes, is no Mad Max. He's not a postapocalyptic action hero who always has a plan. He's not the brilliant scientist-hero of the recent film adaptation of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* ([Lawrence],²³ 2007). Rick is none of those things, and probably the last word he would be likely to use to describe himself is "hero."

(2011b: 23)

I do not agree with Maberry's judgement because it is limited to the comic serial and first season of the television show. Rick's character undergoes dramatic changes over the period of nine seasons, and these contradict Maberry's description. We may compare Rick to Max and Robert (in *I Am Legend*). Both Mad Max and Robert lose their families early in the plot. Lori and Carl die much later in the narrative, but Rick is not a loner and remains a part of a community. Robert is unable to assimilate with the vampires; he is captured and is spared a public execution by committing suicide; Max wanders away at the end of each film. Similar to Max, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) walks away from his family at the end of the famous John Ford Western, *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956). Eventually Rick shares the same fate, as he is injured and is taken away from his community, leading them to conclude that he is dead. Due to *TWD*'s debt to Westerns, the American cowboy is viewed as the archetypical representation of hegemonic masculinity in the serial (Greene and Meyer, 2014; Lavin and Lowe, 2015; Gencarella, 2016; Ho, 2016, 2018; Bennett, 2018; Wilson, 2019a, 2019b). The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first introduced into gender theory by R.W. Connell (1987). However, in response to the plethora of criticism of the original theory, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) revised the concept. R.W. Connell offers the following revised definition:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

(2005: 77)

²³ The name of the film director (Lawrence) has been added to the citation for purposes of clarity as I also reference a 2007 edition of the novel in the Introduction.

Recently, Messerschmidt (2018) revisited this topic and examined how recent scholarly work has expanded upon the usage of hegemonic masculinities in research. A key criticism that he levels against certain researchers is that they equate hegemonic masculinity with fixed masculine characteristics and ignore the core concept that hegemonic masculinity involves the *legitimation* of unequal gender relations (2018: 71, emphasis added). Messerschmidt explains,

The notion of masculinity as an assemblage of traits created the path to treatment of hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type, a notion that has given considerable trouble to properly applying the concept of hegemonic masculinity. We therefore argued that not only the essentialist concept of masculinity, but also more generally the *fixed* character trait approach to gender, should be thoroughly transcended.

(2018: 49, original emphasis)

None of the critics who have examined *TWD* through the lens of hegemonic masculinity noted this idea: they appear instead to conflate hypermasculinity with hegemonic masculinity. In Connell's original conceptualisation of the model, she argued that hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to four nonhegemonic masculinities:

- [1] Subordinate masculinities (such as homosexual or effeminate men) are deviant to hegemonic masculinity;
- [2] Complicit masculinities do not embody hegemonic masculinity but through practice reap the benefit of unequal gender relations;
- [3] Marginalised masculinities are discriminated against because of unequal relations (such as race, class, age, etc.) external to gender relations;
- [4] Protest masculinities are constructed as compensatory hypermasculinities in reaction to positions lacking economic and political power.

(Connell, 2005: 78-112)

In the reformulation, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) recognised that hegemonic masculinity could be challenged by subordinated, marginalised and protest masculinities; women could also adopt aspects of hegemonic masculinity. In a similar fashion, Jack Halberstam (1998) explores what constitutes masculinity in an individual

and a society; he²⁴ contends that while certain forms of maleness are celebrated, “alternative masculinities” are subordinated. As a result of a multiplicity of identities borne from gender transitivity and sexualities, Halberstam controversially asserts that, in terms of the postmodern lesbian body, “we are all transsexuals” and “there are no transsexuals” (Halberstam, 1999: 131). He explains that the debates surrounding sexual identities result in questions surrounding what differentiates butch from transsexual masculinities; otherwise, the risk is that masculinity becomes a “set of protocols that should be agreed on in advance” (Halberstam, 1998: 144). Until Rick leaves *TWD*, he is always presented as the leader *par excellence* and thus establishes male domination in his society. Even his morally questionable decisions are legitimised since they are proven ultimately to be the correct choice; Rick’s group, and later communities, are from all walks of life. Diverse members of the group embody subordinate, complicit, marginalised and protest masculinities and there are also female characters. Male characters who challenge him are ultimately defeated or join his cause; female leadership is portrayed as emotional, unrealistic, and unsuitable for a post-apocalyptic community. Even though subordinate masculinities are considered deviant to hegemonic masculinity, gay characters such as Aaron, Eric and Jesus are accepted and submit to Rick’s overall leadership. Complicit, marginalised and protest masculinities, and female characters, all challenge but submit to Rick’s leadership since he stands in stark opposition to the rejection of femininity and racial otherness that characterised Westerns like *The Virginian* (Wister, [1902] 2006).

Other scholars have not examined nonhegemonic masculinities; therefore, I will explore these masculinities in the second and third chapters of this thesis. Wilson’s (2019a, 2019b) study of *TWD* draws on hegemonic masculinity; however, he inexplicably uses Connell’s 1995 definition in his thesis (Wilson, 2019a), but Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) reformulation of the concept in his article (Wilson, 2019b). Messerschmidt explains that the “shift from patriarchy to gender as the primary theoretical object in feminist theory is the most significant event in the *backstory* to understanding the eventual conceptualization of *hegemonic masculinity*” (2018: 1, original emphasis). Wilson also uses hegemonic masculinity as though it were a fixed trait and does not explore how it contributes to the oppression of women, for instance:

²⁴ Please note that any pronouns must be understood as “under erasure” where Halberstam is concerned, since he/she accepts both pronouns, as well as the names Jack, Judith and Jude.

“Reagan projected the image of the American cowboy, a celebrated form of hegemonic masculinity ...”; “The Ricktatorship is a model of alpha male masculinity, an extreme form of hegemonic masculinity ...” (Wilson, 2019a: 14; 105). This extends to his article as well: “Notably, the American cowboy is an archetypal representation of hegemonic masculinity ...”; “Rick’s appearance in *The Walking Dead*, specifically his trademark sheriff’s hat and cowboy boots, evokes classic western iconography, while both his and Shane’s personalities are rooted in frontiersman aspects of hegemonic masculinity, particularly regarding their roles as family protectors” (Wilson, 2019b: 41). Wilson concludes, “However, while *Fight Club* critiques traditional machismo displays of hegemonic masculinity, *The Walking Dead* instead endorses them through its survivalist scenario” (Wilson, 2019: 50). As opposed to Wilson, Bennett has a more optimistic impression of the progression of the serial, arguing that questioning Rick’s leadership enables alternative masculinities to critique hegemonic masculinity in *TWD* (Bennett, 2018: 46). Ho (2016, 2018) also employs hegemonic masculinity in her study of Glenn’s Asian American masculinity. Notably, she claims that Connell “describes hegemonic masculinity as the dominant form of masculinity” (Ho, 2018: 56). This is another misconception that Messerschmidt clarifies: “*dominant* forms of masculinity are not necessarily analogous to *hegemonic* forms of masculinity, because the former may not always legitimate unequal gender relations and they often center on actual groups of men” (2018: 49, original emphasis). Rick legitimises unequal gender relations since he always tries to control or overthrow the female leaders of the other groups. He also overthrows the other male leaders he encounters, fuelled by a sincere belief that he knows what is best for everyone.

Some of the texts that examine hegemonic masculinity in *TWD* use other definitions of hegemonic masculinity and/or combine it with iterations of Connell’s ideas (see Ho, 2018; Wilson, 2019a). For instance, Nick Trujillo analyses the media representation of Nolan Ryan, a baseball player, and defines hegemonic masculinity in terms of physical force and control, occupational achievement, patriarchy, the frontiersman and heterosexuality (1991). Amanda Lotz, a television critic, clarifies that she employs the term “‘hegemonic’ to indicate deployment of masculinities that are presented as ‘natural’ and that receive support *within that narrative* as acceptable or preferred” (2014: 40, original emphasis). She further explains, “hegemonic masculinities are often idealized in narratives or connected with characters that are heroic or positioned for viewer identification” (2014: 40). These critics have

appropriated the term “hegemonic masculinity” and use it for their own purposes. Unfortunately, they have manifestly misunderstood and misapplied the concept of hegemonic masculinity. While Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) recognise that social science concepts enable the acquisition of new meanings over time and space, they reject the notion of a set of traits, a fixed character type or associations with embodiment. Messerschmidt continues to note that this misconception remains pervasive and is ignored by certain scholars (2018, 2019). The Western hero practices hegemonic masculinity since he legitimises unequal gender relations.

Initially, Rick performs the role of a white Western hero. Roger Horrocks describes the Western genre as made up of “phallic discourses” since “men gaze at each other, pump bullets into each other’s bodies and lust after women as bar-room ‘whores’” (1995: 56). Rick fulfils his role in this phallic discourse as he performs the first two activities early on in the serial; the main aspect that differentiates him from other Western heroes is that he is a family man, and this civilising force governs his behaviour. The relationship between the Western and zombie genres is evident in the first episode of the television serial and the first issue of the comic book series, with images of Rick Grimes visually coded as a cowboy and the use of wide landscape shots. This is an extreme long shot typically used to showcase the environment and set the scene (Thompson and Bowen, 2009: 12). Westerns typically open with this type of shot (Tompkins, 1992: 69). The presentation of Rick as a cowboy is reinforced by images of his sheriff’s deputy uniform, the Stetson hat with a badge prominently displayed on it, his Colt Python pistol, a bag of guns strapped to his back, and Rick riding into Atlanta on a horse (Hassler-Forest, 2011; Rees, 2012; Sartain, 2013; Sugg, 2015; Keeler, 2018; E. Bennett, 2019). The combination of the “great outdoors” setting, cowboy masculinity represented by actors like John Wayne, and scenes from John Ford’s Westerns are responsible for this iconic image. In an interview, Ford asked, “Is there anything more beautiful than a long shot of a man riding a horse well, or a horse racing free across a plain?” (Libby, 2001: 288).

Frank Darabont, who directed the first episode, corrupts this image: Rick and the horse are framed in a long shot with death, destruction, and decay surrounding them. The long shot typically shows the subject’s entire body and some of the surrounding environment (Thompson and Bowen, 2009: 14). In this case, it shows Rick’s naivety and courage as he is surrounded by signs of danger, but still continues on his journey. Atlanta has been overrun by zombies and the government has bombed

the city in response, creating a landscape that is a far cry from the natural beauty of Monument Valley in Utah or the rivers, mountains, and plains of the traditional Western. Nevertheless, the American Myth of the Frontier exerts a strong influence on *TWD* (Canavan, 2011; Hassler-Forest, 2011; Rees, 2012; Sartain, 2013; Sugg, 2015; Christian, 2018; Keeler, 2018; Lavigne, 2018; E. Bennett, 2019; Wilson, 2019a):

The Myth of the Frontier is our oldest and most characteristic myth, expressed in a body of literature, folklore, ritual, historiography, and polemics produced over a period of three centuries. According to this myth-historiography, the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans who originally inhabited it have been the means to our achievement of a national identity, a democratic polity, an ever-expanding economy, and a phenomenally dynamic and “progressive” civilization. The original ideological task of the Myth was to explain and justify the establishment of American colonies; but as the colonies expanded and developed, the Myth was called on to account for our rapid economic growth, our emergence as a powerful nation-state, and our distinctively American approach to the socially and culturally disruptive processes of modernization.

(Slotkin, 1992: 10)

The frontier myth still asserts itself in popular culture because it is still a part of US consciousness. One of Donald Trump’s campaign promises was to build a wall on the border with Mexico. While ostensibly, the narrative was that the wall would keep illegal immigrants out, it also signalled his exploitation of the national obsession with demarcating safe spaces for white people. Richard Slotkin wrote three volumes dedicated to describing the historical development of the mythology of the American West. In *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier: 1600-1860* (1973), he posits that colonists viewed the USA as a land of opportunity or as “The New World”; however, the land was already occupied by indigenous populations. The resulting clashes between the colonists and Indians²⁵ are

²⁵ I recognise the sensitivity and complexity involved in using the term “Indian” and the debates surrounding names and references to the race and ethnicity of indigenous people. However, in this study, I will follow the convention established in Westerns and use the term “Indian”. It also illustrates the argument that the “other” is often seen as an indistinguishable mass akin to zombies. It is impossible to do justice to this topic in a footnote and it is also beyond the scope of this thesis; however, Peter d’Errico (2005) offers a summary of some of the issues surrounding the name controversy. He notes that some members of the indigenous groups despise having a coloniser like Christopher Columbus

memorialised in various texts and documents. The Myth of the Frontier arose from this ideological and physical conflict, which was preserved in narratives, codified in language, and eventually shaped America's worldview. *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (1998) continues to chart how the myth of the frontier was reinforced using the threat of race wars to justify force. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (1992) focuses on how Wild West myths continue to influence contemporary American culture. In this text, Slotkin argues that the violence and displacement executed against Indians has achieved mythic proportions and has become central to the development of the USA. The frontier provided men with opportunities to prove their masculinity; Westerns offer audiences a vision of frontier masculinity as an ideal since the protagonists need to be brave and resourceful to overcome the elements and the enemy. The Myth of the Frontier thus has three phases: separation from Europeans, the regression that occurs from returning to the wilderness and conflict with Indians. "Regeneration through violence", the restoration and improvement of one's condition after "creating civilisation" and "destroying the enemy", was the result of these phases. Rick is, at least initially, the hero who selflessly and violently restores the social and moral order of each new frontier that he reconquers in the name of civilisation.

While acknowledging Slotkin's insights on the narrative and historical frontier, Ari Mattes challenges Slotkin's usefulness for interpreting action films (Mattes, 2014). Mattes's bone of contention lies with "regeneration"; he perceives the concept to be "infused with a tone of optimistic triumphalism", which is "fundamentally negated by the extremely bleak affect" of many action films. There is certainly merit to this argument; while the 90-120-minute film format allows for the defeat of one villain and many henchmen, there is always a new foe on *TWD* that needs to be defeated. Rick and his group continually lose the ground that they have conquered so there is only a short reprieve before more violence arises. Slotkin's theory is useful, nevertheless, in understanding how Rick's masculinity is constructed in a post-apocalyptic environment.

being responsible for the term, "American Indians". "Native American" is also considered pejorative due to its association with "primitive". Political correctness is offensive since it serves as window-dressing and it does not acknowledge how a group views themselves and others; for instance, "traditional" names may have been derived from neighbours or enemies, denying people their "real" names.

Zombie post-apocalyptic texts cotton on to the Frontier Myth by exploiting the nostalgia for the adventure associated with conquering new frontiers, since survivors of zombie attacks must adapt to their new hostile environment, fight and overcome an insatiable enemy and re-establish civilization. *TWD* revisits this myth: civilization has crumbled; the land has been taken over by zombies (who are equivalent to “Indians” in the Frontier Myth); heroes, like Rick, must fight against other human competitors (equivalent to “bandits”) for resources; they must create new settlements and trade with other settlements. Violence against enemies is continually justified.

The concept of the frontier played an important part in the formation of white identity in the USA. Slotkin based his theory upon Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis ([1893] 1920) about the significance of the idea of the frontier in American history. American history had been largely the history of the colonisation of the “Great West”, contends Turner (1920); the close of the “old frontier” resulted in an American identity crisis, which needed a new frontier for resolution.²⁶ This probably accounts for the popularity of science fiction in the USA (for instance, the original *Star Trek* series, sequels, spinoffs and films) and post-apocalyptic fiction, such as *I am Legend*. Turner also describes the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (1920: 3). In fiction, the narrative depends on the source of conflict coinciding with this meeting point. Sugg convincingly utilises Slotkin (1992) and Canavan (2011) to explore the relationships between racism, settler colonialism, abjection and liberal capitalism through Rick, who embodies “a potential critique of liberal individual agency and masculine leadership” (2015: 805). Slotkin also identified “post-frontier” narratives in other genres that draw on the Western but invert the Myth of the Frontier (Slotkin, 1992: 633-635). Keeler (2018) persuasively combines theories from Slotkin (1992) and Cawelti (1999) to argue that *TWD* is a post-Western. Whether Western or post-Western, performances of masculinity are central to the narrative. “The masculine ideal embedded in the Western draws directly from the myth of the frontier”, according to Christian (2018: 66), “in its celebration of particular forms of violence as a tool to reinvigorate manhood”. An ideal Western hero, according to Western genre scholar Jeremy Agnew, is described as:

²⁶ The frontier myth extends to other countries, for instance, Canada (see Furniss 1999), and conceivably any country that has been colonised. The frontier myth is seen in speculative fiction (and other speculative genres), for instance, *Alien* (1979) (see Rushing 2009) where space or other planets are hostile environments and aliens must be exterminated.

The traditional myth of the frontier idealized the White male adventurer as the hero. The movie cowboy is a man on a horse with [a] six-shooter and no home who travels around the West solving problems [...]. The hero and the villain were reduced to a simple pair of antagonists. The good versus the bad [...] the heroes (almost always White Anglo-Saxon males) who populated this mythic landscape were a vague combination of integrity, morality, chivalry, honor, courage, and self-reliance. This was the ideal hero.

(2015: 12-13)

Rick is far from an ideal hero; he offers a more complicated representation of masculinity and heroism than the ideal hero envisioned by Agnew. Rick's ride into Atlanta right into a herd of walkers can be viewed as a sign of naiveté, at best, or stupidity, at worst (Sartain, 2013: 255). Rick is also physically and mentally vulnerable, which is at odds with the image of a typical Western hero (Sartain, 2013; E. Bennett, 2019). Most significantly, Rick's masculinity is threatened by Shane Walsh (Jon Bernthal) who tries to supplant Rick by beginning a relationship with Lori and by adopting a paternal role towards Carl.

The love-triangle in *TWD* has parallels with the famous Westerns, *Shane* (Stevens, 1953) and *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956). In *Shane*, a gunfighter named Shane (Alan Ladd) is hired by a rancher, Joe Starrett (Van Heflin). Joe's wife, Marian (Jean Arthur), and Shane seem to share a mutual attraction; Joe's son, Joey (Brandon deWilde), adores Shane. Ladd's Shane is driven by honour, which prevents him from destabilising the family, so he leaves. Other critics have also observed this similarity between the texts (Rees, 2012; B. Bennett, 2019).

When Carl is shot and injured, Shane Walsh irredeemably compromises himself by murdering another man, Otis (Pruitt Taylor Vince), to save himself. He justifies this decision since he was carrying life-saving medication for Carl. Otis mistakenly shot Carl, yet he volunteers to go with Shane; he also saves Shane but is rewarded with betrayal. Rees observes that this "postideological Shane" chooses to kill Otis to save himself and medical supplies, but also to "poach his best friend's family" (2012: 87). Before condemning Shane, Rick claims that he would have done the same to save Lori or Carl (Berk 2015: 50). In the same scene, Rick claims, "I'm not the good guy anymore. To save Carl's life, I would've done anything—anything" (Dickerson, 2012: "18 Miles Out"). Shane eventually throws these words back at Rick in their final confrontation because Rick's moral compass prevents him from letting

Shane kill Randall shortly thereafter. A fight ensues, but Rick does not abandon Shane to the walkers. The corpses of two sheriff's deputies remind Rick of his friendship with Shane. Rick's rescue and forgiveness of Shane illustrates his honour and strength of character; a hypermasculine Shane sees these traits as a weakness. Bennett argues that Rick and Shane embody similar masculinities as their literary counterparts Joe and Shane in the "early part of *TWD*" though these "positions shift as the series wears on" (2019: 19). Shane continues to view his role as the protector of Carl and Lori and grows convinced that Rick cannot take care of them; however, Lori's pregnancy and the likelihood that Shane is the father create a tipping point. Shane plots to kill Rick and lures him out into a field, yet Rick feigns surrender and stabs him in the chest. The moonlight fight also appears in *Shane* between Shane and Joe. Bennett notes that Ladd's Shane represents an ideal masculinity that Bernthal's Shane can only aspire to as his masculinity is unsuited for a civilised community (2019: 22). In a Western, a wife's infidelity would have irredeemably compromised her husband's masculinity. Shane's lack of respect for Rick shows that he feels that he is a better and stronger man for both Lori and Carl; yet the text also takes pains to show that Lori believed Rick was dead when pursuing a relationship with Shane. It also emphasises Rick's restraint, forgiveness, and sense of honour regarding friendship. This is a recurrent theme throughout *TWD*: Rick's actions and behaviour are always framed as preserving the white male hero's image.

The Searchers (Ford, 1956) also features a love triangle. Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) returns to his brother's home after eight years after the Civil War ended. His brother Aaron (Walter Coy) married Martha (Dorothy Jordan) and they have three children, Lucy (Pippa Scott), young Debbie (Lana Wood), and Ben (Robert Lyden). While it is never openly discussed, Ethan's and Martha's subtle actions suggest they harbour intimate feelings towards one another, but these are never expressed. Ethan, like Bernthal's Shane, also possesses a masculinity that is antithetical to civilised-communities. Another love triangle also develops in the film. Aaron adopted Martin "Marty" Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter), who is one-eighth Cherokee. Like *Shane*, *The Searchers* has a character that shares the same name with a *TWD* character and who is also involved in a love triangle. Laurie Jorgensen (Vera Miles) loves Marty, but she becomes engaged to another man, Charlie McCorry (Ken Curtis), intentionally setting the men against each other, for humorous purposes). Like *Shane*, the hero of *The Searchers* is a bachelor who does not act upon his attraction to another character's

wife. The decision to cast Rick as a married man and father, in opposition to the traditional Western hero, portrays him as sympathetic but also legitimises his violence.

Popular culture representations of masculinity can be harmful and damaging to ordinary men. Susan Faludi's (1999, 2007) studies of post-9/11 America in *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* and *The Terror Dream: Myth and Misogyny in an Insecure America*, uncovered a regressive desire to return to masculinity as embodied by superheroes like Superman or Western heroes like John Wayne. Using this idea as her point of departure, in addition to Slotkin (1998) and Tompkins (1992), Bennett (2019) tries to establish to what extent cowboy masculinity is reproduced in *TWD* and concludes that the male characters are trapped by obligations to perform a traditional, but self-destructive form of masculinity. Hassler-Forest (2011) notes that George A. Romero's zombie narratives challenged and critiqued conservative ideology through the destruction of patriarchal characters and institutions; however, the Western influence on the comic series shows the contradictory impulse to reassert phallogocentric power but also encapsulates its unsustainable violence. The re-imagined masculine agency in *TWD* is drawn from the Western frontier myth to showcase a white masculinist survival narrative (Sugg, 2015). The Western affords men the possibility of escaping from domesticity; yet *TWD* traps the male characters into a cowboy identity that encompasses a "self-destructive form of masculinity" (E. Bennett, 2019). The comparisons between the structural and thematic elements of the Western and *TWD* are capably discussed by Keeler (2018), who argues that the serial is a post-Western. In a similar vein to Sugg, Wilson argues that *TWD* resists feminist and liberal ideologies, with its main protagonist Rick exemplifying masculine leadership within a neoliberal framework (Wilson, 2019a). Sugg describes how the serial is complicit in affirming late liberal capitalism, which, in turn, coincides with the twenty-first-century crisis in white masculinity. Feminism and multiculturalism, she argues, have undermined the privilege and economic stability of normative white masculinity; therefore, the frontier setting is conducive to Rick's "embattled white masculinity" (2015: 802). Sugg observes that from the first episodes, Rick's fitness to lead the group is both a "foregone conclusion and an ongoing question" (2015: 794). She also perceives a regressive conception of gender, where Lori is nurturing and protective in nature, whilst Rick is shown as level-headed, quick-acting and strategic (2015: 795). This also extends to racial coding, as with stereotypical non-white characters playing

supportive and disposable roles (Sugg, 2015: 795). This is unsurprising given that these qualities and stereotypes coincide with those of the Western:

The Western town of the media was of course not perfect because it reflected the ideology of the times—our manifest destiny to take over and settle new land and countries to the west and our white supremacy. It reinforced our gender stereotypes of women as nurturers and civilizers, and men as restless fighters and dreamers.

(Weston, 2002: 52)

Rick's first character arc ends with the death of hope, which is observed in Sophia (Carol's young daughter). The first episode's opening scene shows Rick dressed in his uniform driving along a road until he has to pull over because he has run out of fuel. At the filling station, he sees a little blonde girl wandering in a dirty pink robe and bunny slippers. She picks up a teddy bear and begins to shuffle away. He introduces himself:

Rick: Little girl? I'm a policeman. Little girl. Don't be afraid, OK? Little girl.

(Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye")



Figure 2 Rick is confronted by a little blonde walker

Rick's identification as a policeman and authoritative figure is meant to soothe and reassure the girl. She turns around and her face reveals that she is a walker as her mouth is torn open. She growls and charges towards him, so he shoots her in the head. Rees comments that this scene is "drawn for maximum pathos" and that it demonstrates how Rick's work "conflicts with the grisly necessities of a mutated world"; furthermore, she observes that the Western genre constructs Rick as a "pure-hearted lawman who brings an outdated value system of order and justice into the realm of the

new, the postapocalyptic city [...]” (2012: 80). While the scene’s uncanniness immediately transmits a reversal of the natural order in which a law enforcement officer is responsible for killing a young girl instead of protecting her, it also carries intertextual associations. *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) also opens to a scene in which a car travels on a road. The intertextual references continue as *Night* is the first modern zombie film which introduced a little zombie girl. Karen Cooper (Kyra Schon), an eleven-year-old girl, turns into a zombie, eats her father, and then stabs her mother. This scene is also echoed in the *Dawn of the Dead* (Snyder, 2004) remake, where the protagonist Ana (Sarah Polley) and her husband Louis (Louis Ferreira) are attacked by a little zombie girl in their bedroom; Louis does not survive the confrontation. The little girl is also dressed in a pink night-dress and has her mouth ripped open. While Ben, the black man, and Ana, the white woman, cannot bring themselves to kill the little zombie girls that they encounter, Rick proves at the onset that he can do the unimaginable for his own survival.

Children symbolise innocence; the show exploits the terror, apprehension and disgust that arises from the corruption of a young white girl. Eli Roth says that he believes that possessed young girls inspire feelings of protectiveness, whereas “teenage boys can be violent and dangerous already” (Blakeley, 2010). While Roth’s remarks are offensive, they resonate to a certain extent with Wright’s (2001) study of the cowboy. He argues that individualist theory assumes that only men are rational; therefore, women need to be protected in a family and relegated to private and separate spheres (Wright, 2001: 143-157). These arguments extend to race; “equality” is assumed amongst white men, but Indians had to be “removed” because of their “irrationality” and “savagery” (Wright, 2001: 158-171). The killing of innocent children is seen in the Western, *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968), which was released in the same year as *Night*. Young Timmy McBain (Enzo Santaniello) is shot by the villainous Frank (Henry Fonda); the camera lingers on Frank’s face, highlighting his cold blue eyes. When he fires, only the gun is seen, leaving the horror of the scene to the imagination of the audience. When the children “turn” or are “contaminated”, Rick has no choice but to kill the walkers as they are no longer innocent. When Sophia Peletier, a ten-year-old girl, goes missing in the second season, Rick tries to track her down. The trope of the white male hero rescuing an innocent girl child can be traced to the Western (Rees, 2012; E. Bennett, 2019). As Slotkin explains:

In the various historical narratives associated with [Daniel] Boone, the narrative formulas and ideological themes of the captivity tale (redemption through suffering) are integrated with the triumphalist scenario of the Indian-war story to make a single unified Myth of the Frontier in which the triumph of civilization over savagery is symbolized by the hunter/warrior's rescue of the White woman held captive by savages.

(1992: 15)

Sophia is not rescued. In a scene reminiscent of Timmy emerging from the wooden house, Sophia, who is now a walker, slowly staggers out of the wooden barn and walks towards the group of survivors. Rick's shock and devastation gives way to a look of grit and determination as he approaches Sophia. When Frank shoots Timmy, the camera switches between a "choker shot" (which frames the subject's face from above the eyebrows to below the mouth) and his gun at waist level. In *TWD*, Rick's face, shoulders, and the gun are in a medium close-up. The lack of remorse on Frank's face shows that he is a psychopath. The medium close-up shot allows the audience to see the facial expression of the actor and background. Since the shot is also from below, and the gun is pointed at the camera, it is Sophia's perspective. Rick frowns, but is also determined as he is once again in a position that no other character is willing to endure.



Figure 3 Rick stares down the barrel of the gun at Sophia

Rick fires and the scene shows Sophia crumple to the ground. An overhead shot of the survivors and the felled walkers highlights the devastation of the scene. The difference between the scenes shows the contrast between the gunfighter for hire versus the merciful execution shot. Rick kills the little walker girls out of mercy and because no-one else will do so. Bennett observes that many of the male characters

blame themselves for failing to protect Sophia when she is discovered as a walker, which she links to the sense of failure to protect that men experience in post-9/11 narratives (2019: 20). This perspective ignores feelings experienced by women. Later, Carol loses her adoptive daughters, as well as a son; Michonne's son also dies; however, Bennett focuses on the male characters.

The Governor of Woodbury, Philip Blake, also fails to protect two little girls. Bennett observes that his masculinity suffers when he loses his daughter, Penny, and another little girl, Meghan Chambler, who serves as a replacement for Penny (2019: 21). Bennett notes that the Governor is unable to acknowledge his failure to protect Penny, who is now a walker, when he begs Michonne not to hurt his little girl (2019: 21). The situation is more complicated than the Governor being in denial about his daughter's death. The Governor treats Penny as though she is still alive. For instance, when he brushes her hair, a chunk of scalp with hair comes off; then he tells her, "Daddy still loves you"; he also keeps her in a cage in his room (Nicotero, 2013: "Say the Word").

When Michonne finds Penny chained in a cage in the Governor's apartment, Penny appears clean and wears different clothes from the hair-brushing scene. Michonne mistakenly assumes Penny is alive, implying that he is bathing and changing her. When the Governor asks Michonne not to hurt and make Penny suffer, this further establishes that he is mentally unhinged (Gierhart, 2013: "Made to Suffer"). Michonne's gender and race intersect when she kills the walker version of Penny. Rick, the white male hero, kills the walkers out of mercy and necessity: whilst Michonne is motivated to end a perverse situation, she is also driven partly by revenge as the Governor has previously tried to kill her. The Governor's attitude is different towards Meghan, since he shoots her without emotion to prevent her reanimation. His coldness and villainy align him with Frank from *Once Upon a Time in the West*. Bennett observes that Shane, the Governor and Rick struggle with the border between savagery and civilisation (2019: 24). Bennett argues that these characters are motivated by their desires to protect their community, which is why Rick murders Saviours in a pre-emptive attack (2019: 25). I disagree that these three characters are struggling with the border between savagery and civilisation; both Shane and the Governor have realised, in the Governor's own words, "In this life now, you kill or you die. Or you die and you kill" (Dickerson, 2013: "Welcome to the Tombs"). They both crossed the border into savagery a long time ago. Rick, on the other hand, straddles

the border until Carl dies. The scene that follows the first little walker's death is one of the scenes most often remarked on by critics for its regressive representation of gender relations. In a flashback, pre-apocalypse, Shane and Rick discuss the difference between men and women:

Shane: I never met a woman who knew how to turn off a light. They're born thinking the switch only goes one way On. They're struck blind the second they leave a room. I mean every woman, I ever let have a key I swear to God. It's like I come home, house is all lit up, and my job, you see, apparently because [...] because my chromosomes happen to be different cause I then gotta walk through that house, turn off every single light this chick left on Alright, Reverend Shane's preaching to you now, boy. The same chick, mind ya. She'll bitch about global warming. That's when Reverend Shane wants to quote from the Guy Gospel and say, "Um, darling? Maybe you, and every other pair of boobs on this planet just figured out that the light switch see, goes both ways? Maybe we wouldn't have so much global warming." ... I wanna say, "Bitch, you mean to tell me you've been hearing this your entire life and you are still too damn stupid to learn how to turn off a switch?" You know I-I don't actually say that though.

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.

Shane: Hey look, man, I may have a fail to amuse with my sermon, but I did try. The least you could do is-is speak.

Rick: That's what she always says: "Speak". "Speak". You think I was the most closed mouth son of a bitch you'd ever hear to hear her tell it.

Shane: Do you express your thoughts? You share your feelings and that kind of stuff?

Rick: The thing is lately whenever I try ... everything I say makes her impatient, like she didn't want to hear it after all. It's like she's pissed at me all the time, and I don't know why.

Shane: Look, man, that's just shit couples go through. Yeah, it's... it's a phase.

Rick: Last thing she said this morning? Sometimes I wonder if you even care about us at all. She said that in front of our kid. Imagine going to school with that in your head. Difference between men and women? I would never say something that cruel to her. Certainly not in front of Carl.

(Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye")

This scene is quoted at length to illustrate the misogynistic language and attitude towards women early in the series. Bennett (2019: 17) observes parallels between this scene and Tompkins's (1992: 39; 42) belief that the Western emerged as a reaction against the Victorian female's preoccupation with Christianity, salvation, and the home. Everything associated with the feminine domain (religion, language and culture) was mistrusted (Tompkins, 1992: 49; 55); therefore, Bennett (2019: 18) concludes that Shane and Rick specifically complain about woman's language against them. Wilson (2019b: 44) believes that this is an instance of Shane mocking Rick due to Lori's questioning Rick's masculinity. Dunaway (2018: 13) observes that the scene positions women as the "Other" and underlines Shane's hypermasculinity whereas Rick is "feminised" through discussing his emotions; Shane's naturalness with hypermasculinity is emphasised while Rick is a more unwilling participant. Women in general and Lori in particular are portrayed unsympathetically in the conversation. Alternatively, the discussion reverses the stereotype of women complaining about men and underscores miscommunication between genders. The sexist rhetoric in this scene reifies conservative gender roles and stereotypes (Greene and Meyer, 2014). Greene and Meyer observe: "In addition to the creation of a divide between men and women and their roles, this scene portrays sexism as humorous and light-hearted, marking it as harmless and socially acceptable" and "[w]ithin the first minutes of the show, we see that women are characterized as sex objects ('pair of boobs'), stupid, incapable, and cruel" (2014: 67). Shane also places his hand on Lori's mouth before they have sex (MacLaren, 2011: "Guts"); Bennett believes that this is in reference to the conversation above (2019: 17). This scene, I argue, has an additional purpose. It is meant to engender sympathy for Rick and disgust with Lori. This is the last argument the married couple had before Rick is shot and falls into a coma; after the zombie apocalypse, Shane informs Lori that Rick is dead. Lori does not mourn or show signs of remorse. The audience sees a woman kissing and then having sex with Shane, only for it to be dramatically revealed in a family picture that the woman is Lori. Misogynistic members of the audience will not forget this betrayal. After Lori's symbolic castration of Rick through infidelity, it becomes imperative to re-establish his masculinity.

Rick's narrative arc is replete with shootouts (Rees, 2012). Rick is shot by criminals in the first episode and reprimands Officer Leon Basset for wanting to be on a reality show; kills the walker version of Leon, and out of compassion tracks and shoots a walker that is missing the lower half of its body (Rees, 2012). The Western

hero does not indulge in killing for pleasure. There is another important aspect to Rick's dressing down of Leon Basset (Linds Edwards) before the shootout: Rick tells Leon to focus and "make sure that you got a round in the chamber and your safety off"; Leon's subsequent actions demonstrate that Rick had judged him correctly (Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye"). Rick is shot twice; the first bullet hits his bulletproof vest and he begs Shane not to tell Lori about the near miss. The second bullet results in him falling into a coma. From a narrative point of view, these scenes have two purposes: firstly, they show Rick in a sympathetic light. Despite Lori's unconscionable behaviour, Rick is still a good husband who cares about her feelings. Secondly, Shane's probing questions seem to be a result of his own attraction to Lori. He uses the knowledge that she likes to talk about issues to seduce her. For example, in the same episode, after Rick awakes from his coma and searches for Lori and Carl, he tries to establish radio contact with anyone. The survivors at the Atlanta camp hear him but are unable to warn Rick about the danger in the city. Lori argues that they need to put up signs, whilst Shane vehemently disagrees that they should risk any resources. When she walks off, he pursues her and forces her to talk to him; then they kiss. Shane learned from Rick that Lori needs him to "speak". This is also the first example of why the group gravitates towards Rick's leadership. Shane unheroically is unwilling to put himself, Lori or Carl in danger, but is willing to let others die, whereas Rick risks his life for others, including strangers and antagonists.

Kimmel argues that the restraining and feminising influence of women has resulted in men in the USA wanting to escape from their counterparts for over 200 years (2005: 19). He provides the example of the California Gold Rush, when the influx of 85 000 men led to men comprising 93% of the state's population between 1849-1850; the result was degeneracy and barbarism but proved an effective proving ground for masculinity (2005: 22-23). This idea appears to have emerged in 1819 when Washington Irving's character, Rip Van Winkle, falls asleep for twenty years to escape from his nagging wife (Irving, 1991). Although Rick does not actively seek a coma to escape from Lori, the hero's hospitalisation at the beginning of a post-apocalyptic story appears in *The Day of the Triffids* (Wyndham, 2003), which was originally published in 1951, and *28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002); however, both of these narratives are set in England. In his comparison of Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* and Matheson's *I am Legend* (originally published in 1954 and set in Los Angeles), Yeates observes "the last man theme", offensive depictions of women and the use of

“racially charged language” against antagonists (2016: 411). He concludes that these postwar texts are both “products and critiques of white male anxieties” related to race and gender (Yeates, 2016: 429). In 2010, almost sixty years since *The Day of the Triffids* was published, Rick wakes up in a hospital bed alone and it appears as though he is the last man on Earth. This parallel, together with the fact that *TWD* faces similar criticism, establishes that not much has changed.

Rick’s vacillation between heroism and monstrous antiheroism spans nine seasons. In the first season, he exhibits heroism in the following incidents, among others: he tries to rescue Merle and Glenn; he gives valuable guns and ammunition to Morgan and the Vatos, a group of survivors in Atlanta; and he tries to save Jim when he is bitten by a walker. In the second season, he searches for Sophia even though Shane believes that it is a waste of time. Once Sophia is discovered to be a walker, Rick loses his confidence and hope and no longer performs the role of a traditional Western hero. In a scene reminiscent of a shootout at a saloon, he shoots two survivors, Tony and Dave, in “The Carriage Bar” (Gierhart, 2012: “Triggerfinger”). While Dave initially conceals his intent behind a mask of affability, Tony is coarse. While urinating in a corner of the bar, Tony asks, “You got cooz? Ain’t had a piece of ass in weeks” (Johnson, 2012). Keeler (2018: 428) cites this scene and Rick’s decision to kill the men as an example of Cawelti’s distinction “between good violence (perpetrated by the hero) and bad violence (that used by the villains in pursuit of their evil aims)” (1999: 120). Rick’s actions are justified: Dave had tried to “draw” on Rick first through deceitful means. One of the members of Tony and Dave’s group, Randall, is rescued by Rick. Shane murders Randall and lures Rick into a field. Rick mirrors Dave’s actions; he pretends to hand over his gun to Shane only to stab him with his other hand. The line between friend and foe, hero and villain, grows increasingly thinner but Rick’s transition into an anti-hero has begun.

Reflecting on another television anti-hero, Tony Soprano, Alyssa Rosenberg debates the purpose of anti-heroes:

But I wonder if we might be better off accepting that antiheroism is a specific way of exploring hypermasculinity and masculinity gone toxic. The tension of an antihero comes from an audience rooting for a character against our better judgment, and again and again, the things that have lured us in have been masculine-coded traits.

(Rosenberg, 2013)

This certainly appears to be the case at least in the confrontation between Rick and Shane. Shane has plotted Rick's death, because he covets Rick's family. He believes that his performance of masculinity is superior as he can provide for and protect Lori and Carl. He also believes that he can "fix" Lori and Carl but will not be able to do so while Rick is alive. Noble and honourable Rick has forgiven Lori and Shane and he is rewarded with this new betrayal; therefore, his killing of Shane is condoned by the audience:

Rick: You're gonna kill me in cold blood? Screw my wife? Have my children-- my children-- call you daddy? Is that what you want? That life won't be worth a damn. I know you. You won't be able to live with this.

.
. .
.

Shane: What happened, Rick? I thought you weren't the good guy anymore. Ain't that what you said? Even right here, right now, you ain't gonna fight for 'em? I'm a better father than you, Rick. I'm better for Lori than you, man. It's 'cause I'm a better man than you, Rick. 'Cause I can be here and I'll fight for it. You come back here and you just destroy everything! You got a broken woman. You got a weak boy. You ain't got the first clue on how to fix it. Raise your gun.

(Ferland, 2012: "Better Angels")

The myth of the frontier is invoked through Shane wanting to "rescue" Lori from Rick and echoed when Beth and Carol are held against their will by police officers at Grady Memorial Hospital and Rick's group attempts to free them. Lieutenant Dawn Lerner, who is apparently in charge of the hospital, supports sexual slavery as she allows her male officers to rape the female survivors in the hospital. This places her leadership in question since she defers to her male officers by validating hegemonic masculinity to maintain her position. Yet, her own officers reveal the precariousness of her leadership to Rick and the group. Recalling the initial dialogue between Shane and Rick about the difference between men and women, the show portrays hegemonic masculinity as being the dominant representation in police departments. This parallels real police officer structures in the USA; not only does a "hidden curriculum" encourage hegemonic masculinity, but women students are excluded, women in general are denigrated and the differences between men and women are exaggerated (Prokos

and Padavic, 2002). As a woman and a police officer, Lerner's decision to allow rape can be understood as legitimating hegemonic masculinity. There are numerous studies that detail police organisations as "sites of hegemonic masculinity", where the division of labour forces female officers to deal with "women issues"; women who resist these roles are neither respected or accepted as equals (Rabe-Hemp, 2009).

Rick wants to sneak in and kill the officers, but Tyreese wants to avoid bloodshed. Daryl supports Tyreese and so they kidnap officers to exchange as hostages for Beth and Carol (Gierhart, 2015: "Crossed"). Tyreese is a black man, and Daryl is a redneck:²⁷ here, Rick acquiesces to "marginalised" masculinities, which potentially shows growth in his character. By working and listening to others, he demonstrates his willingness to participate in a democratic system. Yet, when one of the hostages escapes, Rick chases him down and uses excessive force. Rick drives Sgt. Bob Lamson's car, warns Lamson to stop escaping, and when he fails to do so, accelerates and breaks Lamson's back (Dickerson, 2015: "Coda"). A picture of Lamson and a boy are attached to the dashboard, clearly showing that the positions could have been reversed, but Rick shows no empathy for Lamson and shoots him. If Rick had practised restraint, then there would have been enough hostages to satisfy Lerner. Since there were three officers, she wants Noah, a survivor who escaped from the hospital, to be returned to her as well. Beth sacrifices herself for Noah's freedom. For the first time, Rick does not kill the leader, Lerner: this time Daryl executes her in revenge for killing Beth. Rick's murder of Lamson cannot be justified; however, he is not sullied by killing a woman. In keeping with the traditional hero's image, descended from Greek epic literature, Rick does not kill women: "the warrior does not war on women" (Lowenstam, 2001: 45). Rick kills or engages in physical altercations only with men: for instance, Dave, Tony, Shane, Tomas, the Governor, Gareth, The Claimers, Pete and Negan. Hegemonic masculinity is predicated on the assumption of legitimised gender inequality; the act of killing a woman would destabilise male authority. As Rebecca Biron notes:

When successful manliness is associated with power over women, and successful male citizenship is associated with obeying laws designed in collective male

²⁷ The pejorative term "redneck" originally described poor or working-class white people from the southern states in America; however, in the late twentieth century it began to be embraced as a complimentary designation amongst certain southerners (Huber, 1995).

interest, then the criminal male who kills women simultaneously celebrates and undermines hegemonic masculinity.

(Biron, 2000: 8)



Figure 4 Rick breaks Lamson's back and then shoots him

Margrethe Vaage (2016) identifies a trend on television shows set and made in the USA in which the main character commits murder. However, Shane, Tomas, Andrew, the Governor, Joe, and Gareth wanted to kill Rick first, so his actions, whether duplicitous in performance or not, can be argued to be examples of self-defence. Rick forsakes the traditional heroic role in favour of antiheroism by using monstrous methods of despatching these men. For instance, when his family is threatened, he hacks Gareth to death and bites and rips out Joe's jugular vein. Rick's conduct towards Lamson cannot be justified either. Lamson was restrained by his handcuffs and Rick used unnecessary and excessive force to subdue him. The tendency to excuse the behaviour of an anti-hero is related to their families, since the needs of the family are presented as a noble cause in these narratives (Lotz, 2014: 63). Lamson knocked out Sasha to escape; Lerner and her officers have captured Carol and Beth; three women in Rick's "family" have been attacked and therefore the assailants need to be punished or eradicated. Traditional Western heroes do not have families since they have to maintain their honour and practise restraint; they cannot undertake selfish actions. The antihero's family justifies seemingly inexcusable behaviour.

When Aaron appears and invites the group to leave the wilderness and re-join civilisation in Alexandria, Rick is suspicious and immediately attacks him. He would like to kill Aaron, but the group decides to go to Alexandria as they would not survive

much longer on the road. By the time Rick's group arrives at Alexandria, he strongly mirrors Shane in that he is attracted to Jessie Anderson, the wife of Pete Anderson, and decides to take over Alexandria if the residents prove themselves weak (Boyd, 2015: "Forget"). Following Rick's increasingly unstable behaviour, the leader of Alexandria, Deanna Monroe, calls a meeting to decide whether Rick should be expelled from the community. Deanna, like Dawn, maintains her position through supporting hegemonic masculinity. She knows Pete is abusive towards his family, but his position as surgeon ensures his value and untouchability in a post-apocalyptic environment. Deanna's husband, Reg, tries to calm down Pete who is carrying Michonne's katana (sword); his throat is sliced, and Deanna calls upon Rick to execute Pete (Nicotero, 2015: "Conquer"). Deanna is proven to be a hypocrite as she always advocated for "civilised" exile; when a crime affects her personally, then a very uncivilised execution is a suitable punishment. Once again, Rick is recognised to have been right all along; he tries to restore Deanna's confidence but is forced to replace her as leader of the community, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity in the serial.

