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I am Warrior Woman, Hear Me Roar: The Challenge and Reproduction of Heteronormativity in Speculative Television Programs

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I am Warrior Woman, Hear Me Roar: The Challenge and Reproduction of

Heteronormativity in Speculative Television Programs

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

To the PaleoNerds for the coffee and tea, talking me down from the ledge and for recognizing that chocolate and laughter will cure anything.

Acknowledgements

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the "warrior woman" trope in western culture, as

portrayed in late 20th century science fiction/fantasy and speculative television, reflects

heteronormative/heterosexist discourses of femininity in American culture. First, I will

examine feminine discourse in American culture, especially in the late 20th century.

Then I will discuss how the tenets of second and third wave feminism influenced western

paradigms of "the ideal female" and impacted pop culture by producing "warrior women"

who both reflected and challenged heteronormative ideas and feminist principles. By

examining several television shows produced in the United States and Great Britain from

the late 1960s to 2007, I hope to show how the warrior woman trope has grown and

changed under the influence of feminism and 20th century values.

Chapter One: Introduction

"Why does Mrs. Robinson always have to cook and clean? Why can't she go out and explore with the men? Even her son, who is younger than me, gets to go out and have fun." – Excerpt from personal diary, Leisa Clark, 1979 (age 11).

When I was growing up in the 1970s, I was only peripherally aware of feminism and women's rights activism, but I knew enough to be concerned about the women I saw on television. My parents limited our exposure to television during the school week, but my sisters and I had control over what we watched on the weekend, especially on Saturday mornings. Even as a little girl, I did not enjoy cartoons, so I waited until the afternoon to watch reruns of shows like *Lost in Space* (1965-1968) and *Star Trek* (1966-1969). While watching the 1960s version of the future, I grew increasingly troubled by the options presented for young women in the next century: It seemed as though my choices were limited to receptionist or housewife…in space. Even without the discourse to identify and explore why these issues were problematic, I became increasingly aware of the messages inherent in the programs that I was watching. These messages told me that to be a "woman" in contemporary western culture, I had to be young, thin, able-bodied, white, and heterosexual, and that my career choices would be limited in the future. It was not until I was older that I began to ask "why?"

Adrienne Rich suggests that we exist in a paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality that is a major organizing principle in our culture (241). She asks that we look at heterosexuality as being historically situated (an idea echoed by Foucault), yet constantly reinforced by a culture that rewards individuals who fail to challenge the rules. Monique

Wittig and Marilyn Frye both challenge notions of heteronormativity by asking what defines a woman (Wittig 103; Frye 97). Wittig, Frye et al challenge us to look outside of the constraints put on identity by western culture. One may think that a TV show that chooses as its setting a futuristic or fantasy world might find this a way to be freed from social mores. This should be liberating! The problem is that before one can challenge those roles, first one must understand that gender discourses are socially constructed. Under an essentialist view that there is an immutable, innate and transhistorial "femaleness", taking the contemporary rules for female behavior and applying them to the future makes sense. NOT challenging how gender is performed is easier than understanding gender conformity based on culture and social order. Here I explore the more complex understanding of gender as socially constructed in television discourses.

During the past forty years, Science Fiction and Fantasy television shows have held a dominant place in network and cable programming. More than any other programs on television, those in the Science Fiction/Fantasy genres have challenged the "function" of women in contemporary western culture by reflecting and projecting gender into futuristic or fantastic settings; however, even as they challenge heteronormativity and white, heterosexual western culture, often these programs end up reinforcing the mores and values they set out to critique.

Each of the programs I examined for this study, specifically late 20th century American and British television shows featuring warrior women as primary characters, support my hypothesis that western cultural gender paradigms are reflected by television, even within the structures of Science Fiction and Fantasy.

This paper explores how the "warrior woman" trope in western culture, as portrayed in late 20th century science fiction/fantasy and speculative television, reflects heteronormative/heterosexist discourses of femininity in American culture. First, I will examine feminine discourse in American culture, especially in the late 20th century. Then I will discuss how the tenets of second and third wave feminism influenced western paradigms of "the ideal female" and impacted pop culture by producing "warrior women" who both reflected and challenged heteronormative ideas and feminist principles. By examining several television shows produced in the United States and Great Britain from the late 1960s to 2007, I hope to show how the warrior woman trope has grown and changed under the influence of feminism and 20th century values.

Categorically Astounding Genres

Speculative fiction is a broader category that includes both science fiction and fantasy, but also can include horror and adventure stories. As a genre, science fiction has existed for at least one hundred years. There is no moment everyone can agree upon for when it began, although I find that I agree with Justine Larbalestier, who writes that science fiction is "something that is published as science fiction and read as science fiction (so therefore) *is* science fiction" (emphasis in original, xvi). While this might not be the most elucidating of descriptions, to fans of the genre, it is apt. Science fiction challenges the boundaries of what we perceive as "normal" or "familiar" by looking at the present and imagining a future. Most people probably think of science fiction as taking place in outer space and/or in the future, filled with robots and technological

wonders and aliens. But at its core, science fiction is about conjecture. It is about

imagination and an attempt to understand our world by looking at others. Most of all it is

about "actions and events that have not yet occurred within the realm of human

experience but conceivably might" (Weedman 6).

Science fiction and fantasy are often separated into two distinct categories, with

the former being more scientific and "reality"-based, and the latter existing in the spaces

of complete imagination, where one finds unicorns, dragons and magic-wielding

sorcerers. Fantasy, as described by Weedman, "centers around events and characteristics

that apparently cannot happen" (6), so in a sense, it is the converse of science fiction,

which suggests that the events included in the stories might be possible in the future or in

an alternative universe. The distinctions may sound like mere semantics, but as genres,

they are separate entities, especially on television, where fantasy is less often seen[1].

For the sake of this paper, I am suggesting that all of my warrior women exist in

the "speculative fiction" realm for multiple reasons. Some television programs (*Buck

Rogers in the 25th Century, Battlestar Galactica* and *Doctor Who*) are firmly rooted in the

science fiction/outer space category, whereas shows like *Wonder Woman, The Secrets of

Isis* and *Xena: Warrior Princess* fall in the cracks between fantasy and adventure.

Arguably, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files* can be viewed as "horror", while

Firefly is best described by writer/creator Joss Whedon as "a mixture of genres, a

Stagecoach kind of drama with a lot of people trying to figure out their lives in a bleak

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[1] Fantasy is usually relegated to "children's television". I believe this is primarily because unicorns, dragons, magic and fairies are associated with children in American culture. Any programs featuring magical creatures such as these are generally cartoons or low-budget shows aimed at children, such as *H.R. Pufnstuf* (1969-1971), *Land of the Lost* (1974-1976) and *Power Rangers* (1993-present). It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine all of the fantasy television shows produced for children from the 1960s forward.

and pioneer environment" (6). These are all speculative fiction categories, and for the sake of clarity in this paper, they serve the purpose of uniting all of my subjects under one rubric. This is not to discount science fiction, fantasy, horror and adventures as individual categories, but to unite them by their similarities rather than separate them for their differences.

Literature Review: Let There Be Woman

"It seems to me that Wilma (Deering) should have all the power because she's a general but instead, she takes orders from Buck. Why does she do that when she's supposed to be in charge and he isn't even from that century? It doesn't make sense." – excerpt from personal diary, Leisa Clark, 1980 (aged 12)

As a child and young teenager, I was exposed to multiple "warrior women" on television, as speculative fiction in all its forms was popular in the mid to late 1970s. At the time, it never occurred to me to wonder why these programs were so trendy: they were just there[2]. Later, with the advent of strong female characters on television in the 1990s, I started thinking about the heroines of my childhood, and what their roles were in creating or reflecting the "feminine ideal" for American audiences in the late 20th century. The women portrayed on television programs such as *Wonder Woman, The Bionic Woman, Secrets of Isis, Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* and *Doctor Who*, were on the one hand, strong, independent and sexually mature, when compared with their early counterparts, Uhura on *Star Trek* and Maureen Robinson on *Lost in Space*. But at the

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[2] While developing the historical context of warrior women is beyond the immediate scope of this paper, I recognize that warrior women are more common during different periods of history. In this case, I am noting specifically that they are prevalent on television in the 1970s and again in the 1990s.

same time, these very strong women were subject to the decisions and instructions of the men who were their employers, love interests or, in rare cases, coworkers.

How does the late 20th century/early 21st century television "warrior woman" trope both challenge and reproduce the contemporary heteronormative paradigm? Does the TV warrior woman continue a long tradition of warrior women silenced just as she obtains true strength or is she emerging as the paradigm for the new post-modern woman?

In this paper, I am using the phrase "warrior woman" to describe all of the female protagonists explored. "Warrior woman" is a specific choice because I feel that these women exemplify the characteristics of the warrior trope in literature and history. Within myths there are certain common entities and motifs – namely the hero and the journey or quest. Traditional oral storytelling tells the tales of powerful heroes, like Archilles and Hector of *The Iliad*, Siegfried of *The Nibelungenlied*, Roland of *Le Chanson de Roland* and Beowulf of *Beowulf*, who use sword and shield to face enemies of their people. Traditionally, these heroes are of noble birth and are given the tasks of saving their kinfolk from outside forces. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell describes the archetypical hero as someone "who ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (Campbell 30). Myths and legends provide us with a motif from which to examine warriors, and thus, warrior women.

Novelist Jewelle Gomez wrote that "the women's movement show(s) us how much we want heroic figures" (87), suggesting perhaps that a lack of female warriors in

contemporary literature leaves a gap in the pop culture narrative. Human history has had a long tradition of female warriors, goddesses and Amazons, but these heroic women often degenerated to the damsel in distress prototype with the advent of heroic fiction and epic poetry like that of Homer, Virgil, and the anonymous tales of Beowulf and Roland. Although often existing on the outskirts of society, warrior women reflected the mores of the cultures that embraced them, often challenging widely held beliefs (Helford 5). Whether the women are "real" is inconsequential in mythology, they persist in the legends and folk stories over the vast history of human existence. At the end of 20th century, American and British fantasy and science fiction television programs re-introduced the warrior woman to millions of viewers, recreating her for contemporary audiences and reflecting current cultural values and fears.

If science fiction and fantasy television shows are representative of fantastic or futuristic settings, why does it appear that the women portrayed on these shows are bound to contemporary gender expectations? If we are looking at societies that are "not us" (i.e. future, alternate realities, fantastic settings), why are we usually confined to the same gender expectations? And, very importantly, what happens when the gender paradigms are challenged?

