

'Engaging' in Gender, Race, Sexuality and (dis)Ability in Science Fiction Television  
through *Star Trek: the Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Voyager*

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## *Abstract*

As Richard Thomas writes, “there is nothing like *Star Trek*...Of all the universes of science fiction, the *Star Trek* universe is the most varied and extensive, and by all accounts the series is the most popular science fiction ever” (1). Ever growing (the latest *Star Trek* film will be released in Spring 2013) and embodied in hundreds of novels and slash fanfiction, decades of television and film, conventions, replicas, toys, and a complete Klingon language *Star Trek* is nothing short of a cultural phenomenon. As Harrison et al argue in *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek*, the economic and cultural link embodied in the production of the *Star Trek* phenomena “more than anything else, perhaps, makes *Star Trek* a cultural production worth criticizing” (3). A utopian universe, *Star Trek* invites its audience to imagine a future of amicable human and alien life, often pictured without the ravages of racism, sexism, capitalism and poverty. However, beyond the pleasure of watching, I would ask what do the representations within *Star Trek* reveal about our popular culture? In essence, what are the values, meaning and beliefs about gender, race, sexuality and disability being communicated in the text? I will explore the ways that the *Star Trek* universe simultaneously encourages and discourages us from thinking about race, gender, sexuality and disability and their intersections. In other words, this work will examine the ways that representations of identity are challenged and reinforced by *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Voyager*. This work will situate *Star Trek* specifically within the science fiction genre and explore the importance of its utopian standpoint as a frame for representational politics. Following Inness, (1999), I argue that science fiction is particularly rich textual space to explore ideas of women and gender (104). As Sharona Ben-Tov suggests in *The Artificial Paradise: Science Fiction and American Reality* (1995) science fiction’s “position at a unique intersection of science and technology, mass media, popular culture, literature, and secular ritual” offers critical insight into social change (ctd. in Inness 104). I extend Inness and Ben-Tov here to assert that the ways in which science fiction’s rich and “synthetic language of metaphor” illustrate and re-envision contemporary gender roles also offers a re-imagination of assumptions regarding race, sexuality and disability (Inness 104).

Extending current scholarship (Roberts 1999, Richards 1997, Gregory 2000, Bernardi 1998, Adare 2005, Greven 2009, Wagner and Lundeen 1998, Relke 2006, and Harrison et al 1996), I intend to break from traditions of dichotomous views of *The Next Generation* and *Voyager* as either essentially progressive or conservative. In this sense, I hope to complicate and question simplistic conclusions about *Star Trek*'s ideological centre. Moreover, as feminist media theorist Mia Consalvo notes, previous analyses of *Star Trek* have explored how the show constructs and comments on conceptions of gender and race as well as commenting on economic systems and political ideologies (2004). As such, my analysis intends to apply an intersectional approach as well as offer a 'crippled' (McRuer 2006) reading of *Star Trek* in order to provide a deeper understanding of how identities are represented both in science fiction and in popular culture. Both critical approaches – especially the emphasis on disability, sexuality and intersectional identities are largely ignored by past *Trek* readings. That is to say, while there is critical research on representations in *Star Trek* (Roberts 1999, Bernardi 1998) much of it is somewhat uni-dimensional in its analysis, focusing exclusively on gender or racialized representation and notably excluding dimensions of sexuality and ability. Moreover, as much of the writing on the *Star Trek* phenomena has focused on *The Original Series* (TOS) and *The Next Generation* this work will bring the same critical analysis to the *Voyager* series. To perform this research a feminist discourse analysis will be employed. While all seven seasons and 178 episodes of *The Next Generation* series as well as all seven seasons and 172 episodes of *Voyager* have been viewed particular episodes will be selected for their illustrative value.

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Introduction

Stepping onto the *Voyager* ship in the fourth season, Seven of Nine, half human half Borg, is cyborg woman in perfect form; tall, blond and leggy, with breasts that seem to defy gravity and proportionality. Despite her spandex-clad Barbie like figure, typical television babe she is not. Unparalleled in her technical proficiency and ambivalent toward, if not at times scorning of, sympathetic behavior (Consalvo 184). Unlike the iconic android Data of *The Next Generation*, Seven has no longing for affect and humanness. Forcibly removed from her Collective, disconnected from the Hive Mind, Seven makes an uneasy transition on *Voyager*. Her rocky relationship to the *Voyager* crew is caused in no uncertain terms by her flagrant disregard for ‘normal’ human and gender conforming behavior. Seven is an immensely complex character. In the words of Mia Consalvo, Seven is not easy to “pin down”:

...should we focus on her Barbie-like figure or her sexless personality? Is her intelligence and rationality a step forward for traditional female representations, or does her ambivalence about femininity bespeak a valorization of masculine norms and behavior? (177)

What I would suggest we find in Seven is a personification of the complex nature of representation in the *Trek* narrative. As with the *Trek* megatext, Seven defies the simplistic reading. As such, Seven is symbolically significant for this work, as she represents the possibility and necessity for divergent styles of reading. Following the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, this thesis will adopt both the reparative and a critical style of reading in an effort to expand beyond past interpretations of *Trek*. In as much, I hope to hold on to the many possibilities in *Trek*. This is not to deny the value of the critical approach, which in many ways reveals *Trek* as a future built on idealized whiteness and the colonial adventure. Rather, I hope to diversify and complicate *Trek* through divergent reading practices, to hold on to the pleasure and hope in *Star Trek* but also to learn, as Sedgwick says

we do in the reparative reading, of the ways in which communities find sustenance even in cultures which seek their disavowal (150).

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This thesis aims to explore the ways in which popular understandings of gender, race, sexuality and disability are constructed and represented in the utopian science fiction television programs *Star Trek: The Next Generation (TNG)* and *Star Trek: Voyager*. In essence, *Star Trek* as text will provide the cultural space through which we can explore the ways in which representations of gender, race, sexuality and disability are normatively ordered. In this sense, this project is an attempt to make television and *Star Trek* “critically strange” (Allen 3, 1992). As Fiske argues, television “appears to be the natural way of seeing the world” (4, 2003). In making television “strange” we attempt to make it visible, both as medium and message. In other words, we view television not as the ‘boob tube’ but as a part of our cultural and ideological machinery. In seeing television as a cultural artifact and in examining the fictional worlds that it creates, we make visible “the cultural logic” of our popular culture (White 177). That is to say, it is through textual analysis, an examination of the language used and not used, the stories told and not told we can find the hidden ideology imbedded within text (Hall ctd, in Consalvo 182). Thus, textual analysis can help us to better understand our social and cultural systems and the power within them and ultimately recognize these systems as producing and reproducing the very texts which we consume (Consalvo 182). As such, *Star Trek* as a piece of science fiction television will provide the text through which we can explore television as an expression of culture and as part of the gendered, racialized and ableist systems of power in which we live.

In essence, this thesis aims to deconstruct *Star Trek: TNG* and *Star Trek: Voyager* for their representational politics and to theorize what these representations mean. As such, this project relies on a critical investigation of the power of representation. This project, is as Richard Dyer writes in *The Matter of Images*, an “images of” analysis, one which attempts to identify, contextualize and problematize the representations of social groupings in media (1, 2002). This thesis aims to ‘break into the text’ of *Star Trek* to examine the program as one which is rich in representational politics, complex in its genre position and dynamic in audience readings. Specifically, this project attempts to draw connections between *TNG* and *Voyager* as utopian science fiction and contemporary understandings of gender, race, sexuality and disability. Representations in science fiction are important in part because they offer ideas of the future read through contemporaneous discourses of gender, race, disability and sexuality. *Star Trek* as the most successful science fiction program ‘out there’, in terms of its financial success, cultural diffusion and cult loyalty, is a particularly rich and fitting text for analysis. As Consalvo notes, it is important to study popular science fiction, like *Star Trek*, as “such constructions are developed to be commercially viable, and therefore give us a useful barometer of... ““mass” pop culture and our ideas of subjectivity, gender, race, disability and sexuality” (181).

As with much of popular culture, I would suggest that *Star Trek: TNG* and *Star Trek: Voyager* often (re)construct ideas of gender, race and disability which are tied to normative ideals. As Relke argues, “if popular culture told us things about ourselves we didn’t want to know it wouldn’t be popular for long” (4). I argue both programs concurrently subvert normative representations in ways that are important and that are meaningful, for fans, for academics, and for the viewing public. What this research is most interested in is

complicating unambiguous conclusions about *Star Trek* as either being a progressive liberal humanist text or a patriarchal neo-colonial text. For example, I would suggest that in its representation of women, both *Star Trek: TNG* and *Star Trek: Voyager* are significant in their consistent commitment to presenting female characters in positions of authority (military no less) and expertise in human and hard sciences. However, these representations are complicated by competing discourses of whiteness, racialization and science and thereby must be read with an intersectional approach to capture the nuances of the text. Moreover, I argue though *TNG* and *Voyager* possibly subvert hegemonic gender, race and disability discourses they have strict limitations. As Shaw argues in *Sex and the Single Starship Captain: Compulsive Heterosexuality and Star Trek: Voyager*, there is a persistent subtext in *Star Trek*, which, despite its progressive longing, reproduces the very inequalities which it struggles against (66). In other words, *Star Trek* is often the quintessential liberal text, progressive only in as much as it is contained by structuring but unacknowledged neocolonial and patriarchal impulses. This contradiction, which Shaw describes as the “self deception of contemporary neo-liberalism” is what has drawn my attention to the *Star Trek* text (66). However, as will be explored in the chapter “‘Crippling’ the Future: Reading Queerness and (Dis)ability in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Voyager*”, I argue for what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls a reparative reading (2003). While most of this work will comprise what Sedgwick may have called a ‘paranoid’ or critical reading, when exploring the relationship between queerness and disability on *Star Trek*, I argue there is considerable room for a reparative approach. According to Sedgwick, the reparative reading is one which acknowledges the pleasure and amelioration in the interpretative text, pushing back against the suspicion of the paranoid reading. The reparative reading offered in

'Crippling the Future' serves in part to complicate critical (or paranoid) readings of *Trek* which frequently deny the possibility of queer pleasure. As Sedgwick argues, the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (125) which dominate textual interpretation and privilege the paranoid approach (125) leave little room for hope and contingency. In as much, the privileging of the paranoid reading has classified the reparative stance as naïve (126 Sedgwick), defensive, and sappy (150 Sedgwick). However, I argue, as Sedgwick does, that the reparative reading is no less motivated by intellectual pursuit, no less realistic and importantly no less "attached to a project of survival" (150). As Sedgwick argues, what we can best learn from the reparative reading is "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them" (151). In "'Crippling' the Future", a reparative approach is taken to acknowledge the pleasure experienced by those queer and (dis)abled viewers who see in *Star Trek* their possible futures.

### *Theoretical Framework*

As Robert C. Allen writes, television is defined in a multitude of ways; as a technology, an aggregate of images and sounds, a group of institutions (Allen and Hill 1). Television is characterized both as a material commodity in a traditional Marxist analysis and as a cultural commodity, particularly by John Fiske (1991) in a cultural studies context (Burton 23). In the context of this research, television is understood as a "complex system for representing the world" (Allen and Hill 1) in which television as text and as medium is understood as both building upon and chipping away at foundational ideologies (Burton xii). As Burton writes, television is key in the dissemination of cultural ideas, beliefs and values (14). In essence, television is a part of making meanings and of representing ideas, people

and experiences and of establishing ways to think about and understand our social world. As D'Acci writes, "'representation' is what television is all about, denoting, as the term does, signs, symbols, images, portrayals, depictions, likenesses and substitutions" (91, 2002). Moreover, "its schedule, information and stories are a part of shaping how its viewers organize their days and think and feel about themselves as gendered" and, arguably, racialized, sexualized and (dis)abled people (D'Acci 91, 2002). As such, understanding television's representational power is critical to an appreciation of television as a medium and the meanings created for its audiences (Burton 21). As Dyer writes, how social groupings (and here we say groupings and not groups to indicate an intersectional understanding) are represented is part of systems of oppression and marginalization (126, 2002). How we see and are seen by each other implicates how we treat one another and representation is crucial to how we 'see' (Dyer 1, 2002). In the words of Carter and Steiner, the media construct normative definitions of what we 'should' look, act, feel and be like and through their dissemination these definitions are made to appear natural, normal and 'real', "in other words, common sense" (2).

### *Feminist Media Studies*

Over the past forty years feminist media research "has made the case that it is *through* representational or signifying systems such as language, photography, film and television that the categories that seem so natural to us and the differences that organize our thinking and our lives (like femininity and masculinity, male and female) actually get determined" (D'Acci 92, 2002). In other words, feminist media scholars have argued that media socializes people to normative ways of being and relating, and more so, through the power of representation normalizes and naturalizes hegemonic systems of power (Carter and

Steiner 2). Traditionally feminist media research focuses on understanding how women and femininity are represented in media, how gender is constructed and how those constructions have changed over time (Consalvo 180). Historically (and contemporarily) feminists have critiqued narrow and stereotypical representations of women on television (Casey et al 122). In the words of Myra McDonald in *Representing Women* “[f]rom bra-burning feminist, to house-proud housewives, from sex-crazed seductresses to neurotic career-women, the media regularly serve a menu of female stereotypes that stimulates misogynistic taste buds” (13). However, varieties of feminist media studies and television criticism have led to differing subjects, approaches and methodologies (Kaplan 256, D’Acci 92, 2002, Gill 7). As Kaplan notes, traditional liberal feminist interpretations of television analysis have focused on content analysis as a methodology with the intention of analyzing the kinds and frequencies of female roles on television (254). For example, Diana Meehan’s *Ladies of the Evening: Women Characters of Prime-Time Television* focused on counting the number of female character and female heroes in prime-time television and incidences of violence committed on or by those women (Kaplan 255). Likewise, Marxist feminist approaches to television criticism center on television as an explicitly capitalist institution. As such, Marxist feminist television criticism often focuses on the intersections between capitalism and the representations of women as workers, mothers and individuals (Kaplan 257). For example, Marxist feminist television criticism has focused on the ways in which media representations of women as content housewives are linked to a capitalist system which benefits from their unpaid labour (Kaplan 257). Similarly, feminist research has questioned and linked the lack of women employed in the television industry and the kinds of representations of women on television (Casey et al 300). As D’Acci notes, “the way gender is imagined, thought,

represented in the mind's eyes of television industry, has everything to do...with the functioning of the industry as an economic and social sector" (93, 2002). Additionally, some feminist media researchers have attempted to inverse the emphasis on so-called 'male' media texts, like news or current affairs programmes by shifting focus to so-called 'female' texts such as soap operas and melodramas (Casey et al 123, Bignell 223). While feminist media critiques have largely argued that stereotypical representations of women have been limiting and exploitative, some feminist media scholars have engaged with the complex experiences women have as viewers and the pleasure they encounter watching television. As Dyer notes of Amy Kaplan's collection of women and film noir (1978), those representations which would largely be read as negative were differently interpreted by particular female viewers, some of whom were exhilarated by the dangerous and conniving femme-fatales (2, 2002). Notably, this kind of audience research is not meant to argue that viewers can make representations mean anything they want, but rather to emphasize the complexity of interpretation and the possibility of those readings which subvert dominant interpretation.