In the sixth season, Rick consolidates his position and grows arrogant. Rick and Daryl encounter Paul "Jesus" Rovia; even though he steals from them, they spare him. Jesus is from Hilltop, a more prosperous community, led by the pompous and cowardly Gregory. Rick's patriarchal urges manifest when he grows more desperate to provide food, medical supplies and security to his community. In exchange for food and supplies from Hilltop, Rick and the Alexandrians attack the Saviours and slaughter them (Nicotero, 2016b: "Not Tomorrow Yet"). The Saviours, despite their name, first killed a sixteen-year-old boy, Rory, to ensure Hilltop's submission; they have since blackmailed a member of Hilltop to kill Gregory and they have already struck closer to home by attacking Daryl, Abraham and Sasha. This "pre-emptive" attack is thus presented as a necessary evil even though it is morally reprehensible to kill people in their sleep. The Alexandrians, however, are portrayed as being justified in their actions. The Saviours adorn their walls with Polaroid pictures of bodies with heads smashed, suggesting that the pictures are the trophies of a serial killer; the pictures in fact foreshadow Glenn's death. Later, the Alexandrians discover that they only succeeded in destroying a Saviour outpost and the rest of the Saviours enact revenge on Rick's group. Negan, the leader of the Saviours, uses his bat, "Lucille", a phallic weapon, to beat Abraham and Glenn to death mercilessly (although the identity of the first victim is not revealed in the season finale).



Figure 5 Negan asserts his dominance by waving Lucille in a defeated Rick's face

The seventh season continues with the scene from the previous season's finale. The Saviours also subscribe to hegemonic masculinity with Negan in the apex position. Negan instantly recognises the complicit masculinities represented by Abraham and Glenn; he knows that to weaken Rick, he must eliminate Rick's lieutenants. By smashing Abraham and Glenn's heads, he symbolically castrates Rick. Negan sees Rick's resistance to subjugation; and succeeds in breaking Rick through threatening Carl. Carl is already symbolically castrated as he has lost one eye; Negan threatens to kill the entire group if Rick does not cut off Carl's right arm. Without his eye and arm, Carl would be defenceless and would likely suffer a long-drawn-out death. A shaking, shivering, convulsing Rick almost commits the act before Negan prevents it. Not only has Negan neutralised Rick's masculinity in front of his group, but he has psychologically bolstered his own men who watched this performance. After Daryl strikes Negan, he takes Daryl as a hostage, depriving Rick of even more "manpower". As Negan continues to plunder and kill, Michonne, providing the love of a good woman, bolsters Rick's masculinity, enabling him to fight back. Rick creates a coalition amongst the communities: Maggie, a white woman, replaces Gregory as leader of Hilltop and the Kingdom led by King Ezekiel, a black man. He also recruits Jadis, a white woman representing the lower class. Jadis leads the Scavengers, also called the "Garbage People" given that they live in a junkyard. Unsurprisingly, Rick leads the coalition, seemingly cementing the hegemonic masculinity in the serial.

Season eight begins with the coalition of communities or "Militia" in a war with the Saviours. At first Rick offers Negan's lieutenants a chance to surrender, but it quickly degenerates into all-out war. When Rick kills a Saviour who turns out to be

protecting an infant, an unrepentant Daryl kills Morales (a survivor from the first season) who is now a Saviour, and then another Saviour whom Rick had promised they would spare. Rick begins to rethink his actions and to realize that there is no regeneration through violence. When Carl dies, Rick continues his downward spiral by murdering more Saviours even though they had nothing to do with Carl's death. Carl writes several letters before he dies. In his letter to Rick, he implores him to find peace with Negan and to restore civilisation. Rick resists this at first, and slices Negan's throat before asking Siddiq to save him. Rick asks all of the communities to try and live together in peace. Maggie and Daryl do not agree with Rick's decision. This marks the end of hegemonic masculinity in the serial as Maggie, Daryl and others refuse to be led by Rick and it signals closure for Rick's character arc.

The first scene from the first season (Rick's encounter with the little walker girl) is mirrored in the first episode in the eighth season. Carl appears to be ready to take the mantle of gunslinger from his father as it is Carl who is driving and stops at a filling station. The scene is almost identical: Carl (as Rick had in the first season) now wears the sheriff's deputy hat and carries a jerry can. He also walks past overturned vehicles, signs of a camp and a child's bike; he stoops to see a decomposing body in the driver's seat; and as he prepares to siphon fuel from a car, he is surprised by a noise. In Rick's case, it was the little walker girl. In Carl's case, it is a man, later identified as Siddiq:

Siddiq: Hi. Yeah. I-I'm okay. I mean I'm not, but I've been shot at. Someone threw a microwave at me. So I-I'm just gonna say something my mom used to say and hope for the best here. "Whatever you have of good, spend on the traveler." My mom said that -- that helping the traveler, the person without a home -- that's everything. I'm sure you've seen things, been through things, that you don't trust people. I get it. I get it. I don't, either. I've been through things, too. My mom -- she also said that, "May my mercy prevail over my wrath." (Scoffs) It's not all my mom. That -- That one -- That's from the Quran. Probably shouldn't have said that. I don't even know you, but I ha-- I haven't eaten in a few days. You might not even be real.

(Carl looks under the car (again, mirroring Rick's action) and see's the man's feet.)

Carl: Hands up.

Siddiq: Listen. I'm gone. Huh? It's cool. I just -- I just wanted some -- e-even just some food.

(Rick arrives and shoots above Siddiq's head.)

(Nicotero, 2018: "Mercy")

Siddiq represents a marginalised masculinity. He is asking a younger man for food and knows that mentioning that he is a Muslim in the USA would engender distrust in Carl. Conservative audience members would also recoil from this character. Rick tries to justify his actions to a disappointed Carl. A female walker appears, comparable to the first walker that Rick encountered; she has a mouth wound, wears a white nightdress, and approaches Rick, who draws his hatchet to dispose of her. The actress, Addy Miller, who played the little walker girl in the original scene, returned to play the older female walker. This doubling reflects that Rick is no longer affected by the humanity of the walkers as well as hinting at narrative closure. Carl's decision not to hurt Siddiq or kill the walker breaks this cycle, suggesting that the "regeneration through violence" will not continue with him. Carl returns to help Siddiq and is bitten in the process. When Rick spares Negan, he repeats Siddiq's words, "My mercy prevails over my wrath" (Nicotero, 2018: "Wrath"). The titles of the first and last episode bookend the season (Mercy and Wrath). The Quran consists of 114 chapters or *suras*. There are many English translations of the Quran. John Meadows Rodwell's version from 1861 notably divided the *suras* into four groups; the first group is named "Compassionate" or *Ar-Rahman* due to the frequent occurrence of this word (Starkovsky, 2005: xxi). *Ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim* are two of God's names, which are derived from *rahma* or "mercy" (Starkovsky, 2005: 2). The line that Siddiq and Rick utters is not from the Quran but a hadith (one of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed):

The dwellers of Paradise and Hell will see one another. The righteous might pity the sinners and ask God to forgive them. Perhaps, He will. According to the Hadith, God wrote over His Throne the words: "My Mercy Supersedes my Wrath!"

(Starkovsky, 2005: 153)

Rick's decision not to be an executioner or perform the role of an antihero is a result of Carl's plea for him to find another way. Rick is not religious at any point throughout the serial. The first and only time Rick prays is when Sophia goes missing:

(Rick looks at the statue of Jesus on the altar.)

Rick: I don't know if you're looking at me with what? Sadness? Scorn? Pity? Love? Maybe it's just indifference.

(Rick takes off his hat and lowers his head.)

Rick: I guess you already know I'm not much of a believer. I guess I just chose to put my faith elsewhere. My family, mostly. My friends. My job. The thing is, we – I could use a little something to help keep us going. Some kind of acknowledgment. Some indication I'm doing the right thing. You don't know how hard that is to know. Well, maybe you do.

(Puts his hat back on and walks away, but turns around to confront Jesus.)

Rick: Hey look, I don't need all the answers. Just a little nudge. A sign. Any sign will do.

(Dickerson and Horder-Payton, 2012: "What Lies Ahead")

Rick's struggle to show humility and respect in his "prayer" shows the struggle between the masculine and feminine sides of himself: as mentioned earlier, religion and language are the domain of women in the Western. Rick walks out of the church, but he is framed in black in a scene reminiscent of the last scene of *The Searchers*. The key difference is that Ethan was able to bring back the lost little girl, who is his niece, Debbie (Natalie Wood). The door threshold signifies the meeting point between savagery and civilisation. Shortly after the prayer, Carl is shot. Rick still feels rage about the incident; when Hershel and Rick look at the trees, creek and hills in the distance, they appear to be fulfilling the roles of a farmer and cowboy:

Hershel: That's something, isn't it? It's good to pause for an occasional reminder.

Rick: Of what?

Hershel: Whatever comes to mind. For me it's often God. No thoughts on that?

Rick: Last time I asked God for a favor and stopped to admire a view my son got shot. I try not to mix it up with the almighty anymore. Best we stay out of each other's way.

Hershel: Lori told me your story. How you were shot, the coma. Yet you came out of it somehow. You did not feel God's hand in yours?

Rick: At that moment? No, I did not.

Hershel: In all the chaos you found your wife and boy. Then he was shot and he survived. That tells you nothing?

Rick: It tells me God's got a strange sense of humor.

(Gierhart, 2012a: "Cherokee Rose")

The scene highlights Rick's cynicism and explains why his disbelief is warranted and justified. Moore also reiterates that the "church was the province of women" and during the nineteenth century attempts were made to assert a "muscular

Christianity” (2014: 50). Hershel assumes a paternal role to Rick, gently trying to lead him back to God; however, it is Hershel who is remembered when Rick hallucinates about a similar scene when he is on the verge of death. Based upon his past views of religion and considering that this is only one sentence, “My mercy prevails over my wrath” does not mean Rick has become religious; it is a peculiar and unrealistic development in his character. Rick has always been governed by the law and when that institution was removed, he still used that moral framework to navigate the post-apocalyptic space. His decisions, stimulated by what Slotkin describes as regression, are primal; they are based upon self-preservation and the protection of his family. He does not consult scripture; he even desecrates a church at one point. The final character arc for Rick requires him to forgive Negan and establish peace amongst the communities. Only then can he re-establish his reputation as a hero and “ride off into the sunset”.

In the ninth season, Rick tries to help the Saviours and asks Daryl to lead them. As the Saviours depended on violence to get supplies from the communities, they are incapable of providing for themselves. There is understandable resentment from the other communities who do not wish to help the people who attacked, killed and looted their communities; they do not wish to turn the other cheek. Rick is treated like a messiah when he arrives at the Sanctuary with one man shouting, “Rick Grimes is here!” (Nicotero, 2019a: “A New Beginning”). Rick’s attempts to help the communities fail with his own family, Maggie and Daryl, betraying him in their attempt to kill Negan and not intervening in the execution of Saviours. The allusion to Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Jesus is evident in this behaviour. This would imply that Rick is a white saviour:

This trope is so widespread that varied intercultural and interracial relations are often guided by a logic that racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites). Such imposing patronage enables an interpretation of nonwhite characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological, while whites can emerge as messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities.

(Hughey, 2014: 2)

Throughout the nine seasons of *TWD*, Rick has assumed the role of a saviour. He saves the Atlanta group (even though he endangered them in the first place); he saves Hershel Greene's family (even though it is his gunshot that attracts the herd of walkers to the farm); he saves the prisoners (only to kill two of them and have the rest killed by the Governor); he saves the people of Woodbury (only for them to succumb to a deadly influenza and the Governor); and so forth. His actions are always justified, and it is always outside forces that thwart him. By the ninth season, the various communities are quite diverse; the main and supporting cast includes men and women from various backgrounds and Rick continues to try to help everyone. It could be argued, nevertheless, that Rick's sacrifice and deliberate associations with Christ and martyrdom are contradictory and even slightly blasphemous given his past violent actions.

Rick's messianic transformation is similar to the character arc that Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood) experiences in *Gran Torino* (Eastwood, 2008). Walt sacrifices himself to ensure the safety of his community. After a climatic confrontation with antagonists the camera lingers on the melodramatic display of Walt's body lying on the street in the pose of Christ's crucifixion. Tania Modleski critiques male melodrama, homing in on Clint Eastwood, arguing that these types of films appear when "masculinity is in an especially acute crisis" (2009: 136). In response to Clint Eastwood's character sacrificing himself, Modleski notes that film reviewers excuse this cliché and mention his "masculine qualities" (Modleski, 2009: 150). Equally critical, Hamilton Carroll observes, "the audience is left to bear witness to the sacrifices of white men on behalf of women and people of color, whose wounded, raped, and dismembered bodies testify to the benign authority of white masculinity" (2011: 156). In one of his hallucinations, Rick walks over hundreds of bodies, stretched as far as the eye can see, including characters who are not dead yet. Sasha appears and comforts him:

Sasha: They give us the strength that we needed to do what we had to do for the others, and the others draw strength from us. We change each other. We help each other. We make each other better. And it never ends.

Rick: It feels like it's ending.

Sasha: Little things do end, but it's never the end of everything, because we don't die. It's not about you or me or any one of us. It's about all of us. And I don't think it just evens out. I think it always crosses over toward the good, toward the brave,

toward love. Your family...You're not gonna find them, because they're not lost. And you are not lost.

(Nicotero, 2019: "What Comes After")

Rick's despondency over not being able to help the Saviours, and the unwillingness of the communities to follow his guidance, again highlight his cynicism: "it's ending". Rick's exit from the television serial is necessary in terms of the Western narrative. His constant fluctuations between heroism and monstrous anti-heroism trap the communities in a cycle of violence. His awareness and recognition of this aspect of his character results in sparing Negan, but this is not enough as the Oceanside community starts hunting and executing Saviours, spurred by Maggie's decision to hang Gregory. Rick's efforts to build a literal and figurative bridge fail. He attempts to bring the communities closer together by getting everyone involved in building a bridge. Civilisation begins with trade and roads; his failure to bring this project to fruition signals that it is time for him to leave these communities.

This ambivalence expressed itself in cautionary tales detailing how the savagery of the frontier experience made "frontiersmen" – the first wave of adventurers and explorers (and mercenaries and outlaws) who were responsible for the elimination of the Indians – unfit to function in civilized society. In many great westerns, including *The Searchers* and *Shane*, the ambivalence regarding the male hero culminates with his departure at the story's end, when he returns back into the wilderness from which he came. In these classic films, the iconic frontier antihero (also known as the gunfighter or "Indian-killer" figure) illustrates how the masculine subjectivities produced by classical liberalism have always been a problem.

(Sugg, 2015: 806-807)

The ninth season establishes Rick as a messiah and martyr. A massive herd of walkers need to be guided away from the communities. Rick rides a white horse and attempts to lead them away but runs into another herd. He is thrown from his horse and lands on a pile of reinforcing steel bars. He loses consciousness as a bar pierces his lower torso, mimicking Christ's wound. He regains consciousness before he is torn apart and uses his belt to lift himself off the bar. He is able to remount the horse which turns red from his blood. Throughout the episode he periodically loses consciousness and hallucinates each time he is asked about his wound. In the first episode of the first season, Morgan was concerned that the wound was from a walker bite, which would

yield an unholy resurrection. In his hallucinations, he returns twice to the hospital from the first episode. The symbolism of death and rebirth frames Rick as godlike. Rick's wound, the horse and army of the undead following him have biblical allusions to Revelations 19:11-16:

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

(Coogan, Brettler, Newsom and Perkins, 2018: 1828-1829)



Figure 6 Rick rides a white horse but is too weak to staunch his wound

The rider is Jesus Christ and the scene represents his victory over the "beast" and the Apocalypse. While there is no consensus about the reference to the inscription on the thigh, Edwards argues that it is an allusion to Apollo, "Helper", "Sun God", "Oracle Giver", "Beneficent Revealer" and son of Zeus (2018: 521-522). Rick leads the walkers to the incomplete bridge, but it does not collapse under their weight. The gunslinger takes aim at some dynamite on the bridge. Michonne, Daryl, Maggie, Carol and the other community members arrive in time to bear witness to his sacrifice. Sasha's words resonate with him as he says he has found his family and shoots at the

dynamite. The bridge explodes; however, Rick is merely injured. Anne collects him and he receives medical treatment on a helicopter, as he literally ascends to the heavens. This marks the end of Rick's story on the television version of *The Walking Dead*. I find this ending a cliché and a cheap trick. Before Glenn was killed by Negan, it appeared that he had died in an earlier episode (Slovis, 2016: "Thank You"). After Abraham and Glenn died, and as noted in the Introduction, the television serial has never been able to recover in terms of ratings (Zinski, 2019). In the eighth season, he murders a man who turns out to be protecting his baby (Rodriguez, 2018: "The Damned"), and he helps Morgan to kill a group of Saviours to whom he had given his word that he would not harm them (Michael E. Satrazemis, 2018: "Still Gotta Mean Something"). Even though he repents for his decisions and tries to make amends, raising him to a godlike status is unwarranted. This decision was probably financially motivated as AMC has planned to release three *Walking Dead* films with Rick as the main character, so it needed to restore his image as a hero (Bishop, 2018). Nevertheless, the gunslinger's legacy lives on in Judith, who now wears the Stetson hat, and unknown to him, in his son, R.J. In a final act that spares Rick criticism, he is unaware that Michonne is pregnant and unconscious when he is spirited away. After all, a hero would never willingly abandon his family. Rick's departure as a messiah and martyr is unearned, despite his consistently risking his life from the first episode onwards to help others. With Rick's departure from the serial, and Carl's death, it seems as though Daryl would take over as the protagonist of the show. Yet, this has not happened. Daryl, as a white male, would be the ideal candidate; accordingly, the next chapter examines Daryl's character and why his representation of masculinity excludes him from this position.

Chapter Two – The Margin is now the Center: Redneck Reborn



Figure 7 Daryl Dixon with his trusty crossbow

In the previous chapter, I examined how Rick Grimes, who is presented as the ideal human, maintains power and privilege despite his morally compromised decisions. His carefully crafted exit from the show ensured that he leaves as a hero and saviour. As Rick's son, Carl would have been his natural successor. Carl was also the deuteragonist²⁸ in the comic serial. Unfortunately, Carl's television counterpart was killed in the eighth season. The show could go on without Rick and Carl due to fan favourite, Daryl Dixon (Norman Reedus). Social media posts, memes and merchandise proclaim: "If Daryl dies, we riot" (Kurp, 2013). Daryl's popularity is a remarkable feat. In the first season, he was not even a main cast member but was listed as a "recurring" character.²⁹ In addition, Daryl did not have an established fan base from the comics as Robert Kirkman did not create the character. Norman Reedus auditioned for the role of Merle Dixon, a part that was awarded to actor Michael Rooker; however, the writer and showrunner for the first season, Frank Darabont, created a new character for Reedus (Goldberg, 2015). Initially, Daryl plays an antagonistic role, but gradually transforms into Rick's most trusted ally. Daryl has been

²⁸ The "deuteragonist" is second in importance to the protagonist; the term is derived from the roles assigned to actors in Greek tragedies (Jouanna, 2018: 200-201).

²⁹ In a television serial, various types of roles are based on actor agreements. A serial "regular" or "main" character appears in the opening title sequence and is engaged in a long-term role, whereas a recurring character appears in multiple episodes but is not bound to the serial (Basin, 2019: 117).

described as the “Indian sidekick” to Rick’s “Lone Ranger” persona, an image that is reinforced by his crossbow and expertise in hunting and tracking (Rees, 2012: 90). In terms of the criticism that *TWD* reifies white hegemonic masculinity (cf. Chapter 1), it would seem inevitable that Daryl would assume Rick’s role, yet this has not occurred. When the serial began, I presumed that Daryl’s status as a poor white male with a questionable sexual orientation prevented him from assuming the role of a leader of a community on *TWD*. In this chapter, I will demonstrate, using an intersectional approach, that Daryl’s performance of a marginalised masculinity and the rehabilitation of his redneck³⁰ image has not only ensured his survival but has led to his eschewal of a sole leadership role.

Hegemonic masculinity legitimates unequal gender relations among men and women, masculinity and femininity, and among masculinities (Connell, 1987, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is also constructed in relation to other nonhegemonic masculinities. This typology was previously quoted in relation to the meaning of “hegemonic masculinity”; however, it is worth quoting it in full again here to illustrate what I mean by “marginalised masculinities”:

[1] Subordinate masculinities (such as homosexual or effeminate men) are deviant to hegemonic masculinity;

[2] Complicit masculinities do not embody hegemonic masculinity but through practice reap the benefit of unequal gender relations;

[3] Marginalized masculinities are discriminated against because of unequal relations (such as race, class, age, etc.) external to gender relations;

[4] Protest masculinities are constructed as compensatory hypermasculinities in reaction to positions lacking economic and political power.

(Connell, 2005: 78-112)

While Connell’s theory relates to gender inequality, it does not sufficiently detail power relations between men. Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvotrup Jensen address this gap by proposing that intersectionality can supplement the concept of hegemonic masculinity (2014). Intersectionality is an analytical tool that can be used to understand how categories such as gender, race, sexuality and class, are interrelated and interact to create modes of discrimination and privilege (Collins and

³⁰ The pejorative term “redneck” originally described poor or working-class white people from the southern states in America; however, in the late twentieth century it began to be embraced as a complimentary designation amongst certain southerners (Huber, 1995).

Bilge, 2020). Christensen and Jensen also observe that there is some overlap between different masculinities and this can be perceived in *TWD*. Daryl follows white male leaders – such as Merle, Joe and Rick – but not females or minority males, which places him in the “complicit” category. However, Daryl does not enjoy any benefit from the “patriarchal dividend” (“the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (Connell, 2005: 79)). He has always shown strength and survival skills. Initially, he was antagonistic and aggressive towards women, minorities and authoritative figures, thus associating him with protest masculinities. This form of masculinity is also associated with ethnically marginalised men in a working-class setting (Messerschmidt, 2018). As a redneck, Daryl is also subsumed under the banner of marginalised masculinity; however, he navigates through masculinities and engages with hegemonic practices when following white male leadership and during the Whisperer War. Recognising that diversity occurs between and within communities, and there is rarely one type of masculinity within a group, marginalised masculinities can position themselves within hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2000). As Connell avers, “[d]ifferent masculinities do not sit side-by-side like dishes in a smorgasbord; there are definite relations between them” (2001: 17).

Even considering that masculinities are not static, Daryl’s expression of masculinity is complex and contradictory. Robert Hanke observes that hegemonic masculinity “remains complicit with dominant (masculinist) ideology by reinforcing the marital status quo and fatherhood, and privileging heterosexualism” (1990: 231). Daryl does not conform to hegemonic masculinity since he is unmarried and does not have any children. For ten seasons he has remained single, which has led to speculation about his sexuality. In an interview, Reedus revealed that Darabont indicated Daryl would be “prison gay”; Darabont did not clarify what this meant, but Reedus told Darabont that he was open to the idea of playing a gay character (Rowney, 2017). “Prison gay” refers to the phenomenon of men identifying as heterosexual but engaging in consensual sex with other male prisoners purportedly due to the lack of women (Hensley and Tewksbury, 2002). After Darabont was fired, that storyline never materialised. Given the popular culture associations of the redneck or hillbilly with *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1972), and its infamous male-rape scene,³¹ the stereotype

³¹ *Deliverance* is about four friends, Lewis (Burt Reynolds), Ed (Jon Voigt), Bobby (Ned Beatty), and Drew (Ronny Cox), from Atlanta. They take a canoe trip into a rural part of Georgia. They travel in pairs, but are separated by the rapids. When Ed and Bobby go ashore, they are confronted by a pair of

might have coalesced in Darabont's imagination. Jan Roddy notes that the hillbilly embodies middle and upper-class fantasies of the "other" as "base" and without "sexual constraints" that manifests as "homosexual, incestuous, or even bestial desire" (Roddy, 2008: 38-39). Daryl's sexuality is important to fans: some argue that he is heterosexual, while others have speculated that he is gay (see Ausiello, 2014). Finally, Kirkman weighed in on the issue, though somewhat ambivalently:

"Daryl Dixon is being somewhat asexual on the show," said Kirkman. "I think that he's a very introverted character and I think that's somewhat his appeal. I do have to clear something up, though. In the *Walking Dead* letters column in the old comic book that I do, there was a question that made me mention that there was a possibility early on about making Daryl Dixon's character gay and it caused quite a hubbub online."

"I just wanted to make it clear that I was saying that the possibility is there and I would've been fine with it, the network would have been fine with it, but we ultimately didn't do that. I can make it official – Daryl Dixon is actually straight."

(Steiner, 2014)

The constant debate demonstrates that this is a contentious issue. Despite assurances from the actor, creator and AMC that the character's homosexuality would be acceptable, the "hubbub online" ensures that Daryl's character will remain heterosexual. Kirkman is evasive on this issue. His response reads like an exercise in political correctness: he does not want to come across as homophobic, yet he needs to placate and assure conservative fans that Daryl is "straight". The situation has not been laid to rest because Daryl's closeness to gay characters, such as Aaron and Jesus, reignites the possibility for fans that he could be gay (Cavanaugh, 2018). "Queerbaiting" is a term that fans use to criticise homoerotic subtext that will never be acted upon (Brennan, 2018: 189). For instance, before Kirkman spoke definitively about the issue, an article quoting the showrunner, Scott Gimple, hedged on this issue: "we're not holding back any information on Daryl's sexuality as any sort of big reveal" (Ausiello, 2014). Various fans reacted to the ambiguity in the statement in the comments section below the article:

hillbillies. One of the hillbillies rapes Bobby. Lewis arrives and shoots the rapist before Ed is raped by the other hillbilly.

D: Never Ever thought Daryl was gay no one I know ever thought either. I haven't seen any hint of homosexuality in the character. I couldn't disagree with your statement more. I see him and Carol having more than friendship on his part but not hers as yet she's been through a lot and is very closed off emotionally.

JC: There is not a thing that has ever happened in this show to make anyone think Darryl is gay.

Steven: I don't think Daryl is gay and I'm sure the producers don't think he is either. They're just queer baiting.

AP: Could Daryl be gay? Maybe. But all this is he or isn't he really comes off as queerbaiting to me.

(Ausiello, 2014)³²

Recently there was a potential relationship developing with Connie. However, it is uncertain whether the producers would risk losing more conservative fans by pairing Daryl with a black woman. After it seemed that the pair were getting too close, Connie appeared to have been killed off as a result of Carol's impulsive actions. Since part of the fan base wants to pair Carol and Daryl, this seems like a deliberate choice. After having been missing for six episodes, Connie miraculously appears in the last few minutes of the sixteenth episode of the tenth season (Nicotero, 2020: "A Certain Doom"). She literally falls into the path of Virgil, who will probably become a romantic interest. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, Norman Reedus seems to have significant control over the direction of the character's development. In an interview, Reedus was asked about the possibility of romance between either Carol or Connie and this was his response:

Once you do it, it's done. So it's just such a topic of conversation forever. I get it. But once you do that, it's done forever. So I want to be really careful with doing that and I think Angela does as well. But it's *The Walking Dead*, so as soon as something good starts happening, it all goes down. You know what I'm saying? So I don't want to get me too happy or I might get bitten.

(Ross, 2019)

Reedus understands that the "wrong" choice could have catastrophic repercussions for his character, even the highly unlikely event of his character being killed off. Connie's disappearance appeared to satisfy conservative audience

³² I have not corrected the grammar or spelling in the responses.

members since Daryl and Carol will have a spin-off show when the eleventh and final season airs (Otterson, 2020). Daryl's (a)sexual appearance as a redneck marked him as "other", but now it seems essential to maintain his image. His transformation over ten seasons has established that Daryl is not a racist, which is a deviation from popular cultural norms. As John Hartigan Junior notes, "representations of racism in popular culture continue to rely disproportionately upon images of 'rednecks,' 'hillbillies,' and 'white trash.'" (2003: 111). Furthermore, these labels are "deployed and projected in order to maintain the unmarked status of whiteness" (Hartigan, 2003: 110).

White supremacy relies upon the invisibility of whiteness (Dyer, 1988; Hooks, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993). Toni Morrison draws attention to how "others" are marked by observing, "In this country America means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate" (Morrison, 2013). Whiteness can be understood in terms of privilege and the disavowal of a white collective identity (Hartigan, 2015). White privilege stems from the advantage of appearing racially "unmarked" and "normal"; however, whites do not acknowledge this benefit. Similarly, Kimmel notes that masculinity is invisible (2005). Robinson explains that this idea serves as a frequent point of departure: invisibility is a "necessary condition for the perpetuation of white and male dominance, both in representation and in the realm of the social" (Robinson, 2000). This explains why Rick is the de facto leader of the group, as he is a white middle-class heterosexual male. It is a privilege to inhabit an "unmarked body" since historically "the constructions of gender, race and class were embedded in the organically marked bodies of women, the colonized or enslaved, and the worker" (Haraway, 1991: 210). Both invisibility and visibility are a vested concern amongst those who define themselves in terms of normativity; marginalised groups recognise subjectivity and employ "identity politics" to embrace their difference against the norms (Robinson, 2000: 3). Hence Daryl's self-identification as a "redneck". Post-1960s culture in the USA saw a "crisis" in white masculinity that marked white men as victims of physical and emotional trauma (Robinson, 2000: 4-5). A crisis of masculinity occurs when men are emasculated or threatened: they seek alternative constructions of masculinity that are reified in displays of masculine virtues (for instance, toughness or physical prowess) through sport or hunting (Kimmel, 2005: 64).

In the ten years while *TWD* has been on television, much has changed socially and politically in the USA. When the show began, Barack Obama was president. Donald Trump held this position from 2016-2020. Under Trump's presidency, white

supremacy and terrorism dominated news headlines. As indicated in my introduction, Trump has a history of racist and sexist rhetoric. On 12 August 2017, mostly male white supremacists and KKK members gathered in Charlottesville to protest the removal of Robert E. Lee's statue as well as immigration reform. They marched with Nazi flags and tiki torches (one assumes, in lieu of burning crosses). They did not wear white sheets; instead, they wore khaki trousers and golf shirts and looked strikingly similar to the golfing outfits that Donald Trump favours. Golf is a leisure activity associated with retirement; therefore, it is understandable that Trump was criticised for continually golfing since he became president. It is also considered to be a hobby for the wealthy. Given that the redneck is the stereotypical image associated with racism in the USA (Hartigan, 2003: 111), it is significant that the young men in the protest wished, through their clothing, to align their image with the upper class. Reinforcing the mirroring of Trump's "uniform" as pseudo-Hitler Youth, many of them also wore caps with "Make America Great Again" (Trump's campaign slogan). They have also rebranded themselves as the "alt-right", refusing the title of Neo-Nazi (or redneck). However, their chants included "White lives matter", "Jews will not replace us" and "Blood and soil" (Jenkins, 2017). "Blut und Boden" (blood and soil) is a Nazi slogan that spurns the idea of diversity and idealises race (blood) united within a settlement (soil) instead (Ayçoberry, 1981: 8). When an anti-fascist protester was killed at this rally, Trump defended the Neo-Nazis and said that there were "very fine people on both sides" (Gabbatt, 2020).

At the 2020 presidential debate against the Democratic Party's nominee, Joe Biden, Trump was asked to "condemn white supremacists and militia groups"; he refused and called on the "Proud Boys", a white supremacist group, to "stand back and stand by" (Gabbatt, 2020). This could be interpreted as a call to stand by for a civil war. In the previous week, Trump refused to commit to a "peaceful transfer of power" to Mr Biden if he lost; Trump's response was "Get rid of the ballots, and you'll have a very — you'll have a very peaceful — there won't be a transfer, frankly, there'll be a continuation" (*BBC News*, 2020a). Donald Trump was defeated in the 2020 election. His court challenges also failed; his supporters stormed the Capitol, and Trump was impeached for inciting the insurrection (Zurcher, 2021). President Joe Biden assumed office on 20 January 2021 (King and Garrison, 2021).

Over the last decade, *TWD* seems to have been influenced by the political and social climate, and this reflects prominently in Daryl's character arc. The earlier

incarnation of Daryl would have almost certainly followed a leader like Trump. Former President Barack Obama observes that Republicans have created and promoted the message that white males are victims, ignoring the facts presented by history, data and economics (Holpuch, 2020). This context is essential to understanding some of the creative decisions taken on *TWD*.

From a historical perspective, southern masculinity was indelibly linked to the Civil War. Craig Thompson Friend explains: “[t]he long shadow of the Civil War stretches across the South, shaping southern men and masculinity” (2009: vii). Postbellum white southern masculinity had to be renegotiated by former Confederates; since victory would have ensured mastery over slaves, freed African American men were no longer emasculated by slavery, reframing notions of manhood (2009: vii). Two forms of white masculinity emerged from the defeat: “the Christian gentleman” and the “masculine martial ideal”, which were both inspired by the example of Robert E. Lee, a general in the Confederate Army. The Christian gentleman embodied the antebellum ideals of being “honourable, master of his household, humble, self-restrained, and above all pious and faithful”; the masculine martial ideal was similar to the Christian gentleman, but the experience of war filtered the ideals (Friend, 2009: xi). In *TWD*, these ideals inform the behaviour of some of the characters, such as Dale and Hershel.

Dale serves as the moral compass for the group until his death. He is the only character from the protagonist’s group to fight against pre-emptively executing Randall. The rest of the group believes that Randall poses a potential threat to their safety (Nicotero, 2012: “Judge, Jury and Executioner”). Like Dale, Hershel is an older member of the group. As a farm owner, his paternal authority extends to his family, and his employees. He initially resists absorbing Rick’s group, but eventually defers to Rick’s leadership. Hershel is guided by his religious beliefs but is willing to compromise his morals to protect his daughters, which is why he does not side with Dale regarding Randall (a possible rapist). Later, when the Governor wants to displace Rick’s group and replaced it with his new community (Dickerson, 2014b: “Too Far Gone”), Hershel shows support for Rick’s suggestion that the communities share the prison. Since the Governor had sexually assaulted Hershel’s daughter, Maggie (Sackheim, 2013: “When The Dead Come Knocking”), this demonstrates Hershel’s capacity for forgiveness. However, this type of masculinity proves futile and unrealistic (until Rick’s departure from the show) in a post-apocalyptic environment as the Governor executes Hershel shortly thereafter (Dickerson, 2014b: “Too Far Gone”).

With their backgrounds in law enforcement and the army, Rick and Abraham are aligned with the martial ideals; they are family men who try to maintain these qualities but recognise the need for soldierly action in a zombie apocalypse. Due to the ongoing violence and trauma that Rick and Abraham experience as protectors in the group, they begin to act dishonourably and lack restraint even when their friends and family are not at immediate risk. For instance, they reason that the Saviours will eventually pose a risk to their community so they sneak into a Saviour compound and murder the Saviours in their sleep (Nicotero, 2016b: "Not Tomorrow Yet").

Fictional representations of southern masculinity, such as those portrayed in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* ([1929] 1990) and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* ([1936] 1993), were highly influential. Rhett Butler, the male protagonist of Mitchell's novel, blended the ideals of honour and mastery with an individualism that revered drinking, hunting, swearing, cunning, sex, and fighting as a powerful remedy for a weakened southern masculinity (Friend, 2009: xviii). While Daryl has mastered hunting, Rick represents the ideals of honour and mastery that Daryl wishes to attain for himself. In a critique of Connell's original model of hegemonic masculinity, Demetrakis Demetriou (2001) usefully distinguishes between external hegemony (male dominance over females) and internal hegemony (the social ascendancy of one group of men over all other men). The "dialectical pragmatism" of internal hegemony allows hegemonic masculinity to appropriate "what appears pragmatically useful and constructive for the project of domination at a particular historical moment" (Demetriou, 2001: 345). These "hegemonic masculinity blocs" can be create new hybrid masculinities that reproduce their dominance over men and women (2001: 350-351). While Demetriou envisions a configuration of gender practice where subordinate and marginalised masculinities affect the construction of hegemonic masculinity, in *TWD*, the opposite occurs. Daryl aspires to and appropriates what is useful and constructive for his own performance of marginalised masculinity.



Figure 8 Daryl hunts in the forest

After World War II, Trent Watts notes that even more models of white masculinity emerged, including the resurgence of a stereotype that appeared before the end of the eighteenth century: the “hunting and fishing-addicted redneck” (2008: 2-3). While Rhett Butler’s wealth protected and insulated him to a certain extent, poor white men did not enjoy that luxury and were openly scorned and ridiculed. The lower class refers to “those in society with the least amount of income, wealth, prestige, power, status, and cultural capital” (Weir, 2007: 479). It seems ludicrous to suggest that class would impact how a person is judged in a post-apocalyptic environment. Yet, Daryl still identifies as a “redneck”. This class slur has been primarily directed towards rural, poor white men in Southern states who hold conservative, racist or reactionary views (Huber, 1995). Plantation owners and white professionals coined the term to describe poor white farmers, labourers, and sharecroppers who were sunburned from working in the fields every day (Huber, 1995). The hillbilly elicits similar derision but is associated with the Appalachia region and the Ozark Mountains (Harkins, 2004). Huber, for instance, expands upon the various racial slurs directed towards poor whites:

Arkie, clay-eater, corn-cracker, cornpone, cracker, dirt-eater, hillbilly, hoosier, low-downer, mean white, peckerwood, pinelander, poor buckra, poor white, poor white trash, redneck, ridge-runner, sandhiller, tacky, wool hat ... And this, of course, does not exhaust the list. Rural poor and working-class white southerners have endured a broad range of slurs throughout U.S. history, many derived from geographic regions, dietary habits, physical appearance, or types of clothing.

(Huber, 1995: 145; original emphasis)

There is also a link between dietary habits and masculinity. Citing numerous studies, Greenebaum and Dexter detected a recurring theme that “men use food as a means of subscribing to and reinforcing the norms, expectations and behaviours of their gender” (2018: 1). Specifically, eating meat is associated with “masculine traits” such as “emotional stoicism, strength and virility, food consumption becomes a performance by which men are able to assert their dominance as hegemonic men in patriarchal culture” (Greenebaum and Dexter, 2018: 1). There are numerous scenes in which Daryl is shown hunting, fishing and providing for the group, which becomes essential for their survival while also reinforcing his masculinity.

Belittling representations of rednecks are taken to an extreme in the horror genre. Rednecks have a long history in horror; stretching back to the 1960s, films like *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (Lewis, 1964) portray poor people as monstrous considering that the rednecks torture, kill and (it is suggested) eat their northern victims. In each subsequent decade, this idea was duplicated. Often depicted as incestuous, barbaric, murderous and glorifying rapists, “redneck horror” continued to be popular with releases such as *Deliverance* (Boorman, 1972) *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974), *Redneck Zombies* (Lewnes, 1987) and *The Hills Have Eyes* remake (Alexandre, 2006); however, there have been no recent major film releases from the USA. Instead, rural horror films are being produced in the rest of the world: these include *Wolf Creek* (McLean, 2005) in Australia, *Inbred* (Chandon, 2012) in the United Kingdom, and *Midsommar* (Aster, 2019) in Sweden.

Eugenics is inextricably linked to white supremacy and gender inequality. In the late nineteenth century, a professor of pediatrics, Lawrence Royster, grew concerned that poor whites were wasting their genetic potential through inbreeding and miscegenation (Dorr, 2008). Both activities were equally abhorrent to this privileged white male. Royster believed that it was a public health crisis and advocated the purification of the white race in the US through segregation and sterilisation. The combination of rural landscapes and rednecks in horror films exploits cultural myths surrounding “inbreeding, insularity, backwardness [and] sexual perversion (especially incest and bestiality)” (Bell, 1997: 93). Echoing Huber, Bell attributes this to the intersection of social, cultural and economic factors in the rural regions in the USA. In other words, poor white people are marginalised not only because of their cultural practices, but also because of their location and poverty. The representation of the rural as idyllic is associated with the farm or small town; in other words, “frontier life”.

However, the horror representations tend to explore an “anti-frontier myth” or a “frontier-myth inversion” (cf. Chapter 1) since the city folk are “inept at civilising nature” and the environment “becomes uncontrollable, alien, terrifying and ultimately murderous” (Bell, 1997: 92; 95; 97). Since “mother” nature is coded as feminine, rednecks and hillbillies are feminised as they are one with nature. They have been able to adapt and sustain themselves in this environment.

Like Bell, Murphy also links the frontier to horror. She sees the “backwoods horror’ narrative [as] transform[ing] the ‘pioneer’ spirit and rugged individualism ... into signifiers of resentfulness and savagery”; also, she connects the “backwoodsman’s ‘almost compulsive mobility’” with the “stagnation and degeneration” associated with the “closing of the frontier” (Murphy, 2013: 134). The south is a common setting for these narratives because of the prejudices held by the rest of the USA; in fact the south serves as an “Other” for the rest of the USA (Murphy, 2013: 137). There are two types of sub-genres in “backwoods horror”: antagonists who are “resentful working-class men” (*Deliverance*) versus antagonists who are “degenerate, savage, and often cannibalistic family groups” (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) (Murphy, 2013: 147-148).

Daryl and Merle Dixon portray stereotypical rednecks in *TWD*. However, their images are gradually sanitised and redeemed, revealing a more palatable and positive representation of redneck masculinity. The brothers are initially presented as almost indistinguishable in personality. In the early seasons, Daryl’s position in the group was precarious; Rees notes that his “self-conscious defensiveness about his lower-class status [kept] him on the periphery” (2012: 90). Daryl is abusive and uses racist and misogynistic language: in his confrontation with Carol, he calls her a “stupid bitch” and when Lori asks him to fetch Rick from town, he calls Rick a “bitch”, then insults her by calling her “Olive Oyl” (MacLaren, 2012: “Pretty Much Dead Already”). This is possibly a double-pronged insult as he is alluding to her emaciated frame and her love-triangle with Rick (Popeye) and Shane (Bluto). He refuses to learn Glenn’s name and calls him a “Chinaman” (Dickerson, 2011: “Vatos”; Renck, 2011: “Wildfire”). In “Vatos”, Glenn tells Daryl that he is Korean, which Daryl dismisses with “whatever”. Later, Merle refers to Glenn as a “Chinaman” but Daryl corrects him and says that Glenn is “Korean”; Merle mirrors Daryl’s response with “whatever” (Mann, 2013: “Home”). Although the dialogue is constructed as humorous, it is also designed to indicate that Daryl has evolved, and that he is no longer under the malign influence of his brother. Daryl sees how Merle is reviled by the other group members, and how similar his own behaviour

has been to Merle's; this forces Daryl to reject the repressed racist part of himself. Yet, this interaction is also similar to how Trump insisted on referring to the Covid-19 Coronavirus as the "China Virus"; he has denied that it is racist, yet experts say that "its usage could lead to increased discrimination and racism toward Asian Americans – a marginalized group with a long history of being scapegoated amid public health crises" (Chiu, 2020). These concerns have proven to be justified. Indeed, over a period of three months in California, there were 832 incidents of discrimination and harassment against Asian Americans (Mendez, 2020).

The incident with Glenn was minor, and it is noticeable that Daryl does not display any overt racism towards the black characters in that incident. The unrealistic portrayal of discrimination continues when Daryl, Rick, Glenn and T-Dog try to find and rescue Merle. They encounter a group of Hispanic³³ men, who capture Glenn, who, as an Asian American male, embodies another form of marginalised masculinity and is feminised by requiring rescuing. Merle has already asserted his masculinity and shows himself as superior to Glenn by escaping through his own efforts. Daryl is constructed as the victim in the confrontation as the Hispanic men hurl racial slurs, such as "redneck", "hillbilly" and "white boy" at him (Renck, 2011: "Vatos"). There is no verbal retaliation from Daryl. Given Merle's "taco bender" remark, this is disingenuous. Furthermore, another marginalised masculinity, Hispanic men, are portrayed as racist towards the redneck without provocation.

The association of ethnicity with marginalised masculinities requires further explanation. Charles Ramirez Berg identifies three types of common Latino representations in Hollywood films:

1. Those films that denigrate Latinos and present the stereotype in its "pure," degenerate state. Many Westerns did this with their "greaser" or bandido villains and Chicana prostitute stereotypes. More recently, these villains have been updated into urban bandidos ...
2. Those films that denigrate, but whose stereotypes are subverted in some way
- ...

³³ There is some dispute surrounding the use of the ethnonyms "Hispanic" and "Latino" to refer collectively to people of Latin American or Spanish origin who are inhabitants of the USA. The terms can be used interchangeably. "Hispanic" refers to persons of Spanish-speaking origin whereas "Latino" refers to persons with ancestors from Latin American countries (*2020 Census: Race and Hispanic Origin Research Working Group*, 2014).

3. It needs to be recognized that there are films that are obviously trying to “do the right thing” vis-à-vis Latino representation. Some of these films do succeed in breaking with typical Hollywood stereotyping, but others—despite their good intentions—fail and end up being condescending instead.

