

The Future Looks Awfully Familiar:
Gendered Representations in Popular Dystopian Television

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The Future Looks Awfully Familiar: Gendered Representations in Popular Dystopian Television

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This thesis examines gendered portrayals in AMC's *The Walking Dead* and NBC's *Revolution*, two popular, contemporary television programs. The shows' location at the generic intersections of science fiction and post-apocalyptic drama potentially allows for them to tell fantastic stories about people, place, and politics that diverge from current cultural conventions of gender, ability, and power. This project utilizes a feminist rhetorical criticism to interrogate these texts in order to uncover the degrees to which *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* put forth narratives that uphold hegemonic assumptions and "norms" about gender, power, and survival despite their futuristic settings, as well as moments which subvert them. I found contradictory messages about gender overall, and specifically about bodies, ability, and power as they function in their respective dystopian worlds. There is an uneven burden of gender-complexity for female characters only; women alone must learn to adopt masculine ways of fighting, maintaining a home, and even mothering. Men who lead, fight, and mentor are assumed to "naturally" possess these abilities. Qualities and strengths typically associated with femininity are almost never privileged, for even when communication and contemplation are adopted by men, they are mixed in with the typically-masculine traits of aggression and expansion. Such familiar scripts are also often characteristic of the Western genre, as both programs utilize these qualities, as well as the wandering hero, the evil villain, and the duel, to provide recognizable narratives in otherwise-strange settings. However, *The Walking Dead*'s additional genre of horror then works to disturb

familiarity. By presenting the audience with bizarre and grotesque images, sounds, and stories, this show, above *Revolution* overall, presents more complicated narratives about gender, ability, and power. Neither program can be dismissed as outright sexist or conventional, nor can their kick-ass female protagonists simply deem the shows revolutionary. Rather, they, and I find *The Walking Dead* more so, simultaneously work within traditional ideologies of patriarchy and Western cultural hegemony while providing moments and characters which subvert those very norms.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: The Future Looks Awfully Familiar

On Halloween night 2010, *The Walking Dead* premiered on the AMC channel to over 5 million viewers, the largest ever audience for a cable drama (Nielsen Media Research [NMR], 2013). The show, about a group of zombie-apocalypse survivors, has gone on to shatter Nielsen records for cable each season, with over 12 million viewers for the season 3 finale (NMR, 2013). The emphasis on cable (versus broadcast) is significant because television watchers are increasingly consuming their shows in new places and in new ways (NMR, 2013). More lenient censorship standards are luring writers, producers, and actors to cable networks (any television channel which requires an affirmative subscription such as Comcast or DirecTV) as they are able to push story telling boundaries much farther than has been traditionally attempted on NBC, ABC, or CBS. However, the 2012-2013 NBC line up also included a post-apocalyptic drama set in a technological dystopia where all the electricity has “disappeared.” Given network television’s rapid ratings descent, *Revolution*’s average of 9 million viewers each week was enough to prompt NBC to renew the series as early as October 2012 for the 2013-2014 season (NMR, 2013). This genre then seems to be on the upswing of popularity with four major science fiction motion pictures having been released in the summer of 2013 and several more planned for 2014 (Johnny Depp in *Transcendence*, a new *Godzilla*, and yet another Tom Cruise alien-flick, *Edge of Tomorrow*): American audiences are devouring dystopic and apocalyptic fiction en masse.

The fact that all four movies mentioned above star Hollywood’s leading *men* is not lost on me, far from it. Although I certainly have become accustomed to, if not comfortable with, the lack of gender parity in science fiction and dystopian fiction, while watching *The Walking Dead*

and *Revolution* each week, I made a different observation. To be sure, there *are* women, and many of these women “kick ass;” they can assist in the protection of their small communities with both their bodies and with weapons. Certainly at the end of the world it would be unwise to not utilize as many hands as possible. Rather, I began to make observations about the *ways* that these women were transforming into warriors and what it looked like when women took up arms to protect themselves and their loved ones. I also noticed that when groups of survivors banded together to accomplish goals, echoes of hegemonic traditions regarding organization and leadership seemed to be anchoring these futuristic tales.

A particular set of stories is continually being told about women, men, children, family, and power in contemporary popular representations of the dystopic-future such as *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution*. As works of science fiction, these kinds of shows have the potential to be radically different and present the audience with whatever kinds of futures our imaginations allow for. The reason I have chosen to study these two particular texts lies in both their popularity and because of their genre. As noted above, both shows receive relatively large audiences, and *The Walking Dead* has become a bonafide pop-culture phenomenon. Additionally, their location at the generic intersections of science fiction and post-apocalyptic drama (and as later discussed, the Western and horror) means they are popular texts which contain the possibilities to tell fantastic stories about people, places, and politics that are unlike our current cultural conventions about them. In my project, then, I examine these texts in depth in order to uncover the degrees to which *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*¹ put forth narratives that critique hegemonic assumptions and “norms” about gender, power, and survival as well as where such institutions are being upheld.

¹ Throughout the paper, when referring to both shows, I will vary the order that I present the names of the two shows, so as to not privilege one over the other.

The broad research questions that informed my thesis were: How do *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* function rhetorically to put forth stories about women, men, power, and cultural norms? To what extent do the genres that these shows occupy work to assist them in reinforcing gendered conventions, subvert them, or both? Do these shows take advantage of the possibilities for alternative (re)imagining of gender, bodies, and ability that the futurist science fiction setting could allow for? Placing a close reading of these two programs in conversation with literature on critical rhetoric, hegemony, gender, bodies, and genre, I was able to glean an analysis of the implicit and sometimes contradictory messages regarding these foci hidden underneath the dystopic narratives.

In my thesis, I argue that *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* convey competing messages about gender, bodies, power, and ability. Complex and hybrid gendered performances are consistently portrayed as useful, competent, and especially-able to survive in unfamiliar and dangerous worlds. However, only female characters *must* adopt skills, behaviors, and attitudes typically associated with masculinity. All male leads, whether protagonists or antagonists, are not required to embody traits often associated with femininity. Masculine values and norms still subtly prevail in their post-apocalyptic times. Yet there are instances of a feminine privilege in the two male protagonists of each show. Although the programs are heavily masculinized as men's stories about men's drama, that Rick and Miles are the ones who most embrace ways of knowing that include some typically-feminine characteristics is indicative of the possibility of egalitarian values. Further, I find that, overall, *The Walking Dead* tells more nuanced stories about gender, ability, and power than *Revolution*, but the difference is not so much due to their varying television platforms, rather is the product of the additional genre of horror to the former program. The divergence in genre suggests the potential for this show to perpetuate more

complex and critical narratives than *Revolution*. Neither program can be dismissed as outright sexist or conventional, nor can their kick-ass female protagonists simply deem the shows revolutionary (regardless of title of show). Rather, they simultaneously work within traditional ideologies of patriarchy and Western cultural hegemony while, and I find *The Walking Dead* more so, providing moments and characters which subvert those very norms.

Method

Rhetorical Criticism

My analysis utilized feminist rhetorical criticism in order to reveal how these highly visible artifacts communicate ideas about gender, power, and ability. Although various methods have been used to analyze popular culture texts (content analysis, discourse analysis, or ethnography, for example), the rhetorical frame will best allow me to see how specific words, phrases, behaviors, costumes (including makeup), and landscape work to make arguments about what post-apocalyptic survival looks like. Specifically, what arguments are being made about how people *should* behave and appear? Campbell and Burkholder (1997) note:

Just as language is never neutral or impersonal, so rhetoric, no matter how expository or informative it may seem, is always designed to gain acceptance for certain ways of evaluating and labeling things. Similarly, as the naming process includes feelings and attitudes toward what is named, so rhetoric, because it is concerned with problems, seeks to label and evaluate in ways that make present conditions unsatisfactory, even intolerable, for audiences. (p. 12)

My project uncovers ways of labeling men, women, children, and leaders, and to trace how each group acts and communicates in a time of utter chaos and danger. As the authors above point out, this will then reveal ways that certain behaviors and utterances are evaluated as “normal,” “cooperative,” “right,” or as something “deviant.” Examining texts that contribute to and influence popular culture is important to rhetorical scholarship as pop culture is a contested site of “the people” and their relation to those who hold hegemonic power (Storey, 2009; Hall, 1989).

That is, popular texts engage in popular discourse but do not necessarily *create* or *progress* the narratives; there is an uneasy tension between the opposition of the people and imposition of those in power (Storey, 2009).

Based on these sites of inquiry in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, an ideological rhetorical criticism will be the most illustrative tool to examine how such evaluations are placed within our current, collective (that is, in 21st century, U.S. culture) understandings of “normal” or “abnormal.” A turn to the “third persona” (Wander, 1983), referring to those discourses which affect human subjectivity without having to be explicitly “talked about” such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, or classism for example, places ideology at the forefront of my criticism. Rhetoric is a cultural site, and an ideological investigation allows the critic to deeply examine how hegemonic discourses constrain and/or liberate the characters of these shows.

Because the specific ideologies this thesis scrutinizes are discourses that maintain patriarchy, my rhetorical criticism then takes on a feminist perspective. By closely examining these texts through this lens, I am able to negotiate male-dominated meaning systems that I sometimes find perpetuated in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* while at the same time find moments where they were subverted. Intersectional feminist rhetorical criticism extends the loci of oppression and works to investigate racist, heterosexist, classist, and ageist discourses, as well as those that assume able-bodiedness and “normal” body size (Crenshaw, 1991). My finding that these shows, at least in the seasons that formed the basis for my analysis, are very much straight white people’s stories unfortunately does not allow for much study of characters of color or who are not heterosexual. *The Walking Dead* seems to be “righting” this course in its fourth season, but like *Revolution*, its first three seasons were quite homogenous in these ways. Therefore my

feminist rhetorical criticism tended to reveal moments of adhering to or rejecting, or both, of gendered performances.

Visual Rhetoric

I will be utilizing a feminist rhetorical criticism in order to study two popular visual texts, a medium which carries several assumptions and abilities. Particularly regarding the televisual genre of popular culture, images speak to the audience more powerfully than do words; as DeLuca (2005) so succinctly points out, it's the "visual over the verbal" (p. 120). Visual rhetoric has the capacity to strongly relay emotionally-charged messages (Cloud, 2004). Although traditional rhetorical criticism has looked for rhetors to create "images" in the audiences' minds through vivid example and intense narrative (Campbell & Burkholder, 1997), contemporary audiences are increasingly receiving persuasive messages via film, television, and advertisements with few to no written words. Further, new generations of scholars have literally grown up in the "information age," never knowing a time "pre-internet." Critical analyses of television, film, and visual advertisements proliferate alongside the explosion of avenues through which we receive these mediated texts: no longer are we confined to the living room for our favorite television shows, the theater for a new movie, or a magazine for the latest L'Oréal campaign. As a person who came of age parallel to this media boom, I am particularly drawn to visual messages as they purport to tell a story of who I am, who I am supposed to be, and where I am supposed to be going. This thesis situates post-apocalyptic, televisual rhetoric as it shapes the social imagination and articulates particular performances about bodies and experiences for audience members (Aschraft & Flores, 2003).

Show Synopses

I will next lay out the basic premises for the artifacts that I examined through a feminist rhetorical analysis, followed by a brief synopsis of the particular episodes that I focused on. I have watched all episodes of all of the seasons of these shows, so all story arcs, characters, and settings in seasons one through three of *The Walking Dead* and season one of *Revolution* were available to my critique, but I deeply concentrated on a proportionate number of episodes for each. That is, when this project began, there was only season of *Revolution* and three of *The Walking Dead*, so I chose two episodes of the former and four of the latter, two in season 2 and two in season 3. These episodes are not in chronological order, but were chosen because their plots and characters' trajectories were linked, providing for a continuity of analysis.

Revolution. NBC's *Revolution* takes place fifteen years after all the world's electricity fails to function. The introduction to the series is the voiceover from a young girl:

We lived in an electric world. We relied on it for everything. And then the power went out. Everything stopped working. We weren't prepared. Fear and confusion led to panic. The lucky ones made it out of the cities. The government collapsed. Militias took over, controlling the food supply and stockpiling weapons. We still don't know why the power went out. But we're hopeful someone will come and light the way

Well, some people know about why the power went out and even how to turn it back on. In 2012 we are introduced to the Matheson family as dad Ben hurries through the door, quickly indicating to his wife Rachael that "it's beginning." Ben desperately downloads something to a USB flash drive before all the electricity in their house goes out. Two young children, Charlie and Danny, whine that they can't watch television anymore. Ben and Rachael's panicked interaction and behavior indicate that they not only know what is about to happen, but also why. This scene jump cuts to the next, two men returning to their military base jokingly arguing over texting etiquette. They are Marines Miles Matheson and Sebastian (Bass) Monroe. Miles

receives a warning phone call from his brother Ben just before the two men witness an airplane fall from the sky, reminding the viewer that the consequences of a worldwide blackout are much more serious than mere inconvenience.

Revolution is one of a few contemporary television programs which uses a short and dramatic title screen and then rolls credits in the narrative scenes that follow it, rather than a traditional theme song with introductory images and names. After the opening scenes of the Matheson family and friends experiencing the first few apocalyptic moments, the screen goes black, but we hear what sounds like the buzz of a neon light. The word “evolution” appears brightly, with the “o” replaced by the symbol collectively understood to be the “on” or “power” button for many electronics. An “r” flickers on in front of “evolution,” the title now having “evolved” into *Revolution* (see figure 1).

The plot forwards to the “present,” to a small village where people are tending to crops in the front yards of houses and hanging laundry to dry. Ben Matheson lives there with his girlfriend and Charlie and Danny, now young adults. Rachael disappeared shortly after the blackout and is presumed dead. Danny has severe asthma and Charlie is tasked not only with looking after him, but also for some of the hunting for food. The village is stormed by men in old-fashioned uniforms (more closely resembling those from the American Revolution than modern military) on horses looking for Ben. He is wanted by the governing body that has taken jurisdiction of the northeastern (former) United States, controlled by Bass Monroe. Danny tries to intervene, Ben is shot and killed, and Danny taken in his father’s place. Ben’s dying words to Charlie are to find his brother Miles and then together rescue Danny.

The introductory mission serves as a set up for the larger plot: to take down the corrupt Monroe Republic and harness the power in the USB drives that Ben, Racheal, and their

colleagues from the U.S. Department of Defense all had fifteen years ago in order to turn the electricity back on. The narrative relies heavily on flashbacks, particularly in the front half of season 1, in order to acquaint the audience with who these characters were in their pre-apocalyptic lives, and often tell us about their relationship with each other and to the blackout.

For my close analysis, I focused on the series pilot (1:1²) and an episode towards the end of the season (1:15). Pilots are often demonstrative of the kind of tone, genre, and narrative to be anticipated as the season progresses. The introduction of key characters and conflicts are done so carefully and purposefully in order to give the audience a “base” understanding of who these people are and what their goals are. Much of the *Revolution* pilot was described above; Charlie is a curious young woman who has some hunting skills, but has been kept fairly sheltered from the larger post-apocalyptic world. Charlie’s rescue party also include village school teacher, Aaron, a former-scientist who is hinted at having knowledge of the cause of the blackout. Uncle Miles’ is found running a tavern in what used to be Chicago, laying low after having defected from the Monroe Republic. He is a bitter alcoholic who hadn’t seen Charlie for fifteen years and is reluctant to help the group look for Danny. Flashbacks reveal he was instrumental in the construction of the now tyrannical Monroe Republic, which formed initially to help people and provide law and order before Bass became hungry for more power and control. Fourteen episodes later, Danny has been rescued, but later killed, and the major narrative of the show emerges as singularly to overthrow the oppressive Monroe Republic. Miles and Charlie ally themselves with the Georgia Federation, and Miles is immediately placed in charge of tactically taking down his former partner. These episodes in particular contain dialogue, conflicts, and momentum which ground these characters and their motivations.

² For the remainder of the thesis I will be connoting specific episodes through this method. The first number represents the season and after the colon, the episode within that season. 1:1 meaning season 1, episode 1.

The Walking Dead. AMC's *The Walking Dead* is loosely based on a series of graphic novels of the same name; the first comic was written in 2003 and they are still being written by Robert Kirkman presently. Although Kirkman serves as an advisor and sometimes-writer of the television series, the show is *not* necessarily faithful to the books. Some characters and story arcs are exactly as written in them, others composites of several people or narratives, and yet others completely original to the show. They share a protagonist in Rick Grimes, however, an Atlanta-area Sheriff's deputy who wakes up from a coma to discover that the world has been overrun by zombies. Although at first utterly alone and confused (and wearing only a hospital gown), Rick resolves to find his wife, Lori, and son, Carl, about age 12. He is informed about the apocalyptic events that occurred while he was in the hospital by a man who takes him in for some rest and food, although time references are never explicit in the show nor is any explanation given of its causes. The zombie outbreak is assumed to be world-wide, however, for by the time Rick wakes up, there is no indication of an organized resistance, and basic utilities are cut off, including electricity. The pilot episode presumably takes place within weeks of the zombie outbreak, with all characters at various stages of comprehension and coping. Rick eventually finds Lori, Carl and his former partner and best friend, Shane, camping out with other people. During their time without Rick, Lori and Shane acted on mutual feelings of attraction and began an affair.

The Walking Dead's four seasons depict Rick, his family, and those who become part of the "Grimes Gang," coping with post-apocalyptic horror. They must learn how to avoid and, when necessary, kill zombies, as well as how to respond to the consequences of being bitten (like much zombie fiction, you become one). As with *Revolution's* characters, these survivors must also learn to hunt, fish, and fight without electricity. The overarching narrative of surviving a world filled with the undead is often complicated by encounters with other (living) individuals

and groups. Food, water, and shelter are scarce, and many resort to violence to secure them. Further, trust becomes a contentious theme, because while there is certainly safety in numbers, there is no way to know if a stranger or bucolic-looking shelter contains violent traps.

Unlike *Revolution*, *The Walking Dead* uses a traditional title sequence to present its name, head writer, executive producer (sometimes also referred to as the show runner), and the names of the principle cast. The thirty seconds contain a barrage of images, all varying in length, but none longer than five seconds. The shots are very dark, with any contrasting light portrayed in dingy sepia tones. The staccato of the images is matched by the screeching violins that form the basis of the instrumental theme song. Although there are no zombies shown in the title sequence, graphic depictions of disturbing images, such as extreme eyeball close-ups or a hack saw, are interlaced with shots of abandoned cars, buildings, and mattresses. Each individual shot is sped up, increasing the disorientation and adding to the audience's understanding that this is truly disturbing dystopia. The final title screen (figure 2) is the name of the show in stained yellow over a completely black screen: the title looks as dirty and distressed as its world.

Although *The Walking Dead* relies on a traditional title sequence, its pilot deviates from the conventional fast paced opener which often works to introduce as many characters and conflicts as possible. Rather, the pilot for this show did not seem to be a good episode for deep analysis, for its slow pace does not reveal much plot, or even much about Rick, in its hour. An indication of how this show will unfold, the pilot leaves many questions unanswered. The two episodes I closely inspect in season 2 (2:10 and 2:12) feature Rick and Shane in charge of a group of about 10 survivors as they camp out on the property of a farmhouse. The owner, Hershel, allows them some space, but is wary of the group of strangers actually entering his house, where he lives with his surviving family, daughters, Maggie and Beth. Yet another

stranger enters the property in episode 10, a young man that had previously belonged to a group of bandits who threatened several of the Grimes Gang on a supply run. The man begs to stay on Hershel's property; that he was only with the marauders because he did not have other options. Encountering strangers and whether or not to trust them forms the base for the two episodes I analyze in this season, as the moral conflict this man's presence posits finally drives Rick and Shane apart. Tensions become insurmountable in 2:12 when Rick kills the increasingly unstable Shane.

In season 3, the Grimes Gang and Hershel's family must flee the farmhouse and take (relative) safety in a nearby prison. However, one member, Andrea, becomes separated in the desperate race against the zombie hoard and is rescued by Michonne, a character we have not yet met. The two episodes I have chosen to closely examine revolve around the conflict between the prison group and the community of Woodbury, a seemingly "normal" town with protected walls, and a charismatic Governor (3:13 and 3:16). Andrea and Michonne are taken into Woodbury and Andrea quickly strikes up a romantic affair with the Governor. He learns of the prison and decides that Rick's group is a threat to his community, and importantly, his despotic authority. Episode 13 depicts the first time Rick and the Governor meet and episode 16 culminates in the "war" between their groups. These moments provide illustrative examples of gendered expectations about allegiance, violence, and humanity, and like those in season 2, highlight the conflicting messages about our hero, Rick.

Theoretical Frameworks

The following literature situates my thesis within several rhetorical traditions which broadly guide the lenses through which I analyze these texts. Although there will be more specific literature reviews contained within chapters, scholarly conversations about critical

rhetoric, polysemic reads, and post-apocalyptic science fiction will serve to ground my findings within arguments about ideology, hegemony, and connections between genre and cultural attitudes and anxieties.

Critical Rhetoric and Hegemony

Through a focus on the above episodes of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution*, this thesis identifies moments of (re)productions of dominant ideology in dystopian popular texts as well as subversive potential regarding gendered norms and assumptions that the post-apocalyptic genre could reveal. Thus I will examine hegemonic discourses contained in my artifacts. Following a discussion of how hegemony has been explored by rhetorical scholars I will turn to critical rhetoric and feminist postmodernism as theoretical frames through which to examine my texts for hegemonic reproductions and sites of liberation.

Often attributed to the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, Dana Cloud's (1996) translation of hegemony seems most appropriate for my work: "...the process by which a social order remains stable by generating consent to its parameters through the production and distributions of ideological texts that define social reality for the majority of the people" (p. 117). That is, although that "majority" may not benefit from the "reality" that is being packaged and sold to them, they participate nevertheless, creating over time established "truths." Taken-for-granted ways of understandings the world, then, feel "real" or "natural," despite being tiered-social constructions, gender included (Butler, 1990).

Several theorists have argued that rhetoric is the most powerful vehicle through which understandings of power, place, and "norms" are perpetuated (see Gramsci or Ernesto Laclau, for example) and contemporary scholars have examined rhetoric in its many forms as it works to both uphold hegemonic interests as well as undermine it. Cloud (1996) found that discourse

surrounding Oprah Winfrey in popular books articulated a specific rhetoric of “tokenism” which served to maintain the neoliberal (and very white) myth of the American Dream. Flores, Moon, and Nakayama (2006) found that political discourse about a potential law to “colorblind” state records, a thinly veiled attempt at erasing non-white subjectivity and abuse, demonstrated a tension between “post-racial” rhetorics and those of social change. By exploring representations of groups of humans who must organize and survive in a post-apocalyptic world, my thesis unearths ways that discourses of power and freedom are carried over from the “old” world as well as new ways of thinking about how people could potentially look, talk, and behave.