Largely, feminist media studies is thought of as concerned with the ways that gender is represented in particular programmes (news, commercials, documentary, fictional forms, etc.) and how those representations work to constitute normative femininity and masculinity (D'Acci 93, 2002). However, contemporary feminist media studies has expanded the exclusive focus on gender to include those social identity categories which intersect with gender, including sexuality, race, class, age, etc. (D'Acci 92, 2002). In other words, feminist media studies, like much of the feminist movement, has attempted to critique and redraw understandings of femininity which rely on the exclusion of racialized, working class, old,

non-maternal and queer women (D'Acci 93, 2002). Moreover, contemporary feminist media studies seeks to explore the ways in which masculinity is represented in media, recognizing masculinity as just as thoroughly constructed as femininity (D'Acci 379, 2004). The intervention of queer theory in feminist media studies has increasingly drawn questions about how the gender binary has limited the representation of sexuality and gender on television (D'Acci 379, 2004). As the work of Alexander in *Making Things Perfectly Queer* demonstrates, queer theory can be used to read representations of masculinity and femininity in dominant media for all the queerness they mobilize (D'Acci 379, 2004). For example, Doty suggests re-reading the homoeroticism in traditional gender tropes of television, like male police team and female friendships, to see the queerness at work. Using Doty's work as specific example, we could engage in a queer reading of the US television show *Lavern and Shirley*, about two women best friends, viewing the characters as possibly lesbian or as simply undermining discourses of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1986) (D'Acci 380, 2004).

Moreover, as queer theorists have reinterpreted feminist media criticism to include an analysis of sexuality and to disrupt the assumed heterosexuality of women on and watching television, so too have critical race feminists reexamined the cinematic context as well as feminist film and television criticism for its white supremacist impulses. As such, critical race feminist media studies explore representations not only for the ways in which gender and femininity are constructed in a patriarchal context but also how racism and white supremacy informs those representations. Particularly in film and television, critical race feminists have drawn attention to the ways in which the white feminine ideal is constructed in contradistinction to black female sexuality. As critical race feminist and media critic bell

hooks argues, the idealization of white womanhood in Hollywood is inherently linked to white femininity as innocent and virtuous and black female-ness as experienced and impure (19, 1994). Furthermore, as white femininity colonizes cinematic representations of womanhood, black femininity is essentially erased (hooks 118, 1992). This erasure of black femininity extends beyond the televisual and cinematic screen to dominant discourses of feminist media criticism. As hooks argues,

Feminist film theory rooted in an ahistorical psychoanalytical framework that privileges sexual difference actively suppresses recognition of race, reenacting and mirroring the erasure of black womanhood that occurs in films, silencing any discussion of racial difference – of racialized sexual difference (123, 1994).

In other words, while much feminist film criticism makes claims to deconstructing representations of women they are in fact, speaking of *white* women (hooks 123, 1994).

#### *Race, Whiteness and Intersectionality*

In as much, media play a significant role in communicating ideas about racialization and whiteness. In the words of Stuart Hall, “the media construct for us a definition of what race is; what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the “problem of race” is understood to be. They help us classify the world in terms of race” (cited in Burton 193). As such, it is through discursive analysis of media that we can uncover how race is constructed and the “routine narratives” and stereotypical representations of people of colour present in media (Jiwani 31, 2006). As Yasmin Jiwani notes in *Discourse of Denial: Mediations of Race, Gender, and Violence*, ‘traces’ of discourses of colonialism are rife within contemporary media messages, constructing the public imagination as a reflection of fields of colonial power (32, 2006). In other words, mass media work in tandem with other institutions of power to construct a hegemonic view of social reality in which whiteness is

communicated as natural and normal (Jiwani 32, 2006, Bernardi 21). As such, the normalization of whiteness in turn structures the ways in which racialized minorities are represented and treated (Jiwani 32).

When whiteness dominates televisual representation, or, in other words when whiteness is most of what we see on television, it is universalized and normalized. In essence, the dominance of whiteness is reproduced specifically because “white people colonise the definition of normal” (Dyer 127, 2002). In as much, white people come to be seen as unmarked, unspecific and universal specifically because in visual culture they are essentially seen but unseen. In this sense, whiteness is understood as non-raced when in fact, whiteness is racialized – it is racialized for power and privilege. In this sense, “whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen” as all that which ‘marks’ whiteness as raced are invisible symbolic properties (Dyer 45, 1997). As Dyer writes,

...in the realm of categories, black is always as a colour...and is always particularizing; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality because it is everything – white is no colour because it is all colour. This property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the source of its representational power (qtd. in Morely, 429).

As such, this research is a part of the project of making whiteness (and able-bodiedness) visible. As Dyer writes, we must ‘make strange’ or make visible that which is unseen and normalized (as whiteness is) in an effort to de-center it (4, 2002). In this thesis, I examine the way in which whiteness structures the *Star Trek* narrative. As is noted in the second chapter of this thesis, discourses of whiteness and a white future are prominent in *Star Trek*, particularly as they are contained and supported by colonial discourses of indigeneity. As whiteness is critical to *Star Trek*’s representation of the utopian, highly technologized future, indigeneity is set-up as the *Trek-ian* foil, symbolizing a static, primitive human past.

That said, whiteness and racialization cannot be examined without an intersectional approach which considers social relations beyond a single category of analysis and instead views the simultaneous and intersecting experiences of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc. (Gillman 119). As Gillman suggests, an intersectional approach disregards ideas of discrete categories of identity in exchange for a constitutive model which emphasizes the fluid and relational nature of identity categories (119). As critical race feminist Kimberle Crenshaw notes, intersectionality captures the unique social location of identities at the crossroads of gender, class, sexuality and race hierarchies (403). Moreover, as critical race feminists Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack suggest, because systems of domination mutually reinforce one another, it is futile to approach one system and not another (Fellows and Razack 1998). That is to say, as racism relies on sexist and classist modes of power to manifest itself one must approach all systems (racism, sexism, classism, etc.) together to cause disruption to the system. In this research, an intersectional approach will be applied both to understand the complexity of the relational nature of gender, race, sexuality and ability but also to deconstruct and make visible the ways in which whiteness remains a distinct part of imaging ‘unmarked’ and normative femininity.

In the context of this work, feminist media studies, with particular emphasis on the work of critical race feminists, provides a theoretical framework through which to interpret television representations of gender, race, sexuality, disability and most importantly their intersections. In other words, feminist media studies provides theoretical links between representation, ideology and power in which we see representations as functioning ‘ideologically’ as they produce and reproduce systems of domination and exploitation. In this sense feminist media studies creates the space to acknowledge that in a world stratified

by gender, race, sexuality, class, age, location and ability and in which privilege is unequally bestowed, representations matter (Gill 7).

### *Feminist Disability Studies and Crip Theory*

In this thesis, along with feminist media studies, intersectionality and a critical approach to whiteness, feminist and critical disability studies will be employed to read representations in *Star Trek*. As Robert McRuer's work *Crip Theory* will be prominent in my approach to a 'crip' reading of *Star Trek*, a large part of this section will be dedicated to an explanation of his theoretical approach. However, to frame McRuer's work and the larger context of disability in my thesis, I will also discuss feminist disability studies as a field of inquiry.

Feminist disability studies is an interdisciplinary field which integrates the exploration of cultural meanings of sex, gender and the body with the ability/disability system developed by critical disability studies. As such, feminist disability studies approaches concepts of gender, sex and the body as culturally constructed in which meanings are tied to patriarchal and ableist norms. In this context, the ability/disability system is understood as the cultural system in which certain body types are stigmatized based on an inability to satisfy cultural norms. Those bodies which do not conform to cultural standards of medical or aesthetic norms are often described as "sick, deformed, crazy, ugly, old, maimed, afflicted, mad, abnormal, or debilitated" (Garland-Thompson 17). However, critical and feminist disability studies question the apparent natural inferiority of 'disabled' bodies and alternatively suggest this cultural narrative as more of a myth of patriarchal and ableist norms (Garland-Thompson 17). Feminist disability studies in particular, links the cultural history of women to people with disabilities as women have

often been described as intellectually and physically inferior or disabled as compared to the ‘normal’ male body (Garland-Thompson 18). In particular, feminist disability theorists point out how the disciplinary nature by which women’s bodies are evaluated is linked to discourses of disability, particularly in terms of medicine and appearance (Garland-Thompson 22). As feminist disability theorist Rosemary Garland-Thompson asserts, weakness and illness are culturally gendered as female while simultaneously women’s bodies undergo increasing levels of scrutiny demanding normative and unmarked bodies only (Garland-Thompson 24). As such, the twin demands of women’s bodies to look both ‘normal’ and ‘beautiful’ draw an ever narrowing and invariably unachievable ideal picture of the female body (Garland-Thompson 24). In the context of this research, feminist disability studies will provide a lens through which to read how the bodies of female characters on *Star Trek* are shaped by patriarchal and ableist norms. Particularly, I will examine how, as the cyborg character Seven of Nine is humanized and gendered as female, her visible cybernetic implants are removed in attempts to bring her closer to normative non-disabled/unmarked femininity. Moreover, as Seven progresses toward normative non-disabled humanness and femininity, I would argue she is rearticulated in the text as a sexual individual, confirming ableist and patriarchal discourses of people with disabilities as a priori asexual.

### *‘Crippling’ the Future*

In *Crip Theory*, Robert McRuer argues for a coming together of queer theory and critical disability studies. McRuer argues for an understanding of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality as intimately connected and as deeply implicated in contemporary ways of understanding disability and sexuality. In this project, I

hope to engage crip theory as a way of understanding the methods in which disability and sexuality intersect in the representational politics of *Star Trek*. Specifically, I aim to interrogate the ways in which normalcy, disability and queerness come together to ‘undo’ heteronormativity and hegemonic cultural assumptions about sex and disability. In this way I hope to see *Star Trek* as providing a sort of ‘crippled future’ as it pushes forward the crisis in compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality. This ‘crisis’ in compulsory able-bodied heterosexuality stems from those moments when the system fails to maintain the fallacy of itself. As Groner argues, we need to perpetuate the crisis by pushing at the moments of failure and suggesting multiple alternatives (265).

According to McRuer, idea(l)s of normalcy are at the centre of both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness. In essence, both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are conceptually drawn as the norm. As McRuer writes, “The parallel structure of the definitions of ability and sexuality is quite striking... to be able-bodied is to be free from physical disability,” just as to be heterosexual is to be “the opposite of homosexual” (8). In essence, both the ideas of heterosexuality and of able-bodiedness function around ideals of normal relations. The idealization of ‘normalcy’ produces the compulsive nature of both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness. In other words, in a context in which, as Michael Warner writes “nearly everyone wants to be normal” (qtd. in McRuer 7), heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, as emblematic of normalcy, compel their adherence. As McRuer writes, the compulsory system demands an affirmative answer to the unspoken question “Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?” (9). However, both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness are obscured in the discourse of choice (‘choosing to be gay’, or ‘choosing to be fit and healthy’), which disguise a system which

provides no meaningful choice at all. Moreover, despite definitional understandings of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness as tied to socio-historical moments those roots, too, have been destroyed. In its place, the disciplinary structure of compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness appear to emanate “from everywhere and nowhere” (McRuer 8).

Moreover, McRuer argues compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality are linked as “identities that are constituted by repetitive performance” (9). Both compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality require the constant imitation or performance of idealized able-bodiedness/heterosexuality and both inexorably fail. Neither the ‘perfect’ heterosexual or able-bodied identity can ever really exist. As McRuer writes “Able-bodied identity and heterosexual identity are linked in their mutual impossibility and in their mutual incomprehensibility – they are incomprehensible in that each is an identity that is simultaneously the ground on which all identities supposedly rest and an impressive achievement that is always deferred and thus never really guaranteed” (9). In other words, both compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness are constituted through repetitive performances which are bound to fail as the ideal heterosexual/able-bodied identity “can never, once and for all, be achieved” (9).

In this sense, compulsive heterosexuality is always already able-bodied and vice versa; each is contingent upon the other. Heterosexuality and disability are interwoven in a “complex process of conflation and stereotype: people with disabilities are often understood as somehow queer (as paradoxical stereotypes of the asexual or oversexual person with disabilities would suggest), while queers are often understood as somehow disabled (an ongoing medicalization of identity similar to what people with disabilities more generally

encounter, would suggest)” (qtd. In Groner 265). In the context of sexuality, much of what ties ‘disability’ to queerness is the supposed failure to perform heteronormative codes of behavior. Here, I speak not only of gendered and sexual behaviors but also of heteronormative ideals of sexuality about sex and love (for example, the expectation that love is at the heart of all sexually intimate relationships). A crip reading of *Star Trek* might look for the ways in which the text constructs and positions disability and queerness as desirable. Moreover, it might look for the ways in which disability ‘undoes’ compulsive heterosexuality, by questioning and rejecting narratives of sex, love and pleasure and by embracing the queerness of disability. In this sense, we can push at the moments of crisis and failure in compulsive able-bodied heterosexuality, which McRuer and many others suggest, in the hopes of unraveling able-bodied heteronormativity.

To be specific, what I am most interested in is the ways in which the *Star Trek* non-human characters Seven of Nine, a cyborg, and Data, an android can be seen as representing disability and the ways in which their sexuality can be seen as both undoing and shoring up able-bodied heterosexuality. In this context, I argue that these characters, both relentlessly rational but challenged by human emotional and social relationships, can be read as disabled and autistic. As such, I would suggest that in particular moments the *Star Trek* narrative validates their queered sexuality by demonstrating the absurdity of compulsive able-bodied heterosexuality. I would make this claim in a similar way that Rachael Groner writes in *Sex as ‘Spock’* that biographical accounts and personal narratives written by and about autistic people challenge heteronormativity. As Groner writes, “...by highlighting the strangeness and unintelligibility of gendered and sexual norms, these texts point to the fictiveness of NT heteronormativity” (270). In other words, as those *Star Trek* characters draw attention to the

strangeness and the absurdity of the gendered and sexed logic of able-bodied heterosexuality, they in effect begin to unravel its hold.

