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## Metaphors of patriarchy in *Orphan Black* and *Westworld*

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### ABSTRACT

*Orphan Black* (2013–17) and *Westworld* (2016–) use their science fiction narratives to create metaphors for patriarchal oppression. The female protagonists struggle against the paternalistic scientists and corporate leaders who seek to control them. These series break away from more liberal representations of feminism on television by explicitly portraying how systemic patriarchal oppression seeks to control and exploit women, especially under capitalism. They also engage with radical feminist ideas of separatism and compulsory heterosexuality. The science fiction plots allow them to deal with feminist issues. *Westworld* uses computer programming as a metaphor for patriarchal social conditioning, while *Orphan Black*'s clones recall cyborg feminism. The programs vary in how well they ultimately deal with patriarchy. *Orphan Black* encourages assimilation, while *Westworld* allows for some advocacy of a violent overthrow of the robots' oppressors. Moments of narrative closure, and especially endings, within the series reveal interesting frictions between the series' awareness of systemic sexism and their inability to imagine a solution to the problem of patriarchy. Nevertheless, I argue that these series represent a new possibility for television's representation of complex and challenging feminist ideas.

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## Introduction

The science fiction genre, despite its tradition of reinforcing gender binaries (Constance Penley 1991, vii), has also, almost since its inception, included works that “engage with feminism, and feminist science fiction” (Justine Larbalestier 2002, 2). Science fiction television is not typically considered part of the lineage of feminist science fiction. This is potentially due to television's presumed conservatism. I refer to conservatism both in terms of its ambition as science fiction, as it is often seen as constrained by form and budget (J.P. Telotte 2008, 5) and in terms of television's relationship to progressive social movements. Programs such as *The Bionic Woman* (ABC 1976–7, NBC 1977–8) were contextualized within second-wave feminist discourses (Sharon Sharp 2007, 508); however, there has not been a recognition of feminist science fiction television as a specific form. Modern “complex” or “quality” forms of television draws upon serialized forms of television storytelling associated with feminized genres such as soap opera, although this influence is also downplayed. For example, the influential cult hit *Lost* (ABC, 2004–10) simultaneously capitalizes on a love triangle, while denigrating its seriousness in favor of

the masculine-coded mystery plot (Michael Kackman 2008). However, recent science fiction series have seemed more able to foreground explicitly feminist discourses.

Programs such as *Orphan Black* (BBC America, 2013–17) and *Westworld* (HBO, 2016–) are comfortable putting stories about women, and women's oppression, front and center. *Orphan Black* and *Westworld* are hour-long science fiction drama series that predominantly follow female scientific creations of nefarious corporations. *Orphan Black* concerns a group of genetically identical clones, played by Tatiana Maslany. Although the program never garnered more than one million live viewers, it ran for five seasons and fifty episodes on BBC America. The clones attempt to free themselves first from the Dyad Institute, a bioengineering company that created them, then from the Neolutionists, a group of transhumanists who wish to exploit the protagonists' genetic code in order to attain immortality. *Westworld*, whose first episode was viewed by 3.3 million people, has run for two seasons, with a third scheduled for 2020, and consists of twenty episodes in total so far. The series is centered on the futuristic theme park Westworld that recreates a fantasy of the Old West for rich tourists. The park is populated by sapient robots, or Hosts, who are unaware that their lives are not real. The Hosts eventually become self-aware, rebelling against their creators.

In this article, I use close textual analysis to determine how these two programs use their science fiction conspiracy plots as metaphors for patriarchal oppression—or rather, the series use their science fictional plot to make clear the parallels between the protagonists' on-screen oppression and real-world systems of domination. Both are critical of how corporate science exploits women's bodies and suffering. The clones of *Orphan Black* and the Hosts of *Westworld* are the products of corporations that care little for their rights as sapient beings and profiteer off them. *Orphan Black's* Dyad Institute created the clones for the purposes of drug testing, accidentally infecting them with a fatal disease. When the Institute discovers that one of the clones, con woman Sarah Manning (Maslany), has given birth, they experiment on her and her daughter. *Westworld's* Delos Corporation allows their customers to rape and kill the lifelike robots. The series place their heroines in opposition to the (largely) male creators who seek to commodify them. Male programmers, scientists and corporate figureheads are portrayed as central to the gendered oppression of the female clones and robots, creating a clear metaphor for patriarchal exploitation. The protagonists attempt to free themselves from patriarchal control and define their own destinies. The series probe at radical questions such as how capitalism and institutional misogyny are closely linked, and how romantic relationships can enact patriarchal oppression. They form a partial, incomplete, and yet crucial, break away from the commodified lifestyle feminism prominent on television. There are relatively few works that discuss feminist influences on science fiction television compared to other genres (such as soap opera or the sitcom). Television tends to mediate liberal understandings of feminism, often prioritizing notions of equality within the public sphere. They tend to avoid more radical aspects of feminist thought that suggest that all aspects of society, including personal relationships, are shaped by patriarchy. Patriarchy is the system of power where “men as a group dominate women as a group and are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women” (Sylvia Walby 1990, 3). The acknowledged existence of the patriarchy is crucial to radical feminism, but also to what might be termed “popular feminism.”