An important intervention that this thesis is situated in is the shift from traditional rhetorical criticism to looking for critical rhetoric, allowing me to unmask discourses of power, freedom, and domination (McKerrow, 1989). Raymie McKerrow, in his conception of a critical rhetoric, declared that such an orientation, “...provide[s] an avenue...toward a postmodern conception of the relationship between discourse and power” (p. 109). By teasing out both a critique of discourses of freedom as well as those of domination, the critic is (relatively) free from the obligation to “find” emancipation or utopia. Assessments of domination will persistently motivate feminist critics who work to find out how it is that certain discourses continually (re)inscribe the “...sectional interests of hegemonic groups” (Giddens, 1979, p. 187). But a move towards critiques of freedom allows the critic to include Foucault’s (1976) assertion that power is not always oppressive, but rather constitutive (DeLuca, 1999). That is, a new understanding of how rhetoric can be deployed allows for those not in power to articulate their struggles and perspectives. Although feminist and critical scholars tends to view “truth” as something that those in power possess and can be used as a kind of currency, a critical perspective holds that there are multiple “truths” and how those “truths” are produced and

disseminated (or not) is where critical rhetoricians should be focusing: “By producing a description of ‘what is,’ unfettered by predetermined notions of what ‘should be,’ the critic is in a position to posit the possibilities of freedom” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 100). That is, to begin one’s work with the assumption that hegemonic forces will be in play in fixed and assumed locations and emancipatory potential will be found in others is too narrow lens with which to examine a text. Critical rhetoric then is a transformative practice rather than a method (McKerrow, 1989), and one that allows for an analysis of the often competing and contradictory messages about gender and power I find in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*.

As noted above, McKerrow then invites rhetorical criticism to take a postmodern turn; to abolish rigid boundaries, definitions, and assumptions about where critics will find discourses of oppression and freedom. Particularly when analyzing contemporary mediated texts, utilizing a postmodern- along with a feminist -critical-lens will be the most revelatory, as they demonstrate “...a commitment to analyzing the politics of culture and the relations of culture to political and economic power” (Bignell, 2000, p.5). Rather than theories and ideas that are rooted in essentialist and foundationalist discourse (as is characteristic of a “modernist” philosophy), that is, something that is true for all people at all times, postmodern theory is, “...explicitly historical, attuned to the cultural specificity of different societies and periods and to that of different groups within different groups and periods” (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990, p.35). Fraser and Nicholson (1990) and Nicholson (1994) note that these concepts developed concurrently in the second-wave of the feminist movement, and although there is no perfect marriage between the two viewpoints, a postmodern-feminism would be beneficial in that theories would become “...comparativist rather than universalizing” (Fraser & Nicholson, 1990, p.34). McKerrow (1989) notes that a post-modern critical rhetoric is a perspective that explores the implications of

theory, and Flax (1990) similarly points out that a postmodern-feminism is useful for explaining and interpreting the human experience with recognition of a metatheoretical method of raising questions and critiques about theory and the process of theorizing itself.

When examining texts of contemporary popular culture, as is my project, through a postmodern-feminism lens, I examine the narratives, characters, sets, makeup, and public reception in the context of not only my specific time and location, but also with an eye on what has come before. Murphy (1995) reminds the critic that any “post-“theory is so because of the assumptions and theories that used to be: “...the ‘post’ also implies a dependence on, a continuity with, that which it follows” (p. 3). McKerrow (1991) notes that this tension is “inevitable” (p. 75) in postmodern work, but that “...discourses of the postmodern therefore presuppose a sense of an ending, the advent of something new, and the demand that we develop new categories, theories, and methods to explore...this novel social and cultural situation (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 30). Although these pieces don’t explicitly call up feminist work, the goal of innovative categories and theories is clearly aligned here. Further, although I use these perspectives to allow me to reveal underpinnings of power and freedom in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, the language about “ending,” “something new,” and “novel situation” seem to lend themselves especially to programs about the end-of-the-world.

Polysemy

My artifacts are complex texts; they contain competing explicit narratives and then even more multi-faceted inferential reads. The wide variety of storytelling techniques characteristic of contemporary popular television requires the audience to work through dense and often complex narratives. Shows such as *Game of Thrones*, *Lost*, and even *The Walking Dead* have blogs devoted solely to “recapping” the previous night’s episode so that not only does the reader catch

up on anything she missed or was confused about, but also is provided a clear “point-of-view” through which to understand the text. Further, these blogs also contain active “comments” sections where viewers can then convey their opinions and perspectives about an episode, plot, or character. Being an “active audience” member has never been so easy (and either so rewarding or frustrating, depending on who you ask) than in a Web 2.0 world.

Readers of any text are active interpreters; not only do we view a story, an advertisement, or an argument through our particular and unique perspective, but we are also constantly “filling in” unstated understandings and theories in order to arrive at a text’s meaning (Stern, 1993). Given the wide audience viewing my artifacts week to week, as well as the tenet of postmodernism that multiple subjectivities come together to weave the fabric of popular culture, some attention to the multiple ways that texts can be read seems warranted. In this way, texts are often polysemous³; they are open to multiple interpretations and their “meanings” are almost never finally fixed. Anyone who has debated a favorite (or despised) movie with a friend knows how divisive a text can be. Meanings exist on a continuum, where sense-making is the result of the tension between the text sending the message on one end and the interpreter on the other (Hall, 1977; McGuire, 1961). Further rhetorical critics need to be attentive to the idea that although a text may be open to more than one interpretation depending on one’s personal and unique perspective, texts *do* contain concrete and direct meanings and messages (Ceccarelli, 1998). That is, although we are active interpreters of text and insert our subjectivity into our viewing experience, audience members are not completely free to make meanings at will (Condit, 1989; Fiske, 1987; Hall, 1989). A number of factors are at play when we attempt to shape our own readings in any given rhetorical situation including access to oppositional codes, relationship of work needed and pleasure production in the decoding process, and importantly,

³ And maybe *all* good ones are.

the historical moment (Condit, 1989). Rhetorical critics should interrogate polysemous texts carefully, examining the variety of ways that they are actually consumed, and asking “who do they benefit?” (Ceccarelli, 1998). McKerrow (1989) sees oppositional potential in polysemy because although primary readings of a text may serve to reinforce dominant cultural norms, secondary readings by critical consumers are able to uncover the seeds of subversion. Celeste Condit (1989) is not quite as optimistic about the unveiling of multiple meanings in popular texts, as she argues that polysemous texts merely serve those in power with more of what they want, and then invite as many marginalized viewers as producers/writers/show runners are comfortable with. That is, she suggests that what we often view as progress (shows like *Glee*, *The New Normal*, or, even possibly *Revolution* with its female protagonist, for example) is actually a careful calculation of novelty and palatability. Searching for deployment of power and resistance in texts is at the foundation of feminist inquiry, and looking at the ideology driving the production and dissemination of power is particularly useful when working to understand the underlying assumptions about gender in dystopian televised fiction.

My findings required multiple viewings in order to arrive at a conclusion about the complex stories being told about gender, bodies, space, and power. These shows, *The Walking Dead* in particular, operate within multiple and often-competing meaning systems about hegemonic norms. For example, explicit messages about female characters direct them to be adept at violence and aggression while simultaneously tells them to get back in the kitchen. My feminist rhetorical criticism required me to uncover which narrative was the dominant one, and if this read was indeed an oppositional orientation to cultural norms about gender, or if it simply reminded women where they belong.

The Potential of Science Fiction

There is little scholarly disagreement that science fiction, the genre that generally encompasses utopian, dystopian, and apocalyptic narratives, has an almost unparalleled creative potential (Hubble & Mousoutzanis, 2013). Imagining technologic possibilities beyond anything that could “exist” in the modern world has produced some of the most groundbreaking and enduring literature, television, and film. From Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to *Dr. Who* to *Star Wars*, this genre has the potential to create worlds where today’s problems and struggles are a thing of the past. Even in dystopic futures, the aim can be whatever the author wants it to be. The goal of liberating the subordinated has been the subject of several popular fictional works (most recently with the widely popular *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* novels and films). And yet, inherent in the concept of genre itself is a set of rules that a text must abide by in order to “fit into” its respective category. Genres have set rules, conventions, and expectations which are at the same time culturally constructed and rest on a binary, like gender itself, of “normal” and “deviant” (Baccolini, 2004). Further, as pop-culture artifacts, *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* fit into contemporary ideological schemas which often serve to reproduce dominant power structures (Storey, 2009). So although utopian and dystopian fiction seems that perfect space to imagine a better, more perfect world, these popular shows often adhere to the conventions of what our world looks like *now*, particularly in their reliance on patriarchal norms.

Apocalyptic Science Fiction

Important to note here is the relationship between science fiction and post-apocalyptic fiction. The two genres do not necessarily have to intersect. Some apocalyptic fiction hinges not on science and technology, but religious and Biblical foundations (*The Book of Eli*), where some science fiction is set in alternative realities that have not experienced an apocalypse (*A.I.:*

Artificial Intelligence). Yet, they almost always do intersect in contemporary television, film, comics, and video games. *Revolution* is explicit in its narration about the blackout as a result of the misuse of an electric weapon; its deployment serves both as a reminder about the quest for too much power as well as the driving force behind the main characters' aims. *The Walking Dead* is much more mum about the cause of the zombie-pocalypse, but the end of season 1 lets the audience know that the epidemic originated with the Centers for Disease Control [CDC] in Atlanta. End-of-the-world crises in fiction are almost always the results of unfettered scientific or technologic possibilities, which, although exaggerated, often mirror contemporary political and cultural anxieties about change.

Some scholars argue that discourse and rhetoric which relies on apocalyptic-themes and logic are inherently masculine (Doyle, 2002; Quinby, 1994). That is, the causes of fictional apocalyptic scenarios are masculine in nature as well as the impetus for apocalyptic-talk in the modern world: threats to masculinity and androcentric hegemonic norms calls forth apocalyptic rhetoric (Quinby, 1994). The end of patriarchy becomes the end of the world. In this way, apocalyptic talk then becomes dystopic, as a post-modern world erodes ideologies of patriarchy, heteronormativity, Euro-centrism, and the traditional nuclear family (Quinby, 1994). Feminism and social movements generally upset hegemony, and post-apocalyptic fiction often parallels these fears, perhaps contributing to my finding that many of the stories being told in my artifacts contain tension between patriarchal norms and feminist progress.

Science fiction has the potential to envision different futures that can be critical about hegemonic ideologies, and yet often falls short of this as the concepts of utopia, dystopia, and apocalypse are co-opted by neoliberal and free-market principles, also typically associated with masculine pursuits of work, currency, and independence. Capitalism is supposed to empower us

to work towards our individual “utopias,” while we are simultaneously being threatened with “dystopia” at best (becoming a welfare state, for example) or “apocalypse” at worst (North Korea aiming nuclear missiles at us). U.S. culture then functions to exploit utopian discourse by (re)enforcing the idea that utopia is both nowhere and here in our home nation (Berlant, 1991). Post-World War II Western culture has faced several of its own apocalyptic adversaries, including fascism, communism, nuclear arms, and secular progressivism (depending on one’s personal inclinations, that is) (Nolan, 2011) but neoliberal economics and philosophy persevere, and have even accelerated since the 1980s (Baccolini, 2004; Hall, 1989). Baudrillard (1991) laments:

[Modern science fiction] has been shrunk by globalization; has become a collective market place not only for products, but for signs, values, and models, thereby leaving no room any more for the imaginary...we can no longer imagine other universes; and the gift of transcendence has been taken from us as well. (n.p.)

Utopian rhetoric continues to conform to the realities of time and place and never ceases to exist with the realm of the possible in political culture (Kumar, 2008). Christine Cornea (2007) points to the tension inherent in the modern state of the genre: “...science fiction is caught between that which exists outside of the laws of a known world and that which might be read as a logical extension of the known world” (4). Those who saw promise in science fiction to look beyond the economic and political strongholds of the West feel let down that contemporary authors cannot see past the commodification of culture and conventions about what exists now.

Feminist Science Fiction

Yet I find moments of gender boundary blurring in these shows, perhaps due to the intersections of their genres. Browne (1996) was optimistic that acceptability (and even root-for-ability) of female action heroes of the 1980s and 1990s would be a turning point in gender parity in Hollywood. Others argue that it is feminist science fiction authors who have consistently been

the ones creating texts which warn against the dangers of patriarchy, racism, classism, and heterosexism (Baccolini, 2004; Goldsmith, 1990; Lensing, 2006). Although Mary Shelly is most famous for *Frankenstein*, she also authored arguably the first Western apocalypse novel with *The Last Man* in 1826. Two hundred years later have brought us Margaret Atwood, Ursula LeGuin, Marge Peirce, and Suzanne Collins who have all written very radical stories about a future where unfettered patriarchy, racism, and eco-terrorism have obliterated civilization. Still, feminist science fiction remains on the fringe of popularity regarding mediated texts about the future as pointed out by a library reference guide to genre, “Women’s fiction, the genre that deals with relationships and womanly concerns, usually does not intersect with science fiction” (Rosenberg & Hereld, 2002, p. 159). The assumption that female authors are unconcerned with science, technology, apocalypse, and humanity remains a consistent barrier to a loud feminine voice in this genre, potentially contributing to my finding that *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, despite strong female characters, are ultimately men’s stories.

The moments of subversion of gendered performances I do find affect all female and some male protagonists so perhaps a feminist or critical eye is being utilized by the (mostly) men who write and produce these shows. Feminist science fiction has the potential to lay a critical lens over (post)modern society through which to consume presentations of “utopia” and “dystopia” and which can ultimately point the audience towards action and change (Baccolini, 2004). Critical utopian and dystopian fiction opens a space of opposition for not only women, but anyone who has been Othered by dominant discourses. Further, I am finding that several male characters in *Revolution* and, in particular, *The Walking Dead* are allowed a fluid gendered performance, often the result of an inward turn about their humanity in post-apocalyptic settings. Where androcentric science fiction tends to be “explosive,” that is, motivated to explore

extraterrestrial themes and possibilities (Baudrillard, 1991) feminist science fiction is “implosive” in that it turns a critical eye on the everyday experiences, and in the cases of my artifacts, what it means to be human in a world filled with monsters.

Conclusion

Although much thought and criticism has clearly gone into utopian, dystopian, and apocalyptic literature (and cinema as well), considerably less (scholarly) attention has been paid to popular televised end-of-the-world depictions, despite their recent popularity. As noted above, *The Walking Dead* continues to smash television ratings for a cable program, amassing over 12 million viewers for the third season finale on March 31, 2013 (NMR, 2013). Although *Revolution* does not achieve nearly those numbers, the show consistently wins the coveted 18-49 demographic for NBC, and was renewed for a second season. The popularity and post-apocalyptic settings of *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* called forth my interest in these shows, and a feminist rhetorical analysis allowed for the revelation of underlying and sometimes contradictory messages being forwarded about gender and power. In order to achieve this goal, my thesis is divided into three analytical chapters; exploring themes and mapping explicit and implicit messages about gender. Chapter 2 investigates how the post-apocalyptic survivors of both shows are organized and led. I observe that all leaders are men, a heavy reliance on (para)militaristic styles of working together, and common, yet often competing, goals of expansion and dominance. Hence, leadership roles are reserved for male bodies and masculine ways of operating. Exceptions are found in our protagonists, Rick and Miles, as a deeper read of their trajectories indicates that they are complex leaders who come to embrace both masculine and feminine styles of governance. Chapter 3 explores divisions of labor in these dystopic worlds; what bodies perform which functions? I note that superficially, females are often

disciplined into remaining in domestic spheres while men are assumed to be “outside” where the danger lies, although closer readings uncover characters who defy standards of the public/private divide. All women are required to be competent fighters or zombie-slayers, but must adopt masculine traits of stoicism and aggression in order to do so. On the other hand, some men receive a “pass” at this skill. Finally, motherhood functions rhetorically to uphold conventions of the maternal feminine, while also conveying the notion that even motherhood requires a masculine orientation. My enthusiasm for strong female protagonists is tempered in this chapter by the implied, yet consistent, message that masculinity is still “best.” Chapter 4 pulls my analysis away from moments of gendered performances and onto the generic intersections of these shows. They are not only post-apocalyptic science fiction dramas, but also both contain elements of the American Western, and then *The Walking Dead* adds a layer of grotesque horror. Utilizing Western tropes serves to situate unfamiliar environments, narratives, and monsters in more familiar frames, for example, with the clear distinctions between heroes and villains. However, the horror format of *The Walking Dead* then resituates the show in the realm of the unfamiliar by disturbing not only the audience’s senses, but also understandings of morality and humanity. The hero/villain is more often upset in this show, and its tendency to tell more nuanced and complex tales about its characters indicates that the additional generic layer of horror allows for *The Walking Dead* to potentially be a more critical and progressive program, at least regarding gender, ability, and power. The concluding chapter places these findings in a conversation with larger cultural conversations and trajectories which are increasingly rewarding complex science fiction for telling stories and providing characters which challenge hegemonic ideologies. Implications for my research are discussed, where I find that despite a familiar-looking future in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, the right combination of format and genre,

housed within a culture that contains a population ready for alternative possibilities about gender and power seems to provide the seeds of something new.

Chapter 2

Republics and Ricktatorships: Masculinized Organization and Leadership

Season 3's penultimate episode of *The Walking Dead* opens with an extreme close up on Rick's profile, zombies moaning against a fence in the background. "It's the only way," Rick is shown to be telling two other men, Hershel and Daryl, "No one else knows." They are in a remote corner of the prison, but Rick still lowers his voice to stress, "We have to do it today and it has to be quiet." Rick is telling his closest advisers of his decision to turn Michonne over to the Governor in the hope that the two factions can have some peace. Daryl's inability to keep eye contact with Rick for more than a blink reinforces his discomfort with the decision: "This ain't us, man." "No. No, it isn't." Hershel, the eldest of the prison, agrees. The camera angle changes from deep close ups to a wide angle over the isolated concrete corner to show Hershel walking away in disgust. The larger scene now visible, Rick's semi-automatic weapon and Daryl's crossbow are now observable, always strapped to the men's backs. There is no music, only a crow cawing and the clanging of Hershel's crutches as Rick attempts to sway Daryl. "If we do this, no one else dies." Back to a close up, Daryl's forlorn face betrays the nod he gives Rick: "Got it." Still, Rick is the leader, the one responsible for such a heavy decision and Daryl concedes to it.

Media representations of women, men, children, society, and culture are often exactly that: re-presentations of cultural phenomena of any given reality (Hall, 1977). Despite the post-apocalyptic setting of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution*, it should come as no surprise that those who come to occupy recognized-leadership roles in these two fictional communities are white men. Further, the men who are in charge of their respective groups of survivors are self-appointed, with some leadership arrangements being more despotic than others. Regardless of the level of democratic leadership appointments, all portrayed communities are organized as

recognizably hierarchically, and even para-militaristically, often using titles such as “lieutenant,” “soldier,” and “major.” This is not to say that there are no female characters in roles of authority or decision-making, but these women tend to acquire informal and feminized leadership roles; those with label-less (semi)permanent positions, and those that tend to be in charge of children and verbal communication. Whether facing zombies, outlaws, tyrants, or sometimes simply strangers, the men who lead their respective communities, as well as the very leadership styles themselves, are explicitly marked “masculine” or “feminine.” This chapter will explore the portrayals of those who assume leadership roles in these two programs as they not only tend to be in the form of male-bodied people utilizing a militant organizational style, but a large theme of both programs is also how the survivors, and especially those in leadership roles, navigate issues of morality in a time of relative lawlessness: Is the goal of post-apocalyptic life to simply survive, or is this an opportunity to take what I want?

By grounding my analysis of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* in the rhetoricity of power and expansion, I am able to uncover how these characters engage in leadership that functions to often reinforce patriarchal ways of organizing and, in a few instances, subvert taken-for-granted understandings of what types of leadership, and what kinds of goals, might best serve apocalypse survivors. Through an analysis of hierarchal, often militarized-organization, a heavy reliance on male and masculine leadership, and transgressive bodies which make attempts at a more communal and communicative-based style, I am able to uncover messages about what effective leaders look like in these shows, and the implications regarding the perpetuation of these ideologies for contemporary viewers.

Problematics of leadership and power are prominent across both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* for survivors *must* band together in order to stay safe; going it alone in these post-

apocalyptic wastelands is a sure death sentence. This chapter will examine what happens when people organize, who assumes authority and what that looks like. A feminist rhetorical criticism of the stories continuously being told about power and leadership will help me map instances of these science fiction artifacts working to reinforce gendered norms about organization as well as moments where they are challenged. I will first situate my artifacts within the rhetorical literature regarding leadership, gender, and power, and then lay out several instances of hierarchal organizational patterns and masculinized leadership in the two shows. Finally, I weave them into a conversation with each other and the rhetorical scholarship about power and gender in order to unearth implicit messages and contradictions about them.

Literature Review: Leadership, Power, and Gender

While academic attention to leadership, organization, and power often fall under the purview of organizational scholars (communicative or otherwise), rhetorical critics too have contributed to theory about dominance and hegemony, for "...there are general rhetorical strategies organic to the situation of power maintenance" (King, 1976). Indeed, systems of power and domination have been argued to be communicatively constituted: "...attention falls on human beings who attribute power to each other while jointly taking decisions that affect events still to come. Before a scenario for the future can be made real, power must become real to the symboling creatures who in a world of complexity choose without deliberating in the classical sense of the word" (Brown, 1986, p. 185). This notion is uniquely interpreted through a post-apocalyptic lens where groups of people, often strangers, are placed in various situations concerning organization, survival strategies, and leadership. Further, they rely on signifiers from their pre-apocalyptic understanding of power and order as they navigate new terrain. Rather than deliberate, many characters assume that the most effective way to organize is based on the

Western, military-grounded style that we recognize, if not always endorse, in today's society (Clark, 2004). The perpetuation of such power structures is rhetorically significant in two ways: they are inherently patriarchal and they are based on assumptions about human nature as fundamentally competitive and combative. Andrew King (1976), when outlining the seven rhetorical topoi utilized by those interested in gaining power or justifying its loss, notes that "the weaponry of rhetoric" are "the gladiator's blueprints for victory" (p. 134) impressing a violent nature on systems of power and the persuasive efforts used to bolster them.

If gender stereotypes inform assumptions about what kinds of people will make good leaders (Clark, 2004) then those who embrace competitive and aggressive rhetorical maneuvers in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* seem to "naturally" rise to the top. Men's traditional positions as the financial providers for women and children have dug deep grooves in even today's cultural assumptions of men's and women's societal positions, with stereotypes persisting about men as representing the "public" and women, the "domestic" (Winter, 2010). Critics have found that these messages are pervasive in our cultural discourse, particularly as mediated by popular culture artifacts (Odland, 2010). Based on the consistency of these stories, men are seen as inherently possessing agentic skills, such as competitiveness, aggression, and dominance, while women are viewed as being naturally communicative, affectionate, and sympathetic (Bosak, & Sczesny, 2011; Katila, & Eriksson, 2013). The categories of assumed characteristics about men and women, like gender categories themselves, are constructed as strict binaries and often as mutually exclusive. Further, these categories are ranked according to the cultural value placed on competition, individual achievement, and even aggression such that masculinized ways of leading are considered in Western culture to be "better" or more effective than those seen as feminine (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Clark, 2004).

Another important characteristic of male-oriented leadership that presents itself in my artifacts is that of expansion. Beyond being in charge of an army, militia, or desperate group of survivors, leaders are often interested in moving outwards, both materially and politically. Expansion and the acquisition of resources in *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* are not relegated to only villains; rather they are a necessity for any group looking to stay alive. There is a fundamental connection between exploration, imperialism, and American identity, a relationship often communicated through fiction, and in particular, the cowboy (Rushing, 1983). Therefore, the connections are also inherently gendered as male pursuits. Scholarship on the military provides some of the most illustrative examples of the rhetoricity of power through regional and cultural dominance (Clark, 2004; Prividera & Howard, 2008). Further, this literature points out the dualistic categorization of soldier, like cowboy as well, in that women *cannot* be them: “warrior...is a term of identity that excludes women” (Burke, 2004, p. 56). This message is not only prevalent in militaristic-spheres, but is heavily perpetuated by the mass media (Gronvoll, 2007; Holland, 2006; Prividera & Howard, 2008). Fictional representations of women in positions of power, particularly those in the military, often work to (re)frame them in more traditional gendered terms, perpetuating the ideology that female bodies are not soldiers as well as the notion that gender, and its associated abilities, exist as a binary (Furia & Bielby, 2009). Some researchers find that when women do engage in highly-visible instances of political or physical power grabs, they adopt masculine-styles of talk and behavior (Clark, 2004; Gronvoll, 2007) perpetuating the dichotomized notion that not only are there two, and only two, forms of leadership, but that those qualities typically associated with masculinity are naturally the “best.”

