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As Good as it Gets: Redefining Survival through Post-Race and Post-Feminism in Apocalyptic Film and Television

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As Good as it Gets:

Redefining Survival through Post-Race and Post-Feminism in Apocalyptic Film and Television

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

To my mother who never stopped encouraging me. And to my grandfather “Mac,” a source of gentle wisdom, and whose example continues inspiring me to learn.

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Abstract

Concentrating on six representative media sites, *28 Days Later* (2002), *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Children of Men* (2007), *Snowpiercer* (2013), and one television series *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), this dissertation examines the strain of post-millennial apocalyptic media emphasizing a neo-liberal form of collaboration as the path to survival. Unlike traditional collaboration, the neo-liberal construction centers on the individual's responsibility in maintaining harmony through intra-group homogeneity. Through close textual analysis, critical race theory, and feminist media studies, this project seeks to understand how post-racial and post-feminist representational strategies elide inequality and ignore tensions surrounding racial or gender differences to create harmony-through-homogeneity in popular apocalyptic film and television.

INTRODUCTION

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Apocalypse myths are as prolific as humanity's creation stories, with tales of destruction and renewal appearing in Hopi, Jewish, Christian, Norse, Hindu and countless other traditions, (Leeming, 1990). Adapted from religious roots, the apocalypse became a robust literary genre, eventually making its way to the silver screen in the early years of cinema. In 1916, for example, *Verdens Undergang* gave the West its first taste of the cinematic apocalypse. One hundred years later the apocalypse remains popular at the movies. A sign of its continued popularity, the output of apocalyptic films has roughly doubled every decade since 1950. The most recent apocalypses to hold the global imagination were Y2K, seizing upon millennial fears, and less than a decade later readings of Mayan prophecies began the countdown towards 2012. Soon the Mayan calendar became a popular topic from newsrooms to movie theaters. In recent years, apocalyptic fiction has proved equally successful in television, with a number of popular shows. Recent instances include *Colony* (2016), *The Walking Dead* (2010), *The Strain* (2014), *The Last Ship* (2014), and *Falling Skies* (2011) among others. Joining fictional representations, reality television continues a long standing tradition in the apocalyptic imagination with shows like *Doomsday Preppers* (2011), *The Colony* (2009), and *Apocalypse Preppers* (2013) appearing on basic cable. As varied as these apocalypse media are, ranging from religious to popular fiction, each share the genre's usefulness as a sense-making device. By imagining its own destruction, a culture shares insight into itself. Apocalypse stories not only reflect social anxieties, they reveal

what a given society values and fears. Though the details vary, several themes remain constant in modern apocalyptic visual media: A racially diverse group of survivors (men and women) forced to work together while fighting against seemingly insurmountable odds, all while running towards an uncertain future. Concentrating on six representative media sites, *28 Days Later* (2002), *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Children of Men* (2007), *Snowpiercer* (2013), and one television series *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), this dissertation examines the strain of post-millennial apocalyptic media emphasizing a neo-liberal form of collaboration as the path to survival. Unlike traditional collaboration, the neo-liberal construction centers on the individual's responsibility in maintaining harmony through intra-group homogeneity. In this case post-racial and post-feminist representational strategies elide inequality and ignore tensions surrounding racial or gender differences to create harmony-through-homogeneity. Such strategies include using characters of color as props and attempts to inoculate narratives from charges of racism by including racist characters. Representations of women are also problematic; women are depicted as subordinate to men through storylines defining a woman's success along gendered lines. Undermining otherwise strong representations of women, each is ultimately judged as poor leader or fighter in relation to her success as mother or mate.

Introducing the key ideas and theory guiding my dissertation, this chapter begins with an overview of the Apocalypse genre and the importance of the genre as a setting for my media sites. Next, a discussion on the films and televisions shows I examine, including the rationale used in choosing each text. Following a section detailing my methodology, each of the subsequent sections lay out the key scholarship and theoretical frameworks informing my study. Two primary foci of my project are the gendered and racialized representations of survivors. Discussions devoted to post-race and post-feminist theory precede my definition and rationale

for a specific form of collaboration found in my sites: neo-liberal collaboration. Informing this construction of collaboration are post-racial and post-feminist representational strategies which depict racial or gender difference positively, but frame paying attention to any difference as flawed. Finally, this section concludes with a preview of chapters.

Apocalypse Then... and Now

In his work on the topic, Amos Funkenstein (1985) notes, “Every culture seems to harbor thanatic fears of an ultimate catastrophe and hopes of rebirth of a new world” (p. 45). The apocalypse genre critiques aspects of contemporary culture by invoking images of cataclysm. The suggestion is that at the end of the world, anything is possible – there is no script for what comes next in the face of such spectacular destruction. Such open-endedness in apocalypse stories has been used literally and allegorically. For some, early Judeo-Christian apocalypses laid out the path to salvation, similar to the later millennial religious predictions they would inspire. As allegories, apocalypse stories are vibrant cultural critiques on political, religious, or social events. While shifting attitudes or changing cultural trends lead to new targets of critique, the stories continually question social structures and institutions. My dissertation recognizes this critiquing function of the apocalypse as a foundational characteristic of the genre, leading to questions of what modern apocalyptic film and television critiques, and how this critique functions.

Originally a religious concept, the Apocalypse is referred to in any number of “revelatory texts” (Stone, 2011, p. 67). Etymologically, the term derives from the Greek word for uncover, ἀποκαλύπτειν (*apokalypsis*) (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012). Describing acts of disclosure from a divine source, early religious texts use the promise of salvation to provide guiding

principles for the chosen (Hamerton-Kelly, 2007, p. 2). The word's status as synonymous with the violent end of the world derives from its use in the Book of Revelation within the Christian Bible, originally titled in Greek as the *Apocalypse of John* (Stone, 2011, p.79). The apocalypse is both eschatological and political in nature, particularly in the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic. For example, the *Apocalypse of John* is most often read as a reaction to the Roman Empire's treatment of Christians; Accompanying John's description of civilization's impending end is a thinly veiled political critique (Pagels, 2013; Stone, 2011). Traditionally, stories of the apocalypse promise renewal, often in the form of literal or metaphorical salvation. Religious apocalypse stories reveal the rules and behaviors leading to salvation, relying on images of a promised paradise. This afterlife is the antithesis of the wicked world of a particular apocalyptic text's audience. For example, within the Christian apocalyptic tradition peace and happiness replace the violence and pain found in the world. Likewise, as a literary tradition with religious roots, the Apocalypse pairs images of imminent destruction and divine knowledge to function both prescriptively (providing a set of behaviors) and descriptively (social critique).

Building upon this literary tradition, the apocalypse, as found in popular media of television and film, presents a secularized version by stripping out the divine while emphasizing catastrophic destruction and humanity's efforts to avoid the end of the world (Walliss, 2009, p. 73). It is important to note that, while film and television representations of the apocalypse are overwhelmingly of the secular variety, there is no definitive break from their religious antecedents. So while, "The most common modern definition may be 'the end of the world'" eschewing much of the term's religious history, that history is still present in references, format, and style (Starnes, 2009, p. 27). Most importantly, the apocalypse continues to evolve, functioning as political critique and as a metaphor for the end of the world. According to

apocalypse scholar Casey Starnes (2009) this evolution occurs as each generation retools the apocalypse in their own image (p. 27). In contemporary apocalypses, themes of revelation, divine intervention, and the promise of a glorious afterlife are replaced by stories centered on the spectacle of destruction and human perseverance. Notably, from ancient to modern apocalypses, their focus on social critique remains. As Apocalypse scholar John Hall (2009) asserts, apocalypse stories are not about “the End, but about the present Crisis,” (p. 2), whatever that may be. In other words, the Apocalypse functions as a sense making device and prescriptive text in both religious and secular formats.

This dissertation uses the secularized understanding of the term apocalypse throughout. Writing on the cinematic apocalypse, Conrad Ostwalt (1998) notes a narrative shift in sovereignty from God to humanity. Hope, once in the form of an eschatological kingdom, is now represented as “hope for this world” (para. 19). This refocusing also signals an emphasis on human agency (nearly) absent in the Judeo-Christian apocalypses. Rather than representing a break from earlier apocalypses, the modern apocalypse continues to borrow from religion. These stories, less religious in theme and content, nonetheless share an existential dimension of their biblical counterparts. The result has been a preservation of what Apocalyptic scholar Lorenzo DiTommaso (2009) notes as a key component of both the secular and religious apocalypse: “humanity’s overriding task... to fathom the hidden patterns,” revealing the appropriate path to survival (p. 225). Within religious apocalypse stories salvation is reserved for the true believers who must find, interpret, and follow a divine message. By doing so their survival is guaranteed while the non-believers will perish. In a secular apocalypse narrative, the clues are not of a divine nature. While the protagonist is still required to see what others cannot, the heroes are driven not towards transcendence, but to save the world. The subtle, but important, distinction

between the religious and secular apocalypse stories lay in humanity's response, namely a shift from *accepting* to *avoiding* the apocalypse. Ostwalt (1995) notes this recurring theme in his examination of apocalyptic film since the nineteen-seventies. An ability to avert the apocalypse through action is a key feature of contemporary apocalyptic fiction film in the United States (Stone, 2010). Forgoing images of complete destruction, apocalyptic films show an unfolding cataclysm set against apocalyptic imagery which the protagonist must work to avert. The modern apocalyptic narrative places the human at the center of the plot to avoid or mitigate disaster. For the protagonists, the apocalypse is simply another problem to be solved. Human intervention and sheer willpower averts or abates the end of the world in films such as *Armageddon* (1998), *Deep Impact* (1998), *Independence Day* (1996), or *2012* (2009). No matter the central characters, the hero is humanity's endurance (Labuza, 2014). By averting the apocalypse and saving the world, these films temper messages of social critique found in previous apocalypses (Walliss, 2011, pp. 58-9). Reflecting a sense of optimism presented through an enduring faith in humanity to overcome any obstacle and preserve the status quo, these films are the dominant form of popular apocalypse stories of the past three decades. During the nineteen-nineties this framework of confident positivity characterized most popular apocalyptic film. Today, that trend continues in film ((*Pacific Rim* (2013), *World War Z* (2013) and television (*Colony* (2014-present), *Falling Skies* (2011-2015)), rejecting fatalistic overtones or themes (Ostwalt, 1998; Walliss, 2011). Using the apocalypse as a plot device, apocalyptic media show the power of human ingenuity, tenacity, and collaboration. The bleakness of apocalyptic settings belies an "underlying optimism" through narratives showing "circumstances need not be as they are, and acquiescence in the face of doom is not the proper heroic response" (Stone, 2010, p. 66).

Stone's characterization of the apocalypse as ultimately an optimistic genre is central to understanding the media I discuss in this dissertation. To varying degrees, my media sites break from this tradition, trading optimism for ambiguity. Given the genre's tendency to incorporate cultural anxieties, this shift is significant because it suggests a limit to faith in human ingenuity to solve any problem. Discussing the apocalyptic, Amos Wilder (1971) notes that inspiration for stories about the end times draw on cultural anxieties (p. 441). Apocalyptic scholars of film and literature echo Wilder's assertion, agreeing apocalypse stories reveal and react to the cultural currents of their times (Hall, 2009; Kinane & Ryan, 2009; Walliss, 2009). Each version evolved to reflect the situation and sensibilities of its audience. Part of its enduring draw as a genre lies in the mutability of apocalyptic narratives. *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) reflected the turmoil of nineteen sixties America and its sequel *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) spoke to consumerism. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) commented on the Cold War and nuclear destruction, while the film's 2008 remake focused on environmental themes. Revealing the apocalypse's usefulness, the films embody anxieties around shifting cultural discourses. As a matter of necessity the apocalypse takes as its subject the world it threatens to destroy, exposing social, cultural, and political structures to critique (Friedländer, 1985; Hall, 2009; Kinane & Ryan, 2009; Walliss, 2009). Ancient and modern apocalypse stories emphasize the frailty of institutions, discourses, and socio-political structures, offering alternatives to the current state through the promise of renewal (O'Leary, 1994; Stone, 2011). In this sense, apocalypse stories are the ultimate "symptomatic texts," reflecting and revealing surrounding discourses (Walters, 1995, p. 6). As popular media, film and television both influence and are influenced by the cultural moment in which they are produced. To take an example outside the scope of this dissertation, the FOX television action-adventure series *The Gifted* (2017-present) follows the conflict between

humanity as we know it and newly evolved humans called “mutants.” Centered on two opposing groups, the drama erupts between the non-evolved humans who are afraid of change and the mutants (and their human allies) fighting for co-existence. While the show is a mix of science-fiction, fantasy, and adventure, it serves as an analogue to contemporary discourses around race, ethnicity, and society. The non-evolved frame their fight in terms popular in the alt-right: they are embattled heroes fighting for survival, difference is dangerous, and the mutant’s human allies are naïve traitors to their race. The apocalypse stories examined here are symptomatic of the discourses surrounding race and gender, specifically the tensions produced through post-racial and post-feminist representations. The traditional optimism of the apocalypse remains primarily in the surface narratives, especially through dialogue promising equality. However, the treatment of women and characters of color complicate optimistic readings, leading to a break from genre convention. Closing scenes which typically feature relieved survivors and a hopeful tone are left ambiguous. My media sites represent a timely formulation of the apocalypse story. Playing off the genre’s optimism and promise of renewal, the stories here present a neo-liberal articulation of the status quo. Reframing racism and sexism as personal failings (rather than institutional) supports post-racial and post-feminist discourses minimizing inequality and society’s responsibility to eradicate it. This framing concludes that while racism and sexism are bad, such behavior is the result of bad actors, not representative of society as a whole. Fix the individual, fix the problem.

Media Sites

While apocalyptic themed media enjoyed relative popularity since the nineteen fifties, the turn of the century marked an explosion in titles. The post-millennium also marked the first time

multiple apocalyptic television shows ran concurrently. Though the scope of apocalyptic media continues to grow, my interest is limited to a small number post-millennial works sharing common thematic elements. Focusing on stories set as the apocalypse unfolds, I chose media sites which, superficially, appear to positively represent diversity (race and gender), include narratives about collaboration, and inextricably link survival to getting along with other survivors. While these overlapping themes most often recur in film, more recently examples appear in apocalyptic television as well. I settled on one television show, because *The Walking Dead* was not only thematically similar to the films, it was also an instant cultural phenomenon. And, with eight seasons as of this writing, the series provides a rich source of examples. Two underlying themes appeared within my media sites – (1) the appearance of white patriarchal power structures as natural and inevitable, and (2) individual survivors are responsible for maintaining said power structures. Thus, my research questions aim to understand how carefully constructed representations of collaboration, survival, and the survivors come together to create the neo-liberal reimagining of society found in my media sites. Showing harmony-through-homogeny, the narratives assure us that focusing on sexism or racism is regressive, even harmful. What then are we to make of narratives positively representing racial and gendered diversity, yet continually naturalizing white patriarchal power structures. In an attempt to answer these questions, I look to uncover the post-racial and post-feminist ideologies operating within my media sites.

An independent film, *28 Days Later* was wildly successful at the box office, earning ten times its production budget of eight million dollars (“28 Days Later,” n.d.). The horror film follows a group of Britons fighting for survival across England during a viral apocalypse. *28 Days Later* was hailed for its colorblind casting because the film never focuses on main character

Selena's race (black) (Humphries, 2009; Moreman & Rushton, 2011). The film ends with images of a family cobbled together by the apocalypse. The composition of this family is notable for some scholars; Jim (white), Selena (black), and their "surrogate daughter" Hannah (white) represent the "multi-cultural" future of England (Korte, 2008, p. 320). Largely escaping critical attention are the intersections of race and gender which Selena's character arc bring to light. Detailed in the following pages, the narrative frames Selena's transition from heroic loner to Jim's subordinate love interest through her ability to overcome a perceived character flaw (independence). Thus Selena's story aligns with a post-feminist representation of a successful woman – one who finds fulfilment by trading success outside of family for happiness *in* family.

The fourth installment of George A. Romero's "*Living Dead*" eight-film series, *Land of the Dead* (2005), was the second highest grossing in the series (Bradshaw, 2005). Similar to his other "*Dead*" films (6 in total), *Land of the Dead* features sharp cultural critique set against the backdrop of the zombie apocalypse. While all six of Romero's films are worthy of study, *Land of the Dead* is the only post-millennial film in the series to feature the themes of collaboration and diversity relevant to this dissertation. Romero scholar Kim Paffenroth (2006) praises *Land of the Dead* (and Romero's greater body of "*Dead*" work) for their "thoughtful and serious examination[s] of ideas" (consumerism, race and gender, to name a few) in the guise of horror (p. 2). *Land of the Dead* (2005) was a commercial (Bradshaw, 2005) and critical success (Harper, 2002; Hemmings, 2008; Loudermilk, 2003). The film tripled its production budget, earning forty-six million dollars world-wide, making it the second highest grossing film in George A. Romero's "Living Dead" film series (Bradshaw, 2005). Romero himself argues his films are vehicles of social commentary (Romero, 2005b). In this tradition, Romero sees *Land of the Dead* as an allegory of corporate exploitation and resistance (Romero, 2005a). Through a

critique of the gated community mindset, the film establishes a progressive tone by playing to the utopian possibilities inherent in the rebuilding of society. Tension surrounding questions of exclusion and belonging drives narrative action. *Land of the Dead* offers hope by depicting communities that achieve success by working together and rejecting divisiveness, in this case racism and classism. Critics consistently praised the film for its satirical engagement of class (Ebert, 2005; Fahy, 2010; Wilmington, 2005) and attacks on capitalism (Bradshaw, 2005; Dargis, 2005; DeGiglio-Bellemare, 2005). Though some scholars and critics do mention race, this is in the form of uncritical praise for the black zombie “Big Daddy” as a commentary on class and race in contemporary capitalism (Paffenroth, 2006). This critical praise for the treatment of race makes the film an interesting object of study, as it features troubling racial representations. The film is a post-racial reimagining of society, minimizing race and showing racism as an anachronistic holdover, while relying on racist images and themes to tell its story.

Critically successful, *Children of Men* (2007) was well received and garnered numerous award nominations, wins, and critical acclaim by major film critics (Dietz, 2014, Metacritic, 2007). Although the film had limited box office success, it enjoyed a resurgent popularity in the video on demand market, while the popular press noted its prescience for its representations of immigrants and their treatment (“Children of Men,” n.d.; Cho, 2016; Riesman, 2006; Yamel Rodrigues-Cuervo, 2015). Unlike the three horror films introduced earlier, *Children of Men* mixes the science fiction and dystopian genres to explore the impacts of class, segregation, racism, and nationalism. It does this through the (literal) body of the Other, in the form of an African immigrant named Kee who is the first pregnant woman in twenty years. Kee’s transformation from “worthless” immigrant to the most important person on the planet hinges on the intersection between race, gender, and motherhood.

Also a commercial success, Zack Snyder's 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead* earned nearly one-hundred million dollars world-wide. The sixth most financially successful zombie film since 1980. The film is the successful remake of George A. Romero's 1978 film of the same name. While Romero's original was hailed for its sharp critique of capitalism (slow moving zombies served as a metaphor for the zombifying effects of consumerism) (Loudermilk, 2003), the sequel avoids any overt cultural critique. Replacing themes of consumerism with frenetic action and a story based on collaboration, a common complaint by critics was that the newer film abandons social critique (Ebert, 2004; Kipp, 2004) in favor of dumbed-down violence. However, the remake borrows many elements from the original, for example zombies and the focus on a group of survivors seeking shelter in a mall. Important for my work, the leadership dynamics are refreshed, with a strong woman (Ana) leading the survivors rather than two male police officers. Interestingly, there is no acknowledgment from critics of the film's powerful female lead.

The popularity of my fourth film, *Snowpiercer* (2014) is harder to quantify than the others here. Only earning double its estimated production budget of forty million dollars, it would appear to be commercially unsuccessful. However, this has widely been attributed to a distribution disagreement between its production company and director which limited its release to 356 theaters domestically. A critical success (Dietz, 2014) the film enjoyed worldwide popularity ("Snowpiercer 2014," n.d.). Set in the near-future, the action in the 2013 science fiction film, *Snowpiercer* occurs on the eponymous train circling the Earth with humanity's last survivors. The train's inhabitants are divided into the one percent who live in the front cars of the train, and the tail dwellers crammed into the back cars. Though categorized as a science fiction film, the narratives focus on global warming and social stratification (through a thinly veiled critique of the 1%). Operating under the surface are representations of motherhood defining all

of the women protagonists. Similar to the other media sites in this dissertation, motherhood consistently appears as a framing device for women, however there has been no critical engagement of those representations.

My final media site is the critically and commercially successful AMC series, *The Walking Dead*. The longest running apocalyptic television series, this popular horror-drama centers on a group fighting for survival, using the violence of the zombie apocalypse as a backdrop for intense character driven stories. Featuring similar themes to the five films examined here, *The Walking Dead* is an equally rich site to explore the neo-liberal collaboration found across my media sites. Additionally, spanning eight seasons (so far) *The Walking Dead*'s success suggests an enduring resonance of the representations and themes presented in the show. Boasting an impressive run, the show recently wrapped up its eighth season, the show consistently breaks ratings records, for example as the most watched show among the key 18-49 age demographic in 2016 (Lynch, 2016; see also Carter, 2012; Collins, 2013; Patten, 2015). And 2017 marked the fifth season in a row *The Walking Dead* viewership made it the highest rated series in both cable and broadcast ratings (Otterson, 2017). Individual episodes also break records, for example the season five premiere ranked as the most watched cable television program (St. John, 2014). More recently, in the live plus three-day delay rating measurement, the season six premiere drew 19.5 million viewers, while season seven's opening episode increased to 20.8 million viewers (Patten, 2015; 2016). During its seven seasons the series has been both praised and critiqued for its representations of race. Some critics praise the series for its racial diversity and a willingness to cast characters of color in major roles (Brathwaite, 2015; Deggans, 2014; Garcia, 2013; Lowry, 2013). Others question the treatment of those characters, especially the constant killing-off of black men (Deggans, 2012; Murphy, 2012). Similar to the films

discussed here, *The Walking Dead* presents collaboration as the key to survival. With narratives celebrating characters who reject notions of racial difference and disciplining those who dwell on racial difference. The series suggests humanity will default to post-racial communities where questions of race are largely ignored. Treated similarly, it is suggested gender inequality no longer exists, mainly through dialogue and casting women as action-heroines. However, in the end women are subordinate to the men. The uneven treatment of women has not escaped scrutiny, as the series has been criticized for its two-dimensional treatment of women (Berry, 2012; Zevallos, 2015). Early in the show's run, *The Walking Dead* was said to have a "woman problem" (Abrams, 2013). However, such criticism has waned in recent seasons, with some in the popular press praising the series for "acing feminism" (Eddy, 2016) due to its representations of strong women. The series, which tends to remain faithful to the structure of the graphic novel it is based on, recently generated positive press for casting a woman as a major character who was originally a man in the comic (Berkshire, 2015; Ross, 2015).

Apocalyptic Divisions

In addition, it is important to note I draw a distinction between the apocalypse and post-apocalypse. While representative works from either genre share attributes from the another, for the task at hand, my general understanding is that there are significant differences in function (and to a lesser degree, in form) between the two genres. In the apocalypse, driving the action is the threat of cataclysmic destruction which soon becomes part of the environment. The overarching threat pushes the characters forward. Take for example, the asteroid in the 1998 film *Armageddon* the protagonists fly towards to destroy, or the zombie horde in *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) which forces the heroes into perpetual exodus. Visually and thematically, its uncanny

representations of familiar landscapes (social and physical) sets a tone of uneasiness as a recognizable world deteriorates. By contrast, the end of the world is a pre-condition of the post-apocalypse. Civilization as we know it has long since vanished, radically transforming the world. This distinction is more than temporal; inherent to the apocalypse is a sense of possible renewal or rebirth. In the post-apocalypse, a new (often dystopian) society already exists. Consistent with the conventions of the dystopian genre, post-apocalyptic protagonists are often shown at odds with the newly emergent social structures. In other words, the protagonists are often implicated in destroying the new society, not rebuilding civilization. Finally, although future research may open avenues to explore this post-millennial apocalypse in graphic novels or video games, as discussed here, the scope of this study is the apocalypse in popular television and film.

Methodology and Theoretical Foundations

As stated earlier, the post-millennial apocalypse stories in this project are rich sites representing race and gender through the logics of post-race and post-feminism (respectively). The examples discussed reveal cultural tensions surrounding inequality, representation, and visibility. Set shortly after our world crumbles, and a newly emergent society begins taking root, the narratives use storylines of community building to construct an image of what comes next. Examining what the stories put forward as the ideal survivor or next iteration of society offers an opportunity to understand our culture at large. Further influencing my choice of subject matter is a desire to learn how race and gender are used to construct the image of a successful survivor because as mediated constructs the characters reflect a broader notion of who makes a good citizen. The media sites in my project are uniquely suited for such an analysis because they reimagine collaboration through a neo-liberal lens; reproducing post-feminist and post-racial

ideologies, issues like sexism and racism are shown to barely exist, and wherever such issues do appear individuals (not institutions) bear responsibility. In the apocalypse equality is a state of mind.

A Critical Cultural Studies (CCS) orientation allows me to access the discourses activated within my media sites. As a transdisciplinary approach, CCS brings a number of disciplines into conversation to challenge ideological, political, and intellectual orthodoxies within cultural artifacts (Ono, 2009). A Critical Cultural intervention allows scholars like myself to examine, and hopefully better understand, questions of inequality, oppression, and disenfranchisement. Further, my project pulls from Critical Race Studies, Gender Studies, and scholarship on post-feminism, post-racism, film and television. Critical Race Studies allow me to interrogate how apocalyptic media naturalize racist stereotypes and undermine the push for equality by arguing for a colorblind society while consistently depicting characters of color as secondary to their white counterparts. For example, part of my analysis examines how particular representations of race are used to reify traditional (that is, white) configurations of power by diminishing issues of inequality and difference (race or gender) within the narratives. Scholarship from the field of Feminist Media Studies helps me access dynamics of power through representations of gender showing women as strong yet still subordinate in the end. One implication for my work is in understanding the cultural scripts (re)produced by the relatively narrow depictions of women in my media sites. For example, depictions of women as less capable leaders due to their emotions, or those who represent starting a family as the only definition of success for women.

My approach is a close critical textual analysis of the media sites paying attention to narrative, character development, and production elements. The benefits of a cultural studies approach, according to Grossberg (2010), is to understand, “that discursive practices are

inextricably involved in the relations of power” (p. 10). Writing about race, but applicable to representations of difference in general, Stuart Hall (2002) contends popular media is where ideas “are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated” (p. 20). Film and television allow us “to talk about the social, economic, and political struggles operating in society as well as about the cultural sites... in which those struggles are made representable and take place” (Gray, 1995, p. 2). As a critical project, mine seeks to draw out the discourses about race and gender circulating in the popular media. Examining the mechanics (for example, narrative, framing, and camera work) reveals how the shows and films ask to be consumed. Importantly, this requires a situated and contextual analysis of the discourses within the sites. This allows me to access the sense-making processes of film and television, revealing context “about the world and how it works” (Dow, 1996, p. 5).

Bringing together scholarship about race, feminism, and the apocalypse genre, this is the first academic project to examine the racialized and gendered construction of survival in apocalyptic film and television. Crucial for this study is how my media sites engage issues of difference through post-racial and post-feminist representational strategies. In short, the strategies bring to life optimistic ideologies asserting a view of Western society as basically fair, where all people are relatively equal. This happens, as will be discussed throughout, by framing behaviors which draw attention to inequality as counterproductive and divisive, and otherwise ignoring issues of inequality. In the case of my media sites, this results in (perhaps counterintuitive) narratives set at the violent end of the civilization which nevertheless present a vision of the future imbued with hope (in the form of nascent societies). Historically, the apocalypse genre reflects a sense of hope shown through the promise of renewal or rebirth (Labuza, 2014; Ostwalt, 1995, 1998; Stone, 2010; Walliss, 2011). I connect the optimism of the

genre to the optimism of post-racial and post-feminist frameworks. Specifically, the hopefulness imbued in presentations of emergent social structures where equality has been achieved. Integral to post-feminism and post-racism is an assumption of equality. A redefinition of collaboration equating silence as acceptance (of the status quo) and absence (of attention to inequality) as equality, encodes an optimistic worldview of achieved equality in my media sites.

Though post-race and post-feminist thought work to minimize difference, constructed signifiers of race and gender remain to reinforce their ideologies. Through contingent and contextual representations, ideas about race and gender are produced as culturally-bound social constructs (Brooks & Hébert, 2006; Dubrofsky, 2013; Kang, 2002; Joseph, 2009). As Kang (2002) notes about race in visual media, “what *matters*... is the illusion of human bodies” (p. 99). In other words, race (and gender) are socially defined, not essential attributes of the body. Moreover, because I understand race as culturally and socially constructed, rather than biologically determined, I engage representations of race as situated and contextual. Subsequently, my work analyzes media sites which frame racial or gendered difference through post-racial and post-feminist lenses. Such interpretations create an ideal future populated by racially diverse men and women meant to show the promise in post-racial and post-feminist harmony. Given the complex matrix of oppression, privilege, and representation, this project takes an intersectional approach to its analysis by recognizing the multiple and dynamic relationships between identities and inequality. Race, gender, class, sexuality, and other categories of identity are constituted with one another, along with social, historical, and cultural contexts, creating complex relationships. Systems of power and oppression work in uneven and overlapping ways (Weber, 2009). In other words, categories of race, gender, and class, are “mutually constituted and deny separation into discrete categories of analysis” (Dill Thornton &

Kohlman, 2012, p. 154). To engage in critical analysis without considering the intersections risks missing the completeness of the images, for example how sexism affects white and black women differently (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Intersectionality does not treat difference hierarchically, instead it recognizes a person can be oppressed and benefit from privilege simultaneously. Thus, a white woman may reap the benefits of social institutions privileging whiteness, while also being subordinated to men. For example, one point of access in this project is the contrasting framing of motherhood for black and white women, showing how the intersection of race and gender dictate disparate treatment for otherwise similar (pregnant women) characters. Likewise, as a man, a Chicano may be treated differently than a Chicana (woman) who faces not only racism, but also sexism.

Post-race Theoretical Foundations

As a strategy, post-race seeks to minimize racial difference, marking race as insignificant (Esposito, 2009; Johnson Thornton, 2011; Ono, 2010, 2013). Because racial equality has supposedly been achieved, (Joseph, 2009) racial discrimination is no longer a concern. According to Kent Ono (2010), racism loses its historical significance in this way of framing race, shifting accusations of racism onto those opposing it (pp. 227, 229). For example, a post-racial response to affirmative action programs frames proponents of the program as racist (anti-white) (p. 229). Similarly, post-racial ideology holds that race-problems in the United States are firmly anchored to minorities who refuse to let go of the past, continually questioning inequality and disparate treatment (Bonilla-Silva, 2010' p. 1). This is notable because it reframes the problem of racism to include *talking* about race or racial issues. In the contemporary social climate, where overt racism is shunned, racism still exists through coded languages and

behaviors. The result is a system which rejects the ugliness of racism (For example, slavery or Jim Crow) while remaining racist. In popular media, maintaining appearances of equality is not only the norm (Hill Collins, 2004), it is a central strategy for post-racial media attempts to appear anti-racist (James, 2009). For example, avoiding racial issues, rejecting overt racism, and casting characters of many races or ethnicities, all work to assure audiences the ugliness of racism is in the past. Scholars point to the success of *The Cosby Show* as the start of a post-racial era in the United States (James, 2009). For some, the visibility of the Huxtables was proof the United States had finally moved beyond race. For many, the election of Barack Obama confirmed the sentiment of a better, brighter, post-racial United States. At the time, Forbes boldly claimed, “Racism in America is over” (McWhorter, 2008). After Obama’s first State of the Union, Chris Matthews of MSNBC proudly claimed he forgot Obama was black (Calderone, 2010). In latter attempts to clarify, Matthews went on to say Obama himself is post-racial, that is, beyond racial considerations (Calderone, 2010). Matthews’ comment and clarification, reveals a key component of post-racial discourse: a desire to appear non-racist (James, 2009, p. 470). This appearance is foundationally important for post-racial ideology as it provides an excuse for racist behavior. Several tactics maintain this appearance. For example, using the presence of race, such as diversity in casting, as a testament to the irrelevance of race. In a post-racial context, race is not completely ignored or hidden; instead, through carefully structured visibility, race stands as a reminder of the progress made while simultaneously deemphasizing historical or political meaning (Johnson Thornton, 2011, p. 425). In this tokenized form of race, people of color are pointed to as proof of how far society has come. This is part of the complexity of post-racial representations, race is always present, yet neutralized (Joseph, 2009). Issues related to race are minimized, safely contained through displays of racial harmony. The danger of the post-racial is

that by muting talk of race, race itself risks becoming unspeakable (Esposito, 2009, p. 523) or unexamined (Dubrofsky, 2013). Notably, the post-racial has historical implications when the significance of race is diminished in attempts to purge racism's vile history (Ono, 2010). Replaced with a better-than-it-ever-was version of the past, racism is more easily forgotten. Further, in a post-racial world, race no longer has the power to divide. Taking for granted explicit racism as aberrant, within post-racial contexts, divisiveness also comes from talking *about* race. Discussing race in any form is thus coded as similarly abnormal. My project engages three complementary post-racial media strategies: (1) narratives marking racism as an individual flaw, (2) creating a broader definition of racism by framing it as any undue attention to race, (3) and showing racism as solvable by simply ignoring racial issues and working together.

