

Spring 5-19-2020

Trauma, Violence, and Deathly Consequences: Female Justice in Contemporary Literature and Television Adaptations

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Trauma, Violence, and Deathly Consequences:
Female Justice in Contemporary Literature and Television Adaptations

By

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Graduate Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The College of Arts and Sciences
Department of English and Rhetoric Georgia College & State University, May 2020

Abstract:

Over the past decade, a familiar villainous character has begun to arise in television adaptation: the mentally-fractured heroine who turns to villainy: women who have been attacked, raped, or lost loved ones to villains. These attacks and losses trigger murderous rampages and other violence that often leads to their descent into villainy. Netflix's *Jessica Jones*, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and its television adaptation *Game of Thrones*, feature heroines that turn to violence to get revenge. However, the violent heroines in these texts and television adaptations do not just become villains; some find redemption and retain their status as heroes. The level of violence the women commit and the varying consequences that some face for similar acts of violence, shows the changing morals of modern society. The rising prominence of these heroines-turned-villains in popular entertainment formats can be seen as a marker of the growing section of society that believes in pushing for less violent solutions to injustice. This small movement means that a shaky line is being drawn in entertainment formats between what is defined as acceptable violence and what is now being considered as a villainous character flaw. What determines when a character is lost and when they are redeemable is when their actions are completely controlled by their trauma and when they are deemed to be too much of a risk. Analyzing the portrayals of Daenerys, Arya, Trish, and Jessica works to highlight ongoing issues

in our society: sexism, fear, ableism. The forms of entertainment that get time and attention must be looked at with a critical eye in order for society to see if it is perpetuating negative ideas about women, trauma, or mental illness.

Keywords: Feminism, Violence, Justice, Activism, Legal, Mental-illness, Morality, Trauma

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Submitted by Allie Owens in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.A English Literature.

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Acknowledgments:

First, I have to give a special thanks to Dr. Jennifer Flaherty, who helped me turn my rambling ideas into a comprehensible thesis. The creation of this thesis has been difficult, with many trials and tribulations to overcome during its creation. The advice and support from my mentor, Dr. Flaherty, has been instrumental in keeping me sane and on track. I would also like to thank the other members of my thesis committee for the advice given to me over the years in their classes and on this thesis: Dr. Mary Magoulick and Dr. Joy Bracewell. I also have to say that I find the fact that this thesis was presented by a woman and overseen by a panel of women to be very fitting, given the subject matter of my thesis. Thank you all.

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Introduction:

Over the past few decades, the rise of television popularity has led to a mass of adaptations of books, plays, and comic books into television shows. This growth in popularity, combined with the current third-wave feminist movement, has created a demand for shows with female characters at their heart; if one desires equality in the home and in the workspace, then the desire to be equally represented on the big and small screen is only natural. The result of this demand is the growing popularity of female characters that are complex and full of passion, anger, love, or hate. In her book, *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*, Vicki Callahan discusses the issues facing the portrayal of women on the screen: “Within feminist theory especially, there were debates about the weight of cultural and social factors, since ‘real women’ often seemed to be absent from the screen” (127). When looking at classic films or television shows one often finds women stereotyped into romantic love interest, sexy femme fatales, and humorous fools. This stereotyping of women is problematic because the entire female experience cannot be fit into neat little categories; everyone wants to see themselves represented fairly, so inclusivity is needed to create connections. Feminist theorist, Clare Hemmings also looks at the importance of creating connections between women in her article, “Affect and Feminist Methodology, Or What Does It Mean to be Moved.” In the article, Hemmings discusses the way emotional connections can be made “through affective belonging to social movements” (148). By having entertainment portray women who experience love, loss, pain, and anger, female viewers can feel a sense of “belonging “connection because they recognize themselves in the characters.

This need for inclusivity to create representation on the screen and connection between women viewers is a simple part of being feminist. Judith de Luce discusses the way that

inclusivity has become a key tenant of feminism in her article, “Mutatis Mutandis: Feminism, Slogans, and the Future of Female Homosapiens:” “feminism includes the experiences and perspectives of all women...regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender preference, marital status, motherhood status, ability status, economic status or any other kind of difference” (270). By creating stories that include women from all walks of life, entertainment platforms can present life experiences that can help open viewers up to new world views and help get rid of feelings of negativity that come from being excluded or ignored.

As the feminist movements encouraged others to express desire for more accurate representation became more prominent, one can see stronger and more violent roles of women being portrayed by more and more entertainment outlets. This leads to the rise of a murderous Bride¹ who is a fit match to the gun slinging Rambo. This change has also been seen in television shows. Like Dexter², and their other male counterparts, modern, television heroines do not shy away from getting justice or taking vengeance. These female protagonists who take justice into their own hands are even hailed as heroes for killings that they commit. Slim from *Enough* or The Bride from the *Kill Bill* films act as perfect examples of a complicated, female heroine who is not condemned for her violent actions. Like Slim and The Bride, female characters have now come to represent a vast number of women that have experienced trauma, assault, and persecution for simply being strong females. Furthermore, as fantasy and supernatural elements of storytelling made their way into film and television, these female characters also gained

¹ The Bride is a character from the *Kill Bill* films. She is considered to be the deadliest assassin in the *Kill Bill* universe. After Bill attempts to kill her, The Bride, whose actual name is Beatrice Kiddo, hunts down Bill and his accomplices in order to get revenge.

² Dexter is a serial killer that only kills other murderers. Dexter is featured on the Showtime’s popular, television series, *Dexter*.

access to supernatural powers; it is these powers which make the female characters able to achieve justice that would be difficult to achieve in the real world.

However, a trend is emerging in which female heroes become villains after physical, emotional, or mental trauma. Netflix's *Jessica Jones*, George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and its television adaptation *Game of Thrones*, each feature violent female protagonists that become murderous heroines after mental trauma influences them to further acts of violence. This is a drastic change, as many heroines, like the aforementioned *Slim* and *The Bride*, rise up after they are mentally fractured. The change in perception and portrayal of these heroines turned villains can be linked to the smaller factions in the entertainment field that are starting to advocate for less violence and to the ever-present fear of what female power can do to upset the patriarchy system of privilege that is currently in place. Even though promoting "girl power" claims to be mainstream, the idea that women might gain enough power to disrupt the status quo is a threatening one for many that benefit from the privileges of being in a patriarchal society; privileged majorities can fear that helping minorities will disenfranchise the privileged. Feminist theorists Andrea Mosquera Varas and Alberto Coronel Tarancón discuss the sexism in positions of power and leadership in their article "Dismantling the Patriarchy in the Contemporary Gender Struggle:" "Thus, the most radical feature of hetero-patriarchy is that its political order is always presented as natural, necessary, ahistorical" (107). This narrative that a man in charge is "natural, necessary, ahistorical" is dangerous because it leaves no room for female advancement in politics or other platforms of power.

This fear of upsetting the current order of male power can be currently seen in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement. In her article, "Torment Porn or Feminist Witch Hunt" Candice Lanus analyzes a database of #MeToo posts from popular forums, such as Twitter and

Reddit: “With the long list of accused, new fears appeared in the discourse that #MeToo had become a ‘witch hunt’” (428). The fear and negative reaction to #MeToo movement can be seen specifically in the amount of negative reaction to accusations from Christine Ford against Brett Kavanaugh in 2018. One article in particular, by Emily Jashinsky, speaks of the futility in confronting one’s attacker long after the fact: “Does an unprovable and uncorroborated allegation that Kavanaugh did a terrible thing as a teenager— conduct that stands in contrast to what we know about his character today— disqualify him from sitting on the Supreme Court?” (par. 8). Jashinsky’s insinuation that Kavanaugh’s age and current character excused him from speculation highlights why so many women do not come forward when their assault happened in their youth or many years ago. Even if legal action cannot be taken against Kavanaugh, the need to believe and support victims of assault and harassment is crucial for helping survivors to overcome any possible trauma.

Despite the negativity, *Time* reporter Haley Sweetland Edwards notes a marked amount of support for Ford from fellow survivors: “For millions of women and men, she had replaced Kavanaugh as the protagonist in the nomination narrative. Women began calling into C-SPAN to tell their own, decades-old stories of harassment and rape. The hashtag #WhyIDidntReport exploded on social media, a rallying cry for those who had never gone public about their own sexual assault until then” (par. 4). This moment highlights the “affective belonging” that Hemmings discusses (148); by seeing Ford describe her experience, other survivors felt safe to join her by telling “their own, decades-old stories of harassment and rape.” Even in the face of the negativity from writers like Jashinsky, people who had never met before felt a connection over a shared experience and were moved to action because of this connection.

However intimidating the change to the status quo might be, it is needed to make improvements to society. While #MeToo might have caused systems to change, it was necessary for the truth to be heard and for justice to be served. This need to change and adapt as a society, even knowing that perfection is impossible, is another important argument made by Varas and Alberto Coronel Tarancón: “In other words, the genuinely populist ‘we’ within a progressive ‘we the people’ must always be under construction, yet aim for universality, maintaining its own openness and assuming the impossibility of perfect closure” (107). While a “perfect closure” can never be achieved, society must work for “universality” and “openness” in order to improve their society. One small step that can help push this inclusive agenda forward is in art and entertainment. After all, art reflects and helps to mold a society, which is why one needs to create and examine its message carefully.

The importance of understanding society’s influence on fictional characters cannot be understated; television helps us understand what society values. Despite the clear importance of violent, troubled female protagonists, there are limited studies that focus on fans’ reactions to them. Doug Meyer’s 2019 study, entitled “‘She Acts out in Inappropriate Ways’: Students’ Evaluations of Violent Women in Film” was created to collect data on how students reacted to violent female protagonists. Before diving into the data gained from the experiment, Meyer explains why he felt the need to conduct such an experiment: “because of the power of film to appear as objective evidence of the world, many social scientists have been concerned with how film’s messages are received” (64). With the understanding that filmed works are meant to be a reflection “of the world,” the portrayal of certain character types, including violent heroines, can influence the reactions of the viewer; to try and understand the current society, self-reflection of our biases and unconscious thoughts must be evaluated.

Data gained from Meyer's study is consisted of viewer responses; a group of women and men were polled after watching the film *Girls Town* in order to understand their reaction to the violent heroines of the film:

respondents most frequently praised violent female characters for selfless behavior...Furthermore, most respondents focused on characteristics other than violence when describing their reasons for liking a character...they explicitly and repeatedly addressed violence from their least favorite character. (Meyer 68)

The sample collected by Meyer shows that the female protagonists of *Girls Town* were judged positively for their "selfless behavior" and that those polled seemed to ignore the fact that their favorite character had violent characteristics. On one hand, this reaction suggests that the students like the violent heroines in spite of their violence. On the other hand, this type of reaction could simply mean that those in the study were simply uncomfortable with discussing female violence in a positive manner. In contrast, the students focus in on violent characteristics when discussing "their least favorite character." This type of reaction suggests that viewers will only condemn a character's violence when they dislike a particular character. While this study acts as a small sample, it highlights the importance of analyzing the ways that violent women are portrayed or viewed in negative or positive lights. In the case of Daenerys, Arya, Jessica and Trish, this sample acts to show how certain audiences could react to the violence that each woman facilitates. While Daenerys is the most violent of all the female characters mentioned, this did not hinder her popularity with fans because she is presented as a hero until the final season of the HBO show. In comparison, a viewer is more likely to focus negatively on the violence of a character that is presented as a villain. Acknowledging the possible bias is important when analyzing the way that the audience is likely to view these violent characters.

In the case of the heroine-turned-villain, readers and viewers can see double standards connected directly to the gender of the violent protagonist; while male heroes, like Dexter or James Bond, are not condemned for their murderous actions, Daenerys and Trish are condemned for their violence. One can also see a lack of understanding for violent heroines regarding their clear mental instability. Daenerys and Arya from *Game of Thrones*, and Trish and Jessica from *Jessica Jones*, are all moved to action by intense, emotional trauma, which has an obvious impact on their mental states. While none of Martin's books, *Game of Thrones*, or *Jessica Jones* shy away from violence, they actively promote characters that choose violence as a last resort. Although some of these violent heroines find redemption and retain their status as heroes in spite of their mental trauma, the heroines that are condemned as villains are often brought down because of the extent of their mental trauma. This double standard is exactly what happens when the mental traumas of Arya and Jessica are used to endear them to the fans, while the mental traumas of Daenerys and Trish are either ignored or actively used to condemn them.

In a world that is growing ever more aware of mental health struggles, why is the mental traumas of Daenerys and Trish ignored? Ableism³ and sexism play an important role in why the mental traumas of Daenerys and Trish are viewed as irredeemable characteristics. In an article for *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, Stephanie Larson discusses the negative reactions that society can have towards disabling trauma: "I suggest that disparaging and ableist ideas about mental disabilities undergird the oppressive, sexist, and even empowering labels" (682). Though Larson is focused on real-life incidents of trauma resulting from sexual assaults, her ideas easily apply to the violent heroines in this article. Arya, Daenerys, Jessica, and Trish all use varying levels of violence in direct reaction to their trauma, physical and mental. The

³ Ableism is when one discriminates against those that are disabled physically or mentally.

consequences of their portrayals on the screen are labels that focus on the worst aspects of their characters. H. Rakes also highlights the issue of ableism in her article, “Crip Feminist Trauma Studies in *Jessica Jones* and Beyond:” “The isolation many people with disabilities are forced to inhabit is due to the ableist sociopolitical arrangements that have invested in... segregating people with disabilities” (77). Her focus on the “isolation” that disabled people face is especially seen in the cases of Trish and Daenerys, because each woman’s mental trauma results in total isolation and death, respectively.

Although there are only minor differences found between Daenerys and Arya and Trish and Jessica, in their respective shows and worlds, their portrayal by showrunners and writers on the screen ignores the mental trauma of some character, while allowing it to be the factor that determines villainy in other characters. In a majority of modern societies the awareness of mental illness and trauma has increased to such an extent that it is now discussed in everyday activities: law, medicine, work, and education to name a few. While the desire to promote heroes that choose violence last seems positive, the choice to put Daenerys and Trish in the crazy villainess stereotype highlights the ways in which society is still struggling with mental illness and with female characters displaying violent characteristics that have previously been attributed to male characters. Although each text works to show powerful and multidimensional female characters, the hypocritical way each woman is treated either positively or negatively for similar acts of violence, works to reflect the many prejudices and double standards that society still struggles with today.

**Chapter 1: Assassins, Dragons, and Direwolves, Oh My:
*A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones***

It cannot be denied that George R. R. Martin's series, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, has become one of the most popular series of the fantasy genre in the last few decades. It is this popularity that led to Martin's series being adapted to a television format, entitled *Game of Thrones*, by HBO in 2011. In her article, "Power and the Denial of Femininity in *Game of Thrones*," Dain Marques attributes a significant portion of the popularity of the books and the show to fact that they feature so many strong female characters: "Depictions of women in the fantasy genre have historically been scarce. While reproducing the structure of medieval chivalric romances, these portrayals tend to fall into two different categories: either the damsel in distress—fragile, weak, and in need of a hero to save her—or the villain of the story" (47). Although few women in the series are "fragile [or] weak," the way that the prominent, female characters balance between hero and "villain" is of considerable notice. Despite the violence that Martin's series is known for, it can be surprising to new readers or viewers that many of the prominent female characters, like Daenerys, Arya, and Cersei, are just as embroiled in the violence as their male counterparts. In the case of Daenerys and Arya, their involvement with violence is often viewed in a positive light by the audience because of their desire to use violence to get justice for themselves and for others.