Examining television shows as modern myths illustrates the idea that even in a world of science and technology, humans still need these stories on some deep level. We are drawn to heroes and heroines because they seem to do great things that are beyond the reach of average, everyday people. Most of us will never take a literal journey to Oz or Middle-Earth or Dagobah, but we can join Dorothy, Frodo and Luke Skywalker because their experiences are familiar. We understand the stages of change and growth

encountered by the hero in the stories we read and the movies we watch because each of our lives are similarly narrated as a quest. As such, it is clear that myths and heroes will remain with us for as long as we need to understand ourselves. Warrior women help us understand who we are in contemporary western culture because they reflect and challenge the accepted roles of women in society.

Findings and Discussion: The Heteronormative Paradigm

"I want to be another Wonder Woman, traveling and doing something exciting! Bringing JUSTICE to a country that needs it." - excerpt from personal diary, Leisa Clark, 1983 (age 15)

As suggested by West and Zimmerman, Butler, et al, there are specific rules and requirements for how women are expected to behave in order to be considered "normal" members of society. Some of these expectations include marriage and childbirth, but also extend to mannerisms, clothing and interactions with other individuals. Symbolic Anthropologists, such as Mary Douglas, suggest that "the body is a model which can stand for any bounded system" (433). As a symbol of western culture, the female body becomes an object, and women portrayed on television become indicative of cultural values and unachievable, but greatly desired, ideals.

It may also be argued that 2nd and 3rd wave warrior women both reflect and challenge the paradigms of femininity for female-bodied individuals, in that they do not always follow the rules, but very often conform to expectations for gendered behaviors. They are powerful (often exhibiting supernatural or super-powerful strength and fighting skills), but they capture the bad guys while wearing skirts, low-cut tops, and very often,

high heels. Their powers are almost always hidden from outsiders, with few, if any,

individuals knowing their secrets, so that externally, they appear to be secretaries,

teachers, students and journalists: respectable careers for single women of the 1970s, as

well as the 1990s.

Additionally, 2nd and 3rd wave feminism has been affected by the portrayals of

women on television. As television is usually a reflection of the cultures that produce the

programs, feminists, as a subgroup within the dominant culture, cannot help but be

influenced by what they watch on television. Young women and men growing up in the

1970s reaped the benefits of 2nd wave feminism every time they turned on a primetime

drama or Saturday morning program and saw self-actualized, single women with careers

as the protagonists, like Diana Prince of *Wonder Woman*, Jaime Sommers of *The Bionic

Woman* and Colonel Wilma Deering of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*. I suggest that as

adults, many of the children who watched these programs openly challenged tenets of 2nd

wave feminism to create the 3rd wave.

The definition of "woman" in western culture is subject to interpretation.

Feminists, for the most part, agree with a constructionist perspective that "there is

nothing about being female that naturally binds women" (Haraway 155) while Sandra

Bartky adds "we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine" (90). This

suggests that how we look at women is not only constructed and subjective, but changes

through time. The "rules of femininity have come to be culturally transmitted more and

more through the deployment of standardized visual images" (Bordo 17) and what we see

in 20th century media portrayals is generally someone who is thin, young, and able-

bodied, someone who does not take up a lot of space, and who navigates the world in a somewhat subordinate position to the men around her.

West and Zimmerman suggest that not only do we perform gender, but that others hold us accountable for how we present gender. Gender is performed in multiple ways, including dress, occupation, and sexual identity. In contemporary American culture, female-bodied individuals are expected to behave in a prescribed manner that includes being soft, gentle, quiet, and nurturing, taking up less space and never demonstrating their own powers. They are mothers or at least mothering and they are in submissive positions physically and psychologically. Additionally, they are expected to enter into heterosexual relationships, to marry and to eventually produce children. If West and Zimmerman are correct, we hold ourselves and each other accountable to these rules every day. If we know what "female" is "supposed to" look like it, then we are pressured to conform to those requirements in order to be "normal" members of society, even when these rules are fantasies. In contemporary western culture, a woman is expected to be feminine and to display the behaviors associated with femininity and described by cultural paradigms.

Western culture is primarily binary and heteronormative, not only assuming that everyone is heterosexual, but having a vested interest in conveying that message across generations. Heteronormativity is described by Michael Warner as a "default" position in western culture, and suggests that it "has a totalizing tendency that can only be overcome by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world" (7). It is the idea that not only does everyone want to be heterosexual, everyone "naturally" is. Since heterosexuality is the preferred state (see Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality*), then

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individuals must act and react as part of the heteronormative paradigm. If they are not heterosexual, they should at least give the impression that they are through behaviors and actions.

West and Zimmerman have argued that we perform our gender and that we are accountable to one another for our gender roles, stating that "gender itself is constructed through interactions" (129). Children are taught gender by parents, teachers, peers and the various institutions humans put in place for control. These control mechanisms are culturally and historically embedded, with the most dominant institutions or individuals "making the rules" and also holding every individual accountable to them everyday. Anyone who departs from the social structure may be considered to be an outcast or deviant.

The word "woman" has historical and cultural implications. Monique Wittig suggests that "one is not born a woman", but by and large, we "assume 'men' and 'women' have always existed and will always exist" (104) because that is how western culture labels individuals: as binary opposites. If one is not a man, one is a woman by default. Public discussion of "woman" often degenerates to an essentialist biological description of someone who is an adult human and female-bodied, designated by the presence of vagina and enlarged mammary glands (and in general a supposition that she has functioning ovaries and uterus). The simplistic and heteronormative definition of "woman" does not generally take into account women who are no longer (or never were) capable of reproduction or a woman who has either undergone surgery to create a female form or who inscribes "female" on her body through clothing, make-up and behaviors. It

also dismisses the experience of intersex individuals who are genetically neither male nor female, or perhaps male and female at once, creating other sex categories.

Television shows that are supposed to reflect futuristic, fantasy or "other" worlds are still created as part of our cultural narrative, and as such, reinforce contemporary values. What we, as a culture, envision as "ideal" is reflected on television – we idolize and idealize certain performers because of their "perfection" at meeting our cultural discourses – or for their ability to reflect the social and cultural norms for the United States (or all English-speaking nations in many cases). It is easy to think of the future or fantasy worlds in a utopian way. According to producer/writer Gene Roddenberry's vision of the future as reflected on *Star Trek*, everything will be better – there will be gender equality and no health problems and everyone will be rich: the American dream incarnate. But often "gender equality" looks like a token woman (white or non-white) as part of the "command team" or in a lead role, but dressed in mini-skirts or tight-fitting leather.

Uhura on *Star Trek* (1966-1969) is one infamous example of an African American woman who was placed on the Bridge of the Enterprise, wearing mini-skirts and answering the "comm" like a secretary. Performer Nichelle Nichols often expressed her frustration at being a "glorified telephone operator in a short skirt", as she was well aware of her token position (she filled two roles – woman and minority) on the show (Nichols 161). She threatened to quit unless given more of a role on the show, but she reports that a conversation with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. about the impact of the show on African Americans convinced her to change her mind (Nichols 164). The sexualization of the character was troubling, but because the fashion codes of the late

1960s suggested that a mini-skirt was not only appropriate, but desirable, the few women on the show were indeed dressed in this manner. The show may have taken place 200 years in the future, but Uhura's mini-skirts and long, painted fingernails were reflections of the values of Vietnam-era America. Uhura was performing her gender, "woman", in a way that fulfilled requirements and expectations of social values for female-bodied people in 1960s America. She did not pilot the Enterprise. She was not the Captain or even second in command. Uhura was the telephone operator.

Second Wave Feminism and 1970s Television

Susan Douglas writes that the baby-boomer generation (children born between 1945 and 1960) "grew up internalizing an endless film loop of fairy-tale princesses, beach bunnies, witches, flying nuns, bionic women, and beauty queens" while hearing subliminal messages "to be all these things all the time" (18). Because of mixed messages telling girls to "know a women's proper place" while at the same time extolling the virtues of an education and life experience, young women of my mother's generation felt a disconnect between what they were being taught, and the realities of their own mother's lives (Douglas 42). From this disconnect came the generation of women who went to college in droves, wanted careers instead of jobs, and were some of the founders of 2nd wave feminism.

Although historically women (especially women of color) have always worked in and out of the home, in 2006 the United States Census Bureau reported a sharp increase in women wage earners over the past fifty years, from approximately 36% (of women in

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the labor force) in 1960 to 58% in 2000 (Clark and Weismantle 4). According to the 19th century ideology "doctrine of the women's sphere", women[3] were primarily responsible for everything that occurred within the home, which was their domain, while men exercised control over wages, employment and public offices (Woloch 72). Even if women did work outside the home, they did so in traditionally female positions, like seamstress, midwife, cook or maid: jobs that were associated with the home, and therefore did not challenge the concept the doctrine of the women's sphere or the idea of what was proper behavior for women, especially if they remained unpaid or earned very little money (Woloch 72). This changed with the onset of World War II, when due to the economy, as well as the need for war materials, women were encouraged to explore jobs in areas that were traditionally male, such as "factories, shipyards, and steel mills" (Yellin 39). After the war, men returned wanting their old jobs back, but "women had had a taste of making their own money and having their own life outside the home, and many liked it" (Yellin 71). The tensions between expected roles for women and the "dissatisfaction felt by many middle-class housewives with their lot as housewives" contributed to the rise of 2nd wave feminism in the 1960s (Nicholson 1).

The first wave of feminism is generally acknowledged by scholars as encompassing the time from the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Conference in 1848 to the ratification of the nineteenth amendment (granting National Women's Suffrage) in 1920. After women's suffrage was signed into law, cultural events, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s and the United States' involvement in World War II in the 1940s, shifted the focus away from women's rights for several decades. Some women spent the war years playing "a number of roles…war bride, military wife, career woman,

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[3] "Women" in this context primarily pertained to white, middle or upper class women.

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Red Cross girl" while others "worked in defense plants" (or)…"joined the military in non-combat positions" (Yellin xiv), then after the War, many were expected to return home and take up the mantle of good wife and mother for the returning soldiers. In the book *Where the Girls Are,* Susan Douglas writes that her mother was one of the millions of women who found some autonomy and freedom during World War II, then spent the successive years resenting the return to domesticity as required by the cultural rules of the 1950s and early 1960s (47-48). Douglas, as a child of the so-called Baby Boom generation, felt the anger her mother projected at the mixed messages from the 1930s ("don't steal a job from a man") to the admonishments that women needed to work for the War effort in the 1940s to the "backlash against our mothers (that) began nine seconds after Japan surrendered" (47).