Of the post-racial strategies above, the first I examine individualizes racism, using racist behavior to take appear anti-racist, something I term "inoculation." Specifically, stories depict certain characters as aberrant racists, then the creators discipline those characters through death or exile. Alternatively, narratives may show racism as something which can be overcome: characters reject their previously racist behavior and it is never referenced again. Strategically, racism is visually and diegetically erased and the narrative appears anti-racist, yet problematic presentations of race remain. The implication is that racism is easily identifiable through overt displays. Narratively, excising racists and their behaviors is a simple (often) permanent solution which avoids the complex work of confronting and dismantling racism. My work builds on scholarship examining narrative techniques used by media to distance itself from the views of racist characters. For example, John Kraszewski's (2004) examines how the MTV reality series *The Real World* framed racism as an individual choice. By showing racism as the product of one's upbringing, the series often presented the cast members with an opportunity to make the

“right” choice and move past racist behaviors and attitudes. Similarly, in her work on *Glee*, Rachel Dubrofsky (2013) notes how humor is deployed to lessen the sting of racism on a series relying on racist stereotypes to drive the narrative. Finally, in his work on *Mad Men*, Ono (2013) details how historical distance, used to highlight acts of overt racism, allows the audience to disassociate from subtler contemporary racism. Both *Glee* and *Mad Men* actively engage racism for a short time as a strategy to move past it. Post-racial media use racism strategically, framing racists as unsympathetic and antithetical to the narrative, thus allowing the media site to appear to reject racism and allowing audiences to distance themselves from racist characters. This calculated treatment of racism echoes another mobilization of racist images and speech to deflect accusations of racism, something called “Hipster racism.” Coined to reflect the ironic use of racist language and behavior (typically by educated middle-class whites), Hipster racism appears as a more palatable form of racism for some. Drawing attention to racist depictions as proof of an anti-racist stance (Watson et al., 2015), Hipster racism is an unconscious expression of white privilege applying racist humor as proof the user is aware of racism and unquestionably not racist. The logic follows that such blatant racism is as ridiculous as it is funny (see also Squires, 2014). For example, the recent appropriation of the term “thug life” in a Twitter exchange between the singer Sara Bareilles and Zoey Deschanel (both white): “@Sarabareilles: Home from tour and first things first: New Girl episodes I missed. #thuglife” (West, 2012). The humor draws from the distance between the negative and raced stereotype of a thug as a violent black criminal, and Sara Bareilles as an affluent white celebrity unwinding in front of her television. This example also highlights another benefit of hipster racism for its users, joking about race becomes proof race is no longer important. By posting (and Deschanel retweeting) her comment on Twitter, Bareilles the acceptability of joking about black men within this context. A post-

racial phenomenon, hipster racism flips the blame on anyone who would take this form of humor too seriously, labeling critics as “the real racist” (Kennedy, 2012). Hipster racism is a powerful post-racial strategy because it invokes issues of race to minimize them.

In the media sites I examine, hiring racially diverse casts supports the appearance of post-racial equality. As Ono (2013) points out, racism in contemporary media operates primarily within a post-racial logic relying on inferred and coded racism, rather than overt, requiring an analysis of how characters of color are constructed and treated. In the narratives examined, every survivor group includes at least one character of color. Depicted as meritocracies reliant on people working together in prescribed ways, the appearance of racial harmony is essential in the survivor communities. To seem credible, a meritocracy requires proof of the elimination of discrimination (Hill Collins, 2014). In post-racial media, racially diverse casting becomes visual shorthand for achieved equality (Dubrofsky, 2013). Equality takes on a Benneton-esque quality when inclusion assures audiences that focusing on racial issues is no longer necessary (Johnson Thornton, 2011, p. 425; see also Hill Collins, 2014, p. 178). Relying on “display[s] of diversity” as proof of equal treatment risks overlooking how characters of color are presented (Dubrofsky, 2013, p. 85). Many times, characters of color function only in two-dimensional supporting roles, existing to enrich an understanding of their white counterparts at the expense of their own narrative depth (Ono, 2013). Diverting attention from problematic representations of race, displays of diversity occur simultaneously with subtly racist images or themes. Indicative of what Hall (2002) calls “inferential racism” many of the displays of diversity rely on racialized assumptions, rather than explicitly racist images or themes. Uncovering the racism hiding within the subtext requires an examination of how characters are presented through the use of language,

dress, and backstory, for example. Inferential constructions take racist assumptions for granted, reinforcing race based expectations (Hall, 2002).

Post-feminist Theoretical Foundations

Interested in revealing the implications of how apocalyptic film and television presents difference, this project also focuses on the framing of gender through post-feminism. Post-feminism assumes that, due to battles won in the past, women enjoy more equality than ever so feminism has served its purpose (McRobbie, 2004; Projansky, 2001). As such, post-feminist thought dismisses feminism as a relic of the past (Tasker & Negra, 2008, p. 8). Further, to mark the successes of earlier feminist movements as harmful to women and society, post-feminism appropriates aspects of feminism to reframe achievements negatively (Butler, 2013, McRobbie, 2008). As a reactionary response, post-feminism advocated for women reclaiming traditional roles, arguing feminism has outlived its usefulness (McRobbie, 2004; Tasker & Negra, 2007).

Appropriating the successes of feminism (for example, a woman's right to work outside of the home) to argue for its irrelevancy, post-feminism undermines these successes (McRobbie, 2004; Butler, 2013). For example, a post-feminist reframing of choice uses the ability *to* choose as evidence of equality (Probyn, 1993). This threatens obscuring the quality of the choices themselves. As a discursive strategy, a given set of options frame the conversation, without a critical examination of the options and the context in which the options are viable. Choice becomes a symbol of feminism as a consumable product. In other words, a right to choose proves equality has been (supposedly) achieved (Butler, 2013; Projansky, 2001). Important scholarship explores some popular deployments of choice, including work on the intersection of choice and femininity (Probyn, 1993; Jensen & Ringrose, 2014; McRobbie, 1997), motherhood (Thoma,

2009), career (Dow, 1996; Projansky, 2001; Vavrus, 2007), and femininity (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2006). Take for example, the binary of deciding between career or family, which precludes a host of alternate options, simply by framing career or family as the only two choices (Dow, 1996; Projansky, 2001; Vavrus, 2007). Reframing feminism through choice shifts the burden on the individual when, all things level and equitable, personal failings hinder success, not systemic imbalances or obstacles.

Post-feminism also represents equality in a carefully constructed ways by limiting images of women in roles traditionally reserved for men, for example the action hero or superhero. Helpful for its exploration on the framing of “protection scenarios” is Carol Stabile’s work on gendered representations in the superhero genre (Stabile, 2009, p. 88). In short, as a trope, protection scenarios require gendered notions of protector/victim. Often appearing in action genres, protectors are masculine, while those needing to be protected are feminized (women, elderly, or children, for example) (Stabile, 2009, p. 91). Stabile studies media where women are not relegated to simple victim status (think damsel in distress). Instead, both women and men are portrayed as heroes with extraordinary powers. Though she does not use the term, these representations are post-feminist for two intertwined reasons. First, unlike the men, gendered limits of women’s super powers eventually come into focus, for example the women have passive powers like healing or prone to misuse due to emotional outburst. Due to the limitations described, ultimately even the strongest woman super hero needs a man’s protection. Aligning with post-feminist logics, the women seemingly inhabit the promised “level playing field,” (Vavrus, 2010, p. 223), only to be subordinated to the male heroes. Stabile’s work helps me frame a tactic of empowering women as a pre-requisite for showing them as less capable. The superpowers of the women Stabile describes are either passive (healing for example), or if active,

the woman wielding power proves unable to control her power, often killing those she tries to protect. In the end, even as heroes women are incapable of protecting themselves or others. Under constant threat, women are called upon to protect themselves and others, but failure is inevitable. Thus, the protection narrative re-asserts itself; ultimately depicting women as vulnerable men must step in to save the day. Importantly, as a post-feminist framing of femininity, the source of women's vulnerabilities is gendered in ways not applicable to the men, such as through the threat of rape or the complications of pregnancy. Framing femininity through protection is useful for my work, particularly in understanding a collaboration dynamic representing success through a women's acquiescence to male power.

Another focus of my analysis of post-feminist depictions of women are representations of motherhood. Relying on traditional portrayals of women as feminine and maternal, post-feminist depictions reduce womanhood to this role. My examples of post-feminist media feature a range of portrayals of women, from reluctant heroes to fierce survivors. Yet, most of the media sites eventually suggest women ultimately simply want to settle down and start a family. I build on Carol Clover's (1987) work on Slasher cinema to look at gender. The last woman alive in the film, Clover's "Final Girl," becomes the film's hero through masculinization. Using piercing weapons to kill her attacker, the Final Girl undergoes a symbolic phallicization. This transition is remarkable because in the male-centric Slasher genre, women are otherwise victims at the mercy of violent men. Reformulated to reveal the post-feminist logic of my media sites, what I call the "Final Mothers" are feminized through symbolic castration. The Final Mother character initially embodies the attributes of a masculine action-hero, only to transition into the maternal and domestic as the story's male protagonist develops. Normalizing the idea of women as inherently maternal (de Marneffe, 2009; Rich, 1995), the Final Mother's feminization makes room for the

men to assume their role as hero. It also reinforces a traditional view of women, equating womanhood with motherhood; in other words, to be considered an ideal woman she must also be a mother (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 1995). Studying the depiction of mothers in film and television, Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels (2004) reveal good mothers are represented as women who devote themselves entirely to their children. Walters and Harrison (2014) discuss increasing challenges to traditional representations of motherhood, through images of imperfect, yet aspiring mothers on premium cable television. Walters and Harrison's "Aberrant Mothers" describes an increase in mediated depictions of moms as neither saint nor demon (2014, p. 51). Subverting traditional images of maternity, an increase in portrayals of imperfect mothers are a sign of progress for Walters and Harrison (2014) because the modern images broaden an understanding of motherhood in media. Similarly, I also examine images of imperfect mothers requiring careful analysis to understand how such images operate beyond simply being counter-images. Of particular interest for my work is how narratives suggesting there is no perfect mother nonetheless eventually fall back on the good mother trope by disciplining or shaming imperfect mothers. For example, as the Aberrant Mother becomes increasingly visible, representing alternative notions of motherhood, an outstanding question remains: do depictions meant to challenge the good mom trope in fact reinforce traditional representations? Do these images present a mother-character who appears more nuanced when compared to the monolithic good mother trope?

Representing Survivors: The Importance of Genre

Post-racial and post-feminist representations of survival are integral to my study of modern apocalyptic texts, but they are only part of the story. An understanding of the genre

considerations within which the representations appear allows for a more nuanced reading of how depictions of survivors operate. Particularly, understanding the conventions of the disaster genre (where I situate apocalyptic film and media) is essential to my understanding of how survivors are represented. This framing lends insight to a neo-liberal redefinition of collaboration. Discussed in detail later in my study, this form of collaboration requires racially diverse men and women to ignore difference in the name of harmony. Discussed earlier as the primary apocalyptic style found in film and television, the secularized apocalypse is a sub-genre of the disaster genre. Conceptually, genre helps lay out the repeated themes, patterns, and expectations built into a film or show. Writing on the problems in defining genre, Sarah Berry-Flint (2003) points to an inherent intertextuality in popular media. Arguing that though distinct, films or shows in a genre inform one another by updating genre conventions when examined as a whole (p. 27). Though genres are created through general models of repeated themes, structures, and narrative patterns, they are not unchanging nor inflexible. This notion of flexibility is important for my discussion of the apocalypse because in film and television the apocalypse resists rigid categorization. Looked at another way, the apocalypse fits easily within many genres. Naming just a few from the past several years, the television series *Falling Skies* (2011-2015) represents the alien apocalypse in science fiction, the film *Contagion* (2011) is an apocalyptic thriller, *Resident Evil* (2002) began a series of successful films set in the zombie apocalypse (horror), and the 2009 film *Zombieland* is a comedy, also set in the zombie apocalypse. The examples show the pliability of the apocalypse genre, simultaneously appearing within other genres. What is important to note is that whether appearing in drama, science fiction, or another format, the apocalypse consistently reproduces the conventions of the disaster genre.

Maurice Yacowar's (1986) influential description of the disaster genre lays out a series of conventions operating within disaster film. Of those, six are also specific to the apocalypse film, especially those discussed in this dissertation: (1) little or no sense of temporal distance, events occur close to our current time; (2) set against a backdrop of cataclysmic destruction; (3) the danger of imminent threat engenders an anxious tone; (4) support systems like the government or military have failed; (5) a general feeling of isolation; (6) the survivors are on their own, with only each other to rely on. I find bracketing the six attributes into two groups helpful in conceptualizing two dominant threads which make the contemporary apocalypse such a rich site of study. The first three themes set an urgent tone, implicating the present. Unlike, for instance, the post-apocalyptic film *The Hunger Games* (set roughly 100 years in the future), the apocalypse presents a familiar world under assault. The uncanny settings of the stories provide sufficient distance from contemporary social institutions while allowing those institutions to remain familiar enough for the sustained critique to make sense. Yacowar's final three attributes emphasize the genre's intense focus on survivors (Keane, 2001; see also Wasser, 2015). Film scholar Mick Broderick (1993) describes survival as "the dominant discursive mode" in disaster film (p. 362). Notably, as a discursive mode survival brings with it a series of entanglements. Alone or in a group, the atmosphere implies constant existential threats and a sense of embattlement for the survivors. Even more than the images of cataclysm, the spectacle centers on the fight for survival and the dynamic produced between characters. Asteroids, aliens, or zombies threaten humanity, but the struggle to survive is what drives apocalyptic films. Film scholar Stephen Keane (2001) writes, "... for their part disaster movies are innately passive and survivalist. When their central disasters occur the characters have no choice but to try and make their way up, down or out into safety" (p. 42). To solidify his point, Keane contrasts disaster and

action films, further noting that characters in the Action genre run towards danger. In other words, the heroes are driven by conflict rather than survival. He goes on to argue that the films reflect the social circumstances from which they are created. He continues, “[disaster films] are said to be borne out of times of crisis. Whether human or environmental, alien or accidental, most of all disaster movies provide for solutions in the form of a representative group of characters making their way towards survival” (Keane, 2001, p. 5). Keane’s categorizations hold true for the apocalyptic sub-genre as well. The media sites discussed in this dissertation reflect growing tensions between several contemporaneous discourses. Take racial or gender inequality for example, the apocalypse stories here reify post-racial and post-feminist ideologies by showing the minimization of inequality as social progress while depicting characters focusing on inequity as dangerous.

Another revealing conjuncture occurs through evolving representations of the individual’s ability to rely on anything other than themselves, whether that be other survivors or social institutions. This evolution can be seen by contrasting earlier films with today’s. The nineteen seventies marked a prolific period of the disaster genre, apocalyptic or otherwise. Thematically, a deference to expertise characterized this cycle’s dynamic as protagonists, “can only find strength in group action and follow their leader” (Keane, 2001, p. 49). Overwhelmingly, the leaders in 1970s and 1980s apocalyptic films possessed some professional, institutional, or other specialty knowledge, reflecting faith in imperfect yet generally benevolent social institutions. Leader-characters embodied social institutions (for example, science or the military) while reminding audiences that survival depended on more than individual effort. In a remarkable shift, my media examples do not present this faith in staid institutions. Reflecting a neo-liberal stance on individual accountability, characters in my sites bear the responsibility for

their survival through their ability to work and coexist with others. Thinking back to attributes 4-6 pulled from Yacowar's (1986) description of disaster, survivors are increasingly isolated as government, religion, science, and the military become increasingly ineffectual. In my apocalyptic media sites, the failure of institutional support systems not only leave the survivors alone, as civilization crumbles the former supports threaten the survivors. Politician, scientists, family members, and soldiers are shown as enemies to survival. For instance, in *28 Days Later* the military is just as dangerous as the zombies, while *Dawn of the Dead* shows the incompetence of the mass media, religious leaders, and scientists as deadly. In *Children of Men* the British government treats its citizens as criminals, appearing as the greatest threat to the survivors. While institutions are presented as broken, often dangerous, the regressive (often autocratic) structures emerging in their place are presented as natural and progressive.

Coming Together

In the worlds described here, survivors are constantly reminded they are stronger together. Overt racism and sexism are portrayed as threats to survival. Narratives emphasizing collaboration *over* division support two post-racial and post-feminist assurances. First, in the sites discussed here the destruction of society has finally levelled playing field; For example, in *The Walking Dead* the survivors are one race – the human race. Second, minimizing issues of difference (for example ignoring racism or sexism) is integral for solving racial issues. The apocalypse stories featured in this dissertation are rich sites for articulations of post-racial and post-feminist representations of race and gender because the tales of destruction and renewal follow their earlier apocalypse stories as methods of social critique. Uniquely, the focus of the critiques is not on harmful institutions or social structures like racism or sexism--those who

would draw attention to such issues are under fire. In a neo-liberal twist, bettering society is an individual's responsibility, in this case by agreeing racism and sexism are bad, and then moving on seamlessly to work in harmony with one another. However, this articulation circumscribes any engagement of the complex and dynamic issues of inequality. As symptomatic texts, apocalyptic film and television offers insight into our culture. Following Walters' definition, a symptomatic text reveals the discourses and cultural anxieties present in a given moment, reflecting and bringing to light issues while creating spaces to work through relevant cultural currents (Walters, 1995, p. 6). The stories examined here are symptomatic as they reflect a tension between conflicting social narratives on difference and equality. The media sites in this dissertation represent racial and gender equality as an easily achievable (given the right attitude) objective. Moreover, the narratives unsympathetically frame any character who focuses on inequality. Framings are important because frames produce social scripts regarding the treatment of inequality. One such script produced by the stories suggest racism is an individual attribute, solvable through a disavowal of racist behavior. Similarly, portraying characters who speak about racial inequity as equally disruptive as the racist behavior of other characters reinforces the post-racial notion that ignoring issues of inequity is the path to social harmony.

As the world crumbles, difference (racial, gender, or sexual) is presented as irrelevant through narratives binding survival with collaboration. Just as quickly as survivors join together, collaboration is framed through post-racial and post-feminist strategies of representation. In this project's media sites, the problems associated with racism and sexism are represented as solved or ignored altogether. Kent Ono's (2010) observation of post-race as simultaneously a political strategy and cultural condition (p. 227) is equally appropriate for post-feminist thought. I bring the two together in this section for several reasons. First, to recognize that post-feminist and

post-racial representations regularly inform one another (Joseph, 2009). Just as race and gender (and class and sexuality) are always in conversation, so too are the discourses framing them (Thornton Dill & Kohlman, 2012). Second, I consider race and gender together to emphasize that both post-race and post-feminism strategically diminish issues related to difference. Whether focused on race or gender issues, the minimization of difference is primary to discourses promising equality has been achieved. Finally, both “posts” play on an unspoken but inherent optimism to support their ideological constructions. Underlying post-feminist and post-racial representations is an assumption of achievement. In other words, the struggle is over, the fight has been won, let us move forward. In post-race and post-feminist ideology, equality is redefined as the absence of social friction caused by inequality. Thus, the construction of equality is essentially willing it into existence by ignoring past and contemporary inequality in all of its forms. The actions of social justice advocates and racists are flattened because both threaten the image of equality. As represented in my media sites, this work remains the onus of the individual to move on from the past.

A neo-liberal emphasis on personal responsibility is integral to the logics of both post-race and post-feminist discourse. Perpetuating a myth of meritocracy, post-race and post-feminist representations re-affirm racist and sexist stereotypes. Diminishing the impact of race and gender, while celebrating the egalitarian achievements, post-racial and post-feminist ideologies represent racism and sexism (respectfully) as artifacts of a world best left in the past.

Complimentary to the apocalypse genre, post-racial and post-feminist thought take a sense of optimism for granted. Creating worlds built on the assumption of equality, the narratives appropriate hope by purporting to show the emergence of a better world. The apocalypse presents hope in the form of renewal. Post-feminist and post-racial thought exploit the promise

of egalitarianism. In other words, the discourses of post-race and post-feminism rely on a sense of optimism as proof that equality has already been accomplished.

Neo-Liberal Collaboration

The media sites in this dissertation produce cultural scripts featuring a carefully curated form of collaboration. According to such scripts, survival requires racially diverse groups of men and women working together. Successful characters (those who survive) do this by ignoring difference (particularly race or gender) while championing commonality. The notion of collaboration used in this study varies from the traditional understanding of working together. The form of collaboration represented in my media sites is a neo-liberal reimagining of the concept. Born out of economic philosophy, neo-liberalism places faith in the private sector over all else. Ideologically “concerned with individual freedom, choice, democracy, and personal responsibility,” neoliberalism conflates the perception of individual economic choice with freedom (Gill & Sharff, 2011, p. 22). In the narratives discussed here, the world is crumbling and so too are the traditional economies comprising it. What remains are social and political structures reaffirming their analogues in contemporary Western society. This particular articulation of collaboration serves as aspirational scripting which promotes a traditionalist worldview focused on preserving the Western-centric and patriarchal status quo. Each individual survivor bears responsibility for their own survival in so much as they must accept and properly perform their roles within the larger community. Narratives continually return to the theme of working together to survive, through dialogue where responsibility is always centered on an individual who threatens cohesion. Collaboration is thus twofold: First, the group is there to assist, but not to carry the individual (strength in numbers philosophy). Second, the individual is

responsible for maintaining harmony by ignoring issues of inequality which might upset the balance. For example, the ideal leaders are white men, and the ideal support system for white men are others who do not question their leadership. In one example, the women who challenge the patriarchal setup on *The Walking Dead* are ostracized for their behavior. Collaboration, in this neo-liberal sense, is always raced and gendered because the responsibilities for individual survivors vary based on race and gender. Collaboration then becomes the coded behavior for the “post” discourses about race and gender (post-race and post-feminism) through survivors whose storylines downplay inequity and argue that success only comes through working together. True to the “posts,” while society reemerges as a white patriarchy, antithetical to the egalitarian dialogue, successful manage any cognitive dissonance by turning the focus to the importance of getting along. Thus, racist characters or those who express concerns about racial hierarchies are treated similarly in that their behavior is called out as antithetical to group harmony, and in turn, to survival. This suggests the ultimate goal of survival is only achievable by removing conflict or tension related to difference, in other words by ignoring or minimizing difference. The resulting narratives privilege the ideal of diversity while reinforcing traditional representations of race and gender subordinating women and characters of color. Successful leadership remains the purview of white male protagonists in narratives which portray any attention to difference as deadly (especially in relation to gender and race). Questions of race and gender are downplayed as inconsequential in the apocalypse stories discussed here. The stories articulate post-racial and post-feminist cultural discourses which ignore underlying issues of inequality, instead framing conversations around race and gender as the source of social discord. By situating reactionary representations of race and gender in apocalyptic narratives which feature civilization reforming

through small scale communities, the narratives popularize a social order naturalizing post-feminist and post-racial ideologies.

The discourses of post-race, post-feminism, and neo-liberal representations of survival come together to redefine collaboration in contemporary apocalyptic films. Survival requires individuals to work with one another, yet a subtle narrative shift reframes collaboration; this neo-liberal form of collaboration represents maintaining harmony as more important than expertise. The expert-as-leader, once a defining characteristic of apocalyptic media in the final decades of the last century, gives way to the regular guy (or girl). Where previously engineers, scientists, or government officials rallied desperate people in a push for survival, the leaders in my post-millennial apocalypses are expert collaborators – inspiring others to get along. Integral to their success, the leaders (and the successful survivors they lead) assert or assume there is equality amongst the survivors. There are two attributes of successful survivors. First, a championing of individual responsibility. In each of the media sites discussed, the survivors come together in a realization that they are on their own. Left without support, the characters are shown scavenging or fighting for the few resources left. Storylines representing collaboration in specifically prescribed ways reinforce this feeling of isolation. Collaboration is not simply working together, as the traditional definition would suggest. Instead, a successful collaborator is someone who accepts their individual responsibility in performing a prescribed role to sustain or prop up the status quo of Western white patriarchy. For example, women are expected to be enthusiastic mothers and their performance of this trait determines their survival. Lori's (*The Walking Dead*) struggle with being an expectant mother quickly becomes her main storyline. Framing motherhood as a social responsibility, her (un)willingness to accept her role as mother is represented as a character defining choice within the narrative. Each time Lori questions her

commitment to motherhood, other characters attempt to change her mind by scolding or talking down to her. Lori's continued bad behavior (according to the narrative) results in her ostracization, solidifying the series' unsympathetic framing of her as mother. Finally, successful survivors promote notions of equality and minimize inequality, thus avoiding discord. Often, unsuccessful survivors (normally leaders of rival groups or avowed racists) project a worldview that not only recognizes inequality, but attempts to exploit it. Collaboration then, is more nuanced than simply working together. In the narratives, collaboration requires the erasure of difference (race or gender). Significantly, this does not mean everyone looks and acts the same. In practice most casts feature racially and ethnically diverse men and women. Yet, a character's race or gender regularly correlates with their development, or lack thereof. Foreshadowing a few examples to come, black women are rarely in leadership positions, and while white women are sometimes depicted as leaders, inevitably their leadership is usurped by (white) men represented as more capable. A successful survivor routinely affirms the ideological stance that all are equal, while doing their part to recreate contemporary systems of power characterized by a white patriarchal structure. Taken together, the picture of a successful survivor is one who is future focused (the mistakes of the past are in the past), while affirming the ideal of equality as worthy and achievable through acts of personal responsibility (like disavowing or ignoring racism). Overwhelmingly, these characters are white men.

This construction of the successful survivor redefines collaboration into coded behaviors supporting post-feminist and post-racial strategies for framing the world. By framing strategies, I mean an investment in representations and storylines minimizing, flattening, and ignoring differences of race and gender. The coded behaviors are shown through characters who emphasize working together over working through issues of inequity. This framing achieves two

things. First, it serves as a foundation for the meritocracies which emerge in the media texts. In other words, if everyone is equal, then their successes are based on skill. Second, such framing strategically deflects away from disparate treatment of minority characters because, narratively, the only difference that matters is a character's willingness and ability to contribute to the effort to survive. In the end, privileging this form of collaboration fixes the responsibility for working together and maintaining harmony on the individual. It's not enough to simply 'work together' but rather to affirm the power of sameness to help survivors come together as one. This redefinition of collaboration is related to, but differs from media messages championing diversity as a strength. Take the overarching theme of the X-Men film franchise, focusing on difference to assert that while we are unique, we are more alike than we often realize. In contrast, the narratives examined here point to homogeneity as a strength. Rather than presenting difference as a weakness, post-racial and post-feminist representational strategies frame the focus on difference as flawed.

Conclusion

Evidenced by the resiliency of the apocalypse as a genre and concept, imaginings of the end continue to resonate. Drawing upon the genre's juxtaposition of tragedy and possibility, the apocalypse becomes a site of conjuncture. It is a place of rupture, where the past, present, and future come together – a space where “what could be” confronts “what is,” often through spectacular destruction. This spectacle creates a sense of distance that offers a chance to represent cultural anxiety. As an update of traditional apocalypses, the modern variants here owe their construction to a convergence of genre (the apocalypse), neo-liberalism, and discourses of race and gender. Post-racial and post-feminist representational strategies redefine survival

through a specific interpretation of collaboration. The narratives reimagine collaboration through a neo-liberal frame, adding to the definition a sense of working together that maintains the status quo. Producing a script for the ideal survivor, most survivors are overwhelmingly white, and those who are not support the contemporary power structure characterized by white male supremacy. In other words, to collaborate is to survive, but collaboration does not look the same for everyone. Rather than a *new* apocalypse, my media sites offer an apocalypse refreshed by the pushes and pulls of the discourses of race, gender, and neo-liberalism. Finally, the apocalypse is not limited by the scope of this dissertation. Though setting is often the most apparent characteristic of an apocalyptic film or show, the apocalypse readily appears across genres using narrative, character, or plot as well (Ostwalt, 1995). While all of the films and shows in the dissertation are set at the end of the world, I agree with Ostwalt's broader characterization that apocalyptic themes permeate any number of genres.

Post-race and post-feminism are integral in understanding representations of the survivors. Specifically, compared to their white counterparts, the narratives qualify survival differently for characters of color. Woven throughout this dissertation, it is necessary to note a general pattern for success in survival, following what I term the "Logics of Survival." A set of non-exhaustive conditions, the Logics of Survival are predictive indicators of death for certain characters. Raced and gendered, patterns of representation are indebted to a post-racial and post-feminist set of assumptions which privilege a conservative (that is white, patriarchal) understanding of who should survive. Generally, white men are the de facto survivors. The right of survival is theirs, absent character flaws (for example, racism, sexism or greed), challenging the overtly progressive message of the film or show. For women, survival is often predicated on their ability to perform as wife, mother, or both. Women who do not display traditionally

feminine attributes or attitudes are either ostracized or they ensure their survival by transitioning into more feminine roles and enacting more feminine behavior. Women who perform as mother are often guaranteed survival as long as this performance reinforces traditional notions of motherhood. This is true for most women in the apocalypse stories examined here, regardless of race.

Chapters

Chapters one and two analyze how race and racism are used to create the illusion of racial equality in the media sites. The first chapter explores how media sites “inoculate” themselves from claims of racism by strategically using racists and storylines dedicated to issues of race. Chapter two details additional tactics used to appear anti-racist, in particular, hiring racially and ethnically diverse casts as a sign of equality. The chapter also explores how characters of color are often represented in a two-dimensional fashion, used to enrich the storylines of white characters. Chapters three and four turn to the treatment of women in the apocalypse. Chapter three examines how survival is gendered in post-feminist narratives, specifically when motherhood is represented as necessary for womanhood. This chapter looks at the construct of motherhood as a transformative device used to feminize some women. For others, their performance as mother is framed as either positive or negative to privilege a traditional construction of what a “good” mother looks like. It should be noted that this chapter also discusses the use of sexual assault in narratives, which may be disturbing to some readers. Chapter four explores how failure is gendered, undermining initial depictions of women as capable fighters and leaders. Finally, this project concludes with a look forward at future expansion of media sites and research questions. A proliferation of television apocalypses offer a

new set of objects of study that potentially challenge or expand this analysis. Additionally, I explore the possibility of incorporating some discourses of globalization in future analysis, as well as the intersections of whiteness and the framing of leadership.

CHAPTER ONE

INOCULATION

Theoretical Intervention and Focus

Under threat, the characters of *The Walking Dead* (2010-present) and *Land of the Dead* (2005) work to re-establish community as part of their violent struggle to survive. Narratives promoting collaboration and minimizing differences (of race and gender) strike a progressive tone. Affirming this tone are the protagonist's liberal attitudes and narrative disciplining of racist characters (death or exile). Focusing on the post-racial images and stories in *The Walking Dead* and *Land of the Dead*, this chapter examines how this television series and film (respectively) appear anti-racist through strategic uses of racism. For example, both texts use the introduction and eventual rejection of racist characters to make the narratives appear anti-racist. Similarly, specific storylines devoted to showing the ills of racism present bigotry as easily solved with the right attitudes (from white characters). Both media sites feature communities diminishing the reality of racism through acts of denial and forgetting (Ono, 2010, p. 228). Post-racial representations assure audiences that issues of racial difference no longer exist, acting, in part, to induce amnesia for "the icky historical abomination known as racism" (Ono, 2010 p. 227). We see this forced forgetting play out in several ways in my media sites.