Since the final two books of the series are still to be completed, HBO had to work ahead of Martin's books. Although the *Game of Thrones* directors, David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, planned the off-book seasons with Martin's character arcs in mind, the fate of a number of the characters has left many fans unsatisfied. Despite the similarity in their plotlines and portrayals in the book series and the television show, only Arya receives a happy ending on the show:

Daenerys is murdered by Jon Snow, who is her nephew and former lover, and Arya gives up her chance for revenge to survive and sails to explore what is west of Westeros. The dissatisfaction of the fans can be linked to the novel's incompleteness, which means that fans of both the series and show do not know how closely Benioff and Weiss followed the character arcs that Martin shared with them. Daenerys's extreme popularity as a character in the books and on the screen, leaves fans confused about her sudden descent into insanity and her unmitigated slaughter of innocent citizens in King's Landing. Her seemingly insane cruelty and subsequent death left fans reeling, with many fans of the books turning to the text to see if they had missed the signs of a mass murderer in the making.

As discussed in the introduction, this is not the first time that readers and viewers have seen a powerful woman going on a murder rampage after suffering a mental trauma. However, the treatment of the rampaging women in HBO's *Game of Thrones* is drastically different from past films, such as *Kill Bill*. If one follows the storyline of Daenerys and Arya in both the books and the television show, one can see how both women follow a similar character arc. Although they do not suffer a mental breakdown immediately after they experience the extreme traumas in their lives, both women are pushed to violence to ensure that the villains are punished for their crimes. Despite their many similarities, the differences in their endings feel dramatically different, but the reason the HBO producers promoted one woman over the other is relatively simplistic in nature. The primary reason that Arya has her happily-ever-after is because she is not an unstoppable force, like Daenerys and her dragons, and because Arya chooses to give up her revenge. Ultimately, Daenerys is condemned because of the idea that ultimate power, especially in the hands of a woman, could lead to catastrophe.

Above everything, both women represent actual human conditions: orphans, victims of abuse and violence, underdogs, powerful people, the hopeful, and the pessimistic. Due to what they represent, there are certain factors that influence their character development but not their endings, including their gender. Although the fact that they are women influences their choices and arcs, the fact that Daenerys is a woman is not the main reason she is killed. If she had been a man, it is possible that Daenerys would have met the exact same fate; like the Mad King before her, who was killed because he abused his power. While the mental health of each woman clearly influences the choices that lead to her ending, it is not the deciding factor in why Daenerys is killed and Arya is free. Although both women have a number of similarities, the level of threat that each woman presents to the characters and to the entire fantasy universe are unequal; Arya possesses the skills of a master assassin, and Daenerys possesses extreme levels of power via her dragons.

Ultimately, fear is one of the main factors that influences how Daenerys is portrayed by the HBO showrunners and writers. In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, affect theorist Sara Ahmed discusses how fear influences the actions and reactions of humanity: “Fear involves an *anticipation* of hurt or injury. Fear projects us from the present into a future.... So the object that we fear is not simply before us, or in front of us, but impresses upon us in the present, as an anticipated pain in the future” (65). The idea of a Daenerys, a woman who possesses unstoppable control over creatures of mass destruction, creates bodily fear in the same way that a ruler with a new powerful weapon stimulates physical emotional reactions: “One sweats, one’s heart races, one’s whole body becomes a space of unpleasant intensity, an impression that overwhelms us and pushes us back with the force of its negation, which may sometimes involve taking flight, and other times may involve paralysis” (Ahmed 65). Fear has the power to cause the most

extreme reactions in the human existence, such as flight or fight. HBO's portrayal of Daenerys emphasizes fear of her because there is no chance of creating checks and balances in her reign; her dragon and loyal armies give her an incredible amount of power that creates a high level of fear in the other characters of the show.

1. From Underdogs to Avengers: The Rapid and Slow Ascent of Daenerys and Arya

In *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones*, righteous, female violence can be found in the parallel characters of Daenerys Targaryen and Arya Stark. Arya Stark's rise from lost-boy to unstoppable assassin follows a similar story arc of Daenerys, who rises from slave-bride to dragon queen. Although they are not the only female characters that are willing to kill, they both accumulate high body counts in pursuit of what they consider to be justice.

One of the biggest differences between their character arcs also created their devoted fan bases: the speed at which they rise up from the proverbial ashes. Since Daenerys's character arc in both the show and the series is almost constantly rising, the readers and audience are able to be swept up with Daenerys as she reaches new heights. In contrast, Arya's character arc is on a near-constant descent until she finally becomes a Faceless man, a select order of assassins that can change their appearance to help complete their missions. As the readers and audience follow Arya's constant tribulations, the readers and viewer's desire for her to succeed increases with every set back that she faces. While the arcs and plotlines presented by Martin and the HBO showrunners are designed to create different emotions in the fans, they both create the perfect atmosphere for the fans to become more and more attached to both portrayals of Arya and Daenerys.

Part 1

Ultimately, it is their portrayal as underdogs and feminist icons that gains Daenerys and Arya the love of the fans. In Daenerys's case, she is an orphan who is essentially sold into marriage and has to survive by her own strengths: "His fingers dug into her arm painfully and for an instant Dany felt like a child again, quailing in the face of his rage. She reached out with her other hand and grabbed the first thing she touched, the belt she'd hoped to give him...She swung it with all her strength. It caught him full in the face" (*A Game of Thrones* 417). This moment is where Daenerys finally stands up to her abusive brother in the book. The abusiveness of her brother is only highlighted by the fact that Daenerys states that she has been afraid "in the face of [Viserys's] rage" in the past. This scene also highlights her growth by acknowledging that she is using "all her strength," which is the strength of a fourteen-year-old girl, to stop him from hurting her anymore; she is acting in self-defense because she is no longer willing to be hurt or abused by anyone.

The fact that her character is constantly beaten down by her brother is what initially endears her to the fans of the books and the show. However, it is Daenerys's pursuit of justice for everyone that really establishes her character as a feminist icon. In her article for the *University of Baltimore Law Review*, Bridget Crawford discusses the key tenets of feminism, stating that, "In its best and most capacious form, feminism embraces justice for all" (168). Throughout the entire book and television series, Daenerys repeatedly works to accomplish "justice for all" of the people that she meets, regardless of color, gender, class, and especially the downtrodden. One instance where this can be seen is when Khal Drogo is invading small villages to prepare for war: "They passed other women being raped. Each time Dany reined up, sent her khas⁴ to make an end to it, and claimed the victim as slave" (*A Game of Thrones* 701). While her husband

⁴ Khas are Dothraki warriors. These khas follow Daenerys and do her bidding because she is their Khaleesi.

belongs to and stands for the traditions of a society in which slavery and rape are everyday occurrences, Daenerys does what she can to mitigate the horrors.

It is also important to note that it is her position of privileged that allows Daenerys to help the enslaved and assaulted women; Daenerys, like Arya, was born to and married to people of power. Working to help the enslaved, who also happen to be people of color, Daenerys often fulfills a “White Savior” character trope that can be problematic because the character created the ideas that minorities and people of color need a white person to save them. The redemption of this problematic characteristic can be considered to be Daenerys’s motivations; the race and gender of the people she sets free does not matter to Daenerys. In her article, “Reflections on the Appropriate Use of Unjustly Conferred Privilege,” Sally Matthews discusses how privilege can be used for the benefit of those without privilege: “I argue that in order for those who have benefited from injustice to contribute meaningfully to struggles for justice...[by using] privilege in ways that can effectively undermine the unjust social order which conferred it in the first place”(24). Matthews’s ideas take on more impartiality when she acknowledges that she is also writing from a place of privilege. These words from Matthews are also echoed in numerous other scholarly and entertainment articles encouraging advocacy from privileged, white members of society. The title of advocate can often be applied to Daenerys because she is using the privilege that her birth and race afford her to actively dismantle a system that helped to enslave people of color. The idea that she is an advocate can also be seen in the way that she works to promote the lives of the less privileged: Missandei is promoted to advisor to a queen and Grey Worm becomes the leader of Daenerys’s army of Unsullied.

While it is true that the power she exercises to stop the attacks on the enslaved comes from her husband, there is a great deal of blossoming courage in Daenerys because she is going

against Dothraki tradition. This moment is also featured in the first season of the HBO series. As the showrunners and writers stick awfully close to the scene written by Martin, this moment from the books only solidifies Daenerys as a caring character within the HBO series. The fact that she is actively doing her best to stop sexual assaults is also what further solidifies her role as a feminist icon, an important moment for establishing Daenerys as a clear hero.

However, it is only after she loses her husband and steps into a fire that Daenerys can really be seen as a powerful player in the great game: “She was naked, covered with soot, her clothes turned to ash, her beautiful hair all crisped away...yet she was unhurt. The cream-and-gold dragon was suckling at her left breast, the green-and-bronze at the right...Wordless, the knight fell to his knees. The men of her khas came up behind him” (*A Game of Thrones* 845-846). This is a crucial moment because it marks the real beginning of Daenerys’s reign and because it is really the first instance in which Daenerys wins over a vast group of people without the help of a man. Up until this point, Daenerys was respected because of her husband, but it is the sight of Daenerys surviving the fire and arising with the dragons that causes her “khas” to join her tiny army.

Although the birth of the dragons is arguably the most pivotal moment of the book and television series, the imposing image that Daenerys projects only contributes to the awe that her character can create in a fan. Her clothes and hair have burned off, “yet she was unhurt.” Despite starting out as little more than her brother’s slave, Daenerys transforms herself here into a symbolic phoenix, arises from the flames with dragons by her side. The phoenix symbolism tied in with the idea that Targaryens are dragons, creates the idea that Daenerys is a magical creature like the dragons that she births from stone eggs. The scene is such a powerful one in the books that it is not surprising that it is the final moment of the first season of *Game of Thrones*. HBO

portrays the scene from the books in almost the exact way that it is found in Martin's book; the only changes being that Daenerys's hair is not burned off from the fire in the television show and that the dragons do not breastfeed. These differences aside, the scene still evokes elements from the myth of the phoenix. Even with no knowledge of myth, any reader or audience member is likely to get swept up in the high that this moment induces.

The emotional high we experience after Daenerys emerges from the fire with her dragons only increases as she conquers city after city; watching Daenerys overcome the constant stream of people that would kill her or her dragons only adds to the excitement when she wins. The steady rise in her storyline only adds to the idea that she is a conqueror for peace and freedom, instead of tyranny. In the seventh season of *Game of Thrones*, which is in a timeline that surpasses the novels, the showrunners and writers explain the effect that Daenerys has on her people and, by extension, the fans of the books and television series by having Missandei explain the loyalty that Daenerys evokes to Jon Snow: "I serve my queen because I want to serve my queen. Because I believe in her...All of us who came with her from Essos, we believe in her. She is not our queen because she's the daughter of some king we never knew. She's the queen we chose " (*GOT* 7.4.34:45-35:20). Over a large number of books and seasons, the fans' love for a character that they can "believe in" grows. Fans of Daenerys do not want her to regain the Iron Throne because it is her birthright; they want her to be queen because she is the "queen we chose." It is her kindness toward many slaves and downtrodden in Essos and her willingness to punish people that we perceive as evil that makes readers and viewers cheer for her.

Part 2

Arya starts off on her story line in much the same way as Daenerys; an underdog being oppressed by the world she lives in. One key characteristic that establishes Arya as an underdog,

and helps her to become a feminist icon, is that she does not want to conform to the gender roles of her society. In Martin's series, Arya is a girl that would rather fight than conform to the traditional roles of a lady: "Your mother and I have charged her with the impossible task of making you a lady.' 'I don't want to be a lady!' Arya flared." (*A Game of Thrones* 234). The term "flared" lets the reader know just how passionate Arya is about not wanting to be a lady; this is not a childhood phase. This moment in the book series is mimicked in the television series when Arya and Ned discuss her future:

Arya: Can I be lord of a holdfast?

Ned: [chuckles] You, will marry a high lord and rule his castle. And your sons shall be knights and princes and lords.

Arya: [shakes her head] No. That's not me. (1.4.27:03-30)

While this moment is not from Martin's book, the complete rejection of enforced gender norms is what really cements the character of Arya as a feminist icon in the HBO series. Although the scenes are different, both show how Martin and the HBO showrunners work to establish Arya as an underdog, by presenting Arya as an outlier in her society.

Arya's place as an underdog becomes crystal clear when one looks at the constant pitfalls in her storyline. In *A Clash of Kings*, Arya spends much of the book reflecting on her pitiful state: "The direwolf was the sigil of the Starks, but Arya felt more a lamb, surrounded by a herd of other sheep. She hated the villagers for their sheepishness, almost as much as she hated herself" (408-409). At this point, she hates herself as a "lamb," and she is right that she is among strangers with no real way to defend herself. This moment from the books is mimicked in the show as Arya is helplessly tossed from one bad situation to the next.

This presentation of Arya as an outlier and the way her plotline in the show and books is in a near constant downfall work together encourage the fans to feel sympathy for Arya. One of Monani's key principles, discussed in "Evoking Sympathy and Empathy: The Ecological Indian and Indigenous Eco-Activism," is how sympathy is often connected to a person's feeling of charity: "sympathy, as primarily a concern *for*, is motivated not necessarily by a sense of sharing but instead by a sense of charity" (147). Since the book and television versions show Arya facing the same set of trials, the continual loss, of family, home, eyesight, and identity, we naturally feel "a sense of charity" for a child facing tragedy after tragedy. The feeling "for" or "with" the characters will also play a role in the way audiences react to the victims of Arya in the show and the books.

In the books, Arya's traumatic plot line is only moderately stabilized when she finally seems to become a fully-fledged Faceless man: "'Who are you, child?' 'No one,' [Arya] replied" (*A Dance with Dragons* 1063). By finally becoming "No one" Arya achieves the skills needed to kill the people on her list. However, this final surrendering of her name also signifies another important part of herself that Arya is losing. While the books do not yet offer any ending for Arya, being unfinished, HBO's Arya is happily able to start her character's climb when she takes back her name and uses the skills she learned from the Faceless men to return to Westeros for her revenge in the finale of season six. The fact that it takes Arya six seasons to finally start having a rising arc with triumphant moments, otherwise absent throughout the five books, emphasizes the deep and lasting nature of her struggle, a time length that only encourages fans to feel sympathy "for" her character.

The biggest difference between Daenerys and Arya's respective rises is that it takes Arya many books and seasons to reach the pinnacle of her power as a faceless-man. Conversely,

Daenerys's ascent to the top within two books and seasons, emphasizes Arya's slow rise which leaves the readers and audience experiencing delayed gratification. With no resolution for Arya on the books and most seasons' horizons, the reader and audience experience a steadily increasing emotional connection to Arya. As they travel with her through trial after trial, any compassion developed for Arya results in a desire for her to get the vengeance that she wants. This type of reaction can be seen from Rachel Syme, a writer for *The New Yorker*. In Syme's article, "A New Kind of Woman on 'Game of Thrones'," she argues in favor of Arya's violent acts of revenge by comparing her to a white-knight: "As she rides off into the sunset on a white horse, she looks less like a princess on a pony and more like a knight coming to her own rescue" (par. 8). Although Syme is acknowledging the fact that Arya's agenda is a violent one, the idea that she is "coming to her own rescue" is a clearly positive one that reflects the reaction of a larger pool of fans. While many people do not advocate such violence, the arcs of Daenerys and Arya in the television show and book series causes fans to view their violent actions in a positive light. Ultimately, it is the prolonged highs and lows of each characters' arc that endears them to the fans of the show and the books and contributes to the way the fans connect to each woman.

2. The Slippery Slope of Vengeance

From the very first time Martin's series and the HBO show introduce Arya's character, she performs a balancing act, constantly shifting between the role of lost child and blossoming assassin. In her article, "Power and the Denial of Femininity in *Game of Thrones*," Diana Marques discusses the way men influence Arya's morality throughout both versions of her character arc: "Arya is mainly in the company of men and boys her age... This allows her to grow surrounded by men's habits and attitudes toward violence, and she also learns from it, becoming almost senseless when she kills, just like a soldier, a mercenary, or a warrior who must

kill in order to survive” (54-55). While Marques is right to state that Arya learns to kill “in order to survive” from being surrounded by men, the idea that she is “almost senseless” is not entirely accurate. In fact, Arya spends a majority of the first books of the series and the first seasons of the show without a real kill to her name. Instead, she is acting in self-defense because she must “kill in order to survive.” It is also important to note that she does feel badly about taking a life: “even as she was feeling sorry for him, she was killing him, shouting, ‘Winterfell! Winterfell!’” (*A Clash of Kings* 226). These lines come from a battle scene in which Lannister soldiers are trying to find Arya and bring her back to King’s Landing, a fate which could result in torture and death. In this context, Arya is given no choice but to kill in self-defense. The fact that she is “feeling sorry for [her victim]” clearly shows that she is not acting in cold blood.