Despite a recent claim from organizational communication scholars that leadership as a skill is fundamentally relational (Fairhurst, & Connaughton, 2013) archetypes of a singular male,

usually white, stoic, and strong, still seem to pervade the cultural conversation about what authority looks like. Still, this call can be placed in conversation with rhetorical scholars who find that women, and feminine-styles of conflict, have constructed successful forms of resistance (Pezullo, 2003; Stillion Southard, 2007). Stillion Southard (2007) finds that some of the most effective militancy employs rhetorical strategies that bridge both traditionally masculine and feminine styles, making space possible for new ways of conceiving gender, power, and resistance. It is in this space I seek to situate my analysis of the ways that individuals come together as groups in these dystopic environments and negotiate leadership, ethics, and survival. Where am I finding adherence to conventional understandings of hierarchy, liberal-styles of organization, and masculinized-norms of leadership, and are there moments that challenge these?

Post-apocalyptic Leadership is an All-Boys Club

With almost no exceptions, those who head their respective band of apocalyptic-survivors in *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* are men. Even secondary authoritative figures are predominantly male, and while some female characters are looked up to by their respective groups as “wise,” “experienced,” or “brave,” official leadership titles, such as Governor or Major, are reserved for men only. cursory reads of these shows (and indeed of so much cable television!) indicates that the programs are men’s stories about surviving and sometimes even thriving in a post-apocalyptic world. Beyond the undead or bands of marauders, this means that the shows must create characters and situations that pit male leads against other survivors with mutually-conflicting goals in mind. *The Walking Dead*’s four seasons are bifurcated in plot, but both major narratives feature Rick as protagonist positioned against another man in a struggle for safety, resources, and authority: his former-best-friend Shane in seasons 1 and 2, and the Governor in seasons 3 and 4. *Revolution* portrays a more expansive dystopian America and

therefore a larger variety of leadership roles. However, the authority figures that the audience is clearly supposed to root for and against are Miles and Monroe respectively.

In *Revolution*'s dystopic world, two male former Marines, Miles and Monroe, take on self-appointed leadership roles after the majority of their base is killed during or immediately following the "black out"⁴. While the two are benevolent leaders of a growing area of the eastern (former) United States for a period of time, one of them eventually turns the region into the sovereign-run Monroe Republic. This new "state" is organized militaristically, with Monroe himself as commanding general of the militia that enforce the laws and tariffs he has effected. He employs an all-male army, led by Major Neville, whose story is featured as an ancillary plot line.

The organizational patterns in *The Walking Dead* take on similar forms, although often with even less time and calculation than those of *Revolution*. While not the megalomaniac that Monroe is, Rick's primary leadership style replicates that of an autocrat. His followers do not have an official name (bloggers and online re-cappers dubbed them the Grimes Gang) or unifying goal other than to stay alive, but there is still evidence of hierarchal, even paramilitaristic, organization. Rick wears his sheriff's uniform, hat, and gun throughout the first three seasons as he leads his small, desperate community. Less enthusiastic about power and control, Rick nevertheless embraces his role, particularly as his devotion to protecting his "family" (biological and otherwise) throughout the seasons progresses. He is turned to by the group for decisions about where to live, how to handle conflict, and whether or not to allow new members in.

⁴ The catastrophic black out caused much casualty due to car accidents and plane crashes. However, it appears that the world population is still much closer to something like we have currently than the world of *The Walking Dead*, where living humans, at least in the Atlanta area, are rare. This information is anecdotal, based on my observations and blogs; no "official" surviving population counts are made available by show-runners.

Some women do have authority in these programs, but none with a title or the final-say that any man ever exhibits. The highest “ranking” woman in Rick’s camp is a middle-age woman named Carol. Shown to be an housewife and mother in the first season, losing her abusive husband and only daughter in zombie attacks hardens Carol and allows her courage and tenacity to emerge. Carol is the only female member of the governing “council” that the group erects in season 3 (discussed below) but is principally in charge of instructing children. While several female characters are portrayed as fearless and willing to put down as many zombies as possible, no others are considered “leaders.” The only female character on *Revolution* who could be considered an authority figure is Miles’ friend Nora, a tough woman who has joined an official resistance to the Monroe Republic. Despite Nora’s ability to be quick thinking, brave, and strong, she is actually portrayed as more of a consultant to Miles-the-leader. Because of her abilities, he seeks out her assistance in saving Danny, yet she is clearly a “sidekick” to his leader. Charlie, too, learns to be brave and unafraid to use violence when necessary, but she is never portrayed as a leader, always a follower.

Revolution clearly demonstrates the perpetuation of masculine leadership as it constructs Charlie as naïve, at first wary about using violence, and one who will only ever evolve to Miles’ sidekick. Perhaps most disappointing about this story arc is that NBC seemed to pull a bait-and-switch regarding the hero/ine of this exciting new drama, executive produced by J.J. Abrams (creator and executive producer of television’s *Alias* and *Lost*, and director of the recent *Star Trek* film reboots). Promotional material for *Revolution* (figure 3), previews, and even the first minutes of the pilot suggest to the viewer that a young woman will be the foremost protagonist, the one who will lead the small group to save her brother. As noted above however, this is not so: Uncle Miles is quickly portrayed as the “hero,” with the true abilities to lead. Despite the

aforementioned first few minutes of the pilot displaying Charlie's determination to rescue her younger brother, other scenes foreshadow her future place as Miles' deputy. The audience's introduction to the character shows her to be a curious researcher about the pre-apocalyptic world, finding old artifacts such as lunchboxes and postcards as she attempts to piece together the past. This inquisitiveness doesn't morph into an asset for her; rather her naiveté becomes a liability on the rescue mission. She trusts strangers blindly and is almost completely unable to defend herself, almost always resulting in trouble for which she must be guided or rescued. After being scolded for journeying to the outer limits of her small village in order to explore relics, Charlie asks her father, "There're other towns like us? Other people?". Later, as Charlie and a few villagers set out to find Uncle Miles and then to rescue Danny, she meets a handsome young man who requests to join her group. Charlie immediately trusts this stranger, who turns on the group later as a spy for the Monroe Republic. In another scene mid-way through the pilot, the group finds refuge on a fallen airplane to sleep for the night. They awaken suddenly to looters. Charlie is paralyzed with fear as the men drag her off with the implicit motive of sexually assaulting her (one says to another, "It's my turn next") before the outlaws are thwarted by another group member.

While the character of Charlie grows and toughens over the course of the entire season, the pilot episode is careful to portray her as a sympathetic female who is not in a position to lead this group. Her dying father's words suggest as much when he follows the declaration, "You're strong. You can do this" with the command, "Go to Chicago, find my brother Miles." While he doesn't doubt his daughter's desire to save her vulnerable sibling, because of her inexperience outside the village she was raised in, he does doubt her ability to act alone. There is a domesticity about Charlie, innocent and unworldly, due to her confinement in the village and role as

hunter/gatherer for her family. Despite the dystopian and sometimes unrecognizable world that these characters inhabit, there is a clear public/private divide, as seen in the pilot when Monroe's militia storms in the gates of Charlie's village; the political and public world, in uniform and on horses, loudly crashing into the quiet, rural community in order to carry out orders. Charlie's femininity is then not only tied to her body, but her place in the world too, as women have historically been relegated to the private realm of the home and family. Thus, the narrative of the rest of the series follows Miles as the unquestioned leader, and Charlie, the plucky and pretty sidekick.

The Walking Dead similarly struggles with females in positions of power, for not only are there none with titles or who are explicitly deemed "in charge," but the pitfalls of domesticity follow several characters here as well. The first female character introduced is Rick's wife Lori who is immediately oriented *as* Rick's wife and Carl's mother. Her pregnancy in season 2 further serves to indicate that Lori does not lead the group; at best she is Rick's companion. She is able to learn to kill zombies to protect herself and her family, but she is happy to leave decision-making to her husband. Andrea is shown to be tough and often independent woman but is never considered to be a leader. Her domestic qualities, although much more subtle than Lori's, render her unable to officially take charge. Despite being quite pragmatic about the horror of the zombie-pocalypse, in her final utterance of "I just didn't want anyone to get killed," Andrea is revealed to still be devoted to peace. In many ways, Andrea defies obvious domestic markers in that she has no children and prefers activities typically relegated to masculinity, such as fighting zombies, drinking, and being sexually forward, she is also introduced as Dale's protégé, and then dies as the Governor's former-girl friend. Almost *all* women in these shows are therefore presented as relational; we only know them in conjunction with the men in their lives. The same

cannot be said for most of the men; with few exceptions, they are independent, some even isolated. Despite his “community” of Woodbury, the Governor is depicted as very much “alone.” Miles, too, singularly tends his bar; he needs no one. Female characters are thereby figured as domestic by their constant placement in relation to others, and further, their placement, “under” men.

Having gone through the various ways that post-apocalyptic organization and leadership in *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* is heavily masculinized space, both because of the bodies that occupy these roles and the ways that groups function, it would be easy to dismiss these findings as just more of the “same old,” mere reflections of current cultural constructs. But a study of some of implicit contradictions within the organizational and governmental structures of these futuristic shows may point to moments of something different, places where alternative modes of power and dominance are allowed to speak. Rhetorical scholars have located some potential of transgressive messages about gender and hegemony, and while the message that women are still “not” soldiers persists, perhaps males in these positions can play with different understandings of how to proceed.

Romancing the Military

Both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* feature rag-tag groups of survivors who make decisions about power and organization in ways that often reflect the norms and hierarchies of contemporary U.S. families and power structures, particularly the military. That is, one man who is ultimately the leader (and thus the “hero” or “villain” of the show), one or more female-bodied mother-figures, and a band of “soldiers,” who while not involved in the decision-making process, are charged with protecting the group at any cost. While organizing often takes place quickly and seemingly without thought about who will perform which function, within a few episodes,

groups begin to emerge as recognizably hierarchal. That is, based on what character's "knew" or had experienced in the world before the cataclysmic event that rendered it radically different, one (male) leader is established, with others under him assuming a variety of bolstering assignments.

Both shows feature male pro- and antagonists who are not democratically elected to their positions of power, rather, to varying degrees, take it. Assuming authoritative roles is a behavior that is not only considered to be masculine (Wood, 2013), but taken for granted in a culture that heavily favors white male governance. In many ways, Rick, Shane, the Governor, Miles, and Monroe, whether thought to be benevolent or evil, closely resemble contemporary Western leaders. "Taking" control becomes a powerful theme throughout these programs as the different men grapple with the morality of taking things, people, and places in the name of protecting and preserving their groups. If masculinity is defined by authority, autonomy, and the acquisition of resources, these characters often view "taking" as the avenue to survival. Further, who or what gets "taken" can often be traced to feminine bodies and interests and in more than one instance, women are regarded literally as currency.

That the leaders of the groups of characters on these popular, contemporary television shows are (former) Marines and law enforcement officials perhaps serve two purposes: They provide clear and comfortable candidates for a brave, knowledgeable leader in chaotic circumstances, and they will also be likely to implement an evidence-based efficient organizational strategy in order to (what they believe will) best ensure survival. That is, the evidence they are turning to for safety and comfort is that which they believe the former U.S. military-based operations will provide. As with the labels of "Governor," "President," and "Major," we see evidence of a reliance on military strategies in the language used by those in charge and their supporters, suggesting that both leaders and followers are convinced that this

type of organization is best. In 3:13 of *The Walking Dead*, Rick gives perhaps his most forceful and fateful decree by declaring that his group will “go to war” with the Governor.

The romanticism that both of these shows affords to (para)militaristic organization and even ways-of-life is indicative of contemporary Western investments in maintaining hierarchal and imperial power structures based on capitalist models. There is no money in these worlds, so currency must be constructed elsewhere. Monroe enacting a tax system based on agriculture is an obvious way this occurs, but his collection of known-scientists is a more subtle, and sinister, “bank” the he hopes to tap into in order to gain control of electricity. Quickly into the first season, *Revolution*’s audience learns that Charlie’s mother, Rachael, is not dead, but had been kidnapped by Monroe shortly after the blackout because her expertise helped develop the weapon that caused it. Rachael’s body literally becomes this villain’s investment into the potential for more power. The word “power” here even takes on a new meaning as two definitions commonly associated with it, political influence and electrical current, are combined in this show. Not unlike today’s U.S. military industrial complex, maintaining and expanding power means capturing the technology that will allow for the fastest and most effective spread of a specific set of ideas and laws. That said, this show seems to be contradicting its fetishization of militaristic organization and colonial aims when we closely examine Monroe’s devotion to them and the frame that he is increasingly given. In some ways, writers of both shows take advantage of this and work to disrupt conventional assumptions about hierarchal and militaristic governance, while in others instances, the shows fail to do so.

Revolution provides the better illustration of a post-apocalyptic show that explicitly relies on militaristic hierarchies; ones containing the monikers and duties that the current U.S. military complex employs. Further, this show is able to play with messages about technology, power, and

organization in a unique way due to its setting in an electricity-free dystopia. In many ways, *Revolution* uses this distinct landscape to forward competing narratives about its characters' reliance on hierarchal and militarized organization, as well as the ramifications of an obsession with power. The season 1 finale ends with Charlie and Miles, by banding with another militaristic-run republic, and backed by what is left of the United States government, overthrowing Monroe. It seems that we are receiving mixed messages then about the usefulness of such organization, as one hierarchal group of people violently defeats another. But there are differences between the "good" and "bad" guys and the ways they do business. As noted above, Miles quickly "takes" control in his relationship with Charlie: he is experienced, rational, and able to be aggressive; therefore she needs his leadership to find Danny. Further, it is his influence that inspires Charlie to become politically involved with resisting the tyrannical government. Yet, there is a reciprocity in their relationship not present in any associations that Monroe has with his militia, even one as high as Major Neville. To listen, take advice, and give advice to one to whom you are a superior, real or imagined, is a threat to Monroe, as is often the case with those who have too-long relied on staunch independence, competition, and aggression to hold on to power. Further, while Miles and Charlie must join forces with a militaristic-run organization to complete their task, they do so on their own terms. The (mostly) cooperative nature of the way they get along allows for this show to explore power and leadership that doesn't *always* rely on submitting to hyper-masculinized autocracies.

We begin to see, then, cracks in the seemingly-stronghold of militarized organization with a closer inspection of relationships and certain bodies who lead. Even using *Revolution*, the show with more explicit devotion to hierarchal norms of grouping people together, there are competing narratives about the usefulness of such organizations and, further, the kinds of people

who can contribute to them. This finding leads me to explore more closely *how* leaders in both shows go about governance, for if strict hierarchies and imperialist goals lead to the downfall of some of the groups, perhaps looking at various leadership styles will provide additional insight on what messages are being forwarded about power, gender, and post-apocalyptic organization.

I have explored how *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* both work to give the audience stories about military men and their struggles, conquests, and development, although *Revolution* is more expressly concerned with militaristic organization. These men formed organizations hierarchically, seemingly-based on what they understood to be “normal” given their former positions as law enforcement officers or Marines. The narrative of Miles’ and Charlie’s teamwork, which tends to adopt a more reflective, cooperative orientation, frames Miles as a just and competent leader. Coupling this stance with understandings that the apocalyptic conditions in these shows were brought about by blindly following models of imperialism and expansion, there seems to be indication that *Revolution* is at least slightly interested in thinking about cultural norms in a different way. However, that only men “may” lead and, further, that masculinized-styles of leadership are still prioritized, indicates that only *men* are allowed to transform regarding power and leadership.

Take vs Talk

I have introduced the notion that in these shows, leadership tends to favor “taking;” relying on previous understandings of how a (particular) world works in hopes of attaining the most safety and security possible. As noted above, such ideologies are deeply embedded in U.S. cultural norms, based on the neo-liberal principles of independence, self-sufficiency, and wealth accumulation. These taken-for-granted assumptions form a kind of public-consciousness which functions rhetorically as it influences the ways the characters in these shows operate. In working

through powerful ideological manifestation and perpetuation, McGee (1980) notes: “Such consciousness...is always false, not because ... we have a propensity to structure political perceptions in poetically false ‘dramas’ or ‘scenarios,’ but because ‘truth’ in politics...is always an illusion. The falsity of an ideology is specifically rhetorical, for the illusion of truth and falsity with regard to normative commitments is the product of persuasion” (p. 4). Both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* seem to rely on “truths” that may have served humans pre-apocalypse, repeating ideological narratives as though they are “right” not because they don’t “know” any other forms of organization or goals for existence, but because certain bodies enacting certain tasks and occupying certain roles has been become rhetorically “fixed.” Different leadership styles, particularly as demonstrated in *The Walking Dead*, highlights the tension between assumed “truths” about taking charge and the actual falsity of them. While still very much portraying men as leaders, *how* certain men go about reigning and their ultimate fate demonstrates an ability of this show to offer up a staunch “taking,” and thereby masculine, orientation to leadership as ultimately false. That is, Rick’s trajectory has him, at various moments, experimenting with a more deliberative style of governance, more focused on “talking” than “taking.”

Through the lens of the competing ideologies of “taking” vs “talking” I am able to see more clearly how these post-apocalyptic shows deal with effectual leadership. On the surface, those who “take” are portrayed as strong and competent men, who may have morally questionable end-goals but seem to be able to physically protect those under them. Those who “talk” then are berated for being weak and ineffectual leaders, a conflation that cannot be extrapolated from Western, imperialist ideological mandates. “In this culture doing is almost always contrasted with talking” (Brown, 1986, p. 181), a divide with gendered implications as

well. These binaries of survival strategies are not merely differences of opinion, but heavily gendered in that to act quickly, decisively, aggressively, and without much contemplation is a masculinized-style of achievement. To hear, and seriously consider, multiple opinions and perspectives, and to talk through problems and threats is seen as a feminized, and ultimately weak, way to proceed. Despite the fact that only men possess leadership roles in these shows, those who “talk” are implied to be *more* masculine. Verbal communication, listening skills, and sympathy being considered feminine qualities, masculine bodies who enact them are called out for being less-than-men. The gravity of this tension can also be said to take on a “kill or be killed” layer, where decisive and often violent action is necessary to staying alive, for being contemplative or compassionate will surely result in being taken advantage of, at best, or killed, at worst. Indeed, the men who take charge of their respective groups of survivors in *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* spend much of their time contemplating and/or justifying the morality of their decisions. When apocalyptic events rendered the world they knew obsolete, official law and order were also eradicated. With no formal government, military, or police squadron, those who lead in their dystopian communities must act of their own brand of ethics and consciousness, and both programs work to explore these themes, often through the “take vs talk” dialectic.

The Walking Dead, being an all-together more complex television program than *Revolution*, treats the moral quagmire of a post-apocalyptic world more heterogeneously, providing characters with a variety of behaviors, beliefs, and guiding principles. Several interactions across the series, and in the four episodes I closely examine in particular, demonstrate tension between those who insist that autocratic and aggressive leadership (“taking”) is the only way to survive the zombie-pocalypse and those that see potential in a more humanistic approach (“talking”). Characters on this show often find themselves on either side of

the “kill or be killed” dialectic, where violence, mercilessness, and an imperative to conquer direct the actions of “successful” leaders and talking, listening, waiting, and compassion are seen as weak traits that will only get one or more people killed. What follows are the analyses of four major story arcs from *The Walking Dead*: The first two from season 2, revolving around Rick’s relationship with Shane, and the latter two from season 3’s conflict between Rick’s group and the Governor’s Woodbury. Moving across these four narratives in light of the dissidence between leadership styles, I will examine how different instances of power and masculinity function rhetorically. This analysis allows for a read of Rick which imagines a more nuanced and conflicted character than any other male in either show. Such an interpretation has implications about organization, leadership, and masculinity, but also story telling as well; taking three seasons and several significant conflicts regarding power and survival to tell the story of a man trying to keep it together in a zombie-pocalypse may be making a subtle, yet powerful, argument about humanity and progress.

Rick vs Shane

The first two seasons of *The Walking Dead* focus heavily on the deteriorating relationship between Rick and Shane. One-time best friends and Sheriff’s deputies, they were portrayed to have been emotionally close. While a superficial viewing of the show up until 2:12 may suggest that the altercation between Rick and Shane originates from Shane’s affair with Rick’s wife Lori, in fact that circumstance turns out to be a symptom of a larger issue between the men. Episodes 2:10 and 2:12 have Shane declaring definitively that Rick has been a weak and ineffectual husband, father, and leader, and it should come as no surprise that Lori turned to Shane, a “real” leader, in a time of crisis. Shane’s “taking” of Lori is a symbol of his attitude towards domination and capability. Shane has been routinely portrayed as quick to draw his gun on those

(living characters) that challenge him and to want to sacrifice weak or potentially threatening newcomers in order to preserve security. This desire to rid the group of a possibly dangerous outsider culminates in a disagreement between Shane and Rick, who can't justify killing someone who hasn't actually yet committed a crime. The latter of the two episodes sees the men come to what proves to be final blows, alone in a dark field, where Shane reminds Rick, "You got a broken woman. You got a weak boy." Shane continues to challenge Rick's ability to not only lead his family to safety, but to raise his son into a strong man, a role that Shane considered himself to be better suited for. While the show up until this point, and in many ways beyond it, portrayed Shane's style of leadership to be the one that best ensured security, it is Shane that is ultimately bested by Rick; stabbed in the back while going in for a redemptive embrace. The method in which Rick chose to off his once-partner, as well as his desperate cries of "This was *you*. Not me! *You* did this!" suggest that Rick hasn't adopted a heartless, despotic attitude. Killing Shane clearly hurt Rick very much, demonstrated by his intense emotional outburst immediately following. Here we see the first instance where *The Walking Dead* struggles with what kind of leadership style is truly the most appropriate for this devastated post-apocalyptic era, with Rick, a "talker," besting Shane, "a taker."

The story being told at this moment is certainly contradictory. Almost two full seasons posited that a particular style of leadership is warranted post-apocalypse, and particular bodies are best suited for them. That men are "natural" leaders remains unchallenged, but when Rick kills Shane, the best method of governance is. When thinking about the relationship between the men, they were organized hierarchically, with Rick always assumed to be "in charge" over Shane. Yet, the level of division between them was still fairly close, not unlike Miles and Charlie. Rick often consulted Shane about decisions and, until opinions about leadership became

overwhelming between the two, they enjoyed a relatively egalitarian relationship. Still, something snaps in Rick in 2:12 and he makes the ultimate decision as leader of his group by taking Shane's life. We see him attempt to verbally justify it, to no one but himself, as this character has taken a dramatic shift from Rick the compassionate "talker" to Rick the "taker" and "killer."