The focus of this chapter is on another strategy to move past racism, something I call "inoculation." Drawing on the medical understanding of the term where a pathogen is strategically introduced into an organism to elicit a healing response, I use the idea as a metaphor

for narrative strategies. Inoculation occurs when racists or acts of racism become a temporary focus of the narrative, setting the stage for an anti-racist response. Shortly after, the storyline centering on race is abandoned. Racism is only acknowledged insofar as it can be resolved, and therefore dismissed as a far-reaching structural problem. The subsequent lack of visual or diegetic reminders of racist characters and their views reveals a post-racial desire to forget things that have the potential to cause discomfort (Ono, 2013, p. 2). In other words, introducing distance (both temporal and proximal) audiences are invited to imagine problems like racism are historical aberrations. Notably, post-racial representational strategies minimizing issues of race or racism appear across my sites. Racism (and sexism) operate differently but cooperatively within my media sites; though appearing in several different forms, the strategies are linked by their work to minimize or erase racial (and gender based) difference. The form focused on in this chapter (inoculation) is only found within in the film *Land of the Dead* and the television series *The Walking Dead*.

Relying on a common theme of the apocalypse genre—hope through the promise of renewal—my apocalyptic narratives show the emerging communities of survivors working to establish a new social order. With this new social order, however, white men invariably emerge as leaders. Their leadership is only questioned by other white men seeking power. This re-emergence of naturalized white leadership opens a space to better understand how narratives appearing to celebrate diversity reconcile representations of white patriarchy. Collaboration is regularly pointed to as the key to survival in modern apocalyptic stories, with specific attention paid to the importance of diverse groups of people coming together for a common goal. Represented as a threat to survival are behaviors that waste time or energy focusing on difference, for example racism. Utilizing the conventions of the apocalypse genre, where

destruction implicates a critique of socio-political institutions, the narratives quietly reaffirm the established order. Disrupting the genre's conventions, the new social order is simply a copy of the old one, yet heralded as a move forward. Collaboration becomes neo-liberalized when survival, predicated on ensuring harmony, is each individual's responsibility. However, the cultural scripts produced via the narratives expand the scope of responsibility beyond the notion of avoiding behaviors like racism; Instead any behavior threatening stability while talking about racial difference becomes taboo. Thus, the racists and their opponents are cast in the same lot. Moreover, deploying a post-racial sleight of hand, the hope of a renewed future is founded upon constructed images of equality layered (and obscuring) the reaffirmation of traditionally racist power structures. As a post-racial representational strategy, inoculation plays on images of equality, diversity, and progressiveness to subvert those same images.

Inoculation

The inoculation metaphor is, in part, a response to scholarship examining media that marks racism as a spectacle to be contained (therefore ultimately harmless). For instance, Jon Kraszewski's research on MTV's reality series *The Real World* reveals a strategy of presenting racism as a characteristic of Southern or Midwestern characters thrust into the urban environments of the series (Kraszewski, 2004). The study details how the show positions racism as "a phenomenon located within rural conservatives" to "free the audience of any implications of racism" (Kraszewski, 2004, p. 208). The anti-racist message is meant to resonate with an audience of young liberals who see racism as a failure of the individual, while simultaneously deflecting from MTV's own racially problematic programming choices (p. 209). *The Real World* grants the racist person an opportunity to "expel racism" and evolve (p. 208). Evolution appears

in the form of scenes showing a character's realization of their racism (often presented as ignorance) and an expressed desire to change. In her work on the television series *Glee* (2009-2015) Dubrofsky (2013) describes how the show uses the lens of humor to deflect accusations of racism. The series stays true to a pattern framing the (mostly white) characters racist behaviors as dumb mistakes, rather than racist. Depicting the characters as oblivious plays on a sense of irony as the students become jokes themselves. Importantly, this pattern also allows the audience to be in on the joke; by laughing at the characters' cluelessness marks any overt racism as "funny and harmless" (Dubrofsky, 2013, p. 87, 88).

The result of framing racism as harmless is twofold. First, like the unwitting character, the audience is relieved of any racist intentions. This pattern also simultaneously affirms the racist assumptions on which the jokes rely (Dubrofsky, 2013, p. 87-88). As a matter of course the series draws purposeful attention to race to assure audiences that racism is as harmless as the characters themselves. Dubrofsky (2013) asserts the depictions are a synthesis of both inferential and overt racism, also a favored tactic within the narratives I examine. Overt racism can be characterized as openly and unambiguously racist. By contrast, Inferential racism naturalizes racist assumptions, often leaving such expectations unquestioned (Hall, 2002, p. 20). A similar tactic occurs on *Mad Men*, but instead of humor, the series uses temporal distance to contain the spectacle of racism (Ono, 2013). According to Ono (2013), the show's sense of self-reflexivity allows it to appear "antiracist," by operating "outside of traditional racial logics" (p. 301). Set in the nineteen sixties, the series acknowledges the racism of the time period while suggesting it is a relic of that era. The resulting sense of irony comes from the disconnect between the display of sixties style racism and the contemporary audience consuming it; using distance to sanitize the racism allows audiences to recognize and reject racism as it is presented in the series.

Simultaneously affirming anti-racist sentiments, audiences are relieved of discomfort caused by confronting their own potential racism. The media sites I discuss go a step further by eventually erasing all traces of racism in the narrative by killing racist characters or abandoning racially themed storylines.

There are two primary strategies of inoculation I detail in my analysis. First, and most commonly, overtly racist characters are disciplined for their behaviors and ideologies. The second strategy is when entire storylines are dedicated to engaging and resolving issues of racial difference. Both forms of inoculation follow a simple pattern: 1) introduce a racial issue or racism; 2) confine the issues to a single character or storyline, then 3) definitively solve the issue of racism by killing the character or ending the storyline. In this way, *The Walking Dead* and *Land of the Dead* are made to appear anti-racist by taking a stand against the racism of a single disciplinable character or contained storyline, thus showing racism as easily resolved. As with other post-racial strategies of representation, inoculation identifies, fixes, and then makes racism a thing of the past that does not impact the present.

Erasing Racist Characters

In the nascent survivor communities of *The Walking Dead* and *Land of the Dead*, racial difference is no longer a concern. Racism appears as an aberrant behavior, and enlightened protagonists stand in sharp contrast to racist characters who get what they deserve, death. A scene from the second episode of *The Walking Dead* encapsulates the post-race world operating within the series and across my apocalyptic texts. Here, the patriarch Rick (white) breaks up a fight between Merle (white) and T-Dog (black). A southern “good ol’ boy” with a bad attitude, Merle shoots zombies from the roof of a department store. The group rushes to the scene to stop

Merle from attracting unwanted attention. Morales (Latinx), and T-Dog scold Merle for his reckless behavior. A visibly annoyed Merle scoffs, “It’s bad enough I’ve got this taco vendor on my ass all day [Morales], now I’m going to take orders from you? I don’t think so. That’ll be the day.” When T-Dog asks what day he is referring to, Merle responds, “the day I take orders from a nigger.” A fight ensues, ending when Rick knocks Merle to the ground and handcuffs him to a pipe. Rick proclaims, “Things are different now, there are no niggers anymore, and no dumb-as-shit inbred white trash fools either. Only dark meat and white meat. There’s us and the dead. We survive this by pulling together, not apart.” Rick’s speech embodies the post-racial claim that we have moved past race (Joseph, 2009; Ono, 2010). Later in the episode a handcuffed Merle tries to rationalize his racism while pleading for his release, “it was nothing personal. Just your kind and my kind weren’t meant to mix. That’s all. Don’t mean we can’t work together...” The final moments episode reveals the show’s position on Rick and Merle’s opposing worldviews: Rick makes it out of Atlanta safely to join his family and lead the other survivors, while the unsympathetic Merle remains handcuffed on the roof – T-dog even went so far as to chain the rooftop door. Their different fates suggest focusing on racial difference is not only divisive, but also deadly.

Rick’s premise, that collaboration is the key to survival, suggests two things. First, time spent worrying about race is time not spent trying to survive. Second, overt racists are stupid and unlikely to survive in the rapidly evolving world in which they find themselves. In a post-racial context, talk of race is dismissed as divisive, detrimental, unproductive, and ultimately deadly. The absurdity of racism must be recognized, rejected, and quickly forgotten. When Rick subdues Merle with a punch and a speech, the series establishes its stance towards race and racism: positioning Rick as a noble hero and Merle as an aberrant racist. The interaction between the two

men also marks the first stage of inoculation: the introduction of a racist character within an anti-racist narrative, placing a little bit of the illness into the body so the body can learn to fight back effectively. If the illness (racism) propagates, gets too big and unwieldy, it will kill the body it inhabits – in this case Rick’s survivor community. Merle’s treatment has precedent in other media sites. Similar to the racist cast members on *The Real World*, *The Walking Dead* sets Merle’s character apart from the others. Those characters are marked and disciplined, allowing the series to distinguish itself from the views of those people. In the case of *The Real World*, characters tainted by racism can evolve or be ostracized (Kraszewski, 2004). Overwhelmingly, in the stories of the apocalypse detailed here, the chance to evolve is not an option, but fighting off racism is how one survives: racism is marked not only as undesirable, but fatal. Killing off a racist character has the added benefit of excising visible traces of racism within the show. In the rooftop example, unapologetic racist Merle becomes an aberrant spectacle. The series quickly disciplines his behavior, resulting in his exile. After his tirade he is left to die handcuffed to the department store roof, mysteriously disappearing soon after. Merle not only represents a poor collaborator, his ultimate fate reveals the price for those who fail to properly work together: death or exile.

Merle’s absence lasts nearly two seasons, roughly eight narrative months. During his exile Merle lived in Woodbury, the community led by Rick’s nemesis, the Governor. When Merle returns, he remains belligerently racist. Merle’s unchanged behavior continues to set him apart from the other survivors. His brother Daryl pleads with the group to welcome Merle back. Merle’s lack of growth is further emphasized in contrast to Daryl who has shed his own racist behaviors in the intervening season. Merle mocks his brother’s evolution in episode nine of season three, remarking that Daryl has “gone native.” This phrasing is disapproving and tinged

with racism. Drawing from a racist attitude of colonial superiority, it suggests Daryl has rejected the superiority associated with whiteness (“native, adj.,” n.d.). With Merle’s return, the series is once again injected with his over the top racism. Merle continues to make racist comments, for example calling Michonne (black) his “Nubian queen” and calls two men who only speak Spanish “beaners,” a derogatory term for Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Unlike his brother Daryl, who becomes an integral part of the cast as he grows less racist, Merle’s sustained racism leaves him an outsider. By presenting him as antagonistic and unlikable, he is visible but marginalized. Driving home Merle’s outside status, Michonne tells him, “No one's gonna mourn you, not even [your brother] Daryl.” Merle’s return also allows the series to frame racism as a character flaw which is easily changed *if* that character appears willing to evolve, an evolution seen in Daryl who is presented in a positive, sympathetic light once he moves beyond his own bigotry. Through Merle, the series applies a neo-liberal “discourse of individual choice and personal responsibility” to racist behavior by framing his racism as a controllable individual trait (Brunsdon & Spigel, 2008, p. 150).

Merle’s third season character arc focuses on his struggle in finding a place within Rick’s survivor camp, in part because of his racism. Merle’s storyline in season three juxtaposes the two very different communities he finds himself caught between. The settlement Merle escaped from maintained order through unwavering loyalty to a demagogue. Merle’s racism was of little concern because of his blind loyalty and proficiency as a soldier. It was only after Merle disobeyed a direct order that his loyalty was questioned, resulting in his exile. Because Rick’s group finds stability through collaboration, an unapologetic racist poses an ideological threat. Following the inoculation metaphor, the threat of Merle-as-racist must be purged for the health of Rick’s group. In Merle’s final episode, “This Sorrowful Life,” he engages in several

conversations with the survivors of Rick's group. In each of the above moments we are reminded Merle is welcome if he is willing to integrate himself. Maggie tells him that he has a place with them if he can get along with the rest of the group and fall in line. In the following episode Carol (white) asks, "are you with us?" In context, her inquiry does double work by asking if he will fight with them against his former group and in gauging his willingness to integrate. This becomes clear as the conversation continues. Merle remarks on her evolution from timid to fearless, noting "You're a late bloomer." Carol's response, "Maybe you are too," suggests his potential for change as well. Finally, Daryl reminds Merle, "you can't do things without people anymore." Ignoring this advice, Merle kidnaps Michonne to win back favor with his other group. On the journey when Michonne tells Merle, "you choose to stay on the outside" she vocalizes the narrative's position that Merle's overt racism is an individual choice. The suggestion is, issues of racism can be fixed by individuals willing to make the right choices. Merle is not willing to make this choice, so he remains a bad person and a racist. When the series kills Merle it definitively deals with its most racist character. By killing racist characters, the narratives assure us these people no longer have a place in society. Through his death the show excises any traces of the racism that he represents and abandons the last storyline devoted to race in general. As a post-racial strategy, inoculation presents issues of race as solvable so ultimately we may move forward.

In the film *Land of the Dead* racism is also a defining characteristic of an unsympathetic character. Depicted as a capitalist caricature, Kaufman (rich, old, white male) is an unapologetic racist. Always dressed in a suit and tie, he smokes Cuban cigars and only drinks the finest Scotch and Champagne. Similar to Merle in *The Walking Dead*, Kaufman is a convenient scapegoat for issues of race. While Merle's racism is tied to his good ol' boy persona, Kaufman's is linked to

unabashed capitalist greed. Kaufman is the CEO of Fiddler's Green. Before the apocalypse, "The Green" was a luxury tower offering condominiums, restaurants, and shopping. Even as the world around it crumbles, it maintains a gentrified exclusivity. The residents are affluent whites who spend their time shopping and dining in the safety of the tower. As the CEO, he polices the whiteness of this space by denying residency to people of color. He is the antithesis of the film's heroes, people of color and enlightened (colorblind) white folks who fight to remove racial barriers carried from the old world.

The first indication of Kaufman's racism comes through an exchange between him and Cholo, who is Mexican. Cholo has saved enough money to purchase an apartment in Fiddler's Green by doing Kaufman's dirty work (for example, murder). Citing the market forces of supply and demand, Kaufman refuses to sell Cholo an apartment, noting, "This is an extremely desirable location. Space is very limited." When Cholo counters, "You mean restricted don't you?" Kaufman defers to his board of directors and membership committee. This conversation is reminiscent of the discriminatory practice of redlining, or the use of financial policies to keep neighborhoods white by refusing loans to people of color who want to buy homes (Madrigal, 2014). This exchange also introduces the film's major critique, aimed at people fighting to maintain separate and unequal spaces, namely along race and class lines. A direct result of Kaufman's rebuff, the film's climax centers on outsiders (characters of color) and their violent attempts to breach the sanctity of The Green's white spaces. As Cholo threatens to destroy the tower, the black zombie, Big Daddy, leads a horde of undead to the tower.

Big Daddy's race carries significance because the zombie's history is intertwined with questions of race and difference (Fahy, 2010; Paravisini-Gebert, 1997). The origin of the contemporary zombie mythos is traced to another George A. Romero film, *Night of the Living*

Dead (1968). His film revived the genre with updates that remain conventions today. Notably, critics agree the film is an allegory of late sixties race relations in the United States and a history of racial mistreatment embodied by individual and institutional racism (Harper, 2005). Beyond ushering in a new generation of zombie cinema, the film also inspired a body of scholarship exploring the zombie-as-racialized-other (see Fahy, 2006; May, 2010; Stratton, 2011). In these scholarly interpretations, the zombie represents the faceless Other encroaching on the sanctity of the (white) status quo. In *Land of the Dead* Big Daddy is unique as a zombie in that he has a name and has evolved a rudimentary self-awareness. He leads his zombies to Fiddler's Green, not out of mindless hunger, but in search of a home. Kaufman's rabid reaction to those threatening his space punctuates his desire to keep the tower racially pure. Looking out of his penthouse window, Kaufman emphatically yells, "You have no right! No Right!" In the next scene, Kaufman comes face to face with Big Daddy and declares again, "You have no right" before shooting him several times. And, in the final confrontation between himself and Cholo, Kaufman's racism is on full display when he calls Cholo a "Fucking Spic bastard," before shooting him multiple times. Moments later, Cholo and Big Daddy kill Kaufman, marking the final stage of inoculation where the racist is killed and racism disappears. In the closing moments of the film, Riley has the chance to kill Big Daddy and his zombies. Choosing not to attack, he says, "They're just looking for a place to go... same as us" (Romero, 2005). This notion of sameness between Riley and Bid Daddy is significant for several reasons. First, Riley has now allied himself with Kaufman's enemies, all characters of color and their allies.¹ Second, some scholars suggest Big Daddy is such a break from convention that he and Riley are the film's heroes (Paffenroth, 2006), or perhaps even Riley's "alter ego" (Dargis, 2005). This

¹ In an earlier scene Riley stops Cholo from attacking the tower. The two men find a common enemy in Kaufman and part ways respectfully.

unconventional setup, a zombie as a hero, leaves the film with just one villain: Kaufman. Riley's decision to spare the zombies because of their similarities to his group affirms a post-racial framing of difference where achieving equality is only a matter of having the right outlook. The implication is that if coexistence is possible by looking past racial differences as stark as those between the living and the dead, surely it can be achieved between living groups divided along racial lines. Closing the film on another instance of Riley insisting we are more alike than different sympathetically frames Riley's worldview of harmony-through-homogeneity. His victories, coupled with Kaufman and Cholo's failures, exemplify the power of neo-liberal collaboration: Riley not only survives, his final sentiments remind us that Riley succeeded by ignoring difference and celebrating similarities.

In the media sites described in this chapter there is one notable exception to the preferred strategy of killing off racist characters. *The Walking Dead* introduces Daryl as a racist character who simply, with no narrative explanation, ceases to be racist after two seasons. For a time, Daryl mimics the racist tendencies of his brother Merle. As he becomes less racist he also sheds his loner persona, establishing himself as a leader of the survivors. In the first season of the series, Daryl often makes offhand racist remarks. When he calls Glenn (Asian) a "Chinaman," in the series' fourth episode, Glenn mumbles back, "I'm Korean." Daryl responds, "whatever." Daryl's flippant response expresses the stereotype that Asians are indistinguishable from one another (Volpp, 2001; see also Lee, 2005). During the seventh episode of season one, Daryl refers to Glenn as "Short Round," a reference to the young Chinese sidekick in the film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Spielberg, 1984). Again, Daryl's comments play off the racist sentiment that Asians are interchangeable. However, while his brother Merle is gone, Daryl no longer makes racist comments. When Merle returns in the tenth episode of season three, he and

Daryl have a heated argument about Merle's racist treatment of Glenn, reminding the audience of their divergent paths. The series doubles down on Merle's racism when he calls Michonne "that black bitch" before confessing he, "damn near killed that Chinese kid [Glenn]." Exasperated, Daryl yells back, "he's Korean!" The exchange mirrors the "Chinaman" conversation between Glenn and Daryl. When Merle replies, "whatever" (as Daryl did in season one) we are not only reminded of Merle's irremediable racism, but also Daryl's evolution from racist to empathetic ally. Daryl's transition, presented through the two mirrored incidents, marks him as a modified example of inoculation. Unlike the other racists on the show he is not literally killed off, but his racist persona is. Borrowing dialogue from the previous episode the series presents Daryl as two distinct characters that cannot be confused for one another: racist Daryl and ally Daryl. The racist Daryl is figuratively killed off when he abandons his racist behaviors. In some ways, this is the most painless example of inoculation examined here because racism simply disappears. By devoting no screen time or dialogue to his transition, difficult conversations are avoided and post-racial harmony is achieved.

Erasing Storylines

In the fourth episode ("Vatos") of the first season of *The Walking Dead* we see an alternative form of the inoculation metaphor using a storyline, rather than a single character. Similar to inoculation through killing a racist character, here the series introduces a storyline about racism, shows how to move beyond racism, and never returns to the issue after it has been addressed. This episode uses depictions of racism and racist stereotypes to frame itself as anti-racist by suggesting a group of Latinx characters are gang members. The episode invites viewers to make racist assumptions throughout, only to end in a plot twist asserting racism is bad. Rick's

misreading of the other group as a gang drives this episode's action. The twist reveals the other men as caretakers, not gangsters. This episode assumes an anti-racist stance, using Rick to trick the audience into making incorrect assumptions based on appearance. This episode follows Rick and his group as they search Atlanta for a lost bag of guns. Before completing their mission, Rick encounters a group claiming the weapons for themselves. The newly introduced characters dress in clothing typical for Latinx gang members. Though never claiming gang affiliation in the episode, the Latinx characters are presented as such through their speech, dress, and even in AMC network promotional material referring to them as "the gang" ("Talked About Scene Episode 104 The Walking Dead," n.d.). Appearances are important because the plot twist only works if the characters are perceived as gang members. Unlike the previous examples in this chapter, racism is not relegated to one character in this episode. Instead, the episode itself (narrative, dialogue, characters, and theme) becomes the locus of "racial difference." Using negative stereotypes of Mexican Americans lays the groundwork for the last minute reveal. Abandoning the series' standard narrative structure, this episode of *The Walking Dead* echoes the format of serial television used to take a position on social issues. Known as "very special episodes" (VSE) such episodes engage social topics so the show can, "claim redeeming social value" (Griffin, 2011, p. 244; Wilcox, 1999, p. 16). Common to sitcoms of the nineteen eighties and nineties, the VSE is characterized by an obvious (for example, uncharacteristically serious or preceding the episode with a special pre-amble) attempt to teach a moral lesson. Race and ethnicity were often at the heart of VSEs, with narratives problematizing "social issues by emphasizing the difficulties... rooted in racial difference" (Griffin, 2011, p. 244). Emblematic of post-millennial iterations of the VSE, *The Walking Dead* forgoes a special introduction (or similar break of the fourth wall), yet otherwise follows the format – a tonal shift away from what

audiences expect (blood and gore) to edification. Unlike most episodes of *The Walking Dead*, “Vatos” turns to overt social commentary by encouraging audiences not to make assumptions based on looks.

Following the traditional Very Special Episode arc, the protagonists in “Vatos” appear racist within an anti-racist storyline. Rick and his group act on racist assumptions about the Latinx characters before the show reveals its educational message when Rick realizes his error. The show’s protagonists, and in turn the audience, are implicated by the racism making the plot twist effective. In this episode Glenn, Rick, and Daryl make their way through a zombie-infested Atlanta in search of a weapons cache they abandoned earlier. The confrontation begins when a young man, Miguel (Chicano) runs into Daryl. When Daryl points a crossbow at him, Miguel responds by yelling “ayudame,” Spanish for “help me.” Trying to stop Miguel’s yelling, Daryl attacks him. Miguel’s friends quickly rush in and join the fight. They knock Daryl off Miguel before kicking and beating Daryl with a bat. This scene is setup to resemble a gang attack in several ways. First, though Daryl is now unarmed and curled up on the ground, Miguel’s friends continue to beat and kick him. When reinforcements arrive the men beat and kidnap Glenn before jumping into a getaway car. Second, similar to Miguel, the two men are dressed in stereotypical “Cholo” gangster attire. A negative stereotype of young Mexican American men, the Cholo is, “of questionable character, with few redeeming qualities” (Mora, 2011, p. 125). The Cholo stereotype draws from several discourses. As a “gendered coping mechanism” of the marginalized Mexican American community of Los Angeles, it is used to project toughness and hyper-masculinity (p. 126). Second, as a stereotype the Cholo violently threatens (white) society. Dating back to the nineteen forties, Cholos have been equated with deviancy and gang affiliation in the white imagination (pp. 126-7). Cholos are instantly identifiable through the intersection of

their race, clothing, and language. Typical of the Cholo style, Miguel wears a white tank top and long pants, while the others wear a mix of Pendleton style shirts, Khakis, and a bandana (Vigil, 1994, pp. 110-111). The scene further reinforces a framing of Miguel and his friends as gangsters through their speech. They frequently use an argot associated with the Cholo known as “Caló.” Described as a “highly creative code,” Caló is used to establish “in group solidarity” while producing “an effect of authenticity” by its users (Sanchez, 1983, p. 134). A descendent of the argot used by Chicano youth gang (Pachuco) subculture, modern Caló continues to be “the slang of young Chicano males” (p. 129). In this episode, Rick’s adversaries pepper Caló throughout their speech. For example, when Rick attempts to negotiate for Glenn’s release, Guillermo and Felipe confront him. Felipe uses the Caló words “vato,” “ese,” and “holmes,” interchangeably. Roughly equivalent to the English “guy” or “dude” the words are used in this context to establish the solidarity present in Guillermo’s group and emphasize the outsider status of Rick’s group. Because the words are associated with Chicano gang culture in the Western imaginary they have the secondary effect of marking the men as gang members, as does their distinctive dress. Though using gang associated language and dress, Guillermo’s group never calls itself a gang; instead the series invites the audience to assume Guillermo and the others are gangsters to setup its educational message against racism. Rick’s initial attempts to bargain with the gang leader, Guillermo, are met with a mix of bravado and resistance. Their meeting ends when Guillermo lays claim to the guns, giving the ultimatum to return with the weapons cache and Miguel or “come back locked and loaded.” Their words contrast the two leaders. Rick wants to save his friend’s life, while Guillermo wants his friend’s release and Rick’s weapons. During their second meeting, the tension escalates when Guillermo is again shown to be unwilling to compromise. Guillermo threatens to sick his dogs on Rick’s group, and the scene climaxes when everyone

draws their guns preparing for a shootout. Having firmly established Guillermo's crew as a ruthless gang, the narrative's plot twist is finally revealed: Felipe's "abuela" (grandmother) makes her way through the heavily armed group asking for help. Her interruption relieves the tension and reveals Guillermo and the others are not a street gang, rather they are protecting the last survivors of an assisted care facility. Soon both groups find common ground, reaching a compromise. Bringing to life the metaphor "don't judge a book by its cover," the audience is reminded that appearances can be deceiving.

It is problematic to draw from racist or race based stereotypes in a narrative attempting to minimize racial difference. The narrative admonishes those who make assumptions based on racial stereotyping. However, by using negative images racist depictions become reinforced. Guillermo and his friends are not gangsters, but for the plot twist to be effective, the image of Chicano gang members has to resonate. Yet, in the very moment that reveals the episode's educational message, the message is undermined. When Felipe's grandmother notices Rick, dressed in Sheriff's gear, she begs him not to take her "little Felipe" away. She pleads, "Don't you take him! Felipe's a good boy. He had his trouble but he pulled himself together." Although apparently reformed, this dialogue suggests Felipe was a troublemaker before the apocalypse. Beyond marking a turning point in the narrative, the grandmother's interruption alleviates any guilt that might arise from Rick's (and the audience's) mistaken assumptions. Her confused response shows both groups are equally susceptible to misunderstandings. A few moments later, Guillermo reinforces this notion by blaming his original hostility on "appearances." As this iteration of inoculation winds down, Rick and Guillermo close the storyline with a final conversation. Guillermo asks Rick why the others look to him for protection. There is a change in camera work at this point, alternating between increasingly tight close up shots of each man as

he speaks. During an extreme close-up of Rick's face, he pauses thoughtfully and answers, "Because they can." Similar to Guillermo, Rick became leader after protecting his group of survivors. The camera work and Rick's comment convey a sense of sameness between the two men, revealing the second moral lesson of the episode: we are more alike than we are different. Within this educational episode, the series also reinforces its neo-liberal framing of collaboration. The reconciliation between the two leaders not only portrays racist assumptions as absurd, it also reveals post-racial undercurrents depicting the characters' preoccupation with racial difference as similarly absurd. In the final moments of their encounter Rick and Guillermo show what proper collaboration looks like: moving past difference, finding commonality, and working together as one. When another survivor questions why Rick helped Guillermo, Rick again reinforces the notion of sameness by comparing his group to Guillermo's. Bringing the inoculation metaphor to a close, issues of racial difference are solved through frank dialogue between the two men. As an example of the inoculation strategy this episode introduces the problem of racism, shows a way to solve it (follow Rick's example), and quietly leaves racism behind. Rick, and the series, moves on, leaving the Vatos "gang" in this episode. This is the last time Guillermo and his group are seen and the last episode to use the "very special" format.

A final example is from *The Walking Dead* season two episode two, featuring the only other storyline to engage issues of race in the show. As the sole black man in the survivor group, series regular T-Dog (black) questions the precarity of his situation. T-Dog wonders why he and the father figure of the group, an older white man named Dale, have been left behind as the others search for a missing little girl. T-Dog suggests his race somehow makes him less likely to survive given that the group is led by, in T-Dog's words, "two good ol' boy cowboy sheriffs and a redneck." His comments unwittingly touch on a curious aspect of the first seasons of the show

where only one black man is part of the cast at a time. Though T-Dog is present in almost every episode of the first three seasons, he has notoriously few lines for a major character. He is only given value, in the form of increased narrative attention, when he drives a storyline focused on race. T-Dog's first conversation about race begins as a fever-induced tirade during season two's second episode. This exchange, and one follow-up conversation, mark the series' final example of inoculation where the show directly engages racial issues in an attempt to move past them. T-Dog suggests that in the eyes of the group, he and Dale have been left behind because they are the weakest. He reasons Dale's age and his own race mark them as expendable, noting "they think we're the weakest." T-dog explicitly mentions the lack of diversity within the group and his status as a marginal character. When the argument turns to the impact his race might have on his chances of surviving, T-Dog nods to the continued treatment of black men in the show: "I'm the one black guy. You realize how precarious that makes my situation? As the series struggles to make room for more than one black man at a time (discussed in the next chapter), his words are made all the more powerful. He goes on to invoke historical racial violence by suggesting that if the group were to turn on him, the white survivors would probably lynch him. Instead of an opportunity to meaningfully engage race issues, T-Dog and Dale's discussion actually shuts down sustained dialogue about race. Dale dismisses T-Dog's concerns, calling him crazy and blaming such uncharacteristic talk on T-Dog's high fever. The fact that T-Dog's comments only manifest while he is suffering from a behavior altering sickness suggests there is something nonsensical about focusing on the racial complexities of the situation. Just two episodes later, when the two men revisit their conversation, *talking* about race is framed as the problem. T-Dog implores Dale to forget the whole exchange, "What I said on the highway, I don't know what that was, where it came from – it wasn't me. If it's ok I'd rather you never told anyone about that

stuff I said.” Completely erasing T-Dog’s previous concerns, Dale responds, “What stuff? I couldn’t get a word out of you all day.” T-Dog effectively gives Dale the power to affirm race is unimportant and any mention of it is a disruptive anomaly. The pair of conversations between T-Dog and Dale provides an example of successful neo-liberal collaboration in action. By voicing his worries, T-Dog threatens the group’s ability to harmoniously live and work together. Dale’s erasure of T-Dog’s destabilizing words gives T-Dog a chance to properly collaborate again by forgetting the conversation ever occurred. Recalling the initial conversation, Dale’s framing of T-Dog’s comments (calling him crazy, not serious) isolate T-Dog while Dale’s actual argument points out how much the white leaders have done for T-Dog. In the final conversation the inverse occurs: After Dale’s promise he will forget the earlier dialogue, T-Dog immediately moves on to another subject where he (T-Dog) invokes the notion of collaboration saying, “everyone kicks in, does their part.” This turn in conversation marks a break in tension between T-Dog and Dale (they laugh together) as the two move past the discomfort of the highway conversation. Thus, after providing a template for moving past issues of race and the benefits, the ability to work together once again, the narrative moves on. Dale’s assurance to T-Dog marks the final time race is explicitly mentioned in the series (as of this writing). The resolution of the exchange between Dale and T-Dog also reveals how inoculation functions in this storyline: the series portrays T-Dog as the issue when he brings attention to concerns about racism, a sentiment reflected by post-racial critics who argue racial turmoil is the result of constantly talking about race (Bouie, 2016). T-Dog’s fears about his marginalization or being the only black man in the group led by “rednecks” are never addressed. The narrative moves on only after T-Dog begs Dale to forget his comments, asserting *T-Dog* was the issue: “that wasn’t me.” Any narrative tension surrounding

issues of race are resolved when T-Dog accepts the racial dynamics of the survivor group, allowing the series to move past those issues.