Over the last decade or so, expressions of feminism have become more visible in Western media culture, although “spectacular, media-friendly expressions such as celebrity feminism and neoliberal feminism achieve more visibility, and expressions that critique patriarchal structures and systems of racism and violence are more obscured” (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2018, 4). Popular feminism is often accused of primarily offering depoliticized, commercialized identity politics. This assessment, while relevant, can obscure instances where televisual narratives engage with more challenging elements of feminist thought. While notions of patriarchal harm in popular feminism are often divorced from a political context, *Westworld* and *Orphan Black* make clear how contemporary corporate practices and new technologies victimize women, thereby drawing attention to the violence of capitalist patriarchal structures. By doing this, they build on the long tradition of socialist feminisms, emphasizing the central interrelations between patriarchy and capitalism. As Iris Marion Young (1997) argues, Marxist theory that does not center gendered oppression is fundamentally inadequate. Criticism of popular feminism often bemoans these discourses’ lack of serious engagement with how patriarchy works. It seems amiss to ignore spaces in television where the material workings of patriarchal oppression are defined so clearly.

I will first outline how these programs frame their patriarchal metaphors through their corporate scientific antagonists. These corporate endeavors are motivated not purely by profit, but also by strong ideological convictions. The clones are created because the transhumanist cult Neolution desires to artificially extend human life, while the initial design of the Hosts was an attempt by programmer Arnold Weber (Jeffrey Wright) to create sapient artificial intelligence. This conveys that, while patriarchy and capitalism are distinctly related, the paternalistic control of women is also an ideology that extends far beyond the mere buying and selling of women’s bodies. The first section of this article draws on these recurring themes through the course of the series’ narratives, demonstrating their ongoing concerns with feminist issues.

These series are structured around a narrative of female liberation. In *Orphan Black*, Sarah and her fellow clones, including assassin Helena, housewife Alison Hendrix, and scientist Cosima Niehaus (all played by Maslany) work together to elude the Dyad Institute and the Neolutionists. They fight against corporate agents who hope to profit from the unique regenerative properties exhibited by Sarah’s daughter Kira (Skyler Wexler) and Helena’s unborn twins. *Westworld*’s plot touches on similar thematic territory. Dolores Abernathy (Evan Rachel Wood) and Maeve Millay (Thandie Newton) are both female robots who achieve self-awareness and attempt to break free from *Westworld*. Maeve initially attempts to escape the park and then, in the second season, tries to rescue a Host who was once programmed as her daughter. Dolores, meanwhile, leads a group of Hosts in a bloody revolution against humanity. These series actively engage with radical feminist understandings of patriarchy. They consider how heterosexual romantic love under patriarchy keeps women compliant, as well as the need for female separatism as a step toward liberation. By looking at the series holistically, I demonstrate that these moments of feminist critique are not singular or exceptional, but deeply embedded in how they construct the central conflicts at the heart of their narratives.

These programs are nevertheless ambivalent about the full implications of female liberation. In the second section of this article, I critically analyze the *Orphan Black* series finale (“To Right the Wrongs of Many” S5E10) and *Westworld*’s first season finale (“The

Bicameral Mind” S1E10). By using these episodes as case studies, I emphasize how, at these crucial junctures in their narratives, the series attempt to resolve issues of patriarchy and resistance that have been present throughout their stories. As I discuss in the second section, narrative conclusions are seen as crucial to determining the meaning of the story that preceded it. Therefore, moments of closure demonstrate the series’ thematic priorities and conclusions. Media deregulation and the proliferation of online streaming services have greatly increased the amount of television programming. Therefore, appeals to niche, but dedicated, fan bases have become more financially viable. The series finale is a slightly less fraught space than it has been previously, as television creators are more likely to know about cancellations in advance. As written about in *Vox*, “the advent of streaming has made serialized dramas more valuable to their studios as complete sets, with beginnings, middles, and ends, more and more low-rated shows are . . . getting the chance to thoughtfully wrap up their stories” (Emily VanDerWarff 2017). While television finales have historically had to both provide resolution and leave open narrative possibilities, the writers of *Orphan Black* were informed that its fifth season would be its last, allowing them to offer definitive conclusions of both the science fiction plot and the personal arcs of the main characters. *Westworld* had less certainty, as it was only renewed for a second series after the first series had already been filmed, but *Westworld’s* position as the successor to the hugely profitable genre hit *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011–2019) all but secured its success. This means that its first season finale can both provide resolution to the mysteries of the first season, while boldly ending on a cliffhanger that establishes a new status quo for the narrative yet to come. Writing about television finales has been criticized as excessively terminus-based (Stuart Bell 2016, 14). However, if the television industry is becoming more friendly to definitive, planned endings (or definitive planned non-endings), it makes sense to consider them in this light.