"This isn't a Democracy Anymore"

Shortly after Rick kills Shane, the group of survivors find themselves in a situation where they must move locations. Rick had seen a prison campus in an earlier episode, and decides that the group will now reside there. Somewhat understandably, this habitat doesn't seem like a good idea to several members who voice dissent, at which point the group, and audience, is introduced to the morphed-Rick. He reveals that he killed Shane, demonstrating his ability to be merciless, and declares, "This isn't a democracy anymore." While Rick's group was actually not very democratic to begin with, former-Rick listened to advice, and turned to deliberation when opinions seemed evenly split. Following the season finale, however, bloggers began referring to this *Walking Dead* era as the "Ricktatorship" (see figure 4 for an example of a social media meme), with the main character taking a decidedly more aggressive and dominant position on decision-making and resource accrument. He is shown physically leading a group into the prison to "clear" a block of zombies and assigning tasks to men, women, and children as they make the space hospitable. Upon the discovery of several prisoners who had survived, Rick finds himself in a familiar dilemma: like he had to work through with Shane a few episodes ago, are these men threats to Rick's community, or potential members and assets? Having bought into the Ricktatorship way of life, Lori says to her husband, "Do whatever you have to do to keep this group safe," approving of whatever lengths Rick has to in order to ensure that his small group

perseveres. Through several episodes in season 3, Rick's new way of leading clearly demonstrates a "taking" attitude, as they settle into their new home and send reconnaissance teams into nearby towns to collect food and supplies.

With the new Rick we also get a reorientation of those "under" him. Whereas above I noted that Rick and Shane, while still organized hierarchically, had a relatively shallow level between them, the Ricktatorship deepens these divisions. That is, Rick doesn't have a "right-hand" man that he relies on for advice or emotional support; this is a much more isolated Rick. Even his relationship with his wife is irreparable; their talk is instrumental in nature, often with an antagonistic tone. That Lori endorses Rick's shift in leadership style perhaps even bolsters the message that "taking" and a hyper-masculine-style of leadership is the one that the group desires, although at the same time, Rick, now emotionally segregated from his people, probably doesn't care what they think.

Woodbury and the Meeting

This set of stories about a man rethinking his authority and position does not remain static for long, for while the Grimes gang is settling in to the prison and Rick into his new throne, *The Walking Dead* seems to present the viewer with what appears to be an alternative way of organizing. Woodbury, consisting mostly of a few blocks of a Main Street carefully barricaded off from the zombie invaders, has a "small town," co-operative feel to Andrea and Michonne, stumbling upon it after living in the woods for several weeks. All men and women play a role in protecting Woodbury, as well as contributing to a relaxed atmosphere, as though the zombie-apocalypse never happened. A few episodes later it is revealed that Woodbury is run by a dictator-like man known only as the Governor. Under the Governor are several men that comprise a violent militia charged with keeping order, obtaining supplies outside Woodbury's walls (often

by force), and implementing their leader's orders. While not using the militarized-terms that *Revolution's* Monroe prefers, this seemingly bucolic town is the front for a para-militaristic organization. The Governor learns of Rick's group occupying the prison and, goaded by a henchman who was in the past wronged by Rick's group, determines that this community poses a threat to Woodbury. While other than potentially competing for the same resources in abandoned towns, the prison group is, of course, no threat at all to Woodbury. The Governor, a powerful and charismatic public speaker, is able to rile up his militia and also declare "war" on Rick's group. The resulting showdown is a clear illustration of the eventual confrontation between those who believe that killing and taking are the key to survival, and those that struggle with what that means for any shred of humanity left in this desperate and barely recognizable world.

The showdown between Rick and the Governor explicitly arranges "talking" and "taking" in opposition to one another, while also considering them to be mutually exclusive. The first actual meeting between the characters of Rick and the Governor happens towards the end of Season 3, in an episode titled, "Arrow on the Doorpost" (3:13). While never officially reflected on by a writer or producer of the show, the title perhaps is taken from a Bob Dylan (1983) song with the lyrics: "Seen the arrow on the doorpost, saying 'this land is condemned all the way from New Orleans to Jerusalem' ...and we all want what's His, but power and greed and corruptible seed seem to be all that there is..." The entire episode focuses on a meeting that is outwardly supposed to be contemplating the security of each group but is rife with greed, revenge, and plays for power. The song lyrics hint at the folly of unbridled expansion as diametrically opposed to (Biblical) salvation.

This confrontation is quickly established to be a boys-only affair, as Andrea is quickly dismissed when she tries to intervene; the Governor assures Rick, "She's in no position to make

propositions.” Establishing a truce is the work of true leaders: the men. The explicit gender-jabs begin as soon as the men are alone, with the Governor asserting that Rick “...shot up Main Street. If I let that threat persist, I look weak.” He goes on to accuse Rick of having failed as a leader by “allowing” his wife to have an affair with Shane. While the word is never exchanged, it is clear that the Governor is assuming that Rick has failed in his responsibility as a *man* and a husband in order to reach the conclusion that he is also an ineffectual leader. Rick takes a different approach and argues that leadership is more than a self-serving position, that “...leaders have responsibility to their people...leaders *take* responsibility.” Rick seems to be claiming that being in charge means being accountable for your actions where the Governor is concerned with image, a powerful one specifically. This concern is bolstered by the insistence on a particular kind of image that Woodbury represents; children playing, picnics, and a semblance of a “normal” life. When Rick disrupted that, the Governor’s very veneer of an all-powerful and capable leader was challenged and he isn’t concerned about how that might affect his “people” rather how it might impact his position as unquestioned authority. The whole meeting turns out to be an attempt for the Governor to take the prison, while Rick keeps trying to talk him out of it and for the two groups to leave each other in peace.

This narrative (re)introduces Rick the “talker,” a leader who sees the need to think deeply about the moral implications of his decisions and behaviors. Juxtaposing him with the Governor, who is singularly interested in maintaining power, resources, and respect, allows Rick to emerge from the “Arrow” meeting as severely conflicted, but possibly better for it. Rick is an inconsistent protagonist, and he now seems to be complicating the dualist tendency of leadership that, up until this point, had been presented. For several episodes after “Arrow” Rick wrestles with the morality of the Governor’s proposition to turn over Michonne: his priority is on the

contemplation, the ethics, and the impact this would have on his humanity as a leader. According to the Governor, who for at least after the zombie-pocaylps successfully led a safe and comfortable organization for his citizens, Rick's desire to negotiate and even compromise is a sign of weakness. For this narrative to be framed as the dominant one, however, that "reverted" to the old Rick would be problematic on two levels: it would suggest that by eschewing a singular and aggressive leadership style that Rick has moved "backwards," and reinforces the very binary that I find is being blurred here. To this end, Rick's trajectory then is beginning to construct a potentially subversive story arc for these post-apocalyptic programs. Episode 3:16 shows that Rick is still quite capable of waging "war" on the Governor, but his use of violence and para-militaristic tactics are melded *together with* the use of careful consideration about how to best defeat his adversary. These are not mere war-strategies with the aims of conquering or surviving, rather they incorporate humanistic considerations about how to best move forward. The character of Rick realizes the importance to not only the group he leads, but also what it means to be a *human* in a world filled with the undead, and what begins to emerge is a type of leadership that challenges former assumptions about "taking" or "talking."

The Council

This blend of leadership styles is both reiterated and contested when we consider the (re)organization of those in charge of the prison that emerges at the end of season 3 and plays a larger role in season 4. A "council" of leaders is established in order to enact a more democratic form of decision-making in the prison. Far from the Ricktator that moved into the prison, in the formation of a decision-making body, Rick has significantly collapsed the distance between himself and those he governs, affording several of them *some* authority. Resolutions about prison-life functions, roles, and responsibilities are now in the hands of a larger group of

“elders,” so-called not necessarily because of their age, but because they have been with the group for a while and have proved to be fearless and effective in protecting the larger community. The council consists of one white older man with some medical knowledge (Hershel), two younger men, one white (Daryl, portrayed as stereotypically “redneck”) and the other Asian (Glen), and two women, one middle age and white (Carol), and the other about thirty and African American (Sasha). Important to note, however, there still seems to be an “inner circle” contained within the council, consisting only of men; we see this small group appealed to in the deliberation portrayed in the opening to this chapter. When working through the ethical dilemma that the Governor has posed regarding Michonne, only Hershel and Daryl are privy to the information.

Rick, as well as the audience, trusts these council members to serve the interests of their group, as they have been series regulars for several seasons. However, old scripts of gender, power, and ability to wield it seem hard to give up in this show, for although deliberation by a (sort of) heterogeneous group of individuals is given a role in this organization, Rick is still the deciding vote. Further, at times he is shown to make unilateral decisions, for example when he evicts Carol from the community for what he deems an unforgivable transgression. Indeed, Carol’s sin was a decision that she independently acted on; an incredibly difficult moral decision that she deemed to be in the best interest of the group’s safety. Yet *she* is punished severely for her autocratic behavior. There seems to be a tension here then regarding Rick’s position as singular authority figure; he was willing to share responsibility for running the prison until he knew his input would be challenged, at which point he assumed role of unquestioned leader once again. Still, coming full circle, the Rick from season 2 emerges, although evolved, as he can’t bring himself to admit to his group what he has done: he lies and says he became separated from

Carol on a supply run. Despite his journey, he struggles with “taking,” in this case, taking a severe position and then action about Carol’s behavior. Further, while never shown, and given Rick’s oscillation between aggression and contemplation, there is a very real sense that he “talked” to himself at length before deciding that Carol had to go.

Rick 2.0

Rick’s journey as the protagonist of *The Walking Dead*, particularly as related to his role of (usually) unquestioned leader of the “Grimes gang,” serves as a helpful guide to this show’s primary message regarding power, organization, and thinking “outwardly.” His leadership style at times fluctuated between “talking” and “taking,” those deemed typically feminine and masculine, and at the end of season 3, seems to be simultaneously working both methods. Rick’s story of power and masculinity moves along slowly and deliberately, taking its time to construct a man struggling with the complexity of organization and leadership imperatives; at once being pulled by “old forms” while adapting to the demands of an incredibly de-humanizing and violent dystopia. His tale functions rhetorically to argue that the adaptation *requires* both aggression *and* contemplation. This Rick ultimately decides not to give Michonne to the Governor, knowing she’ll be tortured and killed, and the Governor will still probably attack the prison. “Talking” through and about the use of power, expansion, and violence, the elements included in “taking,” is what makes Rick an enduring and effective leader. Not always a “perfect” protagonist, his struggles with decision-making and compassion become moments where Rick develops into a character that makes progressive and dynamic leadership moments possible.

Conclusion

More so than any of the leaders in both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*—good, bad, or sometimes both—Rick’s character and leadership style display the most change, development,

and dynamism. As noted above, *Revolution*'s Miles has moments of portraying a leader who sees the merits of cooperation, community, and contemplation, but the rapid pace of the show's one season (that I was able to analyze, anyway) does not allow for as nuanced a leadership-development. Still, his character demonstrates potential for creating a hybrid leadership style. As argued in the following chapter, fusing gendered characteristics may be the key to surviving the apocalypse, and when Uncle Miles feels that Charlie has become too "hard" as a result of the constant violence, he tries to talk to her about it.

These shows generally, and the episodes and story arcs I explored in particular, demonstrate a continued reliance on organization and leadership-styles that contain stereotypically-masculinized characteristics. There is the glaring message in both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* that regardless of tactic, leadership is for male bodies. Despite their futuristic setting, organization and leadership very much resembles Western, contemporary, cultural norms. These stories seem to be reiterating rhetorical logics that perpetuate gendered norms about power, action, and organization. By examining these artifacts through characters' engagement with two often thought-of-as-opposite, and gendered as well, methods, a dialectical tension emerges between leadership styles that privilege "talking," trying to solve problems and command power communicatively, and those that prioritize the aggression and dominance, "taking." Holding these approaches in balance, eschewing a completely dichotomized orientation, seems to possess the most potential for an adaptable and effective leadership style, thereby constructing a more communal and egalitarian organizational dynamic.

I see potential in the trajectory of *The Walking Dead*'s Rick to possibly present to the audience a complicated version of what it means to lead in the post-apocalyptic future, thereby affecting attitudes and orientations of those who consume this popular text. While *Revolution*

introduces a female president of another territory, it is also continually introducing male leaders of other territories who are violent, abusive even, and strictly autocratic. Females in positions of power are still rare in this show and literally missing in *The Walking Dead*. The only bit of progressive possibility then comes in the form of male leaders adopting a more holistic and humanistic approach to leadership, something I only see, so far, in one character's journey in *The Walking Dead*.

Chapter 3

Fight Like a (Wo)man: Gender Hybridity in Post-apocalyptic Activities and Responsibilities

A close up shot on a flask of liquor being poured into two mugs scrolls up to Miles' haggard-looking face; this is not just demonstrated through his five-o'clock shadow, but his facial expression is exhausted and sad. The next shot is a flashback to the previous night's battle against the Monroe Republic. Miles and Charlie fought on the side of the Georgia Confederation in what is shown to be a violent and fiery conflict. The memories are shown rapidly, just fragments depicting Miles fighting enemies with a sword on a giant rubble heap that is burning in the background. One of the staccato shots shows Charlie wielding an automatic gun. The look on her face is one of pure determination and strength. Back in the present, Miles is debriefing the night's melee with a few other soldiers, noting their victory cost them "22 men." He leaves the tent to survey the battle scene and makes eye contact with Charlie. The camera remains on his face as melancholic music plays; this is the longest shot in 1:15's cold open yet. His half-open eyes and still-sad facial expression indicate that he is deeply concerned to what this dystopic environment has done to Charlie. She breaks the eye contact first as the camera pans out to show her holding several weapons that she has stripped from dead combatants. Charlie is unconcerned with mulling over the casualties; there is work to be done. The music intensifies and the wide camera angle lingers on the death and destruction for a few seconds before cutting to a new scene.

This chapter will also examine representations of men and women in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, but after working through how these groups are organized and led in their respective post-apocalyptic environments I will be thinking about how these characters are gendered in the roles they perform as well the gendered characteristics of roles themselves.

Division of labor provides a broad orientation for this chapter, where I will focus on specific activities, such as caring for the home, fighting enemies, and raising and protecting children. As with leadership, power, and organization, these moments also provide complex readings of gendered bodies, which often conform to contemporary hegemonic ideals while also providing moments which disrupts them. On the surface, women in these shows carry a heavier burden to conform to typically-masculine ideals if they want to survive their respective dystopias, and a closer reading confirms that female characters *do* face a larger challenge than their fellow fighters. But as with my claim that the most “successful” leaders in these shows tend to blend authoritative styles and encompass traits typically associated with two genders, hybrid gendered performances regarding both domestic and exterior spheres are actually what will best ensure the accomplishment of goals, even if that simply means living, in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*. However, the responsibility to blend the “best” qualities of men and women and embrace both “inside” and “outside” worlds falls on women *only*, suggesting that in these post-apocalyptic worlds, masculine qualities still reign supreme.

Literature Review: Gender & Rhetoric

In order to examine the gendered performances of women and men in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, I will first attend to the literature on performance, performativity, bodies, and hybridity. Such lenses will help me map how and where these stories are placing various bodies, and what ramifications exist when bodies “disobey” norms.

Bodies themselves are sites of rhetorical importance, representing norms and assumptions about gender, sex, ability, and desire. For many theorists, the gendered, and even sexed, body is far from “natural,” rather it is a construction of reiterated performances of what any given time and place consider “normal” and right. The gendered body is a product of hegemonic ideals, and

gender is a performance that we put on every day, both for ourselves, and very importantly, for others (Frye, 1983; Kessler & McKenna, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990). Judith Butler posits that each gender performance is imbricated on top of the previous ones such that gender begins to feel both natural (that is, of the body) and also real (in the sense that gender exists in and of itself) (Frye, 1983; Butler, 1990). Further, our gendered communication (speech, gestures, etc.) is not expressive of an-already fixed identity; rather the repetition of gendered acts *constructs* identities.

Not only acts, but rhetoric and discourse about gender construct these categories (Condit, 1997). Performative theories foreground the rhetoricity of the body; they are “invested with relations of power and domination” (Foucault, 1979). This phenomenon is highlighted when people enter spaces typically reserved for another gender (Sloop, 2005), most notably for Butler (1990), during drag. Sloop (2005) argues that when a female body enters a “masculine” space, thereby troubling it, the resolution often entails the deployment of more rigid gendered performances in an effort to (re)stabilize hegemonic norms. Recent scholarship on women in the military has also found that in order to reconcile the female body in the hyper-masculine arena of war, female soldiers are (re)framed in news stories and biographies through signifiers of their civilian life and relationships as wives, mothers, and daughters (Holland, 2006; Prividera & Howard, 2006). Work on women in sports similarly finds that female athletes are met with discursive, and in some cases, physical, resistance when attempting to enter the sports world (Butterworth, 2008). Women will only ever be imitators of soldiers and athletes and their bodies threats to masculinity (Butterworth, 2008; Holland, 2006; Sloop, 2005). My artifacts provide stories about worlds that are virtually unrecognizable due to apocalyptic events, de facto creating *everywhere* as a space of war and conflict therefore always fundamentally opposed to the female

body. Further, Quinby (1994) argues that *all* apocalyptic discourse is the purview of masculine ideologies, so the very settings of these two popular texts places femininity in a problematic position related to the dominant narrative. The episodes I am closely inspecting illustrate several instances of how female bodied characters are navigating this terrain as well as how are they being regarded by others.

To assume that I will find that all female characters retreat to hyper-feminine conventions during the apocalypse is to not give the body enough credit, as gendered bodies are also potential sites for political resistance (Pezzulo, 2003). The above examples of women in the military and sports provide recognizable instances of women defying stereotypical roles, but individuals resist the “disciplining [of] gender” (Sloop, 2004) with their bodies through everyday acts of (re)negotiation (Butterworth, 2006). Bodies can be used as sites for arguments against social and cultural norms by being “unruly” in their behaviors or appearance (DeLuca, 1999; Dow, 2001). Patterson and Corning (1997) note that, “The body [is a] site of cultural inscriptions, self-regulation, and resistance,” a nice summation that we are simultaneously constrained *and* liberated by the discursively-produced identities we claim and the bodies they construct. Rhetorical scholars become invested in this tension because not only are bodies rhetorically disciplined and regulated (Butterworth, 2008), but the opportunity to conceptualize gender differently, and all the cultural baggage that comes along with it, starts with talk. DeLuca (1999) notes that those scholars invested in argument are in a unique position to find instances of talking about gender in new ways, a practice that should begin the blurring of rigid categorical boundaries and the liberation of those who do not “fit.”

Feminist rhetorical scholars agree, and several have found moments of subversion in individuals or groups working to disrupt strict societal expectations by embracing performances

outside of the “norm.” In order for such enactments to truly have progressive potential, these performances cannot merely consist of one performing the “opposite gender” for to do so not only reinforces dualistic thinking about gender, but fails to challenge that the problem in the first place are rigid constructs that hold individuals accountable to “correct” standards (Mocarski, Butler, Emmons, & Smallwood, 2013). It is at this juncture where some cultural and political critics have turned to the notion of hybridity to explore possibilities “outside the box.” Critical colonial scholars have developed hybridization theories to rethink the way we talk about multiculturalism as divided between past imperialist projects and present identities (see Bhaba, 1994 and Said, 1993). Queer theorists, too, have advanced ideas on gender hybridity, with some being enthusiastic about the “...rejection of simplistic binaries and the embrace of rich, complex hybridities of masculine and feminine behavior...” (Johnson, 2004, p. 103). Whether regarding post-colonial identities or gender categories, these theories are enticing for obvious reasons; they create alternative spaces for (re)deploying formerly oppressed narratives and the acknowledgment of multiple subjectivities (Giardina, 2003). Certainly the women in my artifacts seem to be taking on a hyphenated persona in order to survive the “baddies” they are encountering.

But by portraying women who embrace some pretty masculine qualities, whose interests are being represented? There has been significant pushback on theories of hybridity, most notably because multi-faceted identities and representations are often co-opted by the dominant culture and repackaged to serve its interests (Huyntk, 2005; Lorente & Tupas, 2013). For some, hybridity represents yet another way for capitalism and hegemonic ideologies to exploit bodies (Darling-Wolf, 2006; Lorente & Tupas, 2013), while for others theorizing hybridity as a way to perform queerness actually reinforces gender inequalities and binaries (Kraidy, 1999). Rhetorical

scholars examining the representations of hybrid bodies in popular culture have come to mixed conclusions, with some embracing the possibilities for empowerment (Johnson, 2004) and others finding that, at the end of the day, patriarchal and heteronormative values do not get overturned or even seriously challenged by them (Mazzarella, 2008).

Science fiction is a site where hybridity has the potential to take on an entirely new meaning, as bodies are often no longer human or even organic. Fusing humans with robotics, aliens, and animals as metaphors for colonialism, slavery, and out-of-control technology are well within this genre's wheelhouse (Barr, 2008). Given the theoretical tension regarding the rhetorical potential of hybrid bodies, and gendered performances in particular, what are the messages about women and men in the post-apocalyptic environments of *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*?

What follows is a mapping of various characters on these programs as their bodies are figured as capable of, and indeed even responsible for, completing various duties. In order to glean the ways these two shows forward messages about the capabilities and responsibilities of men and women, I will examine how characters are oriented regarding three activities; domestic tasks, fighting enemies, and mothering.

“In Here/Out There”

An important avenue through which to examine the construction and maintenance of gender paradigms is through notions of space. Gender performances organize the ways that certain bodies are recognized as “fitting in” to specific places while also revealing moments of transgression. The term “space” can be understood in geographical or physical terms (a “place”) as well as by the cultural and political qualities implied by those “landscapes” (a term that is used colloquially to describe both “places” and “attitudes” regarding space) (Mountford, 2001).

That is, space is crucial to the discursive perpetuation of cultural norms and assumptions about gender. Feminist rhetorical scholars have noted the ways that domesticity, women's "place" being in the home, has been written *onto* women's bodies and activities (Jack, 2009; Mountford, 2001; Odland, 2010). And while recent scholarly attention has been paid to "masculinity in crisis," (Ashcraft & Flores, 2003; Bordo, 1999; Braithwaite, 2011) primarily brought about by the gains of the feminist and LGBT movements as well as an increasingly disembodied capitalist culture, men who are being emasculated by their positions in white collar jobs or as assistants to powerful women feel so because normative masculinity *still* dictates that men be dominant, independent, and "public." Here I will be tracing instances of women and men occupying spaces traditionally associated with a particular gender and how these norms serve to highlight moments of subversion when a character "disobeys" the rules of space.

Beware of "Out There"

Discourses about domestic spaces and responsibilities occur regularly in *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution*, often explicitly indicated by the usage of the term "in here." These narratives are contrasted by discussions about "out there," which encompasses any space not in a house, or where physical violence and danger are threats. The sharp division of space, and exactly what is contained therein, is explicitly gendered by the bodies that tend to occupy certain domains, and more implicitly by the responsibilities required to maintain them. "Out there" is a masculine space, for it not only represents the sphere that men traditionally occupied, but in these futuristic dystopias, outside contains some pretty significant threats. In a world without electricity and with tyrannical dictators, the characters of *Revolution* face not only an oppressive government, but more immediately, bandits and marauders who loot, rape, and kill for material goods, or for fun. While those (un)fortunate enough to have survived the zombie-pocalypse of

The Walking Dead face the obvious adversary of the undead, pillagers are as desperate for food, water, and shelter as the good guys, just less concerned with morality. Both shows truly create outdoor atmospheres that are terrifying and unpredictable. Being out of doors requires protection and often violence and is therefore delegated in these shows as the space for men.

Rick is a protagonist who is charged with protecting and leading his group of survivors and is almost always portrayed outside. *The Walking Dead* explicitly acknowledges the danger inherent “out there” as well as the rigid divide between spaces in 2:12, when Shane lies to Rick about the prisoner escaping their capture and fleeing into the woods. The scenario is the beginning of the showdown between the former best friends, and the forest not only contains zombies, but a vengeful Shane. Rick quickly assembles a search party, consisting of himself, Shane, and Daryl, and shouts for “everybody, back in the house!” Carol pleads, “don’t go out there!” but there is no real expectation, on Rick’s behalf or the audience’s, that the group will comply with her request. Her half-hearted cry serves to reinforce the danger within the trees as well as the notion that Rick will protect the group from those dangers.