(Berg, 2002: 31-32)

TWD is guilty of exploiting these representations. The men appear to be “urban bandidos” because they have kidnapped Glenn and demand Rick’s bag of guns. They have a stand-off because Rick’s group have Miguel as a hostage. The leader of the group is Guillermo, who is physically smaller than the other men. His “lieutenant”, Felipe, has been shot in the buttocks by Daryl. Miguel is Felipe’s cousin. Guillermo’s group are visually coded as stereotypical gangsters or thugs. They wear gold chains, sleeveless or flannel shirts, and low-slung jeans. Guillermo also has tattoos on the side of his neck. Guillermo threatens to “chop up” Glenn and feed him to his dogs, who are the “evilest, man-eating bitches” that he ever saw and that he picked them up from “Satan at a yard sale” (Renck, 2011: “Vatos”). The stereotype is subverted when the situation is diffused once Felipe’s grandmother appears and the audience realises that the men are not criminals. They are protecting a retirement home. Guillermo is the custodian and Felipe is a nurse. Glenn was never in any danger: three tiny Chihuahuas are sitting in a leopard print and pink dog bed, further feminising their appearance. There is considerable debate about the origins of the Chihuahua, but many people insist that it is a native Mexican breed (Gewirtz, 2006: 18). The idiom “all bark and no bite” may sound simplistic here, but the choice of the breed, and the fact that there are three Chihuahuas, suggest that they represent Guillermo, Felipe and the unnamed man (who appeared with them in the confrontation) since it is the Chihuahua in the middle that barks at the group.

While this scene is designed to be humorous by subverting stereotypes and reminding the audience that people should not be judged by their appearance, it is noticeable that Daryl is pictured as the victim in this scene as he is met with scorn and derision when he is only searching for his brother. Rick leaves weapons and ammunition with them before their group departs from the home, much to Daryl’s shock and disgust. In the second season’s DVD, a deleted scene from the first episode showed the fate of the retirement home: Guillermo’s group and the elderly residents were slaughtered by another group with guns (Dickerson and Horder-Payton, 2012:

"What Lies Ahead"). This grim fate shows the failure of leadership by a man whose masculinity is marginalised.

Daryl's drug habit is also casually mentioned in the second season but is not referred to again. In Daryl's hallucination, Merle teases Daryl about seeing the Chupacabra and sarcastically asks, "And I'm sure them 'shrooms you ate had nothing to do with it, right?" (Ferland, 2012: "Chupacabra"); Shane also refers to Daryl being "methed out" (MacLaren, 2012: "Pretty Much Dead Already"). Norman Reedus is responsible for minimising and then removing the racist and drug addict aspects of the character (Lee, 2017a). It is apparent from the continuity issues that as Reedus gained popularity, he acquired the power to fight for complexity for his character. Daryl transformed from a younger version of the conservative Merle so that he would not be expendable and it has worked in his favour.

Daryl's importance in the group gradually grows, but is secured after his selfless search for Sophia and his friendship with her mother, Carol. As Rick's "sidekick", Daryl inherited some of the tropes associated with the Western; however, while Rick is framed as a Western hero, Daryl is implausibly likened to the Native American "Other" (Rees, 2012). I agree with Lavigne's dismissal of this association as a "shallow stereotype" (Lavigne, 2018: 99-100). Furthermore, a crossbow is not the same as a bow and arrow; most Native Americans used a bow and arrows for hunting (Staeger, 2014: 16). As a white male, it is more realistic to portray him as a man who knows Indians (Slotkin, 1992: 14). These characters, explains Slotkin, know both sides of the Frontier, the border between savagery and civilisation, thus they struggle to suppress their darker impulses (Slotkin, 1992: 14). This is made clear when Daryl's brother Merle challenges him about his allegiances and reminds Daryl that they had originally planned to rob the Atlanta survivors before Rick handcuffed Merle to a rooftop (Mann, 2013: "Home"). Like Rick, Daryl is also affected by the Myth of the Frontier, in which the triumph of civilisation over savagery is marked through the hunter/warrior rescue of the white woman held captive by savages (Slotkin, 1992: 15).

When Carl is injured, Rick (as his father) must remain close to him (Dickerson, 2012b: "Bloodletting"). Shane is injured procuring the medication for Carl, so Daryl takes it upon himself to find the missing Sophia. His hunting and tracking skills are invaluable. When Rick and Daryl initially search for Sophia, Rick's skills as a policeman pair well with Daryl's skills as a tracker and huntsman; however, Daryl asserts his masculinity when they come across a walker (Dickerson and Horder-

Payton, 2012: "What Lies Ahead"). Rick checks the teeth and fingernails and notices that it has recently fed. Rick prepares for a makeshift "autopsy", but Daryl intervenes and pulls out a hunting knife that is larger than Rick's knife. Daryl questions Rick's ability: "How many kills you skin and gut in your life? Anyway, mine's sharper". As Daryl continuously thrusts his knife into the belly of the walker, whilst Rick struggles to keep from vomiting, Daryl searches the open and rotting cavity, discarding organs whilst Rick breathes through his mouth and looks away. When Daryl throws "the gut bag" onto the ground, Rick says, "I got this" and cuts it open. They examine the contents and discover that it was a woodchuck that the walker had consumed and not Sophia. Rees argues convincingly that Daryl is able to assert his masculinity in this scene (2012: 90). The scene is more than a display of dominance. The comparison of knife sizes has obvious phallic connotations; unlike Merle, who would crack a crude joke, Daryl uses the opportunity to showcase his usefulness. His comfort with gutting carcasses underscores his familiarity with this task, and his relaxed attitude to undertaking this task on a corpse associates him with redneck horror.

When Merle is introduced, he is standing on the corner of a departmental store roof with a rifle, firing randomly at walkers and attracting more of them in the process (MacLaren, 2011: "Guts"). The audience are given a point of view shot (POV shot) from Merle as he expertly dispatches each walker from a considerable distance and height. POV shots are subjective since they show what an actor sees (Rooney and Belli, 2013: 96). Rooker's performance was so convincing that many people around the building called the police to report a sniper (Opie, 2014). Since this scene aired, there have been many mass shooting incidents by white supremacists in the USA (Cai, Griggs, Kao, Love and Ward, 2019). The number of average days between mass shootings has alarmingly decreased. Between August 1966 and April 1999, there was a mass shooting on average every 180 days; between April 1999 and June 2015, the average decreased to every 84 days; from June 2015 to August 2019, it decreased even further to every 47 days (Berkowitz, Blanco, Mayes, Auerbach and Rindler, 2019).



Figure 9 Merle dominates T-Dog

Merle is almost a parody of a racist redneck. When Morales and T-Dog confront Merle about attracting more walkers through his reckless and irrational acts, he responds immediately with aggression and threats. He calls Morales a “taco bender” and T-Dog a “nigger” and mercilessly beats T-Dog. Rick disarms Merle, handcuffs him to a pipe on the roof, and discovers drugs in Merle’s pocket. Rick declares, “Things are different now. There are no ‘niggers’ anymore; no dumb-as-shit-inbred-white-trash-fools, neither. Only white meat and dark meat. There’s us, and the dead. We survive this by pulling together, not apart” (MacLaren, 2011: “Guts”). This positions the post-apocalypse as post-racial (Ho, 2016: 62). Some are, however, sceptical about this declaration (Baldwin and McCarthy, 2013: 78; Gencarella, 2016: 130); others note how this intervention serves Rick’s character and masculinity (Bennett, 2018: 48-49; Jionde, 2018: 22). This scene contrasts Merle, as a stereotypical racist redneck, with Rick, the small county sheriff’s deputy, as a non-racist and a protector, thus making it easier for the group to fall into line. As a redneck, Merle is expected to express politically incorrect opinions and exhibit hypermasculine behaviour, which, as mentioned, resonated with a rural audience. Merle calls Andrea, a member of the group, “sugar tits” and asks her to “bump some uglies” since they are going to die anyway. She responds that she would rather [die]. Merle does not handle the rejection well, referring to her as a “rug muncher” (a derogatory term for a lesbian). Whilst his racist diatribes were attacked, no-one reacts to the homophobic comment. Later, Merle tells T-Dog, “Come on now. It wasn't personal. It's just that your kind and my kind ain't meant to mix. That's all. It don't mean we can't... Work together, parley, as long as there's some kind of mutual gain involved” (MacLaren, 2011: “Guts”). The overt

homophobia, racism and sexism serve to present Daryl as the more reasonable and sympathetic brother.

After Rick's group leaves Merle handcuffed to the roof, he escapes. When Rick, T-Dog, Glenn and Daryl return for Merle, they find a bloody handcuff, hacksaw and hand. Daryl follows the blood trail until they discover that by using a gas stove top and an iron, Merle was able to cauterise the stump and left the building. A contradictory image of Merle's masculinity is once again displayed: he is strong enough to fight off multiple walkers, literally single-handedly, and tend to his wound. However, the redneck's degradation seems complete: he is like an animal who has chewed off his own limb to escape.

Daryl's first appearance is more in line with the image of a stereotypical redneck compared to Merle, although he does not attack the minorities in the group. Daryl emerges from the forest after having hunted a deer for many miles. He has dozens of squirrel carcasses hanging from his body. He wears a dirty, sleeveless shirt (pejoratively referred to as a "wife-beater")³⁴ with a knife strapped to his belt. To demonstrate the incompetence of the other males in the group, when the children first sound the alarm, the men surround the walker and keep beating it until Dale is able to decapitate it. When the head begins to move, Daryl shoots it and derisively asks if they "know nothing" since they have to destroy the brain. In this post-apocalyptic space and time, the traditionally low-class, unvalued members of society are now the most competent hunters, defenders, and providers. Doctors, scientists, architects, and so forth are not protected or given more privileges or rights in this environment. Nicholas Proctor describes hunting in the Old South was a "definitively masculine pursuit" and "made an effective stage for increasingly elaborate exhibitions of masculinity and power"; however, "[r]ace and class altered the form of these masculinity displays" (Proctor, 2002: 1). While the rich hunted for sport, "poor white hunters focused on the utility of hunting because the products of the hunt helped confirm their patriarchal authority over their households" (Proctor, 2002: 1). The hunter was considered to be the "masculine ideal" during the antebellum period because this image was predicated on a set of characteristics: prowess, self-control, mastery (Proctor, 2002). As Daryl is

³⁴ Rachel Lubitz discusses the history of the phrase "wife beater" and the eventual association with the white sleeveless shirt. The term has been used by the American public and in popular culture since the 1990s; however, the public's growing awareness of gender-based violence has impacted on its usage (Lubitz, 2016).

a redneck, this image is undermined: despite the skill required to kill, he was not able to secure the “big game”; he has only a chain of squirrels to show for his efforts. Like Merle, he is swift to anger. When he finds a walker has fed upon the deer carcass, he kicks the walker. To the disgust of those around him, he suggests cutting around the flesh that the walker had fed on and cooking the rest. When the decapitated head of the walker begins to move, Daryl shoots it and derisively asks if they “know nothing” since none of the men destroyed the brain. The brothers appear together first in a hallucination. While Daryl is searching for Sophia, he borrows one of Hershel’s horses to scout a ridge. A rattlesnake spooks his horse, which throws him down the ravine:

Merle: Huh-uh. You're the one screwed from the looks of it. All them years I spent trying to make a man of you, this is what I get? Look at you. Lying in the dirt like a used rubber. You're gonna die out here, brother. And for what?

Daryl: A girl. They lost a little girl.

Merle: So you got a thing for little girls now?

Daryl: Shut up.

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. .
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Merle: This the same Rick that cuffed me to the rooftop in the first place? Forced me to cut off my own hand? This him we're talking about here? You his bitch now?

Daryl: I ain't nobody's bitch.

Merle: You're a joke is what you are, playing errand boy to a bunch of pansy-asses, niggers and democrats. You're nothing but a freak to them. Redneck trash. That's all you are. They're laughing at you behind your back. You know that, don't you? I got a little news for you, son. One day they gonna scrape you off their heels like you was dogshit. Hey. They ain't your kin, your blood. Hell, you had any damn nuts in that sack of yours, you'd got back there and shoot your pal Rick in the face for me. Now you listen to me. Ain't nobody ever gonna care about you except me, little brother. Nobody ever will. Come on, get up on your feet before I have to kick your teeth in. Let's go.

(Ferland, 2012: "Chupacabra")

Daryl’s marginalised masculinity is evident in the fear, doubt and insecurities about his gender, race, sexuality and class that bubble to the surface. The association with deviant sexuality is immediately introduced in this scene. Even though “screwed” in this context suggests making a mistake or being in trouble, it is also coupled with

the image of a used condom and the implication that Daryl's interest in the child is sexual. Merle's insults about his masculinity and his lack of loyalty also indicate Daryl's guilt for not searching for his brother. He is terrified of Merle's and Rick's opinion of him. The entire sequence shows intense self-loathing. Dunaway views this scene as representing Merle as a "hypermasculine bully" who leads to a "reconciliation of Daryl's dialectic between his hypermasculine self and a neo-masculine self that sees the need for caring, loyalty, and socialization" (Dunaway, 2018: 17). Examining the rhetoric in this scene, Berk (2015: 51) sees "classic Right-wing extremism" and a "call-to-arms" and ponders whether the scene reflects Daryl's hatred for Merle or Rick. He reads the rejection of Daryl's racist and sexist past as well as his submission to Rick's leadership as transformative. Rees interprets the scene as representing "the classical hero's descent into the underworld" with the snake representing "trickery and wisdom". For him, the journey reflects "his divided loyalties and insecurities"; by killing the two walkers, Daryl submits to a symbolic death and the image of his hands emerging over the ridge shows his resurrection in this "vision quest" (2012: 91). Rees's explanation is vague given that numerous mythologies contain narratives with trips to the underworld (Leeming, 2005); although she mentions "vision quest", she does not explore this idea in relation to any indigenous belief system.

Since Daryl mentions the Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears, the scene resembles an indigenous vision quest. In traditional practice, visions could help establish "a special relationship with a spirit that would provide them with knowledge, power and protection" (Ferraro and Andreatta, 2014: 353). A Crow warrior would go to a place that was abundant with spirits; he would take off his clothes, smoke and fast and engage in self-inflicted torture to gain the attention of spirits (Ferraro and Andreatta, 2014: 353). The visions that resulted had several common elements, including a spirit animal like a snake as well as the seeker gaining power or insight (Ferraro and Andreatta, 2014: 353). When Merle threatens him and tells him "Let's go" then begins kicking him, Daryl wakes up to find a walker attacking him; his hallucination has protected him. Merle mentions the chupacabra and "shrooms", suggesting that Daryl regularly imbibes hallucinogens. As Merle is a drug dealer before the apocalypse, it makes sense that Daryl would have experimented as well, although in subsequent episodes these allusions to drug-taking disappear through the actor's intervention. The subsequent disappearance of racist and misogynistic language is also noticeable. The insinuation that Daryl is interested in little girls hints at deviant

sexuality, but since this is also never referenced again, it appears to show how Merle's relentless bullying has damaged Daryl's sense of masculinity.



Figure 10 Merle looms over Daryl

Daryl fights off the zombies and realises that “his brother” was right; there is an abrupt change in his demeanour. Daryl transforms into a horror hillbilly. A musical cue begins to play that heightens the drama of his subsequent actions: he “breaks his fast” by cutting open a squirrel on a log and eats its raw innards. His mouth is covered with blood, mirroring the walkers he has killed. He then pulls off the shoelaces from one of the walker's shoes, slices off both of its ears with his hunting knife and strings them up on the laces. He then wears these ears as a necklace with his face covered from the blood of the squirrel. The music is a combination of what sounds like tribal drums and banjo music. This fusion of Native American music and “redneck music” is intentional. Bear McCreary, the composer for *TWD*, writes that he used “low percussion to create a primal, tribal heartbeat”:

Here, the more typical instrumentation of “The Walking Dead” kicks into full force. Drum kit and electric bass provide the foundation, while celli, violas, scraped autoharps and dulcimers chug away at the rhythm. You can also hear the signature “zombie banjo” wailing away above the entire texture.

(McCreary, 2011)

The addition of the banjo is significant; banjo music seems to be associated with rednecks, but specifically “redneck horror”. The most famous and iconic redneck horror film, *Deliverance* (1972), is about four suburban men who venture into the mountains for the weekend to go canoeing. There are two (in)famous scenes in the film: The “duelling banjo” scene when a young, inbred, mentally challenged redneck

boy named Lonnie (Billy Redden) plays a banjo and is accompanied by Drew Ballinger (Ronnie Cox), one of the “city boys”, who plays on his guitar. In the second scene, Ed Gentry (Jon Voight) and Bobby Trippe (Ned Beatty) are confronted by two local men and forced into the forest where Bobby is raped by one of the men. Anna Creadick analyses this scene in *Deliverance* and argues that it is “pivotal for understanding how such a lasting legacy of hillbilly horror and banjo shame could have been instilled by one fictional crossing of American’s monumental cultural divides” (2017: 64). She observes that:

In popular memory, *Deliverance* is about two things, that rape and that song, and metonym ensues so that the banjo is the violence, and the violence has a banjo soundtrack, not only here, but intertextually, in future films and popular culture iterations.

(Creadick, 2017: 72)

Similarly, Bird notices that music is vital to “master narratives”; in Westerns “heroic or sweet-sounding compositions” accompanied cowboys, whilst Indians were associated with “evil harmonies, the kind played while the innocent, big-bosomed, blonde white woman was being prepared to be stewed in a huge cauldron” (2004: 40). The association with cannibalism and the other with strange music is a sign of difference.

Daryl’s decision to cut off the ears of the two male walkers and wear them as a necklace is not only gruesome, but adds to his otherness. Rees believes that this action associates Daryl with Western settlers’ fears of being scalped by Indians (2012: 91-92). Again, this is a false equivalence. Cutting off ears cannot be likened to the fear of being scalped. Instead, Rees’s interpretations reflect the misunderstanding and fears of white people in the USA. From a historical perspective, it was not Native Americans who cut off ears. It was originally the Puritans who cut ears off Quakers as punishment; male Quakers caught in Boston were punished with having their right ear cut off as the penalty for a first offence, and the left ear for a second offence (Tarter, 2001: 162). There are also strong associations with the Vietnam War. Soldiers from the USA who fought in Vietnam related that some soldiers would mutilate the bodies of the enemy: Vernado Simpson Jr., said, “They would hang ‘em ... or scalp ‘em.” then James Bergthold added, “They cut ears off a guy” (Drinnon, 1997: 456-457). Before Rick arrived in the Atlanta camp, Daryl, Glenn and Shane referred to the walkers as

“geeks”, which uses similar consonants to “gooks”. “Geek” can refer to carnival freaks (Mark, 2009) or it could have been used ironically. Nevertheless, the derogatory term “gook” was used by the USA military during the Korean and Vietnam Wars to describe people of Eastern or South Eastern descent (Roediger, 1992: 50). Bird also notes that it was common to cast Vietnamese as Indians during the Vietnam War since soldiers from the USA described the enemy’s territory as “Indian Country” (Bird, 2004: 43). The posthumous mutilations of the walker bodies show Daryl indulging in “Indian hating fantasies” (Drinnon, 1997: 456). Furthermore, this callous action seems to have been precipitated by Merle’s attack on Daryl’s loyalty and masculinity.

Lawson analyses the misogyny associated with the Vietnam War in terms of the “high incidence of sexual atrocities perpetrated against Vietnamese women by American GIs” and argues: “racism itself has misogynistic overtones” (Lawson, 1989: 57). New recruits are ritually humiliated by referring to them as “pussies”, “pansies”, “ladies” and “faggots” (Lawson, 1989: 58). Merle’s delirium on the roof cycles back to the humiliation he endured during basic training; Merle assumes the persona of a drill sergeant in Daryl’s hallucination.

White soldiers in the USA mutilated Native American bodies in a similar manner to Daryl. Before Andrew Jackson became the seventh President of the United States of America, he was General Jackson leading his soldiers into a massacre: they surrounded eight hundred people of the Creek Nation and killed almost all of them at the Battle of Horse Shoe Bend; the soldiers stripped skin from the Indian corpses to fashion bridle reins for their horses and cut off noses to measure the body count (Takaki, 2008: 108). After his ordeal, when Daryl reappears at Hershel’s farm, his difference is once again foregrounded. The group cannot distinguish him from a walker, and he is shot by Andrea. Rick hides the ear necklace from Hershel, but it seems that Daryl continues the practice for a short while as Carol spots more ears hanging from a clothes line (Gierhart, 2012: “Triggerfinger”).



Figure 11 Daryl appears to be a walker

Merle's desire to lead was stymied by Rick. His sexual advances towards Andrea were also rejected as she chose the Governor instead. As a man who embodies marginalised masculinity, he is dominated by males who are representative of hegemonic masculinity. While Daryl slowly tries to assimilate into Rick's group, Merle has been serving as the Governor's henchman. When the brothers reunite, Merle is rejected by Rick's group. Merle's character has been one-dimensional up until this point. His unreasonable, unhinged, inexplicable behaviour served only to help shore up Rick's character in the first season. His reappearance was also unbelievable to a certain extent. He had cut off his own hand, fought off walkers to escape Atlanta, and risen through the ranks of another group. To see his character's racist, sexist and homophobic responses restrained only bolstered the mystique, charisma and ruthlessness of the Governor. Therefore, it is unbelievable that Merle sacrifices himself for Daryl and Rick's group. His redemption is in line with the rehabilitation of the redneck image. He spares Michonne and admits to killing people only after working for the Governor. He atones for his crimes through a dramatic, brave self-sacrifice, showing courage under fire as he kills many of the Governor's men. The Governor kills him, and he turns into a walker that a sobbing Daryl must kill (Nicotero, 2013: "This Sorrowful Life").

Kunyosying and Soles argue that this episode was constructed to elicit sympathy for Daryl and "for white male hillbilly characters in general" (2018: 34). Minority characters such as Glenn and Tyreese do not receive dramatic backstories; moreover, Daryl's tragedies eclipse Tyreese's victimisation as an African American (2018: 34). This reading ignores the fact that Merle also enjoyed a fan following that

led to his reappearance on the show. After his first season performance, but before his redemptive arc, the actor Michael Rooker (Merle Dixon), was “both surprised and amused” by his popularity; Rooker mentioned the viral Twitter campaign, #MoMerle, to bring back the character (Frappier, 2011). The campaign worked, indicating that AMC and the producers listened to fans who obviously enjoyed seeing a racist, sexist and homophobic character on television. Like Daryl, Merle enjoys a rewriting of his character’s history, which carefully ignores his history as a drug dealer and the white supremacist imagery that adorned his belt and bike. Both Glenn and T-Dog are savagely beaten by Merle in separate incidents. Merle also hands over Maggie to the Governor who threatens to rape her. The group cannot overlook Merle’s past; therefore, his death would have been an attempt to appease the more liberal audience members.

Before Merle’s death, he was marginalised even further as an amputee. However, he turns his disability into a strength through attaching a prosthetic with a knife to his stump. In spite of his heroic self-sacrifice, his dignity is stripped by the Governor. During their fight, the Governor bites off Merle’s fingers before leaving him to turn into a walker. He is the first main character not only to resurrect after dying, but also to eat the dead.

In a serial where zombies feast upon the flesh of the living, it seems superfluous to include cannibals; still, they almost inevitably feature in post-apocalyptic fiction. The act of eating human flesh can be motivated either by a need to survive or by the desire to consume any type of meat, despite vegetables being available. Jennifer Brown observes that cannibalism is primarily about eating; however, she notes that eating has “highly complex cultural” meanings (2013: 2-3). She cites the dietary rules in Leviticus, discussed in Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* (1966), to support her argument (Brown, 2013: 3). As a code, cannibalism is frowned upon because it is not widely practiced and elicits uncertainty because “it both reduces the body to mere meat and elevates it to a highly desirable, symbolic entity; it is both disgusting, and the most rarefied of gastronomic tastes” (Brown, 2013: 4). Brown does not mention zombies; however, she explains how fearing non-Christians, colonial subjects and so forth is used to other these people since “fear of the Other is often expressed through images of being literally and metaphorically consumed by the Other” (Brown, 2013: 4). Many of the behaviours discussed by Brown are observed in *TWD* and I will now explore these aspects below.

Daryl is part of a group who are captured by the cannibals who inhabit Terminus. Most “hillbilly horror” capitalises on the narrative that involves stranger(s) from the city being waylaid, trapped or hunted in the countryside. The visuals in hillbilly horror can also be coded to show decay. For instance, Sharrett views *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* as an apocalyptic allegory given the evocative images of “dying cattle, abandoned gasoline stations, defiled graveyards, crumbling mansions, and a ramshackle farmhouse of psychotic killers” (2004: 318). In a post-apocalyptic landscape, the separation between country and city no longer applies since the dead have claimed both spaces. Civil and government institutions that create, maintain, expand and protect the cities and borders no longer exist. It follows that these monstrous, albeit human figures are loosed upon the suburban and urban survivors who fled the cities that are inundated by the dead.

Since the serial is set in the south, a stereotypical representation of cannibals would have involved rural rednecks or hillbillies similar to the family in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; however, *TWD* subverts this expectation. Daryl’s sympathetic portrayal as a hillbilly is borne out in the seemingly “normal” depiction of the citizens of Terminus who are not only intelligent, but strategic as well. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the house, which is the locus of horror and unimaginable crimes, is dark and cluttered. There are meat hooks, freezers, butcher aprons and tools in grim and filthy rooms. Terminus, by contrast, is clean and well organised. The “slaughter room” is clean and brightly lit with sunlight; the victims are lined up behind a bathtub and are methodically hit on the head with a baseball bat, thus the blood drains efficiently away. There are separate rooms and tables for dismembering the bodies and hanging up the corpses. When Rick, Daryl, Michonne and Carl try to escape Terminus, sharpshooters on the roof fire near them, guiding them like cattle. Eventually, they separate Carl from the group; since the youngest and most vulnerable one (the human equivalent of a calf) is in danger, the adults meekly submit to going into the train cart. This is in strong contrast to Leatherhead’s chaotic chasing of a screaming female while wielding a chainsaw in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Further emphasising the intellectual nature of this operation, Gareth appears with a notebook when he interrogates the group. This emphasises that it is not the poor marginalised country folk who are to be feared, but the middle-class exploiting the vulnerable and desperate. The cannibals of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are unemployed slaughterhouse workers who have lost their jobs to technology; their cannibalism might be intended as a metaphor for

capitalist consumerism (Wood, 1979: 21). The cannibals of Terminus invert this metaphor as they represent the capitalists in the apocalypse: they gain “employment” through slaughtering and looting their victims. The real enemy is thus revealed, not as misunderstood rednecks like Daryl, but dishonest, intelligent, smooth-talking capitalists who will take everything from you.

There are two ways of using cannibalism in horror. Family members can devour each other (even metaphorically), or cannibalism may be a means the family uses to sustain itself (Wood, 1979: 17). The people of Terminus fall into the latter category. He also observes that in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Sally is not in danger of rape as sexuality is sublimated into sadism, violence and cannibalism (1979: 21). The people of Terminus do not rape or torture their victims; they are interested in human flesh only for sustenance. Wood also observes that the monstrous family evokes an ambivalent response due to their familial bond (1979: 21). Terminus is run by Gareth and his mother, Mary. They originally wanted to offer sanctuary to people, but they were attacked by a gang of rapists and murderers; therefore, once they reclaimed Terminus, they became ruthless and deviant (Maclaren, 2014: "A"). In other words, the true horror in this situation stems from “normal” people being pushed too far and it is a deliberate step away from “hillbilly horror”. The fact that the cannibals are not stereotypical “rednecks” is noteworthy since, as I will discuss, the other minorities in the serial are portrayed in terms of stereotypes.

The decision by the producers and writers not to represent the cannibals as hillbillies demonstrates that the redneck’s image has been rehabilitated in more mainstream media. The popularity of this once maligned stereotype has been not only embraced, but performed as well. The transformation of the redneck image is evident in reality television programmes such as *Duck Dynasty*, *Hillbilly Handfishin’* and *Mountain Men*. *Duck Dynasty* is “the highest-rated nonfiction series in cable television history” (O’Sullivan, 2016: 367). The show chronicles the lives of the millionaire Robertson family, who manufacture duck calls. The men in the family hunt, fish, wear camouflage and have long, unkempt hair and beards. The women (true to gender expectations) mostly cook or perform other household activities. Frequently in the early episodes, the family disparaged “yuppies” (young urban professionals), but, after the patriarch of the family, Phil Robertson, made racist and homophobic comments, a photograph of the family surfaced, revealing their yuppie past (O’Sullivan, 2016: 368). Shannon O’Sullivan links Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity to the

Robertsons' performance of redneck identities, despite their enormous wealth (ibid.). The popularity of the series demonstrates the interest in rural, white masculinity and the neoliberal valorising of upward social mobility.³⁵ Watts believes that many white people in the USA consider the redneck to be "benign and even beloved" (2008: 4). This does not appear to be wishful thinking as perceptions of the redneck have improved. For instance, Gwendolyn Foster contends that rednecks have transformed into the "ruling white class" and they are "no longer confined to the lower rung of the American class system" (2016: 285). Considering the golf-shirt-wearing Neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, and the Trump supporters who used a private jet to take part in the insurrection at the Capitol (Rosenthal, 2021), this view appears to have merit.

The Whisperers, another antagonistic group, are survivors who wear the skin of the dead to disguise themselves so they can blend in with the walkers. These actions recall Leatherface (Gunnar Hansen), the chainsaw-wielding villain, who made masks from human skin in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Alpha is the leader of the group, whilst Beta is her loyal subordinate. Beta's huge size and strength also recall Leatherface. Alpha is abusive towards her daughter Lydia, which draws sympathy from Carol's adoptive son Henry³⁶. After Rick's "death", Daryl retreats to the forest in search of Rick's body in case he is a walker. Carol draws him back to society by asking him to take care of Henry who is relocating from the Kingdom to Hilltop to learn blacksmithing. The Whisperers kill Jesus (the leader of Hilltop) and capture Lydia. After seeing the scars on her arm and learning that Alpha murdered Lydia's father but created false memories blaming Lydia for his death, Daryl feels sympathy for the young girl and takes her under his wing. In a confrontation with Beta, Daryl manages to defeat the giant, establishing his "alpha" status; however, Daryl does not assume leadership over any group. He is comfortable with the homestead he built on the river, his pet named Dog, as well as hunting and fishing.

When Henry, Tara and other members from various communities are killed, Daryl is forced to return and fight the Whisperers, and eventually kills Beta with the help of Negan. Daryl thrusts two hunting knives into Beta's eyes, a symbolic castration before the walkers devour him. In the comics, two homosexual characters, Aaron and

³⁵ This new version of upward social mobility can be seen as a latter-day version of the American Dream.

³⁶ Henry has aged from a young boy to a teenager over three seasons; therefore, he has been portrayed by two actors. Siblings Macsen Lintz (S7-S9) and Matt Lintz (S9-S10) play the younger and older version of Henry respectively.

Jesus, accomplished the deed. Once again, *TWD* ensures that only certain characters (who belong to dominant social groups) are allowed to accomplish the important heroic actions that “save the day”.



Figure 12 Beta pulls out Daryl's knives from his eyes

Despite ongoing claims by producers that no-one is safe, it seems highly unlikely that Daryl would leave the serial (Bonomolo, 2019). This was confirmed in the events of the actors' lives: when actor Andrew Lincoln (Rick Grimes) decided to leave *TWD*, actor Norman Reedus (Daryl Dixon) negotiated a deal worth more than \$20 million to remain in his role (Bishop, 2018; Goldberg, 2018). In the USA, *TWD* is “most popular in rural areas, particularly southern Texas and eastern Kentucky”, suggesting that rural southerners identify with Daryl (Katz, 2016). Another aspect of Daryl's appeal is that he fulfils “contemporary masculine fantasies of apocalyptic self-sufficiency” (Sartain, 2013: 263). As an expert tracker and hunter, Daryl's skills, courage and independence appeal to fans more than Rick's attributes do.

Daryl's uncontrollable rage dissipates through his confrontations with his abusive past and the support of various characters in the narrative. Initially, Daryl was marginalised in terms of class; this explains his inability to seek or accept leadership. Yet as the popularity of the redneck character increased, it became more important to show that Daryl needed to be “his own man” and not lead a diverse community. It is also apparent that the character's asexuality is preferable to Daryl being paired with the “wrong” character, for example with a black woman or man.

Daryl's popularity runs parallel to the drastic change of representation and acceptance of rednecks in popular culture, since his lack of ambition and intimate relationships can be read as a choice to embrace freedom. Rick is always part of the

community by virtue of family, first as Lori's partner and then Michonne's; by extension, his concern is a diverse community, which would not appeal to a conservative audience. In contrast, Daryl does not want that responsibility; his rugged individualism, and choosing whom he wishes to help, resonate with the conservative members of the audience. As a white male in the south, it follows that Daryl would be privileged. Given his abilities to hunt, track, defend and protect, which are invaluable skills in a zombie apocalypse, he could offer a challenge to Rick for the role of the leader in the group. Yet he does not and defers to Rick until his rebellion in the eighth season. This chapter explored how the historic representation of rednecks and class initially limited Daryl's power, but how the transformation and popularity of the redneck image now serves to keep Daryl from leading a diverse group and becoming part of the community through miscegenation. In the next chapter, I shall explore how gender and race intersect in the marginalisation of black masculinity.

Chapter Three – Black Masculinity: Collateral Damage or Replaceable Bodies?

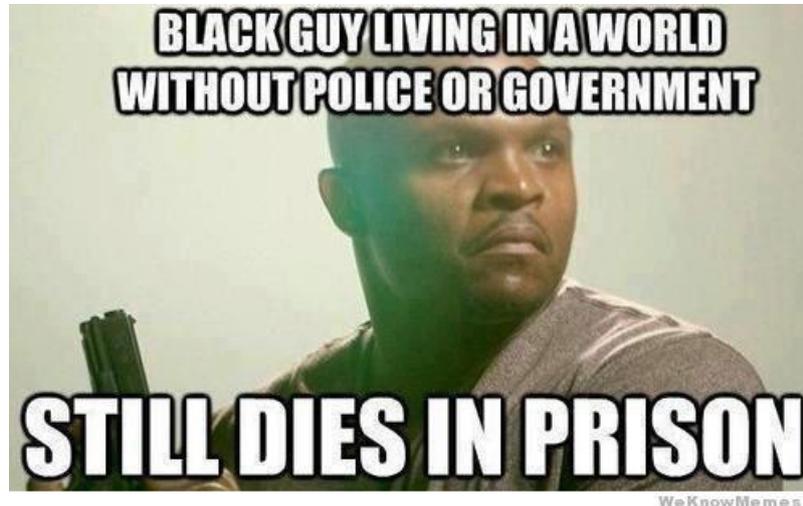


Figure 13 T-Dog Meme

Earlier chapters noted that Rick and Daryl both enjoy complex character arcs and transcend stereotypes, despite the different ways in which their whiteness and masculinity intersect with class and sexuality. They will also continue to survive even after the show ends after the eleventh season in film and television spin-off shows. The black male characters on *The Walking Dead* do not appear to be as fortunate. This chapter investigates the criticism surrounding the longevity of the characters and explores whether the serial moves beyond stereotypes to create complex black male characters. I consider the stereotypes of the ilk of Uncle Tom, the “coon” and the magical negro, while responding to the critique of the high mortality rate of black characters. The apparent expendability of these characters resonates with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, along with the problematic representations of black male characters in popular culture. The “black dude dies first” trope tends to prevail in films that have a high volume of character deaths; invariably the token minority seems to be the first to die (*Black Dude Dies First*, n.d.). In a zombie post-apocalyptic television serial, a high turnover of characters is expected, since the undead disproportionately outnumber the living and easily kill and transform the living. So does *TWD* conform to the “black dude dies first” trope?

As mentioned in the introduction and previous chapters, hegemonic masculinity legitimates unequal gender relations between men and women, masculinity and

femininity as well as among masculinities (Connell, 1987, 1995). Connell and others have revised the concept to emphasise its relational aspect, acknowledge the agency of subordinated groups and stress the intersectionality of gender with other social categories (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Marginalised masculinities are trivialised and discriminated against because of social stratification (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The USA's history of colonisation and slavery must be included in any analysis, since it has had a determining impact on the kinds of masculinities enacted and performed by white and black men. Race relations remain a contentious issue to this day: masculinity is modulated through race and vice versa. As James Baldwin avers: "The white man's masculinity depends on the denial of the masculinity of blacks" (1963: 91).

One of the ways that discrimination manifests in the USA is the shooting of unarmed black men by police officers. Terence Crutcher, Philando Castile Alton Sterling, Walter Scott and many other unarmed black men have been shot by police officers (Hafner, 2018). There have been little or no repercussions for most of the police officers who killed them. Eric Garner was killed by a New York Police Department (NYPD) Officer Daniel Pantaleo from a fatal chokehold in 2014; Pantaleo was not charged, but he was fired five years later (Levenson, Prokupecz, Gingras and Morales, 2019). Citing a history of violence against black men like Eric Garner, Ta-Nehisi Coates argues, "Here is what I would like for you to know: In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body — *it is heritage*" (Coates, 2015: 103; original emphasis).

The practice of lynching is predicated on the notion that a "transgressor" must be punished. In the USA, it was originally used against white Southerners during the American Revolution. During the Reconstructionist period (1865-1877), white supremacists targeted African Americans (Berg, 2011). The Emmett Till Antilynching Act was passed on 26 February 2020; Representative George Henry, the country's only black member of Congress, first tried to pass the bill in 1900 (*BBC News*, 2020b). Three Republicans (Ted Yoho, Louie Gohmert and Thomas Massie) and Independent Representative Justin Amash voted against the House Bill, citing "government overreach" to justify their repugnant decision (Touchberry, 2020).

Mass incarceration also shows the vast inequality and discrimination that black men have to endure in the USA. Based on the latest report released by the US Department of Justice, the imprisonment rate of black males was 5.8 times that of

white males, and black people represented 33% of the total number of prisoners, despite constituting only 12% of the total US adult population (Gramlich, 2020). One of the contributing factors to the killing and incarceration of black men is the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. For example, twelve-year-old Tamir Rice was shot and killed while playing with a toy gun; instead of sympathising or apologising for this tragedy, the representative of the Cleveland Police issued this defence: “Tamir Rice is in the wrong. He’s menacing. He’s 5-feet-7, 191 pounds.³⁷ He wasn’t that little kid you’re seeing in pictures. He’s a 12-year-old in an adult body” (Schultz, 2015). The stereotype of young black men as physically threatening, generally culpable and physically superhuman has resulted in a distorted perception of the size of black men (Wilson, Hugenberg and Rule, 2017). If we wish to halt violence against minorities, it is crucial to undermine the power of stereotypes and the unintended consequences of perpetuating dangerous myths. Accordingly, this chapter will explore the extent to which *TWD* subverts or confirms these stereotypes.

Initially writers for blogs and webzines were the first to critique the representation of race in the serial. For instance, Michael Harriot opines, “T-Dog was big and powerful, but he was killed. Tyrese [*sic*] was unafraid and a skilled fighter, but he was an au pair who eventually died,” and then dismisses Morgan as a “magical negro” (2017). He refers to Bob Stookey as “D’Angelo Barksdale from *The Wire*” (both characters are played by Lawrence Gilliard, Jr) and compares his recapture by the cannibals from Terminus as “reminiscent of what they did to Kunta Kinte in *Roots*, some white people caught him leaving the plantation and cut his foot off” except they “went into full wypipo³⁸ mode and made him eat it” (2017). Bob is not forced to eat his own body part(s); however, the loose comparison does bear some merit since Bob and Kunta both attempt to flee from their captors. Given the choice between castration and losing half his foot, Kunta chooses the latter.³⁹

³⁷ In the metric system, 5 feet 7 inches equates to 1.70 meters and 191 pounds is the equivalent of 86.63 kilograms.

³⁸ The opinion piece by Harriot appears in “The Root” (an online magazine dedicated to African American culture). Harriot explains in the humour section of another website, “*Wypipo* is an alternative, partly phonetic spelling of the words ‘White People’”; however, the terms are not interchangeable (2017b). Surmising from the various scenarios offered by Harriot, *wypipos* are racist, insensitive and hypocritical and belong to any race or nationality (2017b).

³⁹ This also appears to be a trope. In the science fiction comedy *Evolution* (Reitman, 2001), Harry (Orlando Jones) is eventually persuaded by Ira (David Duchovny) to “snag” an alien insect, only for it to penetrate his hazardous materials suit and skin. Given the choice between castration and losing his leg, he also tells the doctors to take the latter.

Harriot's palpable anger mirrors similar opinions from other African American male writers. Common grievances include the point that black characters die and are seemingly replaceable. In addition, the lack of black characters is also noticeable in the Deep South, which has the densest population of black people in the USA (Deggans, 2012; Howze, 2015; Smith, 2015; Johnson, 2016). The perception of black men being targeted in these popular articles reflects a general view that African American men are targeted by the police. T-Dog, as a fictional character, voiced these concerns; hence his death would be a bitter pill to swallow.

The censures voiced by these Black male writers should not be ignored given that "scholars have examined representations of Black men in popular culture, [but] much of this work has not included the direct words and voices of Black men" (Goodwill, Anyiwo, Williams, Johnson, Mattis and Watkins, 2018: 2). Black audience members also voiced similar critiques of *The Walking Dead Universe*. To understand Black audiences' readings of transmedia texts, Rendell's netnography study of blogs, forums and the Twitter universe demonstrates how race and identity contribute to (anti)fan identity performance (2019). He notes how Black antifans take umbrage at *TWD*'s portrayal of "servile, passive secondary Black male characters" (Rendell, 2019: 1.2). Furthermore, antifans criticise the "othering of the Black male body" in *FTWD*; audiences see parallels between the real USA police force and state's maltreatment of young Black men in both shows (Rendell, 2019: 1.3).

Other bloggers and webzine writers have also observed a problem with racial representation in *TWD*. For instance, Fang observes that, despite the serial having a racially diverse cast, it still ironically has a "Black Man Problem", which she defines as "a repeated inability to depict more than [sic] one ass-kicking Black man at a time" (2013). Fang also perceives that the lack of diversity extends to the zombies (2013b). The criticism finally garnered mainstream attention when *Vanity Fair*, a high-profile magazine, questioned whether the spinoff serial *FTWD* had inherited *TWD*'s "race problem" (Robinson, 2015). Robinson's focus is on the new serial, but she summarises the same observations as the other writers mentioned earlier in this chapter. In a response to the *Vanity Fair* article, Shaunna Murphy of *MTV News* analysed the number of human characters killed onscreen in the first six seasons of *TWD*. However, she offers a disclaimer:

MTV News did the math. (Math that we fully realize will be 'off' since this is A, a television series, and B, a television series that takes place in a very violent universe. But regardless, some of these numbers are jarring) ... if we had included the death of every single zombie on the series, we'd have gone crazier than Season 3 Morgan, and it's inarguable that those numerous zombie kills don't tend to hold a lot of dramatic weight.

(Murphy, 2015)

Murphy distinguishes between main, recurring and guest actors, but ignores the fluidity of these roles. For instance, Daryl and Carol were recurring characters in the first season, but Daryl was promoted to "main" and Carol was billed as "also starring" in the second season (Carol was eventually upgraded to main in the third season). Murphy also omits Rick as a main cast member. The results and findings of this "study" are inconsequential, given that it does not adhere to the rigors of a quantitative study. Hence it is still important to explore the deaths of black male characters in *TWD*.

Originally, T-Dog was not scripted to die in "Killer Within" (Ferland, 2013). In a roundtable discussion with other *Walking Dead* actors, Andrew Lincoln (Rick) revealed it was initially planned that Carol and Lori would both die, but Sarah Wayne Callies (who plays Lori) fought for Carol's character to survive (Ross, 2016). It is not clear why T-Dog was chosen to die instead of another character, but his death inaugurated a succession of black characters who were introduced and died shortly thereafter. Audience members who noticed the succession of deaths created memes about the "One Black Man at a Time" pattern on *TWD*. The ongoing scrutiny, however, did force producer Gale Hurd to address the lack of diversity after the death of Tyreese:

"Look, this is something in this world that we should be cognizant [*sic*] about, so my feeling is: Sure, let's get it out there, let's talk about it," Hurd told me. "We've killed a lot more white characters than African-American characters. And not only that, I think it's important to point out that we did cast two African-American actors in roles that were not African-American. In the comic books, Bob was white. And the character of Noah was not an African-American. We just cast the best actor."

(Hurd qtd in Dos Santos, 2015)

Hurd's claim that more white characters have died is correct. Turner and Perks conducted a quantitative content analysis of the first seven seasons of *TWD*; a

pertinent finding confirms that race and gender are influential in terms of mortality (2019). However, the findings seemingly contradict the perceptions noted by black male critics and audience members alike. Of the 122 characters killed in the serial, the majority were white (78.7%) and male (75.4%). Likewise, of the 87 characters who killed in the serial, the majority were White (82.6%) and male (60.9%). These authors analysed the data for 2016, the year when they wrote the article, instead of 2010 (when the show began). While they examined gender statistics, they did not explore overall race statistics. Atlanta's demographics reveal that, in 2010, 52.3% of the population of Atlanta was African American (*United States Census Bureau*, 2010). While the statistics appear to support Hurd's argument, the reality is that black characters are underrepresented in the serial and so their representations and deaths are noticeable. The history of the genre probably contributes to the perception that black male characters do not survive, beginning with the character of Ben (Duane Jones) in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Curiously, Hurd's statement echoes George A. Romero's comments about casting a black man as the protagonist in his film:

Duane Jones was the best actor we met to play Ben. If there was a film with a black actor in it, it usually had a racial theme, like 'The Defiant Ones.' Consciously I resisted writing new dialogue 'cause he happens to be black. We just shot the script. Perhaps 'Night of the Living Dead' is the first film to have a black man playing the lead role regardless of, rather than because of, his race.