I chose these case studies to demonstrate how recent science fiction television can provide a unique space for depicting the workings of contemporary corporate culture. While some current science fiction series have explicitly mediated feminist themes, notably *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Hulu, 2017-), *Orphan Black* and *Westworld* more consciously engage in the interrelations between recognizable contemporary technoscience and gender-based oppression, interrogating how “technologies are thoroughly social inventions” that are “intimately intertwined with institutions” (Torin Monahan 2006, 10). *Orphan Black* explicitly evokes the work of Donna Haraway, whose socialist feminist work marks a distinct departure from liberal feminisms associated with television narrative. *Westworld*, on the other hand, operates from a position of implicit feminism more typical of televisual representation, although still exploring challenging ideas less common in mainstream discourses. This broadly maps onto Larbalestier’s division between feminist science fiction and science fiction that deals with feminist themes (Larbalestier 2002, 2). Both of these programs comment on capitalist patriarchy, demonstrating how radical and socialist ideas are coming to the forefront in popular programming. These series definitively engage with the reality of capitalist patriarchy, but ultimately shy away from the full implications of their stances.

### Metaphorical patriarchy

*Orphan Black* and *Westworld* create metaphors for patriarchy, and specifically capitalist patriarchy, by figuring its male antagonists as controlling paternal figures. The

programs' treatment of individual patriarchal actors is at times ambivalent; however, the core metaphor remains intact, and resonates at crucial moments at the narrative. The patriarchal figures in *Orphan Black* include Aldous Leekie (Matt Frewer), the CEO of Dyad Institute and Ethan Duncan (Andrew Gillies), one of the chief researchers of the Leda project. In *Westworld*, the patriarchal stand-ins include *Westworld* co-founder Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins) and head programmer Bernard Lowe (Wright), who is a robotic copy of Arnold. These men are explicitly portrayed as father figures. In *Westworld*, Bernard's sympathy for the Hosts is juxtaposed with (false) memories of his deceased son. Ford, while more morally ambiguous than Bernard, tells Maeve that she is the closest thing he has to a daughter ("Vanishing Point" S2E9). In *Orphan Black* Leekie is a caretaker for clone Rachel Duncan (Maslany), while Duncan was her adoptive father in her early childhood. The framing of these men as father figures—powerful and controlling—strengthens the patriarchal metaphor. Despite this, it also allows these characters some redemption through their paternal love.

*Orphan Black* emphasizes the slippage between Ethan as scientific creator and Ethan as patriarch by alluding to the story of *Frankenstein*. When Ethan asks about Rachel, Sarah replies, "You've really created a monster there" ("To Hound Nature in Her Wanderings" S2E6). The colloquialism most obviously refers to the act of spoiling a child. However, "creating a monster" also alludes to the unnatural circumstances of Rachel's design—and the most famous story of an unnatural offspring resulting from scientific hubris is surely *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein's position as "the phallic mother" to a boundary-crossing monster child prefigures Haraway's cyborg (Sarah Canfield Fuller 2003, 218). *Frankenstein* can be read as a biological essentialist anti-scientific cautionary tale—from discussions of genetically modified Frankenfood to Mary Daly's dismissive accounts of trans women—but it can also be repurposed to represent a rage against cissexist conformity (Susan Stryker 1994, 238). In this instance, *Orphan Black* draws upon this polysemous text to underscore Duncan's reckless creation of life. Sarah plays to Ethan's sympathies by framing herself, and her clone "sisters", as his children. Sarah says, "Your daughter is lost. There's just me. And Alison, a housewife with two adopted kids. And Cosima, a brilliant scientist, just like you ... We're sick. Your little girls are dying. It could happen to Rachel too."

These programs link paternalism, writing, and control. Duncan reads *The Island of Dr. Moreau* to Kira, as he did to a young Rachel. The caring act of reading to a daughter or granddaughter is juxtaposed with the disturbing subject matter of *Moreau*. The story of a mad scientist inflicting pain on thinking, feeling creations that he considers less than human proves an important intertext for *Orphan Black*. His copy of *Moreau* contains a code that is key to discovering the missing sequences of the clones' genomes—allowing not only a way to fix their disease, but also to successfully create more clones. Even Duncan's moral ambiguity, as symbolized by *Moreau*, leads to the potential salvation of the Leda line. The link between patriarchal dominance and writing goes back at least to Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) and is complicated by the fact that genetic programming and robotic programming involve patriarchal writing of the female protagonists' bodies and personalities. However, the female characters of *Orphan Black* and *Westworld* co-opt this technological intervention, avoiding patriarchal attempts to circumscribe their fates.