Susan Douglas argues that growing up with a mother who felt angry at the hypocrisy of women only being allowed "the money, the sense of purpose (and) the autonomy" of working outside the home when it was convenient for men to be a catalyst in spurring on the advent of 2nd wave feminism in the 1960s (46). Nicholson suggests that 'something happened in the 1960s in ways of thinking about gender that continues to shape public and private life" and that what happened was the Women's Movement (1). The early 1960s were a time of cultural change and upheaval from the Cold War anxieties to the Civil Rights Movements to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy to the entry of the United States into the Vietnam conflict. Women were left wondering what their place was in this new, tumultuous world. Betty Friedan's groundbreaking *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) planted an ideological seed that suggested

women are more than just housewives and mothers; they are people who deserve a chance at professional and personal success outside of the home.

Failure to see the shift out of the home and into the labor force represented on television implies that as a medium, television is in the business of myth-making rather than reflecting common and current ideologies. The world was changing, but for the most part, television seemed to be more concerned with projecting a "fantasy" than the realities of life in the mid-20th century. Fictional televisions shows produced at the end of the 1960s often ignored the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the anti-War protests and feminism; concerns that would have been on the minds of most Americans during that time. Because of the upheaval from the myriad changes in ideology and culture from the 1950s into the 1960s and beyond, there became, in the early 1970s, a need for the juxtaposition of "reality" with the entertainment fantasy that television had always provided, but television production is a business first and foremost, and the fear of offending too many viewers with "feminism" was a genuine concern (Dow xxi).

Traditionally, prior to 1970, the "preferred mode of representing women in series television was as contented housewives in popular shows such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966), *Father Knows Best* (1954-1963), *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) (and) *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966)" (Dow xvii). Media and feminist scholars such as Bonnie Dow, Susan Douglas and Susan Faludi all point to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977) as the advent of "feminist television", if it can even be argued that such a thing exists. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* was not only extremely popular, it presented a female protagonist who was not married and who had a successful

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career in a male-dominated field (TV news casting). Mary was a feminist without being one of the "angry and militant radical feminists who were depicted as ugly, humorless, disorderly, man-haters desperately in need of some Nair" (Douglas 189). At age thirty "Mary (was) not a 'girl' biding her time until marriage…but a woman who has chosen to pursue a career instead of a man" (Dow 30). She paved the way for other career women on television, and because she existed in a space that allowed for a woman to fight for autonomy, Mary helped to lay the ground work for the women warriors who followed her half a decade later.

What was it about the 1970s that that provided fertile grounds for the introduction of the feminist warrior woman into popular culture? In 1975, the Vietnam War ended after over fifteen years of conflict during which time the American people were ideologically divided[4]. The children of the generation who had proudly fought in World War II were questioning the legitimacy of the United States' involvement in Vietnam and were speaking out against the war and against the draft. Anti-war sentiment combined with the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Rights Movement created a very different climate from that of thirty years prior, when World War II ended in victory and triumph, producing a generation of people who benefitted socially and economically from that experience. Men who returned from Vietnam were generally not greeted as heroes, and many were broken spiritually and physically. The women to whom they returned (assuming they had female partners) did not necessarily have experience with helping

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[4] As a child, I was aware that the Vietnam War was happening, but I knew little about it. Conversely, during World War II, everyone was asked to make sacrifices for "the boys" overseas and even children were involved in the war effort to some extent. My interviews with individuals who were children in the 1940s (for another project) suggest that this awareness of war as a community and national event influenced children of the World War II era in a way that the Vietnam War did not impact the children of my generation.

broken men, but because of the changes influenced by 2nd wave feminism, they did have some of the tools necessary to enter the workforce and support themselves, as well as their families. The generally self-reliant and often unapologetic providers of the 1960s and 1970s were the mothers of my generation and from these women sprang the Warrior Women who informed my childhood years.

Chapter Two: Methods

Reinharz suggests that "a...postulate for feminist research is using a variety of methods in order to generate multi-faceted information" (197), so in this paper, I use theory and extant literature as a lens for critique of contemporary culture through television. I begin my content analysis as an investigation of heteronormativity and its influence on the characters portrayed by women in science fiction and fantasy television shows by watching, reviewing, and analyzing multiple episodes of televisions shows produced in the 1970s and 1990s/2000s, including *Star Trek*, *Xena: Warrior Princess, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, The X-Files, Alias, Battlestar Galactica, Doctor Who, The Bionic Woman, Wonder Woman, Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* and *The Secrets of Isis*[5]*,* focusing on the strong female characters portrayed on these programs. Although there have been dozens of television programs produced in the past forty years that fall under the genres science fiction/fantasy/speculative television, I specifically chose these shows because all feature female heroines who challenge gender expectations, while at the same time performing gender in ways that reflect late 20th century/early 21st century mores.

The method used for content analysis was to watch a sampling of entire episodes from full seasons of all of the programs I wished to analyze. With the advent of television

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[5] Additionally, I briefly explore *Lost in Space* (1965-1968) and *Bewitched* (1964-1972). The reason I do not delve deeper into *Lost in Space* and *Bewitched* is because although these shows feature female protagonists in key roles, I do not consider the women on these programs to fit the "warrior woman" trope. Maureen, Judy and Penny Robinson were firmly rooted in the late 1950s-early 1960s ideology that said women should be homemakers and mothers only. Samantha Stevens is the antithesis of a warrior woman: she was a very powerful witch who deliberately tried not to use her powers because the powers emasculated her husband.

series on DVD, I was able to view programs multiple times when needed. I took copious notes while watching these episodes, specifically looking for behaviors, comments and interactions with other characters that would illustrate how the women in these programs reflect or challenge heteronormative paradigms[6]. I did not use charts or graphs, but I had a list of key terms, including, "heteronormative", "warrior", "feminine", "feminist", "sexualized", "motherhood/nurturer" and "heterosexual". These terms helped to set a framework for analysis, as I was specifically looking at the characters and their behaviors within the scope of the television shows and the shows' settings. It is important to note that historical context was always taken into account: I could not apply 21st century values to a television program produced in 1969, but I could critique the prevailing cultural mores reflected at different time periods, especially when those values are still familiar to contemporary audiences because they have not entirely changed.

My content analysis explores how women are portrayed on these shows, specifically whether or not, and how, they challenge or reinforce heteronormative paradigms. In particular, I examine their relationships with others (both sexual and platonic), their functions as caregivers and mothers, and their behaviors as "warriors". In addition to my analysis derived from watching television programs, my literature review includes material written about the shows in the form of essays, scholarly papers, and books, as well as appropriate feminist and anthropological theories pertaining to the topic of gender performativity and expectations.

Examples from the above references television programs include strong female characters, like Zoe Alleyne (from *Firefly*), Starbuck (from *Battlestar Galactica*) and

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[6] At first, I was looking specifically for illustrations of reinforced heterosexist/heterosexual interactions, but I started realizing that many of the women were also challenging some of these ideas. I later began focusing on warrior women, requiring me to go back and re-watch several key episodes from many programs.

Buffy (from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) who are successful and independent, yet are often

shown dependent on men or in caregiver positions that result in rendering them less

effective at their jobs. Additionally, the continual reinforcement of "compulsory

heterosexuality" (Rich 1993), the distinct lack of non-white women in primary character

roles, and the absence of women of size, older women and differently-abled women,

suggest to me that few attempts are being made by the creators of television programs to

challenge contemporary white, western paradigms even when setting the shows in

futuristic or fantastic worlds.   In my analysis and examinations of the materials, I show

examples of challenges to these paradigms, while discussing the reasons why these

paradigms are continually repeated and generally left unexamined.

Chapter Three: The 1970s: Disco Warrior Women

The idea of a warrior woman did not spring fully formed from the minds of western television writers and producers in the 1970s, like a recalcitrant Athena bursting from Zeus' skull. The Western culture warrior women trope has been present in history and literature, best illustrated by the Goddesses of the Classical World, European and North African Amazons, and Warrior Queens, like Boudicca. These strong women were portrayed in art, architecture, literature and legend starting with the earliest examples of writing found in Mesopotamia ("Hymn to Inanna" circa 2300 BCE) through the prose of Herodotus (5th century BCE) and in the myths of Scandinavia (Valkyries). That these women segued into the "damsel in distress" paradigm suggests that the patriarchal social structures of the Medieval and Renaissance periods did not have a place for strong women who challenged social mores and religious edicts of the time. Early and Kennedy assert that "few women…have achieved warrior status in (the) hegemonic war chronicles…their stories often have been belittled or excised from historical memory" (1), suggesting that although we generally know of the existence of warrior women, they are not necessarily part of the dominant discourse in western culture.

Primarily, speculative, science fiction and fantasy television has been the most successful genre at creating strong, independent, self-reliant women in key positions. *Star Trek* in the 1960s was the first program to feature women in command positions and non-white individuals in key parts, a tradition that was repeated on the 1970s programs *Battlestar Galactica* (original series) and *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*. In the 1990s

and into the 21st century, science fiction and fantasy programs have often featured women and non-white characters in lead roles. However, as my research shows, in many cases, these characters are "tokens" or stereotypical caricatures. Women are given power, only to have it taken away when they are replaced by men, or when the characters marry or (most often the case) they become mothers or in some other way lose or give up their autonomy and personal empowerment to settle into the expected roles for women of the time.

Warrior Women in 1970s speculative television fall into two distinct categories: individualist heroines fighting for a "greater good" and companions to male heroes, albeit with "powers" of their own. Of the former, we have Wonder Woman/Diana Prince from *Wonder Woman* (1975-1979), and Jaime Somers from *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978), while the latter include Colonel Wilma Deering of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* (1979-1981), Andrea Thomas from *The Secrets of Isis* (1975-1977) and Sarah Jane Smith from *Doctor Who* (1963-1989; 2005-present).

Although I categorize them all as "women with powers of their own", it is important to stress that neither Diana nor Jaime ever work alone; both have male "bosses" who delegate responsibilities and often give them direct orders. Both work for government institutions with their inherent patriarchal hierarchies firmly in place. Wilma Deering is technically in a high-ranking military position, but as part of the team that includes Captain Buck Rogers (an astronaut from 400 years in the past) and a human-bird hybrid named Hawk, Wilma is often relegated to the subordinate position. Sarah Jane is quite literally "companions" to the always male Doctor Who, so much that the title "Companion" has been used to describe all of the people the alien, time-traveling Doctor

has picked up over the centuries. Andrea Thomas, in her incarnation of the Egyptian

Goddess Isis (a transformation she achieves through the use of an ancient amulet) has a

male and a female partner who often run errands for her and fill the role of sidekick, to

use the superhero lexicon, but these partners do not have equal powers or abilities.