(Romero qtd in Kane, 2010)

Both statements ring hollow given their contexts. Hurd implies that she was aware of the controversial decisions in light of the Black Lives Matter movement.⁴⁰ Similarly, Romero would surely have been aware of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, which culminated in the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. In this context, he would definitely be aware of his "colorblind casting".⁴¹ Warner, who focuses on "colorblind TV casting", notes that post-raciality challenges the "traditional notion of stereotypes because of how race has been transformed into a marker of visual difference rather than a cultural one" (2015: 2). The veracity of these statements can

⁴⁰ At the time of the interview, there were two high profile protests that had just occurred after police officers shot 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York (Basu, Yan and Ford, 2014; Sanchez and Prokupecz, 2014). In both cases, the police officers were not indicted for their actions, which led to the protest actions.

⁴¹ For a comprehensive discussion of "colorblind casting", see Warner (2015).

be investigated by examining whether these characters are able to transcend stereotypical representations.

The history of black male stereotypes helps to shed light on the negative criticism of *TWD* from fans, bloggers and popular culture opinion pieces. Staples unpacks various stereotypes in an attempt to examine the “reality” behind the cultural images of “the sexual superstud, the athlete, and the rapacious criminal” (1982: 1). His sociological study provides a historical context for how these stereotypes develop, but does not apply its findings to the interpretation of fictional texts. He argues that black men are more marginalised than black women because of the feminist movement. He claims that feminism highlighted the plight of women, which benefited black women and resulted in more opportunities (Staples, 1978). He then cites research indicating that black women are better educated and have a competitive edge over some black men for certain jobs. This implies that black men are denied the “benefits” of hegemonic masculinity as white and black women enjoy a higher place in US society.

Many critics have analysed stereotypical representations across media. For example, Donald Bogle (2016) examines black stereotypes in Hollywood films. With regard to male representation, one of the figures that he identifies is that of “Uncle Tom”, the “first in a long line of socially acceptable Good Negro characters”, who are “chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, and insulted” but remain devoted and loyal to “endear themselves to white audiences and emerge as heroes of sorts” (Bogle, 2016: 2). The name of this stereotype, Uncle Tom, first appeared in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), which according to Sarah Roth (2014), was instrumental in changing the perception of black men amongst white people in the USA. Stowe, a white Northerner, created a new stereotype: “the humble martyr” (2014: 105). The pathos of the character effectively appealed to “white men and women with no prior abolitionist leanings [who] were moved by the sufferings of Uncle Tom” (2014: 106). However, this was not the only effect of the novel: Roth argues that Tom’s self-sacrifice to save two light-skinned female slaves effectively placed white women above black men in value, resonating with Staple’s comments (2014: 105). Riché Richardson notes that whilst Stowe’s Tom was depicted as strong and muscular, the character transformed into an “innocuous and neutered model of black masculine sexuality and came to be signified primarily in relation to an aged, black masculine body” (2007: 3). Currently, it is a pejorative term used to describe “African Americans who are traitors

to their race” as the figure has become symbolic of “black impotence and a weak, obsequious, unmanly man who is eager to please whites” (Uffelman, 2009: 350-351). One of the figures related to this type, Richardson offers, is “Uncle Remus” (2007: 3). Uncle Remus and the pickaninny are stereotypes derived from a figure Bogle initially described as a “coon” who was an object of amusement or a buffoon (2016: 4-5). He elucidates further:

Before its death, the coon developed into the most blatantly degrading of all black stereotypes. The pure coons emerged as no-account niggers, those unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English language.

(2016: 5)

There is not much difference between the figure of the “coon” and the other stereotypes; therefore, I will not be delving much deeper in relation to this stereotype. The Uncle Remus stereotype is similar to Uncle Tom, except he “distinguishes himself by his quaint, naïve, and comic philosophizing” (Bogle, 2016: 6). The pickaninny is a harmless, pleasant child; for example, 1920s child actor Sunshine Sammy. Another stereotype identified by Bogle is the Mammy type; she was essentially a female “coon” character, except that she was independent and “usually big, fat, and cantankerous” (Bogle, 2016: 6). The actors associated with some of these character types are mentioned in the first season of *TWD*. For instance, Merle tells T-Dog, “I’ll tell you what. You get me out of these cuffs and I’ll be all ‘Sammy Sunshine’ positive for you” (MacLaren, 2011: “Guts”); in the very next episode, Jacqui, a black woman, complains to the other white women, “Can someone explain to me how the women wound up doing all the Hattie McDaniel work?” (Horder-Payton, 2011: “Tell it to the Frogs”). Hattie McDaniel literally played “Mammy”, the house slave of Scarlett O’Hara (Vivien Leigh) in *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939). Katherine Sugg observes in the first three seasons that the stereotyping in *TWD* results in “non-white characters largely play[ing] supporting, and usually disposable, roles” (2015: 795). The final male stereotype identified by Bogle, the “brutal black buck” (2016: 7), appeared in *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), which presented the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) as heroic. Two varieties emerged from this stereotype, namely “the black brute” and the “black buck”, but the differences were minimal; the black brute’s violence reflected a repressed sexuality, whereas the violent black buck succumbed to his desire for white women

(2016: 10). Richardson describes the “myth of the black rapist” as the “obverse of the Uncle Tom” stereotype (2007: 3). Both Bogle (2016: 13-14) and Richardson (2007: 4) aptly ascribe this construction to the fear of miscegenation. Both Gabriel and Morgan are romantically attached to characters who have been impregnated by other men; thus far, no black male character has had his own child and survived the post-apocalypse. Male characters of other races, such as Glenn (Korean) and Siddiq (Middle Eastern), have had children with women of other races, but Glenn died before his baby was born and Siddiq died within a year of his child’s birth. Similarly, Rick left the show, but is assumed dead whilst Michonne is pregnant. Multiracial procreation is allowed but, apparently, at a great cost. Unfortunately, the bloggers’ accusations of stereotypes seem to have merit when analysing the characters in *TWD*.

Other indications of black masculinity being sidelined in *TWD* are T-Dog’s lack of dialogue, the interchangeability of black characters, and the weakness or ineffectualness of the black male characters (Baldwin and McCarthy, 2013; Reed, 2017; Jionde, 2018; Kunyosying and Soles, 2018; Lavigne, 2018; Wilson, 2019a). Many criticisms of this tendency reference Hughey’s definition of the magical negro (“MN”):

The MN has become a stock character that often appears as a lower class, uneducated black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation.

(2009: 544)

Hughey views this character as a racist construction since it appears to be promoting equality but centralises white people as pure and moral. He later revisits this idea:

The Magical Negro is a mysterious Black character that enters a decidedly White and mainstream context. This character labors to transform the life of a lost and broken White character that has somehow fallen from social and moral grace.

(Hughey, 2012: 752)

Hughey clarifies the concept further by ascribing other qualities to the magical negro such as the character being “paranormal or godlike” but typically assuming the façade of being undereducated and lower class. In a thin argument, referencing earlier work by Hughey (2009), Baldwin and McCarthy accuse Morgan of being a magical

negro due to his rescue of Rick and because he explains the “rules” of the post-apocalypse in the first episode (2013: 77). Morgan is neither lower-class, uneducated or endowed with any powers. Rick appears in a hospital gown after being in a coma; this does not make him dishevelled and broken. Jionde, consulting Hughey’s (2009) definition, argues that T-Dog “embodies traditional ‘magical negro’ qualities”, but later tempers this to “reminiscent of the magical negro and ebony saint character archetypes” (2018: 21-22). T-Dog’s lack of development, limited screen time and protection of the mainly white characters underlines Jionde’s argument, which accounts for T-Dog’s poor representation, but does not fully explore his relationship to the definition of a magical negro (2018: 22).

Frank Darabont directed *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) and *The Green Mile* (1999), which, as Jionde notes, were criticised for their stereotypical representations of black people (2018: 23). It is worth noting that both films were adaptations of Stephen King novels.⁴² Darabont thus perpetuated a stereotype when he created the character of T-Dog, as the character did not appear in the comic series. T-Dog’s death, albeit heroic, in a prison is also problematic given “the mass incarceration of black men” (Jionde, 2018: 26-27). Contradicting Baldwin and McCartney’s (2013), albeit early, assessment of Morgan, Jionde argues that other black characters from the comics, like Morgan, are able to transcend the stereotype, blaming Darabont’s desire for comfort in T-Dog’s portrayal as a magical negro (2018: 27). Opposing Baldwin and McCartney (2013) and Jionde (2018), Kunyosying and Soles argue that most of the black characters (Morgan, Michonne, and Ezekiel) in *TWD* function as magical negroes (2018: 38). They select only part of Audrey Colombe’s (2002) definition of a magical negro; the full definition is:

The basic structure of this magical African American male character is as follows. He must have no history; he arrives from somewhere and returns, but those places remain vague and other worldly. He has a threatening aspect; he’s the Big Black Man and a drug dealer, a musician, a thief, a drifter; there is initial danger, which makes the White people nervous in some way. He has magical powers, again rather vaguely defined but not the sort of thing one typically encounters; his sole purpose in the story is to selflessly use [*sic*] those powers to help a White man. He remains “invisible” in the text; the Black figure exists outside of any community of

⁴² Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu identifies Magical Negro characters in four of Stephen King’s novels: *The Shining*, *The Stand*, *The Talisman* and *The Green Mile* (2004).

his own and is not recognized in any significant way by the White community that the main character belongs to.

If one examines the entire definition, none of these aspects apply to Morgan, Ezekiel or Michonne. Kunyosying and Soles imply that Morgan's fighting ability borders on magical; they believe Eastman's teaching him Aikido over some months is unrealistic, given his ability to defeat multiple groups of attackers in the fifth and sixth seasons (Kunyosying and Soles, 2018: 38-39). Yet, Morgan had been fighting alone for survival since ostensibly the first season. By the third season, Morgan had been clearing King County of walkers and burning them (Brock, 2013: "Clear"). It should be obvious that this requires immense strength and endurance. In the sixth season, before he met Eastman, he seemed to have been fighting the dead and survivors (Williams, 2016: "Here's not Here"). After his training, in his first encounter with the Wolves, he fought two of them off (Nicotero, 2015a: "Conquer"). There is a gradual escalation in the encounters before he fights a group of Wolves (Lynch, 2016: "JSS"). Kunyosying and Soles also argue that Ezekiel's relationship with Shiva, the tiger, hints at the supernatural (2018: 39). Ezekiel explains that he was a zookeeper who saved Shiva when she was injured and later rescued her when she was abandoned at the zoo after the apocalypse (Nicotero, 2017: "The Well"). It is unlikely that a tiger would offer the type of loyalty depicted in the serial, but it is no more outlandish than the dead walking the Earth.

Sugg mentions the memes that arose about the racial coding and stereotyping in the early seasons of the serial (2015: 795). At the very least, these memes indicate that a segment of the audience is sensitised to negative stereotypes and point to the early writing teams' failure to see the implications of such decisions. It is also telling which actors are empowered to make decisions or even have backstories on the show (cf. Chapter 2). In a question-and-answer session on the Internet's largest forum site, Reddit, a user named "pojut" asked actor IronE Singleton about his character's name, and whether he felt it was "a bit too goofy", and Singleton responded, "T-Dog is short for Theodore Douglas. He got it during his college football days from his teammates. So ... not goofy at all" (Singleton, 2013). The audience only finds out in the second episode of the second season that T-Dog's name is "Theodore Douglas" and that is only because he refers to himself while despairing about his situation (Dickerson, 2012b: "Bloodletting"). Singleton also revealed that he was meant to do "1 or 2

episodes but I ended up going into 3 seasons. So I always felt that T-Dog was living on borrowed time” (Singleton, 2013). The fictional backstory about “college football” did not exist in the narrative. I contacted Singleton, who confirmed that he created his own background for the show: “As actors, in addition to what’s written in the script, we add more imaginary circumstances to our characters to help make them ... more real ... more human which is what I did” (Singleton, 2020).

This pattern continued with other black actors and actresses. Chad L. Coleman (Tyreese) and Sonequa Martin-Green (Sasha) mentioned their characters’ pre-apocalyptic occupations (National Football League (NFL) player and firefighter respectively) in episodes of *Talking Dead*, although these were not being referred to in the serial (Norman, 2015, 2016). While T-Dog and Sasha were original characters, Tyreese’s former career was mentioned in the comic series. Likewise, Michonne’s comic book counterpart has a surname (Hawthorne), and an occupation (lawyer) that is not referred to in the television serial. While T-Dog’s lack of development could be attributed to the fact that he was only a recurring character, Tyreese and Sasha were promoted from “recurring” to “also starring” and finally “main” cast members; therefore, more time could have been devoted to exploring their backgrounds. After all, the actor and actress who play Daryl and Carol also underwent a similar change in roles and yet they received backstories. Unlike Tyreese and Sasha, Daryl and Carol are currently alive. Michonne was always cast as a main character so she received a background story; however, there are inconsistencies in the narrative (cf. chapter 5).⁴³ A backstory is often fundamental to creating “complex, multidimensional characters” (Homan and Rhinehart, 2018: 37). An inability to create a backstory, let alone a believable character arc, results in stereotypical representations. It is evident that there is a hierarchy concerning which characters are granted backstories and that white characters are more likely to have these than black ones.

Morgan Jones is the only character apart from Rick who appeared in the pilot episode and is still alive at the end of the eighth season. Like Rick, Morgan leaves the show; however, Rick will appear in a trilogy of films, whilst Morgan has been relegated to the less popular television show, *FTWD*. This decision may have been a result of

⁴³ As noted in Chapter 2, in a television serial, various types of roles are based on actor agreements. A serial “regular” or “main” character appears in the opening title sequence and is engaged in a long-term role, whereas a recurring character appears in multiple episodes but is not bound to the serial. IronE Singleton’s status is an example of this (Basin, 2019: 117).

producers and writers not wanting to kill another black male character, especially a character who appeared in the first episode of the serial. Morgan is not a magical negro. Instead, from the moment he appears, he serves as a foil to Rick: both of them are married and have a son. Morgan saves Rick; however, Morgan has “failed” as a husband since he lost his wife Jenny to the walkers. Worse still, he is unable to “put her down” and prevent her from turning into a walker. His mistake continues to haunt both him and his son, literally and metaphorically, as she wanders the street in a white dressing gown outside the home where they have taken shelter. Despite this, he is portrayed as a good father: he provides for his son emotionally, physically and spiritually by not preventing a grief-stricken Duane from crying when he sees his mother, providing a safe shelter and food during the apocalypse and still praying before meals. At first glance, he seems to be a marked departure from any stereotype, be it negative or positive. Even when Rick hands him a rifle with a scope to kill his walker wife, despite his skill at despatching other walkers, his grief and emotion prevent him from taking the fatal shot. This could be perceived as the result of being a loving husband, incapable of brutality, despite her current monstrosity. Yet, this proves to be another failure as when Rick, Michonne, and Carl encounter him in the third season, he is a changed man (Brock, 2013: "Clear"). After Jenny kills Duane, Morgan descends into madness; however, he undergoes another transformation. After the actors for T-Dog and Sasha had created backstories for their characters, it was important to craft a backstory for Morgan to demonstrate development and complexity in a black character. Morgan captures a Wolf and attempts to rehabilitate him by revealing his past to the Wolf (Williams, 2016: "Here's Not Here"). This episode is significant as it is entirely dedicated to Morgan's character. One of the major aspects of a magical negro is not having a backstory (or any character development) since one's sole purpose is serving a white man, so this episode adds to the refutation of the stereotype.

Morgan finds a cabin owned by a man named “Eastman” who has a goat named Tabitha. Eastman easily disarms him with a staff and knocks him out. Morgan regains consciousness in a cell and, reminding the viewer of his last interaction with Rick, begs Eastman to kill him. Eastman hands him a book, Morihei Ueshiba's *The Art of Peace*, which teaches the Japanese martial art Aikido:

The Art of Peace does not rely on weapons or brute force to succeed; instead we put ourselves in tune with the universe, maintain peace in our own realms, nurture life, and prevent death and destruction. The true meaning of the term *samurai* is one who serves and adheres to the power of love.

(1992: 45)

As days pass, and Morgan plots his escape, he observes the compassion of Eastman towards the walkers and Tabitha, as well as how he trains with his staff. Eastman is a vegetarian and tries to make cheese from Tabitha's milk (unsuccessfully). Eventually Eastman begins to engage with Morgan, revealing that he was a forensic psychiatrist; the remainder of the episode is Eastman's attempt to rehabilitate Morgan. Morgan reads the book, becomes a vegetarian and practices Aikido.

Eastman or "East-man" represents an alternative, but marginalised, form of masculinity in a show that glorifies violence and meat eating (whether it is walkers or cannibals). Eastman is an educated white man; the cabin also reflects that he was wealthy before the apocalypse. His interest and belief in an Eastern philosophy and lifestyle stands at odds with hegemonic masculinity. Kristen Sumpter argues: "Specifically, eating meat allows one to be seen as masculine, and the avoidance of meat permits one to be viewed as feminine" (2015: 104). She links hegemonic masculinity to the history of meat-eating, beginning with hunting, since it was the first technique to gather meat for consumption (2015: 106). Subsequently, in Europe, meat was withheld from peasants, women and children (2015: 106). In the USA, higher meat allocations were given to male to slaves and soldiers (2015: 106). Morgan's adoption of these traits would show that his character has gained complexity and moved beyond a stereotype. However, it is insulting that his identity could be easily subsumed by another character's identity and values. Moreover, it is troubling that whenever he "reverts", he relapses into violence, which implies that, without his wife and son, or his white saviour, he is a "black brute".



Figure 14 Morgan and Eastman train together

The Wolf seems unaffected by Morgan's story and promises to kill him. Morgan lacks the skills and knowledge required for assessing and treating people and his character arc continues to repeat this pattern. He seems to fall into the role of a magical negro as he tries to save and help the lost and broken Carol and Benjamin. When Benjamin dies, he reverts to mental instability and once again turns the staff into a spear. Morgan's character is placed in increasingly precarious situations, but he does not die: he literally exclaims to another character: "I don't die!" (Rodriguez, 2018: "The Damned"). Unable to assimilate into any of the communities, Morgan leaves Virginia at the end of the eighth season and joins the spin-off show, *Fear The Walking Dead*. At first unwilling to join any new groups, he seems to follow the pattern of trying to save characters on the new show. For instance, Nicholas "Nick" Clark (Frank Dillane), the son of the protagonist of the show, is lost and broken, so Morgan hands Nick his copy of *The Art of Peace*; Nick is shot and dies while reading it (Liu, 2018: "Good out Here"). On this show, he is currently paired with another former white police officer-cum-gunslinger, John Dorie (Garret Dillahunt). There does not seem any real growth or progression for the character. It seems likely that the decision to transfer Morgan to another serial was the result of a fear that *TWD* would be perceived as killing off another black man.

While Morgan's development in *FTWD* is beyond the scope of this thesis, he has assumed a leadership role in the new serial; in the season finale of the fifth season, he is shot in the chest close to his heart. As he presumably bleeds out, a group of walkers walks towards him (Satrazemis, 2019a). The sixth season has not begun as yet, but trailers show Morgan has survived; his eyes are blood red and he

walks amongst the walkers unseen until he decides to fight them with his staff (RogueVL, 2020). Trailers can be misleading; his bloodied eyes can be explained by haemorrhaging from the gunshot wound, and his bloodied clothes may have resulted in the walkers believing that he was one of them. However, it can also be interpreted that Morgan is immune to walker bites or has partially turned; despite this unlikely explanation, there are some YouTubers speculating about this possibility (TWDEExplained, 2020; Universe, 2020). It is implausible that the producers have decided to make Morgan seemingly invincible. But his character arc strongly suggests that the producers and writers are not only reticent, but angry that they cannot kill off black male characters with impunity. There are further examples from later episodes to support this theory, but it is important to revisit the early characters to show how they were represented in earlier seasons of the show. I will first explore T-Dog's anxiety about being lynched.



Figure 15 Morgan literally sees red

T-Dog: Uh-huh. And I'm the one black guy. Realize how precarious that makes my situation?

Dale: What the hell are you talking about?

T-Dog: I'm talking about two good-old-boy cowboy sheriffs and a redneck whose brother cut off his own hand because I dropped a key. Who in that scenario you think is gonna be first to get lynched?

(Dickerson, 2012: "Bloodletting")

Almost half a century earlier, in the film *In the Heat of the Night* (Jewison, 1967), Virgil Tibbs (Sidney Poitier), a black police officer, is forced to work with the white Sheriff Gillespie (Rod Steiger) on a murder case in the southern town of Sparta,

Mississippi. At one point, Tibbs is almost lynched. Reflecting on this film, James Baldwin states, “Black men know something about white sheriffs. They know, for one thing, that the sheriff is no freer to become friends with them than they are to become friends with the sheriff” (Baldwin, 2011: 50). Confronted by white masculinities in the forms of the cowboy and redneck, Theodore “T-Dog” Douglas’s short-lived run on the serial shows that he voiced valid concerns. Unfortunately, he later recanted his statements to Dale: “I don’t know what that was ... where it came from. That wasn’t me. If it’s okay, I’d rather you never told anybody about that stuff I said” (Gierhart, 2012: “Cherokee Rose”). This forecloses the opportunity for the character to address legitimate concerns raised online by audience members about the serial. Commenting on this scene, Jionde believes that this conversation mirrors real life “where black people are accused of imagining the persistent racial hierarchy” in the USA (2018: 23). Baldwin and McCarthy argue that T-Dog “knows that discussions surrounding the discrimination he faces are not helpful to his future as a member of the group” (Baldwin and McCarthy, 2013: 79-80). The retraction of this statement reflects the conservative ideology propagated in the early seasons of the show. There are parallels with the Black Lives Matter movement and the Blue Lives Matter countermovement; the irony is that the latter movement resulted in the Southern state of Louisiana offering hate crime protections to police officers. The “good-old-boys” and “redneck” that T-Dog refers to are Rick, Shane and Daryl respectively:

The good old boy is described as blue collar, an outdoorsman, a patriot, something of a populist, basically conservative—a “man’s man.” He is also somewhat self-centered and scheming, particularly toward out-groups. Yet, to his in-group, he is an affable comrade and a man of integrity. Billy Carter, the brother of President Jimmy Carter and himself the essence of the type, defined the good old boy as someone who rides around in a pickup truck, drinking beer and putting his empties in a sack. A redneck, by contrast, rides around in a pickup, drinking and tossing his empties out the window. The “redneck” as a concept describes a more menacing figure.

(Parmley, 2009: 126-127)

Almost every critic who writes about T-Dog mentions the above dialogue with Dale since he speaks so infrequently, mainly appearing in the periphery watching Rick or Shane speak. When he does speak, his lines included examples such as “Oh shit!” (MacLaren, 2012: “Pretty Much Dead Already”). A 4:48-minute video capitalising on

these criticisms showed all of T-Dog's lines from the second season. Roughly half of the clip consists of his dialogue with Dale; some of the scenes simply show T-Dog sighing or grunting (TopScotched, 2012). The character of T-Dog was the first to bring criticism about black representation onto the show. Even though he appeared on the serial for three seasons, he was given hardly any lines. He appears in the background, always performing some labour such as digging graves or burning walker corpses. He is also clumsy; notably, he drops Merle Dixon's handcuff key. He cuts his arm fleeing from walkers and has to be saved from the walkers by Daryl and later from infection by Merle's STD antibiotics. It is particularly ironic that the most virulent racists on the serial keep saving him, but also explains the negative perceptions that the show is racist, as mentioned earlier.

More problematic representations occurred when new black characters were introduced when they arrive at the prison. Representing the disproportional incarceration of black men, there are three black prisoners (Big Tiny, Andrew and Oscar), a white prisoner (Axel) and a Hispanic prisoner (Tomas). Tomas is quickly despatched by Rick and Axel is portrayed as benign. While in real life Tamir Rice was killed for playing with a toy gun, Axel is privileged to be arrested for holding up a store with a water gun. Despite his huge size, Big Tiny is almost immediately bitten after they are rescued. Like T-Dog, he does not seem to deserve a first name, let alone a surname. Big Tiny resembles John Coffey, the magical negro, from *The Green Mile*, in appearance and demeanour. When the group is fighting walkers, he backs away in cowardice, but is surprised and bitten by a walker. Oscar proves his loyalty to Rick by shooting Andrew who had unleashed walkers on the group as retaliation for Tomas' death. As members of a marginalised group of masculinities, Big Tiny and Andrew are punished for not submitting to hegemonic masculinity. Recognising that Oscar has to continue to prove himself to Rick if he wishes to survive, he volunteers to help rescue Maggie and Glenn from Woodbury. His efforts go unrewarded as he is killed by a Woodbury guard because Rick is hallucinating about Shane. T-Dog also sacrifices himself to save the group and Carol. In the end, T-Dog becomes an Uncle Tom character as he dies happily sacrificing himself for a white character. As he tells Carol before he is devoured by walkers, "This is God's plan. He'll take care of me. Always has. He's gonna help me lead you out of these tombs" (Ferland, 2013: "Killer Within").

Shortly after T-Dog's death, another expendable black man, Tyreese, is introduced. Tyreese's absence from the early seasons of the television serial was

noticed by Sartain, who is disturbed by his absence and his “replacement” by T-Dog and Daryl (2013: 262; 263). Tyreese is presented as resourceful and strong in the comic strip, but the television version of the character is completely unsuited for a post-apocalyptic environment. Kunyosying and Soles also note the differences between the television and comic counterparts and dismiss the show’s version as “inert” and “feminized, defanged, and rendered marginal and ineffective by season four” (Kunyosying and Soles, 2018: 38). Elizabeth Erwin implies that Tyreese is feminine as he “assumes the duties traditionally associated with motherhood” (2018: 86). When the Governor’s group attacks and destroys the prison, Tyreese is further emasculated as he is rescued by Lizzie and Mika Samuels, two little girls (Dickerson, 2014b: “Too Far Gone”). He then has to care for them and Judith:



Figure 16 Tyreese as the nanny

One would expect Tyreese to spend the episode fighting off walkers and protecting the children; instead, there are scenes of his changing nappies in the middle of a forest and he leaves them alone with a gun to defend themselves when he hears screaming (Brock, 2014b: “Inmates”). From a logical perspective, it might have been his sister that was in trouble and so he had to leave and help, but his heroism is for naught as he arrives too late to save the group under attack. Worse yet, Lizzie might have killed Judith and the sisters could have died if Carol had not appeared to take charge of the situation. That night, as Tyreese is weak with a fever after he was injured in the fight at the prison, he makes scared noises in his sleep, and is comforted by the

young Mika. The implication is that, despite his size and strength, he requires their protection and comfort, which is poor character development given his earlier portrayal.

Tyreese is first introduced with a group that includes his sister (Sasha), a married white couple (Allen and Donna) and their son (Ben). His signature weapon is a hammer, which he ably uses to despatch walkers and lead his group to safety. While Tyreese is trying to clear a path, he is separated, and Donna is bitten by a walker; he does not leave her behind and even carries her at one point. Allen later accuses Tyreese of emasculating him in front of his son when Tyreese had previously saved Donna, "And from that moment, she was glued to you like a lost puppy. Her knight in shining armour. It made me feel like ... I could have done it" (Schwartz, 2013: "Prey") (*TWD*: 'Prey', 2013). In that moment, the spectre of the "black buck" haunts the scene as Tyreese threatens Allen's masculinity. Aside from his strength, Tyreese is also shown to be an independent thinker as he does not follow the Governor unquestioningly. Later, Tyreese begins a relationship with Karen, a white woman. However, she soon falls ill and is killed by Carol in quarantine (Ferland, 2014: "Infected"). This could be seen as an attempt to show a post-racial coupling, but the quick dispatching of the relationship also ends the danger of miscegenation. Karen's death is a turning point for Tyreese's character development. When Tyreese discovers Karen's body and demands that Rick take action, a *melée* ensues with a gaunt Rick preposterously overcoming the tall and muscular Tyreese, repeatedly punching his face. As Daryl saved T-Dog's life, he intervenes and restrains Rick from killing Tyreese (Sackheim, 2014: "Isolation"). This scene ensures that Tyreese is perceived as physically weaker than Rick. Furthermore, Tyreese's emotional outburst provides an opportunity to highlight Daryl's positive characteristics. In fact, Tyreese is systematically undermined and represented as weak.

The times when Tyreese is most heroic, strong, or competent always appear off camera. This can be explained by our understanding that the producers, writers, or actors did not want to portray another violent black man. Tyreese's actions are never prompted by mental illness or a lust for violence or women. While Michonne is allowed to shine, Tyreese's strength is never showcased on camera, diminishing him further. He is shown to be inept with a gun, a "masculine weapon", but is proficient with a hammer, which requires "brute" force to smash a skull (Schwartz, 2013: "Prey"; Dickerson, 2014: "Too Far Gone"; Nicotero, 2014: "30 Days Without an Accident").

Eventually, Tyreese takes on the role of “au pair” (Harriot, 2017a); he protects baby Judith, and little Mika and Lizzie. He is later joined by Carol, who further emasculates him. Carol is able to talk Lizzie down from killing Judith when she had already murdered Mika. It is also Carol who kills Lizzie and goes off to save Rick’s group at Terminus. In trying to understand why Tyreese does not kill Lizzie, there are two possible reasons. *TWD*’s conservative audience would probably not have accepted Tyreese killing Lizzie; also, Tyreese’s character has been firmly established as a pacifist (he even resists killing walkers if they do not pose any harm), therefore, it would be out of character for him to kill a little girl. Yet, it could also have been perceived as sexist if Carol was forced to remain with the baby while he went to fight at Terminus. Carol’s attack on Terminus resulted in tremendous fan adulation, which has ensured her longevity; nevertheless, it seems that at every turn, plot decisions were made at Tyreese’s expense. This is unfortunate as Tyreese demonstrates that he has the qualities of a good leader.

Tyreese dies in the episode “What’s Happened and What’s Going On” (Norman, 2015). At the beginning of the episode, the group heads to Noah’s home. Beth had attempted to kill Dawn to ensure Noah’s freedom and Tyreese explains that Beth’s death was inevitable:

Noah: I never wanted to kill anybody before.

Tyreese: I've wanted that. But it just made it so I didn't see anything except what I wanted. I wasn't facing it.

Noah: Facing what?

Tyreese: What happened, what's going on. My dad always told Sasha and me that it was our duty as citizens of the world to keep up with the news. When I was little and I was in his car, there were always those stories on the radio. Something happens 1,000 miles away or down the block. Some kind of horror I couldn't even wrap my head around. But he didn't change the channel. He didn't turn it off. He just kept listening. To face it. Keeping your eyes open. My dad always called that paying the high cost of living.

(Nicotero, 2015: "What's Happened and What's Going On")

When Tyreese and Noah arrive at Noah’s family home, they discover his mother’s corpse in the lounge. While Noah sits by his mother in mourning, Tyreese hears a noise that he investigates. He sees a shaking door with, presumably, a walker behind it and walks into a room with an open door. One of Noah’s brothers is lying

decomposing in a bed with the stomach cavity open. He is distracted by pictures of Noah's twin brothers as they probably remind him of Mika and Lizzie Samuels. The brothers' rooms are connected as they share a single bathroom. In the same way as Big Tiny was surprised by a walker, the other walker twin quietly approaches and bites Tyreese's arm. Tyreese kicks him away and lands on the floor but is rescued by young Noah who grabs an airplane hanging from the ceiling and stabs his own brother in the eye without hesitation. In an intertextual and doubling image, in *Night*, the little zombie girl, Karen, approaches Ben from behind and grabs his arm. Ben stops her from biting him but throws her on a couch and goes back to hide in the basement. Decades later, it seems as though there is an ongoing sensitivity to showing black men killing children, even if they are undead. However, while Ben is killed by "good-old-boys", being killed by a walker child is the final blow to Tyreese's masculinity.



Figure 17 Tyreese sits helplessly on the ground

While this is not a Gothic tale, the doubled imagery of the pictures and the twins is noteworthy. According to Mario Praz, "an anxiety with no possibility of escape is the main theme of the Gothic tales" (1968: 20). Linda Dryden elaborates that the Gothic double or "the doppelgänger of Gothic fiction reflects this inescapable anxiety through a malevolent 'other' who destabilizes the cohesion of the self" (2003: 39). There is ongoing debate about the definition of the double, yet Sau-Ling Wong identifies psychological "disowning" as an intrinsic part of the creation of a double (1993: 82).

She continues, “The double is symptomatic of a crisis in self-acceptance and self-knowledge” (Wong, 1993: 82). In other words:

The double, or *doppelgänger*, in other words, is a repressed part of the ego that manifests as an externalized entity to confront the ego with its unacknowledgeable desires. When this happens, the ego must either find a way to eliminate this dreadful other or risk becoming overwhelmed by it.

(Ng, 2014: 257)

Tyreese’s failure to embrace the violence required for the post-apocalypse and his desire to escape from the world manifest in the form of the twin. While Morgan kept begging Rick and Eastman to kill him, Tyreese lets death happen to him instead. He begins hallucinating about characters that have passed on, so that even his death is about other people. Rick and Michonne amputate Tyreese’s arm; unlike the elderly Hershel, Tyreese does not survive the maiming.

The question of competence, who survives and who should survive, arises in relation to Tyreese. It seems as if, like T-Dog, his survival instincts have deserted him. At his funeral, Father Gabriel says,

We look not at what can be seen, but we look at what cannot be seen.
For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.
For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made from hands, eternal in the heavens.
In the heavens.

Here he paraphrases 2 Corinthians 4:18: “because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal”, which relates to living by faith. Tyreese loses faith so he is no longer able to live in a post-apocalyptic world. Like T-Dog, his death is bookended with a reference to God, another trait of an Uncle Tom character. The overall message seems to be that Tyreese was too good for the world. His gentleness and unwillingness to do anything that needs to be done (namely murdering potential threats) to survive left him with no will to live. Tyreese did not enjoy a heroic death. Like his predecessors, Tyreese is another Uncle Tom character, existing only to be of servitude. Like Big Tiny, his strength does not help him survive. In fact, the writers seemingly took great pains to show him as harmless, sensitive and helpful to others.

Just five episodes later, another black male character is killed off (Lynch, 2015: "Spend"). Since two main characters, Beth and Tyreese, had sacrificed themselves for Noah, there might have been an expectation that he would contribute greatly to the group. At first, Noah's future seems promising. At Alexandria, Noah attempts to learn architecture from Reg Monroe, Deanna's husband. Noah's leg has been broken and healed incorrectly, so he walks slowly and with a limp; Aaron reassured Noah that the surgeon at Alexandria could fix his leg. Despite there being a town full of people, and his disability, Noah goes with a group to obtain spare parts for Alexandria's malfunctioning power supply. When Noah, Glenn and Nicholas are trapped in a revolving door surrounded by walkers, Nicholas panics and escapes. Noah is slowly and agonisingly ripped apart and consumed.



Figure 18 Noah's last terrifying moments

An entire episode was dedicated to Tyreese's demise, and an extended sequence dwelt on Noah's terror. When Tyreese was hallucinating, the Governor keeps appearing and demanding, "The bill has to be paid. You have to earn your keep" (Nicotero, 2015b: "What's Happened and What's Going On"). The title of Noah's death episode is "Spend"; as there is no more money in circulation, a person can only exchange their expertise or labour in exchange for protection, shelter and food. Both characters had to earn their keep: Tyreese's refusal to murder, and, despite Noah's noble intentions, his inability to contribute meaningfully resulted in their inevitable deaths.

Just before the deaths of Tyreese and Noah, another black male character was destined for mutilation and death. Bob Stookey is introduced while Tyreese is still alive and for a short time it seems as if the rule has been broken. Bob is based on the

“Coon” stereotype. At first, he seems to be positive and upbeat, but then proves to be unreliable. As an alcoholic, he is responsible for the death of a character, Zach, when he tries to steal alcohol on a supply run. He also endangers the medicine run when he fills his bag with alcohol instead of medication. The Termites cut off his leg and eat it, while he laughs and tells them that they ate “tainted meat”. Until Bob Stookey encounters Rick’s group at the prison, he is always the last man standing; however, after surviving the Governor’s assault on the prison with Maggie and Sasha, he remains relentlessly optimistic. Even on his deathbed, he talks about the kick to his face and pain in his side as helpful distractions from the pain of the amputation. He smiles until the end and makes Sasha smile as well. Bob dies beneath a wooden plaque of the Last Supper, which cements the ending of his character arc as a joke (January, 2015: “Four Walls and a Roof”).



Figure 19 Bob's leg is barbequed in the background

In the picture above, Gareth gazes at Bob while feasting on a piece of Bob’s leg. Bob is literally a piece of meat for Gareth and the other Termites to enjoy. The camera pans to the leg on the makeshift grill, and close ups of the Termites’ pleasure of eating parts of his leg. Walkers are trapped in a building behind them; a thin veneer of glass separates them, but there is little distinction between the groups. The tradition of representing “the suffering black male body as [an] object of white desire” can be traced to *The Scourged Back*, a photograph taken during the American Civil War in 1863. The picture is of a black man, a former slave, covered with “a gruesome mass of rope-like scars” on his back (Jackson, 2011: 12). The scars indicate the unbridled rage and pleasure of systematically torturing and abusing a person who could not defend themselves without being executed. The purpose of the photograph is to create

empathy in the viewer by revealing the violence of slavery and to galvanise support for the abolitionist movement. The difference between the presentation of white and black male suffering is stark. The audience is invited to share in Rick and Daryl's emotional distress, but to witness Tyreese, Noah and Bob's physical destruction.

Maimed black men on *TWD* provide a noteworthy spectacle on the show. As Ralph Ellison observes: "we view the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant who . . . forms the stage and scene upon which and within which the action unfolds" (Ellison, 1995: 85). Using this quote as her point of departure, Cassandra Jackson studies the link between violence, visual culture and the black body (2011). She argues that since 1863 the wounded black body has been objectified through photographs of scarred slaves (Jackson, 2011: 12). Jackson explains further:

Indeed, as the image attempts to provoke this bodily intersubjective experience between the subject and the audience, it also strips the subject of any notion of being that doesn't depend on his bodiliness. Thus, the effort to establish bodily connectivity is always matched by difference, an essential otherness that is created when the body is on display.

(2011: 17)

Images of suffering could be used to identify with the subject but could also lend themselves to eroticism, since the viewer has power of the gaze over the image of the body (Jackson, 2011: 24). In addition, "the black body is never individual, but instead is always representative of the collective other" (Jackson, 2011: 31). This othering extends to disability. Using the works of artist Carrie Mae Weems, Jackson explains that disability, like blackness, can be transformed from the singular to the emblematic (Jackson, 2011: 32). Instead of viewing bodies on display, Weems attempts to show the bodies as sites of ideological struggle. As the photographs of wounded slaves could be re-inscribed to demonstrate white superiority and black inferiority, disability, as non-normative, can be "constructed as deviant, deficient, inferior" (Jackson, 2011: 33).

The images of black men suffering could elicit feelings of identification, detachment, repulsion or desire in the viewer. From the perspective of walkers and cannibals, the bodies represent desire as they wish to consume them. By contrasting images of white male emotional suffering, such as Rick and Daryl crying when their

loved ones die, with the physical torture and dismemberment of black men, the black men are marked as different as their bodies become sites of repulsion since their suffering is so much worse. By consistently not presenting black men with romantic partners, the creators of *TWD* ensure that they are never seen as objects of desire by the other characters. The audience members are coerced into viewing their bodies with repulsion as they are graphically dismembered and torn apart. Jessica Kee (2015) links images of abjected Black male bodies, including lynching, to her study of *Night and Candyman* (1992). While *The Scourged Back* was utilised to inspire people to support the abolitionist movement, there were other pictures circulating concurrently that were designed to have the opposite effect, such as “lynching photographs”, which were sold as souvenirs (Allen, 2000). Perhaps the black male deaths on *TWD* served a similar purpose for the racist fans of the show (cf. Chapter 1).

As indicated in my introduction and earlier in this chapter, the succession of black male deaths prompted both popular and scholarly criticism. The writers and producers appeared to heed this criticism, especially after Father Gabriel’s appearance portended Bob’s death shortly thereafter; minor characters Heath and Scott were introduced as “supply runners” for the Alexandria community. While Scott remains a peripheral character, Heath inexplicably disappeared in the seventh season. The actor, Corey Hawkins, who played Heath, was offered major film roles and left the serial; the showrunner for the serial, Angela Kang, explained that Anne/Jadis traded Heath for supplies (Baxter, 2018). The writers had a legitimate reason to kill the character, or perhaps even to recast the role, but they chose an even more horrific fate for a black man. He was sold for supplies for an unknown nefarious purpose, thus being doomed to slavery.



Figure 20 Gabriel cowers and screams on a rock

Gender inequality is perpetuated through male privilege. The term refers to the political, social, and economic advantages that are available to men based only on their gender (Kimmel, 2018). As race and gender can be perceived as invisible, there are also benefits in seeming normal. Not mentioning “female” in relation to an occupation is an example of the privilege associated with being a man. However, race or any other intersectional social category that is not seen as normative erodes that advantage.

Men who are non-White, working-class poor, culturally Other and/or gay tend to struggle with how they fit into a gender matrix that sees them as eternally hegemonic when, because of their intersectional identities, they personally only experience flickers of male privilege.

(Jackson and Moshin, 2013: 2)

Father Gabriel Stokes and King Ezekiel experience “flickers of male privilege” on *TWD*. Father Gabriel seems to be an anomaly and suggests room for a complex black male character as opposed to a stereotype. As a man of God, he could easily have been reduced to an Uncle Tom character; however, his cowardice renders him incapable of self-sacrifice, at least at the beginning of his character arc. Gabriel locked the church doors, condemning his flock to an undead status. His refusal to kill seems to be the result of cowardice, as opposed to religious or moral conviction. His struggle to reconcile his beliefs to the zombie apocalypse is shown in snippets: he cannot kill a walker wearing a cross; he pulls off his clerical collar and throws it into a fire; he rips out pages of a bible; but his actions ensure that he is as unsympathetic as possible.

When Rick and his group continuously protect and provide for him, he betrays them to Deanna Monroe, the leader of the Alexandrians (Lynch, 2015: "Spend").

Even though he continues to manifest signs of trauma and guilt, Gabriel remains unsympathetic due to his ridiculousness and incompetence. In the next episode, "Conquer", he goes for a walk outside the community and approaches a walker feeding on a corpse, saying, "I'm ready", seemingly offering himself up to death. When the corpse also begins to resurrect, he changes his mind and is finally able to act and destroy the walkers. He returns to Alexandria and does not close the gate properly, enabling the walkers to breach the perimeter. When Sasha arrives for counsel at the church, he blames her for the death of Bob and Tyreese. She wants to kill him, but he is indifferent. Maggie intervenes and makes them pray with her. After this, Gabriel tries to redeem himself, especially seeking Rick's approval, demonstrating a semblance of a character arc. Rick does not forgive Gabriel until the priest protects Judith from the walkers and leads the church members into the streets to help Rick clear the town of walkers. The representation of Rick as a messiah clearly resonates with Gabriel, who zealously proclaims, "Rick can do anything" (Nicotero, 2017a: "Rock in the Road"). Over the next three seasons, Gabriel seemingly grows from strength to strength. He attempts to rescue others; unlike Rick and Daryl, he is mostly unsuccessful. At one point, his heroics cost him the sight in one of his eyes.



Figure 21 Covering himself in walker guts results in an eye infection

In the image above, Gabriel bears a striking resemblance to Morgan with his bloodshot eyes. Gabriel eventually loses the sight in one eye, which turns completely white. The Governor and Carl also receive physical damage to one eye and wear eye patches to cover their disfigurement; Gabriel does not cover his blind eye and it is on

display for all to see. Sigmund Freud claims: “The blinding in the legend of Oedipus, as well as elsewhere, stands for castration” (Freud, 1900: 398). Freud does not explain how he came to this conclusion, but it applies well to Gabriel. The male gaze is the act of representing women as sexual objects for the pleasure of a heterosexual male viewer (Mulvey, 1989a). Partially or completely blinding a person is obviously disempowering; therefore, obscuring the male gaze is a symbolic castration. White slave owners punished their black slaves for looking at their “masters”; bell hooks drew inspiration from this idea to develop the concept of the oppositional gaze (hooks, 1992). While hooks focuses on black female spectatorship, I find resonance between her theory that “the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating ‘awareness’ politicizes ‘looking’ relations – one learns to look a certain way in order to resist” (hooks, 1992: 116) and the representation of the gaze in *TWD*. To lack the ability to see in a zombie apocalypse is a death sentence: Gabriel’s partial blindness means that he is never completely independent.

In another surprise departure from established stereotypes and tropes, Gabriel forms a relationship with Anne/Jadis and, later, Rosita. He raises Rosita’s daughter, Socorro, as if she is his own daughter. He also takes difficult decisions, the type that Tyreese rejected, to protect his loved ones. When Dante strangles Siddiq, the biological father of Socorro, and leaves Siddiq to resurrect with his baby in the same room, Gabriel strangles Dante in retaliation and thus ensures the safety of the community as Dante was a Whisperer mole who poisoned Alexandria’s water. This seems to have been a careful decision on the part of the writers, showrunners and producers of the serial: Dante, a Hispanic man, kills a Middle-Eastern man, Siddiq, and is in turn killed by a black man.