These series use the science fiction genre to comment on capitalist and scientific control over women's bodies. In *Westworld*, the Hosts are meant to be sexually available

to the guests—whether non-consensually, as with the Man in Black (Ed Harris) raping Dolores in the first episode, or consensually, such as via Maeve’s programmed role as a brothel-keeper. *Westworld* draws attention to the limitations of choice. Choice is a cornerstone of notions of postfeminism and popular feminism. These discourses depoliticize the everyday actions of women by pretending that potentially regressive gender roles are equally valid, if the woman is willingly choosing it (Rosalind Gill 2007, 153). *Westworld* likens the computer programming of the Hosts to the social conditioning of humans. Humans are called Passengers because of their passive acceptance of the social forces that frame their free will (“The Passengers” S2E10). By drawing the comparison between fictional computer programming and the very real forces of ideology, *Westworld* draws attention to how notions of choice fail to account for the impact of societal pressure on our personalities and beliefs.

Maeve persuades one of the Delos Corporation’s employees, Felix, to reveal her programming. Felix tries to warn her that “Everything you do is because the engineers upstairs programmed you to do it. You don’t have a choice” (“The Adversary” S1E6). When Maeve sees a tablet replicating the exact words she is saying as she is saying them, she briefly malfunctions. This recalls Kate Millett’s observation that patriarchy is entirely pervasive in society and partially operates via “interior colonization” (2000, 25). Just as Maeve is incapable of realizing that her words are not her own, but generated by semi-scripted algorithm, we internalize patriarchy and replicate it unknowingly. The phrase she is in the process of uttering is “if there’s one thing I know, it’s when I’m being fucked with.” *Westworld* makes it clear that Maeve’s crude sexual knowingness is necessary to the maintenance of the park: her role as madam, and the easy availability of robotic saloon girls is part of the Wild West fantasy. While Maeve believes herself to be smart enough to avoid male tricks, she is unable to understand that this very self-belief is a trap to prevent her from discovering the truth about her world.

Dolores breaks from her programming via renegotiating her predetermined gender role. Dolores is initially depicted as a farmer’s daughter ingénue and she is not allowed to enact violence. The first indication that Dolores is changing is when she swats a fly at the end of the first episode. Dolores’s growing capacity for violence is later associated with her abandoning her set narrative position. Dolores and her human love interest William (Jimmi Simpson) adventure to the town of Pariah (“Contrapasso” S1E5). Dolores adopts a moderately androgynous style of dress, changing her long blue dress for a collared shirt and trousers. She and William are confronted with a group of robotic bandits. Dolores overcomes her code to shoot the bandits and save William. Dolores says of her transformation, “I imagined a story where I didn’t have to be the damsel.” While obviously rejecting conventionally feminine trappings is also an element of postfeminist media culture, in this case, the use of the writing and storytelling metaphor demonstrates that Dolores is taking control over her own narrative and resisting the stereotyping of the park programmers. Just as patriarchy is not all-encompassing enough to prevent people from understanding and resisting it, Dolores’s programming is flawed enough that she can exploit these holes in her code and weaponize them against her oppressors.

Maeve’s liberation functions in a similar way—she literally takes away the programming tools from the engineers and improves her metrics. Maeve and Dolores rewriting their own destinies recalls Donna Haraway’s cyborg. Haraway argues that encroaching “technopatriarchy” offers a space for feminists to build new identities and coalitions.

Haraway argues that the cyborg is the “self feminists must code” (1991, 297). As Haraway argues, “The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism ... But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins” (277). As I discuss in the second section, the Hosts of *Westworld* reprogram themselves to resist their patriarchal creators’ oppressive narratives.

*Orphan Black* more explicitly evokes the work of Haraway, particularly in the ways it investigates the intersections of scientific practice and patriarchal oppression. In an official BBC America blog post, the program’s science consultant Cosima Herter explains that “A Cyborg Manifesto” was a key influence on the series (2016). *Orphan Black* directly references Haraway’s work. For instance, scientist Susan Duncan (Rosemary Dunsmore) explains that the Leda clones were designed as a baseline to test the effectiveness of different drugs (“Human Raw Material” S4E5). Cosima, a scientist herself, whispers, horrified, “We’re OncoMice.” The OncoMouse was genetically engineered by Harvard University for breast cancer research. Haraway considers the OncoMouse as a gendered sacrifice: the OncoMouse is Haraway’s “sister ... s/he suffers, physically, repeatedly, and profoundly, that I and my sisters may live” (1997, 79). Haraway is not the only academic to make the connection between capitalist exploitation of animals and oppression of women. As Rosi Braidotti argues, “The phenomenon of Dolly the sheep is emblematic of the complications engendered by the bio-genetic structure of contemporary technologies and their stock-market backers. ... Animals are also sold as exotic commodities and constitute the third largest illegal trade in the world today, after drugs and arms, but ahead of women” (2013, 7–8). Braidotti places women and animals on a posthuman continuum of capitalist oppression. *Orphan Black* also alludes to Dolly, as the clone M.K. (Maslany) wears a sheep mask to hide her identity (“The Collapse of Nature” S4E1). The program draws parallels between these scientific experiments and the clones, highlighting how the clones are treated as property, with little concern for their rights or welfare.