Conclusion

Arguably, the apocalypse provides the ultimate visualization of a neo-liberal ideology. Survivors left to fend for themselves, because of a failure of ostensibly staid institutions like the government or military, are often exploited by remaining or re-emerging power structures. In the examples here, hope is represented in small survivor groups constantly reminding themselves that survival depends on maintaining a nuanced balance between an individual's contributions and the power of (neo-liberal) collaboration. In the newly emergent communities, survivors disavow racism while presenting racial difference as no longer relevant. Viewers are encouraged to find hope in characters who do not see color and stand up to those who would divide rather than unite. If, as Ono (2013) suggests, post-racial representations provide relief for the collective discomfort society has with race, *Land of the Dead* and *The Walking Dead* demonstrate this can be done simply by removing the things reminding us of our racist past. While survivors fight to build communities amid the death and destruction surrounding them, a failure to behave in socially acceptable ways risks expulsion from your band of survivors. Though the progressive stances taken by this show and film are undermined by racist images and themes, any discordance is temporary. Once the racist character or uncomfortable storyline is removed, the promise of the post-racial is fully realized and the series or film appears anti-racist through inoculation.

Given that the context for the stories within this dissertation is the end of civilization and the dawn of a new social order, the narratives allow for unique critiques of Western society – a

traditional function of apocalypse stories. However, as this chapter demonstrates, change comes not in the form of reimagining a better society, but by shifting the onus onto the individual. According to the narratives, achieving an anti-racist society is as easy as simply stating racism is no longer an issue, and rejecting those who would remind us racism still exists. As a genre convention, stories of hope balance the bleakness of the apocalypse. Change in earlier apocalypses was often in the form of structural upheaval leading to new social structures. The neo-liberal takes on the apocalypse represent change as shifts in personal responsibility. Using destruction as a form of social commentary, the apocalypse provides a metaphorical map forward (Friedländer, 1985; Kinane & Ryan, 2009; Walliss, 2009). Marking certain social, political, or ideological institutions and structures expendable, apocalyptic texts excise them through spectacular cataclysm. As varied as the stories taking aim at these institutions are, expendability could be for any number of reasons. Whether deemed ineffective, corrupt, or outright evil, entities like the government, military, scientific community, or capitalists become targets. Again, the narratives propose a neo-liberal orientation where the individual is ultimately responsible for their own safety and security. For example, in *28 Days Later* the military is shown as the epitome of violent patriarchal authority, serving its own interests at the expense of those it is meant to protect. In *Dawn of the Dead*, both the original and the remake discussed here, the government is presented as ineffectual and bumbling, leading to the deaths of untold millions. In place of the flawed institutions, a vision of the future is laid out as the survivors try to build a “better” world (O’Leary, 1994; Stone, 2009). Better is represented through an embrace of self-reliance in the face of institutional failure.

CHAPTER TWO

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES: DIVERSITY AS EQUALITY

Theoretical Intervention and Focus

Drawing examples from *The Walking Dead*, *28 Days Later*, and *Land of the Dead*, this chapter analyzes the quality of representations for characters of color within narratives promoting a neo-liberal form of collaboration. The stories depict successful collaboration for black, Asian, and Latinx characters through two post-racial representational strategies: the use of characters of color to enhance our understanding of white characters (accessories), and the use of race to appear anti-racist (diversion). In the first strategy, characters of color focus or push forward white character's storylines. The result is a racially diverse cast where people of color are not afforded the depth of character and development given to their white counterparts. For example, white characters are more likely to have a detailed backstory or storylines dedicated to them. When narrative focus does shift to characters of color they are used to bolster the audience's understanding of a white peer; after their narrative work of adding depth to white characters is done, the characters of color die, leave, or quietly fade into the background. In the second strategy, narratives use characters of color as tokens which represent racial diversity. As indicated earlier, images of racially and ethnically diverse men and women collaborating projects a post-racial understanding of equality. This form of equality presupposes inclusion is the same as equality. Racial diversity is common in the media sites examined here, but storylines are overwhelmingly centered on white characters. Moreover, the two-dimensionality of such

characters often leads to harmful reproductions of racial stereotypes. Revealing an inability (or unwillingness), to show the characters as independent from the white characters they enhance, the characters remain overwhelmingly two-dimensional. The resulting representations are more shallow than those of their white counterparts. For example, prominent black and Latinx characters often lack backstory or receive less dialogue and screen time when compared to white characters.

Diversions

The post-racial representational strategy I have categorized “diversions” appear in several, often overlapping, ways. Within this category there are three sub-categories regarding diverting through diversity, inference, and irony. In the first subcategory, racially mixed cast serves as visual evidence of diversity. Race is only mentioned during dialogue minimizing difference and emphasizing the power of collaboration. My discussion of the second subcategory, inferentially racist representations which depend on racist assumptions to operate, drawing directly from Stuart Hall’s (2002) work on the subject. The final sub-category, draws on aspects of “Hipster racism” which uses overt racism to support a story’s anti-racist stance. Hipster racism is characterized by the use of overtly racist images deployed ironically to deflect accusations of racism (Watson et al., 2015). Whether obscured through inference or irony, the representations reinforce the racist premises on which they rely. All of the media sites in this chapter present post-race communities which treat race as unimportant and disavow racism when it appears. Achieving the perception of equality through inclusion, pre-apocalypse racial hierarchies remain intact and unquestioned. Even characters of color given backstories or increased screen are ultimately exploited as accessories to enhance their white counterparts’

stories. Progressive surface narratives and racially diverse casts divert attention from problematic representations that marginalize characters of color, reify racist assumptions, and reproduce racist stereotypes.

Diversity in Numbers

As more people of color are present in television and film, the question for critical scholars increasingly becomes *how* are they represented. Part of this work is to challenge the notion that greater inclusion is analogous to equal treatment (Dubrofsky, 2013). A 2014 study by the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism examined 500 popular films between 2007 and 2012 showing that simply relying on the number of characters of color in media is deceptive (Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2013). The study found that when considering *speaking* roles, white characters are still over represented by a significant margin. In post-race media, diversity and visibility come together as evidence of achieved equality. A hallmark of the media sites examined here, each film and television show features a racially diverse cast of survivors. Referring to the myth of meritocracy used to justify racial inequity, Patricia Hill Collins (2014) notes, “a meritocracy requires evidence that racial discrimination has been eliminated” (p. 178). This is relevant to my work because in the survivor communities of my apocalypse stories, diversity acts as a stand-in for a lack of discrimination. Dubrofsky cautions that uncritically relying on diversity as proof of racial progress is dangerous. Particularly, it risks encumbering attempts to “focus on race issues [that these] display[s] of diversity” might produce (Dubrofsky, 2013, p. 85). Although white characters make up the majority of each survivor group, *28 Days Later* also features a black woman, as does *Children of Men*. *Snowpiercer*’s white hero is joined

by an Asian man and woman, while *Land of the Dead* includes a Samoan man. *Dawn of the Dead* has two black men in its core group.

For fans and critics of *The Walking Dead*, race and racial representations are a focus. Praised as one of the “most culturally diverse casts on television” (Brathwaite, 2015) because of the inclusion of prominent black, Asian, and Latinx characters, critics claim such casting makes diversity seem “effortless” (Lowry, 2013; see also Deggans, 2014; Quinn, 2016). Others argue that while such casting is laudable, characters of color are “underwritten” and disposable (Barnes, 2012; Deggans, 2012). Using diversity as a diversion, the show’s creators answer these types of critiques by pointing to its cast and crew. *Walking Dead* director Ernest Dickerson (black) argues other shows underwrite black characters or relegate them to the “background,” but “I don’t think that’s a problem here” (Garcia, 2013, para. 5). He goes on to point out, “There are a lot of black folks on the set” (Garcia, 2013, para. 5). The suggestion is that black workers, regardless of position, can impact content. Within a racist industry like television, Dickerson’s comments are dubious at best given the limited impact any individual contributor makes within an industry grappling with issues of structural racism. In fact, AMC, the producer of *The Walking Dead*, was recently called out by the organization Color of Change for a lack of diversity in their writers’ rooms. Their report examined the writers and showrunners across seventeen content producers. AMC fell in the report’s bottom bucket because 100% of their examined projects had zero (six series) or one (for one series) writers of color and no. Subsequently, the report labeled AMC as “having the worst inclusion problem overall,” (Hunt, 2017, n.p.). Moreover, this report noted the lack of diversity extended to the important position of showrunner. The series’ executive producer Gale Anne Hurd reminds critics they have, “killed a lot more white characters than African-American characters” (dos Santos, 2015, para. 5).

Omitted by Hurd is the fact that white characters, especially central ones, outnumber characters of color throughout the seasons.

Hurd's comments highlight a post-racial framing of diversity where representation is a numbers game. The overwhelming tendency on *The Walking Dead* has been to eliminate (mainly kill) an established black character before introducing a new one.² Morgan and his son Duane (both black) nurse a weakened Rick back to health in the first episode before leaving. T-Dog (black) survives for nearly three seasons, until Oscar (black) replaces him. Oscar lives for seven episodes, killed during the same episode that introduces Tyreese (black). The additions of Bob (black) in season four, and Gabriel and Noah (both black) in season five, updates this convention.³ After Bob joins the survivors, the survivor community remains more racially diverse. Unlike Tyreese, as minor recurring characters they do not get top billing in the credits. Shortly after Bob, Noah and Tyreese die, the series reintroduces Morgan, reestablishing the racial balance maintained on the series (Gabriel remains, but is relegated to the background). The only other male character of color is Glenn (Asian). Framed through the familiar trope of the "Model Minority" (Ho, 2016; McCarthy & Baldwin, 2013), I discuss him shortly. There is one minor Latinx character (Rosita). The treatment of black woman mirrors black men on the series, with one major (Michonne) and one minor character (Sasha) representing the only black women on the show. Their inclusion, limited as it is, reinforces the series' post-racial strategy of substituting visibility for meaningful representations, diverting attention away from problematic representations of race through diversity.

2 With the introduction of another major black character in the most recent seasons may challenge or modify this tradition. Because those seasons are not part of this dissertation's scope, future research may be warranted.

3 Notably, Executive Producer Gale Anne Hurd specifically acknowledges race with Bob and Noah, "In the comic books, Bob was white. And the character of Noah was not an African American. We just cast the best actor" (dos Santos, 2015). Her comments suggest that their blackness addresses issues of racial diversity on the series.

Racism in the Subtext

In an effort to make a film *look* more diverse narratives may forgo fully fleshed out characters of color, instead relegating them to background shots. This risks reproducing racist stereotypes and sentiments because without backstories or individual storylines, characters of color only appear through easily identifiable (and often racist) character traits. This section's first example, from *Land of the Dead*, draws on a progressive-seeming narrative that humanity is stronger together. The film strives for an impression of inclusion and equality through racially diverse casting, the disciplining of its racist villain, and a hero who fights to bring people together despite their differences. Detailed in the previous chapter, the film appears anti-racist by making its capitalist monster an unabashed racist. The film uses Kaufman to give racism a face, assert racists are bad, and binds racism to capitalist greed. Representing Kaufman as evil, equally due to his racism as his capitalist greed, the film diverts attention from underlying racist images and themes. As a satirical attack on late stage capitalism, *Land of the Dead* frames conflict through two existential forces at odds. Conflict arises through tension between the capitalists led by Kaufman, and the working class heroes led by Riley and Mulligan (living) and Big Daddy (undead). Overwhelmingly, critics have commented positively on *Land of the Dead* as an allegory taking aim at the inequalities of capitalism (Bradshaw, 2005; Dargis, 2005; DeGiglio-Bellemare, 2005). These reviews show the effectiveness of the film's post-racial representations, where class commentary obscures problematic images of race. This is problematic because it reinforces essentialist notions that all inequality arises from economic inequity thus potentially circumscribing more complex readings of issues of race. The proposition calls for fixing such inequity to achieve equality. The film takes place in an apocalyptic Pittsburgh that emphasizes

social stratification through the lenses of wealth and class. With no explicit mention of racial inequality, the citizens of Pittsburg have apparently realized the post-racial utopic ideal of living as “one race” (the human race). Instead, conflict arises between the working class heroes and the greedy capitalists. Though the 2005 film never uses the terms, it anticipates the us versus them framing of the “1%” and the “other 99%” popularized by the Occupy movement six years later. Access to “The Green,” and Kaufman’s attempts to keep the space white and affluent, drives the film’s action when three working class characters (white, Latinx, and black) threaten Kaufman’s rule.

Noted in the previous chapter, the film’s climax occurs when two of the working class characters attack Kaufman: Big Daddy (black) and Cholo (Latinx). Although undead, Big Daddy represents a populist hero who awakens a class consciousness in the zombie proletariat (Fahy, 2010; Pullium, 2009). Still dressed in his gas station attendant’s uniform, Big Daddy leads the attack on Kaufman. Bitten by a zombie in a previous scene, Cholo jokes, “I’ve always wanted to see how the other half lives.” Cholo thus joins the revolution, abandoning his capitalist pursuits. Both undead, Cholo and Big Daddy represent the “other half” to Kaufman’s one percenters. On the surface, Romero affirms the primacy of class within the narrative by returning to images of working class violence towards the elitist villain. Yet, as zombies Cholo and Big Daddy are Othered in ways the white protagonists are not: Riley and Mulligan survive while Big Daddy and Cholo remain undead. This distinction between life and death, naturalizes a separation between the white characters and the characters of color.

Supporting Romero’s anti-capitalist allegory, additional racially problematic representations go unquestioned in the film. Particularly, inferentially racist images and assumptions inform Cholo’s (Latinx) character, painting him as less honorable than his white

counterpart (Riley). While the examples of Inoculation found in the previous chapter use racist characters and storylines to appear less racist, *Land of the Dead* uses racist stereotypes to inform Cholo's character. Though operating differently, both Inoculation and the strategies discussed in the chapter work within a post-racial framework which use racist images or language to appear anti-racist. Depicting Cholo as an amoral opportunist draws on race based stereotypes. An update of the "Bandido", depicting Latinx as "dishonest" and "quick to resort to violence" (Berg, 2002, p. 68), his character represents a common frame linking Mexican heritage with criminality (Bender, 2003; Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Cholo-as-criminal aligns with other inferentially racist representations of Latinxs as threats, epitomized recently by Donald Trump's "bad hombres" comments (Moreno, 2016). Using inferentially racist representations in post-race narratives further reinforce the underlying racism. The contrasting representations of the main characters, Cholo and Riley, reveal the racial subtext of their constructions. Both are scavengers working for Kaufman, lead a small group of loyal supporters, and desire more than their current situation. Riley wants to move to Canada and Cholo wants to move into Fiddler's Green. While both are portrayed as independent outsiders, the narrative uses Cholo's race to mark his Otherness. The film distinguishes Riley from the other main characters through his choices. He actively avoids killing others whenever possible (Cholo and Big Daddy for example), and is the only character in the film trying to make a life away from Fiddler's Green (detailed in the previous chapter). An emphasis on Cholo's Latinx heritage establishes his difference through race. For example, Cholo's acts of violence are punctuated by cursing in Spanish. He also shares his name with the term for Chicano gang members. The film invokes his heritage several times. As Cholo sits in the truck he stole, watching a zombie through a security camera monitor, he explains, "If it wasn't for this truck I wouldn't be any different from that poor Mexican bastard out there." That

“poor Mexican” is a zombie imitating his former life by mindlessly pushing a lawnmower back and forth. The green and black security monitor displays a grainy and small image, providing an unreliable view to the outside world. When Cholo asserts the zombie is Mexican, he plays on the problematic notion of Mexican immigrants as manual laborers, particularly landscapers (Brayton, 2008, p. 460). Flattening “unskilled immigrant workers” into indistinguishable “foreigners,” like Mexicans (Brayton, 2008, p. 460) the film reinforces the Latinx stereotype. The stolen truck also reaffirms the film’s conflation of Cholo’s Mexican heritage with his criminality. Denied an apartment in Fiddler’s Green, Cholo plans to attack the tower with stolen rockets. Now blackmailing Kaufman, he threatens to destroy the high-rise full of civilians. Willing to murder and steal to get what he wants, Cholo stands in stark contrast to Riley. Recognizing he is not welcome in the luxury towers, Riley packs-up and moves to Canada. When Cholo tells Riley about his desire to live in the towers, Riley responds, “You’re dreaming Cholo, they won’t let you in there, they wouldn’t let me in there. We’re the wrong kind.” While Cholo and Riley are both unwelcome in Fiddler’s Green, their responses reveal a racist subtext: Riley’s measured response aligns whiteness with virtue and, in contrast, non-whiteness with violence. Like the zombie leader Big Daddy (black), Cholo is characterized by his violent acts. Cholo responds to his exclusion from Fiddler’s Green by attacking it, while Riley decides to leave. In fact, the white protagonists, Riley and Mulligan (a populist leader in the slums), never express a desire to destroy Kaufman’s space. Riley chooses to resettle in Canada and Mulligan demands co-existence telling the others that if everyone works together, “we could make this a fine place to live in.” The method of resistance for the two white protagonists is decidedly pacifist, even when Kaufman’s response is total violence. Of those opposing Kaufman, only

Cholo and Big Daddy choose outright violence. Mulligan, for example, gives rousing speeches and explains his desire to transform the safe zone “into what we always wanted it to be.”

Though ultimately obscured by the film’s overtones of class struggle, the treatment of these characters reinforce problematic framings of Cholo and Big Daddy as driven by rage, while the calm (even unemotional) responses of Riley and Mulligan show them as enlightened. For example, Riley’s comments that both he and Cholo are “the wrong kind” affirm the post-racial logics of the film flattening all categories of difference to class concerns. When Riley equates himself with Cholo, calling them both the “wrong kind,” he suggests the issue is an economic one, not racial. However, the overarching narrative undermines Riley’s argument because he is never excluded from the tower; in fact, Riley has the luxury of choice (unlike characters of color) and simply chooses to set himself apart from the people living there. In one scene Kaufman asks Riley to name his price in return for Riley’s help. Riley’s simply asks for a vehicle to leave town.⁴ This exchange is expressly different from the earlier conversation between Kaufman and Cholo: Kaufman maintains control in both, but is less dismissive with Riley than he was with Cholo (for example, he laughs off Cholo’s requests while honoring all of Riley’s). Cholo on the other hand, is expressly denied entrance. This act of exclusion, coupled with particular attributes the film uses to develop his character, implicate the inferential racism used in Cholo’s construction where, “several racist premises and propositions [are] inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions” (Hall, 2002, p. 20). The film suggests Mexicans are either lazy (Cholo’s description of his father in an earlier scene) or mindless laborers (the zombie landscaper). The juxtaposition of Cholo’s Mexican American identity with his criminal behavior naturalizes a racist perception of Latinx as criminals. In contrast, Riley and Mulligan’s

⁴ Interestingly, in the film’s script Kaufman specifically offers Riley an apartment which Riley refuses noting “That’s what Cholo wanted.”

representations operate off a premise of (white) nobility when they choose community building over power in their final scenes. The film's final moments reveal we are meant to sympathize with the two survivors who live out their dreams, Riley and Mulligan. Cholo never gets to live in the tower, but instead dies from a zombie bite, Riley, on the other hand, rides off to Canada, and Mulligan founds a new egalitarian community.

In contrast to *The Walking Dead* and *Land of the Dead*, the 2002 film *28 Days Later* never explicitly engages race through dialogue or social commentary. However, issues of race still exist in the subtext through the representation of its few black characters. Of the three characters of color in the film, two are black men (Mailer and Bell). Using the future as a framing device for both men the narrative suggests (through their treatment and deaths) the future does not include black men. Their exclusion from the imagined future is all the more notable because the film continually returns to the theme of the future to describe why the survivors carry on. For example, Jim and Selena's relationship is twice defined by conversations focusing on their interpretation of the future; The first paints Jim as naïve and Selena as cold, and the second shows them coming together with hope for the future. The future is also the primary motivator for the film's villain, Major West. Motivated to restore hope for his soldiers, he devises a plan to kidnap and rape women survivors. Recounting a story that happened eight days prior, he tells Jim that after finding a soldier attempting suicide because "there was no future," West made a promise to that soldier: "I promised them women. Because women mean a future." As this section will demonstrate, *28 Days Later* the film treats black men as expendable when imagining an overwhelmingly white future.

Though brief, Mailer's presentation is laden with meaning because of both his skin tone and his behavior. Infected with the Rage virus, this former soldier is now a violent zombie-like

creature. Chained up by his comrades, he is an object of study. Only the chain around his neck tempers Mailer's wild beast-like motions as he transitions between moments of confusion and rage. His commander (Major West) introduces Mailer shortly after saving Jim and the other survivors. The scene evokes historical abuses of bodies of color in the service of white knowledge, such as the U.S. Government experiments in Tuskegee and Guatemala (Landau, 2010). Mailer is the antithesis of the two white men; his skin appearing darker against the bright white sheets hanging on clotheslines around him. He writhes violently, lunging at the other men – a terrifying symbol of difference. Mailer's feral representation is a contemporary example of the "Brutal Black Buck" stereotype reducing black men to vehicles of chaos and violence (Bogle, 2001). Although Jim jumps when Mailer lunges at him, Major West stares down at him, unfazed. Mailer is less a threat than an animal-like curiosity. The camera angle, looking upwards at the two other men, suggests that Jim and Major West are in a position of domination. Mailer's image evokes the image of both a tortured slave and rabid dog. The scene reveals a complex layering of racist image; through Mailer we are given yet another example of black bodies that, "...are portrayed outside of Western images of enlightenment... subordinated to a system of primitive images" (Means Coleman, 2011, p. 213). In contrast to the other zombies Mailer is the only one in captivity. Further, he is treated as an object of study by the white characters. Taken holistically, the images of Mailer and Major West are reminiscent of racially motivated colonial superiority. West uses Mailer to explain his vision of the future and to demonstrate the Major's power. West notes Mailer is "futureless," and only remains alive so he can teach West about the infection.

The following scenes features the only other black character, Private Bell, whose character is also tied to the notion of the future. Sitting down with the other (white) soldiers, Bell

expresses optimism for life after the infection, “once everything gets back to normal.” Fellow soldier Mitchell interrupts, mocking Bell and calling him a “Muppet” – a derogatory British term denoting incompetence or ignorance (“Muppet, n.,” 2015). Notably, amongst Major West’s men, only the black soldiers are characterized by a lack of intelligence, whether savage like Mailer or stupid like Bell. The short exchange between Bell and the other men is interesting because of its focus on a very specific future – one without Black men. In the film’s climax, Jim goes to Mailer who has been left chained up outside in the rain. Jim releases Mailer who goes on to kill Major West and the other soldiers in a violent rampage. On screen violence often reveals the systemic implications of racialized images (Rust, 2015, para. 10). By using Mailer to kill his enemies, Jim not only asserts his claim to patriarchal power, he does so by using one of the film’s only black bodies. Affirming the racist assumption of black men as “inherently violent,” (Hill Collins, 2004 p. 158) Jim provides a direction for the violence in a way that was unnecessary for the other infected in the film who attack indiscriminately. Interestingly, Jim could have provided Bell a future by saving his life. Bell was one of the few soldiers not aggressive towards Jim. As he makes his escape, Jim finds Bell defenseless and cowering. Instead of helping, Jim turns his back on Bell as zombies break down the door, leaving him to a violent death. Jumping back to the conversation where Major West (white) introduced Mailer (black) to Jim (white), West claims the only thing Mailer was able to teach him was that he (Mailer) is “futureless.” Mailer, as a futureless brute, and Bell, mocked for expressing hope in the future, become nothing more than caricatures, one a beast and the other a naïve fool, substantiating white power structures that keep them at the margins. Neither of the men, and by extension no black men at all, seem to be included in the future envisioned by the film. The film’s epilogue, showing Jim, Selena, and Hanna, as a family after the apocalypse, suggests a “multi-cultural” Britain (Moreman &

Rushton, 2009, p. 160). However, the treatment of the only two black men reveals a post-racial orientation. This orientation values diversity within limits, while at the same time affirming the racist representations of black men as beasts or buffoons. The assumption is that power in the form of a white patriarchy, whether led by the hero Jim or Major West, will continue even after the apocalypse.

Ironic Racism

Trading subtlety for irony, *Land of the Dead* mobilizes racist stereotypes to construct the character Knipp. Another reminder of the class stratification in the film, Kaufman's butler Knipp (black) dresses in an all-white suit, dutifully attending to his boss' needs. Knipp's appearance showcases the classist worldview of Kaufman as a caricature of capitalist greed. Knipp embodies the racist stereotypes of the buffoonish and unreliable black man (Bogle, 2001; Means Coleman, 2011; Nesteby, 1984). While Knipp is constructed through racist stereotypes, the film attempts to use the character to highlight Kaufman's racism: Knipp is forced to dress and act in certain ways to please Kaufman. Hipster racism, as introduced earlier, is when racist comments or language are used ironically (West, 2012). Through irony, the user makes several claims: they are not racist, they understand racism, and they disavow it. The issue is these "clumsy" attempts at "irony and satire" (Watson et al., 2015) are no less racist than the overt acts they claim to mock. Knipp embodies this notion, as a satirical device who draws from and reproduces racist stereotypes. He is the historically racist caricature of the fearful "Coon" from film in the first half of the twentieth century: subservient black characters who are easily scared and are unreliable in the face of danger, or as Film Scholar James Nesteby (1982) describes, "the sunshine friend, the coon who turned coward at the first sign of distress or the coon who could not motivate his feet

when the rest of him was shivering” (p. 222). Often Coons are depicted as buffoonish cowards that “bug [their] eyes and quiver with fright” at the first sign of danger or paranormal activity (Means Coleman, 2011, p. 84).

In his first scene, Knipp fearfully swings a door open, his eyes wide, his mouth agape in visible dread. He is timid and deferring, dutifully serving Kaufman as his attentive butler. In the scene described in the previous chapter, where Kaufman angrily shoots at Big Daddy, Knipp stands behind Kaufman holding his bags. Looking on in fear, his head darts back and forth in an overly exaggerated way. Moments later, as Kaufman waits in his limousine Big Daddy emerges at the car’s window. Evoking the image of the fearful Coon, Knipp looks on in terror for a few seconds before he visibly, almost cartoonishly, readies his body before running away up the garage ramp in an exaggerated fashion. This caricature has escaped critique, with scholars (Allkins, 2010; Lutz, 2010) praising the film for its anti-racist messages and representations. According to Romero scholar Kim Paffenroth (2006), the film turns audience expectations on their head by positioning the black zombie Big Daddy as a hero who embodies “the film’s most provocative message decrying class and race in modern America” (p. 125). Paffenroth asserts Big Daddy destroys the racist structures of the old world, ensuring racism in the United States no longer has the power to victimize him. I agree Big Daddy has the potential to subvert traditional representations within the genre. However, Paffenroth fails to account for the post-racial representations within the film, undermining his argument. Paffenroth’s analysis stops short by only recognizing the uniqueness of Big Daddy and the negative framing of the racist Kaufman. Without questioning the racist construction of other characters, namely Knipp, issues of race within the film seemingly begin and end with Big Daddy and Kaufman. For example, Kaufman’s treatment affirms a notion that racism and racists are easily identifiable. Similar to this villain,

racism is overt, obvious, ill-intentioned, and un-relatable. This understanding of racism implies that absent purposeful racist behavior, racism does not exist. The assumption for critics like Paffenroth is that since the film uses Knipp to reinforce Kaufman's image as a racist, Knipp is not worthy of critique. The lack of critical response reveals the effectiveness of the post-racial sleight of hand further naturalizing racist images and stereotypes.

Accessorizing Race

Prominently featuring characters of color, the narratives here regularly turn to these characters to move the story along. However, most remain two-dimensional, rather than fully fleshed out, and are relegated to plot devices that add to the storylines re-centering attention onto white characters, or help create more complex white characters. Glenn (Korean American) offers another notable treatment of race on *The Walking Dead*. As one of the most active survivors on the series, Glenn seems to challenge stereotypical representations of Asian men as submissive and weak (Kim, 2005; Okihiro, 2014; Osajima, 1988). His relationship with Maggie (white) also suggests a sexual agency that is rare for Asian men who are often desexualized in media (Ono, 2009; see also Shimizu, 2012). A post-racial reconfiguration of the "model minority" (Ono, 2009; see also Osajima, 1988), Glenn alternatively challenges and reinforces the stereotype of Asian Americans. Glenn's race is mentioned on the third episode of the series, something which will continue sporadically until the third season. When referred to as "the Asian boy" or "Chinaman," the racist comments generally go unquestioned by other characters. Unlike the series' treatment of T-Dog, who directly engages issues of race, the racial slights directed at Glenn are mostly ignored. When brought into focus, Glenn's race is used to show the growth of other characters. Take the example in chapter one of Daryl's evolution: Glenn was often the

target of Daryl's racist behavior until, realizing his error, he began to defend Glenn from Merle's racism. This disparity aligns with representations of Asians in the media as the model minority where they are both "racially exceptional," that is as a *model* for citizens of color to aspire to, "yet not part of the mainstream" because ultimately Asians are a *minority* (Ono, p.80, 2009). The difference in treatment between T-Dog and Glenn echoes the historical precedent for the model minority myth. Historically, the model minority trope espoused the virtues of Asian American immigrants while denigrating the black community during the civil rights era. According to the trope, the Asian American community embodied all of the traits the black community did not – industriousness, intelligence, and docility. While T-dog becomes confrontational about race, Glenn takes on a "grin and bear it attitude."

Glenn embodies the stereotype of Asian men as "efficient, loyal, and strategic" (Ho, p. 61, 2016; see also Brooks & Hébert, 2006) who are likewise "submissive, and lacking sexual potency and agency" (Ono, p. 82, 2009). In the sixth episode of season two, Maggie scolds Glenn because he lets the others put him in danger by taking advantage of his willingness to use himself as bait or as a lone scavenger. Her passion is, in part, driven by Glenn and Maggie's sexual relationship. Though their romance suggests he does not lack potency, she initiates and drives the relationship depriving him of any sexual agency. For example, their first sexual encounter happens when he accidentally picks up condoms (he was hiding another item). When Maggie notices the condoms Glenn begins stammering, unable to finish his sentences. When he tries to assure her he was not trying to have sex with her, "I would never," Maggie takes charge of the conversation. Staring intently, she delivers a monotone declarative statement, definitely stating, "I'll have sex with you." Maggie's tone and intensity does not invite interpretation – they will have sex. When she takes her clothes off he looks away, embarrassed. After finishing,

Maggie reminds Glenn who is in charge, “it was a one-time thing.” Glenn’s loyalty and efficiency help him cement his position as an essential part of the core survivors without threatening the power of the various white men leading the group. Helen Ho (2016) argues Glenn’s status as model minority contributes to his longevity on the series and his status as a core team member. She notes that he embodies a masculinity not normally afforded to Asian men in popular Western media. Importantly she argues that one reason for Glenn’s unique representation is the show’s “postracial philosophy” positioning racism as anachronistic (Ho, 2016, p. 61). She argues that in this context when the series’ patriarch (Rick) falters, so too does white masculinity. The result is a leadership vacuum where Glenn is able to step into the role of masculine hero, uncommon for Asian American characters. For Ho, the post-racial world of the apocalypse, one which has moved past race and racism, allows characters like Glenn a greater range and depth. I agree *The Walking Dead* universe is post-racial and Glenn’s portrayal is unique. However, my analysis finds that Glenn continues to reinforce traditional representations of Asian American men in popular media. As Ho (2016) points out, Glenn’s “transformation” from sidekick to hero “is made possible due to the flawed masculinity of the group’s white ‘cowboys’” (p. 61). His transformation is predicated on failures of white characters, upending the suggestion that Glenn represents a subversion of traditional limitations on Asian American. Instead, Glenn’s limited break from the model minority stereotype reveals the post-racial configuration of Glenn-as-hero. In other words, Glenn breaks free from the traditional limitations of Asian characters (in this case the weak and effeminized model minority) to attain heroic status, but only in the moments where the white hero falters. Glenn is, at times, shown to be an action hero, but only when characters like Rick allow it. For example, in season three as Rick suffers a mental breakdown, Glenn steps in to prepare the survivors for upcoming battles.

According to Ho (2016) this is not a coincidence because the apocalypse erodes the notion of white masculinity and the trope of the model minority that helps inform it (p. 71). Unfortunately, power continues to default to the white men of the series, especially Rick. Glenn's moments of resistance to white power structures only continue to support the patriarchy. Glenn breaks down several times because he fears he cannot protect Maggie, something made violently clear when the Governor (white) threatens her with rape. While Glenn may not have the character flaws of the white male leaders (such as Rick's instability) he consistently reverts to a subordinate role, ever the sidekick.