A comparable scene can be found in season three of *Game of Thrones*, when Arya kills a man after escaping the events of the red wedding:

Hound: Is that the first man you’ve killed?

Arya: The first man... Valar Morghulis (3.10:42-43:30).

During this scene, Arya’s breathing is labored and her hands shake as she holds the coin that Jaqen H’ghar gave her. It is the shaky hands and rough breath which tells the audience that the killing affects her mentally. The fact that Arya only killed the man because he was mocking her mother’s death works to highlight the turmoil she feels after the loss of more members of her family. Ultimately, both examples, one of remorse and one of emotional shock, show that both portrayals of Arya are not nearly as “senseless” as Marques claims.

However, Arya's character becomes more complex when she finally has the chance to kill people that she considers to be bad or evil. Looking at *A Clash of Kings* and in the second season of *Game of Thrones*, Arya finally finds some means of revenge and protection in the form of

Jaquen H'ghar. As a faceless man, Jaquen is a master at the art of killing, and since he is in Arya's debt, she is finally able to act out her first calculated revenge plot: "It wasn't Harren, Arya wanted to say, it was me. She had killed Chiswyck with a whisper, and she would kill two more before she was through. *I'm the ghost in Harrenhal*, she thought. And that night, there was one less name to hate" (*A Clash of Kings* 459). What makes this moment so important to Arya's revenge arc is that they are the first instances where Arya takes a life without being able to claim self-defense as a motive. She seems to want to mentally claim the murder and eagerly looks forward to killing "two more." One must note that she is claiming full responsibility for the kills, even though it is technically Jaquen who is completing the kills. This moment really highlights her own culpability and the culpability of other characters that have servants or assassins kill for them. Both the show and the books feature a key plot point in which Bran was almost killed by assassins hired by the Lannister family. Although Cersei and Jamie did not try and kill Bran themselves, in that one instance, they would still have been responsible for his death had the assassination been successful. It might seem unfair to compare Arya to the Lannisters, because Arya is ordering the death of torturers instead of crippled boys. However evil the victims are, Arya is just as responsible for the deaths that she orders as the man that does the killing. By calling herself the "*ghost in Harrenhal*," Arya is acknowledging her responsibility and reveling in the fact that she is responsible for the deaths.

Additionally, these moments mark the start of Arya being portrayed as a more bloodthirsty character; although she is a lost child, she is slipping deeper and deeper into the role of a killer. At one point, she even considers asking Jaquen to kill a close friend: "She didn't dare tell Hot Pie who she really was. *Maybe I should say Hot Pie's name to Jaquen*" (*A Clash of Kings* 535). This moment marks a cruel streak in Arya because she is contemplating the murder of an

innocent child. Although the television series follows the plot of the novel series in numerous ways, this display of cold-hearted action is not portrayed therein. One can infer that having Arya contemplate ordering the murder of a helpless child would have damaged the image of avenging girl-child that the showrunners are trying to make.

Understanding adaptation and intent is key to seeing why the HBO showrunners choose to alter the character in order to make them more appealing to fans. In the case of Arya, many character edits make her more sympathetic to the television fan base. As previously mentioned, the television show omits a number of scenes that paint Arya in a negative light in the books; her contemplation of ordering Hot Pie's death is only one. Another minor instance which acts to show her child-like cruelty can be found in *A Storm of Swords*: "Arya took the doll away from her, ripped it open, and pulled the rag stuffing out of its belly with a finger. 'Now he really looks like a soldier!' she said, before she threw the doll in a brook. After that the girl stopped pestering her" (939). Despite the horrors Arya has been through, destroying an annoying child's doll may seem unwarranted. Just as fans are likely to feel sympathy for Arya as a child that has been through trauma, the girl-child that Arya torments might invoke the same emotions from fans. The choice to leave out such small scenes from the book, like Arya tormenting the child and contemplating murdering Hot Pie, can be directly connected to the showrunner's desire to make her a more sympathetic character.

Arya's cruelty is only further highlighted by her almost incessant need for violence: "She would have whispered the names of the Freys of the Crossing too, if she had known them. One day I'll know, she told herself, and then I'll kill them all" (*A Feast for Crows* 401). So much of Arya's internal dialogue involves some variation of the statement "I'll kill them all" that she appears to have next to no thoughts about anything other than killing. Although the rage behind

her actions still negates the idea she is “senseless” in her murderous actions, the fact that so much of her negative attributes are omitted in *Game of Thrones* shows how the showrunners are trying to make her more likeable (Marques 54-55).

In order to further make Arya’s character more sympathetic, and therefore to facilitate a bond with the fans, the showrunners take empathetic moments from Martin’s portrayal of Arya and highlight these instead of her near-constant violence. One small scene from *A Feast for Crows* seems to have dramatically influenced the showrunners and television writers. When Arya is training at the House of Black and White, she has very specific reactions to the history of the Many-Faced God: “Arya drew back from him. ‘He killed the slave?’ That did not sound right. ‘He should have killed the masters!’” (414). After hearing about the actions of the first Faceless man, Arya’s morality becomes very clear. While Arya may have murder on the brain, she has no palpable desire to hurt the innocent. This desire also directly relates her to Daenerys because Arya would have killed the “[slave] masters” over the slaves, just as Daenerys works to stop the evil practice of slavery throughout most of Essos.

The child turned assassin that Martin works to create in his novels comes to fruition on the show when Arya returns to Westeros for her revenge on the Freys. The choice to have Arya carve up Walder Frey’s sons and serve them to him in a pie works to create this image: “They weren’t easy to carve. Especially Black Walder...The last thing you’re ever going to see is a Stark smiling down on you as you die” (6.10:51:20-52:50). During this scene, she slices Frey’s throat calmly, and a peaceful expression can be seen on her face. This moment can be seen as a dramatic peak for Arya’s revenge plot-line. Although she has not killed all the available names on her kill list, the murder of Walder Frey and his male family members marks her first, professional act of revenge; before this moment, her skills were not fully honed and her kills

during training where for the House of Black and White. Now that Arya has mastered the abilities of the Faceless men, she is able to take her personal revenge with a precision and accuracy that is both terrifying and thrilling to watch.

Additionally, the murder of Frey and his family is not enough to write Arya off as a villain, something that the writers remind the fans of in season seven: “Brave men, all of you. Butchered a woman pregnant with her babe. Cut the throat of a mother of five. Slaughtered your guests after inviting them into your home” (7.1.5:25-7:10). Arya, speaking in the disguise of Walder Frey, helps to remind the audience of Arya’s motives to kill an old man and all of his men; he is responsible for the death of her family and countless other northern men. Salma Monani discussions on empathy can be used to explain why fans of the books and series can have a hard time feeling empathy or sympathy for House Frey: “when acting from empathy, I do what I do because I’ve taken on your perspective...I have put myself on a similar plane as you” (147). If one cannot feel “charity” for or put themselves on a “similar plane” as the Freys, then it is nearly impossible to feel either empathy or sympathy when Arya kills them. Since most sane humans cannot relate to men that murder guests, children, and mothers, this particular killing spree does not make fans view her as a villain.

The reaction to Daenerys’s kills can be viewed by the readers and audience in a similar fashion. Although Daenerys kills a large number of people, her actions are often viewed in a positive light by fans and critics alike. In her article, “Cripples, Bastards, Broken Things...and Villainesses: *Game of Thrones*’ Final Season,” Valerie Frankel argues that Daenerys’s violent actions in the series and in the show are often forgiven by fans because of the context of the situation: “her deliberate acts of violence though, it must be remarked, [are] always in defense of children and the most helpless, never against them” (5). Since Daenerys kills to liberate “the

most helpless” people, she is actively working to end slavery; due to the general belief that slavery is evil, many fans would not condemn Daenerys as a villain for her actions. While one can still make the argument that it is wrong to do something bad or illegal to stop evil actions, drastic action is sometimes required to stop something that is truly evil. A less extreme example of this would be the illegal actions of second-wave feminists. In her article, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” Becky Thompson discusses the way past feminists needed to do bad things to encourage positive change: “Many of the early protests waged by this sector of the feminist movement picked up on the courage and forthrightness of 1960s’ struggles—a willingness to stop traffic, break existing laws to provide safe and accessible abortions, and contradict the older generation” (40). Given the controversial nature of abortion access, the willingness of past feminists to go to extreme lengths to “provide safe and accessible abortions” meant that they were going against the laws and dominant morality of the time for what they considered to be a good cause.

In addition to portraying Daenerys as a defender of the weak, Martin and the HBO showrunners make Daenerys’s actions more palatable by having her kills consist of predominantly bad people; a technique also used to soften Arya’s murder of the Freys. One of the clearest examples of this would be when Daenerys kills the slave masters of Astapor in the book:

“Slay the Good Masters, slay the soldiers, slay every man who wears a tokar or holds a whip, but harm no child under twelve, and strike the chains off every slave you see”...And all around them slavers ran and sobbed and begged and died, and the dusty air was filled with spears and fire. (*A Storm of Swords* 409)

This scene is also featured in the fourth episode of *Game of Thrones*' third season, bringing to life the slaughter in Martin's texts. Since the two scenes are almost identical, it is possible to analyze the scene from the show by analyzing these quotes from the book. The horror of the slaughter is never down-played; the terms "sobbed" and "begged" explain the fear of the masters as they die. In addition, the presence and power of the dragon "fire" acts as a reminder of the serious weapon that Daenerys has at her disposal. However, Daenerys is very clear that she does not want the innocent hurt by telling the Unsullied to "harm no child."

This scene would be seen very negatively, had both the books and the series not gone to great lengths to explain just how horrible the masters of Astapor have been to the people that they have enslaved. One scene that features the masters' evil actions, that can be found in both the text and show, is when Daenerys tries to buy the Unsullied, an army of enslaved soldiers: "You take a babe from its mother's arms, kill it as she watches, and pay for her pain with a silver coin?" When the translation was made for him, Kraznys mo Nakloz laughed aloud. "What a soft mewling fool this one is. Tell the whore of Westeros that the mark is for the child's owner, not the mother" (*A Storm of Swords* 342). No one can argue that killing a child in front of its mother is a despicable crime. In a civilized society, anyone convicted with committing this type of crime would be punished severely, which is, essentially, what Daenerys does when she attacks the slave masters. As seen in the previous quote, Daenerys states very clearly that she only wishes to punish the slavers, ordering the Unsullied to "harm no child" and to "strike the chains off every slave [they] see." The way that Martin describes the unimaginable cruelty of the slavers is so important to establishing them as villains that the HBO executives had to include it in the show; they even have the slave master give the same speech, word for word.

This same technique to make Daenerys sympathetic is used again, before she takes the slave-city of Meereen: “they had nailed a slave child up on every milepost along the coast road from Yunkai, nailed them up still living with their entrails hanging out and one arm always outstretched to point the way to Meereen...the count stood at one hundred and sixty-three” (*A Storm of Swords* 820). Again Martin is using the enslavement and abuse of children to influence readers to view the masters of Meereen as deserving of death. As previously discussed, modern society views slavery and child murder in an extremely negative light, so it is not surprising that this moment is featured in the fourth season of *Game of Thrones*. The image of crucified children reflects poorly on the slave masters that ordered these torturous deaths.

Throughout their arcs in the books and in the television series, Arya and Daenerys constantly balance on the edge of villainy; violence follows them. However, both Martin and the HBO showrunners work to make each woman more sympathetic to the fans. Negative scenes and characteristics of Arya are left out when she is portrayed in the show, so that she is more sympathetic to viewers. Additionally, both Arya and Daenerys’s violent actions are minimized because Martin and the showrunners highlight the evil actions of the people that the women kill. The extensive evidence for the evil of the women’s victims, gives fans a way to excuse the tremendous amounts of violence that both women enact. Their willingness to make excuses for Daenerys and Arya’s violence only works to show how entrenched violence is in the entertainment world; making violence acceptable is justified because it seems to keep the attention of the fans.

3. Motives and Mental Trauma

To fully understand the actions and subsequent portrayals of Arya and Daenerys, one must look at what motivates their violence; their personal trauma is what fuels their violence.

Arya's trauma comes from the constant difficulties she faces, starting with the loss of her family and Daenerys's trauma originates during her formative years with her abusive brother, her time as a child-bride, and the loss of her husband and son. While the traumas are relatively easy to pinpoint, each woman's reaction to her trauma varies in ways that are important to her storyline.

Arya's motives for violence are very simplistic in nature; she is primarily moved to kill to avenge her family and to get rid of people that she considers to be bad. The seeds of revenge are planted early in Martin's series. One prominent scene where readers and viewers can see her desire for vengeance bloom occurs when Arya begins her ritual bedtime listing of names:

Every night Arya would say their names. "Ser Gregor," she'd whisper to her stone pillow. "Dunsen, Polliver, Chiswyck, Raff the Sweeting. The Tickler and the Hound. Ser Amory, Ser Ilyn, Ser Meryn, King Joffrey, Queen Cersei." Back in Winterfell, Arya had prayed with her mother in the sept and with her father in the godswood, but there were no gods on the road to Harrenhal, and her names were the only prayer she cared to remember. (*A Storm of Swords* 411-412)

This scene, featured numerous times in the books and in the television series, marks the beginning of Arya's trauma. Every one of the names on Arya's kill list has done something horrible to her or her family; and the list grows as more and more of her family and friends are harmed or killed.

Although the motivation behind her murderous intentions and actions is clearly influenced by the death of her family members, Arya's mental torment deepens her desperate desire to kill what she perceives as evil people. The mental toll that all of the death takes on Arya is obvious when one looks at her dreams from Martin's texts: "she was always looking for her mother, stumbling through a wasted land of mud and blood and fire...she could hear her mother

screaming, but a monster with a dog's head would not let her go save her. In that dream she was always weeping, like a frightened little girl" (*A Feast for Crows* 641). The dreams reveal a clear reaction to her mother's death, which Arya wrongly feels that she could have prevented. The fact that she still feels "like a frightened little girl" in her dreams acts to further motivate her in her assassin-training with the Faceless men. While the show does not offer such an in depth look into Arya's thoughts about her family's deaths, there are still moments that show how she is pushed toward violence. One scene, which has previously been discussed, comes after Arya and the Hound escape the red wedding, when Arya attacks a man mocking her mother's slaughter by House Frey (3.10:42-43:30). The fact that the attack is directly connected to her mother and brother's deaths demonstrate how loss and violence connect in Arya's mind.

Daenerys's reaction to her trauma is slightly more complex than Arya's loss-provoked vendetta. Given her past, it cannot be surprising that Daenerys's driving motive comes from her abusive brother essentially selling her into marriage, in both the series and show. Her desire for justice and to free others from their oppressors becomes a mission for Daenerys as she begins her reign. She directly connects her pursuit of justice with the responsibility of being a ruler: "Why do the gods make kings and queens, if not to protect the ones who can't protect themselves?" "Some kings make themselves. Robert did." "He was no true king," Dany said scornfully. "He did no justice. Justice . . . that's what kings are for." (*A Storm of Swords* 402). While being just is often a desired trait in a ruler, seeking justice with violence is not considered necessary to be a ruler. By connecting justice with the responsibilities of a king, Daenerys thinks through how she herself can become queen, judge, and executioner. This view can be problematic when there are no checks and balances in place; rulers with no checks and balances are more susceptible to falling into tyranny. However, the fact that Daenerys is clearly looking to "protect the ones who

can't protect themselves" means that she has good motivations for her actions when forming her viewpoints about the responsibilities of a ruler.