It is important to note that there is never any doubt as to the physical and mental

skills of any of the warrior women described in this paper, but it is just as relevant to

stress that in the 1970s, the women often *appeared* powerless, even when the viewers

were aware of their training, skills and/or supernatural abilities. Their superhero talents

reflected the empowerment often experienced by 2nd wave feminist women, while their

lack of authority catered to men's fears of emasculation. Women were given just enough

power to be useful members of society, and especially to be useful to the men in their

lives, yet they were not permitted autonomy. None of the 1970s warrior woman worked

completely alone, and if they were ever in a position to have to rely on their own skills

and intelligence to extricate themselves from danger, they usually did so through overt

sexuality.

Although the 1970s warrior women frequently matched wits with female villains,

their primary opponents were male. As such, they often were taken prisoner and usually

detained by the villain of the week, and were then forced to escape. Warrior women with

supernatural powers or increased strength, like Wonder Woman and the Bionic Woman,

found themselves tied in ropes, restrained by handcuffs, drugged or otherwise held

hostage in increasingly complex ways (how many times can an audience watch Jaime

Sommers use her bionic legs to break free from metal shackles before it gets boring?)[7].

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[7] There are, of course, sexual implications to this: historically women who are captured or held prisoner are
often placed in a position of helplessness whereby they may be forced to perform sexual acts or they may

Strong women forced into subordinate positions by seemingly dominate men was a common theme, although often the men gained control of the women through use of weaponry, like handguns. The warrior women of this time rarely used handguns, swords or knifes, weapons traditionally associated with male warriors and heroes. When they used weapons at all, they were already part of their arsenals – costume pieces with more than one use, like Wonder Woman's magic lasso and bullet-deflecting bracelets or Isis's mystical amulet. However, even with limited weapons, the warrior woman always prevailed, but not before she was forced into a position of powerlessness. Not only did this illustrate that she was flawed and able to be subdued, however briefly, but that she was not all powerful and immediately able to dominate men. She was still a woman: just one with supernatural abilities.

A Woman in Disguise

Reproduction of the heteronormative paradigm is found in the costumes, as well as in the behaviors of the 1970s warrior women. Fashion of the time did allow women to wear tight pants and low-cut shirts, as well short skirts, so to suggest such clothing was worn by the heroines solely to titillate male audiences would not be entirely correct. However, the styles of clothing popular at the time left little to the imagination. In the cases of Wonder Woman and Isis, their disguises rendered them even less clothed than their "street clothes", as both fought crime in little more than a bathing suit (Wonder

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use their sexuality to obtain their freedom. The strictures of 1970s television prohibited rape as a plot devise, but did not disallow Wonder Women or the Bionic Woman to be sexually coy or seductive in order to trick their captors into getting close enough for the women to overpower them, steal their keys or talk them into setting them free.

Woman) and skimpy dress (Isis). Underwear always seemed optional, in or out of disguise. The costumes worn by all of the characters showed the audience that the warrior women were sexualized women first and warriors second. As women, they dressed in soft, feminine attire, shifting only to warrior garb by necessity of circumstance.

Wonder Woman and Isis had distinct outfits separate from the clothing of Diana and Andrea, but Wilma, Sarah Jane, and Jaime did not have superhero disguises. Wilma's costume was intrinsically different from those of Sarah Jane and Jaime because *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* was set in the future and one can see that there were attempts by the costume designers to reflect this in the outfits worn by the characters. The use of reflective materials, holograms and sequins created a futuristic appearance to what were basically 1970s fashions in space. Sarah Jane and Jaime often wore what any woman on the street might wear at the time: slacks with bell bottoms, ponchos, gauchos, flowing sleeves and long dresses. In many episodes of *The Bionic Woman*, Jaime was forced to rip her pants or skirt in order to run fast or kick an attacker, but Jaime never appeared on screen asking for a more comfortable uniform, and I have found no evidence to suggest that the actress ever made this plea. Usually, Jaime was undercover and required to wear an evening gown with heels, leaving the audience to wonder how she was going to fight when the time came. The long gowns were so inappropriate to her undercover work that they often led directly to her kidnappings or overpowering by the villains or his cronies. 1970s fashion simply did not have warrior women in mind!

In many ways, Wonder Woman is the epitome of the 1970s Warrior Woman: she is a powerful fighter, but also very feminine, spouting feminist ideology at one moment by telling Steve Trevor that "maybe all women can do wonders if put to the test"

("Fausta: The Nazi Wonder Woman" 1976), then proudly informing younger sister

Drusilla that she takes orders from a man ("The Feminum Mystique: Part 1" 1976).

Diana Prince sees herself as a savior in many ways, viewing the outside world separate

from home of Paradise Island and requiring her assistance ("Pilot", 1975). Her entire

purpose is to keep Steve Trevor (and by extension, the Allied Forces) from harm, because

after the first few episodes, the focus shifted from Diana's love for Steve to a more

"maternal protector" role. Although Diana Prince's initial reason for donning the mantle

of Wonder Woman was because she was attracted to American War Hero Steve Trevor,

the romantic possibilities soon took a back burner to saving the world from the Nazis.

As Yeoman Diana Prince in Washington, D.C. , the Amazon princess, who in her

home setting of Paradise Island is known for her athletic and warrior qualities,

deliberately mimics cultural expectations for female-bodied individuals in the 20th

century (specifically in the 1940s). She is soft-spoken with dulcet tones barely

registering above a whisper, she does not offer much opinion unless she is asked, she is

neat, and she is unassuming. Additionally, Diana serves Steve Trevor (war hero

extraordinaire) as little more than a glorified secretary, projecting the role of subservient

caregiver to those around her. Secretary is a perfectly acceptable position for a single

woman, in the 1970s as well as the 1940s. Diana Prince takes up very little space, so it is

interesting to note that in order to transform into Wonder Woman, she must spin in place

with her arms out to the side, shedding the "costume" of Yeoman Prince for the

"costume" of a super heroine, thus taking up space in the process.

As Yeoman Prince, Diana has the perfect disguise because no one notices her and

sees beyond her large glasses, bun and simply cut skirt in order to observe Wonder

Woman. She is not seen because she is not sexualized at all; she is part of the furniture, as is reflected by the Baroness's comment about her: "she seems so plain and uninteresting. Her coloring is rather like wet Bisquick, and I'm sure she's blind as a bat without those glasses" in the episode "Wonder Woman Meets Baroness Paula Von Gunther" (1976). This is further illustrated by the fact that Steve Trevor is enamored of Wonder Woman, but barely even notices when Diana seemingly disappears for long stretches of time. He never connects the dots that they are one and the same, because the neutral, asexual Diana has nothing in common with the scantily clad, long-haired warrior that is Wonder Woman.

Two other characters whose disguises hide their true identities as "super-heroines" and "warrior women" are Andrea Thomas (*The Secrets of Isis*) who is an Art Professor (not a math or science professor, or even archaeologist) and Jaime Sommers, who teaches middle school, when she is not playing professional tennis. Andrea finds the amulet that enables her to transform into Isis while she is on an archaeological dig in Egypt (which is why it would have made more sense if she had been an anthropologist or Egyptologist). Even though she has access to the power of Isis, she rarely does more than rescue teenagers from bad choices in life. No one connects Andrea with Isis, because she, similar to Diana Prince, assumes the appearance of a mousy intellectual professor, with her hair tied back and the addition of glasses, for that nerdy librarian look superheroes often adopt.

Jaime is not disguised to the same extent as Diana and Andrea because she does not have a secret identity beyond "the bionic woman". Her family and friends are unaware of her bionic enhancements, and they see her as the school teacher and former

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tennis pro that she is: she just goes out of town more than most small town teachers usually do. Her bionics are already hidden, as they are surgically grafted to her bone, muscle and skin, so the only time it is visible is when it is damaged. She works as a secret agent, but her employers know who she is.

It would be very possible for Andrea and Diana to throw away the super-heroine costumes and perform their heroic acts in street clothes, as Jaime Sommers does. That they do not says something about the comic book genre that spawned them: superheroes always have a secret identity in comics. Their disguises act as barriers between the "real" world and the world where they are powerful and self-actualized. In many ways, this reflects the fragmented role of many late 20th century American women. Women have to be wives and mothers at home, but professional and skilled workers at their places of employment. This often causes an identity split, whereby the woman tries to be everything and ends up denying one role in favor of the other, depending on circumstances. A woman in the workplace is often expected to leave her family at home and focus solely on the job at hand. A good wife and mother does not bring the office or the classroom home with her at night. Diana, Andrea and teacher-Jaime exemplify this duality because in many ways they are not permitted to be whole. They have to hide their abilities so that they are not exploited and to keep them safe from harm from stronger powers. Women in the workforce (especially single women) often must suppress their female characteristics in exchange for masculine qualities in order to succeed – but not too much! If a woman becomes too aggressive and goal-oriented, she is condemned for that as well.

In disguise, Diana, Jaime and Andrea's behavior is that of "proper women", with one glaring exception: they are not married and they do not have children, but there is nothing to suggest that this would not be a future goal for any of them[8]. In the 1970s, the heroines were definitely unmarried, reflecting the 2nd wave idealism of "getting out of the kitchen" and into a career before (or as a replacement for) marriage and children (Friedan et al). Characters like Diana Prince of *Wonder Woman*, Jaime Sommers of *The Bionic Woman*, Sarah Jane Smith of *Doctor Who*, and Colonel Wilma Deering of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century* were gainfully employed and unafraid of their own sexualities. They overtly displayed their bodies, not just as sexual objects, but also as powerful tools to fight evil. They are sexualized characters who are not overtly sexual (Crawley et al 72): there is nothing to suggest any of them, except maybe Wilma Deering, are actually *having sex* at any time, even off screen[9].

On *The Bionic Woman*, school teacher-cum-tennis pro, protagonist Jaime Sommers works secretly for the Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI) as an operative, but to her friends and family, she is a former tennis pro turned middle school teacher. Except for very early mentions of her relationship with Steve Austin (*The Six-Million Dollar Man*), Jaime remains very unattached during the run of the show. In fact, Jaime was conveniently stricken with a coma-induced form of amnesia so that she forgot she was ever engaged to Steve Austin, enabling her to live single and fancy free – and allowing her to use her feminine wiles to seduce or coerce the male villains with whom

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[8] Jaime does marry Steve Austin in one of the reunion movies filmed a decade after the show ended.
[9] As single women, they are "allowed" to be sexualized and "available", whereas if they were married, being seen as a sex object to other men would be unacceptable. In the discourse of the 1970s, married women were still objects and vessels of motherhood, and this was not sexual behavior – even if sexual behavior is what leads to motherhood in the first place!

she interacted. If Jaime had been married or in a committed relationship, it is doubtful

she would have been permitted to use her charms to capture enemies.