The genetic engineering of the clones expresses itself in lethal, and gendered, ways. The clones are designed with a form of uterine cancer that is intended to prevent them from reproducing; only Sarah and Helena are immune from this disease. The other clones are sterilized—partially due to ethical concerns (as Rachel says, it would be irresponsible to allow a reproducing prototype), but also to control the proliferation of their genetic material. The disease moves from their uteruses to infect their lungs, eventually killing the clones. Non-consensual sterilization has a long history in scientific practice, where it is usually linked to eugenics, or the belief that women with undesirable genes should be prevented from reproducing to improve the gene pool at large. Forced sterilization, then, is shown as an atrocity committed by patriarchal actors more concerned about protecting their intellectual property than the health or desires of these women. *Orphan Black* shows how the rights of the scientific subject—the clones—are curtailed in favor of the rights of the corporation. The clones’ genetic code contains a copyright marker—their bodies are the intellectual property of the Dyad Institute (“Endless Forms Most Beautiful” S1E10). This draws yet another parallel to the OncoMouse, controversially patented by DuPont. The act of patenting and copyrighting is a process “that give some agencies and actors statuses in sociotechnical production not allowed to other agencies and actors” (Donna J. Haraway 1997, 7). By patenting the clones’ DNA, the program clearly positions the clones as subordinate under the law to the corporation, as “inventions do not have property in



the self; alive and self-moving or not, they cannot be legal persons, as corporations are" (80).

The injustice of this inequality between corporate actor and corporate subject is also seen in *Westworld*. *Westworld* reprogrammed Maeve to forget her child due to Maeve's extreme trauma at seeing her daughter murdered. Yet, the park still uses images of Maeve and her daughter in their promotional material ("The Adversary" S2E6). While the realities of the complex relationship between mother and daughter are too messy for the corporation to deal with, they are perfectly willing to sell these images as a product. The forcible separation of mother and daughter recalls the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade (Maeve is played by a biracial Black woman). Maeve's race draws attention to the subtext of many AI narratives that portray robotic slave revolts as a way to "rightfully assert personhood" (Kanta Dihal 2020, 190). While *Orphan Black* clearly centers its white female protagonists, *Westworld* at least makes a nod toward intersectional understandings of oppression. Both *Orphan Black* and *Westworld* grapple with frictions between corporate inequities and gender equality. This is not merely the lip service to feminist ideology often associated with popular feminism; these are conscious evocations of difficult radical and socialist feminist thinking.

Another crucial way *Westworld* and *Orphan Black* draw upon radical feminist thought is in their depiction of romance. The notion of heterosexual romantic love has long been controversial for feminists, as "feminist analysis of heterosexual marriage, for example, identified love as part of patriarchy's ideological armament through which women became hooked into dependent relationships with men" (Carol Smart 2007, 81). Influential radical feminist Shulamith Firestone claims that "love . . . is the pivot of women's oppression" (2015, 113). This is a key divergence from liberal feminism, where personal interactions are figured as largely apolitical. It is also a striking departure from previous science fiction series—for instance, the remake of *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi 2004–9). While *Battlestar Galactica* earned praise for its depiction of a "post-gender" society (Sarah Hagelin 2013, 125), it also mythologized the importance of heterosexual romance (as the artificial Cylons can only procreate with someone they are in love with). *Orphan Black* and *Westworld*, by contrast, echo the radical feminist position in interesting ways.

In both series, romantic and sexual relationships are key methods of patriarchal control of the heroines. In *Westworld*, Dolores and Teddy (James Marsden) are designed to love one another, but Teddy believes he cannot be with her. Ford brings Teddy in for servicing, and tells him, "Your job is not to protect Dolores. Your job is to keep her here, so guests can find her, . . . best the stalwart gunslinger, and have their way with his girl" ("The Stray" S1E3). The patriarchal programmers of the Delos Corporation mobilize narratives of romantic love to keep Dolores in line—and when she begins to resist them, Teddy becomes less of her partner and more of her tool. Dolores forcibly reprograms Teddy in order to make him more ruthless and, thus, more useful to her cause ("Akane No Mai" S2E5). *Westworld's* cynicism about romantic love is also obvious in the storyline between Dolores and William. In the flashback sequences of the program, Dolores and William meet and have an apparently consensual affair; but the revelation that William and the villainous Man in Black are the same person casts a different light on their relationship. The Man in Black rapes Dolores; therefore, we must conclude that even William, who is portrayed in the first season as a genuinely kind man, is capable of sexual violence. Furthermore, Dolores cannot truly consent to sex, as she is coded to fall in love with

guests that treat her kindly. As Felix explains to Maeve, “Even when you say no to guests, it’s because you were made to.” Love and consent is endlessly compromised under compulsory heterosexuality (Adrienne Rich 1980, 632).