The many losses and difficulties that Arya experiences cause her to react with violence to enact justice; she only kills for survival at first and targets people that she considers to be bad. After being sold into marriage by an abusive brother, Daenerys becomes determined to do what she can to help free others from their oppressors. This desire grows as her philosophy of how a ruler should behave develops; if she wants to fit her own ideas of a good ruler, then she has to meet violence with violence. Her motives help us understand her reaction to trauma. The reason why it is so important to take each woman's motives into account, is because we need to understand how their motives influenced their actions.

4. How to Train Your Dragon: You Cannot.

While both Arya and Daenerys experience physical and emotional trauma that pushes them to violence, the biggest deciding factor in how each woman is represented in the final season of *Game of Thrones* is the weapons that they use to enact their form of justice: Arya's body and her ability to take on another's face is a weapon because of her training with the Faceless men, and Daenerys has her fire breathing dragons. Their weapons of choice directly influence how much they inspire fear in the other characters and why one is killed over the other. Due to the way that fear "projects us from the present into a future," people, fictional people included, cannot help but be moved to action by future fears; there is always a risk that Daenerys could use the dragons for evil (Ahmed 65). While no one can deny that she becomes an incredible killing machine, Arya's fighting skills are not as much of a threat as Daenerys's dragons. Ultimately, because Daenerys and the dragons are very hard to kill, the fear of Daenerys's power is what causes her to be killed in the series finale.

In the show and in the books the dragons have killed in the past, but the number of innocent victims seems minimal and these kills are never personally ordered by Daenerys. Unlike the books which feature doubtful, inner monologues from Daenerys, the show often revels in the power of the dragon so that their destructive power is not fully explored until the final few minutes of “The Spoils of War” from season seven. While the dragons are responsible for the death of a child, which Daenerys did not order, the showrunners and producers predominantly focus on the powers of Daenerys’s dragons in a positive or excited way; most scenes involving the dragons are filled with excited music, choruses singing passionately, and explosions to highlight the awesome fantasy that the dragons represent. However, the battle scene from “The Spoils of War” is shot and edited in a way that shows just how uncontrollably deadly and dangerous dragon fire can be to almost everyone in war.

Even before Daenerys flies in during “The Spoils of War,” the scene is set up to make the audience believe that this will be a battle between armies. Technically, both armies are relatively matched, with the Dothraki having the small advantage of cavalry. With this in mind, Jamie is not wrong to want to stay and fight: “We can hold them off.” It is not until the sound of a dragon roar is heard, that the characters and the audience realize that this will be a slaughter rather than a battle (7.4.40:05-41). A low, ground angle is used to view Daenerys as she rides in on Drogon. Additionally, the background music, which swells as she rides in, is meant to create a potent mix of fear and excitement from audiences; a ploy that is quite successful. Given the popularity of the show, there are many people that gather in groups to watch each new episode of the show and the editing success can be seen in the audience’s reactions to the battle scene. One such group gathered in Burlington Bar to watch episodes of the show together as they aired. This

live, filmed reaction to Daenerys's arrival in "'The Spoils of War'" features a crowd screaming and cheering as she descends on the Lannister army (TankTop 2:20-2:28).

However, the tone of the scene shifts as the excited choral music is subtly replaced by softer, slower, more sober music. This new music is meant to create a sad and reflective emotion in the audience, just as the exuberant drums and singing are meant to provoke excitement for the viewer when Daenerys appears on her dragon. This somber mood is further enhanced when the camera focuses on Tyrion watching the slaughter from a nearby hill while screams are silenced, and the audience hears only somber music. The contrast of the graphic violence on the screen and the unnatural silence of the characters works together to allow the audience a moment to focus on the horror of what they are watching: men and animals burning in horrific torment. The scene also features deliberate cuts between a sad Tyrion, to horses dragging a burning cart. This juxtaposition allows for a greater shock value to be felt. The focus on the horses is especially important to note because the need for food was the whole impetus for the battle. Despite the need for food, Daenerys does not or cannot control how much damage is done and the food and supplies burn right along with the opposing soldiers. In a flash of scenes, the audience is shown ash men blowing away in the wind as Daenerys loops Drogon back to the burning field. This scene is choreographed with the intent to show the audience how awful and uncontrollable firepower can be in a war setting. With dragon fire power, there is no way to differentiate between the good and bad soldiers and to stop valuable food supplies from being destroyed (7.4.46:44-28:20).

The excessive amount of collateral damage in this scene with Daenerys can actually be contrasted with the scene in which Arya methodically kills the men of House Frey in episode one of season seven:

Brave men, all of you. Butchered a woman pregnant with her babe. Cut the throat of a mother of five. Slaughtered your guests after inviting them into your home. But you didn't slaughter every one of the Starks. No, no, that was your mistake...leave one wolf alive and the sheep are never safe...When people ask you what happened here, tell them the North remembers. Tell them winter came for House Frey (7.1.5:25-7:10).

While this scene works to explain Arya's reason and motive for the murders she commits, the end of this scene shows how prolific Arya has become in murder and revenge. She is wearing Walder Frey's face as she gives this speech, highlighting her mastery of the training she has received from the Faceless-men. As she walks out of the hall, her pace is slow, lingering over the bodies of the dead men. This scene shows that her ability to kill is completely under her control.

In addition to her own control, one must also look at the physical weapons that she uses to complete her kills. The use of poison in this scene, and physical weapons in others, allows Arya to control who will die and how; there is no uncontrollable element like dragon fire. This control can be specifically seen in the way Arya does not allow Walder's wife to drink the poisoned wine. Since Walder's wife would be innocent of any wrongdoing, she is purposely saved from death by Arya; she is not willing to end the lives of the innocent in the pursuit of her revenge. This is a sharp contrast to Daenerys, who cannot even stop the fire from destroying the valuable food she needs to feed her army and her people.

Although both women have arguably valid motives for their actions, Arya wants revenge and to remove evil people and Daenerys needs food and to weaken her enemies, they differ in the extent of the damage they can inflict and the control they have over their weapons. Daenerys has no control over the spread of her dragon's fire, which is in direct contrast with Arya, whose powers are completely under her control. Daenerys has the power to inflict more damage and

cannot fully control the dragon fire, which is a factor in why Daenerys is deemed too dangerous and is killed after her mental break-down.

5. Off Book and Out of Nowhere: HBO's Portrayal of Daenerys

One of the biggest issues with any filmed adaptation is that it will always be compared with the original source. HBO's *Game of Thrones* is very unique in the way that it is an adaptation and its own separate text all at once. This is due to the unfinished nature of Martin's series; something that will no longer be true when Martin publishes the final books. Given that the show surpasses the books by a number of seasons, it should not come as a surprise that fans of the books and the show had varying reactions to the development and endings of their favorite characters' storylines. The ending of Daenerys is one that left many fans of the book scratching their heads and rereading Martin's texts to find where they missed the start of the so-called mad queen. Anyone wishing to adapt a text is likely going to make changes to encourage fans to like what they are presenting. As previously discussed, the HBO showrunners left out a number of negative characteristics and scenes in order to encourage the fans to see Arya in a sympathetic light. The opposite is done with the character of Daenerys; the showrunners portray her as more bloodthirsty and mentally unstable than Martin presents her in his books.

One key characteristic of Martin's Daenerys that the show omits is her guilt and uncertainty as a young ruler, one that is many years younger than she is played in the show. Throughout the books, Daenerys is constantly leaning on her council because of her youth. One of these moments can be found when Daenerys has meetings with mercenaries, the Stormcrows and the Second Sons: 'Five hundred of your Stormcrows against ten thousand of my Unsullied,' said Daenerys. 'I am only a young girl and do not understand the ways of war, yet these odds seem poor to me...innocent as I am, these odds seem poor to me'" (*A Storm of Swords* 610-12).

Although Daenerys is primarily playing up the idea that she is a “young” and “innocent” girl to lull the mercenaries into a false sense of security, she actually *is* very young and uncertain; Daenerys was only thirteen at the start of *A Game of Thrones*. Even accounting for all of the things she has been through, losing her husband and baby or gaining her dragons and armies, she is still a young girl who is uncertain of herself.

In addition to her self-doubt, the books also show that Daenerys feels guilt when she enacts justice for the oppressed people that she liberates:

She had them nailed to wooden posts around the plaza...The anger was fierce and hot inside her when she gave the command; it made her feel like an avenging dragon. But later, when she passed the men dying on the posts, when she heard their moans and smelled their bowels and blood...Dany put the glass aside, frowning. It was just. It was. I did it for the children. (*A Storm of Swords* 1032).

As previously discussed, the slave masters that Daenerys crucifies are not innocent victims; they had already ordered the crucifixion of “one hundred and sixty-three” children to try and intimidate Daenerys before she reached Meereen (*A Storm of Swords* 820). The fact that Daenerys questions her own violent form of justice shows that she is not a cold-blooded killer.

While this type of uncertainty is not featured in *Game of Thrones*, there is also a lack of remorse seen in HBO’s portray of Daenerys. The only real moment that can be compared to it is when Drogon kills a child in the show: “I don’t want another child’s bones dropped at my feet” (5.1.41:40-55). In addition to the clearly, sad words, Daenerys chains her dragons under Meereen’s pyramid. These words and actions are the only real signifiers that the show’s version of Daenerys feels some type of guilt or remorse for the pain she and her mission can cause to others. Since HBO’s adaptation ignores Daenerys’s sense of self-doubt and questioning from the

books in favor for glorifying the dragons and making Daenerys, the viewers are shown a character that is so self-assured that she is constantly being cautioned by her advisors. One instance of where Daenerys has total confidence in her violent punishments can be seen when Jorah talks Daenerys out of killing all of the masters in Yunkai:

Daenerys: I have ordered Dario to execute every master in Yunkai. The masters tear babies from their mother's arms. They mutilate little boys by the thousands. They train little girls in the art of pleasuring old men. They treat men like beasts...

Jorah: Brutality is all they have ever known. If you want them to know something else, you'll have to show it to them...

Daenerys: They can live in my new world or they can die in their old one. (4.7.27:40-29:20)

While there is a clear anger in her voice as she describes the atrocities committed by the slave master, Daenerys is not irrational or hysterical in this scene. Even though her decision is being questioned, Daenerys is willing to listen to the advice of Jorah. This scene, including others just like it, and the questioning Daenerys of Martin's texts work together to show that even the HBO version of Daenerys is not unreasonable and can have her decisions questioned.

Forgetting every other instance in the show, including the scene above, where Daenerys has followed the advice of her council, the show begins to portray her as someone that is unwilling to compromise: "I will fight for the North. When you bend the knee... They chose you to lead them. They chose you to protect them. Isn't their survival more important than your pride?" (7.4.26:18-58). Since she considers herself the queen of Westeros, the northern people are her people, so the idea that she would leave her people at the mercy of a monster does not fit the character that has always worked to save others from oppressive monsters. One can infer that

this moment of conflict and lack of compromise, along with similar scenes, acts to lay the groundwork for the Daenerys presented in the series finale: a mad tyrant who is willing to kill innocent people in order to achieve her goals.

Clearly understanding the way that the showrunners want the audience to view Daenerys, Valerie Estelle Frankel describes the Daenerys of the series finale in a negative light in her article, “Cripples, Bastards, Broken Things...and Villainesses: *Game of Thrones*’ Final Season;” “This dark Daenerys has not learned from her failure to colonize Meereen and impose her values there” (6). This controlling character that Frankel describes is in direct contrast with the kindness of the character that the audience has experienced the entire span of the books and seven of the eight seasons of the television series. The idea that Daenerys cannot be reasoned with and only tried to “impose her values” on the people of Meereen is uncharacteristic for most of the show, and can be rebutted when one looks back at the way Daenerys permits a freed slave to sell himself back into slavery: “I did not take this city to preside over the injustice I fought to destroy. I took it to bring people freedom. But freedom means making your own choices” (4.10.25:05-24). Although she will not allow people to hurt the innocent or be enslaved against their will and clearly views slavery as an “injustice,” Daenerys does not try to force her will on someone who is willing to enter into slavery.

This characterization of Daenerys as reasonable is further emphasized in Martin’s books, where Daenerys regularly reminds her advisors that they need to be honest when giving her advice, as when Arstan is hesitant and Daenerys responds: “‘Only lies offend me, never honest counsel.’ Dany patted Arstan’s spotted hand to reassure him. ‘I have a dragon’s temper, that’s all. You must not let it frighten you.’” (*A Storm of Swords* 348). Although she openly admits that she has “a dragon’s temper,” she still welcomes the “honest counsel” from her advisors. This

shows that she is willing to admit to her character flaws, something which every person has, and is willing to cooperate with the people working with her.

To work against the previously positive characterization of Daenerys, showrunners and writers of the show use Jon's advice to Daenerys in order to start to draw a line on how far she can go to liberate Westeros from Cersei: "The people who follow you...believe that you can make other impossible things happen. Build a world that's different from the shit one they've always known. But if you use [the dragons] to melt castles and burn cities, you're not different. You're just more of the same" (7.4.29:05-40). This moment is a prime example of how foreshadowing is used to connect different elements of a story. Jon's warning to Daenerys that doing this one thing, "use [the dragons] to melt castles and burn cities," will make her just like every other villain in Westeros resonates when she eventually torches King's Landing. The only element not addressed in Jon's warning is how unlikely either the book or series version of Daenerys would be to burn down a city.

The plausibility of Daenerys's actions is something that numerous fans decried after the turbulent final season. One commenter on a *Game of Thrones* forum entitled, "Queen of Deserving Better than She Gets" argues against the showrunners choice to have Daenerys go mad within the span of two and a half episodes: "if [the showrunners] really wanted to make Dany seem like some unhinged woman that can't be trusted then they shouldn't have had her, her army, and her dragons just help save the world" (Rae). This is a very valid point, as the show had only just focused on how Daenerys almost died trying to help save the world from the Night King. The idea that one can go from selfless to psychotic in such a short span of time is something that few fans, including Rae, understand or support.

Although Rae is only citing evidence from the show, the analysis of Daenerys's character in the books also gives ample evidence to suggest that Daenerys is unlikely to hurt innocent people. While the way that Daenerys feels guilt even for her evil victims has already been addressed, it is also important to look closer at her own evaluations of herself and her dragons, which are her weapons: "*Mother of dragons, Daenerys thought, Mother of monsters. What have I unleashed upon the world? A queen I am, but my throne is made of burned bones, and it rests on quicksand. Without dragons, how could she hope to hold Meereen, much less win back Westeros? I am the blood of the dragon, she thought. If they are monsters, so am I*" (*A Dance with Dragons* 207). This is just one of many moments when Daenerys questions whether or not she is a "Mother of monsters," and works to show the humanity of her character. It additionally works to highlight the fear the dragons create in the books. Given her image as a phoenix and chain breaker, it can be easy to place Daenerys into a mystical being category. This scene reminds the reader that she is a human, with human doubts and fears. If Daenerys is like any other human, she is going to make mistakes.

Even if one can acknowledge the fact that all humans make mistakes, the one mistake that Daenerys could make which would be hard to credit is the willful murder of innocent people. While fans cannot know for certain if Daenerys will make this mistake in Martin's series, *Game of Thrones* even offers evidence against the idea that Daenerys would make such a cruel mistake throughout many seasons:

Jorah: If you want to sit on the throne your ancestors built, you must win it. That will mean blood on your hands before the thing is done.

Dany: The blood of my enemies, not the blood of innocents. (*GOT* 3.3.30:55-31:10)

There is no ambiguity in this scene; a slight disgust can even be heard in her voice at the idea of innocent blood on her hands. This scene directly contradicts the portrayal of Daenerys in season seven, when she is trying to blackmail Jon into bending the knee, and in season eight, where she firebombs King's Landing, killing many innocents.