Gabriel is also the council leader for Alexandria. Gabriel is neither a warrior nor an autocratic leader; he is clumsy but is still willing to sacrifice himself to save others. In the tenth season’s finale, it appears that his time has come to an end, only to be saved at the last moment by Maggie and a masked stranger. Perhaps Gabriel’s next arc will involve being allowed to procreate with Rosita and becoming a stronger leader without having to rely upon others to rescue him.



Figure 22 King Ezekiel and Shiva

Ezekiel presents an interesting style of leadership, which can be fruitfully linked to the presidency of the USA. Vaughn (2012) notes that in the 2008 presidential election, journalists, essayists, and actors took credit for the first Black American President, Barack Obama's election. For instance, Morgan Freeman and Sidney Poitier are notable examples of actors who prepared "the white electorate to imagine black executive leadership as not only possible but also positive" (Vaughn, 2012: 45). These actors are known for their eloquence, carriage, and dignified demeanour. However, Vaughn argues that these comparisons are incomplete and goes on to examine negative and positive portrayals of black presidents in US popular culture. He argues that there are three categories of fictional black presidents:

First, [some] films dealt with the unreality of black presidents being elected by the American public. Second, films featuring fictional black presidents were frequently set well into the future in decayed and degraded settings when black leadership co-existed with a declining civilization. Third, films set in real time or the imaginable near future pitted black presidents against threats of such epic proportions that the very fate of the nation, if not the world, was in the president's frequently under-matched hands.

(2012: 52)

There are considerable overlaps between Ezekiel's leadership and Vaughn's second and third categories. Using the examples of the presidents in *The Fifth Element* and *Idiocracy*, Vaughn argues that the presidents in the second category are imposing, ineloquent and incompetent: Ezekiel requires a tiger to ensure that visitors are terrified and impressed; his language is peppered with phrases that are archaic

but do not trace to a single period in history; and finally he leads his fighters to their death. *The Fifth Element* (1997) and *Idiocracy* (2006) both include a white protagonist who saves the day in the same way as Carol always appears when things are bleakest for Ezekiel (Vaughn, 2012: 55). The third category of presidents tend to belong to science fiction apocalyptic dramas; examples include *Deep Impact* (1998) and *2012* (2009). In these films, the presidents are already in office when a natural disaster threatens to destroy Earth. The presidents “played by Morgan Freeman and Danny Glover, respectively, are forced into sombre ceremonial roles remembered more for their solemn poise in delivering mankind’s [sic] eulogy than for policy leadership in combating the problem at hand” (Vaughn, 2012: 56). This argument holds some validity: for example, in *Independence Day* (1996), the white president played by Bill Pullman joins the climactic battle by piloting one of the planes and leading an attack on the alien ship. In contrast, Will Smith’s character is a Captain; however, his contribution is significant and he played a saviour role in subsequent science fiction films, although none of these were presidential or leadership parts.⁴⁴ Similarly to Vaughn’s argument, O’Brien (2017: 177) maintains that Smith’s “ultimate manifestation of his heroic screen persona is only achievable, and permissible, in an overtly fantastic milieu often regarded as lacking substance and resonance”. Ezekiel marks a departure from these previous representations: neither wholly negative nor positive, he is a complex character.

While Gabriel led a democratic council, King Ezekiel is the first black male independent leader. While other black characters tend to follow either Rick or an antagonist (for example, the Governor, Gareth, and Negan), Ezekiel leads his own community as a benevolent ruler. His introduction is theatrical: after being injured, Carol is introduced to the leader of The Kingdom by Morgan who does not prepare her, or the audience, for what follows. He takes her to an unlit theatre or hall with a stage. The lights on the stage reveal Ezekiel sitting on a throne with his pet tiger, Shiva, beside him. Ezekiel also has a bodyguard, Jerry, next to him. He sports long dreadlocks and adopts an antiquated speech pattern:

Ezekiel: Shiva, enough. The fair maiden has been through a myriad of trials.
[Shiva continues to growl] They are our guests.

⁴⁴ Will Smith played a saviour role in the following films: *Men in Black* trilogy (1997, 2002, 2012), *Wild Wild West* (1999), *I, Robot* (2004), *I am Legend* (2007), *Hancock* (2008) and *Seven Pounds* (2008).

Jerry: Chill it up, "S." Chill it up!

Ezekiel: Jerry, you are a faithful steward, but your words leave me pitch-kettled. I understand your concern, Shiva. You haven't met Carol. Nor have I. But if she is a friend of Morgan, we shall consider her a friend of the realm until proven otherwise.

Morgan: She's doing better, thanks to you and your people, so ...

Ezekiel: Indeed. It pleases me to see you up and about, Carol. I am King Ezekiel. Welcome to the Kingdom. [Shiva continues to growl, but softly] You have been addressed by the king, yet you remain silent. Do I detect skepticism? Perhaps you think me mad. Perhaps you see this place as nothing more than a mirage. So ... tell me ... what do you think of The Kingdom, Carol? What do you think of the king?

Carol: I ... think you're amazing. It's amazing. And your Sheba –

Jerry: It's, uh, "Shiva."

(Nicotero, 2017b: "The Well")

Ezekiel immediately notices Carol's shock and bemusement; she is neither in awe nor grateful and rejects his offer of pomegranates. Her reaction diminishes his attempt at representing himself as a monarch. Ezekiel is pompous, but he is considerate of his guests, well-mannered and chivalrous. Ezekiel's speech pattern is notable and contrasts significantly with T-Dog and Morgan's use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Speech in the serial, as discussed in relation to Daryl, is not only a marker of class, but also race. African American English (AAE) is what Salikoko Mufwene grudgingly defines as the variety of "English as spoken by or among African Americans", but proceeds to problematise this definition in the ensuing argument (Mufwene, 2001: 21). Rosina Lippi-Green attempted to define AAVE (more commonly referred to as "ebonics"), but also realised that definitions offered by linguists and African Americans are a site of conflict and remain controversial (Lippi-Green, 1997). In the first episode, Morgan strives to correct Duane's use of AAVE even though he is using African American English (AAE):

Rick: You shot that man today.

Morgan: Man?

Duane: Weren't no man.

Morgan: The hell was that out your mouth just now?

Duane: It wasn't a man.

(Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye")

T-Dog also uses AAVE and Merle Dixon weaponises it in his racist diatribes, using a condescending tone to refer to T-Dog as “bro” and “Mr Yo” (MacLaren, 2011: “Guts”). Both episodes were written by a white man: Frank Darabont. The dialogue is arguably his perception of how African Americans speak. It is a prevalent trope in popular culture: “Indeed, the use of negatives, particularly a double negative, is a telltale sign of African American Vernacular English” (Gates, 2018: 18). In other words, Darabont has relied once again on a stereotype to inform his script.

There are social and economic repercussions relating to AAE and AAVE. Douglas Massey and Garvey Lundy attempted to rent units in Philadelphia using three linguistic styles: White Middle Class English, Black Accented English, and Black English Vernacular. Their research gathered dramatic evidence of discrimination against African Americans (Massey and Lundy, 2001). Switching from AAVE to “Standard American English” (SAE), itself a contentious issue, is an example of “code-switching” (Koch, Gross and Kolts, 2001: 31). Andrew Billings demonstrates in his study that speakers of Black English (BE) were perceived to be less credible than speakers of SAE (2005).

Some recent films explore this issue. For instance, in the film *Sorry to Bother You* (Riley, 2018), the protagonist, a young black male, Cassius Green (Lakeith Stanfield) is a telemarketer who only becomes successful when he acquires a “white voice”; and *BlacKkKlansman* (Lee, 2018) is about a black police officer, Detective Ron Stallworth (John David Washington) who infiltrates the Ku Klux Klan through telephone calls.

For my purposes, and from a popular culture point of view, AAVE is a concern when it pertains to representation and perceptions of success and credibility. This explains why Ezekiel employs antiquated and theatrical speech patterns to distinguish himself from others. In order to be the leader of a community, he needs to go beyond “standard English” to be deemed competent.

Eventually, the Kingdom is drawn into the war against the Saviours, joining an alliance with Alexandria and Hilltop. After a spate of victories, Ezekiel grows overconfident, and loses his thirty-four of his soldiers to a machine gun in a Saviour outpost. He is shot in the leg, but his soldiers surround the King, sacrificing themselves so that he can survive. In a tragic scene, he crawls out from under their bodies and tries to check to see if any of his people had survived. Eventually, they begin to turn and pursue him as he humiliatingly scoots on his bottom, trying to escape from them.

Eventually one of his soldiers, Alvaro, rescues him, but dies when Gunther, a Saviour, shoots him. He refers to Ezekiel as a “conman in a costume” (Liu, 2018b: “Some Guy”). Jerry, Ezekiel’s bodyguard, kills Gunther and rescues Ezekiel; however, they are soon on the verge of being overwhelmed by walkers. Like Gabriel, Ezekiel is saved at the last moment by a white woman as Carol arrives just in time to save them.

Ezekiel and Carol eventually marry and adopt a son, Henry; however, their happiness is short-lived as Henry dies and they are forced to abandon the Kingdom. As if that were not tragic enough, Ezekiel has thyroid cancer, so he is neither killed by a white character nor does he have the luxury of a heroic death. His adventures do not appear to have come to an end, as he leaves Alexandria with Eugene, Yumiko and Princess to find Stephanie, Eugene’s love interest, from another settlement. The season finale shows armoured soldiers surrounding them; it appears that they are from the Commonwealth, a community which might have treatment options available for Ezekiel. Significantly, Ezekiel does not display his neck. Instead, he wears a scarf; it is unclear whether he does not want pity or whether this stems from a desire to control how he is perceived by others. Ezekiel has not lost his life, but he is stripped of his kingdom, wife, child and health in a sad and disappointing conclusion to his character arc.



Figure 23 Ezekiel exposes the goiter on his neck

In an example of white male privilege, Robert Kirkman decided to name an animal after a Hindu God.⁴⁵ Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva are the Gods of creation, preservation and destruction, respectively (Dalal, 2010). Given the

⁴⁵ For consistency, all Gods are referred to in this thesis with a capital “G”.

numerous options that Kirkman had for names, he chose to belittle the religious views of a minority in his country by equating Lord Shiva with an animal. I also reject the possible argument that he might have been alluding to the tiger's Indian origin or destructive powers as I doubt that Kirkman would have used the name of a deity or religious figure from another religion with impunity. The lack of empathy or common sense in picking this name indicates a general lack of awareness of how Kirkman's "creative" choices impact on real people.

This chapter established that black male characters were initially portrayed as stereotypes. They were systematically killed off, sometimes in extended gruesome sequences until constant criticism forced the writers to halt this practice. Not being able to kill black characters forced the writers to try and find creative ways for the characters to leave the show. Some of the decisions were ludicrous and improbable and perhaps reflected irritation on the writers' part. The only two leaders to emerge from the change in representation required rescuing from a white female character. This indicates that in the *TWD* hierarchy, race is a more powerful structuring factor than gender; therefore, the next chapter explores white female leadership in the serial.

Chapter Four – White Femininity: Leaders and Victims



Figure 24 Carol arrives just in time to save everyone

In my previous chapter, I examined the representation of black men in *The Walking Dead*. I argued that when black men attain leadership roles, white women become integral in sustaining those positions. These men ultimately lose their positions when the women withdraw their support, illustrating that white women enjoy a more privileged position in the show's social hierarchy. The existence of white women leaders in the show necessitates investigation since it flies in the face of hegemonic masculinity. "Emphasised femininity" is considered the ideal form of femininity that complies with male authority and domination (Connell, 1987, 1995). However, just as there are multiple femininities, there are also women who resist and rebel against patriarchal structures. White female leaders suggest that race, rather than gender, structures the power-relationships in the show. An intersectional approach sheds light on oppression, and "the matrix of domination" describes how these intersections are organised (Collins, 1990, 2004). For some scholars, such as Mimi Schippers (2007), hegemonic femininity is synonymous with emphasised femininity; however, Patricia Hill Collins observes that there are "hierarchies of femininity" within which social categories intersect "to produce comparable categories of hegemonic, marginalized, and subordinated femininities" (2004: 187). Drawing upon this idea, Laura Hamilton, Elizabeth A. Armstrong, J. Lotus Seeley, and Elizabeth M. Armstrong propose the following definition:

Hegemonic femininities are the most celebrated cultural ideals of womanhood in a given time and place that serve to uphold and legitimate all axes of oppression in the matrix of domination simultaneously.

(2019: 322)

Hegemonic femininities occupy “intermediate positions” as they enjoy a higher status and exert power over other women and some men, but remain subject to hegemonic masculinity (Collins, 2004: 188). White women occupy hegemonic and emphasised femininities in *TWD*. This chapter expands upon the existing scholarship on the representations of white women in *TWD* by exploring how suicide and leadership are mediated through white femininity in the serial. Even though the Western visual elements become more dominant as technology can no longer be replaced in *TWD*, the misogynistic traditions arising from the cowboy masculinity and frontier heroism are gradually abandoned.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) starred a black male protagonist, Ben (Duane Jones), who takes charge of the situation. Barbra⁴⁶ (Judith O’Dea) alternates between screaming, running, and being unresponsive in the farmhouse. It is only towards the end of the film that she tries to help, but she becomes paralysed with shock after seeing her undead brother and dies shortly thereafter. Almost forty-four years later, in another farmhouse, in *The Walking Dead*, Beth Greene lies catatonic (Gierhart, 2012b: “Triggerfinger”; Johnson, 2012: “Nebraska”). Beth cannot accept her brother and mother’s death in another parallel to the original Barbra, who lost her brother to zombies. The remake of *Night* reinvents the character; this androgynous Barbara (Patricia Tallman) sports a short pixie haircut, trousers, a jacket, and a gun, forsaking the long hair, dress, and heels that marked the previous Barbra as a “damsel in distress”.

⁴⁶ In the credits of *Night of the Living Dead*, the character’s name is listed as “Barbra” and not the usual spelling of “Barbara”. However, the remake lists the character as “Barbara” in the credits. I will employ the respective spellings when discussing each version of the character.



Figure 25 The original Barbra vs the new Barbara

The contemporary Barbara diametrically opposes the hysteria and passivity of her predecessor. She does not wait for her brother to rescue her, but fights back against her attacker. She demonstrates her agency, strength, and self-possession throughout the film. In another stark departure from the original film, Ben (Tony Todd) is killed by his antagonist, Harry (Tom Towles) and reanimates. This Harry survives, only for Barbara to kill him and exact vengeance, establishing a pattern of black male subordination in the remake. Beth disrupts this trend when she sacrifices herself for Noah (although this gesture is for nought as Noah dies just six episodes later).

The new Barbara is reminiscent of the 1980s and 1990s female action heroes, Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in the *Alien* series and Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) in the *Terminator* franchise. Ripley and Connor are working-class; Ripley was initially a Warrant Officer in *Alien* (Scott, 1979) and a power loader in *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986), but unwillingly assumes a leadership role in the face of carnage. Connor was initially a waitress in *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984), then learns to protect herself and her son from killing machines. Carol Peletier follows in the footsteps of these female action heroines, withstanding the trauma that accompanies bloodshed. Almost half a century later, Beth adopts Barbra's passivity and "damsel in distress" role, undoing the progress that the new Barbara embodies. While Deborah Kennedy (2018) views Beth's beauty and traditional femininity positively, perceiving her as a Gothic heroine, I consider the representation of Beth as regressive. Like the original Barbra, both Lori and Beth, who embody emphasised femininity, are dead; furthermore, the previous Barbra and Beth's equivalences suggest that women's portrayal in the zombie genre remains stagnant. In contrast, like the latter Barbara, Carol survives, along with her women warrior counterparts, by overcoming her fear

and learning to protect herself and others, thus entering an arena that is coded as masculine.

The dominance of hegemonic masculinity manifested in the majority of survivor groups being led by white men. Due to death, storylines ending or actors' departure from the show, the high turnover of characters has resulted in an ensemble cast⁴⁷ by the tenth season. Leadership appears to be more diverse with black men (one of whom is partially blind), a multiracial woman, and a white homosexual man in charge of the various communities after Rick and Maggie's departure (Teng, 2019: "Who Are You Now?"). At the end of the Whisperer War, both the Kingdom and Hilltop have fallen. Since the fifth season, there have been a few white female leaders who have either died or left the show. There are currently only two white female characters who have escaped this fate: Carol and Maggie Rhee (née Greene), who perform hegemonic femininity. They initially uphold the existing axes of domination by supporting and following Rick, despite leading their own communities. Thus far, the only female character to survive from the first season has been Carol, who has endured a radical transformation from a poor, submissive, and abused housewife into an empowered, independent warrior. She becomes Queen Carol, co-regent, with King Ezekiel, of the Kingdom. When their adoptive son, Henry, is murdered by Alpha, Carol abandons her marriage and community, intent on retribution. After achieving her objective, Carol wishes to ensure Alexandria's stability before departing with Daryl for New Mexico. On the other hand, Maggie enjoyed a privileged upbringing on her father's farm and attended college before the apocalypse. She is happily married to Glenn Rhee before Negan brutally murders him. Maggie rules Hilltop, but relinquishes her position after Rick's apparent death and departs with her son, Hershel, to search for new communities with Georgie. Carol asks Maggie to return for the Whisperer War, but now that Hilltop has fallen, it is uncertain whether Maggie will assume the mantle of leadership again, pursue revenge against Negan or forge a new path. Both Maggie and Carol, therefore, have relinquished positions of leadership and have survived thus far.

The dynamic between white men and white women in the post-apocalyptic genre appears to be dominated by reproductive motives: *A Boy and His Dog* (Jones, 1975) is about Vic (Don Johnson) and his telepathic dog, Blood, who helps Vic search

⁴⁷ An ensemble cast refers to a "cast of several actors with equal prominence" (Kroon, 2010: 250).

for women to rape in exchange for food. The women of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, 2015) are either wives of Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne), selected for breeding with him or unattractive fertile women attached to milking devices. Imperator Furiosa (Charlize Theron) is a notable exception to this rule in serving as a war captain: it is unclear whether her superior fighting abilities are more valued, or if the only visible marker of difference, her prosthetic arm, renders her undesirable for reproduction. Theron revealed in an interview that Furiosa was infertile, although the film does not include this information (Sperling, 2015). More recently, *Light of My Life* (Affleck, 2019) imagines a world where a pandemic wipes out most of the female population; a father (Casey Affleck) must protect his young daughter, Rag (Anna Pniowsky), from other men who are always on the hunt for women for sexual purposes. In the zombie apocalypse genre, as Gerry Canavan observes, reproduction is a central concern:

“Proper” control over wombs, and anxiety that they will somehow be captured, polluted, or compromised, is a kind of Ur-myth for the apocalyptic genre in general and the zombie sub-genre in particular; speaking broadly, the function of women in most apocalyptic narratives is to code the ending as “happy” or “sad” based on their continued availability to bear the male protagonist’s children when the story is over.

(2011: 444)

Canavan relates this argument to Lori Grimes in the comic version of the series as both Lori and her daughter, Judith, die. Nevertheless, this observation also resonates with Lori’s television counterpart, who dies during childbirth, while Judith survives. The show’s conservative moral compass is demonstrated by Lori’s demise, which can be seen either as a punishment for infidelity or a sad mistake, as she was impregnated by Shane and not her husband, Rick. Since Shane also dies after attempting to murder Rick, both transgressors suffer the consequences of acting against the protagonist. Pregnancies are few and far between in the ten seasons of *TWD* and do not form a major part of this chapter’s exploration of the dominant representations of white women on the show. Unlike the minorities in the serial, many of the white female characters do not appear to be limited to stereotypes: they have different class affiliations, ages, sexual orientations, relationship statuses and have enjoyed complex character arcs and carefully crafted backstories. However, the way they are portrayed in suicide and leadership seems to be linked to research in these

areas, as I will discuss later in this chapter. First, though, I will explore the relevance of feminist paradigms for understanding *TWD*.

Post-apocalyptic fiction typically invites a return to “traditional values”. This is evident early in *TWD* as the “separate spheres” dichotomy becomes manifest. This doctrine involves a separation between the public and domestic space; white men went out to work, whilst white women remained at home (Kuersten, 2003: xvi). Propaganda became necessary to keep women satisfied with this arrangement. During the nineteenth century in the US and UK, the “Cult of True Womanhood” or “Cult of Domesticity” represented a value system for wealthy and middle-class white women, centring on the family and home (Welter, 1966). These women were expected to exhibit four cardinal values: “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (Welter, 1966: 152). Literature, such as Coventry Patmore’s poem, “The Angel in the House” (1863), became a crucial part of the discourse that propagated these ideals. As a writer who worked at home, Virginia Woolf rejected this caricature. Confronting Patmore’s patriarchal construction of an idealised femininity, Woolf advocates killing the stereotype of the Angel in the House (2008: 140). Heeding Woolf’s call, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar identify the “monster”, the angel’s opposite and double, as a target that should also be eliminated (2000: 17). If the white woman did not fulfil her decorative and supportive function, then she could be perceived as a monster-woman, embodying negative qualities such as rebelliousness and madness. These characteristics are not threatening enough to cast the monster-woman into an adversarial role since she is always unequal to a man because of her gender.

The inequality between men and women is institutionalised in and through patriarchy. If women must remain at home, maintaining it to rear children and support their husbands, then men have to work to provide for the family. The concept of “patriarchy”, embedded in the Bible and Roman law, spread throughout Europe and eventually influenced the legal systems of colonies (Miller, 2017). The *paterfamilias* or property owner was considered the head of a family and exercised authority over slaves and kin (Miller, 2017: 8-9). Religious and legal frameworks confined the identity of a woman to her filial and spousal relationships. In the Bible, the first woman, Eve, was created from the rib of the first man, Adam, giving rise to the essentialist claim that women are inherently incomplete because they were once part of men. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, first-wave feminism marked a period in

which legal inequalities became the focus of activism, culminating in the suffrage movement (Sanders, 2006).

Once women had gained the right to vote, there were still other systemic socio-economic, race, legal, and cultural forms of oppression. For two decades from the 1960s onwards, second-wave feminism attempted to address these inequalities (Thornham, 2006). Feminist theory and activism has always focused on the concept of patriarchy to analyse the oppression of women. Early feminist theory was expressed in works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* ([1970], 2000), and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1974). Beauvoir (1953), recognising the denial of women's individuality, argues that women are synonymous with wombs and are therefore "Other". Since a man is independent, he is a subject; a woman's dependence renders her an object. "Patriarchy is not only male domination of females but also a militaristic hierarchy among males", according to Millet, but of equal concern is that "[d]ictatorships return again and again to a more virulent patriarchy" ([1970] 2000: xii; xiii). Given the political climate of the USA in the early 2020s, this observation has proven prescient. Friedan drew attention to the dissatisfaction women experienced, even countering the assumption that women should be fulfilled by marriage, mothering, and housework; if they pursued activities outside the home, such as employment and education, they were considered unnatural and unfeminine. Feminist film theorist, Laura Mulvey ([1974] 1989), argues that patriarchal society is polarised between the active/male and passive/female. Mulvey draws upon Sigmund Freud's discussion of *scopophilia* — the pleasure in looking at other people as objects — and applies it to cinema (1989: 16). She argues that films objectify and sexualise women through the controlling male gaze. Despite the social advances that have taken place since the 1970s, scopophilia is present as a theme in *TWD*, as I will show through my analysis of selected female characters.

Feminist television criticism has taken inspiration from feminist film criticism such as Mulvey's, but has taken into account the unique challenges of analysing television programmes, such as the length and ongoing nature of programmes. Second-wave feminism inspired quantitative and qualitative research into the representation of women on US television programmes (McCabe, Liarou, Agger, Akass, Buonanno, Chung, Delveroudi, Esan, Horsely-Heather, Jackson, Jedlickova, Kirsch, Leman, Mello, Mithani, Stolyar, Sawhney and Turnbull, 2020). The postfeminist

backlash,⁴⁸ third-wave and fourth-wave feminism developed in tandem with television research. The underrepresentation of women behind and in front of the camera is an ongoing issue. Assumptions such as the media reflects reality; men and women are passive consumers; and researchers are able to resist images because of privileged access to this knowledge, led to challenging the criticisms against stereotypical and demeaning images of women (Fenton, 2006). Charlotte Brunsdon, Julie D'Acci and Lynn Spigel (1997) understood the importance of feminist television criticism as they identified that mass media representations are linked to women's oppression: a position I share.

Feminist television criticism has also taken other directions. There is an emphasis on so-called "women's genres" and female spectatorship and reception. Soap operas do not receive the same respect accorded to programmes classified as Quality TV. Charlotte Brunsdon (2000) attributes this distinction and devaluation to gendered hierarchies of taste. Forsaking the popular quantitative content analysis approach, Ien Ang (1985) analyses audience responses to the popular 1980s soap opera, *Dallas*. Ang placed an advertisement in a women's magazine requesting readers to write to her about what they liked or disliked about the show. She then traced the ideologies and images in the letters in an attempt to understand the pleasure that the letter-writers derived from *Dallas*. Ang embraced her subjectivity as a fan of the show, but noted some ambivalence due to her "identity as an intellectual and a feminist" (Ang, 1985: 12). Ang is unapologetic about pursuing a genre (the soap opera) in a medium (television) that were not popular areas of study at the time.

Television is traditionally associated with the domestic sphere in America. When television first entered households, it garnered extreme reactions about its possible negative or positive effects on the family. Similar to Ang, Lynn Spigel (1992) used women's magazines to investigate television history. She first explores the relationship between entertainment and the home from the Victorian period to post-World War II; she then turns her attention to various controversies associated with television. For instance, the television industry and advertisers promoted the family ideal in post-war America; the role of women was to contribute to this ideal family by conforming to the Victorian values regarding domesticity. Television daytime

⁴⁸ Some feminist thinkers (for example, Roiphe, 1993; Wolf, 1993; Denfeld, 1995) believe that postfeminism is not a backlash, but a continuation of feminist struggles for gender equality.

programming of variety programmes and soaps operas were designed to fit into a housewife's schedule. Even though married women were entering the work force, representations of working wives were noticeably absent. Continuing her focus on the family, Spigel (2001) investigates two claims: the media threatens family values by bringing public concerns into the private arena; and television threatens democracy by replacing discourse with packaged information that encourages passivity. Spigel disagrees with the premise of both arguments that the division of public and private spaces is natural: "I see the division of spheres as a historical phenomenon, and one that has changed its character over time" (2001: 9). This observation has proven prescient. In the 21st century, television is no longer confined to the home, and social media invites people across the world into private spaces. However, there are signs that television programmes and new media have the potential to influence politics. In relation to the recent upheavals in the US regarding antivaxxers, Qanon as well as the attack on Washington on 6 January 2021, public discourse points firmly in the direction of the passive consumption of Facebook and Fox News for the dissemination of disinformation.

Like Spigel, Christine Geraghty (1991) also observes the split between the public and personal life in the first major study of the roles of women in soap operas. Geraghty argues that soap operas can be seen as a conservative genre, but they also have the power to transform prejudicial attitudes surrounding feminism, race, class, and sexuality. A high-profile case that serves as proof of this was when US Vice President Joe Biden endorsed equal marriage rights for gay and lesbian citizens: "I think *Will & Grace* [a popular sitcom] did more to educate the American public more than almost anything anybody has done so far. People fear that which is different. Now they're beginning to understand" (Abramovitch, 2012). This indicates that a television programme has the ability to transform the attitude of the most powerful man in America. It begs the question about what attitudes *TWD* might transform about different groups in the serial.

In this chapter I explore the characters of Andrea, Lori, Beth, Maggie, Deanna, Dawn, Beth, Jadis, Alpha and Carol. There is a plethora of white female characters in *TWD*, but I chose these particular characters since they fall roughly into three groups: feminine characters that appeal to the male gaze, mothers and leaders. They also perform emphasised, hegemonic and alternative femininities. Carol has arguably the

most interesting character arc in the show; however, she is in many ways similar to Daryl.

First, I examine the portrayal of Lori and Andrea, given that they were the only main female cast members in the first season. As a result, they have dominated the criticism of female representation on the show. *TWD's* fan base almost universally reviles Lori Grimes. Actress Sarah Wayne Callies, who plays Lori, was asked about the kind of comments she received from fans of the show, "I learned that people have what is either the temerity or the lack of good manners or both to walk up to a complete stranger in the middle of the day and go, 'I F---ing hate you'" (Gajewski, 2015). Laurie Holden, who played Andrea, was hated to the extent that she received death threats after her character shot fan favourite Daryl by mistake; producer Gale Anne Hurd asked Norman Reedus (who plays Daryl) to post a picture with Laurie Holden on social media, reminding the audience that the actress was not to be confused with the character in the series (Johnson, 2017). Despite Lori and Andrea's differing performances of femininity, they inspired similar levels of ire, suggesting misogynistic audiences. Andrea can be seen as more "feminist" than Lori, but I will interrogate such judgements.

Efforts to control women's bodies and reproduction are represented when Lori tries to abort her baby using morning-after-pills; she is confronted and shamed separately by Maggie and Rick for this decision (Boyd, 2012: "Secrets"). Angela Kang wrote this episode; it is surprising that a woman would misrepresent the morning-after-pill as an abortifacient. The showrunner, Glen Mazzara, reacted to the outcry by offering the following statement:

"The producers and writers of 'The Walking Dead' are fully aware that the morning-after pill would not induce an abortion or miscarriage," Mazzara responded in a statement obtained by TheWrap. "We exercised our artistic creative license to explore a storyline with one of our characters, not to make any pro-life or pro-choice political statement. We sincerely hope that people are not turning to the fictional world of 'The Walking Dead' for accurate medical information."

(Kenneally, 2011)

Despite these protestations, reproductive rights and other efforts to control women's bodies has continued to be a theme. Birth control in the USA has had a contentious history; over two centuries ago, advocates were jailed under obscenity

laws (Gordon, 2002: 8). More recently, new legislation in various states restricting access to abortions have been won by anti-abortion supporters demonstrating a further erosion of reproductive rights (Beckman, 2016). This may explain why birth control is so prominent on *TWD*. For example, Maggie relates a bizarre anecdote in which she reveals that when she returned from college, Beth unpacked her bags and discovered her birth control pills. Apparently, Beth was “so freaked out” about the idea of Maggie having sex that she (Beth) threw the pills into the duck pond (Gierhart, 2012: "Triggerfinger"). In addition, when Glenn is covertly searching for a pregnancy test for Lori, he randomly grabs condoms when Maggie appears, leading her to proposition him (Gierhart, 2012a: "Cherokee Rose").

In an oft-quoted scene, Lori and Andrea clash about their expected roles and performances of femininity. Lori embodies emphasised femininity as she argues that domestic activities provide stability whilst dismissing Andrea’s weapons training and attempt at guarding the camp, telling her: “The men can handle this on their own. They don’t need your help” (Dickerson, 2012: "18 Miles Out"). What has not been examined thus far is Andrea’s last word on the matter:

Playing house. Acting like the queen bee. Laying down rules for everybody, but yourself. You know what? Go ahead. Go in there and tell that little girl that everything's gonna be okay, just like it is for you. She'll get a husband, a son, baby, boyfriend.

(Dickerson, 2012: "18 Miles Out")

While this scene has been read as a pre-feminist vs feminist debate, or as a “cat fight” (since both women have had Shane as a sexual partner) (Baldwin and McCarthy, 2013; Gencarella, 2016; Keeler, 2016; Dunaway, 2018; Lavigne, 2018), one of the main themes that emerges is the idea that Lori is “acting like the queen bee”. This idea is introduced by Carol in an earlier episode when she asks Lori to ask for permission to cook for Hershel and his family in his house since, “You're Rick's wife. It sort of makes you our unofficial First Lady” (Ferland, 2012: "Chupacabra"). The description of Lori as a “First Lady” is apt. An American “institution”, the role of first lady has evolved over the years and is dependent upon various factors and constraints imposed by the president, staff, members of congress, the public and media (Wekkin, 2000). Gary Wekkin’s summary of various first lady roles identified by scholars is relevant to my analysis of Lori. The most relevant role is “the shield”, which is “a

classical marital partner who reflects the prefeminist 'helpmate' construct of womanhood: spouse, mother, caregiver, and soulmate, devoted to the needs of her political spouse" (Wekkin, 2000: 604). For instance, when the group questions Rick's leadership, Lori defends her husband and airs her displeasure with the group: "Y'all look to him and then you blame him when he's not perfect. If you think you can do this without him, go right ahead. Nobody is stopping you" (Dickerson and Horder-Payton, 2012: "What Lies Ahead"). Lori exemplifies conservative values, enabling us to confirm that she is performing emphasised femininity. She has no power of her own, but derives her authority and influence from her husband.

Andrea adopts a masculine gender performance, challenging the idea that women should be protected; she tries to learn about firearms, an action that is considered gender-deviant. She does not perform hegemonic femininity since she never gains power over other women or men. When she is first introduced, Andrea is angry that Rick has drawn walkers to their location and points her gun at him, demonstrating that she is emotional. Later he explains that the safety was on, so he was never in any danger. Incidents like this demonstrate her incompetence and impotence. Her eagerness to prove herself results in shooting Daryl by mistake; it is only her ineptitude with the weapon that saves Daryl's life (Baldwin and McCarthy, 2013; Wilson, 2019a). Like Lori, Andrea attempts to derive her power from a relationship with a man. In her case, it is Philip Blake, the Governor of Woodbury. When the Governor remains in his apartment and refuses to talk to the townspeople, Andrea delivers a motivational speech that calms them down so that they stop attempting to leave Woodbury (Glatter, 2013: "The Suicide King"). When it seems war will break out between the Prison and Woodbury, Andrea arranges a meeting between the Governor and Rick. She attempts to mediate the talks, but the men treat her as though she is an irritation; she is dismissed and excluded, leaving the men to talk and negotiate terms:

Rick: Oh, you want surrender? Come get it. You think we hit Woodbury heavy last time?

Andrea: Just take it easy, all right? We're here to settle this.

The Governor: You're right. Would you step outside?

Andrea: What?

The Governor: Rick and I, we got a lot to talk about.

Andrea: I'm not leaving.

Rick: I came to talk to him.

(Boyd, 2013: "Arrow on the Doorpost")

Andrea's marksmanship and leadership abilities improve as the serial progresses, but she engages in sexual relations with two antagonists, Shane and the Governor, leading to her undoing. Like Lori's, her death can be read as a gendered punishment for sexual incontinence (Lavin and Lowe, 2015; Gencarella, 2016; Erwin, 2018). Critics regard Andrea as having power and agency because of her proficiency with weapons and providing for the group by fishing with her sister Amy (Rees, 2012; Sartain, 2013). When the sisters return with the fish, the episode's director (Michelle MacLaren) uses a tracking shot to trail behind the lower half of the sisters' bodies, framing the fish (MacLaren, 2011: "Guts"). Andrea is in the centre of the frame. Even though they have engaged in a "masculine" activity, they are inevitably sexualised and objectified by the camera angle. Aside from fishing, in almost every shot in this episode, women are engaged in domestic activities (washing, ironing, sewing, and childminding). It is debatable that the female director engaged in a subversive act by drawing attention to the ludicrousness of the gender dynamics in the camp. In an interview, MacLaren declared, "I don't see myself as a female director, I see myself as a director who happens to be a woman" (Lloyd, 2017). Her disavowal of being labelled a female director could explain her complicity with using similar shots from preceding episodes to maintain the aesthetic and dynamic that Frank Darabont had established; still, noticeably fewer scenes of this ilk are present in the remaining episodes of the season.



Figure 26 Beth and Andrea's triumphant catch

Even though the sisters are responsible for catching fish and providing for the camp, Andrea does not accept the appreciation extended by the group for their actions. While they were fishing, the sisters discuss how their father taught them this valued skill, and when Morales thanks them, Andrea responds that they should thank Dale as it was his canoe and equipment, further deflecting and erasing their contribution. Notably, their mother's influence is not mentioned. A turning point in Andrea's development occurs when Amy dies; she is overwhelmed with grief and becomes suicidal (Sartain, 2013). Andrea is forced to abandon her suicide attempt when Dale pressures and manipulates her by declaring that he will die with her; Dale then takes away her gun to "protect" her in another paternalist act (Lavin and Lowe, 2015; Gencarella, 2016; Keeler, 2016; Wilson, 2019a). Afterwards, Dale expects Andrea to be grateful to him:

Andrea: Gratitude? I wanted to die my way, not torn apart by drooling freaks. That was my choice. You took that away from me, Dale.

Dale: But--

Andrea: But you know better? All I wanted after my sister died was to get out of this endless horrific nightmare we live every day. I wasn't hurting anyone else. You took my choice away, Dale. And you expect gratitude?

Dale: I don't know what to say.

Andrea: I'm not your little girl. I'm not your wife. And I am sure as hell not your problem. That's all there is to say.

(Dickerson and Horder-Payton, 2012: "What Lies Ahead")

While it can be argued that Andrea's emotionally vulnerable state justifies Dale's unsolicited "help", the circumstances negate this. Ironically, Andrea dies just as she had predicted: she is tied to a chair and locked in a room with a dying Milton (Dallas Roberts) who resurrects and bites her, but offscreen. In her last moments, Rick, Michonne and Tyreese discover her, and she shoots herself, restoring her agency. Laurie Holden and Dallas Roberts, who played Andrea and Milton respectively, revealed that they originally filmed a gruesome death sequence for Andrea, which left her as a disempowered victim (Ross, 2013; Lee, 2017b). Apparently this upset Robert Kirkman as Andrea plays a larger role in the comics, where she eventually becomes Rick's love interest; showrunner Glen Mazzara was apparently fired for this offence and then replaced by Scott Gimple, who refilmed a sanitised sequence (Masters, 2013).

Unsurprisingly, there has been much criticism of female representation on the show (Canavan, 2011; Baldwin and McCarthy, 2013; Greene and Meyer, 2014; Lavin and Lowe, 2015; Sugg, 2015; Wilson, 2018; Christian, 2018; Erwin, 2018; Keeler, 2018; B. Bennett, 2019; E. Bennett, 2019).⁴⁹ The first two seasons set the tone for most of the criticism regarding regressive gender roles. The gendered division of labour became a bone of contention: female characters relentlessly engaged in cooking, cleaning, laundry, ironing, sewing, and childminding, whilst the male characters protected the camp (Berk, 2015; Gencarella, 2016; Keeler, 2016, 2018; Erwin, 2018; Lavigne, 2018; Pugh, 2018). While Canavan argued that the graphic novel version of *TWD* advances a pre-feminist ideology as a result of its Western influences, Martina Baldwin and Mark McCarthy countered that *TWD* offers a postfeminist framework (2013). They cite Sarah Projansky's (2001) discussion of "new traditionalism", which is considered a backlash against feminism. While postfeminism is a nebulous topic with contesting definitions,⁵⁰ in this instance, postfeminist women are considered to forsake feminist ideology in a nostalgic retreat to traditional values. Lori Grimes embodies this image at the beginning of season 1, as she valorises motherhood, domestic chores and submission to her husband.

⁴⁹ Chapter 5 of this thesis focuses on the representation of black women in the series. Most of these articles mention black female characters without reference to their race. Where race is a factor in the discussion, I will reference it in the next chapter.

⁵⁰ Susan Faludi (1991) argues that postfeminism is a backlash against second wave feminism. Angela McRobbie (2004) asserts that the prefix "post" undermines feminism as it creates the impression that equality has been achieved. Rosalind Gill (2007) contends that postfeminism should be seen as a sensibility; however, it is used as a pejorative term against scholars who are not seen as sufficiently feminist. Elaine Hall and Marnie Rodriguez (2003) note that some young women reject the label of feminist whilst supporting feminist goals, but they feel that the objectives of feminism have been achieved. For instance, gaining the right to vote and reproductive choices is considered enough by these young women.



Figure 27 Carol inexplicably has a vintage cast iron and ironing board at the campsite

The writers and directors of the first two seasons of *TWD* seem not to have been able to conceive of tasks for female characters that did not involve domestic activities. In previous chapters, I demonstrated that hegemonic masculinity legitimises unequal gender relations. Many other scholars agree that the subordination of the women in *TWD* is linked to hegemonic masculinity (Greene and Meyer, 2014; Christian, 2018; Dunaway, 2018; Erwin, 2018; Wilson, 2019a, 2019b). Keeler notes the change that occurs during the third season with the female characters assuming the roles of “post-Western heroines”, which, she contends, fall into two categories: “postapocalyptic warriors” and those “who gradually develop into leadership roles” (2018: 430-431). Keeler’s groups of warriors and leaders are divided along racial lines, with the first group consisting of women of colour and the latter group consisting of white women. Keeler does not probe this issue, remarking that it is another example of “the show’s complex treatment of race and gender” (2018: 430). I agree with Keeler; therefore, I will address this gap in scholarly literature by examining how black women are represented in the serial in the following chapter.

Klaus Theweleit’s *Male Fantasies: Volume I* and *Volume II* (1987, 1989) explore the masculinity and gender relations of the German *Freikorps* (a paramilitary unit that existed between both world wars). Gencarella references how these texts distinguish between “white women” and “red women” in *Freikorps* literature to analyse the female characters in *TWD* (2016: 137). The colour white is associated with purity and virtue, while (in this instance) the colour red signified that the women were Communists. The white woman is idealised as “the nurse, the sister-in-arms to the soldier male, who blooms at the time of his suffering and who is consumed by her own” whilst the red

woman “manifests as a whore, a castrator of the soldier male, and as a monster” (2016: 137-138). Harper, Attwell, and Dolphin disagree with Gencarella’s comparative reading, noting that it ignores the effects of *TWD* and misrepresents incidents and characters (2017). While Gencarella does offer a compelling perspective of the elements of fascism evident in the serial, I agree with Harper et al. Gencarella’s examples of white and red women also illustrate this criticism. Lori is described as a white woman as she upholds and defends the gendered division of labour and her “words perfectly illustrate male fantasies of the white woman’s obedience” (2016: 137). While it is undoubtedly true that Lori subscribes to a traditional gender role, she would be classified as a red woman under Theweleit’s rubric through her association with Shane. Even Gencarella’s argument that Karen is a “rifle-woman”, “a peculiar version of the red [woman]”, is thin (2016: 138); Karen is a minor character who appears briefly in the third and fourth seasons, mostly in crowd scenes in Woodbury, and has hardly any dialogue. In his desperation to win, the Governor compels anyone who can carry a gun to attack the prison; when his people rebel, he shoots all of them, but narrowly misses Karen (Dickerson, 2013: “Welcome to the Tombs”). When an infectious disease spreads through the prison, and Karen falls ill, Carol kills her to stop it from spreading further (Ferland, 2014: “Infected”). Gencarella views this as “an act demonstrating the rifle-woman’s expendability and her impossible conversion to friend or white woman” (2016: 138). However, Karen forms a relationship with Tyreese, and he is heartbroken when she is murdered; Rick even exiles Carol for this act so it cannot be disputed that Karen was accepted as a member of the community.

It seems that women cannot seek protection from other women against either domestic or sexual violence. This follows the stereotypical representations of women being pitted against each other; instead of supporting one another, women end up being each other’s worst enemies. For example, Deanna Monroe tacitly permits a community member, Pete Anderson, to brutalise his wife, Jessie, and sons, Ron and Sam, because he is a surgeon. His profession makes him untouchable since he proves to be an invaluable resource during the post-apocalypse. As mentioned earlier, although Officer Dawn Lerner is in charge, she compromises her position by allowing a male police officer, Gorman, to rape a female patient, Joan. The actress who plays Joan is of multiracial descent. Joan’s arm is amputated after a walker bites her; she opens her stitches and bleeds out, but not before carving “Fuck You” into the floor. When Gorman tries to rape Beth, she is able to push Gorman onto Joan as she

resurrects. By ripping the unsuspecting Gorman's throat apart, walker Joan is able to exact her rape-revenge through her suicide. Nevertheless, Joan is also used by Beth as a weapon to preserve her "purity". Similarly, Sasha, a black woman, kills herself and is weaponised as a walker to benefit others.