### *Methodological Framework*

This project will apply a critical discourse analysis in which the television program is read as text. Discourse analysis is a methodology under a larger framework of textual analysis. Textual analysis is a methodology which requires the close examination of text to expose meanings as well as investigate structure and discourses at play within a particular text (Lockyer 2008). A textual analysis then is a method of deconstruction, attempting to expose “the mechanism by which the text operates” (Creeber 8). Methods of textual analysis are often employed to uncover ‘preferred readings’ (Hall 1980) and link said readings to the various ideologies at work in the text. This is not to say, however, that textual analysis seeks to determine the ‘true’ meaning of text but rather what interpretations of texts are possible (Lockyer 2008) and to make connections between hegemonic representations and ideological underpinnings.

This project takes an understanding of texts as polysemic; multiple readings of *Star Trek* are possible. Moreover, all of said possible readings are socially situated and thereby ideological. However, this is not to say that this thesis does not employ a kind of objectivity in its approach. Here I draw on Donna Haraway’s (1988) conception of situated knowledges to suggest the possibility of a feminist objectivity that acknowledges social location but still holds out for the possibility of “accounts of a ‘real’ world” (372). In this sense, Haraway speaks of a “real” world in an effort to critique the radical constructivist approach in which every layer of the proverbial onion is contestable and thereby illusory (371). On the contrary,

in her seminal essay *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective* (1988), Haraway describes a feminist epistemological standpoint in which modernist objectivity (which she calls the ‘god trick’) and radical constructivism are rejected. Instead Haraway calls for an account of situated and embodied knowledge in which feminist objectivity is marked by an acknowledgement of social location and of *partial* ways of seeing (373). Simply put, feminist objectivity is about recognizing that all knowledge claims are socially situated and thus see the world from a particular perspective or view. Moreover, in recognizing knowledge as social, we also understand that it is structured by power. In contrast to traditional objectivity, feminist objectivity is responsible in that it can be called to account. As Haraway writes “It allows us to become answerable for what we learn and how we see” (373). That is, there are no totalizing claims of absolute authority or “disembodied vision” (377). On the contrary, situated knowledges are by their nature “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” (Haraway 374). Specifically apt to an epistemology of situated knowledges are those subjugated knowledges which Haraway suggests are preferred because at least they understand the “interpretative core of all knowledge” (374). Simply put, those subjugated knowledges (feminist knowledges, anti-racist knowledges, etc.) not only offer a view of the world not currently part of our androcentric objective knowledge base and thereby broaden our understanding of natural and social world, but they also embody the contestable nature of knowledge claims. As such, I approach this research with an understanding of my situated knowledge as a white feminist researcher and with a feminist objectivity in mind. That is not to say that I intend to realize the ultimate or ‘true’ meaning of *Star Trek* as text. Instead, my intention is to uncover dominant and subversive ideologies at play within *Star Trek* with

the understanding that exposing ideology within text is a part of making our everyday lives “critically strange” (Allen 3). In other words, I hope to make visible those aspects of our lives, like television, which are ordinarily critically unseen and unspoken (Allen 3). As such, I will suggest new ways of thinking about *Star Trek* which affirms situated knowledges with the intent of constructing a world “less organized by the axis of domination” (Haraway 374).

To understand the ways that discourse is intimately linked to ideology and representation, we must first examine what we mean by discourse. There are many definitions of ‘discourse’, some more linguistic, some more socio-cultural and many theoretical fields in which discourse takes shape. In fact, as Fiske notes, discourse is itself ‘multidiscursive’ in that it takes a variety of meanings, depending on the circumstance employed (Casey et al 79). Discourse is, as Blommaert describes, ‘language-in-action’: language as a social practice and a cultural tool (2). In the context of media studies, discourse is understood as more than language and refers instead to all forms of signifying practices which create meaning, including film, photography, and of course television (Casey et al 80). As Foucault describes, discourse is linked to “ways of thinking, talking, representing, doing and acting as well as to specific language forms and social interaction” (ctd. in Casey et al 80). Thus, when we consider discourse we must see discourses not simply as “the processes of language use and meaning production” but rather the consequences of said processes, those relations of power which both shape and are shaped by discourse (Casey et al 80). In Hall’s words, a discourse is a way of representing, through a variety of signifying practices, our knowledge about a particular subject at a particular historical moment (72). As such, discourses are a part of shaping meaning, beliefs and values and as such are understood not as neutral but rather as part and parcel to constituting

social reality (Casey et al 80). An understanding of discourse as producing social reality and social relations then views discourse as fundamentally about power and ideology. As Wodak asserts, “discursive practices can have ideological effects in the sense that they work to produce and reproduce unequal power relations in the ways in which they represent things and position people (ctd. in Casey et al 80). Moreover, as Thwaites et al note, “it is through an understanding of discourse that ideology becomes ‘visible’” (ctd. in Casey et al 80). In other words, it is when we see discourse as invested in representing knowledge in a particular and ideological way we see the ways in which discourse is implicated in systems of power.

It is through this understanding of discourse as intimately linked to ideology and power that we come to discourse analysis as a methodological technique. In the context of media, discourse analysis is employed to ‘uncover’ the ways in which media (newspaper, film, etc.) make sense of and give meaning to everyday life (Casey et al 81). Particularly significant in the context of this research are the ways in which media take up particular discourses and not others in the process of representing people, things and events. Discourse analysis is then able to ‘open up’ the question of representation as it links representation to discourse and understands discourse as always an articulation of ideology (Casey et al 81). As Thwaites writes, “what is included and excluded in representation is, ultimately, determined through discourse, which is in turn structured by ideology” (ctd. in Casey et al 81). With the understanding of discourse as constructive of our social reality we can begin to appreciate the power that discourse has in the lives of people. Discourse both produces and represents us often in ways which confirm and recreate dominance and inequity. There

is however, room for resistance. Discourse analysis provides the opportunity to challenge representations and make space for alternative discourses.

### *Why Trek?*

As Thomas Richards writes, “there really is nothing like *Star Trek*” (4). In the context of science fiction television there are few programs which match *Star Trek*, in terms of its position in popular culture, its influence and its cult status among fans. When considering science fiction in general *Star Trek* is, as Hockley writes, “what people think of as science-fiction television” (37). In other words, *Star Trek* is deeply emblematic of science fiction as a television genre. It is by all accounts the most popular science fiction on television, superseding the depth and complexity of its rivals (Richards 1, 4). Moreover, as Booker notes, *Star Trek* has been deeply influential of science fiction television, influencing many other works of science fiction programming (195). In short, *Star Trek* is the “gold standard for science fiction television” (Booker 195). In addition, as Robin Roberts writes in *Sexual Generations*, “*Star Trek* is much more than a television show. For its devotees, it is a way of life, a passion” (1, 1999). So much so that, as Constance Penley (1997) notes in her book *NASA/Trek*, in which she explores the common cultures of NASA and *Star Trek*, many American scientists and astronauts have recognized the influence of watching *Star Trek* on their choice to pursue astronautics and space sciences. *Star Trek*’s influence on popular culture is undeniable; the program’s vocabulary is now a part of the modern American lexicon (Richards 2). The commonality of phrases like “beam me up” and “space, the final frontier” belie the deep saturation of *Star Trek* into popular culture (Richards 2). Beyond its impact on science fiction as a genre and popular culture in general, *Star Trek* has

made “it almost impossible to envision a future that does not include warp drive, phasers, photon torpedoes, tricorders, communicators, and numerous other *Star Trek* military and scientific technologies” (Harrison et al 1). As many have suggested the reasons for the success of *Star Trek* are numerous, not least its shamelessly optimistic view of technological advancement and its consistent commitment to addressing issues of race, gender and class which extend beyond its time (Booker 195). In its initial pitch, creator Gene Roddenberry described *Star Trek* as a “*Wagon Train* to the stars” (Hark 8). I would suggest this situating of *Star Trek* in the mythology of the American West is indicative in part of its appeal and of its attractiveness and fruitfulness as a subject of interest. In essence, *Star Trek’s* exploration of the galaxy is a parallel to the exploration of the Western frontier, situating the program as specifically and significantly American (Booker 196). *Star Trek* is, as Booker argues “a very American series” (196). This American-ness of *Star Trek* offers an opportunity to draw out discourses of gender, race, disability and sexuality in ways which are particularly apropos to an exploration and analysis of Western culture. Moreover, as Roberts argues, science fiction as a genre is most significantly about extrapolation (2, 1999). Because science fiction is set in the future and because this requires an extrapolation or speculation of what might be, science fiction is always offering a comment on American culture (Roberts 3, 1999). It is for these reasons I would argue that it is critical to read *Star Trek* for the incarnations of the future it offers, for what it encourages and discourages and for what its representational politics mean for our present and our possible future.

What is more, *Star Trek’s* cult status, its significance as more than simply a television show, presents the opportunity for a rich analysis of the diversity, complexity and irony of audience experience. *Star Trek* has a particularly diverse audience in terms of

science fiction programming. As has been noted *Star Trek* is credited with bringing the first mass female audience to science fiction television (Harrison et al 1, Roberts 4, 1999). Despite this success *Star Trek* has at times been critiqued for its limited portrayal of gender equality (Booker 206). Furthermore, as Jenkins notes in “*Out of Closet and into the Universe:*” *Queers and Star Trek*, despite certain failures of representation queer fans haven’t abandoned *Star Trek*. Instead, fans have often re-read, re-written, appropriated or ‘poached’ as Jenkins (*Textual Poaching* 1992) has called it, the stories of *Star Trek*, expanding its cannon beyond the official record (Roberts 4, 1999). This is both an example of the extratextual nature of *Star Trek* but also the immense complexity and irony which go into making meaning in the *Star Trek* universe. Moreover, what is significant for this research is the subtext with which fans are identifying. In other words, I would argue, while at times *Star Trek* appears to hearken to liberal and sometimes even a neo-liberal narratives it may also beckon to a feminist, queer, and crippled subtext. I would suggest its overwhelming and diverse fan culture is indicative of *Star Trek*’s transgressive possibilities. Furthermore, as opposed to a tradition in science fiction of “pessimistic postapocalyptic narratives and xenophobic alien invasion tales” (Booker 195) *Star Trek*’s utopian outlook is marked as one of the first positive visions of the future (Harrison et al 1, Richards 8). As Richards notes, *Star Trek* is a fundamentally optimistic picture of the future, one without “poverty, hunger, discrimination, or disease” (8). This utopianism is significant in any reading of *Star Trek* as the program is always an offering of a *better* or more perfect future, a future which supposedly leaves behind the ableist, racist, patriarchal and homophobic politics of our time. In as much, *Star Trek* is profoundly meaningful for the gender, raced, queered and (dis)abled futures for which they imagine and for which they foreclose.

The choice of *The Next Generation (TNG)* and *Voyager* as particular series within the *Star Trek* universe are tied both to functionality and to specificity. I have chosen *TNG* as a sort of ‘jumping off point’, as the first reincarnation after The Original Series (TOS) aired in the late 1960’s, *TNG* is the first full series (The Original Series having been cancelled after three seasons) of *Star Trek* and thereby presents the first opportunity to examine a completed televised project. Moreover, as the most successful of the *Star Trek* series (Hark 59), with one of the most loyal audiences in television history (Richards 4) *TNG* presents the opportunity to explore the series at the height of its cultural currency. Additionally, as Collins writes, *TNG* establishes itself from the very first episode as “perfected liberalism”, arguably the rooting ideology of the *Star Trek* series as a whole. As Richards argues, *TNG* is the truest of the *Star Trek* series to the original vision of the franchise. Thus, in a way *TNG* offers in addition to cultural currency and a sense of completed-ness, a sort of ideological purity in terms of Roddenberry’s guiding narrative for the *Star Trek* universe. Furthermore, while *TNG* may present a sort of *Star Trek* in pure form I offer *Voyager* as offering (a possible and a particular kind of) ‘progress’ and providing a point of comparison between two moments in *Star Trek* history.

In addition, both *TNG* and *Voyager* offer specific characters of interest to explore. For instance, *Voyager*, as the first and only of the *Star Trek* franchise to offer a female captain (Capt. Kathryn Janeway) and the first to feature an Indigenous crew member (Commander Chacotay) present opportunities for analysis of the interaction between gender, whiteness and colonialism unique to this series. Likewise, *Voyager* character Seven of Nine, half human, half ‘Borg’ drone presents a unique opportunity to interrogate idea(l)s of gender, sex and humanness. Moreover, I would suggest that possibilities for a crippled reading of

*Star Trek* also intimately involve particular characters of the *TNG* and *Voyager* series, including Seven of Nine (*Voyager*) and Lt. Commander Data (*TNG*).

### *Chapter Overview*

The majority of this thesis will be dedicated to a critical discourse analysis of *Star Trek: TNG* and *Star Trek: Voyager*. Each chapter will apply a critical discourse analysis to explore representations of gender, race, disability and sexuality in *The Next Generation* and *Voyager*, through specific theoretical frames. The first analytic chapter will focus on questions of gender and sex in the *Star Trek: Voyager* character *Seven of Nine*. This chapter will explore the question of what representations of Seven of Nine reveal about our ideas of gender, sex and humanness in the cyborg body. In this chapter I argue, alongside Seven's journey to humanness is an attendant narrative about the necessity of gender to humanness. Moreover, as Seven makes a claim to gender, femininity is represented in a particularly conservative manner, marked by maternity, monogamy and heterosexuality. Seven as a character makes a particularly intriguing point of inquiry given her complex and contradictory character construction, physically highly feminized while emotionally and socially highly masculinized. I argue, while Seven does appear to challenge certain conservative gendered ideas, that her 'contradictions' are in the end resolved in favour of traditional femininity is significant.

The second chapter will focus on the colonial narrative in the *Star Trek* text. This chapter examines the ways in which *Star Trek's* liberal ethos, particularly its apparently feminist representations of Captain Janeway as the white woman scientist, reinforce colonial ideas about progress and whiteness. In particular, I examine the ways in which Captain

Janeway's scientific expertise is in part established through contrasting representations with her First Officer, the only First Nations character on a *Star Trek* series, Commander Chakotay. Here I argue that Janeway's scientific prowess is, in part, secured through representations of Chakotay in stereotypical terms. In other words, critical to the representation of Janeway as the white scientist is the representation of Chakotay as the racialized, non-scientist, securely located in the pre-scientific world Native spirituality. This chapter also explores the way in which space, as the 'final frontier' is constructed on *Star Trek* as allegoric both for American frontiersman-ship and neo-colonial misadventure. In this context, I employ the work of Sherene Razack to make sense of the ways in which whiteness is secured through the ongoing logic of colonialism which so strongly informs the *Star Trek* narrative.