There are similar issues with Ho's reading of Glenn's sexual agency; while he is sexually active, his agency is in question. Glenn half of the relationship, but for most of season two Maggie drives every significant encounter. Their intimacy begins because of Maggie's sexual needs: when Glenn asks why she wants to have sex with him Maggie responds, "there aren't a whole lot of options." Further, they only start dating as an act of defiance against her father, Hershel. At first, Hershel refuses to even learn Glenn's name, instead calling him "that Asian boy." When Maggie believes she is pregnant, Glenn questions the wisdom of starting a family.) His protests prove ineffective when she eventually becomes pregnant. Rather than undermining the model minority trope, as Ho suggests, Glenn reveals a post-race reformulation. Afforded a greater depth of character, he is nonetheless subordinated to his white counterparts, especially in terms of leadership and sexual agency. The narrative often shows Glenn challenging the trope, nonetheless the stereotypes remain. For example, though he becomes a leader during Rick's breakdown, eventually he steps back into a sidekick role. Rather than break down the model minority trope, the series applies the stereotypes less overtly to Glenn.

Remaining with *The Walking Dead*, Tyreese's (black) story arc is introduced in season three, repeating a common trajectory for black characters. As accessories to white characters' development, his background and storyline is limited (for further examples see also, Dubrofsky, 2013; Giroux, 1997, Ono, 2013). Unlike their recurring white counterparts, characters like Tyreese are not given nuanced histories and relationships. Instead, similar to Glenn, they are treated as accessories, enhancing the white characters or driving the story forward. For much of his time on the series Tyreese is an outsider struggling to find a place within several survivor groups. Very little is said about his past and there is minimal character development until season four when his storyline intersects with Carol (white).

The series presents Tyreese's limited growth through his emotional responses as he comes to grips with the reality of the apocalypse. For example, when he learns of Karen's (white) death he is first gripped by emotion, then rage. However, these short glimpses into his character development happen only in moments relating to Carol and *her* emotional journey. Up to this moment in the narrative, Carol has evolved from a subservient abused wife to a hardened survivor who embraces the Utilitarian ideal of action in the name of the greater good. Her interaction with Tyreese helps the show explore the limits of Carol's newfound ferocity. Shortly after Tyreese becomes part of the core survivor group, he begins dating a woman named Karen. In contrast to other relationships on the show, Karen and Tyreese's romance does nothing to further the development of either character and occurs almost exclusively off-screen. It is nothing more than a setup for Carol's upcoming actions. Trying to stop a flu-like infection ravaging the survivors, Carol secretly murders Karen. A short time later, Rick banishes Carol. Her exile lasts five episodes, ending when she meets up with Tyreese who has been separated from the main group. In the fourteenth episode of the fourth season, Carol admits to Tyreese that

she killed Karen, leaving her fate in his hands. This scene is entirely driven by Carol's vulnerability and the tension surrounding her potential redemption. The scene, occurring shortly after the two share a traumatic experience, features just the two of them sitting across from one another in a cabin at night. The little amount of light comes from a kerosene lamp lighting their faces from the center, adding dramatic shadows to their faces while leaving the rest of the cabin in complete darkness. The scene opens with Carol pushing a pistol towards Tyreese. She then begins speaking, telling her side of the story. Her voice shakes, and she cries during the exchange, while Tyreese appears increasingly confused by Carol's confession. Twice during the conversation, she tells him, "do what you have to do." After a few seconds of processing Tyreese proclaims that while he cannot forget, he forgives her because it is in the past and she has to live with her pain. The scene unfolds following Carol's emotional journey, while Tyreese appears more confused than emotionally affected. Though Tyreese was emotionally distraught by Karen's death, several episodes prior, he now seems completely unfazed by Carol's confession. Tyreese and Carol reunite with the larger group. Rick welcomes back a morally absolved Carol. After helping Carol find redemption, Tyreese is once again positioned as an outside observer in the subsequent episodes. As an accessory to Carol's development, the series abandons his storyline. Tyreese's muted emotional responses speak to the show's use of him as an accessory in lieu of substantial character development. Compare Tyreese's responses to Rick's emotional journey leading up to Carol's exile and eventual redemption, Tyreese's emotional arc appears hollow at best. Tyreese is not afforded the same narrative space as other (white) grieving characters on the show. Instead, Tyreese fades into the background with minimal dialogue and screen time until his death later in the season. Repeating this pattern to great effect, *The Walking Dead* uses Noah (black) to help Beth (white) during her journey of self-realization. Rather than

giving detailed backstories or character developing storylines, the narrative uses both Noah and Tyreese to bolster or progress the storylines of white characters. Deprived of rich storylines or histories, Noah and Tyreese are reduced to plot devices that, “sacrifice meaningful narratives about people of color” in support of their white counterparts (Ono, p. 316, 2013). These types of two dimensional representations reinforce a tendency to show people of color as secondary to white characters and their stories (Ono, 2000, p. 164, 178). In post-racial media like *The Walking Dead*, characters of color find relevance in a subordinate status as accessories.

The most high profile (fan favorite, major billing) accessory character on *The Walking Dead*, Michonne (black) also furthers the storyline of several white characters at the expense of her own development. Introducing Michonne in the press before her 2012 debut, *The Walking Dead* showrunner explains, “We know that she's a loner, we know she kicks ass” (Goldberg, 2012). Her current AMC character bio, updated for the seventh season in October 2016, looks back at her time on the series, “She had finally left behind the identity of the solitary swordsperson” (“Michonne,” n.d.). Her image as the show’s “badass” is established in her first appearance, as a katana-wielding silhouette.⁵ Without speaking a word, she saves recurring cast member Andrea (white), killing the zombie stalking her. Notably, unlike the core white cast members, her backstory remains unexplored long after her introduction. Instead, she will drive the narrative forward through her interaction with the white characters. After saving Andrea from the zombie, the two begin travelling together. When Andrea becomes deathly ill, Michonne nurses her back to health. In season three, Michonne and Andrea take refuge in the walled community of Woodbury. Shortly after their arrival on the fourth episode of season three, Andrea expresses hope in staying in a safe space like Woodbury. Michonne treats the settlement

⁵ In interviews and statements, the term badass is continually used by the cast and producers to describe the character (see Blauvelt, 2012; Goldberg, 2012; Schwartz, 2012).

with caution, unsure what to make of it. Andrea is more open minded, asking Michonne to give it a chance, “We can always leave tomorrow, or the following day.” The series affirms Michonne’s framing as angry and antagonistic on the eleventh episode of season three when Andrea comments, “once we entered Woodbury, you became hostile.” This hostility drives Andrea’s storyline while circumscribing Michonne’s. Andrea integrates herself into the community, for example chatting and sipping lemonade with the residents, while Michonne keeps to herself as she inspects the perimeter. In an exchange during the third episode of season three, fellow survivor Andrea complains to Michonne, “I still feel like I hardly know you.” Michonne dismisses her saying, “you know enough”. In fact, to the audience, nothing is known about Michonne outside of her prowess with a sword. Andrea, in contrast, enjoys a robust backstory by her third episode. That episode reveals her pre-apocalypse profession as a Civil Rights lawyer and multiple family relationships.

Missing a chance to develop further, Michonne is quickly pushed out of Woodbury to make room for a romance between two white characters. In the fifth episode of season three the Governor (Woodbury’s leader) summons Andrea to talk about Michonne, who was caught looking for her confiscated gear. Threatening to kick her friend out, he tells Andrea that some residents want Michonne to leave because, “she makes people uncomfortable.” Immediately after, Andrea confronts Michonne, telling her, “You’re freaking people out. You’re freaking me out.” At the closing of this episode Michonne leaves Andrea and the town behind, leaving the Governor to console Andrea. The remainder of the season follows Andrea’s romantic relationship with the Governor and its effects on her former friends in Rick’s group. In her first episodes, Michonne functions to setup Andrea’s romantic story arc with the Governor. Once she leaves Woodbury she meets Rick’s group for the first time. This meeting during the ninth

episode of season three marks the second time Michonne will be used to push the narrative forward. Telling Rick she knows where two of his kidnapped friends are being held (Woodbury), she sets the main conflict of season three into motion. Though she helps Rick break into Woodbury to find his friends, he refuses to trust her. After the assault, she asks to be part of the group. Rick balks, “we patch you up, then you’re gone.” As she heals, she joins the other survivors on patrol and on scavenger runs. For the remainder of season three, she is only given a few lines per episode, revealing nothing about her past. It is only after twenty-four episodes that Michonne’s backstory appears. When Michonne is finally given a history during the sixteenth episode of season three, it is revealed within the context of a white character’s struggle and subsequent development. In an earlier episode, Rick’s son Carl argues for Michonne to be allowed to join the group. This marks the start of a friendship between Michonne and Carl, and through this friendship Michonne’s shares glimpses into her past. After an attack on the group, most of the survivors are split up, and Michonne spends several episodes alone on the road trying to reconnect with Rick and Carl. Contemplating both the past and her future, season four’s episode nine jumps between flashbacks and scenes of her emotional breakdown in present time. Midway through the episode, Michonne finds herself at a crossroads, yet instead of following the path to Rick and Carl, she chooses to remain alone. As she makes her way through a forest she is tormented by flashbacks revealing glimpses of her pre-apocalypse life, including her young son (Andre) and his father. Michonne becomes increasingly unstable as the flashbacks shift from happy memories to those of her family’s time in refugee camp where her brother, husband, and child die. Talking to herself in an abandoned restaurant, Michonne cries in anguish over her their deaths, trying to understand why her family died and she is “still here.” She quickly answers her own question, “I know why. I know the answer” before turning around, searching for Rick and

Carl again. In the following scene, she finds the house Rick and Carl have sought refuge in, knocking on the door. After looking through the peephole, Rick chuckles to his son Carl, “It’s for you.” These two scenes reveal what Michonne meant when she said, she knew “the answer:” she remains alive for Carl. Screen time explaining her backstory lasts less than thirty minutes and the series only returns to her past one more time. This brevity is meaningful because unlike the backstories of prominent white characters (Carol, Rick, and Lori to name a few), Michonne’s history does not contribute to her ongoing character development or inform her character’s actions throughout the season. Instead, the series uses her past to help Carl and Rick reconnect as a family before jettisoning her backstory.

In the eleventh episode of season four, the next to feature Michonne and Carl, Rick expresses frustration at his relationship with his son, “I can’t be his father and his best friend.... He needs you.” Michonne and Carl go out on a supply run, revealing a side of her not yet explored on the series. Attempting to cheer up Carl, she shoots “Crazy Cheese” into her mouth before admitting, “I’m not very good at making boys your age laugh.” For the rest of the episode Michonne works to comfort Carl. Nothing seems to work until she realizes his interest in her past. Eventually she creates a game based on her traumatic loss. For every item Carl can scavenge she promises to recount part of her history, including the loss of her toddler son. Within one episode the anguish that turned Michonne into a fierce survivor is converted into bits of trivia meant to distract Carl from his own issues. Her suffering is no longer her own, instead the facts about her past are excitedly consumed by Carl. This exchange, and the following ones, reveal a familiar dynamic at play. Building on the notion of appropriation of racial difference described by hooks (1992), the conversations reveal further exploitation. Hooks describes the commodification and consumption of Otherness driven by white culture’s search for newness

and excitement. By consuming Michonne's past, the narrative uses her trauma to enrich Carl's character. Revealing her own loss leads Carl to accept the loss of his baby sister. At the close of this episode, Carl finds peace, remarking on the two lost children, "maybe her and Andre are together." Michonne and Carl's storyline pauses for five episodes, until the fourth season finale when Michonne confronts Carl about his increasingly distant relationship with his father. As Carl grows scared of Rick and his own emotions, Michonne reveals more of her backstory. Recounting how her son died, she begins crying, before explaining how she survived. Carl opens up, revealing that he is not afraid of his father, but of himself. The following episodes show Carl and Rick's relationship return to normal. For example, no longer at odds, Carl helps his father welcome new members into the community in the second episode of season five. As of season seven Michonne's history is never brought up again. Only given a backstory to facilitate Carl's growth as a character, Michonne is only central when she enhances the white characters or drives the narrative forward.

Similar to Tyreese, Noah, and Michonne, Morgan (black) in *The Walking Dead* is also central to the journey of *The Walking Dead*'s white characters. The series' portrayal of Morgan uses an often repeated character trope for black men in film; an example of the "Magical Negro" (Hughey, 2009), Morgan exists to further develop the show's protagonist Rick in very specific ways. The Magical Negro character "save[s] and transform[s] disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful, and content people" (p. 544). Hughey points to the characters Morpheus in *The Matrix*, John Coffey in *The Green Mile*, or Bagger Vance in *The Legend of Bagger Vance* who use their prescient sensibilities in the service of the main white character. Morgan acts as nurse, counselor, and sage to Rick Grimes (white). Rick was in a coma for the first weeks of the apocalypse and is stumbling his

way through a world he struggles to understand. Once Rick is well enough to travel and search for his family, Morgan's job is done and the men part ways. This parting is another quality of the magical negro, who must "walk off into the sunset" to preserve the "racial status quo" (Hughey, 2009, p. 560). Incidentally, this makes room for T-Dog as the main black character on a series with limited space for black characters. Confirming his status as the show's Magical Negro, Morgan re-appears in season six with a newfound Zen wisdom to share. His return coincides with a shift in Rick's group showing the survivors struggling with what it means to be human in the apocalypse. The tagline for the sixth season teases, "To claim their place in this world, the group must become as terrifying as any of the adversaries they've encountered" ("The Walking Dead," n.d.). This tagline reflects the season's focus on the heroes losing their way, slowly becoming like the amoral villains they fight against. Morgan, acting as a counterbalance to the group's increasing ambivalence towards human life in their encounters with other survivors, shares his almost mystical knowledge and experience with Rick's group. After a random encounter with the conveniently named Eastman (white) and his teachings based on the book *The Art of Peace*, Morgan begins a journey of enlightenment via Eastern philosophy. He takes to fighting with staff and refuses to kill other humans, even when his own life is in danger. His new attitude that "all life is precious" is repeatedly shown to be at odds with the pre-emptive and punitive acts of violence by members of Rick's group (Gimple & Williams, 2015). Morgan attempts to convince the others they are losing their humanity in their search for security. As the series progresses it remains to be seen if he will once again fulfil his role as spiritual guide. In the time between Morgan's appearance in the first episode and his reappearance in season six, Morgan has undergone a significant philosophical shift. However, to say his character has

evolved, would ignore that though his knowledge is different he still performs as the show's Magical Negro, once again pushing Rick's storyline forward.

Other black characters in *The Walking Dead* have not fared as well as Morgan, reflecting a general trend within all the media examined in this dissertation. Also of *The Walking Dead*, Noah and Tyreese are both killed off shortly after their appearances supporting storylines of white women on the series. In the dangerous worlds of the apocalypse, death or exile is a common way to deal with characters who have served their purpose. When considering how race affects the treatment of characters, another pattern begins to emerge. In his 2000 work on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Ono notes the series builds an image of white heroism through a contrast with monstrous villains of color. Ono argues that part of the draw for the series is the marginal status of its heroes. Characterized as loveable outsiders, *Buffy's* outcasts, nerds, and loners are made interesting through their difference. However, their form of difference stands in contrast with the otherness marking its villains. Being different on the show often means a violent death, yet he makes the distinction that not all difference is equal. White characters are given the chance to change, while minority characters are not.

The evolution of white characters are major plot points in the narratives, however most black, Asian American, or Latinx characters are portrayed as two-dimensional and static. Like Jim in *28 Days Later*, Carol from *The Walking Dead* radically transforms from weak and vulnerable to a fierce leader. *Snowpiercer's* Curtis and *Land of the Dead's* Riley journey from self-interested individuals to altruistic idealists. A brief look at the black and Latinx characters reveals disparate treatment within the narratives examined here. In *Land of the Dead*, Big Daddy starts and ends as a zombie, while Cholo is as driven by self interest in the first scene as in the last. On *The Walking Dead*, T-Dog and Tyreese never develop much beyond their initial

representations as good natured but unreliable supporting characters. Similar to *Buffy*'s monsters, the men are offered no redemption and no future, instead doomed to suffer "the ultimate form of marginalization" – death (Ono, 2000, p. 164). As accessories, survival for these men and women is tied to their usefulness in developing the white characters.

Conclusion

Creating an image of diversity, the apocalypse narratives in this chapter mask problematic representations of race through racially diverse casting. These worlds, as bleak as they may be, offer the promise of a post-racial utopia if only people can survive long enough to rebuild. By minimizing racial difference and emphasizing the power of collaboration, the narratives try to show that race need not matter. Racist characters are disciplined and the protagonists, flanked by racially diverse casts, stand firmly on the side of progress. Yet, counter to progressive storylines are the troubling representations re-producing familiar racist representations and the assumptions they draw inspiration from. This duality is made possible by the post-racial strategies diverting attention from problematic representations of race. As an ideology, post-race assumes "inequality is at an end" (Joseph, 2009, p. 240) and race no longer matters (Johnson Thornton, 2011, p. 425). Race becomes just another attribute, stripped of its historical and political significance. Within narratives that disaffirm racial difference, attention is diverted, leaving problematic images unexamined. The media sites discussed here either attempt to elide issues of race, for example relying on the diversity of the cast, or use racist images to support an anti-racist message. In the end, the series and films undermine their progressive promise in a reproduction of the racist status quo.

CHAPTER THREE

FRAMING MOTHERHOOD

Theoretical Intervention and Focus

Reinforcing post-feminist subtexts in my media sites, survival for women is predicated on gendered performances. Not relegated to the role of helpless victim, the women fight as fiercely as the men. However, women need to have markedly different skills than the men to survive. For women, survival is often predicated on their ability to perform within traditional notions of womanhood, specifically, as mother or mate. As determined survivors, strength and skill define the women discussed in this chapter. Through their relationship to maternity, women are represented as good collaborators if they willingly and ably accept and adapt to motherhood. Women who fail to embrace motherhood go against the neo-liberal definition of collaboration, undermining the survivor group's ability to remain cohesive. Such women are disciplined through ostracization, exile, or death. This chapter discusses two post-feminist frames linking survival with gender specific forms of collaboration: The Final Mother is an example of a successful collaborator due to her embrace of motherhood, while the Errant Mother struggles to properly collaborate through her failure to perform as mother. The following pages explore the Final Mother through Selena in *28 Days Later*, Yona in *Snowpiercer*, and Ana of *Dawn of the Dead*. The example of Errant Mother is detailed primarily through *The Walking Dead* characters Carol and Lori, while I explore Kee's character in *Children of Men* as a variant of the Errant Mother.

My work understands post-feminism as a rhetorical strategy appropriating, undermining, and capitalizing on aspects of feminism to mark feminism as unnecessary. As an anti-feminist response that is more nuanced than backlash, post-feminism incorporates elements of feminism to subvert these (McRobbie, 2008) while asserting the irrelevance of feminism in contemporary society (Projansky, 2001, p. 86). Post-feminism assumes feminism has run its course, outliving its usefulness once equality was (supposedly) achieved (McRobbie, 2014). Importantly for this chapter, post-feminism, “is reliant upon staid and what are often assumed to be biologically-based performances or hyper-signifiers of heterosexuality, **femininity**, and **maternity**... [emphasis added]” (Joseph, 2009, p. 241). In other words, post-feminism not only assumes the feminine is inseparable from gender, but also there exists an essential notion of femininity. Survival often follows from performances bringing together femininity and maternity. These stories are cautionary tales privileging a regressive notion of womanhood, centering a woman’s worth on her suitability as mother or heterosexual romantic object. Women who align more with traditional masculinity, for example, who are more physically adept, independent, or who repress emotion, face two outcomes within the narrative. Over the course of each narrative they either transition towards more traditionally feminine roles (mothers), or are punished through exile or death for not transitioning to these roles. The examples that follow explore how even though women display solid skills as survivors, their identities are tied to traditionally gendered notions of womanhood – seeing motherhood as a social responsibility for women and assuming that women are inherently and primarily maternal beings (de Marneffe, 2009; Rich, 1995).

Performing motherhood, a defining characteristic driving the development of the women discussed in this chapter, frequently correlates with the likelihood they will survive. This chapter examines two ways of framing women through representations of motherhood, especially those

which conflate womanhood with motherhood (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 1995). The first is a way of using motherhood to feminize women survivors through an archetype I call the “Final Mother.” This term borrows from Carol Clover’s (1987) “Final Girl” and updates it for the post-feminist context of my apocalyptic media. The Final Girl, so called because she is often the last woman alive in her films, becomes the hero through symbolic masculinization. Initially identified in slasher films, the Final Girl finds power through her masculinized femininity. According to Clover, the Final Girl is “not fully feminine” compared to the other women in her film because she is boyish, less sexual, and demonstrates more practical skills (Clover, p.204, 1987). While traditional readings of the slasher genre suggest a male-centered identification with the (often male) murderer, Clover subverts this. For Clover (1987), the predominately male audience identifies with a woman, and by extension the feminine attribute of abject terror, without risk to their own identity (p. 212).

Similarly, the Final Mother character begins from a less traditionally feminine frame. She is a skilled fighter, independent by nature, and dresses in gender neutral or masculine clothes. The transition to femininity for the Final Mother often occurs with the introduction of a romantic or family oriented storyline. Abandoning self-centered or independent behavior, the women embrace their role as mother (through pregnancy or adoption). The second framing uses women who fail to properly perform as mother to construct an unsympathetic image of womanhood, which I call “Errant Mothers.” Though represented as well meaning, the Errant Mother ultimately fails because of her choices; namely the desire to contribute beyond simply rearing her children. I chose the term “errant” for a few reasons. The term denotes “wrong” behavior, but with a sense of deviation or erring, rather than malice (“Errant, adj. (and n.),” 2016). Errant Mothers act as post-feminist warnings, both as foils to “good” mothers, and showing the

consequences of a failure to properly perform as mother. As a point of clarification, the Errant Mothers do not set out to do harm to their children, but rather are presented as unable to protect their children. Second, I draw inspiration from Suzanna Walters and Laura Harrison's (2014) "Aberrant Mothers." Walters and Harrison take issue with the common framing of motherhood in contemporary media which polarizes mothers as either "good" or "bad."

Examining counter representations of mothers – women who are neither idealized successes or monstrous failures – Walters and Harrison's (2014) work finds fictional mothers increasingly operating between extremes (p. 40). Rather than ashamed of their mothering style, Aberrant Mothers are represented as "unapologetically non-normative in their maternal functioning" (p. 38). Two of the authors' examples come from successful subscription cable series. Nancy Botwin (*Weeds*) juggles motherhood with running a marijuana empire and Jackie (*Nurse Jackie*) struggles to balance her career, prescription drug addiction, and raising children. Yet Walters and Harrison argue that categorizing women as simply, "sacrificial saints and demonic destroyers" (p. 51) proves increasingly difficult. Nancy and Jackie directly challenge the "new momism" frame. As a media construct, new momism is an idealized version of what a good mom should be (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). A portion of their definition is relevant to my work on Errant Mothers, "a remotely decent mother... has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being 24/7, to her children" (Douglas & Michael, 2004, p.4). As I will show, the Errant Mother represents a return to a rigid embrace of traditionalism; for example, narratives reward good mothers with survival and discipline bad ones with death. Intensifying the risks and punishments for poor mothering, an Errant Mother faces death or exile. Alternatively, for Final Mothers, the key to survival comes through a devotion to family over the self. Emerging from this alternate performance of motherhood is a

neo-liberal script conflating womanhood with motherhood. The narratives show successful survivors as those who collaborate properly by embracing maternity. The implication for women unwilling or unable to embrace traditional norms of motherhood is to remain on the periphery of the narrative.

The Final Mother

Motherhood is central for many women fighting for survival in apocalyptic media. In post-feminist representations of action heroes, the women of this section are nearly equal to their male counterparts in every way, yet the women ultimately fail due to gendered based shortcomings. One limitation appears as an update of Carol Clover's Final Girl archetype. As a concept, the Final Girl troubles the notion that horror is simply a male centered genre: for men, by men, and most importantly from a male perspective. Looking at horror, specifically slasher films popularized in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Clover (1987) complicates traditional readings of the films. Clover asserts audiences are encouraged to not only root for, but also identify with the main female protagonist. Mentioned earlier, the Final Girl more boyish and skillful than the other women in her film. More observant, practical, and skillful than the film's other women, importantly the Final Girl is also less sexual (p. 204). When the violence begins, the final girls are in constant flight, becoming "abject terror personified" (p. 201). With no escape, survival depends on a symbolic transition: phallicization. As a killer murders everyone around her, the final girl fights for her life with a piercing weapon (for example a knife or coat hanger). Clover notes that the weapons act as a symbolic phallus. In her primary example, Clover points to the character Laurie in *Halloween* who subdues her attacker by stabbing him in the eye with a straightened coat hanger (p. 202). Clover asserts survival is possible through a

reconstitution of self “as masculine” by adopting a symbolic phallus (coat hanger) and violently penetrating her attacker. This temporary transition from feminine to masculine, through the act of penetration, allows for a return to normality, marking the end of the horror (p. 211).

Moreover, Clover’s reading complicates specific representations of women who are no longer relegated to hapless victims, instead they become active participants in their own survival.

Building on Clover’s work, I use the Final Girl to discuss how motherhood functions for women in *Snowpiercer*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *28 Days Later*, and *The Walking Dead*. These Final Girls are perhaps more fittingly called “Final Mothers.” Updating this term allows me to show how media depict motherhood through post-feminist frames to reassert traditional representations of womanhood, particularly, through narratives representing motherhood as an essential attribute of women. If the Final Girl triumphs (survives) through phallicization and penetration (her weapon through the murderer’s body), Final Mothers do so through an inversion of the masculine-to-feminine path described by Clover. The Final Mother begins phallicized, for example, Selena’s weapon of choice is the phallic machete. Survival for the Final Mother depends on feminization through de-phallicization: by being penetrated either physically through intercourse or metaphorically by assuming the role of mother. In the case of women who enter the narrative as mothers, the assumption is they have already been “penetrated” and any de-phallicization has already taken place. Though this inversion serves the same purpose as the final girl’s phallicization, both are ways to resolve narrative tension *through* the bodies of women, the Final Mother comes with post-feminist ideological baggage. Specifically, the Final Mother both draws from and subverts the *image* of power tied to the Final Girl trope when her power to survive is predicated not on guile, physical prowess, or intellect, but on her successful performance as mother.

As the Final Mother in the 2002 film *28 Days Later*, Selena (black) survives by transitioning from action hero to surrogate mother. Set in contemporary England, a viral outbreak (the Rage virus) ravages the country. Causing its victims to suffer from uncontrollable violence, the infected are not zombies, but zombie-like rabid humans. Identifiable by their body spasms and bloody eyes, the infected attack all non-infected with extreme violence. From the outset, Selena is presented as cold, strong, and masculine. She shows little emotion, often reminding others that sentimentality will only get in the way of survival. She wears jeans and a trench coat, her hair is cropped short, and she is almost never without her signature weapon – a large machete. The film first introduces Selena as she and fellow survivor Mark (white) save Jim (white), the main protagonist of the film. Because Jim was in a coma when the apocalypse began, he is only now coming to terms with the scope and breadth of the current situation. Where Jim is emotional and confused, Selena is callous and logical. When a neighbor infected with the virus attacks the group, Selena kills him and quickly turns her attention to Jim. She points her machete at him, asking, “Were you bitten?” As he struggles to answer, she sternly asks again. The moment she realizes infected blood covers Mark’s open wound, she hacks him to death. She then turns to Jim, coldly directing him to “Get that cleaned off.” In the following scene, Selena continues to show her detachment by admonishing Jim for his apparent lack of resolve. She explains if someone becomes infected, whether an old friend or close relative, the person needs to be killed in seconds or they will infect you. She drives this sentiment home by promising Jim that if he is ever infected she will kill him in a heartbeat. As he attempts to process this information, Selena mocks both Mark (now deceased) and Jim for their sentimentality. Telling Jim that Mark was full of foolish plans before he died, she asks him if he has any plans of his own, like curing the world, or “Do you just want to fall in love and fuck?” Before he can answer

she snaps, “Plans are pointless. Staying alive is as good as it gets.” Ridiculing the men, this conversation frames Selena as pragmatic and unsentimental. This scene closes when Jim notices a light in an apartment block, leading the two to investigate. There Jim and Selena meet father and daughter (Frank and Hannah), with whom they form a small band of survivors.

The following scenes detail a transformation in Selena sparked by a series of attempted sexual assaults. Sarah Projansky (2001) details how film “Incorporate[s] rape or the threat of rape specifically to produce spectatorial anxiety often [to] resolve that anxiety through an independent woman character who triumphs in the end” (p. 97). For Selena, triumph comes in the form of shedding her loner persona and starting a family. Hearing a radio broadcast promising shelter and protection, Selena, Hannah, Frank, and Jim leave London in search of the source. On their journey, Hannah’s father Frank is infected. The soldiers responsible for the broadcast find the group, killing the infected Frank. Escorting Selena and the others, they arrive at the military base of operations (an abandoned country estate). Shortly after, a group of infected attack the estate. After defeating the infected, Corporal Mitchell (white) and a few other soldiers return to the Manor’s main hall. Noticing Selena and Jim in the hall, Mitchell and his comrades begin mocking them. Mitchell figuratively castrates Selena by stealing her symbolic phallus, the machete. Taunting her he says, “Listen sweetheart, you ain’t going to be needing this anymore, eh?” While the rest of the group leers and cheers him on, he tries the machete on for size holding it to his crotch emulating an erect penis, telling her, “If you want to get your hands on a really big chopper just come and see me.” Selena responds “Fuck you,” lunging at Mitchell. Someone in the group yells, “that’s an offer Mitch!” Mitchell moves in, picking her up against her will. Soldiers quickly knock Jim to the ground as he attempts to intervene. The precariousness of Selena’s situation becomes clear; she is weaponless, outnumbered, and her

only ally cannot help. While this scene previews the violent reality the soldiers offer, gang rape, it also marks a major transition for Selena. For the first time she is unable to protect herself or her group against an attack. Stepping in to restore order, Major West breaks up the attempted rape. Asserting his authority, he barks orders at his men before giving Selena her machete back. Offering Jim a drink, the two leave to speak privately. Alone with Jim, West explains the only thing missing for his men is, “a future.” Confessing his men have lost hope, the radio broadcast was meant to attract other survivors, specifically women. They are needed not only for repopulation but to provide the men with hope in the form of sexual diversions. West continues, “I promised them women.” For West and his soldiers, a woman’s value is in her use as sexual object. When Jim refuses to allow the soldiers to rape the women, Major West leaves him to die in the woods outside the estate.

After Jim’s exile, soldiers threaten Selena with rape for the second time. Major West orders Selena and Hannah to change into dresses in preparation for their sexual assaults. In these scenes Selena becomes less guarded with Hannah, taking up a maternal persona for the first time. Recognizing the grimness of the situation, Selena shields Hannah from the events as they unfold. As Hannah screams and fights the men undressing them, Selena trades bravado for serenity, speaking to Hannah in calm and assured whispers. Selena convinces the soldiers to let the women change alone. Knowing she cannot stop the attacks, Selena does what she can, giving Hannah a mixture of pills to dull the pain and “help her forget” the impending rape. The threat of rape (a common tactic to develop women characters in film) catalyzes Selena’s transition from masculine hero to Final Mother.

Projansky (2001) argues a variety of post-feminist contexts use rape as narrative devices which prompt character development. Violent events mark a turn in the narrative that “help

women ‘have it all’ (independence *and* family)” (p. 97) by realizing their “latent independent identity” (p. 100). In the media examples Projansky cites, the crisis of rape is transformative, enabling women to protect their families in ways impossible before. The women of *Snowpiercer*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *28 Days Later*, and *The Walking Dead* are independent women represented as *in need* of a family. Both sets of examples, use rape to reinforce a post-feminist notion that a woman’s worth is bound to her “relationships to family” (p. 94). For Selena, an attempted rape scene is a pivotal turning point weakening her and elevating Jim to his role as savior. As the women wait to be raped, the infected attack the estate again. Recognizing their chance to escape, Selena grabs a listless Hannah. Before the women can get away, Mitchell (Selena’s would be rapist) and another soldier recapture the women. During the confusion caused by the attack, Mitchell drags Selena into a room, forcing her into an intimately violent choke hold. Pressed against her, he reminds her of his intention to rape her, telling Selena not to worry because afterwards he will get her to safety where they will, “live happily ever after.” Jim bursts into the room and attacks Mitchell with his bare hands so violently that Jim is indistinguishable from an infected person. Though Jim is not infected, he is covered in blood, non-verbal, extremely violent towards Mitchell. A short struggle ends with Jim, covered in blood, gouging Mitchell’s eyes out with his thumbs. In the aftermath, Jim moves towards a visibly distressed Selena. She grabs her machete and moves to kill Jim as she promised she would earlier (“If it [infection] happens to you, I’ll do it in a heartbeat”). Frozen by indecision, she stands shaking in the corner, holding her machete upright. When Jim rushes towards her she pulls the machete back to strike but pauses. Seeing Jim’s white (healthy) eyes, she realizes he is not infected. Remarking on her indecision he says, “That was longer than a heartbeat.” Dropping her machete, Selena sobs while passionately kissing Jim.