Dawn and Deanna represent hegemonic femininities as they are leaders of other women and some men. They support hegemonic masculinity, which results in men defying and challenging their authority. Various female characters challenge the idea that women need to be protected; however, it is noteworthy that they seldom hold leadership positions or for long (E. Bennett, 2019). The first female leader encountered in the series is Dawn, who is considered a "weak leader"; the next, Deanna, is dismissed as "naïve and ineffective" (E. Bennett, 2019: 33). Bennet describes examples of Deanna's naiveté and ineffectual leadership: Deanna's decision to ban guns and not kill people, preferring to exile them instead, is shown as "foolish". Rick warns them against this lifestyle, and when Reg is murdered, she allows Rick to execute the murderer, Pete; thereafter, she defers to Rick's judgment. When the herd of walkers surround Alexandria, she is shown in a daze. It is only towards the end of her life, like Beth, that Deanna starts fighting back. She is bitten in the process and she does not commit suicide, but fights to the bitter end (E. Bennett, 2019: 33-34). Ultimately, in Bennett's view, Deanna embodies the qualities that Tomkins associates with the role of women in Westerns: language, culture, civilisation, and peace. However, this position is always proven to be wrong in Westerns, which centre on violence (E. Bennett, 2019: 34). Sugg (2015) also observes the nostalgic connection between the Western influence and regressive gender roles. Deanna's preoccupation with language and interviews results in Rick's assuming the role of a constable for Alexandria; Schimmelpfennig (2017) sees Deanna's purpose as only serving Rick's development as, when her democratic style of leadership fails, Rick's objections and behaviour are vindicated. Wilson also observes Rick's disapproval of Deanna's leadership style; he argues that the Alexandrians represent "the feminized liberal society that was originally annihilated during the zombie apocalypse" and mentions that when Deanna cedes to Rick it is because she recognises Rick's "capability as a warrior, something she entirely lacks"; this is, in turn, validates "patriarchy and traditional gender dynamics" (2019b: 48). There is some merit to these criticisms. There are few female leaders in the serial; the low number reflects the hegemonic masculinity that dominates most of the show. Moreover, the statistics of female

characters on prime-time television reflect this chronic underrepresentation. In a 2010-11 study of behind the scenes and on-screen women on prime-time television, women occupied fewer roles than men as they accounted for only 41% of all characters (Lauzen, 2011). Further findings include the fact that female characters were also much younger than male characters, which exposes them to being infantilised; 67% of male characters were in their 50s and 71% were 60 and above, which may have enabled them to condescend to and control female characters. Viewers were less likely to know the occupations of female characters than males, implying that this was not as important as their roles in families. At the end of the tenth season, the television landscape has changed significantly and Dr Lauzen's 2020 report reflects various platforms such as streaming, cable and broadcast networks. AMC is a cable network, so the following figures are relevant: 27% of cable programmes had female protagonists; females comprised 44% of speaking roles; females comprised 45% of major characters; 66% of female characters are white; female characters remain younger than male characters and also remain less likely to have an identifiable occupational status (Lauzen, 2020). The findings for behind the scenes were equally dismal: female creators, directors, producers, executive producers, editors and directors of photography comprised only 25% of individuals working in the field during 2010-11 and increased to 28% in 2019-2020 (Lauzen, 2011, 2020).

Dawn appeared in the fifth season, and Deanna in the fifth and sixth seasons, which were broadcast over 2014-15 and 2015-16 respectively. Women in law enforcement in the USA are drastically underrepresented as, in 2014, they constituted approximately 11.9% of officers (*Table 74: Full-Time Law Enforcement Employees by Population Group*, 2014). It was therefore progressive to portray a female officer in charge of a squad. Nevertheless, Dawn has to kill another male officer to become a leader; therefore, her position is illegitimate as this was a self-appointed promotion that was earned through murder and not police protocols. However, if there had not been an apocalypse, it seems highly unlikely that a female law enforcement officer would be able to achieve a leadership position. Deanna's political career also represents a minority in the series; in 2015, 19.4% of women held seats in the US Congress (*Women in U.S. Congress 2015*, 2015). *TWD* reflects the underrepresentation of female leadership in the USA. Dawn is an autocratic leader, whilst Deanna represents a more democratic style, but both approaches prove ineffective.

None of the characters (male or female; main, supporting or recurring) retains their power in the serial. Dawn and Deanna do not lose their positions solely because of their gender; however, gender stereotypes about leadership contribute to undermining their authority. Like the other male leaders in the show, they depend on the group's support or subjugation to maintain their positions. Dawn is the leader of a group of police officers, hospital staff, and various other survivors living in Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta. She reached this position apparently by killing the previous leader, Captain Hanson. As Dr Steven Edwards explains to Beth, "We lost people. That was the problem. Hanson cracked. He made some calls that got people killed. Dawn took care of things. She took care of him. She saw us past it. Kept us together. Kept us alive" (Satrazemis, 2015: "Slabtown"). Dr Edwards, however, is untrustworthy and motivated by self-interest; for instance, he indirectly kills a patient who could replace him. Legitimacy can be a central concern for leadership; powerful women are less likely to be recognised as legitimate authorities, which means that they receive less respect and admiration from subordinates (Vial, Napier and Brescoll, 2016). A vicious cycle begins if a female leader does not consolidate her position: subordinates will reject the leader, resulting in negative responses towards subordinates, which confirm the initial impression and continue to undermine the leader's authority (Vial *et al.*, 2016). Dr Edwards and the support staff serve as serfs; the police officers' opinions are what matters. For instance, Gorman warns Dr Edwards that Dawn will not always be in charge during their confrontation over Beth (Satrazemis, 2015: "Slabtown"). Later, Shepherd confirms the growing insurrection, "Dawn's running Grady into the ground. A bunch of us want her out and she knows it. Pretty sure she knows we want Lamson to replace her, too" (Gierhart, 2015: "Crossed").

When Beth wakes up in hospital, with a fractured wrist and superficial head wound, Dawn immediately tells her, "You were alone. If we hadn't saved you, you'd be one of them right now. So you owe us" (Satrazemis, 2015: "Slabtown"). Beth's injuries do not make sense: previously, she had injured her ankle in a bear trap, but this was not mentioned (Dickerson, 2014: "Alone"). Daryl chased the car, but it is possible the driver did not see him; it seems likely that the officers grabbed Beth, causing the wrist fracture, and knocked her out, causing the head injury. This scenario seems more plausible when Gorman introduces himself to Beth in the cafeteria and reveals that he grabbed her during the night:

Yeah, one [walker] was eyeing your thighs when we showed up. But I got there first. Jacked that rotter up. I'm Gorman. When someone does you a favor, it's a courtesy to show some appreciation. Unless you want me to write down everything you're taking. Everything costs something, right?

(Satrazemis, 2015: "Slabtown")

The fact that the police from Grady Memorial Hospital injure people, treat and then indenture them is confirmed when they run over Carol: they immediately pull out a stretcher and load her into the back of a station wagon (Mann, 2015). The toxic culture in the hospital is based upon paying off debt, which never ceases to accumulate since food and supplies are constantly added to an undefined bill. Dawn's obsession with control extends to her appearance as she uses the limited generator supply for her exercise bike and directs Noah on how to do her laundry. Noah reveals to Beth that he has not seen anyone work off their debt and leave in the year that he has been at the hospital, so they attempt to escape. Beth and later Carol are captured, so when Rick, Daryl and the group try to exchange Officer Shepherd and Officer Licari for Carol and Beth, Dawn demands Noah back. If Rick had not lost his temper, they would have had Officer Lamson as an additional hostage. Beth stabs Dawn with a tiny pair of scissors and Dawn retaliates by shooting Beth in the head. Daryl kills Dawn; one of the hostages, a female officer named Amanda Shepherd, prevents further bloodshed, and Rick's group leaves the hospital. Dawn's desire for control and to save face in the eyes of her officers and the hospital staff results in her death. These characteristics cannot be attributed to her gender performance; since Amanda took control of the situation and prevented further deaths, she would likely replace Dawn. Yet given the nature of the serial, it seems likely that eventually, the hospital will fall as they will eventually run out of their limited medical, food and weapon supplies in a city.

Deanna was an Ohio congresswoman before the apocalypse and became the leader of Alexandria after the apocalypse. Her husband Reg was a professor of architecture. Reg, with their sons Aiden and Spencer, built the wall that surrounds Alexandria. In adapting the comic series for television, the character's gender was changed: Deanna Monroe's comic counterpart is Douglas Monroe (Kirkman, Adlard and Rathburn, 2010). Douglas is similar to Dawn as he seized control of Alexandria from Alexander Davison; perhaps to avoid repetition, this storyline was omitted for

Deanna's character in the show. In another departure, Deanna has a loving marriage with Reg, whilst Douglas flirts and pursues other women despite his marriage to Regina. Both Douglas and Deanna are supposed to be characters in their late fifties. No reason was provided for this omission, but it could suggest that the writers felt that the stereotypical "dirty old man" was more believable than an older female performing in the same manner. Aside from these deviations, Deanna and Douglas's narrative arcs are similar: they knew that Pete Anderson abused his wife, Jessie, but ignored the behaviour as he was a doctor; Pete kills their respective spouses; they become depressed and withdraw from the community, handing over responsibility to Rick.

If Deanna had not banned weapons within the walls of Alexandria, then perhaps Pete may have been disarmed or stopped before he mistakenly killed Reg. Or Pete could have gone on a rampage and killed more people. Yet Rick's obvious attraction to Pete's wife, Rick's subsequent fight with Pete, Carol's threatening Pete, and Michonne's katana hanging as a decoration instead of being stored with the other weapons, have not been mentioned by any scholar as contributing factors to why Pete arrives unhinged at Rick's "trial". In addition, the Alexandrians were never forced to become "combat ready" because most of the walkers had been falling into a nearby quarry. As a politician pre-apocalypse, Deanna was always a civilian and democratic leader, just as Rick's sheriff's deputy training and post-apocalyptic experiences honed his autocratic leadership style. Dawn advocated exile over corporal punishment — even though it was tantamount to the death penalty in the postapocalypse — until her husband was murdered. This shows her hypocrisy. Her paralysis in the face of the attack by wolves and walkers can also be understood as the residue of trauma following the loss of her son and her husband; she does find her courage too late, but she is a failure as a mother to her remaining spoiled son, Spencer, as well. Like the comic book characters, Maggie and Pam, *TWD* demonstrates that leadership comes at a cost for women; they produce spoiled children by over-compensating materially for the time they spend away from the children and on their jobs. The show thus supports the conservative ideology that men should be leaders and providers whilst women should support the family by performing the role of homemakers. Deanna does not lose her position due to her gender; Rick would have taken over even if she was Douglas Monroe. However, Deanna is a victim, like numerous other characters, in that she serves Rick's narrative arc and proves through her incompetence why he should be in charge.

Another woman whose leadership is shown to be inferior to Rick's is Anne, known by her alias Jadis, the leader of the Scavengers. Rick tries to convince the Scavengers to join the war against the Saviours; they initially reach a deal for weapons and supplies, but the Scavengers betray the Alexandrians. When the Militia (led by Rick, Maggie and Ezekiel) are on the verge of defeating the Saviours, Jadis switches sides again, only to abandon Rick at the last moment. As a punishment, Simon (Negan's second-in-command) and the Saviours slaughter the Scavengers, Jadis relinquishes her identity and strange manner of speaking, and assumes her preapocalyptic name, "Anne", to assimilate with the Alexandrians.

At first, Jadis seems to defy gender stereotypes about leadership. She is comparable to Gregory (the first leader of Hilltop) because she is opportunistic and has no qualms about betrayal if it results in a better deal. Yet, the critical difference between Gregory and Jadis is that she has a communal mindset. Visually, the Scavengers represent their homogeneity through their appearance and language. They dress in dark colours and tend to slick down only the top part of their hair. Jadis rarely uses first-person pronouns, preferring plural pronouns; her speech pattern is also peculiar: "The boat things you took got taken" (January, 2017: "New Best Friends"). Her first sentence to the Alexandrians is, "Are you a collective, or does one lead?"; in response, Rick is thrust forward by Tamiel, a lieutenant of the Scavengers, who utters, "This" (January, 2017: "New Best Friends"). Masculine leadership is agentic; shows of dominance, assertiveness, and self-confidence are significant. Feminine leadership, on the other hand, is communal; thus, the importance of relationships, supportiveness and modesty are stressed (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Simon, therefore, understands that destroying the Scavengers would be the ultimate punishment for Jadis. Bereft of her people, Jadis performs emphasised femininity when she joins the Alexandrians.

It is not the first time Simon has committed mass murder: he is seen as responsible for the massacre of the Oceanside community as well. This community, comprising only women and children, is led by Natania. The Saviours had enslaved their previous community, which led to a quashed rebellion. In retaliation, Simon ordered the Saviours to murder every male over the age of ten, effectively decimating the community. Natania's daughter died during the rebellion, and her eleven-year-old grandson was executed; the survivors, including Natania's granddaughter, Cyndie, fled to Oceanside. To prevent the Saviours from discovering their community, Natania

orders the death of any person who discovers their community's existence. Cyndie disobeys this order when Tara arrives at Oceanside (Satrazemis, 2017: "Swear"). Rick and Tara attempt to convince Natania to join their fight against the Saviours. Even though Cyndie sides with the Alexandrians, Natania refuses, so the Alexandrians take all of Oceanside's guns, leaving them defenceless (Slovic, 2017: "Something They Need"). When Aaron and Enid come back later to ask Oceanside to join the fight, Natania attacks them, and Enid kills her (Satrazemis, 2018: "How It's Gotta Be"); Cyndie takes over as leader of Oceanside and Aaron eventually convinces the community to fight against the Saviours.

Oceanside is a matriarchy. The definition of "matriarchy" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was "rule by the mother"; there is also a distinction between matriarchy and "matrilineal descent", where rulership and property are passed down through the female line (Sanday, 2018). Since many archaeologists and anthropologists dispute the existence of female-dominated societies, twenty-first-century scholars have suggested that concept be re-envisioned in terms of the contribution mothers play in daily life and rituals (Sanday, 2018). Although they follow matrilineal descent, the women of Oceanside support Cyndie's leadership. While Natania focused upon insularity and preserving life, Cyndie's thirst for revenge resonates and aligns more with the community's needs and expectations. Natania and Cyndie defy hegemonic and emphasised femininities. Natania refuses to follow Rick and dies. Cyndie appears to perform hegemonic femininity as she leads Oceanside, but accepts Rick as leader of the Militia.

At this point in the narrative, Maggie rules Hilltop, King Ezekiel leads the Kingdom and Rick is the leader of Alexandria; however, Rick is the overall leader of the Militia. After Oceanside accepts Rick's proposal, each settlement contributes to the Militia that fights the Saviours. Later, Maggie breaks away from Rick's leadership by independently executing Gregory as Hilltop's elected leader, and Cyndie and the Oceanside members receive tacit approval and freedom to kill the Saviours who were responsible for their loved ones' deaths. This demonstrates that Oceanside did not submit completely to Rick's authoritarianism: they only wanted to avenge their loved ones. Maggie's defiance establishes that Cyndie does not perform hegemonic femininity as she does not require Rick's permission to exact revenge on the Saviours. This self-government signals the end of leaders embodying hegemonic masculinity in

the serial. Alexandria and Hilltop embrace democratic leadership and councils instead of authoritarianism.

In the same way as Dawn was replaced by a woman, Deanna wanted to groom Maggie as her replacement. She saw potential in Maggie before Rick was able to discern these qualities. Since Rick does not relinquish his power to Maggie, she demonstrates to the people of Hilltop why she is a better leader than Gregory. This is a gradual process that begins first in Alexandria. As Keeler states: "Maggie assumes a leadership role in Alexandria and successfully negotiates a trade agreement with Gregory" (2018: 431). It is only after this success that Rick confirms that "Deanna was right about you" (Satrazemis, 2016: "Knots Untie"). While this is true to a certain extent, Keeler has disregarded pertinent information about the situation. When Gregory first appears, he is clean and groomed; Rick attempts to introduce himself and talk to Gregory, but is deflected. Rick's appearance disgusts Gregory, who insists that Jesus escort them to a place where they can clean up. The preceding episode, "The Next World" (Skogland, 2016), opens with Rick notching a new hole in his belt because his weight loss demonstrates the precariousness of the food security of the community, so Rick swallows his anger:

Rick: You talk to him.

Maggie: Why?

Rick: I shouldn't. And you gotta start doing these things.

(Satrazemis, 2016: "Knots Untie")

Rick vacillates between not wanting to lead and not trusting others to lead. Aside from Maggie receiving an instruction or permission to lead the negotiation, she adeptly handles Gregory, who stares openly at her when they arrive. She remains amicable, friendly and polite in the first conversation, but immediately mentions that Glenn is her husband to prevent further awkward flirting from Gregory. As Gregory does not want to trade with the Alexandrians, he suggests that Hilltop could use Alexandrian labour and Maggie could be part of that deal. Maggie declines and suggests trading ammunition and medicine in exchange for food, which leads to his refusal. Gregory's behaviour resonates with research that shows sexual harassment is more likely to be directed towards a female leader than an employee; if the woman takes action against the perpetrator, then there will be swift repercussion against her both professionally and socially (Folke, Rickne, Tanaka and Tateishi, 2020).

Therefore, this is a realistic representation of the challenge an attractive young woman has to experience, even in an apocalypse. Even Negan signals his interest in Maggie after killing Glenn, so Gabriel lies and says that she is dead (Boyd, 2017: "Service"). When Negan discovers that she is alive, the Saviours refer to her as the "Widow" (Polson, 2018: "The King, the Widow and Rick"). While the other Militia leaders are referred to by their title or first name, she is referred to by her marital status, drawing attention to her gender and simultaneously desexualising and othering her. This is an echo of the way women are referred to by their marital status as "Miss" or "Mrs", while men are referred to as "Mr" irrespective of their marital status.

Maggie earns the role of Hilltop's leader since Gregory constantly switches sides and even hides when walkers attack Hilltop. Maggie, Jesus and Sasha risk their lives to save the community, earning Hilltop's loyalty. Once again, when Rick decides without consultation that Negan will live to avoid further clashes, his alliance with Maggie is fractured. Gregory loses to Maggie in a democratic vote and then attempts to assassinate her. She sentences him to death by hanging; this action inspires the Oceanside community to avenge the Saviours. Maggie tries to kill Negan, but his weak and pathetic state brings her pleasure, and it satisfies her need for revenge that he begs her to kill him. She leaves him to rot in the Alexandrian jail, but she leaves Hilltop with baby Hershel and joins Georgie's group to search for more communities. Maggie thus abandons performing either hegemonic or emphasised femininities.

The inequalities that Maggie was forced to endure in the show were mirrored by the experiences of actress Lauren Cohan, who played Maggie. AMC refused to pay Cohan an increase, despite the fact that she did not even seek pay parity with her male co-stars, Andrew Lincoln (who plays Rick) and Daryl Dixon (Norman Reedus) (Fitzpatrick, 2018). After negotiations failed, Cohan left the show after five episodes in the ninth season to star in a new show, on another network, ABC's *Whiskey Cavalier*. Her departure was entirely overshadowed by Rick's apparent death and departure in the same episode. As mentioned in the second chapter, Andrew Lincoln received an additional film trilogy deal, and Norman Reedus negotiated a \$20 million contract to remain on the show (Bishop, 2018; Goldberg, 2018). After *Whiskey Cavalier* was cancelled, new showrunner, Angela Kang, convinced Cohan to return for the season ten finale as well as the eleventh and final season finale (Kennedy, 2020). Accordingly, Maggie arrives with a masked stranger just in time to save Gabriel from some Whisperers.

Since the Whisperers ostensibly burned down Hilltop, it is unclear whether Maggie will rebuild the community. As the television serial will come to an end with the eleventh season, and Eugene's group made contact with the Commonwealth in the tenth season, it seems likely that Maggie may enjoy her comic counterpart's fate, where she eventually becomes the president of the Commonwealth, a network of communities numbering about fifty thousand survivors. However, her power comes at a cost as she neglects Hershel and spoils him, resulting in his developing into a flawed, selfish adult (Kirkman, Adlard, Gaudiano and Rathburn, 2019: "Rest in Peace"). Deanna also raised two spoiled and selfish sons, Aiden and Spencer, suggesting that women who pursue leadership risk neglecting their children who eventually develop into dysfunctional adults. In this way, the serial supports the conservative ideology that mothers must stay at home.

Carol arguably has the most surprising character development in the serial. In the first season, Carol is mainly seen undertaking domestic activities, such as washing and ironing clothes. At one point, when Rick asks her if she washed his clothes, she responds, "Well, best we could. Scrubbing on a washboard ain't half as good as my old Maytag [a washing machine brand] back home" (2011: "Tell it to the Frogs"). Her redneck husband, Ed, routinely pummels her and has an incestuous interest in their daughter, Sophia. Keeler (2018) argues that Carol's transformation begins late in the third season when she tries to convince Andrea to kill the Governor in his sleep; yet, there are signs early on that hint at Carol's psychological complexity. For example, she shields Sophia from Ed's advances, and Ed's death is liberating for her as she puts a pickaxe several times through his head to prevent his resurrection. In the last episode of the first season, when they are trapped in the CDC, she mentions that she has something that might help them. Shane derisively and misogynistically rebukes her, "Carol, I don't think a nail file's gonna do it", but she has a grenade that helps the group to escape incineration (Ferland, 2011: "TS-19"). Aside from Shane's misogynistic comments, the audience would also be taken off guard by this action; in the ensuing chaos, the moment is forgotten or not remarked upon by the other characters. After Sophia dies, Carol begins to assert herself over the next few seasons. She is comfortable and proficient with weapons. She even attempts to practice a caesarean section on a walker because of Lori's pregnancy and advises Andrea to murder the Governor in his sleep.

In the fourth season, after assuming a leadership role in the prison, she begins to teach the children in secret to defend themselves. Keeler views this as another sign of Carol's being a post-Western heroine. For Keeler, she moves between "savagery and civilization", recognising that peace will not last for long (2018: 431-432). To ensure that the children of the prison are better prepared to meet the dangers surrounding them than their parents would allow, Carol teaches them about weapons without seeking permission from their parents (Nicotero, 2014: "30 Days Without An Accident"). As a council member, Carol is in a position of leadership; however, she ignores the democratic process and displays authoritarian tendencies. No matter her intentions, she conceals this act as "story time", indicating that she is aware that some or all of the adults would object to this course of action. Her decision to kill an infected Karen and David is taken without consultation. Again, this signifies that she is willing to make tough and difficult decisions. She defies the stereotype of women as leading solely, or primarily, by consensus.

After the death of a group member, Ryan, she takes care of his daughters, Lizzie and Mika. When Lizzie calls Carol "mom", Carol does not entertain this and tells her, "Don't call me 'Mom'" (Brock, 2014: "Indifference"). Mika is similar to Sophia in that she is non-violent and unable to adapt to the apocalypse. The adoptees offer Carol a second chance at motherhood in spite of her protests; however, her joy is short-lived. Lizzie, the older sister, is unhinged: she displays psychopathic tendencies, such as murdering animals and playing with and feeding, walkers. Mika, the younger sister, is clearly a doppelganger in personality for Sophia. For instance, Carol describes Sophia to Lizzie: "She was sweet. She didn't have a mean bone in her body" and later describes Mika to Tyreese in the exact same terms (2014: "The Grove"). Similarly, when Carol tries to counsel Mika about being tough, Mika responds that she does not need to be tough as she can run. Dismayed, Carol reveals to Mika that her daughter could run, but it was not enough to keep her alive. Mika is resolute that killing people is not an option for her and she pities people who kill because that was not who they were before the apocalypse. She also refuses to kill a deer; the peaches and pecans near the house are enough sustenance for her. A consequence of the conversations is that Mika mitigates Carol's belief in killing others as a preventative measure. When Carol and Tyreese discover that Lizzie has murdered Mika and is planning to kill Judith, Carol's years of abuse reflect in her ability to smile and pretend that everything is okay. Lizzie switches from a knife to a gun, preventing Carol and

Tyreese from either getting to Judith or preventing Mika from resurrecting. Carol is able to convince her that everything is fine and stop her from killing baby Judith, arguing logically, "She can't even walk yet" (Satrazemis, 2014: "The Grove"). Tyreese and Carol weigh their options; Tyreese searches Lizzie's room and discovers the box of mice; she also admits to feeding the walkers at the prison and dissecting rabbits; they realise that Lizzie cannot be around people, especially Judith. Carol, therefore, kills Lizzie. Carol always makes the most difficult decision and undertakes the required action despite the cost.

By the fifth season, Carol is able to take down an entire compound, Terminus, and rescue Rick and the other survivors. While Carol's development as an action heroine continues to grow, the trauma of killing others threatens to overwhelm her. She tries to reinvent herself in Alexandria:

Carol: I did laundry, gardened, um always had dinner on the table for Ed when he came home. Um I miss that stupid, wonderful man every day. You know, I really didn't have much to offer this group, so I think I just sort of became their den mother. And they've been nice enough to protect me.

Deanna: Where do you think you'll fit in?

Carol: Oh, um, hmm. Well, I'd like to be involved in the community. Do you have anything like a Junior League? I'm a real people person.

(Nicotero, 2015b: "Remember")

This is entirely a fabrication; she comes from a poor background and has spent most of the postapocalypse rescuing other people; it is partly a ruse to make her appear nonthreatening to the "soft" Alexandrians. Yet, the fresh start allows her to bake cookies and create a new identity. After the interview, she emerges in trousers and a cardigan, adopting a suburban housewife's uniform, only to be told by Daryl that she looks ridiculous. When the Wolves arrive, Carol meticulously assumes their appearance and effortlessly kills them.



Figure 28 Carol the wholesome maternal figure vs Carol the Wolf

The demands of killing to protect others leave Carol with post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). She begins to have hallucinations, seeing the people the walkers were previously. Eventually, she seems to have found happiness when she marries Ezekiel, and they adopt Henry. However, their happiness is shortlived when the Whisperers arrive and kill Henry. Carol then pursues revenge against Alpha, the leader of the Whisperers. Alpha is an extremely destructive woman leader. The Whisperers wear skin masks of the dead, so they can blend into groups of walkers and steer them in any direction for defensive or attacking purposes. They believe that they are animals with Alpha as their pack leader. Her lieutenant is Beta and her daughter is Lydia. She appears to be a matriarchal leader as she attempts to groom Lydia as her replacement. When this fails, she tries to replace her daughter with Gamma. When Daryl and Michonne capture Lydia, she develops a relationship with Henry. Throughout her imprisonment, Lydia slowly realises that she has false memories of her father; Alpha brainwashed her into thinking he was abusive while it was she who was the abuser. This is demonstrated when Daryl sees cuts on Lydia's arms from her mother's abuse (Boyd, 2019: "Omega"). Alpha arrives with Luke and Alden as hostages, saying that she is prepared to exchange them for Lydia. Walkers are attracted to the negotiation; consequently, a Whisperer, Frances, is forced to abandon her crying baby; Alpha explains, "To live with the dead means to live in silence. If the mother can't quiet the child, then the dead will. Natural selection" (Menon, 2019: "Bounty"). After Lydia is exchanged for Alden and Luke, Lydia apologises, only for Alpha to slap her in anger for calling her "mom" and not Alpha.

Over the course of ten seasons, Carol and Jessie are the only women characters to experience domestic violence. Alpha's husband is the first male victim.

Domestic violence “is an attempt to establish power and control in an intimate relationship (married or not, same gender or different) through the use of violence and other forms of abuse” (Bowen, 2009: 3). Not only did Alpha instil fear into her husband and daughter, but she also eventually kills her husband when he tries to keep Lydia with him. The power and control she wields over Lydia are so complete that she is able to reprogramme Lydia’s memories of her father. When Lydia no longer submits to her mother, Alpha decides that it is necessary to kill Lydia as well for her good. Alpha does not act out of self-defence, but she takes pleasure in inspiring fear and terror in others. Anyone who defies her is met with a swift end.

Her abusive and violent style of leadership is seen when two Whisperers, Sean and Helen, disagree with Alpha’s decision to save Lydia. They are unaware that Alpha has overheard their plan to overthrow her. Sean challenges Alpha’s decision to exchange two people for one person. When he challenges her, Beta grabs him, to which he remarks that Alpha is changing the rules once again (Satrazemis, 2019: "Guardians"). Alpha responds that it is really Helen who wishes to challenge her; Helen argues that Alpha has not only failed them but endangered them as well. Alpha then garrottes Helen and places her head in Sean’s hands; as he cries, she stabs him in the stomach; the Whisperers leave their bodies to the “guardians” (walkers) to eat.

Both Alpha and Helen use men indirectly to oppose one another. Alpha may not have felt confident to engage in hand-to-hand combat with Sean; therefore, she blindsides him by challenging Helen instead. Similarly, Helen tries to use Sean to fight Alpha. However, Beta seems to be the lynchpin that secures Alpha’s position. When they first meet Beta, Alpha and Lydia are alone and struggling to blend into a walker group (Nicotero, 2019b: "We are the End of the World"). Undoubtedly, Beta’s imposing appearance influences people to join them; however, once Alpha is able to exert her malign influence, she inspires great loyalty in her followers.

Henry pursues Lydia before Beta captures him. Beta’s height, strength and brutality make him a formidable opponent; he is fanatically devoted to the Whisperer way of life and a loyal subject, though he challenges Alpha’s wavering attitude towards her daughter. When Daryl and Connie rescue Henry and Lydia, Alpha takes revenge against the various communities, killing many members, including Henry, and claiming more territory for the Whisperers. Eventually, Carol enacts her revenge through Negan. She convinces him that he will only be accepted and trusted if he seduces and murders Alpha; he then helps Daryl to kill Beta.

It can be argued that Alpha performs hegemonic femininity because she needs Beta to secure her position. However, without Alpha, Beta immediately leads the Whisperers to their destruction, thereby underscoring that Beta represents a nonhegemonic masculinity. Alpha is an anomaly: she is a violent woman but inspires loyalty that hitherto was only observed in the Saviours. Violent women disrupt gender stereotypes. Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry trace narratives of violent women from the Bible to the War on Terror and find that there is an oppressive need to cast these women as sexually depraved “whores” (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2008). While Alpha does have sex with Negan once, in private, she never uses her sexuality to manipulate a situation. Her clothes are baggy and unkempt; more importantly, she shaves her head. Just before she kills her husband, she cuts her hair and states, “World’s over. We’re doing what I want now” (Boyd, 2019: “Omega”). Conversely, in the same episode, Henry explains to Daryl that Carol revealed that she had kept her hair short because Ed would grab it when he hit her; she felt safe with Ezekiel, so she felt safe to grow it. Long hair is an important marker of femininity and is also a way to control women. The skin mask that Alpha chooses to wear is attached to long blonde hair. The jarring contrast between the decomposing skin and a long-held symbol of beauty reflect Alpha’s inner conflict about her appearance. For instance, when she has sex with Negan, she is completely naked but continues to wear the mask. This could be interpreted as a sign of her fear of being vulnerable, or that she does not feel sexually attractive without hair. It could also be a test. If Negan had reacted with disgust, he would not have assimilated into the group. Names are usually markers of sex, but “Alpha” appears to be gender neutral. After all, Alpha is the first letter and “Beta” is the second letter in the Greek alphabet (Adams, 1987). However, if “Alpha” is part of a phrase, such as “Alpha Male”, then it suggests the male leader of a pack of animals. The names could simply indicate their hierarchy. However, in contemporary culture and in colloquial usage, an alpha is a dominant or hyper-masculine man and a beta male submits to a female. This submission is evident when Beta discovers Alpha’s severed head. Carol places Alpha’s head on a spike as the Whisperers had done to Henry’s head. Overwhelmed with grief, Beta stitches half of Alpha’s face to his mask and marches with the undead to Alexandria. Carol throws Alpha’s mask over a cliff and the remaining walkers from the Whisperer’s undead army join it.



Figure 29 Alpha wears the skin mask and hair

Carol's complex character arc has attracted critical analysis of her role as a mother, warrior or leader (Gencarella, 2016; Keeler, 2016, 2018; Erwin, 2018; B. Bennett, 2019). Now that she has successfully completed her role as an avenger, there does not seem to be more room for further character development. Like Rick, she will leave the show to fight new foes and rescue the vulnerable. With the announcement of *TWD* ending with the eleventh season, it is unclear whether Carol will leave the show after the serial finale or earlier for her spin-off show with Daryl.

In my view, suicide is a gendered trope in *TWD* and is therefore worth exploring in more detail. Killing oneself features strongly in post-apocalyptic fiction in addition to the underrepresentation or elimination of women through rape and murder. These aspects also appear to be linked. For instance, in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), the unnamed female character commits suicide. Before she dies, she tries to explain her fears to her husband. She believes that they are "the walking dead" because "[s]ooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him [their son]. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you wont [sic] face it" (McCarthy, 2006: 33). While some critics note that *The Road* is patriarchal and male-centred (Åström, 2018), others dismiss the problematic depictions of women in McCarthy's novels as irrelevant (Gamblin, 2011). The critical views of *The Road* are valid. The text serves as yet another example of the creative impulse in post-apocalyptic fiction to portray women as incompetent and ill-suited to navigate challenging environments. Hegemonic masculinity dominates *TWD* much as it does *The Road*, so why do women commit suicide?

There are many reasons why a person may consider suicide. It could be seen “as a way of preserving honour, expiation of cowardice, termination of pain, preservation of chastity, escaping from personal disgrace by falling into the hands of an enemy, or intense despair from separation or loss of loved ones” (Evans and Farberow, 2003: xvi). These reasons are presented differently according to gender. For instance, before the invention of paternity tests, women had to be virgins since the “preservation of chastity” reassured men that they were the fathers of their children. Saint Augustine prohibited suicide partly to prevent Christian girls restoring their honour by killing themselves after being raped (Evans and Farberow, 2003a: 123). In the USA, if a Cheyenne warrior lost a battle, he would have to restore his honour through life-endangering situations such as participating in a war party against another tribe; even if he died in a form of voluntary self-sacrifice, his tribe would consider his honour restored.

TWD's depiction of suicide realistically mirrors the gender differences in the USA. Women in Western countries have a higher rate of suicidal ideation (thinking or planning one's suicide) and nonfatal suicidal behaviour than men, yet the mortality rates are lower for women compared to men (Canetto and Sakinofsky, 1998). Unlike in reality, suicide in *TWD* tends to be connected to the threat of walkers as people kill themselves to avoid resurrection after being bitten. There are also gender differences in the methods used to commit suicide. In the USA, women use less violent means such as drugs and poison, whilst men use guns and hanging (Denning, Conwell, King and Cox, 2000). Married men tend to use firearms at home, whereas unmarried men are inclined to hang themselves; unmarried women are less likely to hang themselves compared to married women (Callanan and Davis, 2012).

Race also seems to be a factor in deciding the method of suicide. African Americans are more likely to commit suicide through violent means than Caucasians (Stack and Wasserman, 2005). The National Center for Health Statistics released a report covering the suicide statistics for females and males according to race (Curtin and Hedegaard, 2019). In 2017, the highest suicide rate amongst women was 11% amongst the non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) group, 7.9% White, 2.8% Black and 2.6% Hispanic. The highest suicide rate amongst men was 33.8% for the AIAN group, 28.2% White, 11.4% Black and 11.2% Hispanic. The report does not examine the reasons for the AIAN group to have the highest suicide rate, but it is definitely linked to the historical trauma these groups have been forced to endure.

Expert studies link the suicides to poverty, substance abuse, unemployment, geographical isolation and a lack of access to mental health care (Dastagir, 2019).

In the first episode of the show, Rick discovers the corpses of a white man and woman. They appear to have died in a murder-suicide (Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye"). The camera pans down from the message scrawled in blood on the wall, "God Forgive Us", to the man sitting below it; the top of his head is missing. The camera continues its downward trajectory to the rifle propped in his arm and finally the woman lying by his feet. The woman's eyes are open; the blood from her head wound has soaked into the carpet. The audience can assume from the domestic scene that this is a husband and wife. The message on the wall begs for forgiveness and seems to demand understanding from a patriarch who could no longer protect his wife. Still, the scene conveys that there is no "us"; the position of the wife's body, the blank expression with her eyes open, suggests that she was not expecting this course of action.

While there are many reasons why a person might commit suicide or homicide, homicide-suicide can be linked to the loss of benefits associated with hegemonic masculinity; the ultimate threat of violence sustains the man's position of power and the "family annihilator", a specific type of mass murderer, is almost always male (Gregory, 2012). Men who carry out murders can be understood as confirming their masculinity in terms of status and honour (Messerschmidt, 1993) Another common reason to kill women arises from a desire to control and possess female sexual partners (Hunnicuttt, 2004). It seems likely, therefore, that the husband killed his wife in a final desperate attempt to control her fate.

The next suicides occur in the first season finale and involve Jacqui (Jeryl Prescott Sales) and Dr Edwin Jenner (Noah Emmerich) (Ferland, 2011: "TS-19"). Even though Edwin's family is not part of Rick's group, he also plans a murder-suicide. Many of the scientists "opted out" after the outbreak; Edwin, a white man, plans a similar fate for himself after his wife's death. When he loses his samples and equipment during an accident, he decides to shoot himself. He is interrupted when the group arrives at the facility. He does not tell them that the CDC will self-destruct when it loses power. During the confrontation, Edwin asks them, "Wouldn't it be kinder, more compassionate to just hold your loved ones and wait for the clock to run down?" Rick is able to convince Jenner to grant them a chance to leave, but Jacqui, a black female, and Andrea choose to stay behind. T-Dog briefly tries to convince Jacqui to leave. The

irony is that Jacqui did not have any suicidal tendencies until this point; besides, she would be statistically the least likely to commit suicide as a black female. Edwin's words ring hollow as Jacqui cries while clutching a stranger's hand as their time runs out. A similar euphemism of "opting out" is offered by a man who hung himself from a tree; he did not know he had to destroy his brain to prevent resurrection. The suicide note pinned to the tree states:

Got bit.

Fever hit.

World gone to shit.

Might as well quit.

(Abraham, 2012: "Save the Last One")

In a parallel to the murder-suicide couple in the first episode, the hung man also leaves a message to explain his actions. Since suicide can be perceived as a cowardly act,⁵¹ he deploys humour and rhyme to reaffirm his masculinity and explain that he had no choice and, more importantly, he was not afraid.

Later, another man shows in graphic detail that he did not have any options except suicide to escape starving to death. David Chamblor asks the Governor to go upstairs to his "buddy" Bill Jenkin's apartment to retrieve a chess set (Uppendahl, 2014: "Live Bait"). The Governor discovers an undead Bill thrashing around in a bathtub. Bill shot himself in the face but missed his brain. The bathroom also contains a wheelchair and discarded prosthetic legs. "The social definition of masculinity is inextricably bound up with a celebration of strength, of perfect bodies," according to Jenny Morris, and "[a]t the same time, to be masculine is to be not vulnerable" (1991). Without electricity, the elevators would not work, and Bill could not get down the stairs; it seems never to have occurred to the Chamblors that he would require assistance.

By exploring the suicides in the serial, it is possible to discern a pattern in the reasons why men and women choose suicide. When walkers surround Rick, he puts a gun to his head and apologises to Lori and Carl before discovering a way to escape (Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye"). When walkers surround Nicholas and Glenn,

⁵¹ There are many reasons why a person may choose to take their own life, but it mainly arises from mental health issues (DePaulo Jr and Horvitz, 2002) and terminal illness (Peck, 1997). These actions are idiosyncratically driven, but there are also cases of social suicide. For instance, in some Eskimo tribes the old and sick had to sacrifice themselves to ensure the survival of the group (Evans and Farberow, 2003: xvi).

Nicholas thanks Glenn for saving his life previously before shooting himself in the head (Slovis, 2016: "Thank You"). While women are afraid and overwhelmed by the future and the possibility of a violent death, men use suicide as a final resort. Women are held responsible for triggering men to kill both women and themselves. A flashback reveals that Abraham Ford, a Sergeant for the US Army, was able to protect his family by beating men to death with canned food in a supermarket (Dickerson, 2015: "Self-Help"). When Abraham returns to his family and tells them, "We're safe now. I stopped 'em. You don't have to be scared now", they look terrified of him. Considering his wife has a black eye, bloodied lip, and the front of her blouse is ripped open, his daughter has facial injuries, and his son looks completely uninjured, the audience can assume that the men tried to steal the canned food and rape the women. However, Abraham's violent retaliation seems to have been more frightening, so his family flee during the night, and the next morning, Abraham discovers their devoured bodies. He is on the verge of shooting himself when Eugene Porter requires rescuing; Eugene gives him a new "mission", which permits the soldier to keep fighting and surviving. Abraham's tale demonstrates how men turn to suicide only when they run out of options.

Later, in yet another murder-suicide, the audience sees the aftermath of what appears to be the murder of two soldiers, a wife and daughter (Podeswa, 2014: "Dead Weight"). The decapitated military men have the words "liar" and "rapist" nailed to their bodies outside the house. The house is dark inside as the windows are boarded up; the resurrected mother and daughter wander around in the darkness with the soldiers' resurrected heads placed under the bed. Outside, the father appears to be the perpetrator as he has shot himself in the head, wearing a sign that says "murderer" and clutching a family photograph. The scene suggests that the soldier(s) engaged in sexual violence. It is unclear whether the mother and daughter committed suicide or were murdered, but it is clear that the father was unable to protect his family. His last action seems to have been taking revenge on the soldiers and serving their heads as an offering to his family. He resorts to suicide due to his failure to perform hegemonic masculinity: he is unable to protect the women in his family from other men.

There another form of homicide-suicide that deviates from the established pattern of women committing suicide out of fear while men do so out of strength. This is "filicide-suicide" in which the parent kills the child and themselves, and specifically "maternal filicide", a term that designates a mother who kills her child(ren) (Lewis and Bunce, 2003: 459). An example appears when Michonne and Carl enter a house to

get supplies. Michonne discovers that the matriarch has killed her children and herself (Mann, 2014: "Claimed"). The pink room represents a return to the womb; it contains two single beds with what appears to be two sets of twins laid out on each bed. The bed on the left seems to have two older boys dressed in their pyjamas; one has a comic book laid across his chest. The bed on the right has two young girls dressed in sparkly dresses; they are holding each other's hands, and there is a teddy bear next to them. There are no apparent signs of trauma, although each head has dried blood beneath it. The mother sits on the rocking chair, and she has shot herself in the head. While the bodies are decomposed, the room and their clothes are clean and presentable; the scene lacks disorder and frenzy. The most common form of killing children involves beating or suffocation (Lewis and Bunce, 2003: 459); but aside from the bodies, everything about this scene suggests an absence of violence. It is more likely that this mother sedated the children so that they would not suffer. A covered painting blocks the nursery entrance, which leads to a bedroom door with a "Ssssh! Mae Mae's sleeping" sign on it. The woman in the painting is the mother, but it has been defaced: her eye and mouth are crossed out, signifying unimaginable grief. There is no evidence of a father in the scene; the audience deduces that the mother, an artist, "protected" her children by killing them. Phillip J. Resnick proposed a classification for filicide motivation; he argued that "altruistic" filicides were motivated "out of love": the parent killed to relieve the victim's suffering, whether it was real or imagined (Resnick, 1969: 329). The previous murder-suicide seemed to be motivated by a slight to the husband's honour, since he seems to have punished the resurrected wife and daughter by leaving them to wander around in the dark.

Maternal filicide became a famous literary trope with Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), where the protagonist, Sethe, kills her infant daughter in an effort to protect her from a life of slavery. Sethe is motivated by love; she wishes to spare her daughter pain, misery, trauma and the humiliation that she endured. However, her motivation, even though altruistic, does not change the fact that she commits murder. Similarly, as the woman in *TWD* tries to spare her children future suffering, she is still guilty of murder. Both Sethe and the woman's acts are based upon an imagined future and not on fact. The murders rob the children not only of their lives but also of choice and self-determination.

There is another maternal filicide, but it is unclear whether the mother committed suicide or starved to death. Denise Cloyd convinces Daryl and Rosita to

accompany her to an apothecary as it would be unlikely that anyone would have looted it as yet (Riley, 2016: "Twice as Far"). When they arrive, Denise wanders into a back room that contains a crib; she finds a badly decomposed young female walker lying on the ground, unable to move as her leg is in a cast. The word "hush" is scrawled repeatedly across the wall; Denise's torchlight settles on a blood-filled sink with a toddler's tiny shoe raised above the water. The child's crying attracted walkers, judging from the numerous handprints on the shop's door and windows; coupled with her broken leg, it seems the mother drowned the child in desperation. Resnick does not list self-preservation as a reason for filicide. Guileyardo's Enhanced Classification System lists many motivations such as psychosis, postpartum mental disorder, drug and alcohol abuse, seizures, negligence, and so forth, but these explanations do not account for this action either (West, 2007: 51). However, maternal filicide can transpire when women are simultaneously highly stressed and lack support and resources (Bourget, Grace and Whitehurst, 2007: 76). These scenes demonstrate how white men and white women's depictions align with the gender differences found within research on suicide and homicide.

When Beth wants to commit suicide, Lori and Maggie try to prevent it, but Andrea allows Beth to decide for herself. Each of the women performs emphasised femininities in the confrontations around this issue: Lori argues that the women provide stability for the men, whilst Andrea sarcastically tells Lori to convince Beth that everything will be okay because she will get a husband, son, baby and a boyfriend; Maggie asks Beth to think about her death would affect their father and her boyfriend, Jimmy. As Dale had intervened when Andrea wanted to commit suicide, she sympathises with Beth's decision. Beth half-heartedly slices her wrist, apologising to Maggie and Lori when they rescue her. Andrea interprets this as meaning that Beth wants to live, which is typical of her tendency to misread people and situations, which is incongruent with her profession as a civil rights lawyer. For instance, Beth is sixteen years old and is vulnerable due to the loss of her mother and brother. Maggie is disappointed with Beth's decision and tells her, "Mom would be ashamed to learn that she raised such a coward"; Beth then pleads with Maggie to help by agreeing to kill each other peacefully since it would be "our choice, and then it would be over. Or we'll be forced to do it when the farm and this house is overrun. No one can protect us" (Dickerson, 2012: "18 Miles Out"). Like Andrea, Beth's prediction comes true; they manage to escape, but eventually, she has a violent death. As Maggie makes clear,

“opting out” is aligned with cowardice. Women choosing to kill themselves when there is no imminent danger are seen as being afraid. This contrasts with men who kill or contemplate killing themselves when surrounded by walkers or endure the death of a loved one.

While some men take their spouses with them in a homicide-suicide, some women who depend entirely upon their husbands commit suicide when they lose their spouses. This action justifies the murder-suicides to a large extent. These women commit suicide for emotional reasons rather than as a result of danger. In *TWD*, a minor character named Betsy slashes her wrists when her husband dies (Youabian, 2016: "Now"). Clara, another minor character, tries to feed Rick to her walker husband; she explains that her husband kept them alive and taught her to do what was necessary to survive (Nicotero, 2014: "30 Days Without an Accident"). When she fails to kill Rick, she stabs herself in the stomach and begs Rick to allow her to resurrect so that she can be with her husband.