"Who" Am I This Time?

The Fourth[10] Doctor's Companions on the long-running British series, *Doctor*

Who, are also products of 2nd wave feminism. The best example is Sarah Jane Smith, who

at the time of their initial meeting in 1973 lives alone and works as an investigative

journalist. Sarah Jane is introduced in the episode called "The Time Warrior", and in true

Companion-fashion, she is promptly kidnapped. She uses her wits to escape on her own

and to help the Doctor thwart the evil villain, proving that she is a very capable and self-

assured woman. This is further illustrated in the same episode, when the Doctor demands

that she make him some coffee and she pointedly refuses. Sarah Jane is a product of 2nd

wave feminism, in that she is hyper-aware of her position as a woman and Companion to

the Doctor, but is also firm in her insistence that she be treated with respect. Of all of the

Companions, Sarah Jane is the longest lasting, and during her tenure on the program, it is

hinted that she may be in love with the Doctor, which explains her continued association

with him, even when he fails to acknowledge her contributions to the missions ("The

Sontaran Experiment" 1975).

The possibility of Sarah Jane's love for the Doctor is not thoroughly explored

until 2006, when she encounters the Ninth Doctor and she declares her anger and

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[10] In order to allow for various actors to play the role of the alien Time Lord over the forty or more years
the show has been in existence, the primary character of the Doctor is able to regenerate every time one
actor leaves the show and is replaced by another, while "Companions" simply come and go (Cartmel 2).
Fans simply refer to each incarnation either by the actor's name or by the regeneration number. The
current Doctor, played by David Tennant, is the tenth and is often called "Ten" by fans (Russell 188).

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frustration over his abandoning her when she loved him (*School Reunion*). In 2006, like in the 1970s, Sarah Jane does not exhibit any interest in marriage or settling down with a family: her career comes first. 2007's children's show, *The Sarah Jane Adventures* confirms this "career woman" ideology, as now in her early 50s, Sarah Jane is unmarried and freelances as an investigator of alien artifacts. She does eventually adopt a young son (more to appeal to young viewers than anything else, as it seems out of character for her), but she tells those who asked that she never married because she only had one love and he left her (*Invasion of the Bane*, 2007).

I am in no way suggesting that Jaime, Diana, Sara Jane and Wilma's unmarried status automatically mark them as fervent 2nd wave feminists. It is their focus on career and personal satisfaction with life over housewifery and motherhood that separates them from earlier science fiction characters like Maureen Robinson of *Lost in Space*, who in spite of being described in a voice over as "the distinguished biochemist of the New Mexico Institute for Space Medicine", is first introduced as the wife of John Robinson (*The Reluctant Stowaway*, 1965). She spends much of the three year run of the program making dinner, doing laundry and worrying about her children. Freed from the bonds of motherhood and marriage, the 1970s warrior woman was allowed to express herself as a self-actualized, independent person in ways that Maureen Robinson could not, yet she still remained constrained by discourses of feminine performativity.

Little girls growing up in the 1970s probably never imagined themselves as warriors. After all, there were no archetypes from which to model one's imagination until Ripley picked up a flame-thrower in *Alien* (1979) and fought killer "demons" after the men on the Nostromo had already met their makers. But Ripley was an anomaly[11]. Girls coming of age in the pre-Reagan years had for role models the heroines of the uncomfortable marriage between 2nd wave feminism and the hedonistic hyper-sexuality of the Vietnam era. We did not have the ass-kicking warrior babes of Generation Y; Xena, Buffy and Scully may have been the children of our revolution, but they were born out of the backlash against feminism, not of it.

In the 1970s, we had Wonder Woman, Charlie's Angels, Isis, the Bionic Woman and Colonel Wilma Deering. The 1970s seemed to be the perfect breeding ground for a new type of warrior woman; one who was steeped in the tenets of 2nd wave feminism and the sexual revolution with their messages of empowerment and sexual freedom, but who bent under the strains of patriarchal oppression and the male gaze (Mulvey 62), ultimately failing to achieve autonomy and any real power. Unlike their later counterparts (like Xena and Buffy), Wonder Woman, Isis, Wilma Deering, the Bionic Woman and Doctor Who's Companions never seemed overtly tormented by any of their choices, and who was good or who was evil was always completely clear to them. The characters were not threatening to male or non-feminist female viewers because, even

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[11] The role of Ripley was not specified to be male or female in the original script, and until Sigourney Weaver auditioned, it was assumed the part would go to a male actor (Penley 173).

though many of them possessed almost magical strength, none ever challenged the established patriarchal ideals for how heroines "should behave".

In the history of science-fiction and fantasy television, women were "virtually non-existent (and) if presented at all, they were depicted in the traditional stereotypical roles of wife, mother, and homemaker" (Ginn 2005:25), as in *Lost in Space* (1965-1968). In the 1970s, attempts at creating characters that could be perceived as feminist at first glance fell short upon more careful examination. The characters of *Wonder Woman* (1975-1979) and *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978) appeared to be strong women who embraced their own power, always acting for the good of mankind and in the best interests of the United States. The problem with both shows was that the super-heroines were "far-fetched, metaphorical cartoons in which women, without special effects, were powerless" (Douglas 1994:217). As their alter-egos, Diana Prince and Jaime Sommers, Wonder Woman and the Bionic Woman were weak, ineffectual and invisible, both hiding their identities from the general public and from those who were supposed to love them.

Are all of the warrior women discussed thus far guided by any moral principles or do they merely stumble upon their roles by virtue of ability or transformation? Diana Prince leaves her home on Paradise Island solely to help the "right" (meaning "American") side win World War II against the fascists, so clearly a moral stance has been taken by Diana. As a tool of propaganda, Wonder Woman fights "for your rights, and the old red white and blue" (*Wonder Women* theme song by Norman Gimbel and Charles Fox) and fulfills the role of enforcer and protective mother, seeing the United States as morally good, but in need of guidance and assistance to win the ultimate battle.

A clear enemy (the Nazis in the 1940s) sets Wonder Woman apart from the other warrior women, who fight ever-changing, weekly threats.

In the 1970s shows, who is clearly "good" and who is "bad" is established at the beginning of each episode, and there is rarely any question that the villain of the week deserves to be thwarted or that the heroine (and whatever organization or institution she represents) is entitled to stop him. There is never any attempt to analyze the motives or dig into the characters of the villains; just to prevent their plans from coming to fruition.

The television landscape of the late 70s and 80s was one of supposed sexual liberation and the pretense of strong women in tight clothing without bras who gave an illusion of power that actually fell apart upon careful examination. Wonder Woman was 500 years old, but she ran around Washington, D.C. in a red, white and blue bathing suit taking orders from the barely literate Steve Trevor. The women on *Charlie's Angels* were trained police officers hired by Charlie for their strength and intelligence, but were reduced to sex objects whose main purpose apparently was to "jiggle" on camera. These women were supposed to be enlightened feminists (and indeed, feminist ideology can be found in the dialogue of some episodes), but when all was said and done, they probably helped millions of heterosexual boys (and a few budding lesbians) through puberty. Young feminists in the 1970s had to look elsewhere for empowerment.

My adolescent self saw the character of Colonel Wilma Deering as one of the few strong women on television, and my multiple diary entries to that effect wax poetic about Wilma's strength and power as a woman in a leadership position. As a child of the 1970s, I was raised on evening television shows that proclaimed feminist ideals, but when examined thoroughly, proved to be androcentric models of what strong women

should be like. On some level, I understood this, because I constantly looked for women in power on television and found only reflections of what might have been. Wilma Deering represented the perfect model of 1970s womanhood: Her strength came from intelligence and warrior-like powers in battle, yet she was idealized for her femininity and her ability to take orders from men without complaint. Even at twelve, I did not understand how someone with such a high ranking military office could be rendered incapable of profound thought whenever a problem arose, yet would defer to a 500-year old astronaut who did not even know the current linguistic slang.

In many ways, I sympathized with Wilma. I felt I understood her frustration because she was in a position of leadership, but forced to "look" ultra-feminine in order not to emasculate the men around her. The mixed message sent was that it was all right for a woman to be strong and powerful, as long as she had hair sprayed to the point of immobility, the right shape under the spandex, and the ability to bat her eyelashes and give the appearance of stupidity. Worst of all, Colonel Deering had to wear heels because even though the 1980s accidental time-traveler, Buck Rogers, taught her judo, she was not expected to successfully fight off any assailant: she was supposed to get captured or rendered unconscious. Yet, for some reason, it did not always happen as planned. By the end of the episode, even though Buck was always the hero, Wilma would be positioned in the background, calmly and with great reserve, knowing that she had contributed to the final outcome. It was as if she secretly knew that she was humoring the men with her blue hot pants and big hair, because when push came to shove, she did not need them. She was strong, intelligent, powerful and still feminine, with her long, perfectly coiffed hair, satin jumpsuits and carefully applied make-up and

nail polish. Although employed as a "Colonel" in the military, a position which she

obtained through hard work and skill (Gray, Q&A), Wilma rarely wore a uniform and

when she did, it was often a mini-skirt and high heels: very different from the uniform the

men were required to wear!

By virtue of challenging the expectations that she would be a beautiful and

helpless female, yet still outwardly submitting to the rules of heteronormativity, Wilma

managed to create an illusion that it was possible to challenge the "requirement that one

be and appear heterosexual" (Frye 24). She existed in a world "in which men are men

and women are women, and there is nothing in between and nothing ambiguous" (Frye

25), but by being in a position of high authority in the government, she often "pulled

rank" to control the men around her. I yearned for the ability to pull rank, because I

always had the feeling that, left to her own devices, Wilma would jettison Twiki, the

annoying robot, into space, and hunt down and kill Season One's perpetual villainess,

Princess Ardala. The only thing preventing her from doing so was the social structure

that gave her rank, but no power to back it up because she was born a woman. In

addition to being forced to wear restrictive, overly feminine clothing (even while in

uniform), Wilma was limited to performing the expected female role, in spite of her title

"Colonel". Wilma Deering certainly did not seem to be incomplete without Buck, yet

there was purposeful sexual tension in their interactions. This mimicked the relationship

Diana Prince had with Steve Trevor: Diana, as Wonder Woman, had great strength and

the ability to extricate herself from any danger, but she continually placed herself in

jeopardy at the behest of her "boss" and object of affection, Steve Trevor.