The final chapter will explore a reading of *Star Trek: TNG* and *Star Trek: Voyager* characters as allegories for autistic individuals and the ways in which *Star Trek* can be read as validating their queered/crippled sexuality. That is to say, I argue that certain *Star Trek* characters, Data of *TNG* and Seven of Nine of *Voyager*, can be read disabled through an interpretation of their intellect and non-emotional affect as autistic. As those characters question heteronormative expectations like monogamy or love before sex they push back against compulsive able-bodied heterosexuality.

Sex and the Cy-Borg: Gender, Sex and Humanness in *Seven of Nine*

“All supposed talk of the Other is really projection. Aliens are metaphors for ourselves.”  
(Stephen May *Stardust and Ashes: Science Fiction and the Christian Perspective* 41)

“Finding one’s heart is the surest way to individuality”  
(The Doctor, Human Error, *Star Trek: Voyager*)

In *The Meaning of Star Trek* (1999) Thomas Richard argues that *Star Trek* is a much less alien adventure than one might imagine. In fact, Richards argues “the *Star Trek* universe is a familiar universe full of unfamiliar faces and unfamiliar shapes” (35). The familiarity of *Star Trek* is no less apparent in the cyborg character Seven of Nine. Part human, part ‘Borg’ drone, Seven joins the *Voyager* crew on a journey of her own. Born human but raised by Borg, Seven’s struggles on *Voyager* to reclaim her humanity and her individuality. In spite of an intergalactic context, Seven’s odyssey toward humanity is itself a distinctly familiar story, one which draws on familiar ideas about gender, femininity and humanness. As I will argue, Seven’s journey toward humanity is a distinctly gendered one, through which we can read contemporary ideas about the apparent necessity of gender to humanness (and cyborgness) and the constitution of femininity itself. Simply put, it is through representation of Seven, and of the Borg, which we can answer questions about how we understand ideas of gender, sex and humanness and how those ideas are connected to systems of gendered and racialized power.

In this chapter I will examine how representations of Seven of Nine and of the Borg offer a comment on gender, femininity and humanness in the cyborg body. To do this work I have applied a discourses analysis methodology in a textual reading of several episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* in which The Borg and Seven of Nine are featured. Each of these episodes figure predominantly in the narrative of Seven of Nine as she struggles to reclaim

her apparently lost humanity and individuality. Each episode offers a mediation on the gendered nature of Seven's struggle. In addition, I would suggest each of these episodes offer a moment in which we are left not only to understand that gender and sex are a necessary part of humanity, but how normative femininity is embodied. In other words, as we watch *Voyager* we see dominant femininity in its constructive stages. This is significant in that, as we watch, those discourses of hegemonic femininity (beauty, monogamy, heterosexuality, motherhood) are normalized as natural and inevitable parts of becoming a human woman. Significantly, as Seven, free from the Borg collective but ever the cyborg, with visible facial implants and assimilative tubules snaking out from her hand, embodies the post-human body she offers a distinct opportunity to read gender and sex in a time and place when technology is everywhere in our lives. In this sense, through Seven we read not only discourses of gender but how those discourses intersect with discourses of technology and heteronormativity. Attendant intersections between disability, gender and sexuality in Seven of Nine will be visited in a later chapter. Here, however, I hope to explore the construction of gender and humanness in *Star Trek* and in popular culture in general through a discursive analysis not only of Seven but of her nemesis-come-alter-ego, the Borg Queen. While the Borg Queen is a much less significant character in the *Voyager* series, I argue she plays the role of literally foil to Seven and as such offers much to a discursive analysis.

As a televisual text Seven defies a simplistic reading. Her Barbie-like physique feminized to absurdity contrasted with her masculinized persona, equally acute in its rationality, logic and robotic efficiency, all mediated through her cyborg body of metal and flesh, make her an immensely complex text. For a *Star Trek* fan and a feminist, Seven of Nine is intriguing and frequently contradictory, at times ardent in her dismissal of

monogamy (Course Oblivion) at others a virtual embodiment of the idealized wife (Human Error). To make sense of Seven in a theoretically productive way I look to Mimi White, feminist television studies theorist and her chapter in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*. As White suggests, an ideological or discursive analysis is rarely a simple or self-evident practice (179). Indeed, the critical theory which underlies an ideological analysis stresses the negotiated terrain of hegemony (White 179). Contradiction and instability are an inherent part of dominant systems of power, as they do not develop evenly and universally but rather are written, rewritten and negotiated constantly. In this sense, those spaces of instability and contestation can be most analytically fruitful as it is in those moments that the dominant system is most clearly exposed (White 179). In fact, as White notes, “in some sense dominant ideology can be seen as the effort to contain or smooth over points of contention and contradiction in the process of promoting a more unified idea of social subjectivity” (179). In this sense, as we consider the apparent contradiction or at least the complexity of Seven of Nine, she seems a ripe space for an analysis of our ideological system of representation. As White might suggest it is *because* there is contradiction in the Seven of Nine character that we can draw from her a great deal about the way we understand gender and femininity. Moreover, I would argue it is how Seven of Nine’s contradictions are resolved, particularly how Seven’s subjectivity is formed as she moves toward humanness, that bely how gender and femininity are to be understood in our popular culture.

However, I argue it is not simply through Seven which *Trek* communicates gendered ideals. As such, the first section of this chapter will explore the gendered nature of the Borg Queen and the ways in which she stands in contradistinction to normative femininity. As the collectivist Borg function as a foil for the Federation and the *Voyager* crew, I argue the Borg

Queen is herself a sinister reflection of uncontained femininity and technology in all of its lascivious possibility. In this sense, the Borg Queen's excessive, dangerous femininity is a foil for the kind of safe and hegemonic femininity Seven must learn to adopt. Namely, where the Borg Queen is a mechanized terror, bent on human assimilation and consumed by conquest and unabashed feminine sexual power, Seven develops into a sexually submissive 'helpmate', entirely contained by her eventual concern with motherhood and heterosexual marriage.

In the following sections, I will explore the history and narrative function of the Borg and the Borg Queen in the *Trek* universe. I will then discuss the way in which the Borg Queen and Seven offer contrary discourses about femininity and technology in their unique position as cyborg figures. These sections will follow with an examination of Seven's 'gendering' process through particular *Voyager* episodes, highlighting themes of motherhood and heteronormativity and examining how these themes draw on normative ideas of whiteness, femininity and womanhood. Lastly, I will examine the ways in which Seven's journey to femininity offers a comment on the constructed nature of gender and the absoluteness of biological sex. However, we will first begin with a brief description of the central character in question, Seven of Nine.

### *Seven of Nine*

Joining the *Voyager* series in its fourth season, Seven of Nine, is a unique character in the *Trek* universe. Part human, part cybernetic drone, Seven has been repatriated from The Borg, a race of cybernetic beings bent on intergalactic domination. Assimilated as a child into the Borg and later liberated by the *Voyager* crew, Seven's Borg-ian impulses are strong. Finding her shortened name to be "imprecise", Seven makes an uneasy transition to

life on *Voyager*. While Seven of Nine spends much of her time clad in skin-tight bodysuit, she is more than “mere eye candy” or hired sex appeal (Booker 127). Physically she is, as Barber describes, an “overt caricature of physical womanhood”, “hypersexualized” with prominent “anti-gravity breasts” (Lavin, see Barber 136) but of “immense physical prowess” (Bowring 399), made of both metal and flesh (Barber 136, Bowring 399). Though rescued from the Collective, Seven still possesses the ability to assimilate individuals through “vampire tendrils” that extend from her hand into the neck of her victims (Barber 137). Her scientific and technological expertise is unparalleled by any of the *Voyager* crew. As a recuperated Borg drone, she possesses an exhaustive knowledge of the many ‘alien’ species of the Delta Quadrant and as such, Seven is frequently called upon to save both *Voyager* and her crew. However, unlike the famed android Data of *The Next Generation*, Seven harbors no human longings. On the contrary, in a most charitable moment for Seven, she describes the process of becoming human as “unsettling” (Hope and Fear). However, where Seven feels reluctance toward her growing humanity, it is her journey which provides much of the narrative substance for her character through the series. However, in as much as Seven’s progressive human journey is marked by her relationships with her fellow human and alien crew members, I would argue it is her relationship with the Borg Queen which is most significant to our critical analytical conclusions. As such, we turn now to the Borg and its Queen to explore the ways in which the Queen and Seven represent discourses of femininity, whiteness and gender in *Star Trek* and in popular culture.

#### *The Borg and the Techno Femme Fatale*

As Captain Picard says in the film *Star Trek: First Contact*, the Borg are “[The Federation’s] most evil enemy” (Wagner and Lundeen 206). A cybernetic race hailing from

the Delta Quadrant (the section of space in which *Star Trek: Voyager* takes place), the Borg appear first in the *Star Trek* series *The Next Generation*. Hurling through space time by Q, in episode “Q Who”, they are initially described as “not a he; not a she. Not like anything you’ve ever seen before” (Q Who). Part organic, part cybernetic, the Borg are the complete integration of technology and flesh, so much so they cannot exist without either (Consalvo 182). Like techno-sociopaths, the Borg make their way through space assimilating whole worlds; “erasing all diversity, all individuality and all feeling” (Wagner and Lundeen 136). In the two part *TNG* episode ‘The Best of Both Worlds’, Picard is himself captured and assimilated into the Borg. In one of the most famous scenes from the series, Picard, shown through the *Enterprise* viewscreen, is marred by Borg technology, half his face obscured by black snake-like tubes. The *Enterprise* crew stands in horror as their Captain announces himself: “I am Locutus of Borg. From this time forward you will service...us” (Richards 50). In the aftermath of an offscreen battle between an armada of Starfleet vessels attempting to intercept The Borg as they race toward Earth, the screen pans the galactic battlefield, a virtual cemetery of wounded Federation vessels, a haunting scene of disembodied wreckage floating through space. The first of many confrontations with the Borg, ‘The Best of Both World’ leaves no trace of doubt in the Borg’s supreme evil.

As “*Trek’s* ultimate unredeemable dystopian society” the Borg operate as a single collective mind (Wagner and Lundeen 135). As a frequent enemy of both the *Enterprise –D* and *Voyager*, the Borg, operating in a kind of “quintessential collectivist hell” (Wagner and Lundeen 135) are the perfect counterpoint to *Trek’s* liberal humanism. As Wertheim suggests, the Borg “are a synthesis of every cliché about the Other: a complex (con)fusion of insect-virus-commie-machine, with a hive mentality in which each will is absorbed into the

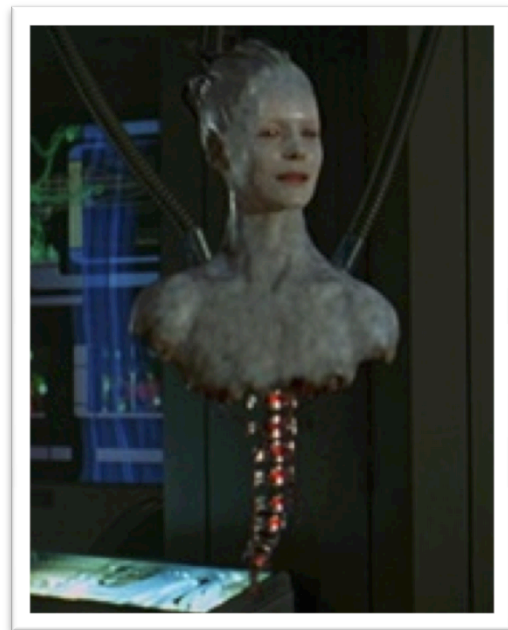
collective drive to ‘assimilate’ the universe” (75). The ‘Otherness’ of the Borg is significant in the *Trek* metanarrative. Secured by a foundation of liberal humanism, Picard asks Q: “How do you reason with them?” to which Q informs him “You don’t.” (Russell and Wolski n. pag). In other words, the Borg is beyond reason, beyond intelligibility: they are absolute difference. A kind of “multi-racial mess” (Bernardi 87), the Borg embody ugliness and horror (Wagner and Lundeen 207). Like “partially mechanized cadaverous zombies” (Wagner and Lundeen 207) the Borg care nothing for one another as “they step calmly over the bodies of fallen “drones”, retrieving them only to salvage their usable parts” (Wagner and Lundeen 136). The collective ‘hive mind’ of the Borg is so complete that individual drones literally do not register life signs on Federation tricorders (Russell and Wolski n. pag). That the Borg appear not even to be living is indicative of their profound difference. It is clear the Borg, as the most villainous *Trek*-ian bad guys, are to be read as Other not only to our Federation alter-ego, but to ourselves. As Wertheim argues, the collectivist nature of the Borg embody all of Western civilization’s fantasies and anxieties about communism and socialism (75-6). The Borg is certainly the pinnacle of ideological Otherness when we consider the metaphoric function of the Federation as an overtly “idealized American society projected into the future” (Roberts 7, 1999). However, as Russell and Wolski suggest, “the Other exists only insofar as it is a projection of the self” (n. pag). As such, in their Otherness, we can read the Borg as reflecting back to us representations of ourselves. In this context, the Borg offer us not only what they are, but we are not. Particularly, as Wolmark suggests, the alien as a metaphor for difference in science fiction offers the space for difference to be enacted, for binary oppositions to be reinforced and for norms of domination and subordination to be secured (ctd. in Russell and Wolski n. pag). From this

conclusion we can look to representations of gender and sexuality in the Borg and particularly in the Borg Queen as drawing the lines of normative femininity, sexuality and technology.

If the Borg represent the ultimate *Trek*-ian enemy, the Queen herself is the epitome of collective monstrosity. Likened to the queen of an insect colony, the Borg Queen is an unholy alliance of matriarchal power and authoritarian group-think. The definitive nemesis to the *Star Trek* series' most popular captains, Jean-Luc Picard of *TNG* and Kathryn Janeway of *Voyager*, the Queen is the mythical origins of the Borg. "I am the beginning...the end...the one who is many. I am the Borg" she states in the *Trek* film *First Contact*. That her language is so similar to that of French feminist Luce Irigaray (*The Sex Which is Not One*) is indicative of the Borg Queen distinctly feminine power. Alluring and repulsive, the Borg Queen leads the Collective, a single mind bringing 'order to chaos' (Dark Frontier). Almost divinely powerful, she is able to direct the Collective, like a totalitarian leviathan with a single thought. Machiavellian in her cruelty, driven solely by the will to conquer, she is without mercy or redemption.