Likewise, when Lydia’s boyfriend, Henry, dies, she tries to kill herself by offering her arm to a walker (Nicotero, 2019: "The Storm"). In a parallel to Andrea and Beth, Carol watches but does not intervene; she leaves it up to the teenager to decide whether she wants to live. Lydia holds Carol’s spear to her neck and begs Carol to kill her in the same episode; Carol refuses and tells her, “You’re not weak”, indicating that, in the same way as Maggie views suicide as cowardice, Carol sees it as weakness. Yet, when Carol leads the massive walker herd towards a cliff, it is clearly an act of martyrdom; Lydia rescues Carol at the last minute (Nicotero, 2020: "A Certain Doom"). Carol’s attempted suicide is for a nobler purpose: the walker herd could have been used to destroy communities, so her sacrifice is for the public good. Lydia and Carol’s mutual support marks a turning point as they no longer seem to be motivated by family and relationship interests. This is also a departure from the suicides that emanated from the personal domain, whether in response to family trauma or rape. While Sasha’s suicide is also for a honourable purpose, it is blemished by the fact that she was captured and therefore put herself in a compromised position in the first place.

This chapter has demonstrated that while *The Walking Dead* did appropriate traditional gender stereotypes at the beginning of the serial, the writers, showrunners and producers began to challenge these representations over time. Women (such as Lori, Andrea and Beth) who performed emphasised femininities did not survive. However, there are an array of depictions of white women in the show. In terms of

suicide, these depictions are not only consistent with real cases, but there was an effort to defy gender stereotypes in terms of the motives for the suicide. Concerning hegemonic femininities and leadership, while there were few female leaders, the writing team were consistent in portraying types of challenges that real women experience in the workplace. Female leaders who did not protect other women did not remain in their roles for long, whilst women leaders who walked away from their positions survived. Although rape-revenge narratives dominate popular culture, *TWD* does not use rape as shorthand for character development. Just like white male characters, white female characters are afforded revenge narratives that centre on the death of loved ones. Unfortunately, black female characters are not as fortunate as their white counterparts in the serial; I will explore their representation in the next chapter.

Chapter Five – Black Femininity: Warriors and Monsters



Figure 30 Michonne is suspicious of Virgil

While *The Walking Dead* empowers white women by making them leaders, the same cannot be said for black women. Two prominent black women, Sasha and Michonne, briefly form part of councils, but never achieve outright leadership; a notable exception is Jocelyn, a minor character, who appeared in one episode, but even then her power and status is undermined by the fact that she leads a group of feral, psychopathic children. W.E.B. DuBois's essay, "The Damnation of Women" (1920), highlights the racism and sexism that black women are forced to endure. Drawing upon DuBois's essay, Marquita Marie Gammage (2016) undertakes an investigation into how negative stereotypes of black women continue to condemn them. In recognition of the repression of a black person's right to look, bell hooks's "oppositional gaze" (1992) offers an opportunity to look with resistance and political awareness at dominant images presented in mass media. The third chapter of this thesis demonstrated that black male critics felt that black male characters were specifically targeted for annihilation in addition to being poorly represented and stereotyped in the serial. For the most part, these critics did not seem to feel that black female characters suffered the same indignities as their male counterparts. As established earlier, black characters are underrepresented in the serial; yet, in comparison to black male characters, there are far fewer black female characters. Accordingly, this chapter examines how black women are represented and placed at the base of the social hierarchy in *TWD*. First, I discuss the history of representation of black women in media. Then, using intersectional theory, I explore why women of colour are disadvantaged, killed and portrayed in a negative light. The number of black female

characters is so small that I will be able to discuss Jenny, Jacqui, Sasha and Michonne. In the conclusion to the thesis, I will briefly discuss other minorities in the serial.

Black women have been systematically dehumanised and exploited on US screens. Slavery undoubtedly influenced early depictions, and continues to influence contemporary representations. Gammage classifies “five modes of attack” with regard to the ways in which Black women are contemporarily represented in the media (news, film and television): “1 the demonization of the Black female, 2 the hypersexual promotion of Black femininity, 3 the animalistic portrayal of Black womanhood, 4 the hyper masculinization [*sic*] of Black women, and 5 the criminalization of Black motherhood” (2016: 7). She then provides a historical overview from the representation of Sara Baartman to Michelle Obama and identifies the mammie, the jezebel and the sapphire as three major stereotypes:

Formed in the 19th century, these stereotypes were created as an over-generalization of Black women and were meant to further dehumanize Black culture. The mammie stereotype categorizes the Black woman as asexual, trustworthy to an extent, and caring for the White children at the expense of her own family responsibilities. The sapphire was designed to describe Black women in the workforce. They were classified as strong laborers [*sic*], aggressive, emasculating to Black men, and lacking maternal instinct. Finally, the jezebel stereotype grew out of 15th and 16th century European ideas about Black women’s sexuality. The jezebel was defined as an overly sexual Black woman with no moral compass. She was believed to invite sexual encounters and thus was not subject to rape. She was also seen as a threat to the White family structure, as she possessed the power to lure unsuspecting White men into [*sic*] sexual odyssey.

(Gammage, 2016: 25)

None of these figures is a positive representation. Variations of these types still exist, leading us to suspect that contemporary popular culture is not well-disposed towards black women. There are also other typologies. Donald Bogle identifies the “Tragic Mulatto”, the issue of a white man and a black slave/mistress and the “Mammy” archetype, an independent, (usually) overweight and cantankerous woman (2016: 6). Patricia Hill Collins also analyses more contemporary stereotypes such “modern mammies”, “welfare queens”, “Black ladies”, “working-class bitches” and “educated

bitches” (Collins, 2004). Historically, the distinct lack of scope for roles played by Black women resulted in maids or nannies dominating performances.

The ubiquitous negative representation of women in colour in popular culture seems to prevail in *TWD*; however, Sasha and Michonne are exceptions. When the show portrayed Jacqui helping with nursing and laundry as well as Michonne taking care of Rick and Lori Grimes’ children, it seemed *TWD* had reverted to stereotypes instead of crafting complex characters with backstories. Collins explains the reason for the insidiousness of these stereotypes, which she terms “controlling images”: “These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (2000: 69). Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) proposed that a single factor could not fully account for oppression. Crenshaw’s paper focuses on three legal cases, which describe racial and sexual discrimination; the term “intersectionality” is embedded in her discussion:

Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytic structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address that particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.

(1989: 140)

Intersectionality has been expanded upon and challenged over the past three decades. Collins and Sirma Bilge offer a general description of the concept:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.

The previous chapter's literature review covered the representation of women in *TWD*; however, the intersections between race and gender were not explored. I begin my analysis with the first black female character that the audience encounters: Morgan Jones's wife, Jenny Jones. She appears briefly in the first episode of the first season (Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye"). As she is a walker and she died before Morgan encounters Rick, she is without personal identity: she is only defined in terms of her role as wife and mother. Jenny still wanders the streets of the neighbourhood dressed in her white nightdress and gown. She literally haunts the family and appears to have an uncanny ability to track Morgan and Duane, her son. When she first appears at night, she is walking down the street and immediately focuses on the house that shelters her family together with Rick. Duane sees his mother through a gap through the blankets covering the window. He says, "She's here" and Morgan responds, "Don't look. Get away from the windows." As a loving father, Morgan wishes to spare his son grief. However, in each scene where walker Jenny appears, she is objectified.

Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1989), mentioned in the previous chapter, elicited numerous reactions from scholars that eventually led the author to reflect upon her work. In a recent interview, Mulvey reveals that she was influenced by Barbara Creed (1986), Julia Kristeva (1982) and "phantasmatic topography", which "is the idea of woman's exterior and interior split between a perfect and alluring mask concealing an abject interior" (2020: 49). Jenny no longer has her beauty: her exterior and interior are abject. There is no question that the males in this scene have the power; Morgan, Duane and Rick do not take pleasure in looking at her; even though she is dressed in night clothing, she is not eroticised. Nevertheless, Jenny is continually stared at and objectified by them. John Rieder adapts Mulvey's theory about the male gaze and identifies a "colonial gaze" which "distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at" (Rieder, 2008: 7). Canavan, invoking Rieder, reminds us that zombies cannot look as they lack an interior mind and are thus colonial objects (2011: 437).

Yet, while Frank Darabont was the showrunner in the first season, there were indications that Jenny had awareness. He also had other walkers show signs of

cognition. For instance, when the group is trapped at the department store, some of the walkers pick up rocks to break the glass doors (MacLaren, 2011: "Guts"). In the same episode, the walkers climb fences while pursuing Rick and Glenn. When Darabont left the show, these signs of awareness disappeared. The signs of limited cognition are a nod to the zombies in *Night*. However, if the intention was to show that Jenny has consciousness, it is a break in convention that implies black women and the walkers are on the same level. In all four shots elaborated upon below, Jenny is framed in "boxes" from which she cannot escape.



Figure 31 Walker Jenny's first appearance

The first shot shows Jenny slowly approaching the house and ascending the stairs. While her steps are heard, the usually noticeable moaning and groaning sounds of walkers are missing from the scene, emphasising her silence. Rick watches her from the peephole, so that a fish-eye lens is used to capture her movements.⁵² The distortion of the lens enhances her grotesqueness. Her alertness and body movements indicate an awareness of someone's presence. She ignores the sounds and lights of the car alarm and it seems as though she is hunting when she appears to sense or "see" Rick through the peephole and then tries to open the door.⁵³ As she cannot see him, this suggests either superhuman "animal-like" senses (in other words,

⁵² A fish-eye lens is a "camera lens whose front optical element is so convex (or bulbous like the eye of a fish) that it can gather light rays from a very wide span. The resulting image formed while using such a lens often shows a distortion in the exaggerated expansion of physical space, object sizes, and perspective" (Thompson and Bowen, 2009: 195).

⁵³ This limited cognitive ability, seen when the young female walker picks up her teddy bear, and when the other walkers use rocks to break the departmental store windows, or jump fences, is similar to the behaviour of the zombies in *Night*. After the first season, the walkers are no longer able to accomplish such feats. This change in representation coincides with the departure of showrunner Frank Darabont.

she has a heightened sense of smell or hearing, and so forth), or Jenny is demonstrating her opposition to these male gazes. This recalls hooks's discussion of the oppositional gaze. Morgan's admonition to Duane, "Don't look! Get away from the windows", means that the mother is not subjected to the male gaze by the son, who is also denied the power of the male gaze. When Jenny "looks back" and attempts to open the door, Rick staggers back and sits next to Morgan, who is comforting a distraught Duane. Morgan explains to Rick that Jenny died in the other room, but he could not "put her down" because "she's the mother of my child". The phrase "put her down" is used in relation to euthanising an animal. So even though Jenny has challenged the white male gaze, this is negated by the fact that she is dehumanised by her own husband.



Figure 32 Walker Jenny stares at Rick

The male gaze is realised once again in a later scene from the first episode. Morgan takes pleasure in looking at pictures of the family in happier times. The pictures are in a box that his wife had saved. He told Rick earlier that Jenny was just as unprepared for survival as Lori: "Here I am packing survival gear [and] she's grabbing photo albums" (Darabont, 2011: "Days Gone Bye"). Jenny is driven more by emotion, another stereotypically feminine trait, than practicality, thus reinforcing the patriarchal notion that she needs the protection of her husband. The photographs also reinforce her otherness as a walker.



Figure 33 Morgan stares at a picture of Jenny in happier times



Figure 34 Morgan takes aim at his walker wife

Once again objectified, Jenny is no longer the confident, attractive woman shown in the photograph. Morgan uses his rifle to shoot a walker to attract her attention. Jenny is lured by the sound of gunshots and once again adopts an oppositional gaze: she stares eerily in the direction of Morgan, immobilising him. Her revenant seems to stare at him uncannily as he gazes at her in a close-up shot of her in the crosshairs of the rifle. Jenny wins the challenge as Morgan is forced to look away. She does not appear again on screen, but Morgan reveals their final encounter to Rick (Brock, 2013: "Clear"). Morgan is separated from Duane while searching for food walker Jenny appears, and Duane is unable to shoot her. Morgan calls Duane, who turns towards his father, leaving him vulnerable to Jenny's attack. Morgan is finally able to shoot her, but it is too late for Duane. Walkers, or zombies, lack a mind; their lack of identity and inability to recognise loved ones is erased. Despite the limits imposed by the *TWD* universe, the audience is led to surmise that Jenny's ability to

home in on their presence means she is hunting and pursuing her own family. The “Woman in White” or “White Lady” is:

a lady dressed in white fabled in popular mediæval legend to appear by day as well as at night in a house before the death of some member of the family; [and] was regarded as the ghost of some deceased ancestress.

(Wood, 1907)

Jenny embodies this figure and portends the death of her son by her own hand (and teeth). In her study of fashion and narrative in Victorian popular literature, Madeleine C. Seys argues that women in white muslin represented heroines as ethereal, innocent, youthful, pure, and virginal (Seys, 2018: 31-32). As bell hooks argues, “the obsession to have white women film stars be ultra-white was a cinematic practice that sought to maintain a distance, a separation between that image and the black female Other” (1992b: 119). Jenny’s soiled nightclothes, dishevelled appearance and filicide subvert this ideal and heighten her otherness and monstrosity. As discussed in chapter three, Morgan and Duane function as foils for Rick and Carl. This function also extends to the women in the family: Jenny is the opposite of Lori. Although Lori is a flawed wife and mother, she sacrifices her own life to save Judith. Jenny, whilst a good wife and mother, turns into a monster that preys upon her own child.

The horror genre has typically portrayed women as victims. However, Barbara Creed (1993) challenges this trend by exploring the concept of the “monstrous-feminine” or female monster. She connects Kristeva’s concept of the abject to the maternal figure in horror (Creed, 1993).⁵⁴ The female monster (or monstrous-feminine) does not utilise the gaze in the same manner as a male monster; instead of “control”, she aggressively “captures” the gaze; Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) fears the maternal gaze because he fears his secret sexual desires (Creed, 1993: 141). The *femme castratrice* or castrating woman possesses the “sadistic gaze”, in which the male victim is her object (Creed, 1993: 153). Kristeva asserts that individuals experience abjection when they attempt to break away from their mothers who are reluctant to let go of the children (Kristeva, 1982: 13). These mothers threaten their children’s attainment of a properly constituted subject. Jenny’s uncanny ability to track

⁵⁴ Abjection was previously discussed in the Introduction in relation to zombies and how they violate borders, identity, systems and order (Kristeva, 1982: 3-4).

her family can be seen as evidence of this reluctance. According to Kristeva, two defilements stem from the maternal, namely excrement and menstrual blood: “excrement or its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without”; menstrual blood represents “the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual)” (Kristeva, 1982: 71). As Morgan explains, “And then she was just—just on him. And I see red. I see red. Everything is red. Everything I see is red. And I do it. Finally. Finally [but I] was too late” (Brock, 2013: “Clear”). Like a rabid dog, she is “just on him” [Duane], but this is also sexually suggestive and implies a desire to possess her son. Duane’s death represents his mother and father’s failure to allow him to form his own identity and join the symbolic order. Creed names the archaic mother as one who refuses to allow children their independence; referring to female vampires, she states, “Vampirism combines a number of abject activities: the mixing of blood and milk; the threat of castration; the feminization of the male victim” (Creed, 1993: 70). By killing Duane, Jenny not only effectively “castrates” Duane, but also Morgan, who is finally able to “put her down”. Jenny therefore satisfies two of the five “modes of attack on black womanhood”, namely “3 the animalistic portrayal of Black womanhood” and “5 the criminalization of Black motherhood” (Gammage, 2016: 7). Creed, once again drawing from Kristeva, observes that women are linked to animals through the reproductive cycle; when the boundary between animal and human collapses, “women are figured as animal” (Creed, 2020: 98).

There are marked differences between the representations of the Jones and Grimes families. Unlike Duane, Carl is able to shoot his mother, thereby preventing his mother’s resurrection after she bleeds out from the emergency caesarean section Maggie performs on the boiler room floor. Carl’s parents were more successful at ensuring his continued survival in the postapocalypse. Lori’s image is redeemed and “preserved” as she sacrifices herself for her baby and offers advice to Carl before her death. In search of her body, Rick finds a blood- and gore-covered floor and a bloody drag mark leading past a male walker with a distended stomach collapsed against a wall. The audience never sees the corpse around the corner from the walker or Rick’s reaction to the body as he stops near the walker. As indicated in the second footnote in this chapter, the walkers lost the ability, with Darabont’s departure, to pick up objects or open doors after the first season. To have a walker drag a body is a massive and disingenuous change in their abilities. Executive director Greg Nicotero had previously

vetoed a request from John Bernthal (who played Shane Walsh) that he be the first walker to speak and say “Riiiiick” (Ross, 2012). It is peculiar that, just six episodes later, Nicotero changed his mind about having a walker’s typical behaviour deviate because he “didn’t want to take away from [her death]” and in “keeping the emotional resonance of Lori’s death, there are some boundaries. You may not believe it, but there are a few boundaries here and there on *The Walking Dead* that we want to preserve” (James, 2012). While preserving white women’s privacy, the production team did not extend the same courtesy to black female characters.

Nevertheless, the bloody mouth and long brown hair on the walker’s hands and mouth seem to confirm that the walker feasted upon Lori. Rick pushes his revolver into the walker’s mouth, fires, and proceeds to stab the stomach repeatedly, performing a ghastly caesarean section. Nuckolls argues that *TWD* supports “Christian sacrifice and the restoration of traditional marriage” as the zombie’s reproductive abilities are perverse compared to marital sexuality and childbirth (2014: 102; 107). Referring to Rick’s action of stabbing the walker’s stomach, Nuckolls observes “the full stomach of the zombie represents improper digestion – a kind of false pregnancy, thus representing its opposite” (2014: 107-108). Nuckolls believes that the sanctity of marriage can only be restored through forgiveness; he acknowledges that Lori is a hallucination, but asserts that her death enables Rick’s forgiveness since she is now “ethereal” and appears as a disembodied voice and ghost who “gently caresses Rick’s cheek” (2014: 108). There is another interpretation to Lori’s post-death appearance. Whilst Morgan and Duane must bear witness to Jenny as a decomposing monster, Carl and Judith are spared this image, and Rick sees a pristine version of Lori. Initially she recalls the insistence in Gothic horror on secrets and hiddenness by appearing in shadow (Glatter, 2013: “The Suicide King”). Later Rick sees her in a field, next to her grave, and then she reappears on a bridge. While Jenny “haunted” the house at night, Lori appears in the daylight. She appears in a white satin dress that contrasts with Jenny’s torn and dirty clothes.



Figure 35 Lori waits for Rick by her grave

The dress may be a nightdress or a contemporary Grecian wedding dress; both interpretations suggest a return to “innocence” or “purity” that had hitherto been marred by her infidelity. At no point is Rick or the audience exposed to her eaten remains. The sequence emphasises the pitiable image of Rick as a grieving widower. Lori upholds the image of the ethereal “Woman in White”, which Jenny subverts. Lori reaches out to Rick, cradles his face and kisses him. The scene concludes with a baffled Michonne watching Rick alone in the field acting upon his hallucination. The voyeur in this case (Michonne) does not have to look upon a gross or macabre scene.



Figure 36 Lori reaches out to Rick



Figure 37 Walker Lori cries because of Rick's rejection in a deleted part of the scene

Originally, in a deleted scene that appears as a DVD extra, after Rick kisses Lori, her face transforms into a marred, decomposing walker visage. Yet, even then, while he draws back in horror, she does not growl or attack him: she sighs, and a single tear falls from the ruin of her face. Rick falls onto the ground screaming, watched by a confused and concerned Michonne. There is no explanation for why this scene was not broadcast. Perhaps it was too melodramatic or damaging for Rick's character. Lori's tear and expression emphasise Rick's guilt in not forgiving her and constantly rejecting her overtures. Once Rick exercises sound judgment and takes in the Woodbury survivors, Lori disappears, confirming that she is a figment of Rick's conscience and has been appeased.

The association between black female characters and death continues with Jacqui, Sasha and Michonne. The first season was bookended with the death of Jacqui (Jeryl Prescott Sales), the only living black female character up to that point. Scholars observed her lack of presence in the show (Reed, 2017; Lavigne, 2018). Introduced in the second episode, Jacqui displays characteristics of calm and competence. When Merle attacks T-Dog and forces the group to vote for him as leader, she displays her resistance by raising her hand and middle finger. Formerly a town planner, she suggests that the sewers may offer a chance of escaping the departmental store (MacLaren, 2011: "Guts"). Her plan does not work, allowing Rick to demonstrate his heroism instead. Walker blood and viscera are applied to Rick and Glenn's clothing so that they can walk without detection amongst the walkers. The following exchange takes place as they dismember the bodies:

Glenn: Oh God! Oh jeez. Oh, this is bad. This is really bad.

Rick: Think about something else. Puppies and kittens.

T-Dog: Dead puppies and kittens.

(Glenn vomits.)

Andrea: That is just evil. What is wrong with you?

Jacqui: Next time let the cracker beat his ass.

(MacLaren, 2011: "Guts")

This dialogue shows that Jacqui is not cowed by Merle's racism and aggression. Moreover, this scene undercuts the seriousness of Merle's attack on T-Dog (whom he wanted to kill) and the use of the most offensive racial expletive in the USA. Even though it is in retaliation to Merle's racism, it suggests that there is intolerance on both sides. In terms of black female representation, Jacqui is portrayed as a sapphire: she emasculates T-Dog and displays aggression.



Figure 38 The group "votes" at gunpoint for Merle to be their leader

However, the sapphire is not the only stereotype projected onto Jacqui. Later, when the women are doing laundry, Jacqui questions, "I'm beginning to question the division of labour here" and "Can someone explain to me how the women wound up doing all the Hattie McDaniel work?" (Horder-Payton, 2011: "Tell it to the Frogs"). As noted in the previous chapter of this thesis, Hattie McDaniel famously played the role of Mammy, Scarlet O'Hara's maid, in the film adaptation of *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939). Jacqui exemplifies the "mammy" stereotype as well as the "sapphire" stereotype since both types are notable for their "fierce independence"; however, the mammy figure is "usually big, fat, and cantankerous" (Bogle, 2016: 6). An offshoot of the mammy is the "Aunt Jemima" archetype who is similar to the figure of "Uncle Tom";

she is “blessed with religion”, “sweet”, “jolly, and “good-tempered” (Bogle, 2016: 7). While the difference in temperament distinguishes the mammy from the Aunt Jemima, colourism also plays a role in stereotypes. The “tragic mulatto”, “the product of a white man and a black slave/mistress”, in contrast to the darker mammy, “was graced with a modicum of sex appeal” (Bogle, 2016: 11-12). The lack of romantic relationships is an asexual, mammy trait. When she is introduced, she is immediately cantankerous and dismisses Rick’s assertion that he was following a helicopter with “you were chasing a hallucination, imagining things”; his subsequent query about the refugee centre is met with the sarcastic retort, “They’ve got biscuits waiting at the oven for us” (MacLaren, 2011: “Guts”).

The inability to craft a coherent character continues when Jenner mentions that the disease could be “microbial, viral, parasitic, [or] fungal”; Jacqui suddenly reveals a “Aunt Jemima” religious aspect to her character by interjecting, “Or the wrath of God” (Ferland, 2011: “TS-19”). Despite invoking this reference, Jacqui, despite her intelligence, is relegated to laundress and nursemaid to the bitten Jim. Jacqui is the first to observe blood on Jim’s shirt the morning after a walker attack. Without hesitation, she immediately reveals the truth to the group. This decision shows her remarkable sense of self-preservation and concern for the safety of the group. Shortly thereafter, at the CDC, she decides that the best course of action is suicide, which is inconsistent with her previous characterisation. It is implausible that the deaths of Amy and Jim have made her consider suicide when the death of her family did not provoke her to this. In addition to black women being statistically the least likely to commit suicide (cf. Chapter 4), there is a correlation between religiosity and a decreased suicide risk (Dervic, Oquendo, Grunebaum, Ellis, Burke and Mann, 2004). The lack of suicidal tendencies amongst black women in the USA is so notable and unusual that they are referred to as a “protected group” in suicide research (Utsey, Hook and Stanard, 2007). By invoking the wrath of God, Jacqui suggests that she could be a Christian; notably, black women are disproportionately the largest group of Christians in the USA (Lugo, Stencel, Green, Smith, Cox, Pond, Miller, Podrebarac and Ralston, 2008). Black women refuse to “opt out” because they have developed resilience born out of longstanding oppression; they form an integral part of family and community support systems, so they refuse to abandon their responsibilities (Spates and Slatton, 2017). Despite her incoherent and — I argue — illegitimate representation, Jacqui is

depicted in her final moments as smiling with relief when the group escapes; she holds Dr Jenner's hands, offering another person comfort, as the CDC explodes.

Like, Jacqui, Sasha Williams (Sonequa Martin-Green) is strong and competent but succumbs to suicide. In the same way as Norman Reedus auditioned for the role of Merle before being cast as Daryl, Sonequa Martin-Green originally auditioned to play the role of Michonne. Sonequa's impressive performance prompted the creation of the role of Sasha Williams, the sister of Tyreese Williams. Unlike Daryl, Sasha never receives an impressive back story or character arc. Pre-apocalypse, Sasha was a firefighter; however, this is never revealed in *TWD*. Sonequa reveals this fact in an interview with Chris Hardwick on a *Talking Dead* episode (Norman, 2016: "East").

Sasha is introduced with her brother, Tyreese, in the third season (Gierhart, 2013: "Made to Suffer"). They are both shown to be strong, skilled fighters; the other members of their group are unable to defend themselves and rely on the Williams siblings for protection. They consist of a white family: Allen, Donna and teenage Ben. The group are near the prison, but Donna's relentless screaming draws dozens of walkers towards them. Donna is unsurprisingly bitten; even though she is bitten on her arm, her husband supports her as they flee, highlighting her weakness even further. Sasha advocates leaving Donna behind. She is rational and unemotional in this moment: Allen is being slowed down and they are in danger of being overwhelmed by walkers; the prison is another unknown and they risk her turning in an enclosed space. Tyreese sides with the family, letting sentiment guide the decision. Once they are in the prison, Donna continues to scream while Allen holds her and Ben sits passively, leaving the Williams siblings to fight the walkers. The group is saved by Carl Grimes, exposing the limits of black male leadership. When ten-year-old Carl locks the group in a room, Sasha confronts him, pleading that they are not animals. Once again, Tyreese understands the need for caution and tells Sasha to "let the man go" (Gierhart, 2013: "Made to Suffer"). Carl's caution is justified: Allen and Ben immediately plot to overthrow the prison, but Sasha and Tyreese refuse to join them. The siblings are shown to be good and noble as they do not wish to harm anyone.

Traditional feminine roles and behaviour, identified by Parent and Moradi (2010), include domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning and child-rearing. The audience never sees Sasha engage in such actions. She is neither masculine nor androgynous in appearance; she is not asexual or promiscuous. She has two romantic relationships over the course of the series, which lasted until her partners died. She is

negatively affected by the deaths of her loved ones and the trauma affects her actions as she engages in risky behaviours. In this respect, she behaves similarly to other characters across gender and racial lines in that she is affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. She grows proficient with weapons, particularly with a rifle, and tries to kill as many walkers as possible. Overall, she seems to have escaped the shadow of stereotypes of women as weak, decorative, dependent on men and even stupid. But she is marked as other compared to Donna, the “damsel in distress”. Sasha is not terrified and does not rely on the men in the group to defend her. Unlike Rick and Carl, who wield guns, Tyreese’s weapon for defence is a hammer, whilst Sasha employs a spade: both tools are associated with labour. By constantly protecting groups composed mostly of white people, they invite associations with the magical negro stereotype; however, there are attempts to portray Sasha in a more complex role. For instance, Sasha becomes a council member at the prison and leads the team that goes on supply runs. Sasha is intelligent, as shown when she discovers that someone is feeding walkers, which is why they are amassing at the fence. She is also heroic: when people become infected by a deadly influenza strain, she continues to help despite being dangerously ill and weak herself.

Sasha, in all respects, is a “strong black woman”. The strong black woman (SBW) schema involves independence, emotional resilience and self-sacrifice (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). The SBW challenges offensive stereotypes (Dow, 2015). However, there is also a conflation of the SBW with the “angry black woman” that leads to young, black women eschewing the term (Jones, Harris and Reynolds, 2020). The later term has been defined as a “mouthy harpy” (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 258). Sasha’s sense of self-preservation, however, is constantly quashed by the men in her life (Tyreese, Bob and Abraham), who advocate living for and protecting other people. Under this pressure, self-preservation eventually turns into self-sacrifice. Sasha helps Maggie find Glenn; she agrees to join Abraham’s group to protect Eugene, but has the foresight to question Eugene about the “cure” (Nicotero, 2015: “No Sanctuary”). Many people have died protecting Eugene; no one else dared question him. Just four episodes later, he is forced to admit that he lied (Dickerson, 2015: “Self Help”).

Sasha is reunited with Tyreese, but then Bob is bitten and subsequently captured by Terminus survivors. The Termites plan to eat Bob’s leg and kill Rick’s group. Sasha joins some of the others in the attack, repeatedly stabbing Martin in the

chest in a frenzied attack. When Bob dies, Tyreese spares Sasha from having to prevent his resurrection. Tyreese's attempts to comfort his sister are rebuffed because she has to remain strong as she is called upon to help others. They try to rescue Beth and Carol by capturing some of Dawn's officers; one the hostages that they wish to trade is Officer Bob Lamson. Sasha is manipulated by Lamson as he sees that his name affects her and manages to escape. Tyreese tries once again to comfort Sasha, explaining to her that he lied about killing Martin (Dickerson, 2015a: "Coda"). He refers to their childhood and speculates that their innocence and naivete are being exploited by the people who were able to escape. Sasha credits Tyreese for not having changed; however, she cannot say the same for herself. Tyreese's death leaves Sasha inconsolable and she grows increasingly rash in her actions, killing numerous walkers and eschewing company when they arrive at Alexandria.

Eventually she comes to terms with her trauma and begins a relationship with Abraham, who convinces her to help Maggie get to Hilltop so she can see an obstetrician-gynecologist for treatment. On the way to Hilltop, the group is captured by the Saviours. Glenn and Abraham are murdered by Negan; however, Sasha is not allowed to grieve. She volunteers to take Maggie to the doctor. During the night, the Saviours attack Hilltop; Jesus, Maggie and Sasha are the only ones who successfully defend their community. The next morning, Gregory wants Maggie to leave; Sasha offers to get supplies in exchange for Maggie remaining at Hilltop. Gregory sexually propositions Sasha, "I think we'd need to meet on that one-on-one just to explore—", before Maggie tells him to go to hell (Martin, 2017: "Go Getters"). It seems that every character they encounter wishes to exploit Sasha.

After Negan murders Abraham, Sasha and Rosita plot revenge, which is awkward as Abraham had a relationship with Rosita before leaving her for Sasha. *TWD* resisted representing black women as hypersexual; instead, this trait was deflected onto another minority in the "Hot Latina" stereotype. This modern stereotype is derived from the "Harlot" figure from Westerns who is "a secondary character, lusty and hot-tempered" (Berg, 2002: 70). Until Juanita Sanchez (more commonly known as "Princess") arrives late in the tenth season, Rosita is the only female Latina character in *TWD*. While the other characters dress conservatively, given that a bite or scratch can turn a person into a walker, Rosita is frequently seen in shorts and tank tops. Compared to the other female characters, Rosita also has more sex scenes. In terms of partners, she has outstripped every other female character: she has been

romantically linked with Johnny, Marcus, “Chaser”, Abraham, Spencer, Siddiq, and Gabriel. Siddiq is the father of Rosita’s baby, but she is currently in a relationship with Gabriel. When Eugene also falls in love with her, Negan ridicules the situation referring to it as a “hot little love quadrangle” (Nicotero, 2019: "The Storm").

The writers of the serial attempted to excuse the characterisation of Rosita. When Sasha and Rosita are outside the Saviour compound, Sasha takes the opportunity to try and reconcile with Rosita and compliments her about knowing how to do everything. Rosita lists her conquests, but frames it in a postfeminist manner; she was not being used, in fact it was the opposite:

Rosita: Johnny. That's who taught me about bombs. Survivalist, prepper-type shit. [Sasha and Rosita laugh] Marcus taught me about cars. He was a mechanic and a wannabe stunt driver. And an asshole. Knot-tying was from Chaser. Yeah, that wasn't his real name. [Both laugh] There were others.

Sasha: Were those people you lost on the way to D.C.? No, not them.

Rosita: A lot of guys wanted to protect me, like there was no way I could know how to take care of myself. And I didn't. And I hated the way that felt. So I rolled with it. They didn't even notice I was picking up everything they knew how to do and doing it better. Then I'd outgrow them and bounce. The sex was just for fun.

(Satrazemis, 2017: "The Other Side")

Recognising Rosita’s value and not her own, Sasha locks Rosita out of the compound. Sasha tells Rosita that “they need you” and allows her self to be captured by the Saviours. Like Gorman, a Saviour named David first tries to extort sex; in this case, it is in exchange for water. David tries to rape Sasha, but Negan kills him. Negan gives Sasha a choice: kill the resurrected David and join the Saviours or let David kill her (Slovis, 2017: "Something They Need"). She kills David, but is now faced with the prospect of being used against the Alexandrians. She takes a suicide pill and attacks Negan as a walker (Nicotero, 2017: "The First Day of the Rest of Your Life). The camera dwells on Maggie’s grief as she kills the resurrected Sasha offscreen. Just as Tyreese’s death became about other characters, Sasha’s final moments are dedicated to sympathising with Maggie’s loss.

Jeryl Prescott Sales (Jacqui) only had a recurring role in the first season; Sonequa Martin-Green (Sasha) was promoted from “recurring” to “also starring” to “main”, while Danai Gurira (Michonne) is the only black female actor to be cast as a main character. Aside from the underrepresentation, the suicide rate among black

women characters equates to 66.6%. Compared to the 2.8% national statistic, this is an extremely troubling form of representation. Both Jacqui and Sasha also disturbingly complete committing suicide whilst some of the suicidal white female characters escape death without even an injury. Sasha's death was foreshadowed when she, alone, carted walkers to a mass grave; she lies down on the corpses and seems to take comfort and peace from this moment (Nicotero, 2015a: "Conquer"). Yet, this is also another deliberate linking of a black woman with death.



Figure 39 Sasha finds some peace



Figure 40 Sasha emerges from the coffin as a walker

Sasha and Merle are the only main characters to turn into walkers and eat people. Merle is discovered eating Ben, a young man he shot and killed while he was alive. Sasha is seen devouring one of Negan's men, after he pulls her off Negan. To date, no other main character has resurrected, attacked and eaten a person. Correspondingly, while other key individuals like Carl and Andrea were bitten and

committed suicide to avoid resurrection, Sasha killed herself to become a walker. She was in the coffin for an unspecified length of time and is immediately violent when she emerges.

The decision to omit portraying Lori as a zombie, as well as the decision to portray her as a sympathetic and nonviolent, are mirrored in the resurrection of Amy, Andrea's sister, the first character from the main group to die. She is also initially nonviolent, but Andrea shoots her before she grows too aggressive and attacks her. Amy's death and resurrection sequence occurs over two episodes. The resurrected Amy also touches Andrea's face and, although she growls, does not attempt to bite Andrea despite their proximity. Greene and Meyer note the emotional scene, arguing that other deaths were less noteworthy given her age and status as a "young woman" (Greene and Meyer, 2014: 70). It cannot be a coincidence that her race, particularly her blonde hair and blue eyes, adds to the tragedy and to the decision to "beautify" her as a walker.



Figure 41 Amy appears to have emerged from a deep sleep (as opposed to resurrection)

Michonne escaped committing suicide, but has left the show. Danai Gurira (who plays Michonne) told Angela Kang that she "felt it was time for me to leave the show to pursue other creative endeavors sometime in 2018" (Braxton, 2020). Despite Gurira's high profile after her role as Okoye in *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), *Avengers: Infinity War* (Russo and Russo, 2018) and *Avengers Endgame* (Russo and Russo, 2019), she was not as well treated as the white women on the show. Sartain's criticism of Michonne characterises her as masculine and a black butch lesbian (Sartain, 2013: 260). Sartain also quotes Halberstam, who notes: "black women face far more damning accusations of masculinity than white women in our society" and

“there is always a subtle level of homophobia built into the defense of femininity by any female fighter” (1998: 271). Okoye has been described as masculine (Sartain, 2013; Gencarella, 2016; Dunaway, 2018; Wilson, 2019a), a warrior or amazon (Johnson, 2015; Sugg, 2015; Schimmelpfennig, 2017), a caretaker (Johnson, 2015), a strong black woman (Reed, 2017; Wilson, 2019a), “threatening in every manner to a hegemonic white masculinity” (Sartain, 2013: 261), and an “angry black woman” (Schimmelpfennig, 2017: 129). While Jionde (2018) argues that Michonne is able to transcend the magical negro stereotype, Kunyosying and Soles (2018) opine otherwise. Michonne’s difference and otherness from the rest of the (white) women is highlighted: she “is not a women who needs to be rescued” (Sartain, 2013: 262) and she is “the opposite of the other female characters” (Schimmelpfennig, 2017: 129). Michonne also does not challenge Rick’s leadership (Gencarella, 2016; Schimmelpfennig, 2017; Wilson, 2019a). The comic version of Michonne differs from the television portrayal of the character, which I will now discuss. An in-depth comparison between the texts is beyond the scope of this thesis; therefore, I have not included the literature relating to the graphic novels here.

Michonne’s entrance is memorable. She effortlessly saves Andrea and is accompanied by two fettered male walkers, forming a coffle. Their arms and jaws have been cut off, rendering them helpless and docile, providing Michonne with invisibility amongst the walkers. Michonne also uses Mike and Terry as “pack animals” as massive bags are strapped to the walkers' backs. Considering T-Dog, Oscar, Tyreese and Bob’s obsession with “contributing”, typically in the form of labour or service, this use of them is distasteful. Perhaps, in recognition of this fact, her replacement walkers are two white men, which she decapitates with her doppelgänger. While tracking Rick and Carl, Michonne speaks to Mike. She returns to Rick and Carl, who eventually become her replacement husband and son.



Figure 42 Mike, Michonne, and Terry



Figure 43 Enchained Captured Africans, Sierra Leone, 1805



Figure 44 Michonne's replacement walkers

In a flashback, Andrea asked about Michonne's walkers, correctly assuming that Michonne knew them while they were alive. As though in response to the question, the scene transitions to the present. There is a deliberate link through a transition shot of the chains restraining Michonne's walkers superimposed over shots of the chains the Governor wants to use to torture, rape and restrain her. Later, Andrea sees the "tools" that he wants to use on Michonne. Amongst the items is a gynaecological device: a speculum.



Figure 45 Andrea peers through slats to see the Governor's tools

Dr James Marion Sims, known as the "Father of American Gynecology", experimented on enslaved women (Owens, 2017: 1-2). Sims pioneered surgery treating vesico-vaginal fistulae, "a common obstetrical condition that caused incontinence, and that was brought on by trauma and by the vaginal and anal tearing women suffered in childbirth" (Owens, 2017: 1). He designed an instrument that would eventually be developed further into the speculum and could be used to examine women's cervixes, but operated on slave women without anaesthesia (Axelsen, 1985: 11). It was common practice to perform surgery on slaves without anaesthesia as it was believed that black people did not feel pain or anxiety. In response to a Kentucky surgeon's assertion that gynaecological advances were predicated on "exquisitely painful surgeries", Dr James Johnson, editor of the *London Medical and Chirurgical Review*, dismissively said, "When we come to reflect that all the women operated upon in Kentucky, except one, were Negresses and that these people will bear anything with nearly if not quite as much impunity as dogs and rabbits, our wonder is lessened" (Washington, 2006: 63). This pernicious belief continues to have implications and relevance today. Studies continue to reflect that people believe black people feel less

pain than whites, which means that they do not receive the same care preparing for and after surgery, or when they suffer sports injuries, and so forth (Trawalter, Hoffman and Waytz, 2012; Waytz, Hoffman and Trawalter, 2015; Hoffman, Trawalter, Axt and Oliver, 2016). These stereotypes can be seen in *TWD*.

In the comics, Michonne is graphically and repeatedly raped by the Governor. There seemed to be what can only be described as excitement about the prospect of the rape in interviews with showrunner, Glen Mazzara. The unnamed interviewer for *Hero Complex*, the popular culture section of the *Los Angeles Times*, repeatedly asked about it, "I'm wondering if that scene means that you've chosen not to include the Michonne rape storyline from the comic books"; followed with "So you're saying the Michonne rape could still happen"; and lastly, "But you're not necessarily saying it would happen this season" (*Los Angeles Times: Hero Complex*, 2012). Numerous articles covered this issue; despite the pressure, Mazzara continued to provide similar responses:

I felt it was important to develop this character [the Governor]. If he is a person who's into rape and mutilation, the audience may not buy into that. They may reject him completely and he would just be a villain and it would just be a matter of time before he's taken down. Now, I like this character, and I want this character around for awhile, so if he rapes Michonne immediately in the story and our formidable heroes do not eliminate that evil immediately, they look powerless. I felt that that was something you'd have to build up to.

When he tells Maggie to take her shirt off, he's using it to terrorize her. Rape is an attack of violence, and he's using the threat of violence to terrorize this woman. When he realizes that she's not going to give up the information he wants, he figures it's a waste of time and he needs another attack. He's very thoughtful about this, and it's interesting to me to create a character who uses rape as a political weapon, not necessarily as an individual attack. If you look at some of the wars in Africa, you see rape is used as a political weapon, or has been. That's something I've discussed with Danai, who grew up in Africa. The idea of rape as a political weapon, as a larger political statement to be explored throughout *The Walking Dead*, is a tall order, and something that I could see the Governor using. But you have to plant a seed and develop that carefully.

(Martin, 2012)

I have quoted Mazzara at length because this is a significant issue, especially for my examination of gender in *TWD*. It demonstrates the misogyny of the press and

the fans who were almost salivating for the event to occur. Mazzara recognises that rape is linked to power, and his reticence to use it is commendable. However, he seems to be more focused on what it would mean for the Governor and Rick than Maggie and Michonne. He wants to craft a believable villain and he does not want to disempower the hero by making Rick appear weak. However, this leads to another rape trope in which the male protagonist is motivated to take revenge on behalf of a female character. Perhaps Mazzara framed his response as he did to reason with the male fans who highly anticipated this scene. He represented his argument in terms of how it would affect the male characters, for whom the fans may have held more empathy, and later also appeases them by not ruling out rape. Regardless of his motivation, it was refreshing not having rape used as a character-building exercise for female characters. The failure to portray Michonne's rape on screen makes *TWD* very unusual since the horror genre often use rape to intensify the audience's involvement.

Despite Michonne's being a main character, her backstory is not crafted with care or consistency. Michonne first appeared in the season two finale, but the audience still does not know her last name or occupation prior to the apocalypse. Angela Kang, the showrunner for the ninth and tenth seasons, revealed in an interview that Rick and Michonne do not marry, which is peculiar since Glenn and Maggie marry and have a child in the postapocalypse. It could be argued that before the apocalypse, Michonne had a relationship and child out of wedlock, so her failure to marry Rick perpetuates stereotypes about unwed black mothers. Pressed about Michonne's surname, Kang said, "I don't want to speak about the name right now because I'm reserving the right to get into that" (Acuna, 2019). The interviewer felt like the response was "hinting that we may eventually learn Michonne's last name on the zombie drama" (Acuna, 2019); however, since Danai Gurira has left the series, it seems that Kang did not feel that it was a necessity. Since a first and last name is part of a person's identity, it is unfortunate that Kang did not remedy this omission. I stress this point as Michonne is the only main character to have an unknown surname; even some minor characters have had both names mentioned. This was addressed to an extent in the comic series. There, Michonne is a lawyer and becomes a judge in the Commonwealth; in the last issue, she reveals that her surname is Hawthorne, but it was her ex-husband's last name (Kirkman, Adlard and Rathburn, 2019). She did not revert to her maiden name because her law practice was under "Hawthorne". This explains Kang's reticence to a certain extent, as Michonne is unmarried in the television series. She had a son,

Andre, with her boyfriend, Mike; they die when she is out on a supply run. When Andrea guesses that Michonne knew the chained walkers that accompany her, she claims, "They deserved what they got. They weren't human to begin with" (Schwartz, 2013: "Prey"). In the fourth season, she describes how she lost her son, boyfriend and a friend, Terry; they were at a refugee camp and she returned from a supply run to find it overrun:

It was over. And Mike and Terry, they were high when it happened. They were bit. Could have stopped it. Could have killed them. But I let them turn. I made it so they couldn't bite, couldn't scratch. I tied chains around their necks. It was insane. It was sick. It felt like what I deserved, dragging them around so that I would always know. I found out that they kept me safe. They hid me. The walkers didn't see me anymore. I was just another monster. And I was. Me. I was gone for a long time. But then Andrea brought me back. Your dad brought me back. You did.