Revolution similarly portrays outside as a place that causes harm or death, where men can protect communities and individuals. Even Charlie, the supposed-protagonist, is rendered as someone who needs shielding from this space. While she is introduced to the audience as “outside,” we quickly receive the message that she is ill-equipped to handle herself there. Finding out that Charlie had journeyed too far away from home, her father scolds her, “I’m trying to look out for you. There is nothing worth seeing out there, not anymore. You want to end up like your mom? She died out there.” Here we see two references to the notion that certain bodies belong “out there” and there are inherent dangers waiting for her if she wanders too far. Uncle Miles’ trajectory in *Revolution*’s pilot features a complimentary swapping of spheres, in

that he is introduced as being indoors; after defecting from the Monroe Republic he became a tavern operator, hiding in plain sight in former-Chicago. When Charlie's group finds his dark bar, he is at first unwilling to join them "out there." Where Charlie's story begins outside and quickly relegates her to "in here," someone who needs *protection*, Miles is quickly moved "out there," as someone who thrives from outdoors adventure and *protecting*.

"We're in Here"

Where being outside is portrayed in these shows as containing male bodies as well as norms about masculinity, inside spaces are treated as inherently feminine. Assumptions about domestic responsibilities and abilities have carried over from pre-apocalypse understandings of women's domains, playing out in both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*. While some of the more literal interpretations of "domestic" become blurred in worlds where groups are moving between different shelters, often because the threats "out there" have invaded "in here," whatever space a group calls "home," however brief, becomes gendered as feminine. This occurs not only in the bodies that are "supposed" to take responsibility of its maintenance, but also in the kinds of duties required to keep it up; cleaning, food preparation, and uniquely to these dystopic environments, perpetuating an optimistic myth of "normalcy."

The Walking Dead's 2:10, titled "18 Miles Out," is itself an indication that men and women have separate abilities and domains, as the entire episode portrays men outside and women either inside, or managing problems that arise there. Rick and Shane are driving their prisoner far away from the farm to release him (much to Shane's chagrin, who would rather kill him immediately, a fate that, in this world, actually might be more humane), while the secondary plot revolves around the various women's method of dealing with a suicidal girl. Chapter 4 will more closely examine the existential angst, and some related metaphors, that many characters go

through in these dystopian shows, but in this episode, Beth, around 13 years old, has decided that the horror and uncertainty inherent in the zombie-pocalypse render life pointless. Lori, Beth's sister Maggie, and Andrea all have different ideas about how to handle the situation (importantly though, it is *their* responsibilities as the women of the house to deal with it). Much of the dialogue referenced in the previous chapter regarding the tension between Shane and Rick and what it means to be an effective leader occurs in the opening scenes of this episode. They are then juxtaposed with scenes in the farmhouse's kitchen, where Lori and Maggie are preparing a meal for Beth. Maggie is also dealing with this new way of life and the constant threat of death, or worse, as Lori reminds her of her place: "Whatever happens out there, happens out there, we're in here trying to keep it together 'till they get back." Lori never uses gendered words or labels but her message is clear; women are best suited to handle safety and responsibilities that are required in the home and family while decisions and danger that the outside contains are men's duties.

Charlie, too, is shown to be someone who is supposed to stay close to home and protect her brother there. Her unworldliness is a trait that ties her to her home, small village, and family. In 1:1 when she is shown to be outside, she is looking over possessions from the past that she keeps in a hidden lunch box; not only is she physically close to home, but she is waxing nostalgic for a safer, more secure time. Viewers never actually learn her age, but Charlie is certainly old enough to explore more areas if she so desired. However, her father has ordered her to "stay close," frustrating Charlie: "Nothing is safe, everything is off limits. If it were up to you, we wouldn't be able to leave our street." He is literally putting her body back in its "place." Further, when she is required to go "out there," she is assumed to not be able to complete the task of rescuing her brother without the assistance and protection of a man.

Still, Charlie is a female character who spends the rest of the series mostly “out there,” slowly shedding the markers of her domesticity and naiveté. The scene described in the opening of this chapter demonstrates that not only has she become competent in this typically-masculine sphere, but Miles has some concerns about this space shift. His concern about his niece’s accomplishments “out there” work to reinforce the notion that she is still a woman, and therefore she hasn’t “shifted” domains, rather is straddling them. Beyond gendered bodies occupying non-traditional spaces, particular behaviors lend themselves to allowing for innovative gendered performances. Charlie embracing aggression and battle will be explored more fully in the following section about violence and fighting, but first I will explore the notion of optimism and “normalcy” that is often deemed feminine and further, domestic. Home is where the heart is, and home is where women are; what messages about heart, happiness, and security do the women of these worlds perpetuate? I find that looking for these messages, rather than cooking or cleaning, reveals some nuances of gendered space. While Lori’s and Ben’s words seem like discussions from the 1950s, in many ways, the characters on both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* are desperate for the safety and normalcy that they used to rely on. These shows portray continued attempts to return to a time when societal and political dangers seemed at least understood and manageable and one seemingly-automatic way that this is achieved is by maintaining what used to be standards of men “out there” and women “in here.” Characters who hold these traditional values as fundamentally separate come across as outdated and at times, delusional. The desire for stability is a falsity that can hardly be sold to the viewer, let alone characters that are immersed in these horrific environments. Therefore, characters who toggle between spaces, and the responsibilities and messages about them come across as the ones we want to root for.

Merging Spaces

The Walking Dead's Andrea provides perhaps the best example of a character who is comfortable “in here” and “out there,” notably through the lens of being realistic about “normalcy” and stability. Season 2 shows her as someone who prefers to be outside rather than in the farmhouse; she spends her time standing watch at the perimeter of the property with a shotgun. She feels she has to defend this post to Lori: “I contribute; I keep this place safe,” to which Lori replies, “The men can handle this on their own, they don’t need your help...we are trying to create stability.” Lori tries to coach suicidal Beth that, “We can make now alright” and decides that it is the responsibility of all the women in the house to stay with Beth and ensure she doesn’t try to kill herself. She then goes on to directly tie notions of stability with the “a life worth living,” an idea that Andrea has already figured out doesn’t exist. Further, Andrea understands more fully than the other women, who are concerned with on-time meals and “mint in the lemonade,” as Andrea sarcastically remarks, that if one is truly thinking about suicide, she has to be allowed to attempt it in order to overcome it: “She has to choose to live on her own. She has to find her own reasons.” The difference in these two women is made clear when Lori responds, “It doesn’t mean I can’t stop her or let her know I care.” For Andrea, looking out for others, even children, has taken on an entirely new meaning in this world; it is *not* what it used to be. Protecting others has always taken on separate, and gendered, spheres; protecting those from “outside” threats and ensuring safety with the comfort of the “inside.” Such a division however needs to be eradicated in this dangerous dystopia, and the character of Andrea seems to best represent this shift. Like Charlie, she desires to work “out there” with her shotgun in order to keep the home safe, while at the same time recognizing that the work needed in the home must also evolve. Again, this is not a shift *over to* the realm of an “opposite” gender, rather the

embracing of priorities and skills that transcend gendered binaries to best stave off death in these worlds.

In *Andrea* and *Charlie*, we see female bodied characters who are, ultimately, *not* disciplined into traditional female roles as they enter a typically masculine space. As much literature on troubling gender and space has demonstrated (Butterworth, 2008; Holland, 2006; Sloop, 2005), "...the ideological impulse of mass culture...is to foreclose that crisis by reaffirming the heteronormative bi-gender system as essential" (Sloop, 2004, p. 148). However, some of the strongest and most multifaceted characters on these programs refuse the attempts of other characters to compel them "back to" their proper place. Charlie's father, Miles' weary face, and Lori's harsh words order them back "in here," but their hybrid gendered performances work to keep them alive and accomplish (some) goals. The futuristic and fantastic settings of *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* perhaps allows for the interpretation of hegemony that Condit (1989) reminds us is a process of "unbalanced concord" (Sloop, 2005). That is, while hegemonic interests are *generally* aligned with dominant interests, they are not synonymous: cultural values and assumptions are constantly-negotiated meanings attached to certain bodies. There is possibility for movement. Looking beyond the obvious, and infuriating, dialogue about women "belonging" in the kitchen, these dystopic and unfamiliar landscapes seem to allow several of the characters to demonstrate quiet but powerful resolves to consider gendered performances in different ways. I will next explore how female bodied people are treated regarding physical combat, an activity that on these shows is a necessary skill for all people who wish to survive beyond a few episodes. Having examined women's and men's "spaces," studying an activity that has typically been deemed masculine may allow for a finding that supports a blurred gendered performance, or perhaps one that requires a return to "in here."

Warrior Women

As argued above, post-apocalyptic landscapes provide environments for some female characters to transcend conventional understandings of domesticity or publicity. Further, these dystopian worlds often *necessitate* that women be proficient in fighting. Certainly not all were before the cataclysmic events occurred, and the same can be said for some of the male characters as well (although all our male leaders, of course, were handy with a weapon). In order to survive the apocalypse, though, all women must toughen up. For *The Walking Dead* survivors, this strength has the additional layer of needing to learn to kill zombies quietly (loud noises will attract more) and allowing their rotting, shambling bodies close enough to slay them with a knife-like instrument to the head (must preserve bullets, plus they're noisy!). Fighting, then, is an activity that must not follow the "in here/out there" dichotomy, and even characters, like Lori, who embrace conservative ideas about men's and women's roles learn to fight efficiently. However, this is not an indication that fighting necessarily flattens out gender norms or binaries.

Through a close examination of the use of aggression and the characteristics that typically are associated with fighting, I uncover contradictory messages about gender and violence. Fighting is still marked as heavily masculine and women who embrace it must adopt masculinized skills. These women do not abandon all feminine qualities, rather lay new ones over existing identities. While this hybridity seems like a novel "third" space through which to enact gender performances, these stories are still very much invested in the competency that the typically-masculine skill of fighting is allowing these women. Men are *not* required to adopt skills and traits usually associated with femininity in these situations, because when it comes to confrontation or fighting, there are *none*. As noted above, not all men enter these apocalyptic landscapes knowing how to defend themselves, and I find that not all men eventually adopt these

skills, whereas *all* women must. This double standard of gender hybridity seems to be reinforcing masculine supremacy and placing an additional burden on the women in these worlds who wish to live.

Fighting Like Men

Regardless of the futuristic settings of *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, the very acts of violence and aggression are still marked as masculine. This is not surprising given that above I found that “outside” was men’s domain because of both old-norms of men leaving the home for work as well as the dangers that the outside inherently contains. This perpetuation of space and duties provides a clear example of what Ashcraft (2013) suggested about the relationship between work and bodies: “...we might say that the construction of the prototypical practitioner yields the nature of the work, rather than the reverse...” (p. 26). In order to become a warrior, women are expected to employ the same behaviors and skills as their fellow fighters. Unlike the attempts at disciplining “unruly” women who wander “out there,” there is *never* criticism of women who use violence to save themselves or others from enemies. In this instance, the extreme nature of these dystopian settings defies contemporary findings about reframing female bodies who engage in masculine activities. When a situation demands instant action in order to protect oneself against an adversary, the “in here/out there” dichotomy is (temporarily) forgotten. Lori’s pregnant body slaying zombies serves as a jarring example that regarding physically protecting oneself or others from enemies, notions of domesticity and femininity are moot. Figure 5 gives a striking visual example that if Lori is to save her son and unborn baby, she must engage fully with typically masculine traits such as holding a weapon. When this particular job is assigned to people who would typically not occupy that position- in this moment, a woman physically fighting- they are expected to also assume the gendered “norms” of that role.

Promotional material for both shows reveals a singular archetype warrior in much the same position and with similar dead-serious expressions on their faces (figures 6 and 7 also demonstrate that the crossbow is a favorite weapon in both programs). Regardless of gender, these characters are displaying clear signs that in order to be most effective at protecting the interests of their respective groups, one must be aggressive, stoic, and even willing to be assaulted and/or injured, as evidenced by the blood on Daryl's face (see figure 7).

One of the most consistent ways that both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* portray female characters who adopt masculinized-styles of combat is in their shedding of visible emotion. A more obvious example of women performing masculinity could be argued to be their proficiency with weapons and ability to kill, but such a finding would be to overlook the sheer necessity of having to learn how to fight. If a person, male or female, does not accept this mandate, we will not have to bother learning his or her back story. So mapping less-explicit ways that women deal with violence will provide a more nuanced understanding of their gendered performances.

There is no room for emotion or hesitation when making an important decision about survival. This is made most clear to watchers of *The Walking Dead*, as characters must come to terms with "killing" former loved ones that have "turned" into zombies; sentimentality and affection for those that die in the zombie-pocalypse are incredibly short lived before you must stab the dead through an eye socket. Over the course of each shows' series, there is a "hardening" of several men, but this transformation is present in *all* surviving women. Charlie poses an illustrative example of becoming "street smart" and knowledgeable about how to fight over several episodes, particularly when it comes to her emotions. While in the pilot, she is accosted for wandering too far away from her small village, by 1:15, after a particularly violent

encounter with Monroe's army, Miles inquires about how Charlie is mentally handling the situation: "...fighting nonstop....that can mess with your head." Charlie replies, "Can we *not* do this?" clearly unwilling to accept the invitation to open up about the death and destruction around her. This exchange takes place immediately following the scenario that opens this chapter; the flicker in Miles' face *was* indicating that he fears for Charlie's emotional state.

The Walking Dead provides one of the most emotionally stoic characters, male or female, in Michonne. Introduced at the season 2 finale as Andrea's heroine, the painfully slow reveal of Michonne's backstory combined with her unique, and widely effective zombie-defense techniques, such as a long sword and two zombie "pets" bound to her body on long chains, shroud her in mystery for several seasons. While still retaining physical markers of being female-bodied, her character has taken on an explicitly masculinized identity. The most obvious signifier of this is the phallic-like Katana she uses to slay zombies. Also ambiguous is her relationship to emotion, family, and community. Michonne is first presented as someone extremely averse to talking about feelings or her past as she and Andrea pass long, cold nights in the woods after the farmhouse burns down and Andrea becomes separated from Rick's group. Eventually, they stumble upon Woodbury, and Michonne is as suspicious and antagonistic about living there as Andrea is relieved and excited. Without knowing much else about her, her mistrust of this bucolic society demonstrates that she is someone who has survived this long by *not* relying on anyone else. This narrative is also telling us that she is uncomfortable with "in" the walls of Woodbury: there is a genuine sense that Michonne is *trapped* in this "Leave it to Beaver"- like town. And yet, she forms a close bond to Andrea and stays in Woodbury because of her. She loves Andrea as family and yet detests the community. This relationship also forwards Andrea's

trajectory as a multifaceted character who desires to stay “in” Woodbury while also maintaining her warrior mentality.

A more complex way that Michonne’s role is masculinized is her *use* of emotion. She mostly seems to suppress feelings of joy or pain except when in combat. Emotion, often manifested as revenge, *drives* her fighting ability. While utilizing feelings about what has happened to her in the past to kill zombies or battle the Governor and his gang, she simultaneously seems to derive pleasure from the experience. Violence and fighting are the ultimate expressions of Michonne’s emotional outbursts. An exception comes when her tough veneer cracks as she comes to terms with Andrea’s imminent death. At the end of 3:16, the audience finally gets tears from a grief-stricken Michonne when she loses her closest friend. This expression of pain, however, still allows this character to remain “tough” and self-sufficient though because the audience identifies with Michonne’s grief and this one-time manifestation of it seems understandable, regardless of gender. Further, we know that this pain will fuel her hatred of the Governor and we will vicariously experience her bloody revenge. While her character is revealed to be complex over many episodes, she is clearly one of the toughest, most hardened by what the world has become and despite her identification as a female is marked as masculine.

So far it seems that, as with notions of space, ability too is not only bifurcated along gendered lines (in so far as men fight, women do not) but those female bodied people who engage in battle must straddle the division. Superficially, this evolution of ability to be a fearless warrior seems a natural development for survival in a dangerous post-apocalyptic land. Contemporary notions of dominance and endurance are so heavily tied to men’s bodies, accomplishments, and behaviors that traits such as aggression, stoicism, and self-sufficiency are

almost completely taken for granted not only as masculine but as the “right” ways to conceptualize survival. Women who fare well in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* accumulate masculinized mannerisms, (lack of) emotions, and sometimes even looks (Carol figures out that a short, “men’s cut” is most appropriate for being comfortable in the zombie-pocalypse (see figure 8)). Bravery, emotion-management, and independence are social constructs that have been assumed to be best when leading, fighting, and surviving traumatic events. Several of strong women in these shows are able to care for their communities both “out there,” with weapons and violence as well as “in here,” by realizing that “home” has taken on a completely new meaning and should be “protected” in a radical new way. A kind of hybrid gendered performance is required for the women of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* to most effectively accomplish their goals.

Men’s Exemptions

Conversely, while all females who survive these uncertain worlds must bridge gendered divides and learn to fight like men, male characters do not seem to have to adopt any typically feminine qualities regarding aggression or confrontation in order to protect themselves. Further, in these shows, some men are even allowed to be incompetent at physical conflict and not succumb to their enemies. Both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* feature male characters that never form bodies or adopt skills that make them proficient at fighting enemies. These men are clearly marked as “feminine” not necessarily by their looks but by their interests, emotions, and abilities. Men who are “book smart,” empathetic, and nurturing are devalued in these shows and never portrayed as heroes or leaders, for their particular sets of skills are deemed useless after the apocalypse.

The character of Aaron in *Revolution* is first introduced to the audience as the village's school teacher. He is slightly overweight, wears a full beard, and is immediately presented as an extremely intelligent man. While Aaron joins Charlie's small rescue group, he is never set up as a leader or a fighter. Aaron is given two dimensions as a character: that he is a scientific genius who could potentially help get the electricity turned back on and that he became separated from his wife during the "blackout" and, fifteen years later, still mourns his failure as a husband. Both of these features are rendered incompatible with post-apocalyptic bravery and fortitude as is explicit in 1:15, in a lengthy marketplace scene where Rachael sends him for coffee: "I have 2 doctorates from MIT, but ok, I'll run errands." On the coffee-run, he spots his estranged wife, who is clearly in trouble. He attempts to rescue her by physically attacking her captor, but he is quickly subdued. His wife, now free, finishes the job by punching the captor and coming to the aid of an overwhelmed Aaron. In a few short minutes, the audience is reminded of Aaron's intelligence and inability to physically protect others. Indeed, these are the last words he utters to his wife at the end of the scene, as he tearfully tells her regrets "...I couldn't protect you" all those years ago. This emotional, physically inept male character is juxtaposed by several women who seem to be able to protect themselves as well as some men. Rachael, Aaron's wife, and of course Charlie have clear trajectories in *Revolution* that "relieved" them from the burdens of grief, fear, and an aversion to violence while simultaneously embracing their affection for the men in their (past) lives.

The Walking Dead's Glenn most closely resembles the male character that does not look or act like a "hero:" he is a small-ish, Asian, young man who, in more than one season, is told to "man up." He is in love with Maggie, makes decisions based on this devotion, and in season 2 is shown to be overwhelmed by the violence and terror of the zombie-pocalypse. While his courage

grows by season 3, he is still derogatorily called “sweetheart” by another character, who then accosts him about the Governor almost sexually assaulting Maggie: “Nut up already, boy! Guy cops a feel of your woman and you pussy out like this?!” Glenn attempts to attack the guy, but is so poorly matched others quickly come to break up the melee. Again, *The Walking Dead* dedicates more effort than my other artifact to character development, with all surviving women being portrayed as overcoming guilt, hysteria, even suicidal thoughts throughout the seasons and yet all male characters are not held to this standard.

Why the imbalance of men and women who are seemingly-required to embody many typically-masculine qualities and abilities? A gender hybridity does not seem to apply to the men of these worlds. A possibility may lie in contemporary understandings of masculinity, (hetero)sexuality, and success. Both in popular culture and the politics of everyday life, there have been clear shifts in what it means to be a successful woman. The products of years-long feminist struggles include women having more access to education, vocation, and political voice. While more work is certainly needed for the equal rights of women who are not white, straight, and economically-privileged, women’s presence in the structures that undergird U.S. culture is strong. Still, women’s success then has been liberal; that is, the goal of “equality” with men has been the loudest and most recognizable, as opposed to a more cultural critique that the aforementioned structure was designed by men for men. If men constructed politics, the economy, and even the culture, in order for women to succeed in it, they must learn to play the game, a “skill” I very much trace in both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*. Despite their futuristic settings, the “kick-ass” women who survive beyond an episode or two play by *men’s* rules. On the other hand, I have found that not *all men* must play up their masculinity in order to live through their respective dystopias, which, according to some feminist theorists, is also an arc

being played out in contemporary Western society. Halberstam (2012) argue that the gains of the feminist movements coupled with the stall of a sexuality movement (if one even got off the ground following Rubin's (1984) call) has created a kind of masculine heterosexuality that no longer necessitates that men be financially successful or even ambitious. While he mainly uses pop culture references as evidence (*Knocked Up*, *Little Children*, and even Sandra Bullock's husband famously cheating on her), nearly all who hear the argument (this is true of my undergraduates, anyway) nod their head and admit to knowing a straight couple where the female has everything in the world going for her (looks, education, career, etc) and the male partner appears to be a lazy bum. Indeed, daytime television judges have made long careers out of this couple (Ouellette, 2008). Not unlike these examples, some heterosexual men in *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* are given passes from ambition and motivation, as though there were some unspoken trade off with feminism working to afford women the opportunity at those very traits. Male characters such as Glenn or Aaron are explicitly portrayed as having "failed" at masculinity and are therefore ineligible for becoming series' heroes, but are ultimately allowed to live.

In sum, in order for female bodied characters to last through several episodes, some even through many seasons, it seems that they *must* prioritize "toughening," something colloquially and culturally equated with "manning-up," and yet, both programs contain male characters who never develop these qualities, men who never "man up." Despite the potential for female bodied warrior women to posit hybrid gendered abilities and performances in innovative ways, tracing the absence of men's transformations seems to indicate that the femininity in women's bodies was the problem the whole time, and is still woefully denigrated while simultaneously, men who embody characteristics at odds with a propensity for aggression are let off the hook. These men

are still in the minority in both shows, as most men portrayed are quite competent at physical fighting, violence, and often leading, a standard that is still very much in place in the contemporary U.S. And like today's culture, there is an equation of success, and especially in these programs, survival, with masculinity and the ability to adopt it. *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* utilize two competing rhetorical messages regarding men's and women's bodies. Possessing the best abilities of all genders is a female-only pursuit but masculinity is (still) the privileged performance: The better you perform it the more successful you will be, *but* if a man cannot achieve it, he will be taken care of.

Compulsory (Queer) Motherhood

Through the exploration of space and ability, both with culturally constructed norms about which bodies belong where, I have found moments of transgressing gendered binaries and conventions as well as the stubborn preservation of androcentric assumptions about aggression and stoicism. The activity of fighting has little to no feminine associations, with the literature finding that women who engage in violent occupations and hobbies being rhetorically, and sometimes physically, "placed" back in their sphere. Conversely, I will now examine a domain that has long been a feminine pursuit: mothering. Despite the hybrid possibilities that are imagined regarding understandings of space and physical engagement, notions of maternity and mothering is a domain where gender normativity continues to be reinforced through women's bodies.