Significantly, unlike the millions (or possibly billions) of drones she leads, who's bodies are utilitarian, essentially un-gendered (although virtually all appear male) and identical, the Borg Queen is distinctly feminine and erotic. While drones move and speak in an almost robotic manner, the Borg Queen walks seductively and speaks in a sensual feminine voice. Classically beautiful, despite almost amphibian like skin and tubules sprouting from her head in lieu of hair, the Borg Queen is undeniably sexy. Like Seven of Nine, her body is feminized to excess, long, lean and "sinuously curvaceous" (Cranny-Francis 157). Lowered mechanically by a Borg apparatus into her drone body, the Queen is

in fact only a head, neck and shoulders connected to a feminized drone body. A snaking spinal cord wiggling visibly below, symbolizing the Queen's phallic power (see Fig. 1). In contrast to her hyper-feminine curves, the Borg Queen's drone body is highly mechanized, long sheathed metal limbs and strong gloved hands "threaten[ing] to pulverize anything in their grasp" (Greven 154). Full of contradiction in her mechanized terror, her 'body' is nearly naked, wearing skin tight exo-skeletal plating, without standard Borg hand, arm and ocular implants. Significantly, in spite of her role as leader of the hive mind, the Borg Queen frequently uses her sexuality to achieve her terrific ends. From her first appearance in the *Trek* franchise, the 1996 film *First Contact*, the Borg Queen attempts to use her powers of seduction to further plans to assimilate humanity. Asking android character Data, "You are familiar with the physical forms of pleasure?"



Assuring us, as she blows seductively on his newly grafted skin, that she is very familiar. In this manner, the Borg Queen is stereotypical in her representation of excessive, sexualized, and dangerous femininity. As Lundeen and Wagner write, "[The Borg Queen] is the terrible witch queen of folklore: sexually aggressive, insatiable, megalomaniacal – a usurper and abuser of power rather than one in whose hands power naturally rests" (209). The Borg Queen is the quintessential femme fatale of film noir, an alluring temptress empowered by her sexual prowess and seductive abilities, motivated by conquest and material success. Of course, the Borg Queen is motivated by much more than material gain. She wants to

consume the entirety of humanity. However, like the femme fatale, the Borg Queen is both explicitly sexual and explicitly violent (Place 54). As Greven suggests in *Gender, Sexuality and Star Trek*, the Borg Queen is the archetypal female figure of misogynistic mythos, consumed with destruction and sexual menace (152). As she assimilates an entire species in *Voyager* episode 'Dark Frontier', she looks to Seven of Nine, who she has trapped on her Borg sphere, and tells her "stop resisting, take *pleasure* in this". The Borg Queen is, in no uncertain terms, taking sexual pleasure in the annihilation of life. In essence, she is "the woman seducer associated with death" (Greven 152). Later, attempting to convince Seven to willingly abandon *Voyager* and assist in the assimilation of humanity, the Borg Queen seductively calls to her in unambiguous sexual metaphor to "be one with us again" (Dark Frontier). In essence, the Borg Queen embodies the mythical patriarchal connection between uncontained or promiscuous female sexuality and destruction and death. In as much, the Borg Queen is the ultimate failure of femininity; seducing the innocent, speaking in the language of desire, taking pleasure in death.

In essence, the Borg Queen represents the terror of female sexuality, "Western patriarchy's most fearful sexual nightmare" (Relke 12). Savoring the annihilation of futurity, the Borg Queen denies the essentialist mandate of sacrificial motherhood as womanhood. In contrast, the Borg Queen embodies a kind of preserve motherhood. Chillingly evil, she embraces Seven as she relishes in the destruction of her crew. Unlike the righteous, altruistic mother, the Borg Queen embraces conquest, desire and death. Like the mythical monstrous mother, she literally kills and eats her young, killing drones and processing their cortical nodes in 'Unimatrix Zero' (Relke 43). While she makes a familial claim to Seven, she is cruel and seductive. "You are mine" she says to Seven, speaking to her through her

neural transceiver (Dark Frontier). When eventually reunited, the Borg Queen raises her formidable metal hand and in bizarre pseudo-sexual mothering, caresses Seven's face, welcoming her home (Dark Frontier). As Greven suggests, she is both the "tender mother figure, and also a suitor wooing his love" (183). As such, the Borg Queen is the monstrous feminine, the perverted mother. Upon Seven's coerced return to the Collective, the Borg Queen forces her to aid in the assimilation/annihilation of species 10026. "Our presence is not required" she says to Seven with wry sadistic humour, "but I thought the experience would be a...rewarding one for you" (Dark Frontier). In as much, the Borg Queen ascribes to Barbara Creed's thesis in *The Monstrous-Feminine*. She is the archetypal woman as monstrous force, "the mother who will engulf her child and reabsorb it into her own system" (Greven 155).

As Relke argues, given the Borg's reconstruction as feminine through the Borg Queen, "the Collective's threat is *ipso facto* sexual, and what it threatens is masculinity" (41). The Borg Queen's symbolic threat to patriarchy is made most evident by her role as unambiguous evil Other and the première threat to the masculinist Starfleet, the military and peacekeeping service operated by the United Federation of Planets and to which all the *Star Trek* starships service. Despite embracing an apparently post-patriarchal world in which female captains head intrepid-class starships, Starfleet is a rigid military hierarchy, adhering strictly to a "masculine ethos of individuality and soldierhood" (Relke 24). The masculine nature of Starfleet is embodied no less in their military protocol by which all superior officers, whether male or female, are referred to as 'sir'. Moreover, as Roberts asserts in *Sexual Generations: Star Trek: The Next Generation and Gender*, women on *TNG* serve little more than a subservient and ornamental role. In as much, as Starfleet symbolizes the

masculinist nature of liberal, humanist individualism the Borg Queen personifies the feminized sexual threat of technology uncontained.

Simply put, that the Borg Queen is, in fact, a *techno* femme fatale is significant. In other words, the Borg Queen is made all the more threatening by her terrible technological body. As Susan A. George suggests in *Fraking Machines: Desire, Gender, and the (Post) Human Condition in Battlestar Galactica*, the dangerous cyborg woman literally embodies the violent iconography of the femme fatale (167). While the femme fatale of film noir often carries a gun, signifying her unnatural phallic power (Place 54), the cyborg femme fatale's "better stronger body is itself a formidable weapon and symbol enough" (George 167). Moreover, as Kakoudaki suggests in *Exaggerated Gender and Artificial Intelligence*, the tradition of representing cyborg women as highly feminized and sexualized is indicative of society's anxieties about new technology and the enduring threat of female sexual power (171). However, I would add that the cyborg woman's unique symbolic power is her ability to inherently link dangerous femininity and technology gone awry. Importantly, as Place asserts in *Women in Film Noir*, the opposing archetype to the femme fatale in film noir, the 'nurturing woman', is always represented as having a primal connection with nature and/or the past (63). The 'nurturing woman' is essentially purified (and purifying) by her connection to the safe and static rural or natural environment, disconnected from the "corruption of greed, money and power" of urban life (Place 63). In contrast, the femme fatale is distinctly located in the urban environment, associated with industrialization and technological change. In essence, the feminized cyborg/techno femme fatale, is one step further, not simply located in or associated with urban/industrial change, but actually embodying it.

In perfect symbolic order, the techno femme fatale is the personification of fears of uncontrolled technology and femininity gone awry. The problematic woman cyborg as allegory for technology out of control is common in science fiction literature. As George asserts, sf film's like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), cold war era cinema like *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* (1958), *She Demons* (1958), and *The Wasp Woman* (1959), and contemporary films like *Eve of Destruction* (1991), *Steel and Lace* (1991), and *Terminator 3* (2003) all indicate the longstanding connection between the sexy woman cyborg and technological danger (George 160). True to form, the Borg Queen is the perfect embodiment of social anxieties about dangerous femininity and perverse technology. The Borg undoubtedly exemplify technology out of control. Beyond (human) reason and redemption, the Borg are the ultimate techno-menace and the definitive threat to humanity in the *Trek* universe. As their leader, the 'origins' of the Borg, the Queen is the pinnacle of Borg threat. That she is also the pinnacle of feminine monstrosity, the failed woman/mother, is indicative of the socio-cultural link between dangerous technology and threatening femininity. As Relke suggests, "the Borg Queen by definition...cannot nurture the soul", the requisite feminine role, "...which humanism regards as a necessary defense against precisely the kind of all-consuming mechanical materialism she represents" (43). In other words, the Borg Queen, by virtue of her role as uncontained feminine technology, cannot perform the necessary maternal role so critical to hegemonic femininity.

Importantly, the Borg Queen embraces her totalitarian techno-power. She scoffs at humanity's limitations (Dark Frontier). "You have become weak", the Borg Queen tells Seven of her return to human individuality (Dark Frontier). In all her megalomaniacal glory she describes humanity: "Species 5618: Human. Warp capable. Origin: grid 315.

Physiology: inefficient. Below average cranial capacity. Minimal redundant system. Limited regenerative abilities” (Dark Frontier). Arguably even more significant, she is contemptuous of human/feminine emotion, particularly Seven’s empathy and compassion for those she assimilates. “You are experiencing compassion, a human impulse. You have forgotten what it means to be Borg” (Dark Frontier). That emotionality is specifically linked to femininity is critical to the Borg Queen’s dismissal. In feeling no empathy or guilt but rather pleasure and desire in annihilation, the Borg Queen is a failure of femininity. Moreover, unlike the fragile ‘emotional’ woman, the Borg Queen in all her techno-glory is a threat both to humanity and to patriarchy.

In her failed femininity, the Borg Queen is both the quintessential cautionary tale and the ultimate literary foil. In all her diabolical evil, the Borg Queen embodies the consequences of uncontrolled technology and uncontained feminine power writ large. As Place explains, “The ideological operation of the myth (the absolute necessity of controlling the strong, sexual woman) is...achieved by first demonstrating her dangerous power and its frightening results” (56). As such, I would argue the Borg Queen serves particularly that purpose in the *Trek* narrative, to demonstrate the dangerous power of the uncontained cyborg woman. Seven, on the contrary embodies hegemonic femininity, Western individualism and contained, subservient technology. Where the Borg Queen threatens the liberal individualist ethos of the Federation, Seven of Nine defends it. “I am an individual” Seven definitively declares to the Borg Queen (Dark Frontier). Likewise, as the Borg Queen plots to diabolically assimilate all of humanity, Seven resists. “Part of me is still human” she tells the Borg Queen, “I will not assist in their destruction” (Dark Frontier). Even as the Borg Queen demands Seven “take pleasure” in the assimilation of species 10026, Seven rejects her cruel

demand: “I will not take *pleasure* in the annihilation of a race” (Dark Frontier). Moreover, where the Borg Queen frivolously sacrifices thousands of drones to prevent disruption in her empire in the two part season six finale and season seven premiere, ‘Unimatrix Zero’, Seven is willing only to sacrifice herself, both for her crew and her former fellow drones.

Where the Borg Queen symbolizes the techno-femme fatale, Seven is, as Anne Balsamo suggests of female gendered cyborgs in *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*, the “object of man’s desire and his helpmate in distress” (cited in George 163). Unlike the Borg Queen, who’s techno-sadism is bent on human destruction

Seven uses her Borg efficiency to save *Voyager* time and again. Moreover, critical to Seven’s difference from the Borg Queen is her ‘humanness’. Like Marilyn Monroe in her feminine perfection, Seven is plush, blond and distinctly *human* in contrast to the pallid, bald and mechanized Borg Queen (Greven 181). Arguably every bit as



eroticized as the Borg Queen, Seven is distinctly contained. She uses both her technological prowess and her femininity for good, saving *Voyager* from near death with regular frequency. What is more, despite being “the sexiest member of the crew”, Seven demonstrates an unwillingness or at least a disinterest in exercising her considerable sexual power (Consalvo 184).

### *Whiteness, Cyborgness & Cinematic Femininity*

The significance in Seven's representation as distinctly human and feminine in contrast to the Borg Queen's mechanized lasciviousness is a discursive link between whiteness, racialization and idealized femininity. As critical race feminists have noted, particularly in film and television, the white feminine ideal has historically been constructed in contradistinction to black female sexuality. As bell hooks and critical race and feminist media studies theorists argue, the idealization of white womanhood in Hollywood is inherently linked to white femininity as innocent and virtuous and black female-ness as experienced and impure (19, 1994). So much so, as Dyer argues, the practices of glamour lighting in Hollywood were developed specifically for white women, with the intention to "endow them with a glow and radiance that has correspondence with the transcendental rhetoric of popular Christianity" (qtd. in hooks 19, 1994). Moreover, as hooks notes, the obsession with ultra-white women film stars, embodied no less in the cultural icon of blond-haired and blue-eyed white femininity and sensuality, Marilyn Monroe, is nothing less than a practice of maintaining distance, "a separation between that image and the black female Other" as an effort to further white supremacy (119, 1992). In as much as actress Jeri Ryan, who plays Seven of Nine, conforms to this kind of idealized white femininity, *Trek* reinforces the dominance of cinematic whiteness. Moreover, as Seven embodies no less than perfected femininity, she discursively reinforces whiteness as constitutive part of normative femininity. The relationship between virtuous whiteness and idealized femininity is made all the more significant through the Borg Queen's discursive Otherness, her lascivious sexuality inherently linked to white supremacist discourses of racialized women as sexually voracious. While the Borg Queen is also played by a white actress, her alien-ness on *Trek* lends to the

possibility of reading racialization and Otherness into her character. As Roberts suggests, because human beings have not yet had contact with alien species, televised aliens must be read as ciphers for humanity (207, 2000a). While the Borg Queen's visual Otherness lends to the possibility of reading race on to her character, I would argue the opposite for Seven. While Roberts argues Seven may be read as a "classic science fiction mulatta" (208, 2000a), given her cyborg existence I would not discount the power of the visual representation of whiteness which Seven represents. It is not insignificant that Seven, the personification of feminine beauty, is also personification of *white* feminine beauty. That Seven goes on to adopt hegemonic femininity, which is itself colonized by whiteness as the normative way of being, only serves as confirmation of Seven's white identity.

That said, while we may read race differently through Seven and the Borg Queen I would argue both characters present the opportunity to read gender onto the cyborg body in meaningful ways. In other words, gender, whether manifest in the cyborg or the human individual, is understood to be critical to identity. There are no humans, or even cyborgs, beyond or without gender. Both Seven and the Borg Queen, along with many other cyborg characters of sf, demonstrate the gendered nature of the cyborg. However, the character of Seven in particular makes a distinct claim to the necessity of gender to humanness. As we will next discuss, while *Voyager* ostensibly presents Seven's journey as one toward greater humanity, it simultaneously makes assertions both about the gendered nature of the human condition and significantly, about how hegemonic femininity is enacted.