The warrior women of the 1970s were strong, independent women, who were nonetheless restrained by the boundaries of 1970s values and expectations for women. They were permitted supernatural strength and/or abilities, while at the same time, they were limited by social structures that suggested they needed to reproduce the heteronormative paradigm. Although unmarried and childless, all of the women were overtly heterosexual and exhibited clear attraction to the men in their lives. Even if the word "marriage" is never uttered, the implication is that one day, they will bag up their magic lassos and amulets, and put away their ray guns to pick up an apron and duster. This is illustrated in the many exchanges between the male and female characters: in most cases when the warrior women interact with their male co-workers, bosses or friends, the physically stronger women are shown seated or in the background, with men in the forefront. Diana Prince is usually at her desk, Wilma Deering stands behind Buck, Jaime sits on employer Oscar Goldman's desk and Sarah Jane follows the Doctor out of the TARDIS and into new worlds. Even when the woman is clearly the stronger character, the man is somehow shown to be dominant, or at least capable of seizing power if he does not already have it.

In many ways, the warrior women of the 1970s reflect social and cultural values of that time through the reproduction of heteronormative paradigms and by illustrating their characters as "female" and "feminine" to the audience. Feminism in the 1970s was often associated with women who "wanted to be men", the myth of the "masculine feminist" took root, creating an idea of a feminist as "a dour executive with cropped hair pictured first at her desk, grimly pondering an empty family-picture frame, and then at home, clutching a clock", as if worried about running out of time to give birth (Faludi 92-

93). By creating warrior women who were both feminist in their ideologies of equal opportunity and ability, but feminine in their clothing and interactions with males, 1970s speculative television programs created a mythical being for young girls and women to emulate. The message was that one could be powerful within the constraints of femininity, and as long as one knew her place. That place was deferring to men, dressing in a manner pleasing to and designed to attract men, and refusing to think *too much* for oneself. A strong woman is sexy…as long as she wears a red, white and blue bathing suit or satin hot pants. The problems start when those women realize they are really the ones with all the power. As I discuss below, when that happens, they have to be rendered ineffectual or they cease to exist. At the end of the 1970s, the warrior women simply vanished off the airwaves, not to return for another decade.

Chapter Four: The 1980s Backlash: Where Have All the Warriors Gone?

"Beverly (Crusher) and Deanna (Troi) working out and talking about guys? What I want to see is Worf and Riker drinking coffee and talking about their hair and makeup." – excerpt from personal diary, Leisa Clark, 1989 (age 21)

Susan Faludi's groundbreaking *Backlash* contains an analysis of the short-lived *Angels `88*, and discusses how, although a spin-off of sorts, it was supposed to be different from the "three jiggle-prone private eyes that took orders from an invisible (male) boss" on *Charlie's Angels* (153). Everything released to the press about the show (and the show itself) proved that it was actually even LESS self-actualized than *Charlie's Angels*. Aaron Spelling's idea of a new woman for the 1980s was incompetence and an inability to do the job on her own (Faludi 154)[12]. Unfortunately, his perspective was not an isolated one.

Faludi refers to the 1987-1988 TV season as "the backlash's high watermark", as almost none of the lead characters on TV in that year were women. Women over age 21 were even harder to find and minority women were practically non-existent. As Faludi noted "an analysis of prime-time TV in 1987 found 66 percent of the 882 speaking characters were male-about the same proportion as in the 1950's" (156). Interestingly enough, when women disappeared from the airwaves, the viewers stopped watching, in spite of network assertions that they were responding to audience demand by creating fewer and fewer strong female characters (Faludi 156). So if audiences were not

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[12] I only vaguely recall this show existing, and mercifully, it has not been released on DVD. Faludi suggests that the women in this program did not think for themselves ever, wore as little clothing as legally possibly and were completely vapid (154).

overwhelmingly demanding he-man action heroes and female victims, why were they so prevalent on TV in the late 1980s? I would suggest that the backlash against feminism led to the creation of anti-feminist characters on shows dominated by men because they put women in their place (back in the kitchen or in bed).

In 1987, the few women who were on televisions were wives and mothers (with the exception of Murphy Brown, who later became a single mother). There were many family shows in the late 1980s, but in many of them, the mothers were absent or dead. Television was replacing "healthy independent women…with nostalgia-glazed portraits of apolitical `family' women" who often stressed family values and gender roles that sounded like something out of *Father Knows Best*!

Additionally, Faludi argues that the single woman vanished in the late 1970s and 1980s , but given the publication date of the book, she was not able to predict the re-emergence of a "brand" of single woman (a la *Ally McBeal*) that was a backlash response to *Mary Tyler Moore* in the 1990s. Ally McBeal was a lawyer with an established career-track and decent income, but she was hyper-sexualized, always portrayed wearing micro-mini shirts and heels, and for such a high-powered lawyer, she often acted unintelligently in social situations (particularly with men). Her singular goal was to fight the adage that stated "a woman was more likely to get hit by lightning than get married after age 35" (Salholz 1) That statement in itself illustrates a backlash against feminism, suggesting that feminists who place career goals above all else will be lonely and unwed, regretting that they ever took the career track over the "mommy track" (Douglas and Michaels, 208). Certainly, at the end of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* in 1977, career-oriented Mary has no marriage prospects and is faced with a job loss when the station who owns WJM

fires the entire staff ("The Last Show"). Perhaps in a post-Mary world, career woman

like Ally McBeal felt they had more to fear from being successful rather than married

(being both does not seem to be an option). Mary (and her 1970s counterparts) cut their

teeth on Betty Friedan's ground-breaking *The Feminine Mystique,* which told them that

the "only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is

by creative work of her own. There is no other way" (Friedan, 344). But Ally McBeal's

generation was more jaded. In fact, the idea of the "Opt-Out Revolution" is steeped in the

idea that "many female careerists were foregoing their fat salaries (though not their

husbands) in favor of the stroller-pushing suburban life" (Faludi x).

I do not think the man-crazed single woman was much of an improvement, but we

also got Scully and Xena in the 1990s, at the same time as Ally McBeal was growing in

popularity. That single women were portrayed as broken, overachieving bitches who

"want it all" was definitely paramount to the idealized "wife and mother" paradigm that

exploded all over the airwaves in the 1980s (particularly with the show *thirtysomething*).

It showed motherhood and being a good wife as the highest possible achievement for a

woman.

Susan Faludi acknowledges, in the 2006 Preface to the fifteenth anniversary

edition of *Backlash,* that there has been some progress since 1991, but points out that in

the current conservative socio-political climate (especially following 9/11), too many

people think feminism is dead (xvi). One of the reasons for this is that many people

believe that women have succeeded in getting everything we need to be equal, but Faludi

believes this is just a distraction created by politicians, advertising and the media to keep

women at the current status quo. Faludi argues that many women are also just missing

the point. An audience member at one of her lectures stated that "feminism has been nothing but a burden for my generation…(because we) have to get the highest grades…best LSAT scores…get into the most prestigious law firm…" (xvi). This statement worries Faludi (and me as well) who argues that many women are misunderstanding how feminism is defined. "What is missing is the deeper promise of a woman's revolution, a revolution that was never intended to champion cut-throat competition or winner-take-all ethics, a revolution that was abandoned on the road to economic opportunity" (xvi). How this is reflected in the sudden rise of Warrior Women in 1990s television is open to debate.

Chocolate, Body-suits and Gossiping on the Bridge

In the 1980s, there were science fiction/fantasy and speculative television programs on television, but none produced any characters I would define as "warrior women" by any stretch of the imagination. Shows like *Voyagers* (1982-1983), *Werewolf* (1987), *The Powers of Matthew Star* (1982-1983), *Quantum Leap* (1989-1993), *Superboy* (1988-1992), *Starman* (1986-1987) and *Manimal* (1983) featured no regular female characters at all, while shows like *The Greatest American Hero* (1981-1983) made a clear delineation between the "hero" played by William Katt, and his girlfriend, who was generally the damsel in distress for him to rescue. *Beauty and The Beast* (1987-1990) can definitely fall into the "speculative fiction" category, but by no stretch of the imagination could the primary protagonist, Catherine, be viewed as a "warrior". In her position as employee in the District Attorney's office in New York City, Catherine often

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fought for the underdog, but it was clear that she had limited power and she was not
intended to be a fighter.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994), a spin-off show from the classic
1960s *Star Trek* series, did address some of the complaints about the lack of women in
key positions on the original program, but still fell short of producing strong female
characters that were known for their fighting skills and heroic behaviors[13]. The
introduction of Security Officer Tasha Yar in the first few episodes showed promise, but
the character was killed in the first season, after having been given no chance to develop.

Aside from the ill-fated Tasha Yar, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* had two
reasonably self-actualized female protagonists in Dr. Beverly Crusher and Deanna Troi,
however, "the two most prominent women aboard the *Enterprise `D'* are involved with
the traditional female roles: they are communicators and healers" (Johnson-Smith 81).
Although Deanna Troi has been through Starfleet Academy and has earned a military
rank in the same way as the others on the *Enterprise 'D*'s Bridge, she is primarily known
for her role as "Ship's Counselor", she is usually referred to just as "Deanna", and her
rank is almost never discussed. Additionally, Deanna is rarely seen in uniform,
especially in the later seasons of the show, when the writers/directors/costumers seemed
to forget she was supposed to be a bridge officer and instead dressed her in a flowing
blue dress, low cut and tight enough to display the assets for which she was primarily
known to fans. Dr. Crusher is at least respected as the Chief Medical Officer, but spends

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[13] Some of the critiques came from the previous discussed issue of Uhura serving a telephone operator, and
Majel Barrett's position as second in command in the original pilot reduced to the role of Nurse Chapel,
whose primary function was to hand Dr. McCoy tools and pine away for her replacement on the bridge, Mr.
Spock (Johnson-Smith 80).

more time mothering her son and building a personal relationship with various male guest stars than she does operating or treating illnesses.

Neither Deanna nor Beverly Crusher could be seen as warriors simply because they did not perform the same functions as their 1970s antecedents: they rarely, if ever fought villains or aliens, they almost never defended themselves from attack and they never carried weapons. Even though both retained military ranks, neither ever led an away team mission or fought in military operations. Famously, the one time Deanna was left in charge of flying *The Enterprise*, she crashed the entire ship into a planet (film: *Star Trek Generations*, 1994)!

After producing some of the most memorable warrior women on television in the 1970s, strong female characters of the 1980s leave something to be desired. Even the UK's long-running *Doctor Who* and *Red Dwarf* (1988-1999) offer no shining examples of female warriors during this time, as the Doctor's Companions during this time were either male, or the prototypical damsel in distress, and *Red Dwarf*'s primary characters were all male until the late 1990s. In fact, it was not until the 1990s that we see a return of the warrior woman on television at all. But when she returned, she came back with blades drawn, attitude on fire and ready to take back the airwaves.