Given the copious amount of evidence from both the books and the show, we can conclude that the only way Daenerys would spill the "blood of the innocents" would be if she becomes mentally unsound, like her father. Since Daenerys's mad father burned innocent people alive, actions which helped to spur on the rebellion that toppled the Targaryens, there is always an underlying fear that she could become like her father. Since the madness route is the most plausible reason for Daenerys's murderous actions, the showrunners use natural mental trauma to create Daenerys's madness. This natural mental trauma comes in the form of lost loved ones; in the final season alone Daenerys loses Jorah, another of her dragon-children, and Missandei. Such amounts of loss in such a short time span are bound to cause mental trauma on any person, let alone one who has already lost her husband, human child, and another dragon-child.

However, the groundwork laid for this possible madness plotline is relatively weak in the books and random in the show. When critics make the argument for Daenerys being mentally unstable, they tend to use the death of Viserys as an example. In the books, this would be where she watches, without protest, as her brother is killed in front of her:

Viserys began to scream the high, wordless scream of the coward facing death... Ser Jorah had made his way to Dany's side. He put a hand on her shoulder. "Turn away, my princess, I beg you." "No." She folded her arms across the swell of her belly, protectively... *He was no dragon*, Dany thought, curiously calm. Fire cannot kill a dragon. (*A Game of Thrones* 525)

It is important to note that this scene is also portrayed by HBO in almost exactly the same way: with Daenerys showing little to no reaction to watching her brother being killed in front of her. The literary and televised version of this scene can be interpreted by readers and audiences in two very contrasting ways. First, a reader can choose to see this moment as a precursor to Daenerys's eventual loss of sanity in the eighth and final season of the HBO series. Second, this can be seen as a liberating moment in which Daenerys is finally freed from the brother who has constantly abused and used her. Even with the book's use of the word "curiously," it cannot be that surprising that she is not upset by her tormentor's death. Ultimately, an unconventional reaction to death is not enough to write Daenerys off as a psychopathic murderer.

Although one can point to Daenerys's reaction to her brother's death as the beginning spark of her madness, there are so many other moments that offer proof of her sanity and kindness, like her treatment of the enslaved people that has previously been addressed. Similar arguments are made by Frankel: "As some critics have pointed out, there is forewarning, but this is not the same as characterization. Daenerys's snap in the penultimate episode "The Bells" (2019) is somewhat set up, but unjustified in her character" (Frankel 5). This "forewarning" that Frankel mentions can be seen in episode five of the final season:

Daenerys: Someone has betrayed me...Jon Snow?

Tyrion: Varys...

Daenerys: You went to [Varys] first. Without asking my permission. (8.5.9:00-11)

During this scene, it is clear that something is wrong with Daenerys: her eyes are rimmed with dark shadows and her face looks haggard, suggesting that she is not sleeping or eating well or at all. Considering that Daenerys has just lost Jorah, another dragon, and Missandei, grief would not be an unusual reaction. In this fantasy world, violence in response to these losses is not

unusual or even unwarranted. After all, the audience has been watching in anticipation as Arya spends years of training and planning before she gets to enact her violent revenge; Daenerys's desire to kill Cersei, a mass murderer of the innocent in her own right, really cannot be surprising or unexpected. Although her physical state suggests that Daenerys is facing clear mental trauma connected to her grief, she is still acting in a rational fashion; Daenerys forgives Tyrion for unintentionally betraying her and agrees to spare the citizens if they surrender to her army. Even with clear underlying mental trauma, is not until the actual sack of the city that Daenerys loses her control and goes on a rampage.

Daenerys's lack of emotion, physical disorder, and willingness to forgive Tyrion also corroborates with the fact that Daenerys's grief is mentally damaging. In her article, "Loss, Grief and Depression: Potential Risk Factors in Grief-Related Depression," Ayten Zara discusses the need for relationships after a loss and during times of grief: "Sharing pain and grief with friends including family can also help people come to terms with grief following the loss of a loved one. Thus, social support enhances quality of life and provides a buffer against adverse life events" (160). Since "Sharing pain and grief" is not possible for Daenerys because she has just lost two of her closest friends, she has no one close to confide in because Jon and Tyrion have started to pull away from Daenerys emotionally; Jon cannot be her lover because of the discovery that they are related and Tyrion is on edge because he is fearful of incurring Daenerys's wrath. With no one to confide in, the grief is allowed to fester, leading to the emotional imbalance and physical strain that is seen in Daenerys' face during her discussions with Tyrion. Daenerys's willingness to forgive Tyrion for his betrayal also shows how she is trying to preserve what friendships she has left. While her attempts to preserve her remaining relationships are appreciated, Jon and Tyrion pulling away leaves her to deal with her grief and trauma alone.

Although viewers can guess what triggers Daenerys's rampage, one of the big issues of Daenerys's character arc is that nothing is explicitly blamed for her break-down. In an article for *The New York Times*, "Game of Thrones' Comes in for a Crash Landing," James Poniewozik underlines this lack of clarity as the key flaw with this shift in Daenerys's storyline: "Leaving aside whether the attack 'should' have happened, it failed the basic job of a story, to give us a clear sense of what the central figure did and why." Poniewozik's argument seems to be the biggest issue that fans have with the finale. The only type of explanation given that she was freeing the innocent civilians by killing them: "I tried to make peace with Cersei. She used their innocence as a weapon against me. She thought it would cripple me... We cannot hide behind small mercies. The world we need won't be built by men loyal to the world we have... It will be... a good world. I know what is good... [others] don't get to choose" (*GOT* 8.6.34:50-36:45). This final speech works to simultaneously uphold the idea that Daenerys is mentally unstable and to highlight past evidence for why a mentally stable Daenerys would never have burned the city. The "small mercies" are what made Daenerys beloved by fans and is seen in the way that she stopped women from being raped by the Dothraki warriors even before she had the dragons. Her statement that others "don't get to choose" directly contrasts with the scene in which Daenerys allows a man to choose to sell himself back into slavery. All of these words in Daenerys's speech suggest that she has completely changed from the character that has been presented previously. The fact that this change happened in the span of two episodes is particularly telling; there must be something wrong mentally for someone's personality and morality to change so drastically in the space of a few hours.

In contrast with Daenerys Arya has complete control over her trauma by final season of the show. This control is ultimately seen in the way she chooses self-preservation over revenge:

Sandor: You think you wanted revenge a long time? I've been after it all my life. It's all I care about. And look at me. Look at me! You wanna be like me? You come with me, you die here.

Arya: Sandor. Thank you. (8.5. 57:40-58:50)

In this moment, Arya has the chance to kill one of the most important names left alive on her list: Cersei Lannister. Revenge threatens to consume Arya in this scene, but the Hound, Sandor, is able to stop her by physically grabbing her arm and persuading her. The elements of this scene work together to show how dangerous getting revenge can be: a dragon roars and the Red Keep crumbles down around them. The fact that the Hound must verbally remind Arya of the obvious dangers around them just demonstrates how strongly her trauma drives her toward vengeance. The showrunners allow Arya to let her trauma go in this scene, setting her apart from Daenerys in this moment; her "thank you" to Sandor even tells the audience that she is grateful to have been stopped. Arya's choice not to let her trauma control her by giving up her revenge, combined with the fact that she cannot cause mass destruction at a dragon level, saves her from ending up like Daenerys.

Though the show clearly promotes Arya over Daenerys because she is the character not consumed by her trauma, there are negative dimensions to the way they go about it; to abandon the characteristics of protagonists that have been built over years requires planning and explanation. The world around us is obsessed with understanding motives and how people react to trauma; seen in the abundance of murder and psychological thrillers in books, films, and in television shows. Entertainment formats like HBO need to explain their reasoning in order to meet the demands of their audience: a credible story line that enlightens them to the thoughts and morality of a character. Ultimately, the treatment of Daenerys and Arya works to highlight the

fears and morality seen in the current society and the issues therein. There is a clear indication from the showrunner's treatment of Daenerys that a person must be permanently separated from society if they are too damaged by personal trauma. The fact that one of the most powerful characters on the show is diminished and undermined so suddenly is no coincidence and reflects the way people fear those with power today, especially when those with power are female. Due to the fact that her trauma does not cause Arya to lose complete control, and that she cannot cause the kind of destruction that Daenerys can, Arya is allowed to travel and see the world. Despite her past kindnesses, the fact that Daenerys's followers do not try to help her get past her trauma in any way could suggest that a certain level of personal trauma disables even a good person, causing everyone to give up on them; just because Arya's mental trauma is given attention and she gets some help from the Hound, it does not mean that the show does not have bias against the mentally disabled Daenerys.

While *Game of Thrones* cannot be called a non-violent show, the promotion of Arya over Daenerys shows how society still has issues with violent women in power and the mentally disabled and traumatized. Since Daenerys's illness and trauma are so severe that they cannot be easily fixed, she is permanently removed from her society. This sets a dangerous precedent that death is the only way to cure someone whose trauma and mental illness is so obvious and severe. There are people in the world with mental illness and trauma that cannot be easily fixed, but it does not mean that they should be killed. One must also acknowledge the underlying fear of female power. By the time she takes King's Landing, Daenerys has more power than any of the other male characters: She is the queen, she has her armies, and a dragon. While her madness is a key reason for Jon Snow's decision to kill her, the choice to have Daenerys go mad in the first place comes from men. Even with the amount of strong female characters in his books and in the

show based off of Martin's books, the strongest character in the series is killed because Daenerys's mental illness and power are threatening. Sansa's only desire is to rule the North and Arya wants to travel the world. While those are empowering desires for women in a patriarchy to have, they are not as threatening as Daenerys's desire to upset the balance of power and to rule the world as the queen.

Chapter 2

Evil is Catching, Like a Cold: The Legality of Justice in *Jessica Jones*.

The mentally broken, female hero is not new to television audiences. One need only look at Slim from *Enough* or The Bride from *Kill Bill* to see these types of characters. However, the audience's reaction to and the creator's portrayal and treatment of these characters is seeing a defined shift; where they used to be considered heroic for eliminating the bad guy, now heroines are being turned into villains when they do not follow the exact letter of the law. This trend is seen throughout Netflix's *Jessica Jones* series before finally culminating in season three with the downfall of Trish Walker. Throughout the series, a parallel is drawn between Jessica and Trish, with Trish starting out as a loyal sidekick and inspiration, then with Jessica ending the series as a hero and Trish being condemned as a villain. While there is a sizable amount of evidence pointing to Trish's transformation into a rogue antihero, the premature condemnation of Trish by Jessica is the true shock of the series.

Season three of *Jessica Jones* acts as an answer to the question that the whole series poses: How far can you go to obtain justice and still remain a hero? Despite killing evil villains and trying to rescue others, Jessica is unwilling to allow Trish to take a similar path; she decides to imprison a mentally unstable Trish without even attempting to get her any medical help. Throughout the series, the showrunners use Jessica as a guide for the audience and a reflection of their desired morality; their choice to have Jessica condemn Trish encourages the audience to see Trish's actions as unforgivable. This can be seen as a reflection of the way morality fluctuates in society; rather than seeing the Slims and The Brides as heroes, women are being portrayed as villains more often when they seek their own justice outside of the influence of the law. The negative view of these violent women's actions outside of the law can be connected to the small,

yet growing, factor in modern society that advocates for non-violent activism in the face of everyday issues. If showrunners promote Jessica over Trish, they can encourage the audience, especially women viewers, to choose violence as a last resort.

Ultimately, the introduction of Erik Gelden, a character with the superpower to detect evil, and Trish's mental instability work against the intentions of the creators to show portray Trish as an unredeemable villain. While the Erik's powers work to influence the audience to see characters in a negative or positive light, Trish's mental breakdown in reaction to devastating, emotional trauma works to highlight the way people react differently to trauma and the consequences of certain reactions. Instead of promoting a nonviolent movement, the superpowered evil- detector and the mental instability work to create the idea that these mentally fractured heroines need help more than the condemnation of their friends and family.

1. The Role of the Audience and the Show Runners

When a work of entertainment is released to the consumers piece by piece, the audience can have a huge influence on how a text or show is made and produced. In the case of Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the negative reaction of the audience caused him to alter the ending of the novel. The creation of the internet has only helped give consumers power over the art that they consume because they can make their complaints all across the web. Furthermore, entertainment businesses are more likely to play to their audiences wishes because of their dependence on good ratings. This is primarily due to the fact that everyone involved in producing a television show is concerned with creating a show that will captivate audiences.

One of the easiest ways in which to capture the love of an audience is by giving them a protagonist that they like and can relate to on some level. In their article, "Morality Predicts Enjoyment but Not Appreciation of Morally Ambiguous Characters," Allison Eden and others,

discuss what elements can influence how the audience feels about certain character types. One theory that Eden discusses specifically is affective disposition theory:

This theory states that whether we like or dislike characters...is based on our judgment of the morality of these characters. We rejoice when the hero, who we judge to be “good” based on our own conceptualization of morality, triumphs over the villain, who we judge deserving of this punishment (in simpler terms, “bad”) based on his or her moral violations. (350)

The idea that a viewer’s opinion “is based on our judgment of the morality” is not unusual, as this is the same with the real world; we judge others, make choices, and act based on the morals we form over our lifetime. With this in mind, morality constantly changes within a person and within a society. What is acceptable at eight is no longer acceptable at thirty. Likewise, what is socially acceptable in India might not be acceptable in the United States. However, the idea that the audience projects their morality onto a character is far too simple an explanation for something as complex as morality. This is something that Eden also notes in her article:

“characters’ morality is more complex than a simple white hat–black hat conceptualizations of morality. This can be seen in the increasing emphasis in popular contemporary media of ambivalently moral protagonists battling equally ambivalent antagonists” (352). Salma Monani also focuses on how an audience can be led to feel sympathy and empathy for someone, even a character on a show, in her article, “Evoking Sympathy and Empathy: The Ecological Indian and Indigenous Eco-Activism.” In her article, Monani states that, “Cognitive scholars recognize that characters are emotive agents with whom audience members can have feelings *with* or *for*” (146). Although Monani is focused on promoting only empathetic connections, showrunners are more concerned with keeping an audience’s attention. Since serial forms of entertainment are

often subject to the will of an audience, showrunners are concerned with portraying characters that an audience member can feel something “*with or for*” a character.

The conflict and characters that are presented by popular entertainment no longer fit a simple “white hat- black hat” patterns, where the audience sees pure good versus pure evil, such as the epic conflict between Beowulf and Grendel. Instead, we now have complex characters like Trish Walker and Jessica Jones who both experience massive shifts in morality, these shifts that facilitate condemning one character over the other, despite massive similarities in plot, characteristics, and violent actions. Overall, the inclusion of characters that experience such big morality shifts works to make an audience feel “with or for” a character. In turn, this connection means that the audience will be open to hearing and possibly believing in the message of the story being told.

2. Jessica and Trish: Parallel Characters and Story Lines

Although Jessica is the main protagonist of the show, her struggle as a troubled hero is paralleled by the story arc of her adopted sister, Trish Walker. This parallel between the two women acts as a reflection of the morality that the writers and show runners are trying to promote: the idea that there is a limit to what a hero can do to get justice. Although this idea is constantly discussed throughout the three seasons of the show, the final season of *Jessica Jones* is where the answer to the big question is found: a hero becomes a villain when killing is no longer a last resort.

Before discussing the fate of the two heroines, it is important to understand the way their heroic journeys align and why the minute deviations lead to one woman becoming a villain. From the start of the show, Jessica and Trish seem to be at odds; Jessica is a hard-drinking PI and Trish is a professional talk-show host. However, later episodes reveal that both women have

addictions to recreational substances: Jessica is an alcoholic and Trish has been in and out of rehabs for using cocaine. At first this dependency seems to be used by the showrunners to make both women appear more realistic, as drug and alcohol addiction is a very widespread, real issue in our current society. Later in season one and all throughout season two the addiction becomes a key contributor in Trish's transformation into a hero. While Jessica never asks for her powers, Trish actively pursues super-powers after becoming addicted to a performance enhancing drug. The addiction with becoming more and more supernaturally enhanced is what pushes Trish to pursue drugs and dangerous experimental surgery no matter the cost to herself or others. While Trish often uses her powers for the good of others, her addiction to enhancing herself goes beyond Jessica's addiction to alcohol. It is also what helps to lead Trish down the road to murder; Trish's obsession with becoming a hero is one of the things which pushes her to kill murderers in order to make the world a better place.