#### *Resistance is Futile!: Gender, Humanness and Hegemonic Femininity*

While there is an apparent contradiction between Seven of Nine's body and her affect – she is physically feminized almost to an absurdity, but traditionally masculinized in her

persona, highly rational and distinctly unemotional – I would argue the discourses about gender, identity and hegemonic femininity at play in Seven’s character are more coherent than initially appear. Ostensibly, the journey for Seven of Nine in the *Voyager* series is not simply one back to the Alpha quadrant like most of her crewmates but rather a more social and cultural one. Assimilated as a child while onboard her parents’ research vessel, the *USS Raven*, Seven has grown up as a Borg drone. As such, she is seen as neither understanding nor appreciating traditional and apparently universal Federation and human values. Human individualism, friendship, romantic (heterosexual) partnership, parenthood all become social ‘lessons’ Seven must learn and values she must adopt. While the series, through the mentorship of Captain Janeway and The Doctor, make no bones about the necessity for Seven to become ‘an individual’, the lesser spoken but no less significant journey for Seven is clearly one of gendered individualism. In as much as Seven must learn to abandon her Borg-ian search for ‘perfection’ (the Borg creed and manifesto for intergalactic assimilation) and embrace human fallibility, she must also learn to perform traditional femininity. In short, as Seven is ‘taught’ human interpersonal rituals like ‘small talk’ and politeness, she is also socialized, with less and more directness, into highly gendered behaviors.

That said, in as much as Seven’s journey relies on normative definitions of femininity it too relies on normative discourses of whiteness and racialization. In other words, I would argue much of the cultural work done through Seven relies no less on her visual personification of idealized white femininity and the cultural ideals organized around whiteness. As Seven is folded into dominant femininity, her whiteness animates and legitimizes her idealized femininity. That Seven’s racialized identity goes unnoticed and unacknowledged in *Trek* is indicative of the white supremacist logic which underpins

popular representations of whiteness and womanhood. As hooks argues, whiteness itself colonizes cinematic representations of womanhood (118, 1992). As whiteness comes to discursively and culturally embody femininity, black femininity is essentially erased (118, 1992). Significantly, this erasure of black femininity extends beyond the cinematic screen to dominant discourses of feminist media criticism and textual interpretation. As hooks argues,

Feminist film theory rooted in an ahistorical psychoanalytical framework that privileges sexual difference actively suppresses recognition of race, reenacting and mirroring the erasure of black womanhood that occurs in films, silencing any discussion of racial difference – of racialized sexual difference (123, 1994).

In other words, while much feminist film criticism makes claims to deconstructing representations of women they are in fact, speaking of *white* women (hooks 123, 1994). As such, it is critically important that in a textual analysis of gender, such as this that we acknowledge the role whiteness plays in subject formation. In as much as *Trek* represents ideas and ideals of womanhood through Seven it does so as a function of Seven's construction as a white subject. As noted previously, that Seven is played by an actress in the Monroe-ian mold of blond-haired, blue-eyed cinematic womanhood is indicative of "the cultural space of the white feminine ideal" in *Trek* (hooks 19, 1994) and the idealization of whiteness in popular culture. Simply put, Seven is an enactment of cultural idealization of whiteness, reifying discourses of ideal womanhood as white womanhood and whiteness as normal and universal. As such our critique must always hold on to the ways in which whiteness make Seven's gendering more possible and the ways in which she contributes to colonization of white femininity on television.

Moving to the text, we look to a series of episodes to illustrate the importance of gender in guiding Seven's journey toward humanity. In the season five episode 'Someone to Watch Over Me', Seven is socialized into dating, not entirely un-ironically by the

holographic Doctor. While Seven has repeatedly and masterfully expressed in earlier episodes a distaste for the strange and highly ritualized nature of human romantic behavior, it is important in the program's narrative that she learn this critical social lesson. That Seven must adopt any romantic or sexual relationship is in and of itself a comment both on the apparent necessity of romantic partnerships to the human experience but importantly, to the acute necessity for women to partner, ostensibly with men, but at the very least with *someone*. This very point is articulated in an exchange between Seven and The Doctor in Sickbay:

The Doctor: You are a woman Seven.

Seven of Nine: Is that an observation or a diagnosis?

The Doctor: A simple biological fact, with repercussions that are hard to deny.

The Doctor's "recommended treatment" is then for Seven to commence dating lessons, through a series of exercises on the *Voyager* holodeck (a simulated reality facility).

As Seven is brought through her 'dating lesson' with The Doctor she is exposed, as are we, to traditional discourses of femininity. In the course of the episode Seven's task is to find a suitable male crewmate and accompany him on the holodeck for dinner and dancing. First and foremost of consideration is of course Seven's attire. Usually dressed not in an androgenous Federation uniform like the rest of her crew, but in a derma-plastic body suit, Seven must trade in her skin-tight catsuit for the quintessential feminine attire; a dress. For Seven, the act of wearing dresses is clearly symbolic. In the iconography of femininity the dress is significant, denoting gentility, submission and inactivity. Similarly, she must abandon her traditional and efficient tight French twist and allow her blond hair to lie loose on her shoulders. These tokens of femininity are in themselves significant. As Inness

suggests, for women, hair plays a significant role in society as a signifier of femininity (116). True to its televised form, Seven's date does not go as planned. Despite being in virtual awe of Seven's success at visually performing femininity, her date, is frightened off by Seven's inability to eat daintily and dance appropriately. That Seven does not allow him to lead while they dance is indicative of Seven's difficulty at performing femininity, particularly its interpersonal aspect. As Tom Paris says to The Doctor, doubting Seven's ability to execute a successful evening with her date, "Seven's dominant personality will have him running for the airlock" (Someone to Watch Over Me). That Seven cannot successfully execute the apparently simple act of dating is critical to the episode's and the series' narrative, in which Seven's inability to entirely fit in with the crew has no less to do with her inability to perform appropriate femininity than with her Borg-ian nature.

While Seven is significantly resistant to learning human dating rituals in the episode 'Someone to Watch Over Me', that resistance is tempered later in the series in the two-part episode 'Unimatrix Zero'. While appearing in Unimatrix Zero, a sort of dream world where Borg drones with a recessive mutation visit during their regeneration cycles, Seven is called by her human and infinitely more feminized name, Annika. Upon her return to Unimatrix Zero, following her escape from the collective, Seven learns she was in a relationship there with another drone, Axom. As the episode progresses and Seven appears in Unimatrix Zero again, her appearance is drastically different than her normal appearance on the series. As in 'Someone to Watch Over Me', Seven wears her long, blond hair loose and exchanges her catsuit for more appropriate feminine attire. Seven's differing appearance in the particular moments discussed draw attention to the performative nature of the costuming and social ritual of femininity. That Seven's dress in 'Unimatrix Zero', as in 'Someone to Watch Over

Me' is pink and purple, typical feminine colours, is indicative of the unselfconscious approach taken in *Voyager* to the relationship between Seven's growing humanity and femininity. Making the connection unmistakably clear, Seven's more feminine presentation in *Unimatrix Zero* is interpreted by herself and Captain Janeway as more human:

Captain Janeway: I couldn't help but notice you were a little different in *Unimatrix Zero* and I don't mean your lack of Borg implants. You seemed more...

Seven of Nine: Human.

Captain Janeway: If you don't mind my saying so, it suited you.

As Janeway specifically asserts it is not Seven's lack of visible facial implants that make her appear more human, it is her feminized appearance. Moreover, this change apparently, suits her. This comment coming from Captain Janeway, Seven's mentor in her transition toward human individualism, is significant. As Janeway praises Seven's appearance in *Unimatrix Zero*, Seven's movement toward traditional femininity is folded into and conflated with the project of individuality and humanness. In other words, femininity or feminine performance is understood as a critical part of Seven's transition to humanness. While Janeway discounts the absence of Seven's facial implants to her 'human' appearance, Seven's unmarked appearance in '*Unimatrix Zero*' is considerable in understanding the intersection between gender, heteronormativity and disability. While this relationship will be explored fully in a later chapter it is important to make note of the way in which Seven is frequently humanized

by virtue of the absence of her Borg implants, which in the past have served to signify Seven's affective and bodily difference.

While Seven shows reticence to human dating rituals in earlier episodes, by the seventh and finale season, her feelings have changed. In the episode 'Human Error', Seven is shown essentially longing for male companionship. The episode opens with Seven attending a holographic version of Tom and B'Elanna's baby shower. In her simulation, Seven appears decidedly more human, her visible Borg implants removed, her hair styled down and in place of her catsuit, a purple top and pants. In keeping with her more human holographic self, Seven requests standard quarters, unlike the Borg regeneration unit she currently occupies, and a standard Federation uniform. It seems her transition to 'normal' individual is essentially complete, at least holographically. No longer visibly Other to the Federation crew, Seven's holodeck life appears to be much like that of her crewmates. Significantly, the bulk of Seven's holodeck program time is dedicated to a simulated relationship with Commander Chakotay, indicating her romantic affections toward him and her apparent desire for partnership which was missing from previous episodes. Seven's virtual date with Chakotay is not unlike her prior experiences, but with significant differences. In 'Human Error' Seven puts considerable effort into her feminine performance. Once again Seven wears a dress, this time red, her hair is long in romantic curls and she is visibly wearing makeup. Unlike in previous episodes, Seven is clearly invested in the success of this 'date'. She revels in feminine domesticity, cooking and playing the piano. Previously unsure about how to even put on a dress, in 'Human Error', Seven seems adept, choosing a sexy red dress which exposes her cleavage. Likewise, she quizzes the real B'Elanna Torres about appropriately styling her hair, an act which would have been virtually

unbelievable of the character in previous seasons. That Seven seems to have finally found ‘success’ in her romantic life is linked to her new found appreciation for her feminine role. Seven has finally stopped resisting and in her acquiescence, has apparently found happiness.

Likewise, as with Captain Janeway’s assertions of Seven’s more human appearance in *Unimatrix Zero*, ‘Human Error’ appears to tie together Seven’s journey toward individualism and her gendered performance. Despite earlier assertions that she does not need romantic partnership, she tells the Doctor in ‘Human Error’ that since the destruction of *Unimatrix Zero* and the possibility of a relationship with Axom eliminated, her “life has seemed incomplete”. In other words, Seven has finally embraced the ultimate trope of traditional femininity, that life is incomplete without male partnership. Moreover, it is confirmed in the series finale ‘Endgame’, that Seven and Chakotay in fact marry, folding Seven completely into heteronormative femininity. Seven’s marriage and heterosexual partnerships in *Voyager* are indicative of *Star Trek*’s embracing of “the traditional gender binary with its attendant myth of romantic love and realization in formal marriage” (Shaw 67). As Shaw points out in “*Sex and the Single Starship Captain: Compulsory Heterosexuality and Star Trek: Voyager*”, despite being set in the 24<sup>th</sup> century with leaps and bounds made in technological and moral progress, *Voyager* appears to indicate “the modern, Western nuclear family as the achieved acme of social development” (67).

Moreover, as Adrienne Rich asserts in her landmark piece “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence”, the assumption of heterosexuality as the implicit and explicit preference for most women is critical to heterosexuality as an political institution (633). That Seven’s romantic partnerships are always with men is indicative of compulsory heterosexuality at work. This is particularly significant given that, as Shaw

suggests, the most significant emotional relationship Seven of Nine has is with another woman, Captain Janeway (70). So much so that in the series finale, 'Endgame' Captain Janeway breaks the Federation's Temporal Prime Directive to travel back in time and prevent the death of Seven of Nine. While Janeway suggests that it is Chakotay who is emotionally devastated by Seven's death, it is she who travels back in time, breaking her series-long standing commitment to all things Federation, to prevent it. Moreover, while Janeway couches her motivations in Seven and Chakotay's heterosexual love, it seems much more believable that it is Janeway herself who cannot stand life without Seven.

Likewise, as previously noted, that Seven's human development involves romantic relationships, particularly with men, is indicative both of the assumption that romantic partnership is essential to women's lives and that these relationships are without question with men. As Shaw suggests, as Seven is re-humanized during the *Voyager* series "...a clear equation is made between humanity and heterosexuality" as all her romantic relationships unquestionably involve men, holographic or organic (70). Moreover, I would suggest it is not simply Seven's actual, realized relationships with men that indicate compulsive heterosexuality, but that her 'social lessons' repeatedly involve educating Seven to the necessities of attracting male partnership. As Catherine Mackinnon suggests of women in the workplace, a claim must be made not only to heterosexuality but heterosexual womanhood, "in terms of dressing and playing the feminine, deferential role required of 'real' women" (see Rich 642). When considering Seven of Nine, the question of 'real' womanhood has added significance, given her cybernetic systems and Borg upbringing. Given that Seven's re-humanization is a significant narrative in the *Voyager* series and that her 'realness' in terms of her humanness is in constant question, I would argue Seven's

gendered socialization process offers a unique look at the construction of hegemonic or 'real' femininity. Clearly indicated through the series, heterosexuality and the appearance of heterosexuality through feminine dress and performance is critical to 'real' womanhood and "real" humanness.

Moreover, while Seven's heterosexual education is a significant part of her gendered socialization on *Voyager*, it's not alone in securing Seven's development into a 'real' woman. While it is alluded to that Seven's reproductive organs have been removed, as the Borg have no use for reproduction, Seven's storylines involve her no less frequently in a maternal role. It is clear from the outset of Seven's appearance on *Voyager* that a relationship with the ship's only child, Naomi Wildman, is important to developing her 'human' side. While Naomi also has a strong relationship with the ship's cook and morale officer, Neelix, she is shown frequently in the company of Seven of Nine, with several episodes revolving around the interaction of the two characters (for example 'Infinite Regress', 'Bliss', 'Survival Instinct'). While Naomi shows a curiosity for Seven, given her status as a former Borg drone, Seven is initially resistant to Naomi's advances. However, as with Seven's developing romantic endeavors, her relationship with Naomi grows until it is embraced as in 'Survival Instinct' in which Seven declares Naomi and herself to be family. Seven's relationship with Naomi, as with her relationship with the Borg children later on, are a critical part of her gendered socialization on *Voyager*. Motherhood is an essential part of traditional discourse of femininity. As Kinser notes, in *Motherhood and Feminism*, motherhood has historically defined womanhood (35). In other words, motherhood has come to represent the epitome of womanhood, the ultimate act which defines women's lives as women. Motherhood, as with marriage and male partnership, is understood as the fulfillment of women's essential nature

(Kreps 47). As such, based on their natural maternal capacity women are expected both to embrace and excel at parenting. Seven's relationships with the children on *Voyager* can be read as an indication of the necessity and naturalness of women's maternal abilities. It is significant that it is Seven, rather than any of the major male characters, who develops a relationship with Naomi Wildman. Even more so given the repeated theme in *TNG* involving Captain Picard's discomfort with children (Relke 47). As Captain Picard is said to represent the ideal embodiment of liberal humanist ethos of the *Star Trek* narrative, it is notable that his disinterest in children is taken as little more than a comedic quirk in personality. As such, we are left with little option but to draw the conclusion that parenting relationships are significant mostly, if not only, to women according to the *Trek* universe.