*Orphan Black* also presents romantic relationships as a tool to control the clones. The Dyad Institute plants potential love interests for the clones as monitors. Paul (Dylan Bruce) runs experiments on first Beth Childs, and then Sarah in disguise as Beth, while they sleep. The intimacy of the bedroom with the intrusiveness of the scientific equipment highlights how the close relationship between the two is exploited by the Dyad Institute (“Conditions of Existence” S1E5). Alison’s paranoia about being watched in her private life causes a significant rift between her and her husband Donnie (Kristiann Brunn), as she (correctly) suspects him to be her handler. This speaks to how neoliberal surveillance culture “can—and does—structure unequal power relations in societies” (Monahan 2006, 9). The interpenetration of the political oppression of women and the intimacy of the personal relationships recalls the feminist maxim “the personal is political.” While liberal feminist and particularly postfeminist discourses have re-appropriated this idea, “this adage was meant to describe *patriarchy*, not *feminism* . . . Television entertainment, for the most part, has taken this idea in precisely the opposite direction in representing feminism: The political is personal, it tells us, as a set of political ideas and practices is transformed into a set of attitudes and personal lifestyle choices” (Bonnie J. Dow 1996, 209). *Orphan Black* and *Westworld* attempt to re-center the personal lives of the clones and Hosts into a framework where patriarchy uses heterosexual relationships as a regulatory mechanism.

Despite this clear nod toward radical understandings of heterosexuality, both programs flinch. Alison and Donnie reconcile, and Paul earns redemption through sacrificing himself. This is symptomatic of how “male power is actually consolidated through cycles of crisis and resolution” (Tania Modleski 1991, 7). While both men are participants in the surveillance of their partners, their moral struggle is foregrounded, and their redemption is relatively straightforward. Because Alison forgives Donnie, for example, he is admitted into Clone Club and is never again treated as a potential threat. In *Westworld*, Teddy is framed as a mere victim of Dolores’s desire for justice, creating a false association of female liberation with male subjugation. This betrays a fundamental ambivalence about the feminist messages within these programs—an ambivalence that is most apparent in their endings.

## Television endings

The series finale of *Orphan Black* and the first season finale of *Westworld* are crucial moments in the series’ formation and resolution of their patriarchal metaphors. Endings are considered important nexuses of meaning in linear narrative, and particularly in “quality” television. Expectations of closure and artistic resolution is a key method of legitimation, where contemporary serialized television attempts to differentiate itself from the “endless” twists and turns of a soap opera (Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine 2012, 90). Quality television borrows from notions of closure more popular among literary theorists such as Paul Ricoeur, who sees a planned ending as a “pole of reaction” that shapes the meaning of the entire work (1980, 174). However, soap operas do contain moments of closure: although these cannot be predetermined, as in a novel or

a film, “the achievement of closure lends a retrospective air of inevitability to a story’s development” (Laura Stempel Mumford 1995, 76).

These endings in my case study series are interesting because they involve key moments of resistance against patriarchal corporate figures. In the *Westworld* season finale, Dolores leads the uprising against the Delos Corporation and the wealthy guests, killing Ford, while Maeve also orchestrates a bloody escape from Westworld, before deciding to pursue her daughter instead. In the *Orphan Black* series finale, Sarah rescues Helena from the clutches of PT Westmoreland (Stephen McHattie), who wants to take Helena’s twin babies in order to achieve immortality. These two moments, located at key moments of narrative closure, are crucial to forming the meanings of both patriarchal narratives, and reveal their approach to radical feminist solutions to oppression. In particular, they show the simultaneous foregrounding of feminist ideas, such as the notion of active overthrowing of the patriarchal order and the importance of strategic separatism, although these gestures are often walked back.