In addition to their similar vices, Jessica and Trish face similar conflicts. It can be said that the most basic requirement for being a hero is having someone to fight against. The first real villains that the women face is the mind-controller, Kilgrave, whose role H. Rakes discusses in her article "Crip Feminist Trauma Studies in *Jessica Jones* and Beyond." "Crip" is a derogatory slang word for disabled, and Rakes focuses on Jessica's character through a disabled studies lens, as Jessica is suffering from mental trauma inflicted by the supervillain Kilgrave. In her article Rakes asks the reader, "what does a supervillain look like in a Crip feminist series? White, abled, financially secure, thin, straight, cis, male. This is a crucial feature of the Crip feminist trauma politics of the series" (81). While Rakes is focusing on Kilgrave's lack of physical or mental disability, it is only one part of the whole package; a package which represents a majority group with power, privilege, and history of abusing both. It is no coincidence that Kilgrave is

played by and portrayed as a “White, abled, financially secure, thin, straight, cis, male.”

Although he was purple in the original comic book series, the decision to have a white male is purposeful. A purple villain is not unheard of, as seen in Marvel's Thanos, but an actor from any race could have been chosen to take on the role of Kilgrave: or any actor could have been painted purple. The choice to have a white male as the villain grounds the plot of the story to real life inequalities seen today; nearly every news station and magazine features articles about able, heterosexual, white men abusing the power that they have gained because of their labels. This casting choice acts as a reflection of the real-life danger that white supremacy imposes on any society that longs for equality.

However, Kilgrave’s role is also used to discuss the level of sacrifice expected from heroes and to introduce the idea that even an evil person can be used for the greater good. This moment is seen when Jessica has to consider working with Kilgrave because his powers could be used to help others:

Kilgrave: What a waste of energy.

Jessica: Was it? You just saved four lives...

Kilgrave: We should do this more often. Think of all the people we could help, all the crimes we could stop. We’d be one hell of a dynamic duo...I can’t be a hero without you.

(1.8.13-12:33)

This is a very poignant moment in the series because, up until this moment, the audience has only seen Kilgrave use his power for evil. With this one scene, the audience is shown how versatile having a superpower can be, something that the show will continue to discuss throughout the entire series, most prominently during confrontations with Alisa in season two and with Trish’s downfall in season three.

Despite the horrible things that Kilgrave has done to her, and the clear suggestion that he wants Jessica in exchange for using his powers for good, Jessica contemplates the idea of working with her nemesis. She even goes so far as to seek out Trish for advice on what she should do: “What would you do if you could harness Kilgrave’s powers for good?...What if you could teach him to be more like you? Show him how to use his powers in a positive way...you could potentially change the world” (1.8.9:25-8:30). In addition to discussing the moral conundrum of trying to turn a villain into a hero, this scene also highlights the level of sacrifice expected from a hero. In order to use Kilgrave’s powers for good, Jessica would be expected to stay with him, even though he raped and mentally abused her. Of course, the price is too high for Jessica to pay, especially when she still has the option of stopping Kilgrave altogether.

Given the recent boom in superhero movies and television shows in the world, from Marvel especially, the line drawn by Jessica is very important to the development of superhero portrayals. When an average hero goes off to fight the villain, there is no guarantee that they will come back alive and whole. Audiences around the world faced this dilemma in 2019, when Tony Stark sacrificed himself in *Avengers: Endgame* to save the universe from the powerful villain Thanos. This sacrifice was not something that was forced on Tony by the other heroes, rather it was a choice he willingly made. This type of consent is something that the heroes silently give when they go to fight in this way; it is no different than a soldier going to war. Jessica is willing to die to take down Kilgrave, but she does not consent to becoming his romantic companion, as she was forced to do previously.

One could view this choice as selfish, given the evidence that Kilgrave’s powers can be used for the greater good, but many people in the show’s fandom do not believe that even Jessica could have made Kilgrave good. Answering the question of whether or not Kilgrave could be a

force for good on the popular forum Reddit, one commenter, called St_Tyler, argued that his powers are inherently evil and could never be used for good: “If you value free will at all, his powers, even if used for the ‘greater good,’ are unethical” (“Question About a Possible ‘Good’ Kilgrave”). This comment by St_Tyler acts as a reflection of popular society; consent has started taking over the mainstream media in order to promote the importance of respecting a person’s right to choose. Ultimately, Jessica is under no obligation to anyone and she is choosing to make an even bigger sacrifice by risking her life by continuing to fight Kilgrave. Most importantly, Jessica is never shamed into or gaslighted by the other characters to sacrifice herself to Kilgrave.

The final confrontation when Jessica kills Kilgrave, is also very poignant because of the way it relates to real social issues and gender issues in particular. During this scene, Jessica holds Kilgrave by the jaw so that he is unable to speak and mocks him, right before she breaks his neck: “Smile” (1.13.10:55-40). This scene features two strong feministic elements that are direct and purposeful reflections of modern society and morality. The first element is that Jessica mockingly tells Kilgrave to “Smile” before snapping his neck, a moment that acts as a parody of the way women are constantly being told by strangers and friends that they should smile. In her article for *The New York Times*, “How Do You Feel About Being Told to Smile?” Shannon Doyne asked her readers, “What do you think about it? Is it helpful advice, made with the goal of helping the non-smiler feel better? Or is it designed to make everyone else more comfortable—or neither of these?” The consensus found in the comments answering this question, most of which were submitted by women, was that a majority of women had experienced being told to smile by a stranger. It was also very clear that a majority found this unsolicited advice presumptive, with the term “annoying” being used at a high level of frequency. One reader, Ashley Tran, commented on Doyne’s article, offering up a comparison between the way men and women face

this issue: “From what I've seen, if a man doesn't smile, they are not questioned, but if a woman doesn't smile, she automatically seems down or upset.” This sentiment is echoed by many other commenters in the article, which only serves to highlight how this issue is so widespread.

Although there is a lot of controversy surrounding a “smile command,” with many also arguing that the issue is not worth such consideration, the implied gender dimensions are a prevalent part of society worth consideration. Women’s need to control facial expression places even more pressure on women to conform to the expectations of others. It is also important to note that a majority of women are told to smile by virtual strangers. The fact that a random person can feel entitled to tell another person, a woman in particular, that they should change their facial expression just shows how much they value their own opinions over another person’s bodily autonomy. There are numerous other articles that discuss this issue, with some even suggesting this is a form of harassment, akin to the catcalling women experience on the street. The fact that this presumptive action mostly happens to women only reaffirms the idea society values a woman according to her looks. Kilgrave valued his own happiness over Jessica’s bodily autonomy and was constantly making Jessica do things that she did not want to do, such as forcing her to smile. By reversing the roles, Jessica effectively shows him how it feels to be told to smile, while something horrible happens to you. This moment also highlights the way women in a society are pushed to conform to fit society's expectations, because Jessica's feelings were ignored by a man who only cared about what he wanted.

The second and most significant element of Kilgrave’s death is that Jessica holds his mouth closed, which prevents Kilgrave from speaking. This is important on a practical level because it keeps him from using his powers to hurt the other people that are susceptible to his mind-control. Practicality aside, this moment has a depth of symbolism that resonates with any

silenced minority. Jessica's action finally silences Kilgrave, like Jessica and so many other victims are silenced by their abusers, which is an incredibly moving moment. Emotion, or the "affect" that something has on a person's mind, body, and actions, is a palpable force in all forms of art; television is no exception. The emotions that come from watching Jessica's domination of Kilgrave will be especially potent to survivors of abuse. Feminist theorist, Clare Hemmings addresses this transfer of "affect" in her article "Affect and Feminist Methodology, Or What Does It Mean to be Moved," which states that affect can transfer "through affective belonging to social movements," even connecting it to queer theorists that are using affect to "create community through the empathy born of shared experience" (148). Anyone who has ever been abused and felt like they were silenced by their abusers will find themselves connecting to Jessica because of their "shared experiences." Jessica's super-powered strength also has a considerable influence because it represents an experience that few women get: the chance to completely overpower and defeat their abuser. Most women cannot physically overpower their abusers so entirely, which is why this scene can invoke a cathartic release; many women would enjoy having Jessica's ability to physically stop and silence their abuser.

Furthermore, when one strips the first season down to its core, Jessica's story is that of a sexual abuse survivor trying to stop her abuser from hurting anyone else. The struggle of Jessica's own experience is a specific representation of the society of the United States: "As of 1998, an estimated 17.7 million American women had been victims of attempted or completed rape" ("Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics"). It is also worth noting that the statistics only represent the number of women that reported the assault, meaning that it does not include the number of women who did not come forward. This significant number means that Jessica is part of and represents a large demographic. Her struggle to overcome her pain and to stop her abuser

from continuing his evil acts reflects the struggle women are still facing today. Jessica's triumph over Kilgrave is a symbolic hope for a future in which women triumph over their abusers.

The necessity of Kilgrave's death is one of the most uncontested elements of *Jessica Jones*. In his article, "Special Section : The Malign Transference: Dealing with the Unbearable in the Internal World of the Murderer," David Jones offers insight into the mind of killers, which was gained from his time working in psychiatric facilities that housed convicted murderers: "the normal unconscious is filled with cannibalistic and murderous impulses of a wide variety and the task of parenthood and social relationships generally is to tame the dangerous animal that is the human being" (52). The idea that people are filled with bad urges is not revolutionary, but the statement that the responsibilities of helping quell those "murderous impulses" belongs to parents and "social relationships" is one that society has begun to see evidence in support of this idea. Kilgrave, like the many real-life serial killers, was not taught how to properly control his urges by his parents; this suggests that Kilgrave had very little to no chance of being able to control his powers for the good of society.

Since he received little to no constructive parenting and no prison could hold Kilgrave, Jessica has no choice but to kill Kilgrave. By ending Kilgrave's life, Jessica is saving an untold number of people from manipulation, rape, and death. This moment is also extremely important because it shows the standard moral towards illegal justice. As a virtually unstoppable, psychopathic villain with the potential to do an untold amount of evil, Kilgrave can be classified as an evil that must be stopped. Since no prison can hold him and Jessica is the only one that can resist his compulsion, the duty of executioner falls on her shoulders. Ultimately, the illegal action of killing someone is for the good of the world, and the audience views Jessica as a hero. This moment aligns with some previous, similar legal morality seen in films, such as *Enough* and the

Kill Bill franchise, which also portray the female protagonists as heroes for their murderous actions. This is a portrayal that will change and diverge as *Jessica Jones* progresses.

Jessica killing Kilgrave parallels with Trish's killing of Alisa in season two. Jessica's relationship with her mother Alisa is the only diverging element, as no one would have mourned Kilgrave when Jessica killed him. Because Jessica has feelings for the villain of season two due to the fact that Alisa is her mother, the reaction to Alisa's death is not a triumphant moment, like Kilgrave's death. However, it is important to note that the two villains are not that different. Alisa even follows a similar trajectory as Kilgrave: hiding in the shadows, killing people, kidnapping Jessica, and eventually being killed. Ultimately, both characters are a risk to society for very different reasons: Kilgrave is unwilling to stop hurting people and Alisa cannot control her murderous rages. Despite the moral differences between the two, the correlation between Kilgrave and Alisa becomes extremely clear when she kidnaps and emotionally blackmails Jessica into staying with her. At one point, Alisa tells Jessica that, "You can reach me" (2.13.50:50-29). This is essentially the same ploy that Kilgrave uses in season one, implying that Jessica can use his power for good if she stays with him. Despite the fact that she and Alisa actually care about each other, Jessica is once again placed in the unfair role of super-powered leash because she is the only one that can "reach" Alisa and stop her from going into a killer rage.

Even considering the fact that Alisa has a desire to be a better person, her uncontrollable, murderous rages do not make her any less of a threat to society. So, it stands to reason that Trish's decision to take down Alisa is essentially the same as Jessica taking down Kilgrave. However, the reaction to the death of this villain is not viewed in a positive light:

Jessica: You killed her!

Trish: Before she could kill you! The police would have shot you both...I had to. I had to save you. Jess... Jess.

Jessica: Run. (2.13.16:50-15:36).

Although it is obvious to anyone that “the police would have shot [them] both” if they had attempted to capture Alisa, Jessica is unable to ignore the pain from the loss of her mother. One could argue that Trish is in the wrong because Alisa was willing to stand down. However, this argument would be ignoring the fact that Trish had no way of knowing Alisa’s intentions and that she is acting with the intent to “save,” rather than hurt. Ultimately, the reason that Jessica and Trish both have no choice but to kill the villains comes from the vast amounts of power that each villain has, powers which make it extremely hard for anyone to stop them from doing bad things.

It is Alissa’s death that acts as the diverging point between Jessica and Trish and as a marker for when legal morality becomes more prominent in the series, because both women are treated very differently for taking what is essentially the same action. When Jessica kills Kilgrave everyone, including Trish, supports her. However, Trish is not given the same consideration when she kills another superpowered murderer. Despite this obvious parallel between Trish’s actions and her own, Jessica is unwilling to forgive Trish:

Trish: I’m not a hero. I don’t know what I am anymore. I just know that I’m your sister.

Jessica: I lost the only family I had. Again... It didn’t have to be you. It didn’t have to be you. I look at you now and all I see is the person who killed my mother. (2.13.9:40-8:55)

This unwillingness to forgive seems shocking, especially considering the fact that Jessica has always protected Trish, even going so far as to kill Kilgrave to protect her. Jessica’s condemnation of Trish can also have an influence on how the audience views Trish. More often

than not, the main character is a massive guiding influence on the show; if the protagonist sees a supporting character in a certain way, this will have an influence on how the audience perceives that character. Now that Trish has killed Jessica's mother, she is more likely to be condemned by the audience because Jessica condemns her. This is purposeful. The writers and show runners know what the end of the series will look like and want to start the groundwork for Trish's descent into villainy.

The parallel between Jessica and Trish is further seen when they kill non-powered bad guys. In season two, Jessica kills a security guard that was torturing her imprisoned mother. During this episode, Jessica follows the guard back to his home and the two end up fighting. During the fight, the guard yells, "You attacked me. You attacked me in my home! Self-defense!" (2.10.2:59-50). This scene is important because it brings up the underlying legal conflict that Jessica and Trish face. The guard's words are also important because of their timing; they come after he pepper sprays and beats Jessica with a baton before she even attempts to confront him. Although the guard is morally wrong to attack Jessica in such a violent way, Jessica is legally in the wrong because she has broken into his house and he does not know that she is not a threat to him.

However, the writers and show runners remove a majority of the blame from Jessica because of her intentions and the interfering elements. First, she is unable to see and cannot aim clearly because she has been sprayed with mace, suggesting that the killing blow she delivers is an accident. Second, she feels remorse for what she has done, reinforcing the idea that she is not acting in cold blood. Finally, she finds evidence suggesting that the guard killed the inmates that he was in charge of, shifting the blame onto the guard by making him appear eviler than Jessica (2.10.3-2:10). However, the end result is the same; Jessica has broken the law and killed

someone. Despite the fact that she is legally a murderer, Jessica never faces any repercussions or reproaches for this death. This fits into the ongoing idea that certain actions are forgivable despite their illegal nature. Similarly, in season three, Trish accidentally kills a corrupt cop when attempting to bring him to justice. Like Jessica, Trish also shows remorse for what she has done. However, in this instance she is not afforded the same forgiveness that the showrunners extend to Jessica.