Seven's most significant and instructive maternal role is with the Borg children rescued by the *Voyager* crew in the season six episode 'Collective'. Upon their relocation from a derelict cube to the *Voyager* ship Seven is tasked by her own pseudo-mother, Captain Janeway, to care for the Borg children. Tucking them into their regeneration units in Cargo Bay Two, Seven is every bit the mother, insisting that it's time for bed despite pleas to stay up later (Collective). Likewise, the children adopt a familial relationship to Seven, Mazati molding her image in clay in the episode 'Ashes to Ashes'. Later, in the episode entitled 'Imperfection', Echib offers his cortical node for transplant when Seven's malfunctions, saving her life and risking his own. Significantly, Echib's gift and her subsequent relief in his survival causes Seven to cry, a moment of emotional and familial closeness unlike any other for her in the series. However, Seven's most obvious maternal role occurs in episode nineteen of season six, entitled 'Child's Play'. Upon reuniting with Echib's biological parents, Captain Janeway makes arrangements for his return home. After his repatriation,

Seven discovers Echib's initial assimilation into the Borg was no accident. In fact, Echib is a biologically engineered child and his parents offered him up to the Borg with the hope that upon assimilation, he would infect the Collective with a deadly pathogen. When Seven discovers Echib will again be used as a sacrificial lamb, she returns to rescue him.

Distraught over how to explain his family's betrayal to him, Seven turns to Captain Janeway who instructs her to "use your maternal instincts, it worked before". That Janeway calls on Seven's maternal instincts is significant. As Kinser suggests, the idea of 'maternal instincts', that mothers 'just know' what is right for their children, draws upon the preposition and assumption that mothering is a natural and expected part of women's lives (19). Moreover, as illustrated by the fact that Seven is not *actually* Echib's mother but is none the less instructed to follow her 'maternal instincts', the gendered expectations of nurturing are linked most profoundly with the female *body*. In other words, it is Seven's sexed female body, even more than her role as surrogate mother, which validate the illusion of "instinctive maternal reaction issuing from [a] female body" (Matthews and Mendlesohn 50). Given that Seven is, according to *Trek* a biological woman, as goes the assumption, she should have no trouble intuiting the appropriate method for parenting Echib. Moreover, as Seven appears to have little difficulty with Echib thereafter, one is left with no other conclusion than Seven's maternal instinct is in fact real and present.

In as much as Seven's sexed-body necessitates motherhood, it is normative whiteness which unpins and validates the endeavor. As Kinser argues, discourses of whiteness have routinely and historically structured ideals of motherhood (33). As motherhood has come to represent the sine qua non of womanhood, motherhood itself is constructed through white ideals. As Kinser argues, "assumptions about the sanctity of childhood and the home, and

feminine dependence and submissiveness, required that mothers remain out of the workforce and devote themselves wholly to home and hearth” (33). That this has historically been a virtual impossibility for working class and racialized mothers has meant that idealized motherhood has been discursively restricted to white, middle and upper class women. As Seven is socialized into idealized motherhood and all its attendant instinctive qualities, it is in and of itself motherhood as defined through whiteness.

As Seven’s heterosexual and maternal endeavors imply there is an explicit connection on *Voyager* between humanness and gender identity. Gender is a critical part to humanness one cannot be human without it. That Seven’s struggle toward humanness is marked by gendered experiences is indicative of such. This conclusion is particularly obvious when one considers whether such topics as romance, marriage and parenting would be such significant signposts of humanness if the Seven of Nine character had been a man. Rather, I would suggest these are signposts of womanhood and given that *Voyager* identifies Seven as sexed female, these are the indicators of the human woman’s experience. It seems the overarching theme to Seven’s experiences with heterosexuality and motherhood indicate that enacting gender by performing dominant femininity is critical to the human experience. Seven cannot become ‘human’ until she stakes a gendered claim and becomes a woman, and to become a woman, Seven must play out hegemonic and decidedly white femininity.

Coming back to the Borg Queen, I would argue it is her inability to perform dominant femininity which mark her as significantly Other and non-human. In part, the Borg Queen is ever the cyborg because she fails in her claim to femininity. Techno femme fatale and perverse mother, the Borg Queen performs the function of literary foil for Seven, highlighting Seven’s maternal, heterosexual and comparatively docile femininity.

Significant, as Greven suggests, is the queered nature of the Borg Queen (47). Positioned “against futurity, reproductivity, [and] progress” the Borg Queen resists normative patterns of heterosexuality and femininity (Greven 47). I would suggest, the queering of the Borg Queen is significant in its opposition to Seven’s heterosexual compliance. Where Seven consistently re-enacts and revives femininity’s maternal and reproductive roles, the Borg Queen relishes in human annihilation: “the *end* of the human” (Greven 47). Seven is recuperated from her cyborg-ness by little else than her reassurance that if not for her cybernetic systems, she would assuredly reproduce biological children of her own (Human Error). Seven, like the foiling ‘nurturing woman’ of film noir, is purified by her resistance to Borg technological system. Longing for the removal of her cybernetic systems and visible Borg facial implants, Seven desires naturalness, even more than her blond hair and soft, plush body already imply.

### *Conclusion*

I began this chapter by asking how representations of Seven of Nine and the Borg Queen offer a comment on gender, humanness and the cyborg body. I have also raised questions about how technology and the cyborg body are implicated in the gendering process. I have examined both Seven of Nine and the Borg Queen as they each present sites in which gender and the cyborg body meet. This is significant in that the cyborg is in itself a feminized figure, embodying multiple discourses of femininity and technology. It is clear in the *Star Trek* narrative that the Borg Queen embodies the dangerous, feminized cyborg figure. As the techno femme fatale, the Borg Queen uses her sexuality to manipulate and further diabolical plans for human annihilation. As the monstrous, perverse mother, she is the feminine inverse, denying her reproductive role, relishing in death and destruction.

Embodying all of patriarchal society's anxieties, she is the ultimate betrayal of femininity and technology, resisting subservience and reproductivity. As the leader of the expansionist techno-collective, the ultimate nemesis in *Trek*, the Borg Queen is the pinnacle of Otherness to the liberal, humanist discourse of *Voyager*. This Otherness is significant in that it sheds light on the implicit heteromascularity of *Trek*, made most apparent in the military nature of Starfleet. Where the Borg Queen is malevolent, annihilating collectivist feminine power, Starfleet and the Federation represent patriarchal individualism, conquering evil and restoring order. In as much as the Borg Queen embodies the dangerous cyborg, Seven of Nine is the technological helpmate, reinforcing discourses of compliant femininity and technology as ideal. Resisting Borg collectivism, Seven strives for human individualism. However, this is a journey not without lessons to be learned. While the *Voyager* narrative is frequently occupied with Seven's struggle toward humanness, this struggle is marked by concomitant preoccupation with gender. In other words, imbedded within Seven's journey to humanness is an equally significant journey toward femininity. That Seven must learn how to enact femininity is indicative of the narrative, both in *Trek* and dominant discourse, of gender as a critical part of subjectivity. That femininity is constituted by heteronormativity and idealized white motherhood is indicative of the overwhelming traditional discourses at play in the *Trek* narrative. What is more, this is instructive when considering the power of hegemonic femininity to construct normative ways of living. As is revealed through Seven, motherhood, male partnership, monogamy, marriage are supposedly necessary, inevitable and natural parts of womanhood according to *Star Trek*.

As such, the socializing of Seven of Nine presents a critical opportunity to essentially lay bare the construction of dominant femininity. In a way, Seven herself demonstrates the

constructed nature of gender and femininity, as she occasionally pushes back against and questions assumptions presented to her by her crewmates. Ultimately, however, I would suggest the most powerful cultural work done by the Seven of Nine character is her eventual folding into dominant femininity. Particularly significant is the way hegemonic femininity is made to appear fundamentally natural and inevitable. Seven is like a teenager, while she may experience some 'gendered' growing pains, they are understood as all essentially a part of growing (up) into humanness.

In all, it is no less disappointing than it is significant that in a moment of possibility for a deeply transgressive character to take shape in a genre marked by its ability to represent what is otherwise often unimaginable, that in the end Seven speaks more to the supposed inevitability of heteronormativity and traditional femininity than anything else.

Gender, Whiteness, and Indigeneity i/on the “Final Frontier”: *Star Trek* as the Story of a White Future

*“Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one has gone before.”*

(*Star Trek: The Next Generation* opening voiceover)

*“Science fiction is a time machine that goes nowhere...”*

(Ziauddin Sardar *Aliens R Us* 1)

Premiering in 1987, the long awaited *Star Trek: The Next Generation* opened with all the revelatory gusto of *Star Trek’s Original Series*. The show’s mission then, as it was in 1966 when *The Original Series* premiered, was to travel through space, to explore “new civilizations”, “to go boldly where no one ha[d] gone before” (Fulton n. pag.). This apparently paradoxical undertaking illustrates in a single moment the colonial narrative at the heart of the *Star Trek* saga. This undertaking represents a paradox because, after all, one cannot both explore new civilizations *and* go where *no one* has gone before. Not unless, of course, as Fulton argues, one reads the *Star Trek* mission through the mythology of Frontier colonialism. Through the logic of *terra nullius* and *manifest destiny*, *Star Trek* represents space exploration through a distinctly colonial frame.

Implicit in the *Star Trek* narrative is the superiority of whiteness as ‘humanness’, the unquestioned centre of the *Star Trek* universe. Importantly, *Star Trek* largely avoids the language of domination, in favor of the subtler process of normalization, in which whiteness is unmarked and unspecific but certainly the ideal. In as much, the representation of indigeneity in *Trek* ultimately functions to define the superiority and civility of whiteness. If we look closely, we can see the replication of colonial and neo-colonial narratives play out: the Other as archaic, savage and evil, whiteness as scientific, civilized and importantly,

progressive. As I will explore, these narrative play out specifically through the character of Captain Kathryn Janeway, in distinction to both Commander Chakotay and the Delta Quadrant environment.

As “the most popular science fiction ever” (Thomas 1), *Star Trek* presents a particularly ripe opportunity to examine discourses of colonialism, race and gender in popular culture. In this sense, *Star Trek* is seen as a part of our cultural and ideological machinery, which both constructs and comments on popular discourse. In as much, I look to *Star Trek* to expose the ways that dominant discourses of colonialism and neo-colonialism continue to construct normative identities and distribute power in distinctly unequal ways.

The examination of *Star Trek*'s colonial logic is particularly meaningful given its construction as a liberal utopian text. Much has been made of *Star Trek* as the embodiment of ideal liberal values projected into the future. However, despite the acclamation of *Star Trek* as a definitively progressive text, with its future free from rapacious capitalism and xenophobic discrimination, its liberal future is predicated on a colonial project, past, present and future. This claim is not made lightly. As I will demonstrate, *Star Trek* is a text which, at times, challenges dominant ideology. This, I would suggest, is the nature of *Star Trek*, as a particularly complex cultural text. However, as evident in its deeply colonial ideology, *Star Trek* is a text which, as it struggles to project a future free from systems of dominance, reifies the very systems it purports to reject. What I will examine here are the ways in which, despite a self-conscious attempt to imagine an egalitarian 24<sup>th</sup> century, *Star Trek* mobilizes colonial ideology to animate both its exploratory mission and its liberal project.

In examining *Star Trek*'s liberal egalitarianism (as demonstrated by its multicultural and gender diverse cast), or its ‘postfeminism’ (as demonstrated by *Trek* consistent

representation of sexism as a thing long past) as Fulton has called it, I would once again revisit *Star Trek*'s self-defined mission, as it is articulated in its opening voiceover. When, in 1987, *The Next Generation* premiered, the *Star Trek* mission has changed, ever so slightly. Space, it seemed, would no longer be a place where no *man* had gone before but rather where no *one* had gone. The “folding in” (Puar 2007) of liberal feminism into the colonial mission of the *Star Trek* narrative is significant. Most importantly, this folding in of liberal feminism is indicative of the complex manner in which ideological systems operate in the *Star Trek* narrative. Specifically, it demonstrates the interlocking nature of systems of oppression in which the story of the liberated white woman is tied, both in *Star Trek* and in contemporary discourse, to the ongoing neo-colonial project. In other words, representations of gender, particularly of the woman as scientist in *Star Trek*, rely heavily on racist discourses of whiteness as progressive and indigeneity as static and primitive. Most specifically, I will examine Captain Kathryn Janeway, captain of the *Voyager* series, for the ways in which she is offered both as a challenge to discourses of the scientist as inherently male and a reification of whiteness as supremely rational and scientifically progressive. Much of this work will be done by looking at the representational relationship between Captain Janeway and her second in command, Commander Chakotay, *Star Trek*'s first and only indigenous crew member.

In as much, revealing discourses of colonialism in the *Star Trek* narrative will be critical in understanding how whiteness is represented both in the series and in popular culture as a whole. To further this point, the setting of the *Voyager* series, the Delta Quadrant, a hitherto unexplored region of space, will be read as metaphor for the colonized land and its inhabitant, colonial subjects. In this context, the representation of the Delta

Quadrant as immoral, technologically primitive, dangerous and regressive is significant. More so, I will argue Captain Janeway, as a stand-in for Federation values of technological and scientific expertise and political and social advancement, is indicative of the gendered nature of contemporary neo-colonial narratives of the West as civilized and egalitarian. Again, the construction of Captain Janeway demonstrates the interlocking nature of systems of oppression and the complex way in which the *Trek* narrative operates, challenging hegemonic representations in moments and while remaining conservative in others. In this way, I hope to expose the links in *Star Trek* and in popular discourse between gender exceptionalism and colonial projects.

To begin this chapter, I will first examine the ways in which *Star Trek* expresses a colonial narrative, one which is particularly tied to U.S. mythology of frontier colonial exploration. The examination of *Star Trek*'s colonial roots is particularly meaningful given its construction as a liberal utopian text. Simply put, *Star Trek* is significant both in its ability to represent an idealized liberal future, apparently without sexism, racism or material need and simultaneously do so through a colonial narrative which relies on reifying hegemonic systems of dominance.