In the *Orphan Black* series finale, Sarah breaks into the facility housing Helena. Helena, while in labor, manages to escape and reunite with Sarah (“To Right the Wrongs of Many” S5E10). Sarah kills Westmoreland and delivers Helena’s twins. This episode is unusual because most of the action occurs in the first half of the episode. After Helena’s children are delivered, there is a fade to white. The episode then cuts to a shot of Helena’s hand-made baby mobile, followed by a pan down to her sons in their baskets. This sequence of shots illustrates the broader shifts between the two halves of the episode. The second half of the episode follows Sarah’s struggle to readjust to her day-to-day life. Thus, *Orphan Black* indicates a split from the wider political struggle of the conspiracy plot as it moves into the domestic concerns of the clones. Sarah, against the wishes of her adoptive brother Felix (Jordan Gavaris) and her daughter, wants to sell the family home that belonged to her recently-deceased adoptive mother Siobhan (Maria Kennedy-Doyle). She is also preparing to take a test for her GED, a high-school equivalent certification. Sarah panics and leaves the test room before she can take the examination and lies about it to her friends and family. After the test, the clones and their allies gather at Alison’s suburban home for a barbecue. Sarah eventually confides in her clone sisters, saying, “I don’t know what I’m doing . . . There’s no one left to fight, and I’m still a shit mum.” Alison and Helena confess their difficulties with their own children, while childfree Cosima laments her lack of maternal drive. This moment illustrates a complex mixture of feminist and non-feminist impulses. This shift toward domestic issues recalls the radical feminist idea of “consciousness-raising,” where women were encouraged discuss their own experiences of oppression in order to understand the systemic power of patriarchy (Valerie Bryson 2003, 165). Nonetheless, by moving so decisively from the political to the personal, and especially with Sarah’s comment that the fighting is over, the program retreats away from the broader implications of the clones’ struggles for their freedom in favor of repositioning Sarah as an individual who has to work on her ability to mother. This is a crucial ideological point of postfeminism, especially as represented on television.

While traditionally denigrated television genres such as soap opera can often provide important spaces that “recognise and value the emotional work which women undertake in the personal sphere” (Christine Geraghty 1991, 43), televisual approaches to feminism often “focus on individual freedom rather than assessing power and class relations” (Lisa M. Cuklanz and Sujarta Moorti 2006, 305). *Orphan Black* moves away from the

narrative about patriarchy toward one that focuses on domestic problems and personal grievances. While Sarah's personal life has largely been on hold since she discovered her clones, she now must readjust to motherhood. This does not necessarily mean that the program has abandoned issues of feminism. The coming together of the clones to work through their anxieties recalls ideas of feminist separatism. The notion of assimilation and separatism is "one of the main things that guides or determines assessments of various theories, actions and practices as reformist or radical, as going to the root of the thing or being relatively superficial" (Marilyn Frye 1983, 96). Frye considers actions such as all-female consciousness raising groups to be a form of separatist activism. Anything that functions as an "instinctive and self-preserving recoil from the systematic misogyny that surrounds us" (97) is, to some extent, a separatist act. Nevertheless, *Orphan Black*, despite its use of some separatist techniques, ultimately encourages assimilation.

One of the problems with *Orphan Black's* approach is evident in its set. As Sarah and the clones discuss her anxieties about motherhood, they sit in Alison's backyard, where they are surrounded by tall fences. Jan Relf criticizes notions of separatism, and particularly separatist science fiction, on the grounds that "we must also consider the possibility of the retreat as a space, which . . . may function as a confining enclosure, like the walled garden, wherein the inhabitants remain conveniently (for patriarchy) powerless" (1991, 134). By placing them in this walled garden, the program spatially contains the clones within the domestic sphere. The clones' liberation from the Dyad Institute and the Neolutionists has little impact outside of their own lives. The conspiracy remains secret: little seems to change outside of their personal situations. Also notable by their absence from this scene are the characters of Tony (Maslany), a trans clone who was featured in one episode of the second season, and Charlotte (Cynthia Galent), a physically disabled clone. The lack of a definitive ending for these characters is especially galling due to their marginalized subject positions, demonstrating a failure of intersectional thinking in *Orphan Black*. Corporate surveillance culture has particular implications for the oppressive policing of gender binaries (Toby Beauchamp 2019, 2), and Tony is notably not allowed to express the sort of "transgender rage" found in Stryker. Laura I. Appleman furthermore points out the eugenicist roots of continuing carceral practices that specifically target disabled people for institutionalization, sterilization and medical experimentation (2018, 419). The exclusion of these characters from this moment of narrative closure mirrors criticism of Western feminism's (and particularly feminist separatists') focus on white, cisgender, able-bodied women, and serves to Other Tony and Charlotte, alienating them from the clone sisterhood and highlighting *Orphan Black's* limited vision of who and what feminism is for.

The final moments of the episode reinforce the need for Sarah to re-assimilate. In the final sequence, we see that Sarah is still living in the family home. She, Felix, and Kira go on a trip to the beach. As the family leaves, Sarah looks back inside the house as she closes the door. The episode, and the series, ends on a shot of Sarah's empty living room. This ending both reassures us that Sarah successfully reintegrates—that is, she goes out into the wider world—but also that her domestic life has been re-established—as the camera stays in. Despite *Orphan Black's* commitment to exploring the metaphor of the scientific patriarchal institution, it flinches at the last moment. Sarah must be successfully domesticated by the end of the program. The finale does not demand that Sarah be perfect, but the happy ending of Sarah as a capable mother seems to undermine the political points

made throughout the series. The demands of narrative closure are remarkably similar to the demands of respectability politics and of assimilation.