Chapter Five: Welcome to the Future

In the 1990s, we see the re-emergence of the strong warrior woman "hero"/lead or title character. What sets her apart from her 1970s counterparts is that she often has strength and training, but not always super powers. Even when she has a male boss (which she almost always does), she often ignores his edicts to think on her own. She echoes the feminist ideologies of her predecessors in that there is no doubt that she sees herself as equal to (if not stronger than) the men with whom she interacts, and she does not see her biological sex as a deterrent to obtaining her goals. This description fits every one of the women I am examining in this section: Xena from *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), Buffy Sommers from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), Kara "Starbuck" Thrace from *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-present), Dr. Dana Scully from *The X-Files* (1993-2002) and Zoe Alleyne from *Firefly* (2002-2003). All five women are talented and trained warriors, but unlike the women in the 1970s, they are often faced with moral ambiguity and indecision that forces them to make difficult choices.

Xena, Buffy, Starbuck, Scully and Zoe share many traits in common, even when their stories and characters are completely different. Xena lives two thousand years in the past, in an alternative version of history, while Zoe exists in a fairly dismal future where humans have spread throughout the galaxy, but have failed to achieve the better universe envisioned by Gene Roddenberry in his *Star Trek* series. Starbuck lives in completely different galaxy from our own, and Buffy and Scully live in the late 20th century, in the United States. The settings are important because the shared themes and

values do not in fact reflect the diverse cultures displayed on the televisions show, but the paradigms for 20th century America, especially for accepted female behaviors.

Although in the late 20th century and early 21st century, futuristic televisions shows have attempted to challenge the generally accepted mores and values of American society, programs still rarely deviate from gender expectations. The critically acclaimed remake of *Battlestar Galactica,* for instance, features a woman who is an Admiral commanding an entire fleet (she gets too powerful and is assassinated), a woman who is the President of the last remaining human society (she has breast cancer), a woman who is assistant chief mechanic for the fleet (she has a baby and is often "away"), and a woman who is a kick-butt, chain smoking, hard drinking, boxer with a foul mouth and a bad temper (she died in one of the most recent episodes). It is almost as if the writers and producers were eager to say "look – there is much more equality in the future – they have a female President", but then did not know what to do except mimic the familiar.

While screen writer and producer Ronald D. Moore was creating strong female characters for *Battlestar Galactica*, he (and the other producers) also decided that they would all be heterosexual (no lesbians seem to exist in the future) and the show goes out of its way to reinforce heteronormative paradigms. The strongest female characters are all "partnered up" with even stronger males, most of the woman fighters and mechanics are married and many have babies. Even when they are fighting a war and struggling to survive, they are having heterosexual love affairs and producing offspring. Apparently, it is much easier to reflect current mores and values for a society than to completely challenge them.

When Judith Butler argues that we all "do gender", she also suggests a need to "undo" gender – to challenge expectations and erase the boundaries ("Imitation and Gender Subordination" 317). Gender becomes performative because we have to make decisions every day about what we will do to tell others who we are. Susan Bordo suggests that how we do gender is reflected on our bodies – not just in genitalia, but in how we say to the world "I am female, here's how you can tell". As suggested by Frye, West and Zimmerman, et al, others can tell who is female not simply through biological clues such as, for example, larger breasts or smaller stature, but because in western culture, women generally walk a certain way (small steps, holding the body close and protected), wear particular clothing (skirts, dresses, lower-cut shirts, etc.) and adorn themselves with make-up and jewelry. Not to do so is to challenge the idea of "woman" in this culture and when the body is restricted by social mores, women (especially, but men as well sometimes, because straight men are careful not to be mistaken as "gay") are forced to construct their bodies in ways that match the gender they are performing – which our culture discourses suggest is "feminine". Women do not just buy the "right" clothing and make-up, but in western culture, often starve themselves and physically hurt their bodies to fit in with expectations. Womanhood is therefore not a natural state, because if it were, then there would be no modifications necessary to become a perfect reflection of that gender performance: all females would already be women, as dictated by western culture.

When looking at heroines of science fiction and fantasy televisions shows, it is hard for someone with feminist awareness to ignore how femininity is reinforced by the characters. Bordo might look at characters like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Xena* not

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just for their warrior status (which definitely challenges feminine paradigms), but for the fact that while they are fighting monsters and villains (mostly male), they are perfectly coiffed, they do not break their nails and they kick butt in skirts! Buffy even manages to kill vampires with fancy martial arts moves, never once feeling the need to kick off her wedge heels. It seems okay for women to be warriors and heroines; as long as they are feminine while doing it (then it also can be male fantasy – the dominant patriarchy often being a major consideration when constructing these characters). When female warriors start to seem too "butch", this is quickly corrected through the clever use of costuming and motherhood. Gabrielle (the sidekick and companion to the title character on *Xena: Warrior Princess*) wears long, flowing skirts and blouses that hide her body until she takes on a more "warrior" role during Xena's pregnancy. Gabrielle's often reinforced position as pacifist and peacemaker is challenged when she, by necessity, must take up arms to defend herself and Xena against multiple enemies over the course of Season Five, as Xena carries, then delivers, a baby girl. Once Gabrielle starts fighting and is labeled "warrior", her clothing seems to diminish in direct correlation to the build-up of her pectoral muscles. There is something threatening about strong women, but a feminized warrior woman is acceptable: Gabrielle is not masculinzed by her well-developed muscles, short hair, or her bad-ass skills with sais and quarterstaff because she is underdressed and clearly still a female and sexualized as female.

On *Battlestar Galactica* speculations about the very "butch" Starbuck's sexual orientation were answered when the character was shown having one-night stands with three men in a matter of three episodes. The audience was told more than "Starbuck is straight". By placing her in submissive, "bottom" positions in sex scenes, some of her

power was removed as well. She was made into a sexualized and feminine being by removing her clothing (which was usually a utilitarian, unisex fighter pilot's uniform) and showing her curves and a hint of breasts. Clearly, showing Starbuck as naked as non-cable TV would allow proved that she was definitely female and traditionally feminized by sexuality. Showing her in bed, under several men proved that she is definitely normatively heterosexual. As Judith Lorber would say "gender done" (141).

As I discuss earlier, the discourses for "femininity" in American culture usually reflect not only gender and heteronormative paradigms, but also reflect the values of white (and middle-class) women. Neither Butler nor West and Zimmerman discuss how doing gender might be different for women of color. In looking at decades of science fiction and fantasy television shows, it becomes clear that even the women of color on these programs are expected to fit into the gender expectations for this culture. Uhura may have been black, but she lacked ethnic identity outside of her name and skin color. She was one-sided because her identity was the same as everyone else's on *Star Trek*; they reflected a hopeful, futuristic utopian mono-culture that Gene Roddenberry created (Johnson-Smith 58). Roddenberry's future without racism also seems to be a future in which there are no cultural differences, no ethnic identities at all. How can there be racial problems if everyone is the same? But what kind of message does send non-white viewers? They are essentially being told that their identities do not matter because in the future, everyone will be white, even if their skin color is not white. When Uhura performed her gender as token woman on the Bridge of the Enterprise and kissed Captain Kirk, the censors were in an uproar at the first interracial kiss on national television[14] (Golumbia 84), but the characters did not reflect on this as an issue at all. Uhura was the

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[14] "Plato's Stepchildren" (1968)

only woman available, and as such, of course she was the one to kiss Kirk because that is what women do. The fact that she was African-American was problematic in a time when interracial embraces where never shown on television, but because she was the only woman present, there were no other choices: two men kissing was not an option in 1968[15].

The challenge in looking at gender performance in these TV shows is to situate the shows historically and culturally, when they are not meant to exist in our time and place. The shows apply contemporary rules for femininity to characters that supposedly live in the future or in alternate realities, so in my analysis I must first deconstruct the rules and then look for the challenges. Are the shows not challenging cultural codes because the writers, directors and producers want to ground the shows in a reality that audiences want, or simply because they do not know how to envision a deconstructed gender? West and Zimmerman introduce the notion of accountability: Not only do we have to perform gender, we are held accountable to others when we refuse to do so (131). Because we know the cultural codes for gender, we know how to behave. Because the characters on science fiction and fantasy television shows are constructed within our culture, they reflect our cultural discourses. The definition of "feminine" in contemporary society includes obedient, quiet, taking up less space, compliant, pretty, heterosexual and, ultimately, married with children.

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[15] It is also important that the two characters where under the influence of alien mind control at the time, perhaps "excusing" the behaviors as aberrant. If Kirk had freely and of his own will sought Uhura as a romantic partner, this would not have been allowed by the censors…or most audience members at the time.

Buffy and *The X-Files* are not set on another planet or in fantasy worlds; they are

quite deliberately placed in the late 20th/early 21st centuries and their alternative worlds of

the paranormal, conspiracy and intrigue are a product of the same influences as the rest of

the planet. Because the stories exist within the "real" world, it makes sense that they

would reflect the social issues dominant in Western culture today. To completely dismiss

the fact that they exist in this historical time and space would cause the shows to seem

incoherent and, hence, less powerful.

Home has historically been the provenance of family and the one place where the

woman might have some influence and authority. There is a sense of "place" that rings

true with both shows, and Buffy and Scully both have a "home base" to return to, where

they want to be relaxed and keep their families safe. Often, episodes of both shows

feature scenes in which those homes are invaded by outsiders, destroying the illusion of

safety. Scully's home is often broken into by other members of her own FBI team, as

well as by the "shadow government" and aliens who are determined to undermine

Scully's attempts to get to the truth. Buffy continually is attacked by demons, monsters

and vampires at her mother's house, and again in her college dorm room when she moves

away. The running joke about the cost of replacing windows and furniture serves to jar

the viewer by creating a realistic threat: the enemy is real and he just broke your mom's

favorite vase.

Placing Zoe Alleyne on a space ship without a home planet immediately shows

the audience that she is far from being a housewife, with all that entails, but to Zoe, the

spaceship *Serenity* is her home, even if she is not the person who cleans the bridge or washes the uniforms. Even though Zoe is married to *Serenity*'s pilot, Wash, she rarely takes on the traditional housewife role, except on one occasion when she nurtures Wash after he is tortured and makes what he calls "wife soup" ("War Stories"). Zoe is described by Wash as "a warrior woman" in another episode ("Ariel"), and as the Captain's clear second in command, it is Zoe, not Wash, who leaves the ship for missions of a generally criminal nature. She fought in the War of Unification (on the losing side) and has not left behind her military chain of command or instinctive reaction to attack, barking orders while defending herself and the rest of the crew. So even though she is a warrior, Zoe is also in the "protector" role, looking after those who are less capable, especially in battle.