(Maclaren, 2014: "A")

This narrative completely contradicts an earlier episode, S4E9 "After", which was written by Robert Kirkman, the creator and writer of the serial. Kirkman's effort to portray Michonne as similar to her comic counterpart is evident. While other episodes seem to characterise her as emerging from a low-class background (an unmarried mother with drug addict "baby daddy" and friend), this episode presents a decidedly different image. After the prison falls, Michonne regresses back into being alone with two armless and jawless walkers. Asleep in a car, she dreams about her former life, which seems to be a blend of memories and the present. In the dream, Michonne is wealthy: she is preparing a cheese board on what appears to be a marble countertop; the furnishing and décor project affluence. Mike and Terry are sitting at a table in front of a fireplace. They are dressed in designer clothes and are well groomed. They appear to have just returned from viewing an exhibition in a museum and are debating it; nevertheless, fantastic elements emerge as Michonne wipes the knife, which turns into a katana. The dream begins to sour; she picks up her son and Mike and Terry's appearance turns dishevelled. Terry is in favour of leaving the camp, whereas Mike is more wary and does not wish to expose his son to danger. Mike grows increasingly pessimistic about their future and the type of life that awaits his son. Michonne remains blissful, holding Andre, until she prompts them to open the wine whereupon Andre disappears, and Terry and Mike appear armless. When she wakes up, other walkers

begin to join their group and she is eventually joined by her doppelgänger (a walker who resembles Michonne). By confronting and destroying her Gothic double (cf. Chapter 3), and the other walkers, she rejects death. She rejoins and remains with Rick.



Figure 46 Memories of the past compete with the present in Michonne's dream



Figure 47 Terry (left) and Mike (right) in happier times



Figure 48 Michonne is confronted by her own Gothic double

Michonne's relationship with Rick is positive and an equal partnership; she also loves Carl and Judith like they are her own children. These relationships could have easily devolved into Michonne assuming a "mammy" role, but fortunately this was avoided. Rick is initially suspicious of Michonne, but grows to trust her because of her friendship with Carl. Their friendship blossoms after the prison falls, but is solidified when Michonne fights by his side after Carl is shot (Nicotero, 2016: "No Way Out"). After Carl recovers, they begin a relationship (Skogland, 2016: "The Next World"). Rick and Michonne are a committed couple; when there is an extended period of peace, they decide to have a baby (Liu, 2019: "Warning Signs"). After Rick's presumed death, unlike Lori, Michonne remains loyal to him and gives birth to their son, RJ (Rick Junior). Alexandria forms a council, but Michonne has the power to veto decisions. Members of the council (such as Siddiq, Aaron, and Gabriel) complain about or second-guess Michonne's decisions, but the audience later learns that she is over-cautious for good reason. In a flashback, some months after Rick's departure, even though Michonne is heavily pregnant, she relentlessly searches for the walker version of him (Shelton, 2019: "Scars"). Later in the same episode, Jocelyn, a friend from Michonne's past, arrives. Jocelyn convinces the Alexandrians to help her save a group of children. Jocelyn claims that she kept finding and rescuing children before she reached Alexandria; however, it is an elaborate ruse. During the night, Jocelyn and her children kidnap the Alexandrians' children. Michonne and Daryl track them to a school; they are captured and branded by Winnie, a young girl. Jocelyn instructs the children to kill Michonne and Daryl, but they manage to escape and split up. Jocelyn tries to beat Michonne to death; however, Michonne is able to kill her. She is surrounded by the

armed children who do not wish to return to Alexandria. One of the children slices Michonne's stomach; another instructs Winnie to kill the Alexandrian children, including Judith; Michonne is forced to kill all of Jocelyn's children. Daryl arrives just in time to see the massacre; he is spared the ignominy of killing children.

Michonne's love for Judith is evident when the toddler emerges from a trailer. They have a loving relationship and later, ten-year-old Judith turns out to be an amalgamation of the positive qualities of Rick, Michonne and Carl. Michonne trains Judith with a short katana; Judith also has Rick's gun and wears Carl's hat. They each communicate with code names on the short-wave radio: Rick is referred to as "Brave Man", R.J. is "Little Brave Man", Judith is "Shoto" and Michonne is "Daito". The Japanese sword names refer to the length of the sword: daito is a long sword and shoto is a short sword (Delage, 2017).

At Judith's prompting, Michonne heals and trusts people again, enabling the reunification of the communities after Rick's passing. She helps Magna's group get to Hilltop; once the Whisperer War begins, Michonne helps another stranger, Virgil, who claims to have weapons. In her last episode on the series, Michonne borrows a boat from Oceanside to accompany Virgil back to Bloodsworth Island (Raju, 2020: "What We Become"). Like Morgan (another black man), Virgil descended into madness after the death of his family. He poisons Michonne with Jimsonweed, a toxic plant colloquially referred to as "zombie cucumber plant", as it is supposedly used by *bokors* to create zombies (Torres, 2020: 9). He believes that the plant will cure Michonne as he recognises her psychological pain.

Under the plant's influence, Michonne sees another double of herself who hands her the chains of Mike and Terry. She hallucinates about an alternate past where she does not rescue Andrea; Rick does not stop to help her; Daryl ignores her; eventually she becomes a Saviour; she ascends to the role of Negan's lieutenant and wields Lucille, Negan's bat, and kills (presumably) Abraham and Glenn. Later in her alternate past, the Militia chase her; Daryl shoots her in the chest and Rick shoots her in the head. The message of the dream is clear: if she had not saved Andrea, then she would not have been accepted by Rick's group. Without him, she would have turned into an antagonist. Once Michonne wakes up and vomits, she is able to fight Virgil and escape. He explains that he wanted her help to release the prisoners, but was afraid they would kill him if she was not present. Michonne forgives him and discovers Rick's boots. Convinced that he is alive, she makes contact with Judith, who

encourages Michonne to go after Rick. Michonne's final scene mirrors her first appearance: she maims two walkers and uses a rope to lead them through the forest. Shortly thereafter, she is forced to terminate the walkers when she encounters two people who need her help. The survivors show her a large gathering of people in the distance. Her rejection of the walkers in favour of people signals the end of the association of Michonne with her double and, by extension, with death. However, it is a disappointing conclusion to Michonne's narrative arc. Michonne has been faithful and a good mother: the antithesis of Lori's defects. The show wished to depict her decision to save Andrea as the lynchpin that changes her entire destiny. The message is clear: black female characters must care for others or they serve no purpose. Sasha had to protect and care for Maggie and Michonne's destiny was linked to saving and protecting Andrea. When Sasha left Maggie to avenge Abraham's murder, she paid for it with her life.

Michonne and Sasha are, to date the only black female main characters on the show. After Sasha's death and Michonne's departure, there are a few minor characters, such as the sisters Connie and Kelly. Like Deanna, Kelly's role has been gender-swapped. In the comics, Connie and Kelly are a heterosexual couple as Kelly is a man (Kirkman, Adlard, Gaudiano and Rathburn, 2014: "A New Beginning"). Connie and Kelly are part of the group led by Magna. The group also consists of Yumiko and Luke. It is unclear why the nature of the relationship was also changed, but perhaps it was because Magna is in a relationship with Yumiko. It is a conspicuous decision given that Magna and Yumiko are feminine-presenting lesbians, whilst Kelly has a masculine or "butch" appearance. Fans interrogated Angel about her sexuality on Twitter and she responded:

Yes I'm a girl who likes girls... Nothing complicated about it... Some of ya act like you never heard the word 'GAY' before. I am proud of who I am. As long as God, my family, friends and fans love me for who I am I'm not stressing about your negative attitude.

(Theory, 2018)

TWD has come under fire for its lack of LGBTQIA+ representation and apparent extermination of gay characters (Bone, 2019). Just as fans and critics had identified the slaughter and replacement of black men as the "One Black Man at a Time" trope, and referred to Daryl's presentation as queerbaiting, *TWD* is now accused of relying

on the “bury your gays” trope. As the name of the trope suggests, LGBTQIA+ characters are more likely to die than heterosexual characters since they are considered more expendable (*TVTropes*, 2019). Tara Chambler was the first openly lesbian character on the serial. Her first onscreen relationship was with Alisha and her next relationship was with Dr Denise Cloyd. All three characters had violent deaths. Aaron and Eric were the first openly gay male couple on the show; Jesus / Paul Monroe was also open about his sexuality. Both Eric and Jesus have since died, and Aaron has lost his arm. In the comic series, Aaron and Jesus develop a relationship; while it was not portrayed onscreen, Ross Marquand and Tom Payne “believed that their love did blossom in the world of the series” (Warner, 2019). They were, like other minorities (such as T-Dog and Sasha), forced to craft their own backstories and off-screen narratives to help them portray their roles convincingly. Also, like another minority, Gabriel, Aaron has been physically maimed; even with a mace-like prosthetic, Aaron requires rescuing by an older, but fully-abled Negan. Even after having been incarcerated for many years in Alexandria’s home-made jail, Negan miraculously beats Aaron in a confrontation. Yet, Jesus had taught Aaron martial arts over the years. In the comics, Jesus and Aaron kill Beta; in the television series, Daryl and Negan have the honour of dispatching the villain. Aaron is the last LGBTQIA+ character left alive until the introduction of Yumiko and Magna. This couple break up in the tenth season, eliminating any representation of a homosexual relationship on the show.

Lauren Ridloff (who acts the role of Connie) was born deaf and has a Mexican father and African American mother (Paulson, 2018). There has been no mention of the sisters being half-siblings; therefore, it is assumed that Connie does not have a multiracial background. Angel Theory (who acts as Kelly) started to lose her hearing after two car accidents (Hatzipanagos, 2020). Angel joined in the ninth season as a “recurring” character, but Lauren’s status was changed to “also starring” in the tenth season. The change in status was due to Lauren being temporarily written off the show, which Angela Kang confirmed, as Lauren was cast as Makkari, a superhero, in Marvel’s *The Eternals* (Acuna, 2020a). As established earlier, *TWD* has a conservative fan base (cf. Introduction). There is also a large contingent of fans that favours pairing Carol and Daryl, so it seemed that Carol’s decision to blow up a cave filled with Whisperers, while Magna and Connie were still in the cave, could have been interpreted as a way of getting rid of a romantic rival (Acuna, 2020a). Was Lauren’s

imminent departure used to test fan reactions to an interracial pairing between Daryl and Connie? Was it possible that Carol was made responsible for Connie's entrapment and possible demise as a way to placate this segment of the audience? Since AMC Networks uses IBM Analytics "to extract insights into audience preferences and viewing patterns" (IBM, 2016), this is highly probable. It seems as though this potential romance was waylaid.

Carol can apparently do no wrong. Tyreese pardoned her for murdering Karen; Lydia absolves her for murdering her mother and then Daryl and Kelly forgive her for Connie's apparent death. Connie has since emerged from the cave, weakened and disorientated, falling directly into Virgil's path (Nicotero, 2020: "A Certain Doom"). Since Virgil seems to have moved on from the death of his family, it is possible that he may provide a convenient love interest for Connie. Since Daryl and Carol will have their own spin-off show, there will be no entanglements for his character (Otterson, 2020).

Nabila is the first Muslim character introduced on the show. She is a minor character, appearing mostly in the background. She is noticeable because of her *hijab* (head covering) and large size. The big black woman is also a stereotype, but is peculiar and deplorable in the show, given that the overwhelming majority of characters are thin because of the scarcity of food, or have developed wiry muscle from labour, walking or killing walkers. Nabila has since married Jerry, a more prominent character, and they have had three children in a short period of time. Her contribution as an overweight Muslim woman is her reproductive abilities. Due to the spectre of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, male Muslims are typically represented as terrorists whereas females are usually depicted as silent and submissive (Shaheen, 2008). Nabila is a testament to patriarchy as she is shown to be happy and content with her role as a wife and mother. She remains a peripheral figure on the show.

Although *TWD* has made some gestures towards inclusiveness, the show remains conservative in its representation of black women. It seems *TWD* is trying to appeal to a liberal audience, or address previous underrepresentation, by introducing a slew of minorities (LGBTQIA+, disabled, fat, and Muslim). Yet, the decision to have them intersect with another minority (black women), seems a deliberate "tick box" or tokenist exercise that comes across as disingenuous. I recognise, though, that audience members who belong to minorities would find these representations meaningful and worthwhile. There has also been a tendency to have minorities enact

violence on other minorities, which started with the male characters. For instance, Siddiq is killed by Dante and Gabriel kills Dante in retribution. The introduction of Joyce and Virgil, both black characters, who try to harm Michonne, also forms part of this pattern. This seems a way to circumvent criticism of racism. In my view, black women are still underrepresented in the show and should not be “catch all” for every other type of minority.

Conclusion

“We are not the same. We are not them.”

This thesis examines representations of gender in *The Walking Dead*. I have examined the intersection of gender and other categories of difference to understand by what means power and inequality are realised in diverse groups in the show. I demonstrated that, despite attempts to address the popular criticisms levelled against the show, the characters and actors experienced unequal treatment. I employed an intersectional approach, which is an extremely useful analytical tool to explore oppression and discrimination. Another intention was to examine the other side of the coin: how certain portrayals were privileged over others. The political climate of the USA certainly influenced the representation in the serial. Jane Coaston (2019) observes that there “may not be a word in American conservatism more hated right now than ‘intersectionality’”. She goes on to list some of the hysterical responses to the concept, but in summation, intersectionality is viewed as “the new caste system”, “really dangerous” and “a conspiracy theory of victimization” (Coaston, 2019). This mentality is pervasive as Donald Trump mocked and dismissed the concept of white privilege (Scott, 2020), and, with it, the whole framework of intersectional oppression. I anticipated that similar arguments would be levelled against my analysis of *TWD*: a potential rebuttal would be that no-one is safe in a zombie apocalypse and even the protagonist left the serial. I have therefore demonstrated the differences in representations in my argument. I analysed current academic discourse about the show and then challenged and expanded upon the criticism levelled at *TWD*. I established that *TWD* reaffirms the existing societal hierarchy of white men occupying the highest echelons whereas black women occupy the base of the pyramid.

My investigation of gender representation began with the pinnacle of the hierarchy initially established in *TWD*: the human as a white, heterosexual, middle-class man. As the initial protagonist until the ninth season, Rick Grimes gained, established, and maintained his grip on power by vacillating between being a Western hero and antihero. His narrative arc on the television show concluded with his assuming the role of a saviour and martyr. Even after his departure, Rick still represents normality and the benchmark against which other characters are measured. Initially, Rick’s identity is firmly centred upon his nuclear family and his role as a husband to Lori and father to Carl. Later, his definition of family expands to include

his group members. Rick's pre-apocalyptic role as a sheriff's deputy informs his identity. He symbolises integrity, honour and chivalry. His struggle to maintain those characteristics stems from being constantly challenged by monstrous antagonists. As a result, his morally questionable decisions and actions challenge even the label of antiheroism as they grow increasingly depraved. However, the narrative takes pains to justify these acts. After Carl's death and spiralling once more into depraved behaviour, Rick decides to honour Carl's last wish and establishes a tenuous peace amongst the communities. His final feat involves appearing to sacrifice himself to save the communities from a massive walker horde. He is unconscious when a helicopter whisks him off for treatment, so he does not wilfully abandon his family. It is highly probable that the film trilogy will vindicate why he could not notify or return to his family, so his legacy will remain intact.

Rick practices hegemonic masculinity, which legitimises gender inequality and the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities. Many critics deployed the concept of hegemonic masculinity incorrectly in their analysis of *TWD*. For instance, some of them used the original definition instead of the reformulation; they incorrectly ascribed fixed traits to the concept and committed other errors of judgement. Early on Rick is coded visually as a Western hero; the Western genre is a patriarchal and phallic discourse, and Rick is involved in gun fights and brawling. The key difference between Rick and a typical Western hero is that he has a family, and this governs his behaviour. The Western and zombie genre share similar visual imagery in that external extreme long shots capture the environment. The Western exploits the myth of the frontier, which justifies colonisation and expansion. Both genres justify and glorify violence. Donald Trump's campaign promise of building a wall on the border with Mexico exploits and validates the dominance of the frontier myth in US consciousness.

The extreme violence Rick uses against antagonists is monstrous, even though the narrative frames him as an antihero who is driven to these extreme actions to protect or save his family. At times the text is unambiguous and shows where Rick should have exercised self-restraint, but instead he murders people. For example, he engages in a saloon-style shoot out with Tony and Dave. It is a typical gunfight: he draws his gun and fires before them. They turn out to be rapists and possible murderers who would have done the same to the women on Hershel's farm, so it is justified. Even when he executes people like Gareth, his actions are not only framed as a punishment and protection for his group, but to save potential victims from the

cannibal. However, when he murders Lamson and some Saviours, his actions are monstrous and cannot be justified. For this reason, I categorise Rick as a monstrous protagonist.

The final arc of Rick's character is his redemption and transformation into a saviour and martyr. It is an unbelievable and unearned conclusion for his character arc. While Rick is not shown to be religious, he is shown to be moved by a Quranic verse exalting mercy. This development is substantiated by Carl's death and last wish for peace amongst the communities. While Rick does play the role of a saviour by constantly trying to rescue people, this role is undermined by his multiple descents into barbarism. Even though his final act saves the communities from a horde of walkers, it is designed to secure his martyrdom and legacy. This cliché of self-sacrifice was necessary since it would have been unseemly to abandon his pregnant partner and child. This demonstrates the power and privilege that Rick enjoys, as even his exit seems to have been crafted to protect his reputation.

Even though Rick was the protagonist, Daryl Dixon eclipsed him as the most popular character on the show. As *TWD* reifies white hegemonic masculinity, it would seem to be a foregone conclusion that Daryl would lead Alexandria and act as the overall leader of the various communities. This did not happen despite Daryl's superior survival skills. I presumed that as a man who embodies nonhegemonic masculinity, Daryl's status as a "redneck", a poor white male, with a questionable sexual orientation secured his subordinate position. Daryl's expression of masculinity is complex and contradictory. He navigates through masculinities and engages with hegemonic practices as he only follows white male leaders. He does not enjoy any benefit from the subordination of women, but he does overcome his antagonism towards women and minorities.

Daryl does not conform to hegemonic masculinity since he is not married or a father. For ten seasons, Daryl has abstained from forming any romantic relationships. This fact has preoccupied a significant part of the fandom's imagination. Frank Darabont informed Norman Reedus that his character would be "prison gay". Robert Kirkman was forced to declare that Daryl was "straight" to appease upset fans. Reedus claimed that he was open to the idea of Daryl's being gay, but it seems that he exercises tremendous control over his image. Some fans berated the show for "queerbaiting", whilst others angrily dismissed the possibility of Daryl's homosexuality. Recently the show introduced Connie, a black woman, as a potential partner. A

significant portion of the fandom prefers Carol as a prospect instead. Reedus's hesitancy for Daryl to be paired with a particular person shows that he is aware of the deadly repercussions for his character if his fans believe he chose the wrong person.

Since whiteness and masculinity are invisible, Daryl is marked by his difference as a "redneck". This class slur has been directed towards poor, rural, conservative, or racist views in the US South. The hillbilly also elicits similar derision. A number of similar terms were historically used to criticise everything from their physical appearance and clothing to their dietary habits. On the other hand, hunting and eating meat are associated with masculinity and a patriarchal culture. Daryl is shown in numerous sequences exhibiting his skills and providing for the group, thus raising his status as a man.

The horror genre has frequently represented rednecks as monstrous as they rape, murder, and eat waylaid travellers (*The Hills Have Eyes*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Wolf Creek* and so forth). Placing rednecks in rural landscapes in horror films exploits cultural myths about inbreeding and sexual perversion. The anti-frontier myth depicts urbanites as inept at civilising nature, but the rednecks and hillbillies are feminised by their association with nature. Even though Daryl is a redneck, he subverts the horror genre's stereotypical depiction by being sympathetically portrayed as a victim. Not only are other minority characters racist towards him, but he had to endure and overcome an abusive childhood. In his interaction with the Latino men in Atlanta, Daryl is upset with Rick's decision to hand over guns and ammunition to them. He is proven right in a deleted scene as all of the people at the retirement home are murdered. Rick also gives Morales a gun when the Morales's family decide to leave the group. Later, Daryl kills Morales after he discovers he is now a Saviour. After Dante's death, there are no Latino characters left in the show. Reedus was instrumental in eliminating the unsavoury elements of Daryl's character, such as his drug usage and overt racism, enabling his transformation into a sympathetic victim. The cannibals in *TWD* (despite cannibalism being a redneck practice) are not rednecks; the leader is highly intelligent, strategic and appears to belong to the middle class.

Given that other minorities are typically reduced to stereotypes, there is a deliberate undertaking by the producers and writers to subvert the redneck stereotype. This decision aligns with the transformation of the redneck in reality television programmes. The families in these programmes are wealthy; therefore, their adoption

of a redneck identity is performative. Similarly, the Whisperers wear human skin masks like the villains from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, but are not rednecks: Alpha seems to have come from a middle-class background and Beta was a famous country music singer before the apocalypse.

Daryl's sexuality and identity as a redneck has ensured his popularity and longevity on the show. Conservative fans have rejected potential homosexual or interracial relationships. By not settling down, Daryl is not tied to a community. Norman Reedus's power and control over the image of his character resulted in the elimination of any undesirable attributes. These factors ensured his popularity and a spin-off show for his character after *TWD* ends.

While Rick and Daryl benefit from complex character arcs and backstories, black male characters have not been as fortunate. Not only are they reduced to stereotypes, but there is also an exceptionally high turnover rate for black characters. Black male characters have long, drawn-out deaths. Black females are the most underrepresented in the series, to the extent that there are no black female characters left from any of the earlier seasons. Aside from Ezekiel, Gabriel is the only black male to survive and he first appeared in the fifth season of the show. Almost all of the gay and lesbian characters have died, with the exception of Aaron, who also first appeared in the fifth season. Gabriel and Aaron were fully abled when they were introduced, but developed disabilities after incidents. Gabriel lost vision in one eye after an infection, and Aaron lost his arm in an accident. Since popular criticism of the show included discussing tropes such as "one black man at a time" and "bury your gays", it seemed that adding a disability to already minority characters was a "tick box" exercise in demonstrating that the show was diverse.

Popular bloggers and opinion editorials have heavily criticised the show about its depictions of gender and race. One of the key indicators of systemic racism in the USA is the murder of unarmed black men by white police officers and the offenders' ability to escape prosecution. The USA's history of lynching is linked to white supremacy; therefore, it is unsurprising that the Emmett Till Antilynching Act was only passed in 2020. However, it was disturbing that three Republicans and an Independent Representative voted against the bill. This context is essential to understanding why fans were upset by the continuous replacement of black characters on the show.

In the same way as Norman Reedus exerted power and influence over his character, Sarah Wayne Callies was privileged enough to dissuade the producers from killing Carol; therefore, T-Dog died instead. Confronted by the lack of diversity on the show, Gale Hurd justified the deaths of the characters by claiming that more white characters died. She did not take into account that more white characters would die in a post-apocalyptic world as the minorities were already underrepresented. Indeed, shortly thereafter, white characters stopped being responsible for killing black characters. Other exit strategies were employed. For example, Heath inexplicably disappeared and it is implied much later that Jadis exchanged him for supplies, which is problematic given the USA's history of slavery. Morgan repeatedly mentions that he cannot die and it is a burden for him since he has watched so many loved ones die. He left and joined the spin-off show *Fear the Walking Dead*, where he keeps miraculously escaping death. This seems to be a pointed effort. Unless the Commonwealth has access to an oncologist, chemotherapy and radiation treatments, Ezekiel will die of thyroid cancer, unless it turns out to be a benign growth, for example. Gabriel is also saved from the Whisperers at the last minute by Maggie. Now people of colour kill each other: a Muslim, Siddiq, was killed by a Hispanic man, Dante, who in turn was killed by a Black man, Gabriel.

A succession of mutilated black men has provided a noteworthy spectacle on the show. The images of black men suffering could elicit feelings of identification, detachment, repulsion, or desire in the viewer. From the perspective of walkers and cannibals, the bodies represent desire as they wish to consume them. The physical torture and dismemberment of black men marks them as different since their bodies become sites of repulsion. By purposefully separating black men from romantic partners, the writers, showrunners and producers of the show ensure that they are never seen as objects of desire by the other characters.

Father Gabriel has deviated from the negative stereotypes. He has a backstory and a complex character arc. However, he supports white hegemonic masculinity. He is depicted as a coward and disloyal, but gradually earns Rick's trust. His attempts at heroics are not always successful and he frequently requires rescuing. His partial blindness further marks his difference. He leads the council in Alexandria, but is not an autonomous ruler like Rick. He forms a romantic relationship with Rosita while she is pregnant, so he has been denied the ability to father his own children. When the Whisperers are on the verge of killing him, Maggie arrives to rescue him. While King

Ezekiel appears to be different from Gabriel as he is an independent ruler, he also submits to Rick's leadership in the war against the Saviours. He also adopts children and his people love him. Nevertheless, like Gabriel, he is not a warrior. He leads his fighters into a Saviour trap, and they sacrifice their lives to protect him. Carol arrives just in time to rescue him. He marries Carol, and for a brief time they are happy. Eventually, he loses Carol, Henry, and the Kingdom.

Both leaders require white women to rescue and support them, which implies that race and not gender ensures a privileged position in the show's hierarchy. Since hegemonic masculinity ensures the subordination of women, I was puzzled as to why white women who practiced emphasised femininities died, while those who engaged in hegemonic femininities were able to ascend to positions of leadership. Initially the show valorised traditional gender roles, which attracted a fair amount of criticism. However, this changed gradually over time. I observed that women who relinquish their positions survive. Characters with emphasised femininities are subjected to the male gaze and gain influence through their male partners or spouses. None of the leaders, male or female, remain in power. Gender stereotypes contributed to the downfall of female leaders, but their replacements tended to be other women. Gender-based violence, in the form of rape and domestic abuse, does haunt some of the women in the serial, but they are all able to overcome it. Eventually, Alpha, a woman, is shown to be abusive towards her husband and child, and eventually murders her husband. This is only one an example of how white women experience complex character arcs and transcend stereotypes in *TWD*. Jadis and Alpha are treacherous leaders; however, Jadis does eventually submit to Rick. The female leaders of Hilltop and Oceanside also follow him in the war against the Saviours. Suicide is also gendered in the show. Men frequently engage in murder-suicides to exercise control over their wives or they undertake it to escape pain and an undignified death. Women who are overwhelmed by fears about the future pre-emptively kill themselves or undertake filicide-suicides in the guise of altruistic love.

While *TWD* empowers white women with leadership roles, the same cannot be said for black women. Not only are they underrepresented, but they are subjected to regressive and insulting stereotypes. The first black woman to appear in *TWD* is a walker who is defined by her former role as a wife and mother. She is subjected to the gazes of her husband and Rick; however, they do not take pleasure in looking at her. Walkers' lack of consciousness renders them into colonial objects. However, Jenny

appears to defy this convention as she appears to hunt her husband and son actively. Since her son, Duane, was denied the option of looking at her in this state, when he is surprised by her appearance later, he is rendered immobile and is killed by her. Her abject interior and exterior is mirrored by the abjection of her not being able to let go of Duane. Endowing Jenny with consciousness, while walkers do not possess minds, implies that black women are no different from zombies. While Jenny's decomposition and monstrosity is translated into a spectacle, Lori is spared this debasement. Her eaten body is never shown on screen and even though she appears as a hallucination, she remains in a pristine and idealised form. The producers of *TWD* deliberately protected Lori's image while Jenny did not receive the same consideration.

There is some overlap of stereotypical traits present in Jacqui. She is not intimidated by Merle's racism and she emasculates T-Dog. She also challenges the gendered division of labour in the camp. She is well educated and observes when a member of the group hides a walker bite. Yet for all her bravura, she suddenly decides to commit suicide at the end of the first season. Not only was it implausible given what was known about her character, but based on statistics, black women are the least likely to take their own lives. Her sudden religious bent further demonstrates the inexplicability of her decision.

Sasha is similarly a strong, black woman who also succumbs to suicide. She is proficient with her sniper rifle and has a warm and loving relationship with her brother. Her beauty makes her a target for men to proposition her. At one point, a Saviour attempts to rape her. *TWD* does not portray black women as hypersexual or promiscuous, instead transferring this stereotype to a Latina character, Rosita. The writers did eventually try to justify this decision. They unconvincingly inserted a dialogue that reveals that Rosita was using the men to learn useful skills. After learning this information, Sasha decides that Rosita is more valuable than she had thought and deserves to live. When Sasha is captured, she kills herself to prevent Negan from using her against the Alexandrians. Sasha and Merle are the only main characters to turn into walkers and eat a person on screen. However, Merle eats a dead person whilst Sasha eats a live person, heightening her monstrosity. Unlike the white woman, Amy's peaceful resurrection, Sasha is immediately violent.

Michonne is constantly described as masculine by critics such as Dunaway (2018) as she is able to fight and she is physically fit and strong. She is labelled as a

strong or angry black woman, an amazon, and a magical negro. Her difference is highlighted by the fact that unlike the other women, she does not require rescuing.

Her early nemesis, the Governor, wanted to rape, torture, and murder her but *TWD* (unlike many other television shows such as *Game of Thrones* (Van Patten, 2011; Graves, 2014; Podeswa, 2015), *Scandal* (Bokelberg, 2014) and *House of Cards* (Foley, 2014)) did not succumb to using rape as a form of character development. However, another multiracial character (Joan) commits suicide to escape from her rapist. The typical rape revenge narrative is subverted as she turns into a walker and kills her assailant; however, in the process she saves a white female character from being raped.

Michonne's backstory is not crafted with care or consideration and is riddled with inconsistencies. She does not even receive a last name. Unlike her comic book counterpart who is married, she has children out of wedlock. She tells Carl that Andre died because her boyfriend and his friend were busy getting high when walkers attacked the camp. Later, she dreams of the past and she appears to come from a wealthy background. She is also confronted by a Gothic double, a walker version of herself. All the black women in the serial are thus associated with the dead. Michonne's relationship with Carl and Judith transforms from a mammy role into a loving mother-child relationship, thereby defying the stereotype. Her relationship with Rick and their child demonstrates that she is also not a magical negro. Her final arc in the show is problematic. She repeatedly hallucinates when Virgil poisons her. Her dreams suggest that her entire future hinged upon saving Andrea. If she had not helped Andrea, Michonne would have become a Saviour and Rick would have eventually killed her. When she finds Rick's boots, she leaves in search of him. While reassured by Judith that her decision is correct and that Alpha is dead, it seems unlikely that she would abandon her children while Beta and the Whisperers were still alive. Compared to Rick's exit, the conclusion of her journey on the show is anticlimactic and disappointing. Michonne's departure means that there are no main black female characters on *TWD*.

The sisters, Kelly and Connie, have been introduced probably to address this gap. Their hearing disability means that they also represent another minority. Other disabled characters include Gabriel, who is partially blind, and Aaron, who is missing an arm. Aaron is also gay, so he also represents a minority. Aaron's partner, Eric, and Jesus have died. Other lesbian characters such as Tara, Denise and Alisha have also

died, leading to accusations that *TWD* is guilty of the “bury your gays” trope. Magna and Yumiko were introduced alongside Kelly and Connie, suggesting that the creators of *TWD* viewed diversity as a tick-box exercise. Nabila, a Muslim, who is noticeably larger than the thin and emaciated characters, is also a mother to three children. These actions suggest that *TWD* is trying to appeal to a liberal audience and address underrepresentation, but it also comes across as tokenism since these characters are underdeveloped. Representations in popular culture affect the treatment of minorities in the real world, therefore there should be more consideration of their characterisation. Inclusion is only the beginning of the process: it is also essential to scrutinise the way minority characters are represented.

Selfishness and desperation tend to create narrative fodder. When an unknown virus infects humanity and resurrects the dead, the survivors of the zombie apocalypse swiftly collapse into “us” versus “them” categories. While tragic, a pandemic and its aftermath offer humanity a clean slate and a chance to embrace equality. Instead, pre-apocalyptic and alternate hierarchies compete for ascendancy. When I began writing about the survivors of a zombie apocalypse, I did not expect to experience a pandemic first-hand. The Covid-19 pandemic continues to have a devastating impact on humanity, but there is hope. Various pharmaceutical companies such as Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca have produced vaccines (Fox, 2021). Thousands of volunteers were sourced from Africa for vaccine trials; however, wealthy countries have bought more than half of the available doses even though they constitute roughly 14% of the world’s population (Patta, 2020). Akin to the hoarding observed in zombie fiction, western countries have amassed a valuable resource.

While there were many scenes of panicked crowds emptying grocery shelves on news networks across the world, another inexplicable and highly sought-after resource in the early days of the pandemic was toilet paper. *The Walking Dead* predicted this anomaly ten years ago in the first episode of the show (Darabont, 2011: “Days Gone Bye”). When Morgan rescues Rick, there is a noticeable stack of toilet paper rolls in the corner of the living room. A popular trope in the zombie genre involves a character who does not reveal that they have been bitten and infected, endangering others’ lives. Jim, for instance, pretends that he was not bitten and it is merely blood from a corpse on his chest (Dickerson, 2011: “Wildfire”). Similarly, “anti-

maskers”, “anti-vaxxers” and Covid-19 deniers threaten the rest of the populace.⁵⁵ Ignoring the advice offered by medical professionals surely contributed to the virus raging unchecked across the world. At the beginning of January 2021, despite accounting only 4% of the world’s population, the USA accounted for 20% of the coronavirus deaths world-wide (Roubini, 2021).

Just over 74 million people voted for Donald Trump’s re-election (Lewis, 2020). Given Trump’s well-publicised openly misogynistic and racist views, these voters presumably condone and share his beliefs. There are numerous incidents that reflect the extremism of some of Trump’s supporters. On 11 August 2017, neo-Nazis marched in the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. It was a disappointing spectacle; but it seemed sanity had prevailed when Joe Biden won the election in 2020. However, a mob of Trump supporters, incited and directed by Trump, attacked the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 in a coup attempt (Reeves, Mascaro and Woodward, 2021).

Thousands of people marched through barricades, broke windows and doors and entered the building. A makeshift gallows was erected outside the Capitol with an orange noose hung from it (Pengelly, 2021). President Trump repeatedly claimed on Twitter that Vice-President Pence had the authority to overturn the election, even though Pence did not have this authority. While chanting, “Hang Mike Pence”, the enraged crowd set about hunting for Pence in the Capitol building. House lawmakers and staff members barricaded themselves away from the bloodthirsty crowd until they were eventually evacuated (Reeves, Mascaro and Woodward, 2021).

The similarities between Donald Trump and The Governor from *TWD* are striking. Trump’s 2016 election campaign was largely built on fear-mongering: he repeatedly claimed that he would keep Americans safe by building a wall on the border between the USA and Mexico border to keep immigrants out of the country. In *TWD*, the communities obsess over walls to prevent zombies and other undesirable survivors out. The Governor covets the prison as its fence and buildings offer protection. His lies convince his people that the prison dwellers are evil and that the prison is important for their survival. An otherwise normal group of people are easily

⁵⁵ There is some consistency in the belief systems of anti-maskers and anti-vaxxers. They claim that they do not wear masks or take vaccines because it violates their freedom, or they maintain that these practices are harmful or do not work. Many of these people also claim that Covid-19 is a hoax (Kandola, 2020; Stewart, 2020).

persuaded to attack another group with just a few words from a charismatic leader. When they arrive at the prison, the Governor executes a defenceless prisoner, and in the ensuing fracas, proceed to break down the perimeter fencing, guard towers and buildings with a tank. Like him, the rioters at the Capitol did not even realise that they were attacking their democracy and the very symbol of their freedom and protection.

Undermining the idea that Donald Trump's base is mainly poor white "rednecks", the rioters were mainly upper- and middle-class people from the suburbs (Bunch, 2021). Jenna Ryan took a private jet and flew to Washington D.C. (Rosenthal, 2021), whilst Jacob Chansley refused to eat after being arrested because he wanted to be served organic food (Noor, 2021). A sympathetic judge found it "deeply concerning" and acceded to his request. This is a remarkable concession given that the Trump administration claimed that "safe and sanitary" conditions did not include soap, toothbrushes or adequate sleep for children held at Border Patrol stations (Sands, 2019). Yet, Trump and his ilk deny that white privilege exists (Scott, 2020). The same sort of inequality is also present among the Saviours. They imprison Daryl without clothes and bedding. Dwight feeds Daryl dog food, while the camera follows Dwight as he collects freshly baked bread, harvested tomatoes, newly laid eggs and condiments from the slave population so that he can make a fried egg sandwich with all the trimmings (Riley, 2017: "The Cell").

Considering the number of black people murdered by law enforcement officers, the resulting Black Lives Matter movement, as well as calls to defund the police, it was unsurprising that police officers helped the far-right rioters at the Capitol (Melton, 2020). Numerous pictures and footage shared on social media showed police assistance and participation in the ensuing chaos: for example, an officer took a "selfie" with protestors, some law enforcement officials opened barricades and other police officers directed people to Democrat offices in the building (Gerstein, 2021). Two Capitol Hill police officers have been arrested; other officers are still being investigated for assisting the insurrectionists (Nickeas, Grayer and Nobles, 2021). The police officers were not alone in their treachery. Nearly 20% of those arrested at the Capitol have served in the military.

Some officers, however, did not abandon their posts. Three officers were pulled down the stairs of the Capitol building and were beaten with Confederate, American and Trump flag poles (Speare-Cole, 2021). One of these officers, Brian Sicknick, was struck on the head with a fire extinguisher. Eugene Goodman, a black officer, used

himself as bait to lead a mob of white men away from the Senate chamber entrance (Honderich, 2021). The contrast between the riot at the Capitol and the way law enforcement officials treated Black Lives Matter protestors is damning. For instance, a peaceful protest held by mostly black protestors near the White House on 1 June 2020 was met by a force comprised of “Washington police, US Park police, over 5000 national guard troops and federal agencies like the Bureau of Prisons”; in addition, a low-flying helicopter, tear gas, batons and horses were used to clear the crowd so Trump could take a picture outside a church (Borger, 2021). Donald Trump has made history for being impeached for a second time; his legacy is a deeply divided nation (Zurcher, 2021).

From the numerous videos uploaded onto social media and broadcast on the news, a few women were amongst the crowds at the Capitol, but the overwhelming majority appeared to be white males. Historically and until the present, military and police organisations are mostly comprised of men. Charlotte Isaksson notes that these organisations are amongst “the most gendered of all governmental and related activities” and the “military and police have for a long time been dominated by men together with masculine norms in the thinking, processes, and activities that make them ‘institutions of hegemonic masculinity’” (2019: 231). It is clear, therefore, that hegemonic masculinity contributed to the events that occurred on 6 January 2021.

Keeping this context in mind, it is hard to take seriously and accept that just over a decade ago, Rick Grimes, a fictional sheriff’s deputy, claimed that, “Things are different now. There are no niggers anymore. No dumb-ass-shit, inbred white-trash fools either. Only dark meat and white meat. There's us and the dead. We survive this by pulling together, not apart” (MacLaren, 2011: "Guts"). While the coronavirus pandemic is not near the scale of devastation of a zombie apocalypse, we have witnessed nations being more divided than ever and Rick’s appeal to equality rings hollow. It asks viewers to accept that a law enforcement officer, who is a white, middle-class, heterosexual man, and embodies hegemonic masculinity, believes that a pandemic has enabled equality. Equally troubling, T-Dog’s concern about being lynched is dismissed by a white man, Dale, who reminds him that he should be grateful since “that redneck went out of his way to save your ass” (Dickerson, 2012: "Bloodletting"). In the real and fictional world, there is an attempt to silence criticism voiced by people of colour who are expected to trust the judgement and authority of figures like Rick Grimes. In the words of Rage Against the Machine, “some of those

that work forces are the same that burn crosses” (Commerford, Wilk, Morello and de la Rocha, 1992).

Analysing a television programme that spans over ten years in this thesis has been a daunting task. Jason Mittell recognises the challenge involved in studying a television programme and cautions against only selecting isolated moments from an episode to support a particular argument (2015: 349). I therefore ensured that I not only identified trends and patterns, but I also looked at the entire character arcs, including backstories. I also had to contend with the added complexities of adjusting to each new episode that aired; how the representations of gender changed over time; the ongoing criticism against the show, and the shifting political and social climate in the world. Examining the evidence that the serial has provided thus far, my thesis has provided multiple perspectives on how gender is represented in *TWD*. The main limitation of my study is that I have not discussed the final season, which has not aired yet. However, this limitation can be mined for future research on the final season of *TWD*. In addition, there is a great potential for transmedia studies; a comparative analysis of the various shows, games, and films could be undertaken.

As a result of the influence of the Western genre on *TWD*, men and women reverted to conservative gender roles. However, as the serial progressed, women who did not learn to defend themselves, but performed a traditional form of femininity and relied upon men to protect them, did not survive for long. *TWD* relied heavily upon stereotypes for the characterisation of characters of colour. Race structures the social hierarchy of the show. In terms of leadership, white male leaders dominate, but there have been a few black men and white women as well. The black male leaders require white women to support or rescue them to remain in power. Race, class, sexuality, and disability affect the chances of a character’s survival, whether they are depicted as competent, if they are able to attain the level of leader and can retain the position, as well as who embodies monstrosity among the characters. The show therefore mirrors the social hierarchies of twenty-first-century US society.

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Appendix B: Glossary of Technical Terms

Production

Executive Producers (EP)

Executive producers may have many roles ranging from dealing with legal, financial, and creative aspects of a television programme. Their role may also overlap with other roles including writing, directing, acting, or consulting.

Showrunner

The showrunner is the main executive producer of the television programme. They are typically the head writer and script editor. They also liaise with network executives, advise actors, create characters, and work with the budget. In addition, they outrank the directors of the show.

Writers

The writers produce scripts for the television programme. The showrunner may write or hand over the writing of each episode to a writing team. Each team member may write or co-write episode(s). Usually, the showrunner and writing staff meet to plan and discuss each episode.

Directors

Directors are responsible for the audio and visual component of the episode or programme. Most television programmes have different directors for each episode. The director interprets the script and ensure that the producer(s) are satisfied that the episode is in line with the original concept.

Types of Shots

The Extreme Long Shot (ELS)

The extreme long shot shows significant space below and/or above the subject. It is used to provide context; therefore, typical shots include the background. They can also be used to convey the mood or atmosphere of the location. High or aerial shots are also used. The effect is to create a sense of objectivity and distance, from which individual personal attributes have been removed.



Figure 49 Extreme long shot (ELS)

The Long Shot (LS)

The long shot is similar to the ELS but is less wide. It generally shows the entire subject(s) in the frame and just above and below the body. It shows where the action is happening and is used to convey the mood or atmosphere of the location. It is typically used at the beginning of an episode to establish the context of a scene. They are primarily used to allow the audience to follow the broad movements or pattern of action and the position of the subjects in the shot.



Figure 50 Long shot (LS)

Medium Shot (MS)

The medium shot cuts the subject just above or below the waist. It allows the audience to see more detail, but also part of the context.



Figure 51 Medium shot (MS)

The Close-Up (CU)

The close-up is commonly framed just above the head to the upper chest of the subject. It is meant to encourage interest in the audience. A close-up of a person concentrates interest on reactions. This shot emphasises personal facial expressions and emotions that might otherwise escape the attention of the spectator.



Figure 52 Close-up shot (CU)

The Extreme Close-Up (ECU)

The extreme close-up is an even more detailed shot of a subject. It is dramatic and reveals mood or emotion. It provides even more detail about a person or the scene.



Figure 53 Extreme close-up (ECU)

The Choker Shot (CS)

The choker shot crops the top of the head above the forehead and ends at the chin. It is meant to objectify the character and convey emotion.



Figure 54 Choker shot (CS)

The Point of View Shot (POV)

A point of view shot shows what the subject sees. The shot typically appears in between two other shots: the first shot shows that the subject is looking at something, which is then followed by the POV shot and then a shot of the subject's reaction. The purpose of this shot is to encourage empathy for the subject. If it is shot from a high angle, then the subject is seen as smaller, weaker, and less powerful. If the shot is from a low angle than the subject is seen as larger, stronger, and more powerful.



Figure 55 A point of view shot (POV)

Shot Reverse Shot (SRS)

A shot reverse shot (SRS) is when the first shot is of a subject looking at another subject (who may be off-screen). The next shot shows the other subject looking back at the first subject. Given that the subjects are shown facing in opposite directions, the audience surmises that the subjects are looking at each other.



Figure 56 The first shot



Figure 57 Reverse shot

Over-The-Shoulder Shot (OTS)

An over-the-shoulder shot shows the subject from behind the shoulder of another character. It is commonly used to film conversations so that the audience member can focus on the person's facial expressions and speech.



Figure 58 Over-the-shoulder shot

Other

Binge-watching

Binge-watching is when viewers watch multiple episodes in a short succession. The advent of streaming services and the ability to watch programmes on multiple devices (such as smart phones and tablets) has changed the viewing behaviour of some audience members.

Class

A system of establishing a social order where individuals are grouped according to a perceived social or economic status.

Flashback

A flashback is a scene in an episode that is set in a time before the current timeline of the main story.

Flashforward

A flashforward is a scene in an episode that is set in the future of the current timeline of the main story.

Gender

Gender refers to the social and cultural construction of what constitutes being masculine or feminine. It is specific to the society or culture of the individual.

Race

Race refers to a socially constructed idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups based on their physical differences.

Representation

A representation refers to the way someone or something is shown or described.

Season

A season is a collection of episodes that is broadcast within a set time frame. Originally, networks used to air 22-24 episodes per season. Streaming services, such as Netflix and Showmax, have encouraged shorter seasons so that these figures are no longer the norm.

Sexuality

Sexuality refers to the way people experience and express themselves sexually.