Following Jim and Selena's reunion, the film's epilogue shows Jim, Selena, and Hannah in the quiet countryside. Safely within the domestic realm of their new home, the survivors are finally out of danger and living as a family. Sitting at a sewing machine, Selena repurposes the dress from her attempted rape scene. Jim joins her, commenting, "You looked alright in [the dress] you know." She smiles as Hannah interrupts to tell them a jet is flying overhead. The three run out to grab a large sign made out of fabric reading "Hello." The film ends with the happy family (father, daughter, and Final Mother) smiling, jumping, and laughing. Contradicting Selena's earlier argument that happiness is obsolete and self-preservation is as good as it gets, everyone seems to live their happily ever after. The transformative power of motherhood allows the narrative tension to be resolved. Through Motherhood, Selena abandons her unfeminine attributes, namely emotional distance, strength, and independence. Selena's character demonstrates how the performative aspect of motherhood supplements the biological. While one's ability to have children is still important, it is not absolutely essential within the narratives. Here, motherhood is not premised on biology, but on her ability to perform the functions of motherhood, namely to protect and nurture.

Selena's transition into the domestic reflects a particular treatment of women in the media where strong, independent women are shown as undesirable, while fragile and passive women deserve men's love and attention (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 1995, p. 110). Of note is the composition of this family, with Selena becoming Hannah's surrogate mother. Selena represents a pattern which acknowledges the sexuality of black women in carefully constructed ways. Feminized through virtual castration, Selena becomes a mother through non-sexual means. Thus, Selena as a black woman is made non-threatening not unlike the racist Mammy archetype. Her feminization is asexual but productive as she performs the labor of being a mother. Adding

to a history of ideological constructions of black womanhood, what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms “controlling images,” Selena is a post-feminist re-imagining of a black mother. One fitting within the paradigm of heteronormative bonding, but without threatening the primacy of white womanhood.

The Final Mother appears in the 2013 science fiction film *Snowpiercer*, in the form of Yona (Asian). Set in the near future, the film shows almost all life on Earth has been wiped out by a failed attempt to combat rising global temperatures. Earth is a frozen wasteland. The surviving humans live on a luxury train circling the globe in perpetuity. A tale of class inequity, the narrative focuses on the “tail dwellers” (the underclass living in the tail section of the train) as they revolt against the oppressive conditions imposed upon them by the residents of the front of the train living in opulence. The film’s villain, Wilford (white), is the train’s inventor turned ruler. Maintaining order through his ruthless security forces, Wilford periodically kidnaps children from the tail of the train, the most recent kidnapping sets off the film’s action. The film’s protagonist, a tail dweller named Curtis (white), uses the latest abduction to start a revolt. As part of his plan to liberate the train, he wakes the train’s former head of security Nam (Asian), and his daughter Yona, from cryogenic stasis. Their time asleep was a punishment for their addiction to a drug called Kronol. As the former security head, only Nam can override the security doors separating the train cars. In exchange for his expertise Nam demands drugs for Yona and himself. Unlike her father, Yona appears to be an unskilled drug addict. Upon meeting her, Curtis looks Yona up and down, asking, “She’s an addict too?” The image of Yona as a selfish and hedonistic addict follows her throughout the film. In two separate scenes the camera frames her face in high angle shots while she asks, “Kronol?” before greedily snatching the drug out of Curtis’ hand. And as they make their way through the luxury cars, she steals drugs

(Kronol) wherever she can find them. Unlike the more nobly framed intentions of the other tail-dwellers (fighting their way to the front to save the kidnapped children), Yona's push forward is in search of more drugs.

After Curtis and Nam come to an agreement, the tail dwellers continue their journey to free the kidnapped children and overtake the train. What follows is a series of bloody battles where most of the tail dwellers die. The only three to survive the trip to the front of the train are Yona, Nam, and Curtis. Before opening the final security door, Nam places a bomb on the train's wall. High and drunk, Yona passes out and loses her weapon. Awakening, as an angry mob comes upon them, she is powerless to help. After her father rushes in, she ineffectually tries to defend him with a handgun, missing every shot. While she and her father face the mob, the film's villain (Wilford) reveals the kidnapped children are forced to work inside the train's engine, maintaining it. Using her clairvoyance, Yona realizes the child kidnapped at the beginning of the film (Timmy, black) remains trapped in a panel under her feet. Curtis and Yona work together, freeing Timmy. Notably, the boy's mother was killed during the revolt, orphaning him. Finally, Yona lights the bomb's fuse. In the seconds before the bomb explodes, Yona runs to Timmy, embracing him to protect him from the blast. This action will ensure Yona and Timmy's survival. The two embrace tightly as Curtis and Nam put their arms around Yona and Timmy. The explosion causes an avalanche from the surrounding mountains, destroying most of the train and killing its inhabitants, save Yona and Timmy.

Yona, apparently no longer gripped by addiction, becomes Timmy's guardian. For most of the film others care for Yona: in the final four minutes Yona emerges as both mother and survivor. Though more abbreviated than Selena's transition, Yona's survival coincides with her evolution to surrogate mother when she trades addiction for motherhood. The implication is that

her addiction and lack of skill (she was born on the train and spent part of that time in stasis) is easily resolved when she accepts her role as mother. Re-fashioning an adult jacket and pair of snow boots to fit a child perfectly, she takes Timmy's hand, leading him into the snow. Surveying the area, Yona catches her breath as Timmy runs ahead. Although the Earth remains covered in snow, and the other occupants of the train (presumably the last humans on the planet) died in the fiery crash, the film still ends with a hopeful nod; Yona takes Timmy's hand and the two stare in amazement at the unexpected sight of a Polar Bear looking down from a mountain. Embracing her role as mother, it would seem, is all Yona needs to survive.

Representations of motherhood are complicated in the 2004 horror film *Dawn of the Dead*. Ana, the film's protagonist, represents a special case of the Final Mother whose transition never takes shape, ultimately resulting in her death and the deaths of her followers. The film continually frames Ana (white) in relation to motherhood, although never *as* a mother. Throughout the film, Ana is strong, independent, and physically capable. Similar to Selena, Ana is phallicized through these traits. In contrast to other women who dress more femininely (pink blouses, dresses, or lingerie), Ana's dress is often more masculine in comparison, for example scrub bottoms, tank-tops, or jeans. She is sure of herself and her actions, attributes serving both her and her survivor group well. Ana is a nurse, an occupation traditionally associated with the feminine and the maternal. Though she has no children of her own, one of the first scenes in the film is a friendly exchange between her and a neighborhood child Vivian (white), as Ana returns home to her husband. A short time later, the now zombified Vivian attacks the couple in their bedroom. After Vivian attacks Ana's husband, Ana throws the child into the hallway and secures the door. This scene marks the first symbolic positioning of Ana related to motherhood.

Throughout the film, most of Ana's interactions with children are violent. This positioning continues through another telling scene with fellow survivor Luda (white) whose entire performance has centered on her pregnancy. Dying during childbirth, her husband (Andre, black) delivers the child, born a zombie. Discovering the child, another survivor, Norma (white), draws her gun to kill it. Andre shoots first, hitting Norma. The remaining survivors rush in, only to find Norma dying. A young man named Terry prepares to shoot Norma (injured but not yet a zombie), but Ana tells him there is no need since she wasn't bitten. The group then discovers the zombie baby. Terry was willing to kill Norma seconds prior, yet unable to shoot the zombie-child. Ana however, shoots the child without a second thought. This scene layers images of Ana as not maternal through another violent interaction with a child. According to the neo-liberal ethos of collaboration women appear to transcend gendered expectations but to be successful they must ultimately perform as either mother or mate – Ana does neither.

Within the Final Mother trope, Ana's feminization would begin with a successful coupling leading to a family. Indeed, Ana begins a romantic relationship with another survivor, Michael. In earlier scenes, the other coupled survivors are shown cuddling (Nicole and Terry, Andre and Luda) or having sex (Steve and Monica). However, Ana and Michel never share the same intimacy. The most affectionate moment occurs when they kiss, one hour and forty minutes into the film. Breaking from the Final Mother trope, for example compared to Selena and Jim in *28 Days Later*, Ana's feminization will never take place and Michael remains uncharacteristically subservient for a horror film hero. The moment before their kiss Michael shows off the modifications he has made to a truck. When Ana jokes "that might be the most romantic thing I've ever seen," Michael loses his joyful tone, defeated (looking down, shoulders slumped) he replies, "I'm trying here." In response, Ana initiates a kiss and the scene closes.

Following their kiss, the survivors leave the mall, hoping to escape to a nearby island. One of the men in their group owns a boat docked at a nearby marina. When the group arrives at the boat, Michael reveals a zombie bite, telling Ana he cannot go with her. Ana and the others leave Michael behind to kill himself. With Michael's death, Ana has run out of chances to perform as mate or Final Mother. Consistent with the treatment of women in the apocalypses discussed here, she also dies. Unlike Selena or Yona, Ana never transitions into the maternal or domestic, ultimately disciplined through death.

Errant Mothers

Much like Selena and Yona, survival and motherhood are intertwined for *The Walking Dead's* Lori. The show frames Lori, my first example of Errant Mother, unsympathetically as she stumbles through raising a child in the apocalypse. Lori is the wife of the show's main protagonist Rick, as well as the mother of their son Carl. Used as a counter-image of a good (read: perfect) mother, Lori's character centers on her choices as a mother. According to the narrative, a good mother is available and accessible, and someone who always puts her child (and their safety) first. And above all, a good mother does not make mistakes. For example, the series presents Michonne's character as a good mother even though her child was killed (the series blames her husband). Through flashbacks Michonne is shown as loving and attentive to her boy and other characters comment positively about Michonne as mother. For instance, in season five Rick remarks twice about Michonne's maternal skills and asks her to step in as Carl's surrogate mother (several seasons after Lori's death). Entertainment Weekly's Darren Franich (2015) notes, Lori (white), "...made mistakes and was always punished for those mistakes." Lori finds navigating the roles of wife and mother as dangerous as surviving in the apocalypse. Her

missteps include a failure to embrace motherhood when she considers an abortion, and keeping her children safe. An example detailed below is a major storyline in season two: centered on Lori's struggle with her pregnancy it involves several characters scolding or shaming her for contemplating an abortion. Lori's storylines focus on her ability to perform the role of wife and mother. The first episode reveals her (wrong) assumption that Rick is dead. In Rick's absence, she starts a romantic relationship with his work partner, Shane (white). Motherhood is immediately used to frame her in the first episode of the series; Storming away after an argument with the group, Lori retreats to her tent. When Shane catches up he admonishes her for running off "half-cocked" in front of Carl. He reminds her the boy just lost his father and cannot lose her as well. Lori bites her lip and whispers, "I'm a good mom." This self-assurance solidifies the series' primary framing of Lori as mother and her subsequent struggles to prove she is indeed a good mom. Rather than confirming her statement, Shane ignores Lori's protest. Instead he repeats his demand for acquiescence. This exchange represents a pattern: Lori is vocal in her assertions that she is a good mother while other characters ignore or (in later seasons) outright challenge her pronouncements. As an Errant Mother, she shows a desire to be a good parent, attempting to protect her child, but in the end, failing. This is essential to Errant Mothers; they try but continually fail.

When Rick returns alive in episode two, Lori breaks off her relationship with Shane and immediately re-establishes her nuclear family. Quickly positioned as her husband's staunchest supporter, she now presents as someone who will do anything to protect her family. However, the narrative calls her ability to properly perform as mother and wife into question almost immediately. Lori's trouble in keeping track of her son quickly became a running joke with fans and the press (Chaney, 2012). One of the first instances occurs in episode three of season one.

Telling Carl to stay in site of another survivor, Dale, she leaves the boy while she completes some chores. Several scenes later, Carl wanders off, leaving Lori to search the camp for him. The moments, where Carl disappears leaving Lori to ask “Where’s Carl?” occur regularly, but without consequence – Carl is always safe. In contrast to previous episodes where Lori acts cautious and protective (albeit forgetful), in the second episode of season two she relents to Carl’s requests to join the adults on a search. When he is shot, his near death calls into question her ability to protect Carl.

In the sixth episode of season two, Lori asks for some items from a scavenging run. Glenn (another survivor) quietly returns with her request: a bottle of abortion pills. Handing her something extra – prenatal vitamins, he says to Lori, “I can’t tell you what to do, I could never tell you something like that, but your... *choice*, maybe you shouldn’t make it alone.” Glenn’s urging reveals a post-feminist strategy of mobilizing choice as ideological cue, privileging a normalized view of family (Probyn, 1993, p. 283) by framing Lori’s struggles in a way that suggests she requires a man (her husband) to help her come to the “right” decision. By bringing the vitamins to her, Glenn clearly feels he has a responsibility to sway her. The series reinforces the notion that men have duty to guide (read: tell) Lori because only men (Glenn, Dale, and Rick) question her decision during the episode. She only asked for the abortion pills, so when he hands her the prenatal vitamins she sighs, “That’s a hell of a choice.” Lori’s choice (to have or not have the child) is an example of what Elspeth Probyn (1993) calls “choiceoisie.” Referring to a post-feminist discursive strategy, choiceoisie appropriates aspects of feminism to undermine these, in this case the ability to choose. According to Probyn, having choice is not an end unto itself, understanding what those choices offer is also significant. Focusing on the benefit of having a choice, risks missing the value propositions imbued in those limited choices. For

example, presented with a choice between a career or having children, the structure of the choice not only precludes other choices, for example having both, it also obscures the factors making such a choice so difficult. In the abortion pill episode, Lori has three conversations about her pregnancy, all with men. Lori mentions several times that she cannot bear to bring a child into the apocalypse. The men all respond similarly, either asking her about her husband's opinion or admonishing her for questioning the pregnancy. In one exchange, Dale tells her, "you can't think like that." Through Lori's struggle to continue or terminate the pregnancy, the narrative depicts a particular interpretation of what makes a good wife and mother. Throughout the episode men continually tell Lori she is wrong. It is only when she acquiesces (sobbing and apologizing) during her final conversation with Rick does interpersonal drama of the episode conclude. This framing will continually be reinforced through storylines featuring Lori as an imperfect and apologetic mother. Her fitness as a parent is under constant scrutiny by her husband and other survivors. Ultimately, Lori's choice is not between whether to remain pregnant or terminate the pregnancy. It is to *accept* the pregnancy or not. To accept is to collaborate within the neo-liberal model. When Lori accepts she fulfils the primary duty of women in this frame: her contribution is motherhood. Two thirds through the episodes Lori seemingly makes the other choice (abortion), swallowing every pill in the blister packs in an attempt to not only kill her unborn child, but herself. She quickly regrets her decision, running to a pasture to throw up. Moments later, Rick confronts her, "Is there something you need to tell me?" Telling him she vomited the pills, he continues to press her. She pushes back, "You want me to bring a baby into this? We can't protect the son we already have!" As their conversation goes on, she protests, but finally acquiesces to having the baby. Presenting Lori as conflicted about bringing a child into the apocalypse, this scene also reinforces the series frame of Lori as a bad mother. In the world of

The Walking Dead, giving birth to a child is fraught with risks, both during pregnancy and beyond. To name a few, Lori will be a less effective fighter as the pregnancy progresses, there is no medical support for her, and after childbirth a baby's cries will attract the attention of zombies putting everyone in danger. However, the antagonistic reactions of the men towards Lori's choice (the argument with Rick, admonishing by Dale, and Glenn's guilt trip), coupled with Lori's final admission that she was wrong, reveal the series' position that the risks of having a child are irrelevant – Lori should welcome her pregnancy and child. Taken as a whole, the episode builds a case for Lori as a bad mother to her unborn child through her interactions with other characters. Moreover, by framing the choice as her own time and again, the series presents Lori as a bad collaborator; within a neo-liberal framework focusing responsibility for intragroup harmony (thus survival) on the individual, Lori's arguments are sources of conflict creating discord. After each of the conversations above, and one additional exchange with another survivor (Maggie berates Lori for putting others in danger to find the morning after pills), Lori appears defeated. She becomes speechless after her exchanges with Glenn and Maggie, in both cases the camera remains fixed on her in silence before cutting to the next scene. After failing to convince Dale of the immorality of having a child in the apocalypse, she storms off in tears. And in the final exchange, moments after Rick screams at Lori about the attempted abortion, she abandons her arguments and becomes tearfully apologetic. Rick says, "Do you really think I'd make you have a baby you don't want?" Agreeing he would not, the series frames her decision to keep the baby as her own. This scene is the culmination of the series' post-feminist framing of Lori. By showing Lori as having choice over her pregnancy, when in fact there is only the appearance of options, is Lori's form of choiceoisie; Lori seems to have power to make decisions about her body but those around her will continue to wear her down until she acknowledges her

errors and conforms. In the end her only choice was to agree with the men who have already chosen for her. Moreover, when Lori *chooses* to keep her baby, the series (temporarily) reframes Lori as a good (neo-liberal) collaborator: Lori performs in the prescribed way, as a woman who (finally) behaves like a good, that is, willing mother.

After fighting the pregnancy because she morally objected to bringing a child into the apocalypse, Lori finally acquiesces only to be met with death. Representing a traditionalist view equating womanhood and motherhood (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 1995, p. 32), Lori's death reveals the show's conflation of woman as mother, her identity and worth tied to her maternal abilities, whether 'good' or 'bad.' Punished for her failures as Errant Mother, Lori suffers the ultimate disciplining through her death. Lori verbalizes the show's framing of her as mother when she declares, "I'm not winning any mother of the year awards." Season three follows the disintegration of her family. Rick grows resentful when Lori again expresses fear of carrying the baby to term. Eventually her son Carl grows closer with his father. Distancing himself from Lori, their onscreen interactions grow increasingly infrequent and short. For example, their exchange in season three episode two epitomizes their relationship when Carl ends their short interaction snapping at her, "Get off my back" and storming off. Even after Lori has made the right choice by embracing her duty to carry her child to term, the narrative continues to focus on her struggles to embrace her role as mother. For example, when she fails to embody the expectations of a good mother. Later in season three, Lori and Rick argue again after she expresses second thoughts about carrying the baby – this time out of fear of childbirth complications. One episode after her mother of the year comment she dies; after a crude cesarean section leaves her immobile a zombie attacks and kills her. Even in death the series continues to connect Lori with motherhood. In a gruesome scene Rick tracks down the zombie that ate Lori. Laying against a wall, the

zombie shows a belly apparently engorged from eating Lori. This is notable because the series has never previously (or subsequently) shown a zombie physically full from feeding. When Rick approaches he shoots the zombie in the head, ending any threat the monster might pose. This type of revenge attack is not unique to the series; often emotional characters will kill a zombie who has killed another survivor. However, Rick's response is remarkable because of his attack's specificity: Rick screams as he furiously stabs the zombie's belly repeatedly. This act of rage, directed only at the zombie's distended belly, specifically invokes images of Lori as pregnant. Given that the zombie is dead, the monster appears as a surrogate for Lori. Through the body of Lori's stand-in, Rick expresses his rage in a very personal and targeted way. Thus, metaphorically, Rick kills Lori a second time. By attacking the stomach, his anger seems directed at Lori as mother. The final images of Lori (her death, and her second death at Rick's hands) suggest that even in death Lori cannot escape the series' primary frame for her: mother.

Fellow survivor Carol (white), also of *The Walking Dead*, is also inextricably tied to motherhood. Yet while the series frames Lori as inept, it portrays Carol as a warped reimagining of a mother. Carol and Lori begin their series tenure as mothers and their performances of motherhood shape their character's fates, albeit in divergent ways. Fan reactions to both mothers offer an entry point to their disparate representations. Unlike Lori who was hated by fans (Franich, 2015; Gajewski, 2015), the press refers to Carol as a fan favorite (Taylor, 2016). The divergent reactions are perhaps due to the women's orientation to family. Lori constantly points to her family as her drive. Carol is the inverse; running from family connections, becoming better at killing each season. Carol as Errant Mother is unique given her multiple failures, punishments, and chances at redemption, something not afforded to other mothers on the series. She offers a sustained look (over multiple seasons) at the series' treatment of mothers who

improperly perform. Though her daughter dies early in season two, surrogate relationships ensure Carol's character remains grounded to motherhood throughout the seasons. A conversation during the twelfth episode of season six verbalizes this framing. Revealing her plans to join a raid, Carol and her potential love interest Tobin (white) talk about her skills. When Tobin admits, "You can do things that, that just terrify me" Carol (white) asks, "How do you think I do those things?" Tobin answers confidently, "You're a mom." Those "things" that Carol has done involve killing eighteen people, including a child in her care. Momentarily drawing on the image of mothers as monstrous (Creed, 1986; Kristeva, 1982) destroyers (Walters and Harrison; 2014) his comment is revealed as a compliment when Tobin admits Carol can do things he cannot. Both monstrous and admired, this duality is key to Carol's Errant Mother persona. Carol's evolution to skilled survivor coincides with her embodiment of the Errant Mother. Tobin's reaction, coupled with further examples below, reveal the intricacies Carol's portrayal: Though admired for the survival skills she possesses, her inability to properly perform as mother marks her as a poor neo-liberal collaborator. Her failure to successfully collaborate consistently puts her at risk of ostracization, exile, and death.

During the first season, Carol is a minor character, best described as an abused housewife aping her former life in an apocalyptic setting. She spends much of her onscreen time washing clothes, sewing, cooking, or caring for her daughter Sophia. After zombies kill her daughter she temporarily recedes further into the background. Sophia's death will mark a transition point for Carol in the following season. Her failure to protect her child does not result in the same sort of narrative disciplining as Lori. Instead, Carol is given repeated opportunities throughout the season to perform as a mother, once biologically and then through a series of surrogate relationships. Acting as a post-feminist reminder of the dangers of trying to have it all, Carol's

continued survival and numerous failures coincide with her evolution into an angry, suspicious, and distant character. Slowly she becomes more assertive and independent. By the start of the third season she has a newfound confidence allowing her to become proficient with weapons and speak her mind. As Carol's character evolves, she is still primarily a domestic nurturer. For instance, she volunteers as Lori's midwife, is a caretaker for Judith (Lori and Rick's daughter), and a surrogate mother to two orphaned girls. During a relatively calm time for the survivors, she runs a day care (season three), and later when they settle into a suburban enclave, she takes on the façade of housewife making casseroles and baking cookies for the neighborhood (season six). Yet each of the images also represent a perverse reimagining of Carol as mother. Running a day care in season four's first episode she reads the camp's children stories. Before finishing she directs a child, no more than 8 years old, to take up position as a lookout while Carol reveals a display of knives. Convinced the area is clear, she begins teaching the children "how to hold a knife, how to stab and slash and where to aim for." Moving beyond cooking and cleaning, Carol's nurturing duties include weapons training for pre-teens. Realizing his death is close, the father of two young girls (Lizzie and Mika) implores Carol to look after them as her own. She agrees, caring for them the only way she knows how, training them as fighters and teaching them how to disconnect emotionally. In the following episode, she beams with pride when the girls show promise learning survival skills, yet she responds to their emotional needs with scorn. In one incident she scolds twelve-year-old Lizzie for showing compassion to zombies, "Honey you're weak. You lost your nerve." Later Carol bristles when Lizzie accidentally calls her mom instead of ma'am, coldly admonishing her. This exchange reinforces the series' unsympathetic framing of Carol as anti-maternal. Rather than simply sharing survival skills, Carol's lessons with children are accompanied with bitterness and anger. Carol's interactions are unlike any

other adult-child relationship in the series, most of which are characterized by protectiveness and gentle guidance. Carol on the other hand increasingly speaks to children with disdain and puts them in danger by giving them weapons. As Errant Mother, Carol is presented as broken, missing her maternal instincts. My argument does not assume maternal instincts, but rather Carol's inability to perform in such a way sets her apart from the other mothers of the show. Within the motherhood frame, the series presents Carol unsympathetically through dialogue, for example when explaining his reasons for exiling her Rick explicitly references his children's safety.

Carol's transformation from meek to skilled survivor becomes even more pronounced in a subsequent episode when her role as caretaker expands to include murder. Looking to contain a deadly flu-like outbreak she kills several residents in their sleep. Suspecting Carol's involvement in the murders, Rick confronts her and she reveals she was the murderer. Rick banishes her from the group using his two children as a justification in episode four of the fourth season. Arguing that even if only the four of them survive the outbreak, she is not welcome, "with *my* children... I won't have you there." Instead he leaves her to survive on her own, punishing her as Errant Mother he exiles her before she can harm his kids. Within the narrative logic of the series Carol's actions are not extraordinary, though her treatment is noteworthy. When (similar to Carol) Rick makes violent unilateral decisions for the good of the group his actions are praised, often pointed to as proof of his capability as leader. For example, in the final episode of season two shortly after Rick kills his best friend, Carol questions Rick's leadership. Fellow survivor Daryl defends Rick, calling him a "man of honor." Rick's comments justifying Carol's punishment upon her exile, and the incongruity of his treatment compared to her, are an early example of the series' unsympathetic framing of Carol. By invoking his children as a rationale, he makes Carol's

flawed maternalism primary. Her banishment echoes Lori's story in some ways because both are punished for flawed performances of motherhood.

Carol is unique because instead of being killed off, the series grants her a reprieve. As Errant Mother the series continually draws on Carol as a cautionary example, using her as a counter to a good mother figure. Carol's five-episode banishment ends when she reunites with Lizzie, Mika, and Judith (Rick's daughter), saving them from a zombie attack. This reunion allows Carol a chance at redemption. Throughout the series the various parents (Lori, Rick, Carol) have all remarked that protecting their children is their main priority. Carol, who failed once when Sophia was killed, has another opportunity as mother through her surrogate daughters Mika and Lizzie. Traumatized by the death of her parents and others, Lizzie adopts a relative morality, telling Carol that zombies are just another version of humans. Failing to realize Lizzie's state of mind, Carol repeatedly brushes the child off, calling her "confused." In an attempt to prove to Carol that zombies are simply different, Lizzie stabs her younger sister to death in the fourteenth episode of season four. After discovering the murder, Carol discusses the situation with another survivor, blaming herself for not seeing what Lizzie was becoming. Carol then calmly walks Lizzie out to a field, telling Lizzie she loves her before executing her for murdering Mika. Soon after this Carol reunites with the larger group, her exile over. She is explicitly welcomed back because she was responsible for keeping Judith safe. Carol's return resets her status as Errant Mother.

Embracing motherhood is a marker of successful collaboration for women in the apocalypse. Women who fail to perform motherhood in prescribed ways undermine the neo-liberal form of collaboration depicting success through specific (gendered) roles. In season six, Carol kills another child, again setting her apart from the successful collaborator, further

solidifying her Errant Mother status. During the final episodes of season five, Carol and the others are welcomed into the community of Alexandria. While there, Carol adopts the persona of a mousey housewife, using this image of domesticity to deceive the other residents. This deception works, leading one of the town's children (Sam) to take a liking to her. Hoping for more cookies, Sam follows Carol, catching her breaking into the town's armory. Afraid her cover persona will be revealed, she threatens Sam if he tells anyone, saying, "one morning you'll wake up, and you won't be in your bed. You'll be outside the walls. Far, far away, tied to a tree, and you'll scream and scream because you'll be so afraid." Her words reinforce the series' framing of Carol as scary and un-maternal. This monologue will be directly responsible for Sam's death several episodes later. Carol continues to use fear to control Sam until his death in the ninth episode of season six. In this episode the town has been overrun by zombies. Sam seeks safety, before suddenly freezing. Representing Sam's thoughts, a voice-over of Carol repeats part of her threat to Sam that day in the armory, "The monsters will come, and you won't be able to run away when they come for you. The ones out there. And they will tear you apart and eat you up all while you're still alive." Gripped by fear, Sam stands paralyzed as a group of zombies devour him. In the following episode, Carol bakes another batch of cookies, leaving one at Sam's grave. Returning to her room, she contemplates her time in the apocalypse, writing down every person she has killed in a notebook. As the episode closes, Carol joins Tobin for the conversation where he equates her strength with her identity as a mom. Through her interactions with Sam and his eventual death, the series again frames Carol as unmaternal. Carol subsequently punishes herself by going into exile. Through consistent disciplining, particularly exile, Carol stands as an example of what the series presents as a maternal failure.

Errant No More: Kee as Ideal Mother

Implicating every woman as partially responsible for the apocalypse, the action-thriller *Children of Men* (2006) offers a counter image to the Errant Mother. In the 1992 novel, from which the film got its title, global infertility is caused by the unexplained drop in men's sperm count. By contrast, the film blames the apocalypse on a failure of women's bodies, revealed as a global increase in female infertility and miscarriages. Re-centering the source of catastrophe onto women, the film takes the notion that a woman's primary worth is in her body, specifically her reproductive capacity, to the extreme by revealing women's biological failure as the cause of the apocalypse. Kee (black), a young West African immigrant becomes the first pregnant woman in eighteen years. The film follows the various groups trying to exploit Kee for her pregnancy, and her journey with the film's protagonist Theo (white). Importantly, the film frames Kee as a good mother. That is, a mother who embraces the idea of motherhood and devotes her entire being to her child (Douglas & Michael, 2004). Through her embrace of traditional notions of motherhood, Kee serves as a counter-image to the Errant Mothers. By affirming a post-feminist representation of good women, the film contrasts good women (successful mothers) against bad (or in this case broken) women.

As an immigrant, Kee is a burden to the United Kingdom, where propaganda portrays immigrants as stability threatening criminals. A news clipping reads "all foreigners now illegal." Other news reports describe the stress immigrants are putting on various European governments. They are routinely rounded up and incarcerated in massive internment camps. Several shots show people locked in police cages lining the street. Public service announcements encouraging citizens to report illegal immigrants are broadcast constantly on digital billboards, public transit screens, and television. However, as a pregnant woman Kee transitions from burden to asset,

gaining worth in her capacity as mother. An insurgent group even provides Kee protection from the violent and deadly camps due to her pregnancy. While her status as mother garners her attention and grants her some benefits, she never attempts to exploit her situation. Instead, the film shows her as fiercely protective of her child. When one of her protectors suggests using her child as a symbol, saying “this baby is the flag that could unite us all” Kee responds angrily, “My baby is not a flag!” A few moments later she yells, “No one’s taking my baby!” Kee’s maternal instinct is on display throughout the film. Explaining her feelings when she first realized she was pregnant, Kee admits she thought about committing suicide, until, “the baby kicked... little bastard was *alive*, Me too! I was alive too.” This exchange affirms an understanding conflating womanhood with motherhood (de Marneffe, 2009; Rich, 1995), Kee was not a whole person until she realized she was pregnant. The implication is that a woman’s identity begins and ends at motherhood.

A subsequent scene complicates Kee’s relationship to motherhood by suggesting her fertility is an exploitable resource. Her child, and her labor, are not wholly her own. This scene reveals representations of race and gender come together in remarkable ways. As a black woman the scene is particularly troubling because of the historical exploitation of black women’s labor (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 132). During a stopover at a safe house, Kee requests Theo join her in a barn. Milk cows surround her as she asks Theo, “You know what they do to these cows? They cut off their tits. Only leave four. Four tits fits the machine. It’s wacko. Why not make machines that suck eight titties eh?” She asks for his help to escape. He refuses. Out of desperation, she reveals her pregnancy by opening the front of her dress, exposing her bare breasts and protruding belly. Her pregnancy is a powerful symbol, both politically and as representative of hope. This scene suggests a connection between Kee and the animals because she only becomes valuable (to

Theo) when she reveals she is pregnant. The film makes a clear connection between her role and the role of the cows: their bodies are used for what they can produce. The implication is the unborn child is no more Kee's than the milk belongs to the cow.