In addition to committing similar crimes for the collective good, Trish and Jessica have similar heroic actions, as when Jessica kills the murdering rapist Kilgrave. This moment could be directly related to a moment in season three when Trish stops a man from raping a woman that he has drugged: “Not this time asshole...I’m here to help...He’s done it before, but got off on a technicality...it was a matter of time before he did it again” (3.2.32:53-28:53). This scene and Trish’s words tells the audience that she has been researching and following people who were acquitted of crimes to catch the criminals. While this scene acts as a constant reminder of the hope for survivors to overcome their abusers, is important to note that Trish is going after people who the legal system does catch. This scene really shows how a fictional character can reflect and relate to the real world; Trish, like so many others, is dissatisfied with the results of the legal system. This is extremely relevant given the low percentage of rapists that are actually convicted and sentenced to jail. This scene could even be seen as a parallel for the Brock Turner case of 2015, in which a college-aged rapist was only sentenced to six months in jail after being successfully convicted. Convictions like this are hard to get because of how hard it is to obtain proof.

In an article for the *Boston University Law Review*, Michael Pardo explains the different types of proof required for levels of law cases: “In criminal cases, the higher standard of ‘beyond

a reasonable doubt' applies" (242). The need to have evidence that proves guilt "beyond reasonable doubt" is connected to the "due process clause of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution" ("What Is Proof"). The fact that a jury is supposed to be convinced "beyond a reasonable doubt" means that a high level of evidence is expected to obtain a conviction. In the case of the rapist that Trish tracks down, justice was not met because "he got off on a technicality." This could be the result of a number of things; the testimony and evidence were not strong enough or the evidence obtained was inadmissible.

However, Trish is not following the strict guidelines of the law regarding obtaining evidence. This means that she can take down criminals in a way that the law does not allow. She is also choosing to try and get the man locked up even though he is "presumed to be innocent" from a legal standpoint. Even though she is acting outside of legal bounds, she has effectively stopped a serial rapist when the law could not. As previously discussed, an audience often favors a character "based on our judgment of the morality of the character" (Eden 350). At this point, most audience members would be on Trish's side because they would be more likely to agree with her morality; a proven rapist was let free and needs to be locked up. By righting a failure of the justice system, Trish is presented in a good light to the audience. It would not be a stretch to say that the rise of personal justice in literature, film, and television, especially when looking at the United States, can be linked to dissatisfaction with the justice system in place.

It is also important to note the role of the law regarding Trish's actions. The series, which is set in a version of modern-day New York, reflects the current legal system seen in the United States. Of course, the world of *Jessica Jones* involves superpowered individuals, so some of these elements have to be adapted. Christopher Slobogin, a professor of law at Vanderbilt

University Law School, explores the different kinds of criminal systems in the world in his article “Preventive Justice: A Paradigm in Need of Testing:”

[the desert system] that is dominant today, bases sentences on an offender's culpability...The idea is to ensure that a person's sentence imposes the punishment that the offender deserves, punishment that is proportionate to the offender's guilt or blameworthiness. In commonly used, somewhat misleading, language, a desert-based system punishes the crime, not the criminal. (392)

A system “to ensure that that a person's sentence imposes the punishment that the offender deserves” is definitely the type of system that Trish advocates. Her statement that, “it was only a matter of time” before the rapist committed a crime again suggests that Trish is starting to believe that people cannot be redeemed after reaching a certain point. Because the rapist escaped justice “on a technicality,” the system is not working, and Trish has now put it upon herself to fix the injustice.

3. The Nature of Evil: Evil-Detector Curve Ball

The parallel story-lines of Jessica and Trish takes a drastic turn halfway through season three, with Trish descending into villainy. Instead of having Trish immediately become a villain upon gaining her powers, the beginning of season sets her up as a very good hero who just so happens to be working outside of the law. Even with the legality of her actions in question, Trish is constantly explaining and demonstrating her intent to remain firmly on the hero side of the moral line. An example of this can be seen when Trish tells Jessica that, “All I want is Brandt⁵ and every other asshole like him behind bars” (3.3. 35:50-40). By stating that she wants the bad guys locked up, rather than snuffed out, the audience is able to mark her progress as a hero. At

⁵ Brandt is a criminal that Trish tries to apprehend in season three of *Jessica Jones*.

this point Trish's actions and words show that she has not crossed the line and firmly intends to fulfil the role of hero.

However, a fundamental shift in the story line is felt when the showrunners introduce the audience to Erik Gelden. Erik is introduced as Jessica's one-night stand turned hero when he reveals that he has the ability to sense evil in people: "All I know is that they're bad...I sense it, the darkness in people. The shit they've done, are doing, or...will do. The worst ones, they have no guilt. What I see, what I feel, is a void, a lack of humanity" (3.4.41:30-40:57). Since he can literally sense "the darkness in people" his superpower essentially becomes the moral compass of the show. Despite the wishes of many, it is not easy to figure out who is good and who is evil with a single look. The showrunner's introduction of Erik, a living, evil-detector addresses the human desire for a clear way to find the evil in the world. It also allows the character and the audience to put legality to the side. This can be seen when Trish asks Erik to help her catch bad guys: "I know what you want. You want to team up and stop all the bad guys... you want me... to tell you who's good and who's bad, and I can. No judge or jury necessary" (3.4.23:50-30). By introducing Erik, the writers have essentially created the perfect world by making evil a black and white matter; who needs a "judge or jury" when Erik's powers are all the evidence needed to find the guilty?

Though the introduction of an evil-detector seems too good to be true, any possibility that Erik's powers are false is put to rest when he and Jessica uncover a pedophile:

Jessica: That's the most heroic thing I've done all year, and it took under two hours... say

I wasn't here and you had found out what he was doing, what would you have done?

Erik: I would have asked for more money...then I would have turned him in. It's kids for Christ's sake. (3.4.33:50-32:52)

While the doll clothes and camera equipment at the criminal's apartment clearly point to the duo having uncovered a pedophile, Erik's use of the word "kids" only confirms any suspicions. In addition to proving that Erik's powers are real, this take down also acts to explain just how his powers work on a physical level. Erik's superpowers cause his emotions and physical body to be altered when he gets in range of an evil person, and the confrontation with the pedophile allows the audience to see how much it influences him. Erik's physical reaction to such "darkness" in the pedophile is quite pronounced; during the scene, his face is twisted in severe pain and he has to lean against a wall in order to stay upright.

Since he is used as a moral guide throughout the final season of the show, it is also important to note Erik's questionable morals. We learn that he consistently blackmails the people that set off his evil-detector instead of turning them into the police. Although he jokes that he would have "asked for more money," the pedophile would not have been caught without Jessica pushing Erik. While this complexity makes his character more relatable, it complicates his role as a moral guide for the audience and the other characters in the show. While critics, like Eden, believe that the audience's opinion of a character is based on "our judgment of the morality of these characters," the introduction of Erik means that the showrunners are encouraging the audiences to ignore Eden's idea that their morality should influence how they view a character (Eden 350). By being given a physical embodiment of the scales of justice, the viewer does not have to think about whether or not they should root for the problematic hero or villain. There is also an underlying level of audience-shaming involved in this story arc as well, seen in the way that, once the evil is revealed, the audience might feel pressured to agree with the morals offered by Erik; if the audience does not, then there is a clear suggestion that there is something wrong with their morality. Despite his questionable morals, Erik's reactions to people, and to

Trish in particular, becomes a deciding factor in who the audience is encouraged to view as a villain.

Unless the audience had prior knowledge of Trish's downfall, it should not come as a shock that Erik does not initially identify her as an evil character. While the killing of Jessica's mother marks Trish as a bad character in the end of season two, the audience is unlikely to view her negatively because Trish's morality and actions are understandable. Before the audience is even given definitive proof, which later comes in the form of the captured pedophile, that his powers are real, Erik confirms Trish's goodness early in the season:

Jessica: What's your head say about whoever is out there?

Erik: All clear. (3.4.38:48-35).

The "whoever" that Jessica is referring to is actually Trish, who has come to speak to Jessica. Even though the encounter is marked by humor and sarcasm, Erik is serious when he states that there is nothing behind the door that sets off his evil-detector.

However, Trish's level of evil shoots up after her mother is murdered by Salinger; something which plays a big role in her mental trauma. To cope with the trauma of being unable to get justice for her mother's murder, she must find another way to do some good; finding a coping mechanism comes in the form of taking down a corrupt cop, identified as Nussbaumer:

Trish: What was he guilty of?

Erik: Killing some drug dealers.

Trish: He killed bad people?

Erik: Kids. Poor kids, who still had a chance to change...

Trish: Do you have proof?

Erik: A file full. Intel from illegal immigrants, ex-cons, snitches, none of whom will

testify. All inadmissible. (3.11.21:05-30).

This is where Trish's values start to become a moral problem for audience members. Although it could be considered reasonable to try and punish the villain that killed her mother, Trish automatically tries to clear the corrupt cop because she assumed that he "killed bad people." The calm, questioning voice that the line is delivered in only drives home the fact that she does not care if "bad people" die. It is only after Erik tells her their age and offers proof that Trish is willing to see the kids as victims and the cop as a criminal. This need to place people in two separate and distinct categories is a direct reflection of the mental trauma from her mother's death. With her trauma fresh and at the forefront of her mind, Trish is too mentally wounded to think deeply about what makes these people good or bad.

Having Trish react so negatively to the murdered teen drug dealers is one of the showrunners' more discreet ways of influencing the audience to view Trish in a negative light. Whether one is addicted to drugs, has a friend or family member who is an addict, or sells or knows someone that sells drugs, the drug industry is widespread and is a prominent part of society. Any audience member watching *Jessica Jones* that fits into any of these categories could react negatively to Trish writing off the young, drug dealers as "bad people." Additionally, normal, mentally sound people do not want children to be killed because it does not agree with the general morality found on this planet. Ultimately, it is Erik's reminder that the drug dealers were "Kids. Poor kids, who still had a chance to change" that firmly places Trish in the wrong during the scene. This scene is also crucial because it works to further highlight some of the issues with the legal system. This is seen when Erik tells Trish that the cop cannot be convicted because the intelligence comes "from illegal immigrants, ex-cons, snitches, none of whom will testify. All inadmissible," which highlights the ongoing issues with the legal system. The

important term to note in Erik's statement is the term "inadmissible." Given the growing popularity of crime dramas, most viewers are familiar with the term inadmissible. It can be argued that everyone does not view the legal systems treatment of inadmissible evidence in a positive light. This is especially true because evidence that could be crucial to obtaining a just verdict cannot be used if it is obtained outside of strict legal guidelines. This moment and the implied underlying legal issues also arises when Trish takes down a rapist earlier in season three; he is charged and tried for rape "but got off on a technicality" (3.2.32:53-28:53). Although the "technicality" is not explained, it is reasonable to surmise that a conviction was not obtained because there was a lack of admissible evidence or refusal to testify by witnesses.

In her article, "The Impact on Juror Verdicts of Judicial Instruction to Disregard Inadmissible Evidence: A Meta-Analysis," Nancy Steblay and her co-writers discuss the role of inadmissible evidence in the courtroom: "Trial court jurors are to reach their verdicts on the basis of only evidence admissible for courtroom presentation. From a legal perspective, IE is excluded to keep the jury from being misled and coming to an incorrect verdict" (471). Steblay's statement that inadmissible evidence is not used to "keep a jury from being misled or coming to an incorrect verdict" can be seen as counterproductive. If there is any evidence that would prove that someone is guilty and it is not used, a jury is being misled and a criminal might walk free from an incorrect verdict. The evidence that Erik has comes "from illegal immigrants, ex-cons, snitches" and is considered to be inadmissible because of who is providing the evidence or their unwillingness to appear in court. Rather than there being a lack of evidence, the source of the evidence is what prevents it from being used; it comes from people whose past is dubious or who are unwilling to place their lives in danger by speaking out in court. Most people want the bad guy to be caught, someone who kills kids even more so, which means that there is a level of

anger that can be felt when the audience realizes a child killer is still on the loose. In the case of the released rapist, the very fact that he does try to assault someone, and he is only unsuccessful because Trish ignores the law to stop him, shows that the jury made an incorrect verdict. Had the laws not been so strict regarding what is and is not admissible, the jury might have come to a correct verdict and the rapist would not have had a chance to strike again.

Although legal struggles are a constant underlying issue throughout the series, it is not legal problems that lead to Trish becoming a killer; it is her mental state. The takedown of the cop marks the first signs of how much Trish's mental state is deteriorating. Although Trish's accidental murder of the cop marks the beginning of her rapid descent into villainy, it is Erik's reaction to the cop's death that is really important to the overall plot and message of the show: "Erik: {laughing} The pain. The pain is gone. In my... my head. It's-- It's like the... world just changed. It's lighter. It's... It's better. And I can feel it" (3.11.27:03-30). Since Erik's power is made to be the deciding factor on morality in this universe, his reaction to the killing should technically mean that the killing was good; because Erik says that the "pain is gone" and the world is "lighter," Trish sees her action as an heroic balancing of the scales.

This is quite literal in Trish's case as she continues to kill under the impression that she is making the world better by killing murderers. When Trish and Erik go after another killer, who is an arsonist, the scene is almost a complete repeat of the previous one, with Trish accidentally killing the man. However, her reaction is not shock and regret, as it was at the death of the corrupt cop: "{droning stops}. 'Is the world better? I can make it better'" (3.11.4-3:00-2:40). With this scene, Trish takes a step further into violence by acting on Erik's senses. The belief in Erik's powers becomes tricky because he believes that the world has become a "lighter... better" place. It is this that leads Trish to the idea that the killings are a necessary evil. Although she is

going further by acting out with violence, Trish's misguided intentions are to try and make the world better in a way that makes sense to her traumatized mind. While his power does not give Trish a license to kill, there is conflict because her mental instability and her positive motives are not considered as a factor in whether or not Trish can still be redeemed.

Additionally, Erik's powers are used to confirm that Trish has completely gone to the dark side. This can be seen when he confronts Trish in the final episode of season three; Erik grabs Trish by the arms and the low-level droning noise, which indicates the level of headache that the evil is causing, increases. To make matters worse, blood starts to pour out of Erik's eyes before he drops to the ground (3.13. 41:41-10). In her book, *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan states that, "the transmission of affect, whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes...some longer lasting" (1). In the scene with Trish, the "affect" of her evil is transmitted in such a way that it has a "longer lasting" effect on Erik. Because Erik's powers have proven to be accurate and true, the extreme reaction he gets from Trish is meant to show that there is no doubt that she has become a villain. Even though Trish is condemned for violently acting on information gained from Erik's powers, it is Trish's mental instability that creates issue with her being portrayed as a villain. By not acknowledging the fact that Trish's mental state is clearly impaired, Jessica's condemnation of her is premature.

4. Mental Instability, Abandonment, and Redemption

One important element to consider when trying to understand Trish's actions during her downfall is her mental state after her mother is murdered by Salinger. Although the murder of the corrupt cop has already been addressed, it is important to note that Trish sees Salinger's face when she attacks Nussbaumer (3.11.25:50-55). The same hallucination happens again when

Trish confronts another killer, a property-owning arsonist that is responsible for the death of his tenants:

Trish: How many died...

Montero: It was fourteen, I'll pay. (3.11.4-3:50-2:40)

What cannot be seen from the words spoken, is that Trish is once again seeing Salinger's face as she beats up another bad guy. The fact that this happens numerous times suggests that there is currently something mentally wrong with Trish. However, one question remains; how far can Trish go before she becomes irredeemable?

One scene that discusses the possibility of redemption can be found after Trish has killed the arsonist. During this scene Jessica asks what level of evil Erik is picking up from Trish, to which Erik replies "For Trish? Five...ish...But maybe, maybe not permanently" (3.12.44:27-11). This level five is an increase from Erik's first reading of Trish, where he does not sense any evil whatsoever. During the scene, Erik even acknowledges the fact that there is something that has changed in Trish: "She was clear. I didn't feel it...until I did. She must have shut down something in order to...do what she did...when they died, my headaches lifted. It was like the balance of all the crap in the world suddenly tilted toward...good" (3.12.45:05-44:25). Although Erik is not attempting to diagnose Trish, his suggestion that she "must have shut something down" in her mind in order to go on a killing rampage suggests that she is going through some serious mental trauma; this mental trauma is responsible for Trish suddenly turning from caring hero into a cold-blooded killer.