Chiefly due to their futuristic, dystopian landscapes, *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* often frame mothering and motherhood in unique ways, most explicitly by playing with the divides of literal/biological and figurative/communal. When the world as we know it is decimated, "traditional" family structures are often physically ruptured. The "often" here refers

both to the notion that families are divided at the apocalyptic moment, but also that any given episode could see a mother, father, brother, or sister succumbing to the dangers of these terrifying worlds. By messing up the familial landscape, these shows then portray communities that act as surrogate families, which usually contain both biological mothers as well as proxies.

Feminine paradoxical maternity

Both biological mothering and the cultural associations with it, namely caring for others, have historically regulated women's bodies as they are related to sexuality. Pregnancy in particular has long been regarded as a contradictory bodily experience: a pregnant body is both fulfilling feminine norms of nurturing, caring for, and giving life while simultaneously representing one who has been sexually active, not pure (Young, 2005). Pregnancy and motherhood then is a condition put on women by men, the result of heterosexual sex, an act that some argue is inherently dominating and violent, resulting in the splitting of the subject (Kristeva, 1980; Young, 2005). While some science fiction, and even radical feminist theory, imagines or allows for reproduction that is separated from the female body (see Butler, 1987; Firestone, 1970), neither *Revolution* nor *The Walking Dead* have constructed this shift in biological capacities. Female-bodied people are still those who not only can become pregnant, but who carry the sole burden of being concerned about becoming pregnant as well the inherent risks of pregnancy and childbirth, a heightened risk in these post-apocalyptic environments.

Both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* portray narratives about pregnancy and mothering that serve to reify norms about gendered (and sexed) bodies, as well as moments that challenge them. Woman as "natural" mother is very much upheld in these shows, as is the double-bind of maternity and mothering: women are "supposed" to be mothers but are ultimately punished because of it. These messages are demonstrated on two levels. The most prominent

way this happens is the fatality of all pregnant women, but more subtly, through the narrative that most female bodied mothers or mother figures are *bad* at it.

Revolution's two female protagonists are not only mother and daughter, but are shown to be less-than-competent caregivers, especially to each other. In a mid-season twist, Rachel (Charlie's mother) is revealed to have been instrumental in the *cause* of the blackout. So she is not only a mother who seemingly abandoned her family during a crisis, but it was her knowledge and technical expertise which led to the apocalyptic landscape. Further, because she was not present for over a decade after the blackout, Charlie assumed the role of mother-figure to her brother. When she "failed" to protect him, Danny is finally killed.

The Walking Dead's Carol's similarly faces the ultimate punishment for her demand that the group go into the woods and search for her lost daughter. The rescue mission results in Lori and Rick's son being shot accidentally: an almost insurmountable punishment for her request. Worse yet, a few episodes later, her daughter is indeed found, but as a zombie, requiring her to be "killed" again. Importantly, the next season Carol is one of the primary caregivers to Rick and Lori's baby girl, indicating that despite her heartbreaking experiences as a biological mother, Carol's role as mother-figure is the "right" one. As noted in the previous chapter, and will be further explored in this section, Carol is also seen as a trusted mother-figure throughout the prison and on the council.

Lori's story arc, however, functions most clearly as a warning about mothering in the zombie-pocalypse. This is first indicated during season 2 when she discovers she is pregnant; having had an affair with Shane, but recently reuniting with Rick, she genuinely does not know who the father is. While this situation would be stressful for a woman in the world we currently live in, bringing a baby into her world gives this plot an additional layer of moral predicament.

In 2:10 she comes across as ambivalent about the consequences of having a baby when teenage Beth yells at her “You’re pregnant?! How could you do that?!” “Well, I don’t really have a choice.” Indeed, she sent others out to raid a pharmacy for Plan B pills in an attempt to not carry her baby to term. Here we see Lori being accosted for *her* error in judgment and attempting to work through this event as though the men in her life bear no responsibility. Lori’s dilemma demonstrates that performing motherhood and maternity in these shows is impacted by cultural norms of “how things used to be,” with women’s bodies the site of conflict. Further, several instances portray Lori as a bad mother to her son and those who she cares for. The above example of Beth contemplating suicide while the other women of the house attempt to stop her provides an example Lori’s faulty “mothering” of the farmhouse. She allows Andrea to watch over Beth after other women took turns, and Andrea then leaves Beth alone to cut herself. This incident looming over her, along with her pregnancy, leads her to admit to Shane, “I’m not winning any mother of the year awards.” Worse than the alienation from her tween-son, like all pregnant women in both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, Lori is dealt the ultimate punishment: death during childbirth. And yet, these messages are consistent with the contradictory rhetoric surrounding women’s bodies, sex, and pregnancy.

Male “Mothering”

Male characters’ relationship with maternity, children, and caring for others takes a less predictable path: Many men are shown to be “good” father figures and, also, several narratives about children and pregnancy are told through *men’s* experiences and emotions. While Western cultural norms of masculinity are often antithetical to this realm, *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* seem invested in allowing men’s bodies in the typically feminine function of caregiver. However, like fighting, where masculinity is privileged above all qualities regardless of the

bodies acting out the task, “mothering” too seems best effected when embodying masculine traits. “Bad” mothers and dead mothers are not the only avenues through which this story keeps getting told, but also through those of “good” fathers and men whose ethos is profoundly affected by maternity.

The Walking Dead and *Revolution* tell tales of both biological fathers as well as a host of father figures who come together to try to keep their small groups alive. Through previously presented dialogue between Rick and Shane, it may seem that Rick is a bad father, unable to protect his son because he is more interested in “talking” than being decisive and violent. But Shane’s clear framing as “villain” renders Rick the “good guy” and thereby a good dad. Indeed in 2:12, the same episode where Lori confesses to Shane she is a bad mother, Rick and Carl sit together in the barn and have a heart to heart about their zombie-pocalypse existence. Despite four seasons of ups and downs between the two, Rick is *never* portrayed as a father who has anything but Carl’s best interests at heart. Additionally, men who are not biological fathers are also portrayed as being competent in this role, including the most “badass” *Walking Dead* character, Daryl Dixon (figure 7). Along with Carol, he takes an immediate interest in the safety and well-being of Lori’s baby, enthusiastically holding and feeding her, and bestowing the temporary nickname “Little Ass-kicker” on her before Carl names her Judith. Rick is given a pass here on being a good dad, since the shock of Lori’s death, despite their fractured relationship, sent him into a daze. *Revolution* similarly allows for men to be responsible for the well-being of children, most notably Aaron, who serves as the school teacher to the neighborhood children. While his intelligence doesn’t allow for him to be a “hero” or warrior, he is trusted to teach children about how the world used to be. Charlie’s dad dies ten minutes into

the pilot, but flashbacks portray him as a loving, if overprotective father, who, in his dying breath, assures her that she is strong.

Another way that these shows suggest that maternity and parenting are of masculine interest is their framing of stories about childbirth and caring for children through the perspectives of men. As argued elsewhere, these programs in general are very much men's stories; the narratives of male protagonists through men's eyes. Maternity and child-rearing, therefore, are not immune, and become coopted by the drama and experience of male characters. For example, the deep emotional pain and confusion surrounding the violent deaths during childbirth is utilized in both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* as driving experiences for the *male* characters. *Revolution's* Monroe loses his partner to childbirth shortly after the electricity goes out, and the traumatic event is suggested to have been a significant factor in his megalomaniacal turn. Rick's at-times-hallucinatory guilt and grief is spread through several subsequent episodes after Lori dies, causing him to not only "check out" mentally from running the prison, but also preventing him from caring for the baby that lived. Further, Lori's death has perhaps the most profound effect on young Carl, who is the one who decides to shoot her in order to prevent her "turn." This scene represents a turning point in Carl's bravery, emotional detachment, and competency with a gun; his very masculinity. Women in these shows are destined to be mothers and then often punished for it, but the collateral damage from this pain and heartbreak is shown through men's perspectives.

Finally, notions of masculinized-maternity are maintained by the ways that "good" mothering, regardless of gender, in these dystopian worlds, like fighting, necessarily takes on masculine gendered norms. As with the roles of warrior, hero, and survivor, mother-figures who live and/or whose children live, *must* adopt traits such as emotion-suppression, bravery, and the

ability to be violent. Further, they must teach their wards to develop these skills. The protective responsibilities that often come with maternity must adopt characteristics that men typically embody. Masculine-mothering is another example then of the hybrid gender performances required of *women and children* to survive the apocalypse.

Moments in both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* portray the “good” mother embodying qualities that are often associated with masculinity, particularly controlling feelings and emotions. After Woodbury is destroyed and the Governor run off, the residents of that community are invited to the prison. The number of children now living there necessitates a kind of organized day care/education, over which Carol is in charge. She has now been a biological mother, a surrogate mother, and teacher of children. Her syllabus differs greatly from Aaron’s, however, in that she teaches even the youngest children, regardless of gender, how to use knives, kill zombies, and critically, to properly manage emotions. The ones they may have to kill will be those they loved, but this is no time for tears and hysteria. A large part of this new pedagogy is *channeling* the feelings that you used to have for this person into a compassionate act of letting them move on to the next world rather than linger in this one as a “walker.” Carol has adopted the “kill or be killed” mentality while still retaining the ability to care and connect with others, and, as a good “mother,” passes it down to her “children.” *Revolution*’s Charlie, too, is shown over the course of a season to become a “hardened” mother-figure to Danny, while maintaining an optimism that taking down the corrupt government means a better future. While she ultimately fails at protecting Danny, her next imperative is demonstrated to be of higher importance, redeeming her prior, motherly, transgression.

While female bodied characters *must* adopt a gender hybridity in their skills as warriors and mothers, men who step into the maternal realm seem to maintain recognizably masculine

behaviors and norms while doing so. “Little Ass Kicker” aside, *The Walking Dead* portrays male characters who prioritize children learning how to use weapons, beginning with Rick and Carl, and men taking responsibility for going “out there” on supply runs for Judith’s formula. There are not many children portrayed in *Revolution*, but Miles is immediately set up as Charlie’s surrogate father; one who may even be more competent than his brother, Ben. Indeed, he *is* still alive and has “turned” Charlie into a worldly, effective fighter. Being a good parent-figure in these shows does not require the eschewing of masculine norms and stereotypes, rather, repeats the message that masculinity is the gender that is altogether stronger and most effective at the end-of-the-world.

Conclusion

Through an examination of various ways that bodies occupy space and activity, I have traced several persistent messages about gender and division of labor. On the one hand, *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* give us some truly “kick-ass” female characters. Andrea, Michonne, and Charlie are brave, independent, and resilient women; certainly women you would want on your side during the apocalypse! They eschew old conventions of domesticity, tranquility, and weakness, refusing to be “disciplined” back into gendered norms about where women belong. Without completely shedding their markers of femininity, they seem to embrace a gendered hybridity, potentially creating space for fictional television characters to continue to occupy.

Enthusiasm is short lived, however, as these findings begin to parallel the critiques of hybrid-theory pointed out by those cultural scholars who noticed that the dynamism of multi-identified subjectivities are often shallow demonstrations of something unique while really serving to uphold hegemonic ideals. In my case, those of patriarchal understandings that

masculinity is still the strongest and most effective way to survive the apocalypse. The writers of both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* seem to dismiss outright typically-feminine qualities as unimportant to surviving the apocalypse.

Like gender itself, at least through a queer performative lens, mass mediated repetitions of norms and values about bodies become ritualized and finally taken for “natural” and “normal.” They function rhetorically to maintain common cultural understandings about not only what certain bodies should look like, but also what they should be capable of doing. Further, polysemic readings of these popular texts suggests that while on the surface, we are getting strong female characters who could serve as role models for young girls (not that they should be watching *The Walking Dead*); these women are telling *new* stories about women’s abilities. However, one doesn’t need a very close inspection to be reminded that both of the shows feature mostly men as the leads. And upon studying the supporting cast more closely, perhaps we are receiving more of the same, sexist and heteronormative messages behind the smattering of empowered women that Condit (1989) warned us about. Masculinity is still the “norm” here, femininity not only the Other, but that which will get you killed. Still, the moments of subversion lend themselves to a growing landscape of fiction, and science fiction in particular which posits that kick ass females can look, act, and maybe even reproduce and mother, in radically different ways, opening up truly creative spaces for something new.

Chapter 4

Working the (Un)familiar: Upholding and Destabilizing Notions of “Normal”

A still camera shot captures a lone car approaching from a distance, about to reach an empty intersection; the traffic signal is not working. It is a Sheriff's vehicle, and on the other side of the intersection the driver discovers several overturned and burned out vehicles. A man in full Sheriff's uniform emerges from the car with a look of confusion on his face. He surveys the scene as he maneuvers around the cars. There appears to have been a makeshift camp set up off the side of the road; he finds children's toys and blankets. There is no music, only birds cawing in the distance and a sign that says “NO GAS” banging against a poll of a nearby convenience store. The camera moves to ground-level, spying on only the man's feet as they walk by several more cars. The man gets down on the ground to look under the cars, carefully placing his Sheriff's hat down first, and spots a pair of feet in slippers. The figure picks up a stuffed animal and shuffles away. The man calls to her, “Little girl! I'm a police officer! Don't be afraid.” The figure turns around, revealing that she is missing half of her face and has an utterly dead look in her milky eyes. The “girl” begins shambling towards the man, gurgling a disgusting and hungry sound, and the man shoots her in the head. Her body is shown to “fly” backwards before spraying onto the pavement; a fly lands on her open wound almost immediately.

The opening scenes to *The Walking Dead* series are as disorienting to the viewer as they are to Sheriff's Deputy Rick Grimes. While those who tuned in for the highly advertised series premiere knew the show would be about zombies, we didn't know how far it would go with violence and gore. In these opening moments, we are not yet sure who Rick is, but these two minutes are telling of what this show will be about and how it will tell its story. Already we anticipate confusion and disturbance about our understanding of the differences between living and surviving. Rick's face turns from confusion about the abandoned camp, to horror at seeing

the zombie-girl's half-rotten face, to devastation that he "killed" her. That Rick's very first zombie encounter, and kill, is a little girl indicates that this man will do what he has to do, and we are along for the ride with him. This show will be Rick's show; a tale of a man navigating the zombie-pocalypse, his navigation shown through his eyes.

This chapter will explore storytelling techniques employed by both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* as they serve to contribute to narratives about men and women in fictional post-apocalyptic worlds. Through an examination of the various genres that these shows occupy, I observe that both programs have features that closely resemble the Western, and that *The Walking Dead* additionally is situated within the horror genre. After broadly defining the genres and demonstrating how the shows conform to their usual-characteristics, I trace notions of familiarity and instances where the familiar is subverted. By analyzing the hero/villain dichotomy as well as character introspection about their dystopic existences, I uncover two distinct functions of (un)familiarity in these shows. The Western format serves to deliver some familiarity to audiences of these post-apocalyptic texts, while by working within the horror genre, atmospheres of comfort and familiarity are explicitly destabilized in *The Walking Dead*, possibly allowing for more nuanced and complex stories about gender, power, and morality to emerge.

Westerns: Making the Unfamiliar Familiar

This chapter is about storytelling techniques in *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution*, and one of the most striking observations about these programs is how plots, characters, and filming parallel those of the Western genre. While I am not an avid consumer of Westerns, I am nevertheless compelled by these two science fiction shows that revolve around vengeance, survival, exploration, independence, morality, and lawlessness, all also qualities of any number

of Clint Eastwood or Jon Ford classics. Some of the stylistic codes of Westerns are so well understood in U.S. culture that one does not have to have seen *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* or *Unforgiven* to feel comfortable identifying many of the genre's most famous features, including the lone gunslinger, the duel (often for the attention or even possession of a woman), the struggle for order in an uncertain time of official lawlessness, and, of course, the violence. Figures 10 and 11 demonstrate the reliance of the wide-angle view to depict the isolation of the lone-wanderer in John Ford's *Stagecoach* and the season 1 poster of *The Walking Dead*. Due to the many similar stories and types of characters, science fiction and Westerns have been "mashed up" in film as early as 1935 (*The Phantom Empire*) and in popular television, comic books, and literature ever since (for example, Stephen King's *The Dark Tower*, television's *The Wild Wild West* (1963-1965), and Hollywood blockbusters such as *Mad Max Beyond the Thunderdome* (1979), *The Book of Eli* (2010), and most obviously, *Cowboys & Aliens* (2011)). Several notable movie directors have successfully made movies in both genres, from 1950s B-movie director Jack Arnold (*Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *No Name on the Bullet*) to more recently Quentin Tarantino with *Planet Terror* (2007) and *Django Unchained* (2012) (Wiesenfeldt, 2010). Even when the genres are distinct, however, *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution*, like much science fiction, revolves around conflict with outside enemies; Others. Encounters and conflicts with unfamiliar territory and people are major themes in the Western genre, primarily with Native Americans.

The Western myth functions rhetorically to make the unfamiliar familiar through its ties with commonly understood assumptions about the American Dream. Using the word "encounter" to describe how Westerns often tell stories about the unfamiliar is to gloss over the genre's propensity for thinly veiled imperialism and expansion. Given the well-known tropes of

the Western, including independence, discovery (another term frequently used to describe these narratives which works to ameliorate its colonialism), the stoic and brave hero, and often violence, this genre is uniquely a U.S.-based form of storytelling (Rushing, 1983; Williams, 1996). The cowboy personifies the American self-image: this is a story we *know* (Rushing, 1983). The myth of the Western perpetuates American supremacy and dominance over whatever and whoever is occupying what is in the way. While the critical scholar cannot help but point out the hypocrisy and violence associated with romanticized terms such as “discovery,” “encounter,” and “new frontier,” these narratives often serve as familiar stories with heroes American audiences want to root for. These are not just stories we know, they are stories that reinforce hegemonic cultural ideologies.

Westerns also function to work through tensions and fears that, while speaking to audiences fairly far removed from the actual “wild West,” are recognizable in that they address a community vs individual dialectic (Cawelti, 2004; Rushing, 1983). A common thread in interpretations of this dualism is that the Western archetype is dependent upon the paradox of being alone *and* as part of a community (Bellour, 1979; Rushing, 1983). This tension rings truer than ever with modern audiences, navigating a world where constantly being “plugged in” to social media and a member of a seemingly-infinite online community can make us feel incredibly isolated (Lanier, 2010). A critical component of the American Dream is the (neo)liberal notion of independent success coupled with the creation of a family or community, two seemingly-competing ideals that play out in Western myths, contemporary politics, and the narratives of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution*.

Another way that this genre serves up familiar cultural anxieties is through the drama of having nothing left to discover. Janice Rushing’s 1983 essay on the rhetoric of the Western myth

makes an astute claim that speaks very much to contemporary American anxieties about expansion, community, and individualism, as technically, there is no more “West” to explore. This perhaps explains why the “modern” Western is often a period-piece, a story that is set in the past *or* the future. The combination of science fiction and Westerns further makes sense when examining it through this dilemma of the American Dream: How to tell stories about discovery and morality when there is nothing left to “discover”? Shifting narratives to the future, and sometimes even to outer-space, certainly serves this function. Rushing’s conclusion adds yet another layer to the construction of the Cowboy-dilemma that is applicable to my futuristic artifacts when she wonders if “inner-space if the new last frontier” (p. 31). While the characters of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* certainly find themselves wandering a new “frontier,” they are also grappling with they have become. To various degrees, these contemporary science fiction dramas are at once exploring their environments *and* themselves.

Revolution calls forth the Western genre in several ways, most notably through scene. This world that hasn’t had electricity in fifteen years, one with wild vegetation and a turn back to traditional farming and water gathering, creates a Western-like atmosphere. The vines encroaching the Ferris wheel in the season 1 Promotional poster (figure 3) is one demonstration of the “savageness” of the land. Another is the literal mapping of the former-United States (figure 9): the sepia tone and crude geographic cut-outs are reminiscent of pioneer maps from European explorers of the “New World.” Characters relying on horses, kerosene lighting, and non-electronic forms of communication are sometimes jarring to the modern viewer, reminding us of the “old days.” Costuming on *Revolution* similarly situates it in this genre, with a heavy reliance on leather, wool, and jeans. Finally, although set in the dystopic future, the overall narrative of the show parallels codes of the classic Western: The main characters are on a

journey through unfamiliar territory which contains various known and unknown dangers in order to “fight” for justice.

The Walking Dead also consistently relies on familiar imagery and stories about the stoic “cowboy” figure, the careful use of sound or silence to connote tension, and “the duel.” These elements are all present in the opening scenes of the series, as described in the beginning of this chapter, as well as in the first few minutes of “Arrow on the Doorpost.” The episode opens with Rick being escorted to his meeting with the Governor by Daryl and Hershel, all scoping out the area to check for hidden enemies. There is no dialogue for almost two minutes. Rick enters the meeting space, and the camera closes up on Rick slowly cocking his gun; the viewer can hear every click. Furthering the “Western” feel to this scene is that Rick maintains his service weapon, a silver sheriff’s gun with a long slim barrel, where almost all the other guns in the show are more the modern, sleek, black Glocks that today’s police tend to use. The next scene is Rick approaching the “arena;” a table with two chairs set up on a platform in the barn where he will meet the Governor and decide his group’s fate. The Governor walks in from the other side, almost all ensconced in shadow except for his face and a patch over the eye that Michonne has impaled. Still wordless, the two men circle each other, much like cowboys and sheriffs facing off at the OK Corral. The meeting’s exit scene, too, is filmed in a Western-style, containing the episode’s only music: heavy on guitars and haunting, deep vocals as Rick’s and the Governor’s back-up men rev the engines on their trucks and motorcycles, giving each other dirty looks. The pairing of the camera work framing the encounter as a duel between the groups and the moral dilemma posed on Rick, that he turn Michonne over to the Governor to ensure peace, plays on several of the above-mentioned qualities of the Western genre.

Heroes and Villains

Such focus on the duel also serves up the archetypal hero/villain dichotomy, a narrative device which contains much rhetorical significance across genres, and for Westerns in particular allows for “the duel” to take on the maximum amount of drama and suspense. Jung’s (1947) archetype of the Hero, who is not only self-sacrificing for the “greater good,” but whose myth exists in our collective unconscious, is clearly provided in both shows. This figure then becomes someone we (almost) always root for to succeed, so then by definition, the hero is defined as one in direct conflict with a villain (Propp, 1984). This antagonism is an important “...discursive practice that makes truth and justice legible by demarcating a clear boundary between right and wrong” (Anker, 2005). Such framing occurs regularly in fictional story telling as well as in political narration, where “good guys” and “bad guys” are necessary to persuade audiences and voters (Anker, 2005). American television viewers, both of fiction and evening news programs, are familiar with this dichotomy as it serves to reinforce tropes of American supremacy and values. *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* both offer moments of obvious heroes and villains, and while the latter program prioritizes complicating this division, “Arrow on the Doorpost” certainly marks the point at which the two men meet in a neutral place, in Westerns it’s usually the town square, and take clear sides on their own personal “right” and “wrong.”

Almost compelled by the genre then, *Revolution* also hinges on the divide between the hero and villain. As in *The Walking Dead*, several encounters throughout the first season serve to set up Miles and Monroe as villain and hero respectively, culminating in a “duel” in episode 15. The showdown between the two men actually does take place in a town square, and Monroe’s despicable decision to burn innocent citizens in a locked building is this show’s moment that cements his clear turn to “evil.” Gunfire between the two sides erupts immediately (as opposed

to *The Walking Dead*, where the gun battle occurs three episodes after “Arrow”) with typical shooting scenes where characters fire rapidly and then hide behind a structure.