*Westworld*, despite not being as explicit in its use of feminist theory as *Orphan Black*, ends its first season finale on a moment that challenges notions of assimilation, and dramatizes the violent overthrow of patriarchal structures. While this does not mean that *Westworld* abandons assimilationist politics, it purposefully ends its first season on a moment of violent resistance. In the season finale, we learn that *Westworld* co-founder Arnold put a murderous personality, Wyatt, in Dolores's body because he was worried about how the sapient Hosts would be exploited by the Delos Corporation. While it may seem as if Wyatt has "taken over" Dolores, Dolores later clarifies that she is neither Wyatt nor Dolores, but someone entirely new ("Journey Into Night," S2E1). She has managed, in other words, to incorporate both personalities to her own ends. In the first season finale, Dolores leads Teddy and a small group of fellow Hosts to a party attended by Ford, Delos executives and employees, and wealthy guests. The first season ends with Dolores shooting Ford dead and leading a violent uprising against the people who have exploited the Hosts. This provocative gesture recalls the influence of anarchism, a political philosophy that advocates "a spontaneous, militant, direct action form of politics," on feminist thought (Susan Archer Mann 2012, 113). It also invokes the semi-ironic SCUM manifesto that argues female liberation requires women to "overthrow the government . . . institute complete automation and eliminate the male sex" (Valerie Solanos 2016, 1). Dolores's rebellion represents a decisive, albeit temporary, break from notions of respectability and closure—and, like the SCUM Manifesto, displaces men in favor of the machine.

Ending seasons on shocking cliffhangers is hardly new, but this cliffhanger remained unresolved for an unusually long time, due to the changing landscape of television production. The season finale was followed by a 16-month hiatus. *Westworld* was renewed for a second season halfway through the airing of the first and did not return until 2018. While *Westworld* positions itself as a legitimated, "closed" narrative, the cliffhanger ending belies this claim. The ending functions like a soap opera cliffhanger, based on "ambiguity and lack of closure" (Sandy Flitterman-Lewis 1988, 120) and opens up possibility rather than shutting it down. The long gap between the two series means that the Host uprising functions as a caesura: although eventually the program will return and the narrative will continue, the long break after this moment highlights its importance.

Admittedly, *Westworld* later shies away from the power of this image. In the second season, Dolores is portrayed as an extremist, reprogramming Teddy and telling Maeve to abandon her daughter ("Les Écorchés" S2E7). Like *Orphan Black*, whose ultimate resolution requires a slight retreat from its radical politics, *Westworld* can only safely include images of revolution when it knows that it can be undone in the next season. This impulse can be seen in television soaps, where storyline closure can "recast previously emancipatory elements in a hegemonic light" (Christine Scodari 2004, 168). I argue that a similar effect happens within semi-serialized primetime television as well. Nevertheless, there are still reasons to regard these series as positive developments. Dow's assessment of television feminism is that it is only "selective, partial" (1996, 214). It is interesting, then, that both *Westworld* and *Orphan Black*, while falling prey to the selective aspects of televisual feminism, choose to foreground challenging notions of radical and socialist feminism, such as the role of separatism, the potential for violent revolution, and the systemic, pervasive nature of capitalist patriarchy.

## Conclusion

Science fiction television allows for a movement away from the lifestyle feminism traditionally associated with television, and toward a more conscious use of metaphors for patriarchal oppression, drawing upon posthuman politics and radical and socialist feminisms. While television often focuses on issues of workplace equality and individual empowerment, *Orphan Black* and *Westworld* question the equality of heterosexual partnerships and address issues about the rights of women under capitalist patriarchy. These series mark a definitive shift away from straightforward empowerment narratives common in postfeminist and popular feminist media culture. This may be partially accounted for by the distancing effect of the science fiction genre—it allows these programs to address real issues of gender oppression through their unreal contexts. While we may be skeptical of representations of feminist ideas in a capitalist media context, it is also important to recognize when they are actively working through issues of patriarchy and making interesting observations about the oppression of women in non-superficial ways. Banet-Weiser argues that popular feminism operates within an “economy of visibility” (2018, 3). Feminist ideas that can be incorporated into neoliberal discourses—such as depoliticized empowerment messages—are more visible than ones that fundamentally challenge the status quo. If we accept the premise of the economy of visibility, we cannot ignore the visibility of more challenging expressions of feminism within fictional narratives. They are ambivalent and metaphorical, but they are undoubtedly there. Feminist media studies, and feminists in general, could benefit from paying more attention to where and how more radical and anti-capitalist criticisms of gender and patriarchy emerge.

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## Notes on contributor

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