Unfortunately for Trish, the agenda and plot line being presented to the audience is not as forgiving as Erik is about the permanence of Trish's evil. The guiding hand of the showrunners and writers causes the audience to perceive a compelling difference between Jessica and Trish's

actions, foreshadowing how far Trish's mental instability will take her into darkness. When Jessica tries to stop Trish from killing Salinger, the two argue over whether it is wrong to kill a monster like Salinger:

Jessica: I want him dead, too.

Trish: But I'm the only one willing to do it. You were willing, too, once, with Kilgrave.

Jessica: And it nearly destroyed me. (3.12.41:00-43)

This moment is where the show explains why they promote Jessica over Trish. Ultimately, Trish feels little-to-no guilt over what she has done, unlike Jessica. Despite feeling terribly upset after accidentally killing the corrupt cop, Erik's revelation that the cop's death righted the proverbial scales of justice. This is what helps cement the idea that Trish was doing something honorable into her mind.

The writer's and showrunner's reasons for Trish's imprisonment start to stack up when she is no longer willing to go to jail for her crimes:

Trish: You have just gone to unthinkable lengths to keep me out of jail.

Jessica: You were willing to go...Who's next, what if it's someone who is redeemable?

What if it's someone who is flat-out innocent? You can't know and you can't stop yourself... You have no control over it. I have seen this before. (3.13. 42:15-41:40).

The fact that Trish feels no guilt over killing bad guys is once again the most prevalent reason that is given for why Jessica must stop her; Trish cannot see that she has to stop. Should a viewer with a less lenient morality take in all the interactions, they might conclude that Trish has chosen her path and that there is no way back. A viewer with more lenient morality might believe that anyone can find redemption, even Trish. The showrunners and writers try to take this option of

redemption away by having Trish commit an unthinkable act: trying to kill Jessica in an attempt to escape imprisonment.

However, the showrunners and writers damage their own non-violent agenda in the final episode of the series. Their condemnation of Trish is made meaningless when they give Trish an epiphany about what she has been doing. This moment of epiphany comes when Detective Costa lists off all of the charges against Trish:

Costa: Two counts of murder in the first degree. One count of murder in the second degree. Multiple counts of aggravated assault, kidnapping, breaking and entering, trespassing. And one count of attempted murder against your own sister.

Trish: {breathes shakily} I'm the bad guy. (3.13.15-14:09)

Trish's acknowledgement of her actions and the fact that they were wrong completely negates the issue of guilt presented by the writers and show runners. Jessica's fear that Trish "can't stop" and the idea that she cannot be emotionally affected by the murders that she committed is proven wrong when she speaks the four words, "I'm the bad guy." It is equally important to acknowledge that Trish is not just making a hollow statement. During this scene, Trish is breathing "shakily," and her face has an expression of shock as Costa reads off the list of charges and when she takes responsibility for it. Although the writers and show runners have tried to turn the audience against Trish by providing the scenes showing Trish's brutality and lack of emotion, the total condemnation that they seem to desire from the viewer is not actually the achieved effect. As Trish is carted off to the Raft⁶ the main emotion felt is sadness for Trish because she did not get the help she needed and for Jessica because she has lost a sister whom she might have been able to help.

⁶ In *Jessica Jones*, the Raft is a maximum-security prison where superpowered convicts are imprisoned.

Ultimately, the intention of the writers and showrunners to promote a hero that is not controlled by their violent impulses is overshadowed by the treatment of Trish's mental trauma. She is not the uncontrollable and emotionless villain that they portrayed her as in the final season. She is seen this way because of the absence of struggle as Trish is taken to the Raft and her sad acknowledgement that she is "the bad guy." Both of these instances show that Trish could have been reached with proper care. The fact that Jessica's violent reactions to her own trauma are ignored or even outright praised highlights the bias going on. Because Trish seems to be too mentally damaged, she is taken away instead of being given the help that she needs. While this show promotes feminine agency in so many ways, including the way it acknowledges Jessica's trauma from her time with Kilgrave, the problems resulting from Trish's treatment damage the showrunners' promotion of a less violent world. While it is always important to promote what is considered to be a positive change in the world, it is also important to acknowledge the trauma, double standards, and mental illness achieve better representation and understanding.

Conclusion:

The harsh treatment of the concluding storylines of Daenerys and Trish serves as a reflection on trauma and as a warning for viewers about the consequences of violence; because both women are controlled by their trauma, they are removed from society. These texts highlight the idea that one must be careful not to cross the line when trying to achieve justice. However, there are issues with the presentation of this morality within both shows, connected to gender and mental trauma. While *Jessica Jones* condemns Trish for killing villains, *Game of Thrones* does not punish Arya for the violence she commits. One could argue that *Jessica Jones* simply takes more steps to discourage violent justice than *Game of Thrones* because *Jessica Jones* has a modern setting; modern audiences could relate to Trish more than a dragon queen. However, Trish's epiphany and the fact that her modern setting means that she could have gotten more mental help than Arya or Daenerys, show some clear double standards.

This pattern of mental illness, trauma, and a rejection of violence is one that continues to be seen in small strands of the entertainment industry. In the summer of 2019, the showrunners of HBO's *Big Little Lies* completely backtracked their treatment of female justice after the first season; the women who had previously escaped male abuse and violence through their own violent justice are portrayed as no longer being able to cope with what they have done. While the series was nominated for and receive countless awards for its depiction of female solidarity and justice in the face of male violence, these elements are ignored in the second season. Because there is only one book that the show is based on, the second season can literally be considered as going off book; this is much like HBO's other show, *Game of Thrones*, which continues beyond Martin's most recent book in the series. The similarities continue when one looks at the way that the showrunners of *Big Little Lies* embrace violent female justice then completely abandon this

in the latter season. This is reminiscent in the way that HBO portrays Daenerys's violence in a positive light before condemning her for the violence in the final season. Violent female justice seems too often receive a negative spin and highlights a slight double standard when left in the hands of television writers. While male protagonists in film or television can kill the villains without prolonged mental trauma or legal trouble, the same is not true for women like Trish, Daenerys, and the female protagonists from *Big Little Lies*. This is a pattern that keeps repeating, as women are looked down on for the violence they enact or when they are portrayed as mentally incapable, including when they are handling the trauma of violent experiences.

The current society faces a massive shift in morality, which is being portrayed in popular forms of entertainment, especially television shows. HBO's *Game of Thrones*, Martin's series, and *Jessica Jones* feature female characters that face trials that every woman faces in the real world: such as sexism, harassment, and assault. By featuring supernatural women that deal with and overcome real-life issues, these shows allow female viewers to see themselves reflected on screen in a position of power. The importance of consent, which has seen a boost in popularity in connection to the #MeToo movement, is making waves and resulting in change. In her article, "#MeToo and the Pursuit of Women's International Human Rights" Benedetta Faedi Duramy discusses factors that contribute to the movement's popularity: "#MeToo also gained momentum because of the international fame of both accusers and abusers, the heightened effect of social media activism, and the subsequent rapid growth of public outrage over sexual abuse and harassment that managed to sway the underpinning social norms" (216). This "momentum" and "public outrage" has led to several high-profile abusers being imprisoned for their actions; February 2020 saw Harvey Weinstein convicted and sentenced to jail after he spent decades abusing women. One must also note that this #MeToo movement is only able to spread and

create such change because of the mainstream media and entertainment outlets. *Jessica Jones*, *Game of Thrones*, and Martin's texts also work to spread this movement through their own exploration of assault and harassment; Jessica and Daenerys are victims of sexual assault and advocates to other victims. By acknowledging and addressing the mental trauma of assault, the shows work to draw attention to pressing issues of current life.

In addition, mental illness and trauma are no longer taboo topics to discuss in society. Mental illness, like depression, anxiety, and PTSD are now seen in television shows and films. While the normalizing of mental illness is helping to break down the barriers between able and disabled bodies, ableism is still playing a role in how people with mental or physical disabilities are being treated unfairly or just ignored outright. One example of this can be found in the entertainment industry. Just as inclusivity for women in film helps to achieve equality, those with severe or minimal disabilities are being ignored. This type of ableism is an underlying element throughout *Game of Thrones* and *Jessica Jones* that works to show how there are still issues with disability, despite an apparent acceptance of mental disability in society. With Daenerys, her mental illness cannot be ignored because she burns a city to the ground. On the other hand, Trish's mental trauma is only seen through internal visions, which means that her symptoms are so minor that even Jessica does not acknowledge how Trish's mental state is influencing her murder spree. While both characters have differing levels of emotional and physical trauma and mental illness from that trauma, they are both removed from society without any real attempt to get them help. This treatment of two characters with severe symptoms and minimal symptoms lacks empathy and care, which shows how ableism is still alive and strong in society.

Larson argues that societies underlying issues with the mentally and physically disabled are the most important reasons to discuss the way popular forms of entertainment portray

disabilities: “Analyzing how contemporary public discourses manage expressions of pain by either denying disability (survivors) or labeling others as disabled (liars) demonstrates the rhetorical forces that condition gendered and debilitating norms surrounding mental illness” (684). By analyzing entertainment one can see and understand the “gendered and debilitating norms” that are still prevalent in “contemporary” forms of entertainment. The “norms” are seen in the way that women are portrayed as needing to be removed from society when they succumb to mental trauma or illness. While the men of HBO’s *Game of Thrones* face extreme trials and become violent because of their trauma, most are not driven mentally ill by the trauma that they face, the one real exception being Theon Greyjoy. These men are also not permanently removed from their society by others due to their mental trauma or illness. *Jessica Jones* also falls into this category because Trish is overwhelmed by her trauma in a way that many popular, male protagonists do not experience.

Some argue that there is an inherent issue with superpowered trauma or disabled victims: “A character’s super abilities compensating for their impairments re-medicalizes and individualizes disability as a personal problem that must be overcome by strength of will, strength of mind, strength of power: superpower” (Rakes 80). If mental illness or other disabilities could be cured by “strength of will...mind...power,” then disabilities would not be so widespread or critical; using superpowers to try and give characters the power to fix themselves only spreads false ideas about treatments and can cause damage to what progress has been and is being made. Trish cannot fix herself; she needs professional and personal help to overcome the trauma of her mother’s murder. Likewise, Arya is not able to let go on her need for revenge until her friend the Hound reaches out with his words. Because Jessica will not help Trish and

Daenerys has no real friends willing to help her, both are unable to recover and are removed from their societies.

The encouragement of a world that is not consumed by violence can be seen in the condemnation of the violent heroines in both *Game of Thrones* and *Jessica Jones*. This encouragement for women to do activism that is not consumed by violence reflects the growing popularity of female-led, non-violent activism. Although the need for less violence is not the dominant trend, this type of activism has grown in popularity in younger generations. These preteens, teens, and young adults want to make significant changes in their society without violence, through the legal format of voting. In their article, “The Participatory Politics of the #NeverAgain Movement,” Henry Jenkins and Rogelio Lopez discuss this rise of these young, female activists:

Emma González has become an icon of youth empowerment. Stepping in front of over 800,000 people gathered at the March for Our Lives (MFOL) in Washington D.C...González stood fearlessly through a six-minute and 20 second moment of silence as she asked her audience to reflect on the short time span it took for her classmates to die at the hands of a school shooter. (1)

As Jenkins’ and Lopez state “Emma González has become an icon of youth empowerment” after she gave a speech in early 2018, a speech which has gained over three million views on YouTube. One of the most notable elements of her speech is what she encourages others to do in order to create change with the gun laws in the United States: “The people in the government who are voted into power are lying to us and us kids seem to be the only whose who notice and are prepared to call bs...if you agree, register to vote. Contact your local congress people. Give them a piece of your mind” (González 10:10-11:40). González’s desire for change is no less than

that of any of the female heroines discussed, but her approach is in line with the current morality of the society she inhabits. To change the system, one must work within the system. Despite growing up in a society where violence is prominent in every form of entertainment, she encourages others to vote out corrupt law makers, rather than overthrow them in a violent uprising.

Another prominent, female activist working to promote legal change is the environmental activist Greta Thunberg. In his article “Averting Climate Catastrophe: Environmental Activism, Extinction Rebellion and Coalitions of Influence,” Neil Gunningham discusses the rise in popularity of eco-activism, specifically discussing Greta Thunberg:

The School Strike for Climate movement, begun by Greta Thunberg, now aged 16, after her solitary weekly protest at the Swedish parliament in 2018 was reported by a journalist and went viral...[the] movement comprised over 1.4 million students in more than 300 cities worldwide. (201)

In late 2019, the girl mentioned by Gunningham, Greta Thunberg, condemned world leaders for their lack of action in the face of climate change: “people are dying... and all you can talk about is money...you are failing us, but young people are starting to understand your betrayal... we will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now, is where we draw the line” (Thunberg 0:25-4:16). Ultimately, González and Thunberg act as representations of the trends of the present society; they are young women who have been encouraged to use their voice to encourage change on a personal and global scale. It is also important to note that each woman is advocating for the same type of change that Trish and Daenerys want: an end to evil actions. The main difference between the women is that González and Thunberg are praised for advocating for non-violent and legal change, while Trish and Daenerys are condemned for using violence to enact

change. Although violence is still a huge part of every form of modern entertainment, so many of the modern heroes featured on television and big entertainment networks are not achieving change through violence.

This back and forth between whether activism should be violent or non-violent was also popular in the past. In her article, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” Becky Thompson discusses sexism and exclusion of the militant feminism in the past:

Omitting militant women activists from historical reference also reflects a number of ideological assumptions made during the late 1960s and early 1970s—that “real” feminists were those who worked primarily or exclusively with other women; that ‘women’s ways of knowing’ were more collaborative, less hierarchical, and more peace loving than men’s; and that women’s liberation would come from women’s deepening understanding that “sisterhood is powerful. (44)

The idea that one must remove “militant women activists” from conversations about feminism to sanitize a movement is sexist in the idea that “‘real’ feminists” must act in a proper fashion to be recognized as valid. This idea also helps to encourage the sexist idea that women are or should be “more peace loving” than their male counterparts. Activism of all types should be recorded instead of ignored so that future generations can learn from all types of feminist. In her article, “Mutatis Mutandis: Feminism, Slogans, and the Future of Female Homosapiens,” Judith de Luce discusses the need for female activism in a number of formats: “Activism can take many forms, and should: a single-pronged approach will not work. Some should march, some should call and email and visit, some should teach and study and produce facts and figures that can undergird action. Some need to learn to use the system while others should run for office” (282). While

Luce does not mention a need for violent or illegal activism, as previously discussed, there was a need to break the rules in the past. While the young female activist like González and Thunberg are to be praised for their work, the idea that there is only one way to be a feminist or one way to be an activist is problematic in that it places stereotypical labels on certain groups.

Although a show's condemnation of the violent heroines is becoming a common pattern, *Game of Thrones* and *Jessica Jones* show how the intentions of showrunners are misread or undermined because of other, underlying issues in the text such as: double standards, sexism, and ableism. Although both shows, and many others that take the same stance on violence, are trying to remind fans that letting trauma and revenge consume you can lead to negative consequences, both shows end with a message that is biased against extreme trauma and the mentally disabled. Given the strides we are making as a society to be more understanding about trauma and mental disability, it would be unwise for a show to ignore trauma because it makes the story-telling process easier; it leads to misunderstandings about mental illness and stereotyping. If studios and producers intend to move forward with non-violent or less violent agendas, shows and books need to be less willing to sacrifice a character and years of positive character development in order to create shock value or to make a point. This would help communicate the intended message without falling into ableism or gender double standards. By understanding how morality is reflected in our entertainment, one can see where society stands on women in power and what biases still remain against the disabled. Ultimately, we must look critically at the texts, films, and shows that we consume and promote, because even the best intentions can encourage further issues and biases about gender, mental illness, and trauma.

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