Revolution and *The Walking Dead* both take place in worlds that look very different from the one we now know. While actual landscapes are the same (that is, as opposed to the radically different Earth that people must negotiate in the *Hunger Games* or *Waterworld*, or even different habitats altogether, such as *Wall-E* or *Alien*), decades of no electricity and the constant threat of zombies renders the characters’ experiences in the world almost completely unrecognizable. Situating these shows within the post-apocalyptic science fiction Western hybrid genre perhaps serves to allow the viewer the familiarity that they can expect from the myth of the American West. Further, despite some moral ambiguity that these dystopian environments provide (to be discussed below), the audience is given clear heroes in Rick, Michonne, Andrea, Miles, and Charlie, as well as obvious adversaries in The Governor and The Monroe Republic. Westerns provide drama, suspense, and good triumphing evil, inserting some often-needed palatability in these two otherwise dark programs.

Horror: Making the Familiar Unfamiliar

Despite the two shows’ placement within the intersection of the science fiction, post-apocalyptic, and Western genres, *The Walking Dead* obviously occupies yet another kind of storytelling. With its frequent zombie-out-of-nowhere shockers and graphic, bloody violence, *The Walking Dead* also fits into the horror genre. The bloody zombie-slayings are truly disturbing; I often find myself turning away from the screen for *just* a second when I know a switchblade will be going through a skull, only to be more distressed by the goopy, slushy sound I am now listening to. Indeed several of the science fiction-themed Westerns mentioned above also contain horror elements. There is a common conflation between science fiction and horror,

given their frequent pairings in literature, film and television (*The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Thing*, and *The Twilight Zone*, respectively, are just a few examples), but the two genres are not necessarily the same. Horror, of course, means something different to every reader or viewer, but critical to this genre is the provocation of an emotional and/or a visceral response, often after a suspenseful buildup (Williams, 1996). A jump, a scream, or, for this writer, having to watch something through a small separation of my fingers, are characteristics of a text with horror elements, and some science fiction contains them where others do not, just as much horror is based not in a fantastical future, but in our very backyards (*Halloween* or *Last House on the Left*). Further complicating the blending of genres is the connection between science fiction, horror, and Westerns as portrayed in *The Walking Dead*. Many classic horror movies contain the landscapes, costuming, and the lone (anti)hero figure prominent in so many Westerns, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, with the latter having an explicit science fiction-twist given the cannibalistic family was mutated by military nuclear testing.

Like Westerns, horror often involves a struggle with the unfamiliar, but more unique to this genre, it often allows for these conflicts to not be resolved neatly, sometimes even allowing the “Other” to win (King, 2010). Where Westerns also depict experiences with unfamiliar places and people, letting the “bad guy” win provides a departure point of the two genres. Beyond their appearance in lucrative sequels, if the zombie, psycho killer, or vampire lives, perhaps these Others serve to disrupt audience assumptions about their purpose. While a straight parallel between zombies and African-Americans in *Night of the Living Dead* is highly simplistic, the horror genre has historically treated taken-for-granted cultural norms and, often exaggeratedly, flipped them on their heads. This genre purposefully and consistently plays with notions of the unfamiliar. Other genres effectively tackle social and cultural tensions, including some Westerns

that attempt to point out the racism and sexism of America's beloved "cowboy," but even Kevin Costner's attempt to adapt *Dances with Wolves* was critiqued as white-washed (Keller, 2003). Indeed, the Western genre is still very much a masculine one; men's stories through men's perspectives, often about dominance over the Other. Taken together, Westerns tend to uphold traditional ideologies regarding gender, sexuality, and race; that which is familiar. Horror, too, has been criticized as relying on misogynistic and racist depictions and narratives (Guerrero, 1993; Lindsey, 1991; Lizardi, 2010), but due its often-bizarre format of incoherence and disturbance, like apocalyptic science fiction, it also has the potential to give the audience something radically different than what we are used to. The Western is consistently reliant on the premises of exploration, competition, and supremacy whereas horror at least contains the possibilities for (re)imagining a different goal. Where the Western prioritizes *upholding* the American Dream, horror is interested in exploring what happens when we subvert it.

Horror, then, has consistently been the genre to critique cultural and political standards, often through the absurdity of the grotesque (Bakhtin, 1984; King, 2010) and/or through "incoherence" (Wood, 1986). Much horror relies on images, sounds, and behaviors that threaten the viewer's understanding of "normal" and work to "disturb" our very sense of safety and comfort. In these ways, the genre has been argued to contain much potential for queer bodily performances. This ability can apply to gender norms, as much horror relies on "the final girl," a tough heroine who not only defeats the killer/enemy, but with whom the audience is supposed to identify with (Clover, 1992). Additionally, horror's unique format sometimes work to de-familiarize the human body; cyborgs and hybrid beings are often the main characters in horror fiction. Critical scholars note that horror serves as a useful site for the (re)negotiation of cultural norms and scripts because of its often bizarre, and competing use of, meaning systems

(Bernstein, 1996; Picart, 2004). Due to its often disturbing images, sounds, and stories, horror has the ability to “...facilitate queer and feminist forms of pleasure” (King, 2010, p. 251). Even when some components of a horror text fulfill traditional conventions regarding bodies, the genre often refuses to be neatly contained (King, 2010). Effective horror upsets once-familiar understandings of environment, bodies, and narrative to both unhinge the audience as well as, sometimes, make a critical commentary about them.

While *Revolution* fits into more classically Western and action/adventure science fiction, eschewing shrieks and spooks, *The Walking Dead* in almost all of its elements very much resembles the Western science fiction horror, from its long, far away shots of the world as an almost barren wasteland, its careful use of bluegrass music, to its slow, deep focus on individual characters and their attempt to grasp the constant danger of the zombie-pocalypse. Costuming for this show in particular is an important connection to the different genres. The “zombification” of extras has been not only critically acclaimed (Emmy nominations in 2011 and 2012 for Special Effects), but became somewhat of a pop culture phenomenon when the AMC network created contests for viewers to win a zombie role on an episode. There are even smartphone apps which will “zombify” your photos!

Beyond the terrifying makeup and shambling of the zombies, however, costuming for the “living” actors serves to portray “cowboys” who have been wandering the West for too long; the characters on *The Walking Dead* genuinely look dirty, smelly, bloody, and sometimes, defeated. That is, those who have survived this long *look* like they haven’t slept more than a couple of hours and have been battling zombies for the past two years (see figure 12). The appearance of these characters nicely captures the show’s intersection of Western and horror. Rick dons his Sheriff’s outfit, complete with hat and badge (a symbol with absolutely *no* practical significance

in this particular dystopia) throughout the first two seasons, while always smattered with blood, sweat, and dirt. Much more so than *Revolution*, this world always appears to “stink;” there is rot everywhere, and the costuming is an important way that the horrific smells are conveyed to the audience.

Horror television specifically has been a site where some of the most subversive and even feminist characters and story arcs have recently appeared. While horror movies portray some of the toughest female characters on screen (*Alien* and *Halloween*, for example), horror films do still tend to return to tired and sexist scripts, such as rape-revenge (*I Spit on Your Grave*) and monsters that literally resemble vaginas (see *Alien* or *Predator*). There has been a recent turn (back) to televised horror, with *The Walking Dead*, *American Horror Story*, and *Hannibal* debuting within the last five years and all three seriously unhinging the once-familiar. Not only have these programs upped the levels of violence and gore, but they have significantly pushed the boundaries of storytelling. Like the images themselves, these shows allow narratives to unfold in unconventional ways: sometimes painstakingly slow, out of chronological order, or through bizarre metaphors. *American Horror Story*'s third season even took an explicitly feminist angle, featuring an almost-all-female-cast and a plot that focused on women's and people of color's “difference” and oppression. So some of the most exciting and progressive work currently on television is utilizing the advantages that the horror genre has to offer, while leaving behind much of the dependence on sexist and racist narratives that so many films continue to employ. As I closely examine my two artifacts, I continually note that *The Walking Dead*, while still problematic in several of its elements, particularly regarding gender, at least tells more complex tales about it. While an obvious explanation for this seems to lie in the differences between the channels through which the two shows are mediated, cable vs broadcast,

the additional layer of grotesque to *The Walking Dead's* science fiction Western also allows it to “flip” familiar scripts and tell richer stories about men, women, and humanity in a dystopic world.

Reflection In and About (Un)Familiar Dystopias

Having mapped the generic similarities and deviations of *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*, I turn to those moments in both where the characters reflect about their existence in such terrifying times. When encountering men and monsters unlike anything (most people) in our contemporary world, how do these characters (re)construct personal morality, and thereby humanity? Further, how does deconstructing familiarity function rhetorically in these shows as they convey messages about the (ab)normality of these dystopias? That is, navigating the post-apocalyptic world requires adapting to newly unfamiliar challenges and threats. How does reliance on Western myths serve characters as they reflect on their post-apocalyptic existences and to what extent does the disturbance inherent in the horror genre affect *The Walking Dead's* characters differently than those of *Revolution*?

The Walking Dead serves up the more fruitful artifact for an examination between surviving in uncertain environments and the loss of humanity given that the enemy in this show is (most often), literally, former-humans. These creatures are the ultimate example of the unfamiliar-familiar. Zombies have longed served as metaphors for society's wrongs, in particular, their West Indian voodoo roots symbolized the evils of slavery (Lauro & Embry, 2008). In 1968 the zombie received its most prominent visual treatment in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, which to many film and cultural critics was dealing with the tensions brought on by the civil rights movement (although Romero himself denies this connection). Regardless of interpretation, this film almost permanently implanted the slow, mindlessly

stumbling, and singularly-wanting-“brrraaaaiinnnsss” -zombie into American pop culture.

While Danny Boyle challenged the sluggish zombie archetype with *28 Days Later* (2002), *The Walking Dead* retains undead that move in slow herds.

That *The Walking Dead* conjures up the classic zombie rather than the terrifyingly-rapid ones is perhaps another signal that the show itself is a more complex, slower paced ride than many televised programs, especially than those on broadcast television. The time afforded to character-development often manifests in reflections about the meaning of life in disorienting dystopias, what kinds of moral compasses are warranted, and at what point are the basic tenets of humanity sacrificed for survival. Further, more scenes are up for interpretation about how a character might be dealing with these existential dilemmas. For instance, 2:10 opens with Shane and Rick in the car driving their prisoner far away from the farm, but the camera lingers on Shane, gazing out of the passenger-side window. Next we see what he is staring at; a lone walker, stumbling around a large, grassy field. The scene seems to be open to interpretation but given its placement within Shane’s descent into madness, begs the question, “What’s the point of all this?” Further, this is the same episode with Beth explicitly asking that question; either we are all doomed to roam the Earth as a zombie, or we will turn into a different kind of monster trying to survive. Yet this episode portrays one of these characters as able to find salvation, where Shane is shown to be spiraling into a zombie-like state when, in a scene with him fighting Rick about the prisoner, he sees his ragged reflection in a window just as a zombie appears on the other side. For a moment, the two images are laid over the other, foreshadowing Shane’s fate as someone whose decision that violence and dominance at any cost, have indeed cost him his humanity. In so many of its narratives and character-arcs, *The Walking Dead* explores at what point will these characters become “unfamiliar,” and what will that look like?

Revolution also, although differently and less consistently, explores themes of introspection regarding the characters' existence in their electricity-free totalitarian worlds. Like Shane, Monroe is shown to be a man who reflects his trajectory and what his tyrannical choices have cost him. This is shown in 1:15, revolving around Monroe storming the town that he and Miles' grew up in to get the latter's attention. While waiting for Miles to show up, Monroe is reunited with his former lover, Emma. Flashbacks tell the audience that Emma was actually Miles' girlfriend but began an affair with his best friend before the blackout occurred. Miles' finally storms the town, looking to finally defeat Monroe, when this show's villain makes a decision that even he seems surprised about. Later he holds a gun to Emma's head in an attempt to negotiate with Miles. His facial expression is pained and conflicted as Emma pleads for her life by reminding Monroe that he was once a kind and sympathetic man. He tells her, "that man is dead." Emma is then killed at the climax by another soldier, and the camera lingers on Monroe's tear-stained face as he gazes out into the horizon, seemingly contemplating what he has become.

While characters of all genders and races have these moments of introspection about their existences, it is only *men* who so rigidly cling to dominance and survival-at-any-cost in these post-apocalyptic worlds. These male characters who fail to adapt a critical stance about their lives in these strange worlds tend to succumb to them. That is, Monroe, Shane, and the Governor chose paths that seem singularly focused on power and the acquisition of resources, most closely paralleling those traditional science fiction and Western characters seeking "expansion." Both shows take place in dystopian futures created by those very goals. Scientific and militaristic growth and development are shown to be the causes of the zombie-pocalypse and the "blackout," direct results of people clamoring for more and more power. When, in these shows, characters

are shown to “not have learned” from past mistakes, they lose a vital part of their humanity. Importantly, the above mentioned characters are all men, relying on familiar hyper-masculine qualities that possibly helped them achieve success in their pre-apocalypse lives. So while *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* both portray some fairly stereotypical messages about which bodies make effective leaders, and which are better suited for domestic tasks, failure to think critically about what separates these characters from the very monsters and militias they fear often results in being overthrown at best, or death at worst.

It will be useful here then to revisit the rhetoricity of the hero/villain narrative as, so far, it has been these “villainous” characters who have suffered the “turn” to delusion or collapse. Further, while these characters are “familiar” in that they are recognizably “bad,” they seem to be struggling with utilizing familiar codes of conduct to guide them through unfamiliar terrain. When these shows do portray clear distinctions between good and bad, as the almost-cartoon-like simplicity of Shane and Monroe demonstrate, they are alleviating some of the uncertainty that the audience is experiencing about these post-apocalyptic settings, intrinsically laden with moral ambiguity. As with the “wild West,” these once-familiar landscapes are completely new territory for the characters and how they chose to conduct themselves in this new territory is based on a set of guiding principles that often look very different from those pre-apocalypse. For some, those goals are dominance, expansion, and the implementation of law and order that will best serve their former interests. For others, this uncertain time and terrain provide moments of introspection: how did we get here and what do we do now that we are here? Codes of conduct are also important to those who are more reflective, but there are far more gray areas of right and wrong for characters like Rick and Charlie, who refuse to stop striving for something that resembles humanity. Both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* are situated in the spaces made

available by their science fiction apocalyptic Western hybrid-genre as their characters negotiate new territory and the moral quagmires which necessitate the inward glance that Rushing (1983) proposed would be the “new frontier.”

Heroes and villains, then, function in both of these shows as familiar frames during disruptive settings, but only in so far as they adhere to “norms” of good versus evil. *Revolution* is far less invested than *The Walking Dead* in characters who take time to existentially reflect on the dichotomy and its newly-blurred boundaries. The above example of Monroe, as well as Charlie’s eyes in the episode’s cold open, are rare examples of this show flipping familiar characters or stories. Yes, Charlie has “hardened,” but she is certainly the same girl who explored the woods by her house. Her journey away from home, pairing her with Miles, and attempting to overthrow a tyrannical government are all familiar codes of the hero in the Western myth. *Revolution*, in its comfortable trench of Western post-apocalyptic science fiction drama, works to ensure that the audience will be placated with familiar tropes and story-telling techniques, despite the show’s futuristic and dystopic setting.

While the hero/villain dichotomy often serves to place clear and familiar demarcations around characters and narration, some contemporary television, *The Walking Dead* included, works to push the boundaries of storytelling through morally ambiguous or transgressive “anti-heroes.” As today’s politics and fiction both deepen in complexity, the sharp division between good and evil characters is becoming increasingly blurred in critically acclaimed television shows. Television such as Cinemax’s *Dexter*, AMC’s *Breaking Bad*, and ABC’s *The Blacklist* feature protagonists who could hardly be called “good,” and yet audiences root for them anyway; these characters have twisted traditional ideologies of “right” and “wrong” to justify killing others or trafficking drugs in ways that could conceivably make sense to viewers (Gregoriou,

2012). Some contemporary Westerns have also played with upsetting the familiar binary of good and bad, such as The Coen Brother's *No Country for Old Men* or F/X's *Justified*. Anti-heroes are very much en vogue currently, and further, they make up some of the most ethically complicated set of stories that work to dismantle taken-for-granted conventions about women, men, family, and law and order. By making the hero unfamiliar, these fictional works present protagonists who seriously and critically evaluate their exigencies to make decisions about their humanity and their future. Like Walter White cooking meth to take of his family, Rick considers and sometimes acts on decisions that in another world would not be "right," but it is in the zombie-pocalypse.

Returning to the slow-paced zombies of *The Walking Dead*, and given that I am consistently finding that this show invests much more time to character development and moral consideration of their new way of life than *Revolution*, there seems to be a connection between the horror element of this show and its critical orientation towards norms of "what used to be." By making the familiar unfamiliar, this show allows for moments that blur traditional boundaries of gender and morality. While conventional deployment of gendered norms are still present in several interactions, characters, and plot, its subversion of comfort and familiarity gives the audience other instances of deep reflection about men, women, and humanity. That is, in many ways, *Revolution*'s action/adventure kind of science fiction Western only allows for that program to move quickly from one fight or struggle to the next. "Races against the clock" are far more common here, whether it's to rescue Charlie's brother or turn the electricity back on. Time is far less focused on in *The Walking Dead*; viewers actually do not ever really know how long it's been since the apocalyptic-onset. And as noted elsewhere, some entire episodes are solely devoted to deep character development and not plot propulsion. The latter's inclusion of horror,

and the zombie in particular, perhaps allows for a show which prioritizes contemplation and critical thinking about which elements of humanity must be shed in order to survive and which must be retained so that the characters do not end up just another monster.

Additionally, there is a gendered element to this necessity of introspection. While many of the notable characters who “turn” are men, *The Walking Dead* also contains female characters who “transform” and adopt more flexible and critical perspectives than their fellows whose dogmatic-masculinity led to their downfalls. Carol’s shift from passive and fearful to brave and pragmatic came after much reflection about the kind of woman she used to be, and who she needed to become to best navigate the new world she lived in. As argued previously, she retained some of her former self, mainly her maternal-self, her ability to protect others at any cost, and combined this highly-feminine quality with a propensity for violence in order to enact that protection. The act that got her unilaterally evicted from the prison by Rick is an illustrative example of Carol’s merging-identities: she pre-emptively killed two group members who were extremely sick with the flu. They had not “turned” yet, but Carol’s desire to protect the prison from two *possible* walkers created an ethical dilemma that, in her zombie-polcalypse experience, warranted an extreme action. Rick’s guiding principle, however, dictates that killing still-living humans in order to possibly protect the group serves to strip people of their humanity, and, much like the prisoner from season 2, drives Carol away from the prison. The horror-element of *The Walking Dead* allowed for not only a particularly nasty visual of the discovery of the two bodies Carol burned, but also for the disruption of cultural norms and values. Ethical questions about sacrificing the few to save the many are certainly issues present in contemporary politics, but the futuristic and terrifying setting of this show yanks the viewer out of her comfort zone, where medical technologies are no longer an option and where allegiances to either Carol’s or Rick’s

moral compass are not so easy to cling to. Further, this is an example of gender-norm disruption as well, for not only was Carol the one to exact extreme violence on two group members, but that *she* was the one ultimately driven “out there,” while Rick returned to the relative safety “in” the prison. In this story arc, not only are the hero and the villain not-so-easily-identified, but familiar imperatives such as protecting one’s “family” are completely distorted by this particular dystopian world.

Conclusion

I find that both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* are post-apocalyptic science fiction shows that contain elements of the Western genre, but that *The Walking Dead*’s additional location in the horror genre allows for richer narratives about its characters. As argued in previous chapters, both shows often rely on hegemonic ideologies of gender regarding leadership, violence, and domestic tasks, all also characteristic of Westerns. The connection between these shows and Westerns is not surprising then, given their basic premises of small groups of people navigating a now-unfamiliar landscape and, to various degrees, negotiating how to deal with the others they encounter. Myths of the American Dream serve to ease the audience’s unfamiliarity with these post-apocalyptic waste lands and the dangers therein. Conversely, the additional layer of horror to *The Walking Dead* allows this show to prioritize the *unfamiliar*, thereby opening opportunities to be more disruptive of traditional cultural norms by freeing it from being the kind of science fiction solely interested in imperialism and maintaining conventional assumptions of “normal” and “right.” While still featuring some stereotypical characters and organizational structures, characters on the *Walking Dead* utilize their particularly dark and scary setting to explore *inward*, in a way that *Revolution*’s do not, allowing for more multi-faceted characters and more nuanced investigations of morality in an uncertain reality.

Charlie, Miles, Rachael, Aaron, and Monroe are always looking forward, to their next accomplishment or goal. In doing so, the show is fundamentally expansive, as most explicitly connoted by Monroe's obsession with acquiring more territory. Charlie's physical move around the country is also indicative that *Revolution* is relying on traditional science fiction and Western tropes of conquering as a means of survival, leaving little time and interest on reflecting inward. Further, while Charlie certainly serves as a strong female protagonist, she is the exception in this program, not the rule. In its effort to rapidly advance the plot and up the dramatic moments, *Revolution* fails to allow many of its characters to shed qualities that, while fitting into today's norms, no longer serve them. *The Walking Dead*, by working within a genre that is based on disturbing familiarity and comfort, is able to more fully flesh out the deep psychic dilemmas that living in a dystopian world inherently present. In doing so, we get characters that embody qualities that potentially benefit *all* genders and people. By utilizing the horror format, this show is able to ward off many of the conventional ways that Westerns tell stories, while still embracing the connection that many Americans have with stories of survival against the odds.

Like multi-faceted characters themselves, it seems then that adopting a hybrid-genre format best allows for dynamic and subversive storytelling. Research indicates that horror-hybrids in particular are able to tell unique stories about bodies and progress (Picart, 2004), a characteristic I am finding in *The Walking Dead*. *Revolution's* position within the post-apocalyptic science fiction Western amalgamation certainly does allow it to tell a unique story about technology, power, and the triumph of good over evil, given its empowered female protagonist and undergirding message about the dangers of unbridled "progress" and expansion. Yet, it often contradicts some of these ideas by prioritizing familiar narrative techniques and not slowing down enough to allow for genuine character reflection about their place in this world.

The unique post-apocalyptic science fiction Western horror (PASFWH?) intersection embraces and takes seriously the competing meaning systems that each brings, calling forth the potential for this particular format to seriously shake up cultural and hegemonic assumptions about bodies and their abilities to kick ass.

Chapter 5

The Walking Dead wrapped up its fourth season on Sunday, March 30, 2014. Rather than waiting to review the season as a whole, several television critics wrote editorials lamenting the show's slowest season yet and calling for a thinning of the proverbial herd. Tom Ward writing for British *GQ* notes, "...the second part of the [season] has been slow to the point of stalling, with a total of seven episodes focusing on developing characters we already know well enough - who knew Darryl was torn between a sense of wanting to belong and embracing his outcast status, or that Carol was a badass? After half a season spent wandering the Atlanta woodlands, the splintered groups finally decided to head to Terminus (where 'those who arrive, survive')." Sean Daly of the *Tampa Bay Times* demands, "There are too many heartbeats, too many breathers. So tonight at 9 on AMC, open up the zombie buffet, I say. If *The Walking Dead* wants to survive and advance into a strong fifth season, the No. 1 show on cable television needs to end its wildly uneven fourth season by knocking off — oh, let's say — half its cast, which has become way too cumbersome. The show has suffered from a cavalcade of characters and plotlines. We've routinely lost touch with crucial heroes because endless, and weaker, narratives need tending. We want *Dead*, not *Dynasty*." Although this (rhetorical) critic does not necessarily agree that the extreme fracture in storytelling in this season was a problem, it certainly was unhurried.