In the back story for the show, it is clear that Zoe's formative years were spent in the military, and that she fought on the losing side in a failed rebellion. She is skilled with weapons, take orders with little hesitation[16] and is the first to put herself in the line of fire when the crew or ship comes under attack. Physically, she is very tall, with defined (but not overly pronounced) muscles and a defiant stance, but this is softened by the casting of a beautiful woman (Gina Torres) in the role. Zoe is never masculinized, even when firing a gun or aggressively taking control of situations because, although Zoe is a hardened soldier who wears tailored pants and utilitarian shoes, *Firefly*'s creator, Joss Whedon makes it obvious that she is feminine. In one telling moment, Zoe casually suggests in one breath that if she were to wear a dress it would "be one with a little slink", while at

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[16] Zoe is too intelligent to follow orders blindly once she has left the military. Although she respects Malcolm Reynolds as the Captain, she often ignores or alters his orders when she feels he is wrong.

the same time threatening to hurt a co-worker who objectifies her after she makes that comment ("Shindig").

In spite of the warrior stance, the tough speech and the no-nonsense approach, Zoe is not asexual: she and Wash clearly have a sex life that is often referred to (and sometimes seen), but she falls short of being a sexualized object primarily because everyone watching her from the audience knows that she will not hesitate to shoot anyone who looks at her the wrong way. Zoe is not an object, but like Buffy, Xena and Starbuck, she is a woman who just happens to be a warrior, rather than a warrior who just happens to be a woman.

Xena: Warrior Feminist

Xena: Warrior Princess (1995-2001) is a genre-bending show that seems to fit best, but not neatly, into the category of "fantasy" television, because although *Xena: Warrior Princess* has semi-historical and mythical settings, most of what occurs in the narrative is outside the realm of possibility. Having established that tentative definition, it is important to note that in spite of fantastic and imaginative settings, the characters on *Xena: Warrior Princess* always seem extremely grounded in current-day discourse when it comes to their actions and behavior. Similarly, *Xena: Warrior Princess* was born during the last decade of the twentieth century and is a manifestation of the values of that time in Western society.

To say that the show is character-driven is an understatement: Most of the plots are decidedly unrealistic, and Xena's amazing skills and feats of acrobatic daring

challenge even the most talented trapeze artists. Even when taking on Valkyries[17], helping the Trojans fight the Greeks[18] or flirting with the destiny of Julius Caesar[19], the relationships between Xena, Gabrielle and many of the characters they encounter, make it easier to ignore outrageous plot devices (Xena's destruction of the Olympian gods, for example) and the tendency for the show to go from tragedy one week to slap-stick comedy in the next with neither rhyme nor reason. Although often "play(ing) fast and loose with history, plundering the canon and interweaving revamped historical events and figures with others borrowed from mythology, literature, and twentieth-century popular culture" (Jones 2000:404), careful character development saves the show from degenerating into mindless entertainment. Never taking the audience for granted or underestimating the power of its fan-base allows *Xena* to challenge some preconceived notions about women action-adventure heroes. The tenets of third wave feminism (Walker 1992:39) are mirrored in the concerns and actions of Xena and Gabrielle, with key plotlines often pivoting on the strength of the two protagonists as strong women who do not rely on anyone but each other in times of great crisis. This is a change from their earlier counterparts, Wonder Woman, the Bionic Woman and Wilma Deering, who always turned to the less powerful men in their lives for assistance.

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[17] "The Rheingold" (6:07), "The Ring" (6:08) and "The Return of the Valkyrie" (6:09)
[18] "Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts" (1:12)
[19] "Destiny" (2:12), "The Deliverer" (3:04), "When in Rome" (3:16), "A Good Day" (4:05), "Endgame" (4:20), "The Ideas of March" (4:21), and "When Fates Collide" (6:19)

 Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a very self-reflexive television show that is usually

not only aware of its fictive nature, but also willing to share that knowledge with viewers.

By continually bringing "real life" references into the fictional settings, "the introduction

of the 'unreal' is set against the category of the 'real'" (Hollinger 200). The storyline and

setting are fiction, but they seem to coexist with the known world and the show often

reacts to the fact that a real world exists separate from the fictional sphere.   In the pilot,

"Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1.1), Buffy just about winks at the audience, tearing down

the so-called 4th wall when she says "now, this in not gonna be pretty. We're talking

violence, strong language, adult content...", she is referring directly to the TV Parental

Guidelines Monitoring Board's warning labels being slapped on television programs. In

a sense, Buffy is telling the viewers, "hey this is a TV program…and it should be rated

TV:MA". As the heroine of the show, she is going to challenge expectations of what a

young woman should act like within the confines of the High School social structure.

Pretty young blonde cheerleaders are not expected to participate actively (and with skill)

in violent acts, use strong language or even consider adult sexual behaviors. Buffy does

all of these things skillfully and with relish.

 At another point in the same pilot episode, Buffy is chagrinned to realize that

everyone seems to know who she is: the chosen Vampire Slayer, alone in her generation,

who is gifted with the supernatural skills required to rid the world of vampires and

demons (Billson 24). The line "having a secret identity in this town is a lot of work" is a

direct reference to the idea of OTHER heroes, like her predecessors Jaime Sommers,

Andrea Thomas and Diana Prince, having secret identities. Buffy does not wear a cape or a mask, but there are clearly reasons why broadcasting to other humans "I am the Slayer" would not be in her best interest unless she wants to spend all of her time looking for monsters under beds and seeking ghosts in attics. Being aware of her place in the superhero lexicon emphasizes the fictive nature of the story because we have a superhero discourse in literature and pop culture. Many viewers are presumably aware of this and expects that it will be understood immediately for what it is. It adds an additional level, suggesting that, like earlier warrior women, Buffy exists in disguise, hidden from the lens of the outside world.

Buffy is a fifteen-year old sophomore in High School when the series begins. She looks helpless, the type who runs to a football player boyfriend if someone insults her clothing choice for the day, but in reality, she has super-human strength and the honed training of a killer. By the time she graduates high school, she has stopped the Apocalypse several times and has brutally slain hundreds of vampires and monsters, rarely breaking a nail and never quite regretting her actions. The mask she wears is that of mediocre student and semi-well behaved daughter. Because her body is not overtly muscular, nor does she appear to be athletic or strong in any way, she is able to hide within the masses as one of them, all the while hiding the secret identity "Vampire Slayer".

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this paper, I explore how the "warrior woman" trope in western culture, as

portrayed in late 20th century science fiction/fantasy and speculative television, reflects

how women are "supposed to" perform gender in American culture. Through analysis of

the paradigms for how women are "supposed to/expected to" perform gender in

American culture, especially in the late 20th century, I show how the tenets of 2nd and 3rd

wave feminism influenced the western paradigm of "the ideal woman" and impacted pop

culture by producing "warrior women" who both reflected and challenged

heteronormative ideas and feminist principles. In the 1970s, she is sexy without being

sexual (Crawley et al 72), she rarely uses weapons and she answers exclusively to male

bosses who make the major decisions in her life, yet she is unmarried and child-free,

epitomizing the disco era's pre-AIDS sexual freedom[20]. By the 1990s and 2000s, she is

often in a long term relationship (if not married), she almost always has a child and she is

nurturing of others, but by the same token, she is an independent agent whose sexuality

comes not just from her ability to attract men, but from her skills, education and personal

strength[21]. This trend towards operating independently of a team or male boss continued

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[20] Jaime Sommers, Diana Prince/Wonder Woman, Colonel Wilma Deering and Andrea Thomas/Isis
[21] The late 20th century characters are a little more complex than those of the 1970s. Xena is the only one who exclusively never takes orders from a male boss, but Buffy sheds her Watcher in the 6th season and Dana Scully works with Fox Mulder and their primary boss is male, but they rarely listen to him. The characters who exist within a military world are more likely to have males in charge, but they are less likely that their predecessors to follow him blindly. Zoe Alleyne who is the 1st Officer of the *Serenity,* follows Captain Mal Reynolds orders, unless she feels he is wrong, and Starbuck continually disobeys Admiral Adama, which ultimately leads to her death,

through the early 2000s, culminating with the cancellation of "warrior woman" shows

like *Xena, The X-Files, Firefly* and *Buffy* after the events of September 11, 2001[22].

Following the post-9/11 trend towards ensemble cast shows[23], this past year has

offered several programs that hearken back to the 1990s warrior woman: however, one

(*Painkiller Jane,* 2007) has already been cancelled and one (an updated version of *The*

Bionic Woman, 2007-) suffers from lackluster reviews and audience disinterest[24], while

the third (*Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, 2008-) has enjoyed critical

success, but at this writing has not been on the air long enough to predict its impact, if

any, on the genre. In many ways, the female protagonists of all three shows mimic the

warrior women who came before them: Jane, Jaime and Sarah are powerful (the new

Jaime Sommers is even more forcefully bionic than the earlier edition, and Jane Vasco

has the ability to heal from any injury, while Sarah Connor has trained extensively in

combat), but only Sarah operates on her own. Jaime and Jane both work for top secret

paramilitary organizations. Jaime and Sarah have teenagers to care for, while Jane is in

and out of relationships, but has no children. The three shows have not existed long

enough to analyze thoroughly for the purpose of this paper, but the fact that they exist at

all suggests a possible renewed interest in warrior women on television.

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[22] At this point, there is no supportive evidence, nonetheless, I am suggesting that there may be a correlation between the events of 9/11/01 and the canceling of many television shows featuring strong, female protagonists. This is something I wish to explore further in the future.

[23] Such as *Lost* (2004-)*, Heroes* (2006-) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-) represent the few remaining shows in the speculative genre, but the "team player" shows like *CSI, Law and Order, Gray's Anatomy,* etc. have flourished the past five years.

[24] http://www.tvseriesfinale.com/2007/12/bionic_woman_has_the_nbc_series_been_cancelled.php

Ideally, in the future, I would like to see a futuristic or speculative television program that acknowledges the diversity in appearance and experiences of all women without reproducing the motifs we have seen for the past several decades. The warrior woman I would love to see on television a strong, older woman who wears over a size 14 (because one does not have to be small to have fighting skills). She would be less concerned with proving she is heterosexual than with winning battles against evil, but she would still embrace her own sexuality and she would be comfortable exploring her sexual identity. If she has a child, it is not to prove her femininity, but because she has chosen to have a child. She would have comfortable friendships with people of all genders, colors and creeds, as well as all sizes and ages. Clearly, as a culture, we still have a way to go before achieving his, but I continue to hope that the warrior woman will once again but on to the airwaves, kick butt and take names, on speculative television shows of the future.

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