Conclusion

Presented in the guise of progressive representations of women (strong, independent, and capable of “kicking ass”) the examples in this chapter ultimately privilege a post-feminist notion of womanhood equated with motherhood. The representations appear progressive by incorporating aspects of feminism while actively undermining them – predicating their survival on their success at traditional gender performances. Constantly proving themselves in combat, after the action subsides women are expected to transition into the domestic world. The narratives present a subtler form of anti-feminism by naturalizing conservative cultural narratives about women. The narratives present a neo-liberal form of collaboration attaching a woman's worth directly to her ability and willingness to perform as a mother. Abandoning the attributes keeping them alive, the Final Mothers find salvation in their embrace of motherhood. Thus a Final Mother represents successful collaboration where women affirm motherhood as an essential trait. Conversely, Errant Mothers serve as disposable cautionary examples of women who try, and fail, to have it all. The journey for each of the characters is unique but the overall pattern remains consistent, revealing a neo-liberal script of what a good (woman) survivor looks like. Time and again the women in post-feminist apocalypses are given the “choice” between performing within traditional gender norms and surviving or fail and face death or exile. The

narrative's post-feminist framework implies feminism has died but cannot recognize its own passing (McRobbie, 2004), much like the zombies in many of these stories.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECTACLES OF FAILURE

Theoretical intervention and Focus

The stories discussed in this study represent women through post-feminist frameworks using images of strength and power to reinforce traditionalist notions of women as weak and powerless. Shown as protectors and leaders, initially the women defy the passive victim roles once reserved for them in the action and horror genres. Confident, skilled, and resilient, the women rise to the same challenges as the men in these stories, dismantling old sexist frameworks –for a time. This chapter focuses on two types of gender based performances which reinforce neo-liberal notions of collaboration for women: *The Glass Coffin* links women’s leadership failures to gender, while the *Weakened Warrior* characters’ apparent strength is circumscribed by gendered limitations. *The Glass Coffin* and *Weakened Warrior* frames use images of strong women to affirm traditional notions linking women with femininity or family, ultimately reinforcing notions of women as weaker or less capable than their male counterparts

My work to understand gender based frames in apocalyptic media builds on Carol Stabile’s (2009) examination of sexist representations in post-millennial superhero movies and television shows. She found that while the stories are increasingly diverse when it comes to race, women are still depicted in traditional, that is subordinate, ways (p. 87). Rather than presented as heroes or partners, women are depicted as vulnerable, and in need of protection. For Stabile, this is due to an inability “to imagine femininity absent vulnerability” (p. 91). Exclusively focused on

the superhero genre, she argues protectors are almost always men, and “the someone in need of protection is invariably female or feminized,” for example, children or the elderly (p. 87). Stabile finds it disturbing that a genre built on imagination cannot envision “women who can protect or need no more protection than men” (p. 91). The savior-protector binary Stabile identifies is destabilized within the apocalypse narratives I discuss in this dissertation. Breaking free from representations of damsels in distress, the stories show women as warriors fighting alongside the men. Recurrently, the women are portrayed as capable of taking care of themselves and protecting other survivors.

The roles of protector and protected are mostly gender neutral in the media sites presented in this chapter, challenging what Stabile categorizes as “traditional protection narratives.” Such narratives take inspiration from the naturalized concept of men as the protectors of others, namely women, children and the elderly (Stabile 2009). In this chapter’s media sites, narratives focusing on collaboration suggests that your role is determined by skill, not gender. This progressiveness is contradictory because, unlike their male counterparts, the strength of the women are circumscribed by moments of gendered vulnerability. For example, the physical toll of pregnancy temporarily hinders the ability of women to protect themselves and others. Though temporary, the instances qualify women’s fortitude relative to the men. The resulting post-feminist representations forefront the women’s strength, while nonetheless limiting that strength. This double move ensures femininity and vulnerability remain intertwined, and the women are what I term “weakened warriors.” This deliberate play on the phrase “week-end warrior” means to combine the temporal sense of the original phrase with a notion of deficiency. The original week-end warrior refers to someone participating in an activity part-time, underscoring the temporary nature of the activity. In this sense, the term suggests survival

is something women only play at. Switching the spelling from week to weak, weakened warrior emphasizes the fact that the women are invariably framed as feeble. This neologism should be understood to play with the ephemerality of depicting women as strong fighters and leaders, gaining and losing their warrior status as the narrative dictates. Responding to images of determined warriors holding their own against zombies and more, these powerful representations of women are undermined by post-feminist framings which naturalize sexist depictions of gender-based limitations.

The second representational strategy shows women as skilled, yet ultimately unsuccessful leaders. As a starting point, I take the notion of a “Glass Cliff,” which describes the tenuous position of women in leadership roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). An extension of the Glass Ceiling, and Glass Elevator metaphors, the Glass Cliff is characterized by a tendency of hiring committees to choose women for positions with a higher risk of failure, thus leaving them on a Glass Cliff. Specifically, the authors cite this phenomenon as observed more often during times of crisis, so “[i]f and when that failure occurs, it is then women... who are singled out for criticism and blame (Ryan & Haslam, 2007, p. 550). Original research into the phenomena of the Glass Cliff focused on corporate settings and has since expanded to include similar findings in law offices (Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007) and politics (Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010). In the context of leadership failures in business, the terms luck and difficulty are used to describe men’s failures (Hall Jamieson, 1995, p. 127). In contrast, for women, failure to succeed is often ascribed to a lack of ability (Hall Jamieson, 1995, p. 127) or poor suitability to a given job or profession (Ryan & Haslam, 2007, p. 551). Perceptions such as these show how men and women are framed disparately as leaders. Representing an inferential form of sexism, the success of women is notable, but temporary. Men’s failures are shown as fleeting tests of strength further

solidifying their status as strong leaders. When women stumble, their failure is complete and irredeemable. Contrasting representations of the men, the women here are never given a chance at redemption. In the apocalypse, arguably the ultimate time of crisis, the women assume power out of necessity. The examples that follow frame failure for women as a lack of ability. How

In every example, the ability of women leaders proves inadequate, resulting in very public deaths. This visibility, coupled with their deaths, is why I term this mediated version of the Glass Cliff, the “Glass Coffin.” Similar to a preserved body on display, women are spectacles. Notably, in each of the power struggles described below, the conflict occurs between two white characters. In the media sites there are no storylines devoted to women characters of color challenging the power of white men. As the only women leaders in the stories, their failures subtly reinforce the sexist perception of women as less capable. Through their deaths, the women and the limits of their leadership serve as post-feminist warnings to other women. By applying the Glass Cliff metaphor to my media examples I recognize representations of women in leadership are constructed to reinforce a notion that women who lead are destined for failure. In short, the narrative naturalizes their failures. On the surface, the women are products of a level playing field. Their resiliency and drive are meant to show that in the apocalypse, equality has been achieved. But as McRobbie (2004) cautions in her work on popular film and television, images are often more complex than they initially seem. Recalling that post-feminism uses the successes and positive images of feminism to mark the movement as irrelevant, and unnecessary (McRobbie, 2004, p. 255), the women here are established as leaders or warriors precisely to display their failures. Whether representing women as Weakened Warriors or victims of the Glass Coffin, such character frames implicate gender as a source of weakness. The

representations of women as failures re-assert men as natural leaders, affirming the primacy of patriarchy.

The Glass Coffin

Leadership is a dangerous position in the apocalypse. Democracy is remembered as a luxury lost to time, and loyalty is reserved for people who can keep their communities alive. Described by Ryan and Haslam (2007) as a “‘second wave’ of discrimination,” the Glass Cliff outlines examples of women who are more likely to be appointed to executive leadership (or political) positions “associated with greater risk of failure” during times of crisis, and thus more likely to be blamed for failure if it occurs (p. 550). Take the recent example of Theresa May, appointed as British Prime Minister amid Brexit. More prominent (male) politicians within the Tory party “walk[ed] away” from the position due to the political uncertainty Brexit caused (McGregor, 2016). This section examines fictionalized interpretations of the Glass Cliff myth through the women leaders of the apocalypse. This section’s first example, Ana of *Land of the Dead*, explores her character’s framing as a skilled leader who ultimately fails at neo-liberal collaboration. The final two Glass Cliff examples are from *The Walking Dead* through Deanna and Dawn. Over the course of the series’ eight seasons, there have been 11 survivor communities, all but two of them led by men,⁶ making Dawn and Deanna unique on the show. The show’s protagonist Rick challenges both women’s leadership; my discussion focuses on how their failures are associated with gendered attacks on their leadership.

⁶ Arguably the list could be expanded by including groups that do not have a stationary home. If expanded to include these nomadic groups that would add another six led by men and no more led by women.

Ana

Among the leaders in my media sites are strong, resilient women. In *Dawn of the Dead*, Ana stands out because she is the only character both capable and willing to lead. In contrast to men who either eschew power or prove unsuitable as leaders, Ana becomes the only logical choice. After a series of small victories, Ana is ultimately depicted as incapable as the men are unwilling. Ana's failures are tied to gendered notions that conflate women leaders with failure. After a brief introduction sequence, the film begins as Ana meets up with a group of disparate survivors. Together they look for refuge at a local mall. The shopping center is defended by a trio of inept security guards who refuse to let Ana's group stay. A standoff quickly escalates until Ana negotiates a compromise. The guards confine Ana and her group of survivors to a locked store and confiscate their weapons. Again establishing herself as the voice of her group, Ana secures some limited freedoms by convincing the guards that her group can help fortify the mall. While everybody works on the roof, a truck full of survivors appears. Another conflict arises when the guards refuse to let the truck's occupants into the mall. Ana's passionate arguments are met with threats of violence. Refusing to back down, Ana and her group attack the guards and take control of the mall. Ana aptly triages the injured in the truck and re-establishes order, the first steps in becoming the group's de facto leader. Unlike Rick of *The Walking Dead* or Riley in *Land of the Dead*, Ana never declares herself leader, the other survivors simply begin to follow her lead. Indicative of the Glass Coffin, however, Ana's leadership is framed in equal measures by her own drive to lead and the unwillingness of available men to take up the role. Describing the Glass Cliff, Ryan and Haslam (2005; 2007) note that women were not only more likely to be appointed to executive leadership roles during times of crisis, but also receive more criticism for perceived failure in their companies. In other words, blame is more often placed on the women in

leadership than on the crisis they inherited. As a fictional analogue to these businesswomen, Ana assumes the reigns of leadership in a hopeless situation – the apocalypse. As the metaphor suggests, in the end Ana fails when she and the other characters die.

As the survivors settle in after the violence on the roof, the group begins to discuss strategy. In these interactions, Ana, in comparison to the other mall survivors, demonstrates the most leadership qualities, particularly when compared to the men. Interestingly, even after Ana begins exhibiting her leadership skills, others in the group still look to traditional forms of male authority to take charge. For example, after the turmoil on the roof, Michael (Ana’s eventual love interest) looks to police officer Kenneth for leadership. Kenneth quickly establishes he is only interested in saving himself. For instance, when another survivor asks him to stay and help the others, pleading, “there are people that need you here.” Kenneth yells back, “Fuck y’all” before walking away. Most of the men exhibit anti-social qualities, for example selfish or aberrant behavior. Kenneth, Andre, Steve, CJ, and Bart all put their personal needs ahead of the needs of the group. The scene with Kenneth not only reinforces the survivor’s situation as nearly hopeless, it affirms the uniqueness of Ana – she alone has the drive to take charge of a rapidly deteriorating situation. Similar to Kenneth, survivor Andre proves himself selfish, even causing several deaths by concealing his wife’s sickness. Though Ana is a nurse, Andre refuses to let her treat his wife Luda. As a result, Luda and her unborn child become zombies. Unwilling to accept the reality of the situation, Andre starts a gunfight and gets himself and another person killed. Also depicted as selfish and unfit as leaders, CJ and Bart (the security guards) were willing to let the others die to protect their mall. Within the frame of neo-liberal collaboration, each of the men described above are failures. The motivations presented in the narrative all embody selfishness, particularly when compared to Ana who fights to bring the survivors together.

In this leadership vacuum, Ana emerges as the driving force of almost every pivotal decision through a set of stereotypically feminine attributes. This is notable because Ana appears most successful when performing collaboration in a particular way: through traits traditionally marked as feminine. She is a nurse, a profession normally associated with women, while acts of gaining consensus (rather than the threat of physical violence used by male leaders) define her leadership style. Scenes showing her as understanding, helpful, emotionally aware, and intuitive represent Ana's leadership style. Strikingly, these adjectives appear in the foundational examples of Ryan and Haslam's (2007) Glass Cliff metaphor. Part of their research examined a series of studies identifying the traits used to describe leadership. Compared to more masculine attributes used when describing the leaders of successful companies, the listed adjectives were most common when describing companies in crisis. Ryan and Haslam (2007) posit that not only were the traits perceived as more necessary in times of crisis, "there was [also] a very strong association between the female stereotype and management of an unsuccessful company" (p. 553). It appears gendered perceptions are reaffirmed through depictions of characters like Ana whose leadership is both framed through the traditionally feminine and circumscribed by seemingly insurmountable odds.

Taken as a whole, Ana's leadership style is best described as collaborative. She draws from each survivor's strengths and fosters a general feeling of democracy within the group. From the moment she negotiates for refuge in the Mall, her leadership saves the group several times, yet she never asserts authoritarian rule. Out of the fourteen survivors, only Ana and her love interest Michael consistently encourage the others to work together. Ana's leadership style balances the strengths and opinions of the other survivors. With a decisiveness the men lack, she spurs the group into action. When Kenneth delivers a half-hearted eulogy for a fallen survivor,

he laments that, “sitting here waiting to die” is worse than death. Ana asserts, “I don’t wanna die here” before looking to Michael for support. Michael helpfully suggests fixing up some of the mall shuttles before Steve, arguably the most self-involved survivor, makes a sarcastic quip about pleasure cruising on his yacht. Ana seizes on the two comments and devises a plan to get them out of the mall and to the safety of Lake Michigan’s islands. Through these scenes, Ana emerges as an example of the ideal survivor who ignores disruptive elements (racism and sexism) in the pursuit of harmony, affirming the neo-liberal notion of collaboration. Often the target of Steve’s sexually harassing or demeaning comments, Ana ignores them in the name of group cohesion. Moreover, by involving Steve in group decisions instead of ostracizing him she devises an escape plan by bringing his ideas together with the others. This decision, much like Ana’s leadership style in general, is vocalized in a subsequent scene. When the group realizes a young woman named Nicole is about to be killed by a zombie everybody appears paralyzed by indecision. It is only when Ana demands, “We need to do something. Now!” that the group mobilizes, saving Nicole. This scene again draws a distinction between Ana and the others. If left to Michael or the rest of the survivors, Nicole would be dead. Ana proves herself as an able collaborator and individual contributor, seemingly checking off the boxes of the ideal survivor (read neo-liberal definition of collaborator).

As the film draws to a close, the limits of Ana’s leadership begin to emerge. Unlike the men who disqualify themselves through their selfish behavior, Ana consistently proves herself as a competent leader. She is smart, resourceful, and inspiring to the other survivors around her. Unfortunately for Ana, her survival relies on gendered performances affirming traditional gender roles. Not unlike the other women of the apocalypse stories discussed here, Ana’s character serves as a cautionary tale to those straying too far from a traditional – weak, subordinate –

notion of womanhood. Explicit attacks on feminism might call out the danger of trying to have it all by arguing that successfully balancing family and a career is impossible. As a character in a post-feminist narrative, Ana's example features subtler representations. While less explicit, the implications are no less impactful: the danger of failure is death. *Land of the Dead* frames Ana's dilemma through competing performances as woman and as leader. The former is presented in two ways. First in her inability to perform as mother (discussed in detail in the previous chapter), and second, in her failure to reaffirm femininity through the promise of a heterosexual coupling. As a product of post-feminist appropriations of feminism, the narrative promotes equality as long as it is in the form of traditional gender norms. The inability of Ana and Michael to consummate their relationship represents a failure to reassert "white, middle-class, heterosexual women and men as culturally central" (Projansky, 2001, p.87). Her failures to reinforce such norms not only mark Ana as unfit for survival, they also cost the lives of those who follow her. In this sense, Ana is useful as a counter example for the ideal survivor. Unlike say Selena, in the previous chapter, Ana never re-feminizes, nor does she open a space for a male protagonist to assume leadership. Doing so would allow her character to represent an "acceptable" path for a woman in her position – one recognizing that even the strongest women are eventually happier embracing femininity and motherhood. As indicated by previous examples, for instance Lori or Andrea's storylines in *The Walking Dead*, this failure eventually leads to her death. However, because Ana is also framed through the Glass Coffin and the dangers of women as leaders, the film also reveals her actions kill the rest of her companions as well. For Ana, the Glass Coffin manifests itself after the film has ended. In the final moments of the film, Ana and the other survivors pull away from the dock in a boat. The camera follows her as she watches her love interest Michael, recently bitten by a zombie, shoot himself in the head. It is interesting that this scene is the

official closing of the film as it is a visual reminder of Ana's failure to properly collaborate: within the neo-liberal reimagining of the concept, success for Ana ultimately rests on gender based performances. While Ana's contributions to the group were many, by challenging patriarchal norms (she never moves aside for a male hero) her character never collaborates in ways affirming the neo-liberal definition. In this form of collaboration everyone must work together yes, but in prescribed (in this case gendered) ways. Shortly after the credits begin, the narrative continues through extra scenes interspersed throughout the credits. The additional narrative snippets reveal the film's post-feminist attitude of Ana's leadership. The scenes are stylized to give the effect of choppy handycam footage: the audio cuts in jarringly, and the visual is bouncy and frenetic. The credits pause several times, showing additional footage. The extra scenes reveal the group's final journey is fraught with issues, for example running out of drinking water and an engine fire. When they finally arrive at the island, the group cautiously disembarks before being attacked by zombies. The credits resume, but are interrupted by extreme close-ups of zombies. By killing all of the remaining survivors, the final moments represent Ana's leadership as a failure, firmly placing her to rest in the Glass Coffin.

Deanna

Thanks to its serial format, *The Walking Dead* allows for a more sustained look at leadership after civilization's fall. Deanna is the leader of the town of Alexandria, and the only woman on the series to challenge Rick's authority as leader of the survivor group. Similar to Rick, Deanna's story is driven by her connection to family. However, where the series frames Rick's family as a source of strength, Deanna's family is linked to her failure as leader. The show's linking of her performance as mother and wife with her failure as leader reveals a

framing of Deanna within the neo-liberal configuration of collaboration. This distinction is key as the series uses both characters to show leadership; Rick succeeds as a strong leader while Deanna fails as a weaker one. Through contrasting images, the series uses Rick and Deanna to define one another. As a congresswoman before the apocalypse, she re-settled in the town during the initial chaos. When Deanna explains Alexandria's founding during the collapse, the town is presented as a thriving example of what happens when strangers work together. Unlike Rick's group, the residents enjoy amenities nearly lost in the apocalypse, such as electricity, running water, and fresh food. In the twelfth episode of season five, Deanna's first scene quickly establishes her as a strong leader. Camerawork and dialogue frame her as Rick's equal. She begins by conducting a formal interview with Rick, something she will repeat with the other group members. Though it is cordial, she overwhelmingly controls this exchange. She sets the parameters, directs the conversation, and counters his skepticism with her optimistic argument. Several times she asks him to join the community. He deflects most of her questions or answers with an air of superiority. When she asks what he did before the apocalypse, he replies, "I don't think it matters anymore." Rick's guarded responses and non-answers are reminders that while Deanna directs most of this exchange, Rick means to retain a level of control by depriving her of the insight she seeks. In other words, superficially Deanna is in complete control, however their exchange is more nuanced than the surface interaction would initially lead us to believe. This nuance is remarkable because the narrative presents Deanna as a leader for the express purpose of re-affirming Rick as a leader (he questions his leadership in the previous episode). As the interview continues, Rick grows impatient and walks to the window, talking with his back to her. She immediately re-asserts herself, moving into his space. Several feet shorter than Rick, she continues her arguments while pushing her chest out and leaning in as she makes her points.

Finally, she gives him an ultimatum, “It’s time to decide, *if* you are the one doing the deciding.” She quickly follows up, framing her leadership success (pre-apocalypse and now) to what she calls being, “exceptionally good at reading people.” Through this comment, Deanna credits her leadership success to her intuition, traditionally gendered as a feminine attribute. Finally breaking, Rick answers her earlier question by revealing he was a Sheriff before the apocalypse. Confirming her gut feeling, she sighs, “Yeah, I knew it was something like that.” Although initially subtle, the dynamic of this interview becomes telling as the season progresses and Rick asserts control over Deanna and her community, using Deanna’s self-described strengths (her family and her faith in intuition) against her.

The framing of Deanna and Rick as equals is notable because the series uses her as a counter image to Rick; as Rick regains his confidence as leader, Deanna loses hers. As a poor collaborator, in the neo-liberal sense, Deanna fails to properly perform as mother and wife. Through her leadership failures, the series affirms Rick’s status as leader. Time and again, other women defer to Rick’s leadership, while in the first Alexandria episodes Rick defers to Deanna. Echoing the pitfalls posed by the Glass Cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005& 2007) where, in times of crisis women are elevated to leadership positions with bleak outlooks for success, this unusual (for the series) shift in leadership is telling. Rick, for the first time, steps aside allowing a woman to lead him and his companions, constructing Deanna’s metaphorical Glass Coffin. Rick’s character is inextricably tied to his position as leader. Each season explores some facet of Rick-as-leader. In season one, he meets a group of survivors and becomes their leader almost immediately. Rick grapples with balancing his family and leadership responsibilities in season two. In season three he experiences the first real challenge to his leadership by another character, and at the start of season four he relinquishes his position. The remainder of season four follows

his journey of self-discovery as he re-asserts himself as leader. Finally, in Deanna's season, Rick struggles to adapt his leadership style to the needs of an established community, rather than a nomadic band. Beginning with the interview scene, Rick and Deanna are shown as equals as they work together. Scenes showing the day to day operations of the settlement reinforce this framing. Rick acts as trusted advisor, while Deanna makes the final decisions. Even though he is helpful, Rick is often presented as skeptical. For example, in a scene describing her vision of the community, Rick's companions agree with her optimistic goals, while Rick remains silent and unmoved at what she calls, "pie in the sky" ideas. This scene, and the other two featuring Rick and Deanna in this episode, play off of their height difference. At times the camera angles even make Rick seem absurdly tall relative to her. In fact, while Rick and Deanna are sometimes filmed in ways that de-emphasize a height difference, such positioning is rare and mostly occurs when their conversation is neutral, lacking conflict. However, the camera angles often shift when Rick contradicts, strongly counters, or outright argues with Deanna. While the two actors have a clear height difference, the fact that this difference is emphasized during particular moments speaks to a subtle positioning of Rick over Deanna, literally elevating him in their power dynamic. Coinciding with Rick's ascension and Deanna's downfall, the camerawork reinforces the series framing of Rick's power relative to Deanna.

The season five climax follows Rick's struggles to conform to the Alexandria community's leadership structure. In the penultimate episode, Deanna openly questions her decision to welcome him into the community, threatening his exile when he argues with her over fellow resident Pete. As Deanna mourns at her son's grave, Rick confronts Deanna about Pete's abusive behavior towards his wife. Admitting she knew about Pete's violence, she says, "I'd hoped it would get better." This conversation suggests Deanna's intuitive abilities are flawed.

Recalling that she attributed her leadership skills to her exceptional intuition, her misreading of Pete (her belief he would stop his abusive behavior) undermines her claim to authority made in her introductory scene. Not only was she wrong about Pete, the following scene will show she misjudged Rick as well. Recalling their first conversation, when she offers his group sanctuary, Rick scoffed at Deanna's naivety because the world is full of people "looking to play on your weakness." As the episode draws to a close, Rick disobeys Deanna's orders against violence when he and Pete get into a fistfight. Deanna and other residents arrive quickly, watching in disbelief. After she orders him to stop fighting, Rick pulls his gun on Deanna and begins a tirade against her leadership. He mocks her power to exile him and "her way of doing things," which he says will get people killed. Rick's actions not only test Deanna's leadership, they mark the first time he proves he was right during the initial conversation. He told her not to trust anyone, that she was inviting ruin. This violent scene proves Rick's comments as prescient, while marking the beginning of the end of Deanna's leadership.

On the surface, this scene seemingly represents Deanna sympathetically compared to Rick. However, a detailed analysis reveals the opposite. Upon arriving in Alexandria, Rick initially appears to be violent, vengeful, and emotionally unstable. Moreover, his actions conflict with a narrative motif and the driving force of Alexandria as a community – collaboration. Rick has taken matters into his own hands in a way threatening to tear the community apart. However, Rick's dialogue in this scene and his vindication in subsequent episodes reveals Rick was right all along; the community was simply following the wrong leader and thus the community's work together was misaligned. Rick's language as he berates Deanna reveals how, ultimately, the series frames her leadership. When he screams, "You sit and you plan and you hesitate. You pretend to know, but you don't" he invokes characterizations of women leaders as indecisive. He

continues by asserting he is in charge now because, “things don’t get better because you want them to, starting right now we have to live in the real world.” Rick’s language is a coded attack on women; compared to Deanna who leads through the fantasy of hope, Rick leads through decisive action. Affirming Rick’s characterization of Deanna as hesitant, she is left to listen to his escalating tirade until Michonne takes matters into her own hands, knocking him out as the episode ends. Taken at face value, the series seems to present Deanna more sympathetically than Rick. However, the next episode marks the beginning of Deanna’s downfall. Questioning her leadership through gendered attacks, the series affirms Rick’s sexist characterization of Deanna. Not only feminizing her leadership style, the series goes one step further. Deanna’s leadership is imagined through a post-feminist lens by tying her failures directly to the (traditionally feminine) traits she claimed as strengths earlier, her intuition and her dedication to family. Her portrayal also aligns with the neo-liberal definition of collaboration; in spite of her tireless work bringing the community together, the series represents Deanna’s failures as leader and matriarch as bound together. In other words, Deanna’s successes and failure are directly tied to her family, when she fails her family she fails as leader.

In the next episode, Deanna admits that inviting Rick into the community was a mistake. Asserting she will, “do what needs to be done” concerning Rick, she begins pushing for his expulsion from the community. The episode culminates with Deanna addressing the other residents as she attempts to gather support for Rick’s exile. Rick interrupts the meeting, beginning another impassioned argument on why his leadership is the only thing capable of protecting Alexandria. As the town listens, Pete appears and threatens Rick with a sword. When Deanna’s husband Reg steps between the two men, Pete accidentally kills him. Rick’s words an episode earlier, that Deanna would get people killed, comes to pass.

After the deaths of her son and husband, Deanna's leadership begins to wane. Her failings, occurring within view of the whole town, open a narrative path for Rick's ascension. The transition of power, from Deanna to Rick, is subtle. As Rick slowly begins assuming more responsibilities, the camera work during scenes with both Rick and Deanna also shifts. She slowly begins to cede control to him as she withdraws from the community. Scenes of Deanna making decisions become increasingly rare. She also abandons the principles she previously held to, like banning guns in the community. In the following episodes she gives most power to Rick by agreeing with all of his suggestions. The episode immediately following Reg's death has a major scene where the community comes together to discuss Rick's ideas for protecting the town. As Rick explains his ideas, Deanna remains off to the side. Selective camera work only shows the back of her head in several consecutive shots. As the others argue for the best plan of action, Deanna is shown in a close up. In the first shot to feature her face, she stares absently out the window. With Deanna's back still to the room, Glenn whispers to Maggie that she needs to "keep an eye on her [Deanna]," because the other residents "**need to see her** come back [emphasis mine]." Notably, Deanna is never in a shot alone, but always to the right or left of Rick. Glenn's comments, her demeanor, and the camera's framing not only portray Deanna as broken, for the first time the series suggests Rick controls Alexandria's future. In the context of the Glass Coffin, this notion of visibility is important as failure is public, on display. Deanna's leadership is not simply faltering, it does so in the same scenes where Rick re-asserts himself. He challenged her as the whole town watched. Because she ignored a threat Rick warned her about (Pete), she was unable to protect her husband. Finally, when she admits defeat seconds after her husband's death, she immediately begs Rick to avenge his death.

If there was any question as to Rick's claim to power over the Alexandrian community, a subsequent scene removes any doubt, when Rick confronts a man plotting against him. Rick asks the man angrily, "you really think you're going to take this community from us... from me?" Through Rick's declaration the series reaffirms his status as the sole leader on the show. Season six episode eight shows Deanna, on her death bed, fully acquiescing to Rick's leadership. She confides to Rick that her plans are now his, as are the people who once followed her, "They're all your people, Rick." Deanna's trajectory as leader is the near inverse of Rick's. He grows more resilient through the deaths of his wife and many friends, while similar circumstances cause Deanna to shrink from her responsibilities. The peak of her leadership is when her family remains whole. Within this neo-liberal understanding of collaboration, Deanna has failed. As a woman successful collaboration depends on affirming traditional notions of femininity in which mark the family as primary. As she begins to lose her family, she also loses control. Rick re-establishes the patriarchy he represents through Deanna's failings. Ultimately, Deanna's self-identified source of leadership, her intuition, leads to her death and the destruction of her community. As a woman who would presume to rule over Rick, Deanna's own gifts (her intuition) betray her and her community.

Dawn

Also facing the Glass Coffin in season five of *The Walking Dead*, Dawn leads a small team of police officers and survivors rebuilding a community in the shell of a major Atlanta hospital. Upon introduction, Dawn's (white) leadership falls under constant scrutiny by the members of her community and the people helping her maintain order. In contrast to male leaders like Rick (white), the series frames Dawn's leadership as a performance. Importantly, her

leadership is a primary theme during her time on the series. Present in three episodes, her leadership is a constant topic. Conversations center on two main axes: 1) attacks on her leadership by the men in her service or protection, and 2) her defense of her leadership (in private conversations between Dawn and her ward Beth (white)). The series spends a short time building Dawn up; at first she appears as a confident and capable leader, responsible for a thriving community. In the fourth episode of season five, describing Dawn's leadership in tough times, one of the residents recounts reverently, she "took care of things.... Kept us alive." However, the tenuousness of her power is soon revealed through the constant negotiation with her subordinates, specifically the men. Dawn's claim to power is supported by her meticulous maintenance of appearances, particularly as a police officer. Although there are no more police departments in the apocalypse, Dawn is always shown in uniform. Her dress visually links her claim to authority in an institutional structure associated with male power, the police force. Dawn uses her uniform as a costume to project authority. Comparing this with the show's treatment of Rick, also a police officer pre-apocalypse, reveals a telling contrast. The tenth episode of the series devotes an entire scene to Rick folding his uniform and putting it away. Notably, this is the same episode which features a common theme on the series, Rick's ability to win over (and eventually lead) another group of survivors. Rick's leadership ability is tied to his skills, whereas Dawn's is represented as a projection of an image of leadership. This framing reveals the trap of a post-feminist discourse of authority for women which situates power "within male-defined parameters. Women can succeed but only on men's terms in a man's world." (Coppock, Haydon, & Richter, 1995). Dawn emulates the other officers, appearing calm, emotionless, and disciplined. Contrast this to the other women at the hospital who appear driven by emotion (Beth) or rage (Joan). In this episode, two references are made about Dawn's

attention to appearances. While working out, one of the residents enters her room to pick-up her laundry. Turning to him she gives him instructions, stating she wants them, “washed separately and pressed.” Notably, the resident rolls his eyes as he says Dawn’s words simultaneously, indicating he has heard them many times before. Later, one of the doctors describes Dawn, sighing, “she likes things neat.” This framing of Dawn as fastidious and fixated on projecting authority, coupled with the reactions of those around her reveal an unsympathetic framing of her character. Recalling the public visibility associated with the Glass Coffin, the series’ framing her leadership as performative is key.