After conducting a feminist rhetorical criticism on two popular, post-apocalyptic television fictions, NBC's *Revolution* and AMC's *The Walking Dead*, the difference in pace between these two shows, coupled with my findings about their stories about post-apocalyptic survivors, reveal potential for new and subversive messages about gender and power when a program dedicates time to character introspection and critique. The above critics seem frustrated that *The Walking Dead* does not more closely resemble shows like *Revolution*, focusing more on

action and adventure, than existential crises. Yet, it is not a coincidence that the slow burn of the former show is also the artifact that provided more moments of hegemonic opposition, or tension anyway. The traditional pacing of *Revolution* seems to sacrifice a dedication to deep subjective inquiry.

In my thesis, I found contradictory messages about gender overall, and specifically about bodies, ability, and power as they function in their respective dystopian worlds of *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*. My first analytical unit, chapter 2, moved beyond the obvious feature of these shows where all powerful leadership figures are male to explore a persistent turn to masculinized-styles of leadership, including the return to (para)militaristic ways of organizing (despite the fact that the U.S. military itself had fallen during the apocalyptic event!). Upon a close inspection of the leadership styles embodied by Miles, and particularly Rick, a “take vs talk” dialectic emerged as the men worked through negotiation, violence, and expansive enticements. The men who lead successfully (in these worlds sometime this merely means allowing for survival) become open to adopting traits that are often associated with femininity, such as open communication, taking responsibility for the larger group, and showing compassion even in the wake of a threat. My finding about Rick demonstrating (at times) sympathy and deliberation foreshadows a kind-of hybrid gender performance that best sets up characters to survive their dystopias. Uncle Miles, too, emerges not as a narcissistic leader bent on power and domination, but one who guides Charlie to do the “right” thing in overthrowing the Monroe Republic. These men embrace “talking” alongside “taking,” sometimes in the form of “killing” in order to evolve into multi-faceted leaders with loyal followers. Still, that only men are allowed to lead, even when transformed, indicates a stubborn reliance on hegemonic ideologies of gender and power.

Chapter 3 maps gendered performances within various activities that are complicated by the apocalyptic settings of these worlds. Maintaining a home and motherhood are still requirements for the women, and physically fighting and defending oneself becomes an additional task, against zombies and bandits in *The Walking Dead* and against tyrannical militias and bandits in *Revolution*. Like Rick and Miles, who begin to fuse masculine and feminine styles of leadership, many of the women in these shows embrace masculine ways of dealing with domestic issues, fighting, and mothering in order to adapt to their radically-altered realities. However, I find an uneven burden of gender-complexity for female characters only; women alone must learn to adopt masculine ways of fighting, maintaining a home, even mothering. Men who lead, fight, and mentor are assumed to “naturally” possess the right tools, and further, some men who do not develop these skills are allowed to survive because other men and women will save them. Qualities and strengths typically associated with femininity are almost never privileged, for even when communication and contemplation are adopted by men, they are still being performed solely by male bodies. In these ways, markers of femininity are never assumed to be better, or even comparable, to those of masculinity; rather, they are always a burden.

Chapter 4 pulls away from a close analysis of the show’s substance to investigate the ways the content, filming techniques, and narrative devices are functioning within hybrid genres. Both *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* contain characteristics which resemble the American Western. The wandering protagonist, encounters with the unfamiliar, and duels between “right” and “wrong” function not only to depict characters on a journey out “West” (that is, a new place that can no longer exist in the contemporary U.S.), but also to (re)frame some of this unfamiliarity for the viewer. Comfortable devices such the hero vs the villain and the duel allows the audience to read these texts through familiar frames and be assured that our hero will not die.

Indeed, even in the above cranky critics' calls to thin the herd, Rick was never an option to be ousted. Still, viewers of *The Walking Dead* have grown accustomed to the offing of regular cast members, perhaps related to my additional finding that this shows location within the horror genre allows for familiar themes and narrative styles to be significantly disturbed. Much horror relies on the grotesque and bizarre, allowing this show, far more so than *Revolution*, to play in metaphor, existentialism, and inflection about what life means in the zombie-pocalypse. This tendency seems to be lending itself, at times at least, to more nuanced and complex stories about men, women, space, ability, and power. While I am still finding an obstinate tendency to privilege the masculine, *The Walking Dead* being the altogether more intricate program, owing in part to its post-apocalyptic science fiction Western horror hybrid genre as well as its deliberate pacing and character development, is a television show that provides instances of ideological critiques and alternatives.

In order to place these findings about fictional gendered representations on dystopic programs in larger cultural contexts, I will explore connections between polysemic reads of complex texts and the economics of television, the recent, but powerful, phenomenon of "extra texts" as they influence audience interpretations, and, finally, the lack of a true feminist science fiction voice within contemporary popular culture as being a space that could propel shows that *sort of* critique gendered norms *sometimes* into full-blown script-flippers.

Cool Things Happen When Multiple Readings are Required

Returning to the notion of polysemy, where multiple readings can be made of a multi-faceted text depending on audience subjectivity, time, and place, it seems that *The Walking Dead's* fourth season pushed the limits on how "interpretive" a text can be. The maligned second-half spent hours focusing on character development and significantly pushed the

boundaries of post-apocalyptic morality in this particular dystopia. Motivations, guiding principles, and, for some, psychoses, emerged as raw and almost primal when these women, men, and children were exposed to extreme danger and exposure. How is one to interpret sweet ten-year-old Lizzie who believes that the zombies are not inherently bad, just “different?” Worse yet, when she kills her little sister to “prove” this, how do we read Carol’s (second) heartbreaking decision to shoot Lizzie, telling her to “look at the flowers” as tears stream down Carol’s face? This season may be slow, but the multitude of angles from which to read each character’s desperate actions is certainly an indication that *The Walking Dead* contains the potential to tell complex stories about gender.

Both shows contain competing explicit messages *and* implicit ones, weaving together a matrix of ideologies about which bodies are able to wield weapons and power, and which kinds of power will best ensure survival at the end-of-the-world. I often struggled with what to make of the combination of messages that at once stated that women belong “in here” while presenting images of those same women physically besting adversaries. Both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* are clearly marked as men’s stories, told through their perspectives, but there are several resilient females in these shows that belie the notion that only men may gain strength and insight post-apocalypse. Certainly *The Walking Dead*, however, provided more moments of contemplation about what a scene, character, or piece of dialogue was actually conveying. The “snails-pace,” so bemoaned by pop culture critics is the characteristic that affords this show multiple reads and tensions among which perspective is the dominant one, and which the opposition.

That I find that this show to be considerably more complex and invested in deep explorations of humanity than *Revolution* can be attributed to several factors and also has

multiple implications. As noted in chapter 4, format provides an obvious difference, yet not necessarily for obvious reasons. Broadcast network television tends to provide programming that not only appeals to the largest audience possible, but also works to prevent viewers from changing the channel during commercials. This economic model assumes that large audiences, heavily skewed towards the key demographic of adults aged 18-49, will allow for higher advertising revenue (Weinman, 2012). Faster-paced programming also lends itself to more advertising dollars, as shorter average shot lengths [ASL] in shows mirror filming techniques of television ads and provides more “breaks” in the action within which to insert a commercial (Smith, 2011). *Revolution*’s quicker pace then fits into this model; working at once within the science fiction genre while being constrained by the economics of its format. This show literally cannot afford to spend an entire episode on one character’s existential crisis.

With the success, both critical and financial, of cable television programs such as *The Walking Dead*, *Breaking Bad*, and *American Horror Story*, the above theory about the relationship between advertising, pace, and ASL is rapidly becoming outdated (Smith, 2011). Fiction that portrays atypical protagonists (most notably the anti-hero), takes its time with plot-pacing, and features provocative premises are no longer reserved for premium cable such as HBO or Cinemax. FX, AMC, and A&E, while still only available with a cable subscription but do not require an extra monthly fee, are increasingly green-lighting shows that revel in the “slow burn” of deliberate pacing and highly complex qualities and studies have found that advertisers are responding positively (Dunleavy, 2009; Smith, 2011). The financial reward for featuring these innovative television shows then allows for their producers and writers to take additional risks with storytelling, potentially paving the way for even more multi-dimensional programming. Coupled with my findings about *The Walking Dead*, such a trend may result in

more instances of stories, characters, and dialogue which oppose dominant discourses about gender and power.

Conversely, the addition of the horror layer seems to allow some broadcast television to tell more complex tales about women, men, and humanity. I turn briefly to the example of NBC's *Hannibal* as a potential broadcast program which shatters the norms of comfort, violence, and metaphor on one of America's most-watched networks. As previously argued, *The Walking Dead*'s location within the horror genre works to disturb norms of familiarity thereby possibly leading to a stronger critique, than *Revolution* anyway, of gendered categories and archetypes. Based on Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*, the novel that introduces serial-killer, cannibal, psychiatrist, evil-genius, Hannibal Lecter, *Hannibal* utilizes similar devices to (re)tell the tale of FBI agent Will Graham who seeks advice about a case from Dr. Lecter. The plot is slowly paced, the violence is the most disturbing I have ever witnessed on broadcast television (and much cable!), and the metaphors are almost indecipherable, at least through a single viewing. Although arguments have long been made about increased television violence as the symptom of a desensitized society (Ferguson, 2013), *Hannibal*'s location at the intersection of psychological crime horror drama perhaps will allow it to transcend the obvious and conventional narration present in much contemporary broadcast television. My finding that *Revolution* has instances of subverting hegemonic norms about gender, power, and ability perhaps is indicative of NBC's commitment to more complex and nuanced storytelling. I point to *Hannibal* as a further risky move on NBC's behalf whereby they seem to be providing a show that is slow, shocking, and begs for multiple interpretations about good and evil.

What's to be Made of Extra Texts?

My analysis and findings revealed complicated and sometimes competing messages about the gendered characters of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* and above I explored how the future of the “successful” television program seems to hinge on the extent to which a show can provide brooding pace and dynamic characters. Complex fiction situated within the digital age then has produced a deluge of “extra-texts” about such artifacts. Web 2.0, roughly defined by the turn in internet availability and ability to be written and edited by “anyone,” has contributed to cultural norms about the internet where individuals expect to voice opinions and experiences about phenomena, spaces historically reserved for experts and critics (Lanier, 2010). Even before this opportunity, DVDs often came with extra material such as director and cast interviews or deleted scenes. Internet blogging and social media have provided fertile ground for lay-critics to express outrage at the latest plot-twist or joy that their favorite couple finally got married. The television “recap” became an official duty for professional entertainment journalists, for example at the websites for “Entertainment Weekly” and “TV Guide,” as the once-popular print magazines made their digital moves. Finally, recap shows have recently appeared, airing live immediately after an episode of a popular television drama,⁵ with clever titles such as *Talking Dead*, *Talking Bad* (which discusses *Breaking Bad*), and *Checking In* (discussing *Bates Motel* on A&E). These shows feature a host and few guests, often the actors or writers featured prominently in the show, deconstructing the episode, posing hypotheses, and explaining (possible) motivations for characters and plot. Broadcast television does not quite have similar shows, although they sometimes feature special reunion episodes of a reality program which airs live immediately following the finale (such as *The Bachelor/ette* or *The Biggest Loser*).

⁵ I was not able to discern which show began airing first, although the radio personalities on “The Wrap Up Show” that follows airings of *The Howard Stern Show* claims they are the first to develop such a program.

Extra-texts are beginning to appear on the radars of communication scholars, as one points out the availability and proliferation of supplemental materials about complex artifacts function rhetorically to “tell” the audience what to think (King, 2000). That is, an interview with the actress who plays Carol could potentially delegitimize my reading of the character’s stance on killing Lizzie. Rhetorical scholars have found that interviews, recaps, and promotional material for a text that purports to be transgressive or queer often do (re)orient the framing back towards readings that uphold hegemonic discourses (Brookey, 2007; King, 2000; Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). This argument adds a new layer to Condit’s (1989) pessimism about polysemic texts as merely placating audiences with seemingly-progressive messages, for the texts themselves may not only be implicitly fitting into hegemonic norms, but also the interpretations of those involved in their creation.

As a researcher writing about *The Walking Dead*, while simultaneously viewing the fourth season, and probably despite my better judgment, I also engaged in AMC’s *Talking Dead* and read the recaps on www.ew.com. At times I felt conflicted with the extent to which these conversations and analyses were informing my own interpretations of the show. These extra texts have the potential to foreground the rhetoricity of the text itself (King, 2000) compelling the rhetorical critic, particularly the feminist critic, to seriously consider these materials as additionally adding to the multiple layers that an artifact may already be providing. This is not to say that all supplementary material will necessarily be reinforcing patriarchal, racist, and heteronormative ideologies, rather they provide a pluralistic rhetoricity. Extra texts have the potential to be constraining when we absorb certain interpretations while they can also be liberating in that audience members may consider new readings of complex texts. Despite their

particular orientation, the proliferation of these materials warrants attention from the scholar whose site of inquiry includes these kinds of texts.

Where is the Feminist Science Fiction?

Finally to the possibilities that a feminist-orientated science fiction could provide to un-wedge contemporary post-apocalyptic dramas (also containing components of the Western and/or horror) from their androcentric comfort-zones. As noted in the introductory chapter, feminist science authors tend to write speculative stories revolving around the tensions found “within:” the “in” possibly being within oneself, a particular culture or society, or even within the human species. Despite the dominant assumption that women’s fiction does not marry well with tales of futuristic discovery, many prominent feminist works, both fiction and non-, apply generic tropes to critique patriarchy, Euro-centrism, capitalism, and heteronormativity (for example, *The Handmaid’s Tale* or Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto”). Given my knowledge of the field, as well as my recent research, there is no explicitly feminist science fiction program currently airing on U.S. television. Worse yet, examples from the past are scarce especially given my focus on *popular* texts, those that reach wide and diverse audiences. *Star Trek* perhaps provides the closest instance of a *humanist* approach to science fiction. Gene Roddenbury’s long-running galaxy quest featured a cast and plots which reflected his strong affirmative stance on civil rights.

This absence is at once understandable given patriarchy’s stubborn refusal to budge, particularly regarding popular culture, while slightly perplexing when one considers that feminist principles, like some science fiction, aim to (re)imagine alternative possibilities. My artifacts, while set in dark and dangerous times, posit realities that look nothing like what U.S. inhabitants currently experience, yet they fail to explore the potentials that embracing feminine talents and

contributions can provide. Rather, at the end of the day, masculinity is still (mostly) upheld as the “best” way to fight, maintain a home, and care for children. Though leadership seems to benefit in these shows from communication skills and the ability to contemplate morality that only men can grow from such insight demonstrates that my science fiction artifacts are still deeply invested in patriarchal values.

In chapter 3 I noted that culturally we have no associations with women and combat; women are not warriors (Privedera & Howard, 2006). The female fighters of *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* then may be the larger takeaway of this project as most closely resembling multi-faceted characters who are able to weave norms typically associated with all genders into dynamic performances which empower viewers of all genders. That is, they are not simply warriors, nor are they solely women, they are warrior women, and they use this skill not only for (often female-associated) protective purposes but also to achieve goals and move themselves and their groups forward. The post-apocalyptic setting of these shows provides an arena for the women of these worlds to demonstrate that they are so much more complex than popular culture often allows for. Archetypes develop for a reason and are never apolitical, so for these popular artifacts to portray women who kick ass without having to lose the components of their femininity they enjoyed (either pre-apocalypse in *The Walking Dead* or pre-rescue mission for Charlie), is at least a movement toward science fiction with a feminist orientation. These strong female bodies are sites of resistance regarding the gendered norms of fighting because they do not simply adopt another way of moving, rather they layer on attributes in ways that best serves them as individuals.

A theme woven throughout the chapters, but more deeply explored in chapter 4, was that of introspection: what am I willing to do to survive this dystopia and at what point will my

humanity suffer? Uncritical and expansive dogmas led to the disasters that form the premises of *The Walking Dead* and *Revolution* and then further contributed to the downfalls of some scary villains. Overtly, these shows are functioning rhetorically to warn viewers of the folly of unfettered masculinity. While closer analysis revealed competing priorities of masculine abilities and behaviors, for example positing that the best leaders apply typically-feminine skills of contemplation and compassion while the same shows portray only male bodied leaders. Although characters of all genders benefit from an inward turn about their humanity in monstrous settings, that males are shown to grow most prominently is demonstrative of an assessment, however subtle, by these shows, about rigid ideologies. Feminist science fiction utilizes speculative premises to make critiques about cultural norms which have oppressed women's bodies, abilities and ways of knowing. Through a careful read, informed by the potential of feminist science fiction to imagine liberatory gender performances, as well critical rhetoric, which allows for multiple truths based on dialectical tensions, I find that, like warrior women, reflective men provide examples of these shows making investments in critical discourses.

Conclusion

Entering my findings into cultural conversations about increasingly complicated texts, and ways of consuming them, I see potential for exciting and alternative representations of people in future (!) television programs. I fully acknowledge the limitations of this study, for my claims are the result of critiquing only two programs. I began the project assuming that I had chosen two popular post-apocalyptic science fiction shows which should lead me to claims about gender, race, and sexuality in dystopian futures. And as happens, my trajectory landed my research in a (slightly) different place. I did not expect to stumble on an analysis of genre, but

consistent bifurcation along generic lines appeared regarding which shows were giving me data. Further, the project became reoriented solely around gendered performances. Unfortunately, like so much popular culture, both *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead* are “white” shows: as with my findings about masculinity, they are white people’s stories about white people’s drama. Had I been able to analyze season 4 of *The Walking Dead*, this argument would change, for there is a much stronger narrative about black characters from their perspectives, but seasons 1-3 were very Euro-centric. The problem extends to sexuality, for there are only straight people represented in *Revolution* and *The Walking Dead*’s seasons 1-3 (season 4 writers must have received complaints about racism and heteronormativity since they also included a lesbian couple here too).

Further, as noted above, there are material constraints to the possible: in choosing popular shows, by definition they must have large audiences and therefore produce substantial revenue for their respective networks. Appealing to the masses often comes at the expense of relying on “tried and true” storytelling techniques and content. Despite the gains of the feminist and LGBTQ movements, Western culture is still deeply invested in a rigid gender binary. Worse yet, our economy is literally based in maintaining the status quo, popular television not excepted.

Halberstam (2012) reminds us:

Business as usual has meant that businesspeople and corporate fat cats run/ruin the world and artists are out of luck; it has meant that education, spirituality, and sexuality all must function on a business model and every attempt to make changes is greeted with a pragmatic question about whether changing things will also mean making money. (p. 132)

Certainly gender can be added to his list of institutions and identities which are tightly regulated by those interested in exploiting specific ideologies about them. If society at large, the primary consumers of the products yielded by the cultural production machine, continues to hold on to

biological notions that conflate sex and gender in determinist ways then perhaps it's not that surprising that even the future looks awfully familiar. Cultural, political, and financial imperatives hinge on the repetition of hegemonic scripts that perpetuate traditional performances, both in everyday experiences and on the big/small screen.

Just how familiar are these futures? I look not necessarily to the dark and scary futures of my artifacts, but the future of the medium itself. The 2013-2014 season of basic and premium cable continue to push storytelling boundaries about gender, sex, sexuality, race, bodies, and power. *American Horror Story: Coven*, *The Good Wife*, *Scandal*, *Nashville*, *Masters of Sex*, and *Girls* are just a few examples of fictional television that are invested in the resistance of oppressive dominant norms by telling complex tales about multi-faceted characters. Further, the proliferation of extra texts online and on television potentially opens space for oppositional reads of popular shows that, while on the surface, are about white men and their interests, contain disruptive B-plots which upend hegemonic ideologies. Finally, post-apocalyptic science fiction is still going strong in popular culture, with the CW's *The 100* recently debuting to high ratings and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy being made into blockbuster films. Dystopian environments, although bleak and dangerous, seem to be providing writers and producers with a playground with which to tinker with gender-norm disruption. These new shows and the progress that *The Walking Dead* is making regarding telling the stories of non-white, non-straight people, indicate to me hope that strict adherence to traditional scripts for men, women, and those who do not identify as either, is a thing of the past.

Figures

Figure 1: *Revolution* Title Card



Figure 2: *The Walking Dead* Title Card

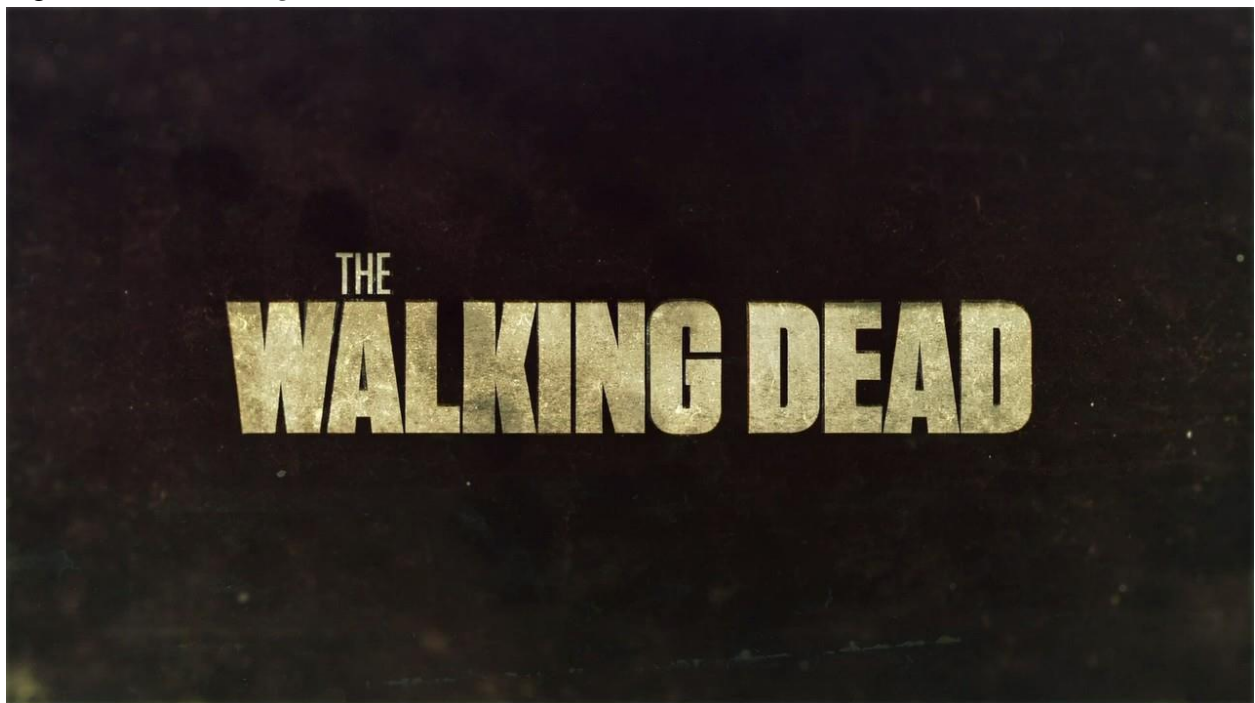


Figure 3: *Revolution* official promotional poster



Figure 4: Social Media Meme



Figure 5: Pregnant Lori and Carl with guns



Figure 6: Charlie with her crossbow



Figure 7: *The Walking Dead*'s Daryl and his crossbow



Figure 8: *The Walking Dead*'s Carol



Figure 9: *Revolution* Map of the former-U.S.



Figure 10: Scene from John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939)



Figure 11: *The Walking Dead* Season 1 Promotional Poster



Figure 12: Rick's costuming with looming zombie



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