Operating within a post-feminist discourse tokenizing women as leaders, the series reinforces sexist notions that, as leaders, women merely play-act, particularly when contrasted with displays of male leadership represented through a mix of strength and effortlessness. Specifically, the show frames Dawn as an imposter working tirelessly to keep up appearances. Building this frame, the show alternates between public and private interpretations of Dawn’s leadership. Emphasizing the spectacle of ineffectual leadership in public moments, Dawn rules through a mix of physical intimidation and psychological tricks. In private moments with Beth Dawn candidly admits she owes her success to manipulating the others, revealing the exhaustion it causes. The juxtaposition of the scenes belie the eventual reveal that the only one Dawn has succeeded in fooling is herself; this myopia directly leads to her swift downfall and death. Describing Dawn’s motivations, one of her male subordinates explains, “Dawn's afraid she'll look weak in front of us. Thinks it'll tip things against her. Hell, it *will*.” In another example, Beth eavesdrops on a conversation between Officer O’Donnell (white male) and Dawn. The two discuss terminating a new patient’s medical treatment because of limited resources. When Beth challenges O’Donnell, Dawn cuts her off, agreeing to terminate treatment. When the two are

alone, Dawn scolds Beth, “You just killed that woman.” Dawn tells Beth she (Dawn) needed to *appear* to side with (O’Donnell) to maintain order. In other words, Dawn agrees with Beth but cannot appear weak to others. In the next episode, when O’Donnell defies Dawn’s authority he asserts Dawn no longer has the other officers’ full support, arguing, “The **guys** are talking. They think you’re cracking” [emphasis mine]. Though Dawn’s demeanor has not changed since her introduction, O’Donnell’s attitude and comments reveal the reality of Dawn’s situation: she remains in power only as long as the men remain loyal. This dynamic resonates within the Glass Coffin metaphor because of representations of Dawn’s leadership as predicated on the choices of men to *allow* her to lead them. By Dawn’s final episode it becomes clear that she lacks the support of those she rules. Within the survivalist logic of *The Walking Dead* universe, Dawn’s continued leadership makes little sense; she is outnumbered by well-armed subordinates who mock her. A comment from one of her officers during this episode echoes earlier comments from others, “Dawn’s running Grady into the ground. A bunch of us want her out and she knows it.” And while the statement contradicts the narrative logic (she is one person against six armed officers), the officer’s comment reinforces an idea of women leaders encapsulated by the Glass Coffin metaphor: Dawn remains in power precisely because the men, anticipating failure, wait for the day when their prediction becomes reality.

A constant projection of strength masks Dawn’s underlying weakness borne from a fear of *appearing* weak. Calculated manipulation defines Dawn’s leadership. Presented as a villain, the series contrasts Dawn with Rick: where she rules through exploitation he leads through loyalty. This unsympathetic framing of Dawn reinforces sexist stereotypes of women as less capable leaders who use unscrupulous methods to gain power (for example, underhandedness).⁷

⁷ The film *Working Girl* comes to mind as an oft cited example (Emmett, 2000).

Attempting to barter for Beth's release, Rick kidnapped several of Dawn's officers. During the prisoner exchange, Dawn changes the terms, demanding Rick turn over an escaped resident of the hospital, Noah. Previously, Dawn proudly told Beth that everyone who leaves comes back. Confirming her move as a power play, Dawn smirks as she gloatingly tells Noah, "I knew you'd be back." Hearing this, Beth attacks Dawn with a small pair of scissors. Dawn instinctively shoots her gun, striking and killing Beth. Seconds later someone in Rick's group kills Dawn. The camera frames Rick's group as he contemplates killing the others. Dawn's power ends with her death, demonstrated by her group's quickness to blame her. Shown in a series of mid-shots and close ups, Rick's group is filled with emotion, people crying. Dawn's group shows no such emotion, revealing where the series expects the audience's sympathies to lie. Miscalculating her last power play, Dawn reveals she was never truly in control. By accidentally shooting Beth, Dawn is unable to control even herself. Her death affirms an inability to maintain composure, nearly costing the lives of her followers. A key attribute of the Glass Coffin metaphor is that women's failures are put on display. Dying in front of her subordinates, Dawn becomes a public example. Moreover, within a series with few women leaders, and no surviving ones, Dawn's death is another post-feminist warning narrative: women are welcome to play as leaders, but have little hope of success.

Weakened Warriors

In the action driven narratives discussed here, the threat of death is ever-present. Far removed from the damsel-in-distress trope, the women in these stories are initially shown as equally skilled and brave as their male counterparts. Although portrayed as capable of defending themselves and others from the dangers of the apocalypse, women face limitations the men do

not. Such limitations are established through storylines or backstory implicating gender as the source of their shortcomings, framing them as Weakened Warriors unable to consistently protect themselves and others. The first of the examples, Maggie Greene, is quickly established as a strong, independent woman. In the fourth episode of this season, she volunteers to accompany Glenn on a dangerous supply mission. While out, she tells Glenn they are going to have sex, reminding him, "It's not like our options are vast these days." As the series continues, she earns the respect of the other survivors due to her tenacious persona. However, the series associates her weakest moments with her body when her ability to protect herself and other is called into question through her attempted sexual assault. Part of a small community of survivors led by her father, Maggie lives on her family's farm. When Rick's group comes to live on the farm, she begins to integrate herself by volunteering for scavenging and patrol missions. Immediately shown as willing to fight for her survival, she quickly evolves into a capable fighter by the third season. The first episode of season three establishes Maggie as both an adept fighter and a leader within the group. Her fighting prowess is revealed when the group becomes overwhelmed by zombies. Only Maggie figures out how to kill them, rushing in to show the others how to fight. Throughout the remaining seasons Maggie becomes one of Rick's most trusted advisors. Groomed for leadership by Deanna, she helps integrate Rick's group into Alexandria. Recognizing her skills, Rick steps aside when their group enters negotiations with a new settlement in season six. However, the images of Maggie are qualified by two instances marking her as a Weakened Warrior. The first is in the seventh episode of season three. Both Maggie and her boyfriend Glenn have been captured by the season's villain, the Governor. He interrogates them to find out the location of their camp. Not getting the answers he wants, the Governor forces Maggie to strip off her top and bra, leaving her to cover her exposed breasts with her

hands. Slowly, and without taking his eyes off her, he removes his gun belt and moves in only inches from her face. Humiliated and scared, she breathes heavily and closes her eyes as he pets and smells her hair. The silence breaks when he grabs her neck and violently bends her over a table. Bent over above her, he whispers in her ear, "So you gonna talk?" His point apparently made, he walks away. Maggie's sexual assault simultaneously marks her body as a source of strength and weakness. Maggie and Glenn are held captive for the same reason, to get information on their camp. The trajectory of their interrogations are markedly different. Though beaten mercilessly, threatened with a knife, and bound at the wrists, Glenn remains defiant. He never breaks, even managing to attack his captor with a head butt. Maggie on the other hand, remains unbound and her interrogator leaves his weapons out of reach. Unlike Glenn, Maggie never tries to attack her captor, acutely aware of the danger she is in. She quivers and jumps when others touch her. In this scene and the next, her only act of self-protection is when she covers her breasts. The juxtaposition of the two scenes tie her inability to protect herself to her (female) body through the threat of rape. The show's use of rape, rather than other forms of physical violence, is notable. After she returns to the relative safety of her group, the threat over, Maggie begins to change into a stronger, more assertive character. Through this evolution, the series suggests that sexual assault represents a turning point which makes her character stronger.

As a post-feminist take on strong women, the attack on her was explicitly tied to Maggie-as-woman. While the Governor ordered his men to kill Glenn, Maggie was never shown to be in similar danger. Instead, recognizing the gravity of sexual assault, the Governor uses the *threat* of rape to demonstrate his power over her. Not only does this suggest that Maggie's weakness is tied to being a woman, it also constructs a narrative about how she hurts those around her. Subsequent episodes shift the trauma off of Maggie onto Glenn, apparently emasculated by his

wife's (attempted) rape. Even more so than Maggie, Glenn is shown as the victim of the assault. Through Maggie's near rape the series begins its use of her as a cautionary tale, revealing the limitations of women as fighters. On two separate occasions after the assault, Glenn uses his fear to beg Maggie to remain safe at camp. Prior to the incident, Maggie was one of the first fighters to rush into a conflict, often fighting alongside Glenn. Maggie is only framed as weak after the Governor's attack – only after he used her body as a weapon against her. By tying her weakness to her gender, *The Walking Dead* reinforces a notion that women's limitations are inherent to their sex. Equally problematic, through Glenn's reactions to the attack, the series appears to blame Maggie as much as her near rapist.

Maggie's assault also marks a transition in her personal character development. While Maggie showed a willingness to fight for survival from the beginning, the narrative often turned to her emotional vulnerability. At these moments she was only able to move on after being consoled by Glenn. After her ordeal with the Governor, Maggie embodies a newfound ferocity. Her transition following the near rape represents a common tactic within the Horror genre. As a post-feminist trope, rape creates a tension that a woman's evolution into a triumphant liberated woman resolves (Projansky, 2001). The threat of sexual violence empowers Maggie. Revealing a previously "latent independent identity," rape brings out her strength helping Maggie protect her family (Projansky, 2001, p. 100). After the near rape, Maggie becomes more outspoken, asserts the primacy of her family, and demonstrates a willingness to survive at all costs. For example, moments after her assault she kills her first of many humans, brutally stabbing a man to death. Though she avoids being sexually assaulted, the specter of rape and its trauma lingers throughout the season. The threat of sexual violence also becomes a turning point in her relationship with Glenn. After her rescue, when both seem unable to move past the trauma, their courtship finally

becomes a major plot point. Several episodes of estrangement follow before Maggie approaches Glenn in an attempt to talk through their issues. They quickly reconcile, and their conversation turns in to makeup sex. Their renewed sexual relationship marks both a return to normalcy as well as a newfound seriousness for the couple. In the coming episodes Maggie and Glenn will get engaged, talk fondly of starting a family, and in season six Maggie becomes pregnant. This is in contrast to the seasons before the assault, when Maggie and Glenn's relationship, which began as a one-night stand, existed mostly in the background. Within the narrative her sexual assault serves as the source and qualifier of her strength. Her vulnerability is no longer shown through scenes of emotional breakdowns requiring her father or Glenn to console her. Instead, the images of her naked and crying visually establish the limits of her strength.

Similar to Maggie, Andrea's storyline on *The Walking Dead* follows her evolution from a survivor with basic skills to a major character who fights to protect herself and others. Notably, the series frames her journey through a conflict between feminism and traditionalism. Unlike the other women in her camp, Andrea rejects a notion of femininity tied to the domestic world. Inter-character conflict arises as she fights against others' perceptions of what a woman's place should be. In the end, she breaks from the domestic realm and her skills as a fighter are affirmed. Superficially, Andrea's character embodies the promise that her gender does not limit her abilities. In the end, the series undermines a feminist version of Andrea, representing her downfall as the result of trying to have family and independence.

The second episode of the series frames Andrea as a no-nonsense character. Meeting Rick (the show's protagonist) for the first time, she dismisses him saying, "We're dead because of this stupid asshole [Rick]." Her comment embodies the antagonistic relationship Andrea will have with Rick and the other men during season one. A major focus of her story arc is her

evolution into a resilient and skilled warrior. The men mock her desire to help with something other than domestic chores. Thus far in the series (season one and two) the women have been relegated to cooking, cleaning, and caretaking. Andrea constantly rebels demanding the right to go scouting and join in guard duties reserved for the men. She is also the only character to question the sexist treatment of the women. In the fifth episode of season two, Andrea, fed up with laundry duty, takes up post as a lookout on top of an RV. Fellow survivor Dale mockingly asks her, “What’s up with the Annie Oakley routine?” Andrea snaps back, “I don’t want to wash clothes anymore, I want to keep the camp safe, is that alright with you?” Out of ear-shot, Glenn attributes her passion to her menstrual cycle. During a conversation in the RV, Glenn asks Dale if Andrea is “on her period” because she seems, “super crazy hormonal.” Her arguments apparently effective, Dale allows her to remain on lookout duty, leaving her to scan the horizon for threats. Spotting a zombie Andrea jumps into action, “I bet I can nail it from here.” Rick orders her to stop. Ignoring him, and the pleas of several others, she fires a shot. Finally given the chance to prove her worth, Andrea lowers her weapon and smiles. Seconds later, her look of joy turns to horror when she realizes she nearly killed a living member of her own group. Her mistake reveals Andrea as impetuous, rather than skillful.

This scene undermines Andrea’s arguments by showing her as less skilled in two ways. The series seems to justify the men’s (sexist) arguments limiting her duties. She is ineffective both as a lookout and a shooter. As a spotter, she fails by mistaking a friend for a zombie. And only grazing him, her shooting skills are below average. Notably, by framing her passion as hormonal (due to her menstruation cycle) just moments earlier, the series associates her lack of ability with her gender. The conflation of Andrea’s skills with her gender continue into the next episode. Andrea shoots her gun while all of the women are given weapons training. When

Andrea hits the target, two of the men joke that she is ready for “advanced lessons.” In the next scene Shane, the instructor, takes her out to the woods to shoot. As she has trouble hitting the target, she becomes flustered. Shane raises his voice, “you’re too damn emotional... you shoot like a damn girl.” Continuing to press her, Shane orders her to focus. Bewildered, she stares at him before giving up and walking away. After Shane chases after her to apologize, the two reconcile by going on a scavenging run. While out, the two are attacked by zombies. Andrea fires but misses several times until her gun jams. She becomes flustered again until Shane steps in to help. After regaining her composure, she kills the remaining zombies and she drives away with Shane. On the drive home she grabs Shane by the crotch and the two have sex in the car. Thematically, the juxtaposition of the scenes again ties Andrea’s questionable survival skills with her gender. The series links her continued trouble with guns to her sex by framing Shane’s comments (shooting like a girl) and their sex scene. The scenes with Shane mark a transition in Andrea’s framing as Weakened Warrior.

Soon after the RV incident, episode ten of season two, the series uses Lori (Rick’s wife) and the other women to police Andrea’s behavior. Lori scolds Andrea for not assisting the other women with the domestic duties, saying it puts a burden on the rest of the women (all of whom unquestioningly accept their domestic roles) and undermines their work. Lori snaps, “The men can handle this on their own. They don’t need your help. You don’t care about anyone but yourself. You sit up on that RV workin’ on your tan with a shotgun in your lap.” For the first time, Lori verbalizes the gender-specific distinctions between work types; the women tend to the domestic while the men protect the camp. Also, by invoking the other women, Lori shows the women as ideologically aligned and key to policing gender boundaries. Interestingly, by invoking the RV example, Lori recalls the images of Andrea as hormonal and ill-suited for men’s

work. The scene suggests that by rejecting her place with the other women, Andrea hurts everyone around them. As their argument continues, Andrea shifts to the offensive. Andrea scolds Lori for, “playing house,” rejecting Lori’s assertion that she and the other women are “providing stability.” As she mock’s Lori for trying to recreate a suburban life, Andrea makes it clear her happiness is not dependent on starting a family. Speaking about a young girl who just attempted suicide, Andrea tells Lori, “Go in there and tell that little girl everything’s gonna be ok... she’ll get a husband, a son, a baby, boyfriend... she just has to look on the bright side.” Through this argument, the series brings together the only two frames it uses to represent women: those aligned with family and those who are not. There is no middle ground on the show; Andrea vocally rejects the life proposed by Lori and the other women, and the other women belittle Andrea for her behavior. Within the series, Andrea is the only woman to actively fight against attempts to domesticize her. Ostracized by most of the other survivors, a conversation with Shane sums up her outsider status. Andrea laments, “These folks, they want to play house,” leading Shane to remind her she’s an “odd man out.” Rejecting the notion that she needs to settle down and start a family to find happiness, Andrea continues her warrior evolution. Notably, Andrea’s rejection of the domestic present her as a bad collaborator in very overt ways – her character causes strife when she repeatedly refuses to behave like the other women. Through the conversation with Lori, coupled with the previous conversations where others mock Andrea for rejecting the domestic, an image of good (neo-liberal) collaboration emerges: Women who support community embrace traditional notions of women’s work and ability to maintain stability. We see this in episode three of season one when another woman questions why only the women cook and clean: the others wonder too, but only Andrea (later) complains and refuses to do the work. The episode shows the other women as aware but unbothered by the “division of

labor,” because (as Lori says later) their work is a stabilizing force. After the argument with Lori, Andrea is no longer shown fighting to join the men. Another survivor, Shane (white) has taught her how to shoot and maintain her gun. Mid-way through the season, the series reinforces the image of Andrea as bad collaborator through her conversations with Shane: the two talk about overthrowing Rick or just leaving altogether – both actions threaten group harmony. In the twelfth episode of season two, Andrea joins Shane and the others patrolling the perimeter, ably fighting alongside the men. This episode marks Andrea’s new alignment within Rick’s group; Andrea, no longer participating in domestic chores, performs the same duties as the camp’s men.

During the final episode of season two, zombies overrun Rick’s survivor camp, separating the group. While the next season’s storyline begins by showing Andrea as a resilient fighter. By the season close Andrea is a Weakened Warrior, broken and dying. In season three after months on the road Andrea, and her traveling companion Michonne (black), are welcomed into the settlement of Woodbury. Immediately the community’s leader, the Governor (white), recognizes Andrea’s skills. Upon meeting the Governor comments, “Hard to believe you ladies lasted so long out there.” Interpreting the comment as sexist, Andrea replies, “Because we’re women?” The Governor answers quickly, “Because you were alone.” The conversation foreshadows Andrea’s treatment in her new community where she will not have to fight for respect as a woman and warrior. Soon, Andrea becomes involved with the villainous Governor, abandoning her previously expressed disdain for settling down (recall her conversation with Shane mocking those who want to “play house”). Coinciding the romantic storyline between Andrea and the Governor is one showing the disintegration of Andrea and Michonne’s friendship. The two come into conflict because Michonne wants to leave, but Andrea wants to give the community, “a real shot.” Michonne disagrees and leaves. Saddened, the Governor

consoles Andrea on a park bench. His kind words lead to sex. In the next episode when Andrea coyly asks, “Are you saying that I like you, too?” the Governor responds, “I think I’m growing on you.” Soon after they establish their relationship, Andrea realizes her former friends (Rick’s group and Michonne) are alive. When the two communities come into conflict, Andrea first sides with the Governor. Realizing she might have chosen the wrong side (the Governor over her best friend and old camp-mates) in the third season’s eleventh episode, she goes to Rick asking him to negotiate peace. Michonne, still upset Andrea would let her feelings for the Governor come between their friendship, scolds Andrea, “you were under his spell from the moment you laid eyes on him... you still are.” After their conversation, Andrea returns to her new life with the Governor. Conflicted, she contemplates killing the Governor in his sleep, but does not.

Unsettled that Andrea contacted Rick, the Governor starts to mistrust Andrea, eventually killing her. Andrea’s season three story arc and death reveal the second framing of Andrea as Weakened Warrior. By abandoning her friends to remain with the Governor to “play house,” Andrea finally seems to embrace Lori’s worldview that a woman’s ultimate aspiration should be maintaining a family; yet the show represents her inability to commit, to either Rick (her principals) or the Governor (family) as her undoing. Showing Andrea’s final flaw through her lack of resolve, the series represents her as weak. Further, through her storyline the series suggests feminism is only useful (season two) until it impedes upon a woman’s ability to have a family (season three). As she lays dying, Andrea apologizes to her former friends. Michonne, who Andrea abandoned while pursuing her relationship with the Governor, holds her hand. As she turns to Michonne, Andrea whispers, “no one can make it alone now.” The direct result of her final attempt to balance her warrior life with her family life, Andrea’s death reinforces the post-feminist stance

that, “feminism actually harms women... because it gives women unrealistic expectations” of having it all (Vavrus, 2002, p. 22).

Conclusion

This chapter’s examples show representations which undermine the disruptive potential of the apocalypse genre while populating the apocalypse with superficially feminist icons. The narratives discussed here undermine images of women as proficient survivors, leaders, and fighters to reaffirm familiar male dominated hierarchies. As stories with post-feminist undercurrents, women are presented as fierce, yet ultimately less capable than their male counterparts. Reinforcing a neo-liberal notion of collaboration, women who fail to perform within traditional norms of femininity appear as unsuccessful collaborators. Women leader’s faults are linked to failures to perform within traditional norms of femininity, for example, maintaining a family. Similarly, women who spend much of their time kicking ass, ultimately falter due to weakness ostensibly tied to gender.

CONCLUSION

WHERE DO YOU GO WHEN THE END IS YOUR BEGINNING?

James Berger (1999) argues that as recent technological advancements reclassify the apocalypse from fictional fantasy to scientific reality, Western society exhibits a pre-occupation with the end of the world, which he describes as a “post-apocalyptic sensibility.” In his observations he notes an evolution of apocalypse stories over time, suggesting that while the apocalypse is not new, our orientation to it constantly changes. Scholars have framed the apocalypse metaphorically as a mirror reflecting society (Baines, 2014; Hall, 2009; Labuza, 2014). I would argue that a more apt metaphor is a river rock shaped by the currents of society. Those currents are the overlapping discourses at play in a given society and time period. For example, the Book of Daniel was a response to Greek attacks on Judaism in the fourth century (Boyer, 2017). The Christian Bible’s Book of Revelation is likely the result of infighting between early Christians over different sect’s worldviews (Stephens, 2011). Similarly, contemporary apocalyptic media reflect the cultural currents of our times. Discourses around security, globalization, race, gender, risk, and terrorism contribute to post-millennial apocalypse stories. For example, post-9/11 social discourses contribute to the neo-liberal shift in American and British apocalyptic film and television. Looking forward, I expect the apocalyptic trend will continue, with new films and shows joining the more recent iterations of *The Walking Dead* (2010-present) and *Snowpiercer* (2014). One reason is a continued interest in the apocalypse in non-fictional contexts since the 2016 election. For example, after the election of Donald Trump

in the United States, The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists moved their Doomsday Clock to 2.5 minutes to midnight. The Doomsday Clock reflects scientific opinion about the likelihood of an end of the world scenario. As the world grows more unstable, the clock inches closer to midnight. While the Bulletin scientists were quick to point out that Trump was not the sole reason for the change, his behavior was specifically referenced. The scientists noted this was the first time the group advanced the clock “largely because of the statements of a single person” (Krauss & Titley, para. 3, 2017). The popular press also continues to keep the apocalypse in the news. Major news outlets now offer shopping advice for prepping: equipping oneself for the collapse of civilization (Boudway, 2017). Additionally, until recently prepping was most often associated with conservative or libertarian leaning individuals. The newest demographic to buy into the apocalypse industry is self-described liberals (Wheeler, 2016) and the “super-rich” (Osnos, 2017).

As a media scholar obsessed with the popular, I am particularly intrigued by the recent surge in apocalyptic television. Unlike film, apocalyptic television in the United States was uncommon before 2015. For example, the NBC series *Jericho* (2006-2008) was canceled after one season, although fan pressure granted it a single reprieve before being canceled again. In 2015, the landscape suddenly changed, with at least five concurrent television shows set in the apocalypse. Jumping to 2018, a film detailed in this project, *Snowpiercer*, is currently being adapted for TV. *Snowpiercer* (the series) will soon join the televised apocalypses of *The Walking Dead*, *Fear the Walking Dead* (spinoff of *The Walking Dead*), *The Last Ship*, *Z Nation*, *The Colony*, and others. The proliferation of apocalyptic TV opens up questions about the new insight the narratives might offer: Why the sudden increase in popularity on television? Do the shows reproduce or challenge the neo-liberal form of collaboration found in my media sites.

A way backwards

As the apocalypse responds to shifting cultural tides, once again reimagining the genre, survival is also being redefined. Or, more explicitly, it constructs an image of the ideal survivor. Consistent with genre conventions, the apocalypse promises renewal after destruction. Mediated through the lens of post-feminist and post-racial minimizations of difference and repeated assurances of achieved equality, the future looks awfully familiar. The emergent societies of my apocalypse stories reveal familiar racial and gender representations. For example, it turns out white men are best suited as leaders. In every media site discussed here, white men overwhelmingly call the shots. Black, Asian, and Latino men are almost never in leadership positions. On the rare occasions when they are, power is acquiesced to the white hero after the hero demonstrates superiority through might or skill. White women are periodically depicted as leaders, but their tenure inevitably ends with their death. For women, the narratives infer that while they can be fighters for a time, motherhood is the ultimate goal. Women who embrace motherhood (Maggie, Selena, Yona, and Michonne) are rewarded, those who reject (Andrea, Ana) or improperly perform as a mother (Carol, Lori) are disciplined, again often through death. Additionally, motherhood does not look the same for everyone. Women of color are almost exclusively surrogate mothers (Selena, Yona, and Michonne). In the example of a biological mother (Kee), the narrative equates her reproductive abilities to factory farming, when Kee compares herself to milk cows. Unlike the depictions of white women, for women of color, motherhood is framed as a service. The characters reveal the social dynamics at play in intersections of raced and gendered expressions of privilege and oppression. Reinforcing contemporary power structures in America, white men become the de facto leaders and

survivors, while women and characters of color are continually written into situations where they have to prove their worth to (apocalyptic) society. In other words, even in the apocalypse it is good to be a white guy. Such representations only reinforce racist and patriarchal systems of power.

Another natural next step for this research is an examination of the raced dimensions of the Logics of Survival as related to leadership. The assumption of white men as leaders in apocalyptic stories begs for an examination of how power is normalized as the domain of whiteness (Dyer, 1988). Specifically, how the construction and affirmation of meritocracies obscure a conflation of leadership with whiteness. In the emergent societies of the contemporary apocalypse, nobody questions why white men are best suited as leaders, while men of color are never given the chance to lead. Instead black, Asian, and Latino men provide support for white men, silently reaffirming the established racial order where whiteness is central (Gray, p. 87, 1999). I imagine this project as a continuation of Ono and Projansky's (1999) work on anti-racist film that though, "understood to challenge whiteness" nonetheless reaffirms it (p. 152). For example, only moments after meeting the other survivors in the second episode of the first season, *The Walking Dead's* protagonist Rick gives a speech proclaiming race is unimportant. In the apocalypse, he argues, we are all human, simply "dark meat or white meat." With this affirmation, Rick becomes the leader of a group comprised of Andrea (white), T-Dog (black), Morales (Latino), Glenn (Asian), and Jacqui (black). Rick represents an ideal of leadership in my media sites, a colorblind white man espousing the need to come together in sameness. Moreover, his sudden and unquestioned rise to power is a common theme across my media sites. In each of the films and the television show examined in this project, the struggle for power plays out almost exclusively between white men.

In the handful of counter-examples showing women and characters of color as leaders, struggles for leadership overwhelmingly end with a white man assuming power. In *The Walking Dead*, when Deanna challenges Rick (both white), he ultimately seizes power when she is proven weak and sentimental. In *Dawn of the Dead*, CJ and Ana (both white) struggle, and though Ana emerges as leader, the entire “survivor” group dies by the end of the film. When characters of color challenge white authority, they eventually acquiesce. Through a mix of might and diplomacy, *The Walking Dead*’s Rick (white) convinces Guillermo (Latinx) that they should work together. A similar arc occurs in *Land of the Dead* when Cholo (Latinx) relinquishes control of his weapons to Riley (white) after Riley backs up his show of diplomatic prowess with overwhelming firepower. The examples highlight a specific representation of power struggles between representing white men as more adept leaders. When a character of color begins the narrative as a leader, take *28 Days Later*’s Selena (black) or *The Walking Dead*’s Guillermo (Latino), whiteness re-asserts itself. At the intersection of race and leadership, who leads, how, and why is never a topic in these media sites; white characters are simply assumed to be leaders.

Another important space to explore involves the representation of romantic relationships within the Logics of Survival, especially the intersection of romance with race and gender. Namely, understanding the non-sexual sexuality of Michonne and Sasha (both black) as attempts to “defeminize” them (Collins, 2004, p. 123) in post-feminist contexts built around promises of equality. Series regulars for six and five seasons respectively, their characters are not sexually active for most of those seasons – a long time compared to white characters on the series. Importantly, when they enter into sexual relationships with other characters (both white men), their relationships are presented differently when compared to other white women. The sex lives of Maggie (white), Andrea (white), Lori (white), and Rosita (Latinx) are all shown in graphic

detail – well, as graphic as basic cable allows. The sexual appeal of white and Latinx women work to feminize them through framings as viable romantic partners. Sasha and Michonne’s disparate treatment demands analysis of the depiction of black women’s sexual appeal. Sasha and Michonne are rendered irrelevant within narratives valuing certain types (white, Latinx women) of sexual appeal above others (black women); Their sexualities are marginal, devoid of the energy or passion of the other women. Mostly intimated through tame kisses, sex occurs off screen. The exception is one scene showing Michonne and Rick waking up together in bed. But even here, and unlike the other women listed above who are shown having sex, Michonne is portrayed as nurturing, not sexual.

New Directions: Going Global

Engaging representations of the apocalypse opens up questions about its construction, particularly through the intersection of discourses of anxiety and the discourses making up globalization. I understand globalization as a complex set of processes, discourses, and phenomena creating a web of interaction felt locally and globally (Giddens, 2000; Harvey, 1995; Hayden and El-Ojeili, 2005; Held, 1999; Kellner, 2002). This web is made up of political, economic, cultural, and ideological processes acting upon each other. In Chapter one, I argue for the overlapping and complementary discourses of anxiety and fear described by Massumi, Berger, and Bratich, shaping the contours of the current apocalyptic moment. Building on this, I identified two avenues to explore further. First, I would pursue a better understanding of a recurring theme in recent apocalypse narratives, the depiction of groups of people always on the move. Survivors are rarely allowed respite, with safety and security constantly shown as just out of reach. The remnants of humanity find their new normal defined by a sense of frenetic

nomadism – unending movement from insecure place to insecure place. This movement is characterized by risk, action, and adrenaline. I suspect there may be a connection to discourses of globalization emphasizing the (real or imagined) threats posed by the forced movements of peoples, refugees for example, (Peters, 2005; Virilio, 2012) and the movement of outsiders, such as terrorists (Carroll, 2014; Hulse, 2014; King, 2006). Both Bauman (2000) and Virilio (2012) reflect on the anxiety caused by the displacement of peoples and the discourses surrounding refugee populations, albeit in slightly different terms. Though Bauman refers to these movements as “permanent transience” and Virilio frames it as a “new nomadism,” both question the effects of displacement in Western society. While their projects seek to describe actual phenomena in the world, the discourses they describe are helpful for examining the apocalypse: anxious framings of the movement of people as threats to Western Civilization – specifically as threats to stability. For example, when United States Representative Steve King makes veiled (Healy & Bosman, 2015) and not so veiled (Schleifer, 2017) references to the existential danger of welcoming non-white immigrants to the country, he reinforces a notion that white America is under siege. Both sets of comments draw from and reaffirm discourses framing the movement of people on the border as a source of anxiety. In the apocalypse, fear and movement are intertwined, as the protagonists are forced to move from one unsafe space to the next. In future work, I want to explore this connection and its implications with anti-immigrant political narratives which frame white Americans as under siege. My entry points are apocalyptic narratives emphasizing feelings of being under constant threat, us-versus-them dynamics, and the enemy as Othered (whether zombies or another group of humans).

A second trajectory points me to the discourse of risk, which stresses a need to prepare for any possible event, something Sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) terms “risk society.”

Understanding and framing risk, according to Beck, has shifted away from the empirical, where past indicators were used to make predictions about the future (actuary tables for example) to a focus on preparing for risk. As Anthony Giddens (2000) notes on the topic, risk was traditionally used to make sense of the future through the statistical past (p. 43). Among discourses of managed instability (Bratich, 2006) or “manufactured uncertainties” (Beck, 2000, p. 221) the future is increasingly characterized by imminent and continuous threat. Further, risk is not simply the possibility that a chosen action will result in an undesirable outcome, the classic definition, but rather it has become a discourse unto itself, positioning the world in an “intermediate state” of the “no-longer-but-not-yet” (p. 213). Whole industries are devoted to the production of anxious narratives, supplying a consistent stream of crises to be reported and managed. Fear of instability sells everything from politicians to news products to handguns, thus commodifying anxiety. As this aura of anxiety becomes less exceptional, or as Massumi (1993, 2011) asserts, becomes the medium of contemporary life, it weighs on a number of social and cultural discourses. This connection between globalization and anxiety interests me for future research on apocalyptic film and television. Mobilized in such a way to engender fear and uncertainty, anxiety emerges through symptomatic texts responding to these tensions. Specifically, examining the representation of constant movement in modern apocalyptic stories coupled with narratives centered on encroaching outside threats, what can these stories reveal? What does it mean to redefine survival as a midway point rather than the end of the journey? Finally, returning to the survivors themselves, the worlds in apocalyptic film and television present the management of imperfect situations rather than imagining a world that has moved beyond contemporary representations of race, gender, or class. We are left with a double bind of sorts. Survival is redefined through the frameworks of post-racial, post-feminist, and neo-liberal

discourses. Successful survivors affirm the status quo or rebuild in the image of an idealized past, at the expense of meaningful change. It would seem Selena's statement of resignation in *28 Days Later*, that this is "as good as it gets," resonates throughout the genre.

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