#### *Star Trek as Colonial Allegory: America and Space as the Final Frontier*

A critical part of the significance of *Star Trek* as a cultural narrative and a rich representational text is its allegorical power. This power is an essential part of science fiction (sf) as a genre. Science fiction has a unique ability to represent the familiar in unfamiliar terms. In other words, despite distant galaxies and alien beings, sf often reflects the social and political concerns of its time (Feasey 56). However, while sf has an immense power to imagine alternative future times, it has been critiqued for its habit of demonstrating

“not the plasticity but the paucity of human imagination” (Sardar 1). As Sardar summarizes in *Aliens R Us: the Other in Science Fiction Television*,

...the fiction in science fiction is the fiction of space, outer space, and time, future time. Far from being the essential object of its concern the devices of space and time are window dressing, landscape and backdrop. The ‘science’ offered by science fiction is populist dissection of the psyche of Western civilization, its history, preoccupations and projects of future domination – past present and future. Science fiction is a time machine that goes nowhere... (1).

In other words, those great leaps of space and time in science fiction often bring us back to where we are. This is no less so in *Star Trek*. As Hockley points out, alien races in *Star Trek* have often been read as caricatures for human ‘races’; the Soviets as the Klingons, Arabs as the Cardassians, and the Chinese as the Romulans (40). That these Federation adversaries have all also been, at one time or another, adversaries of the West, particularly the U.S., is instructive. As was noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, *Star Trek* is a particularly American text. In as much as *Star Trek* represents a human future, it represents most significantly a U.S. future. In fact, the Federation is little more thinly veiled alter ego for American society. As Booker suggests, the designation of U.S.S. (understood to mean United *Star* Ship) which precedes the name of Federation ships on *Star Trek*, draws an obvious parallel with the designation of American naval vessels (199, 2008). Aside from starship designations and allegoric American nemeses in space, that *Star Trek* represents the actualization of liberal values is tied directly to its American roots. In other words, *Star Trek* imagines a future where contemporary American liberal values of individualism, self-determination, democracy and egalitarianism have spread whole hog. As Collins argues, “[i]n *TNG*, “America” has become the world – indeed, the galaxy” (138). *Star Trek* is “more than a popular speculation about the future; it is a document of contemporary U.S. ideology” (Collins 138).

The American-ism of *Star Trek* is no less obvious in its pioneer mythology. Described by its creator, Gene Roddenberry as a “*Wagon Train* to the stars”, *Trek* evokes narratives of American expansion into the Western Frontier (Hark 8). As Wagner and Lundeen note, the American imagination is indelibly linked to the frontier mentality (175). Formative ideas of Americanism, rugged individualism, self-reliance and anti-authoritarianism are tied to frontier mythology in American history (Wagner and Lundeen 175, Bernardi 79). Moreover, as noted, the *Trek*-ian ethos of “going boldly where no one has gone before” is indicative of the colonial preoccupation of the series, drawing parallels between itself and Euro-American colonization. As Richards notes, the mission of *Star Trek* to explore “strange new worlds” is represented in many ways as parallel to historical experience of sixteenth and seventeenth century explores, like Columbus, Magellan and Cortes (13). Like the various *Star Trek* crews, these explorers sought new lands, “where no one ha[d] gone before”. Particularly, the impetus to “go where no one has gone before” draws specific parallels with American colonial frontier mythology of the land as “unknown and unowned” (Wagner and Lundeen 175). These parallels are significant, as they indicate the ongoing colonial logic operating in the *Star Trek* text.

Indeed, where European colonizers expanded across the globe and later, American colonizers across its western lands, *Star Trek* and its Federation explorers expand across space. To its credit, and certainly unlike European colonization in the past, *Star Trek* appears to have a more self-conscious approach to its mission of exploration. The Federation’s first principle, the Prime Directive, which prohibits the intervention of Federation explorers in the normal development of other societies, particularly those which are “pre-Warp”, is indicative of the attempt at a reparative approach by *Star Trek*. The

implication in the Prime Directive, that the advanced nature of the Federation would have considerable impact on other, lesser developed cultures, has a distinctly neo-colonial tone. The implicit assumption in the Prime Directive, that *we*, the Federation have nothing to learn from *them*, the primitive other, demonstrates the Euro/Human centric approach of *Star Trek*, that appears to suggest Federation development as the apex of intergalactic evolution. In the words of Wagner and Lundeen, “[t]he wonders of the [intergalactic] frontier do little to illuminate the already well-lit *Enterprise*; rather the *Enterprise* brings enlightenment and benefit to a dark and underdeveloped universe” (176). Linking *Star Trek* to an imperial narrative, Bill Bolsvert refers to *Star Trek* as a “saga of empire” in which he argues “[a]lien cultures are Kiplingesque caricatures – natives in grass skirts enthralled by squat idols, or harem slaves and gladiators lorded over by effete aristocracy” (cited in Wagner and Lundeen 175). Moreover, as Hoagland and Sarwal suggest, that the Prime Directive is couched in coded terms like “aid” and “protect” ties it directly to an imperial logic (7). Simply put, the Prime Directive is expressed in the language much like that of the White Man’s Burden; ‘we do this not for ourselves, but for you’.

The ongoing logic of colonization is again visible in the *Star Trek* narrative, through its imagined utopian future, built on the universal acceptance of the principles of European Enlightenment manifest through the hyper-valuation of science, rationalism, and liberalism. Where *Star Trek* represents a utopian future without the social and political ills of contemporary time, it does so through scientific and technological progress. What I would suggest this indicates is a quiet narrative about the superiority of European and Western culture, in the past, present and future. As Booker suggests, while little is shown of future Earth, as much of *Star Trek* takes place in space, “[i]t is certainly the case that the future

consensus society of Earth projected by *Star Trek* is one based on a thoroughly Western vision of the importance of material wealth and technological modernization” (198, 2008). In other words, progress according to *Star Trek* is defined and enabled through a distinctly Western vision.

In addition, that the utopian future of *Star Trek* appears to have been reached by a consensus adoption of a Western vision “presumably means that all non-Western-style societies have, by the twenty-third century, been swept away...into the ashcan of history” (Booker 198, 2008). The racist and colonial impulses in *Star Trek* are particularly visible in this moment, where non-Western societies are a part of the past but not a part of our idealized the future. This is evidently the case in *Trek*, in which cultural differences between 24<sup>th</sup> century human beings are virtually non-existent. Representations of ‘human’ culture in *Star Trek* are in actuality representations of Western culture, from the style of dress to the food eaten. The erasure of human cultural diversity is striking.

This cultural erasure is intimately linked to the representation of whiteness as normalized and idealized in *Star Trek*. In the way that *Star Trek* constructs a future dominated by Western culture, whiteness is both universalized and unquestioned ideal. In addition, where, as Dyer states, the representational power of whiteness is located in its ability to colonize the definition of normal, *Star Trek* manifests the normalization of whiteness, both on the screen and in the future. As such, we read, through the whiteness and Westernization of the future, the white supremacist discourses which inform the *Star Trek* narrative, in which not only is whiteness normative and ideal but it has erased all else.

Significantly, this sentiment of a Westernized future appears less absolute when indigenous, particularly American Indian cultures are represented. American Indians appear

to be the only cultural group not entirely swallowed into our Anglo American future (Wagner and Lundeen 166). However, the visibility of indigeneity on *Star Trek* is in fact the exception that proves the rule. Namely, the visibility of American Indians in *Trek* is established not to demonstrate the enduring nature of indigenous culture, but rather to serve as a foil, to reflect back the technological progress made by the rest of (white) humanity. This kind of representational regime, in which First Nations exist to refract a heroic image of whiteness, is not unusual in film and television. As Jacquelyn Kilpatrick writes in *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*, what is at stake in most films with a Native American presence is the self-definition of white westerning male (xvii). In this sense, indigeneity on *Trek* is the “premier model of the mythic Other” (Wagner and Lundeen 177). Given, as Russell and Wolski explain, that the representations of Otherness serve to discursively and ideologically construct the self, I would argue we can read considerable significance in the construction of Otherness and indigeneity on *Trek* (n. pag.). That indigenous cultures in *Trek* remain staunchly resistant to technological change is significant, as it serves to undermine indigenous cultural legitimacy. Moreover, it also simultaneously reifies both the idealization of science and technology and links progress exclusively with whiteness. Significantly, as Wagner and Lundeen assert, the representation of indigenous cultures in *Trek* is rarely, if ever, one of race hatred, but rather a “patronizing picture of a people who are noble but who are, alas, going nowhere fast” (181).

While *Trek* may offer something of a more sophisticated version of ethnocentrism, it is most certainly preoccupied with a culturally essentialist view of indigeneity. As Edward Said explains in his foundational text *Orientalism*, cultural essentialism allows for a simplistic and over-deterministic approach to the cultural Other, in which complexity,

diversity and most significantly, change is absent (Wagner and Lundeen 181). In other words, the cultural Other is determined by his/her supposedly primitive or violent cultural difference, a cultural which has neither history nor evolution. In contrast, the observer culture, in the context of Said's *Orientalism*, European and American culture, has both historicity and mutability (cited in Wagner and Lundeen 181). This culturally essentialist view is strong in the *Trek* narrative. That, over hundreds of years Euro-American culture has significantly 'progressed' (by the scientific and technological standard) in *Star Trek*, but indigenous cultures have, apparently, not, is indicative of static and culturally essentialist nature with which they are represented.

A single episode in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 'Journey's End' revolves around an encounter between the *Enterprise* crew and a colony of American-Indians, relocated from Earth to a distant planet Dorvan V in the 24<sup>th</sup> century. I would suggest, 'Journey's End' offers a particularly significant moment in *Trek* in which the binary opposition of whiteness and indigeneity is reinforced and relations of domination and subordination are affirmed. This is done through stereotypical, homogeneous and culturally essentialist representations of indigeneity which demonstrate the narrative and representational function of indigeneity in *Trek* (as in settler colonial society): to reinforce the idealization of whiteness through its difference. Let me illustrate these assertions with the following examples.

Following the signing a peace treaty between the Federation and the Cardassians which lays the plan for new borders, Captain Picard and the *Enterprise* have been dispatched to Dorvan V and instructed to re-locate the American Indian colonists living there. Noting the parallel between his current assignment and the forced removal and relocation of indigenous peoples in the Americas centuries ago, Picard is disturbed. Assuring Picard of

the necessity of his assignment, Admiral Nechayev tells Picard: “It won’t be easy but it’s a reasonable price for peace” (Journey’s End). It seems clear in this moment that the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination is no more advanced in the 24<sup>th</sup> century than it is in our current one. As in the past, indigenous peoples can and will be removed, relocated or simply wiped out if imperial powers deem it necessary.

In assigning the *Enterprise* its duty, Admiral Nechayev goes on to instruct Picard that the settlers on Dorvan V must be removed, by any means necessary, suggesting that peace with the Cardassians rests with the successful execution of this task. Admiral Nechayev concludes the discussion by telling Picard, “I don’t envy you this task but I do believe it is for the greater good” (Journey’s End). This exchange is particularly instructive. As Collins suggests in “*For the Greater Good*” *Trilateralism and Hegemony in Star Trek: The Next Generation*”, the greater good is defined only by Federation hegemony (150). Indicating the colonial imperative at the heart of the ‘greater good’ in ‘Journey’s End’ is the specific belief that indigenous peoples can be exploited, if necessary, to serve the needs of the imperial force. As Collins argues, the ‘greater good’ is always defined in non-indigenous terms (154). Additionally, that the indigenous settlers on Dorvan V can be forcibly removed for the ‘greater good’ of the Federation signifies the lesser value placed on the lives of indigenous peoples and their connection to their lands. As indigenous feminist Andrea Smith writes in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and the American Indian Genocide*, the colonial project is one in which both native bodies and their lands are inherently violable. Drawing from Smith, I would argue the ease with which Picard accepts the necessity of removing the indigenous settlers is indicative of way in which settler colonialism dehumanizes indigenous peoples. In other words, the necessity of the removal of the indigenous settlers is informed by the

colonial mentality in which the Native population is understood as always subject to the will of the colonizer, and in fact, this violent subjugation is for their own good, that is, for peace (Smith 12).

What is more, while earlier I discussed the allegorical colonial in *Star Trek* in the episode ‘Journey’s End,’ we are confronted with the literal colonial project. Save for the interplanetary context, ‘Journey’s End’ is the actual repetition of the colonial project, in which indigenous peoples must be forcibly and possibly violently removed from their lands to serve the needs of the colonial force. Even in our distant future, indigenous peoples’ oppression is not resolved, rather it is carried forward. Despite the assimilation into full Federation citizenship, the needs and objections of indigenous peoples are of no more significance in the future than in the past. As Admiral Nechayev says, the indigenous settlers’ “objections were noted, discussed but ultimately rejected” (Journey’s End).

Both the assertions that the removal of the American Indian colonists is “a reasonable price for peace” and for “the greater good” is indicative of ways in which colonialism and imperialism inform *Trek*. Where *Star Trek* may appear to make a claim to a more self-reflective approach to American colonial history, in ‘Journey’s End’ the absoluteness and naturalness of the colonial project is utterly reinforced so much so that even in the 24<sup>th</sup> century the colonial project rolls on, questioned only by apparently ‘enlightened’ individual starship Captains. Despite the assurances that *Star Trek* provides an “optimistic view of the future” (Thomas 8), that ‘optimism’ only exists for the non-indigenous viewer. For the indigenous viewer, *Star Trek* imagines a future where the violence of colonization is ongoing.

The tension between *Trek*'s optimism and its colonial underpinning is again illustrated in Picard's protest against the removal of the indigenous settlers on Dorvan V. Picard describes the historic parallel between the forced removal of the colonist from Dorvan V and the forced removal of indigenous peoples in the Americas: "...once again they are being *asked* to leave their homes because of a political decision that has been taken by a distant government" (emphasis added) (Journey's End). The erroneous use of the term 'asked' to describe the displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral land in North America is indicative of the impulse both of *Trek* and of settler colonialism to misrepresent the brutality of its colonial past as one of choice. It is particularly illustrative of the tension within *Trek* between its liberal egalitarian longings and its colonial underpinnings.

This tension between *Star Trek*'s liberal longings and colonial foundation is again apparent in 'Journey's End', where much is made of the parallel between the relocation of the American Indians on Dorvan V and European, Australian and North American colonization. While this self-conscious approach is significant, it is again illustrative of the way in which *Star Trek* constructs itself through white Western vision. The inability in 'Journey's End' to speak of any history of indigenous peoples as outside of or prior to colonial contact is as, Ward Churchill argues in his book *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema, and the Colonization of American Indians*, indicative of a representational politics in which indigenous people exist as nothing more than targets of colonization (233). In other words, the representation of indigeneity that *Trek* offers is one in which indigenous people exist always and only in relation to colonial contact.

What is more, the specific representation of indigenous culture in 'Journey's End' is again indicative of the colonial logic both in *Trek* and in popular culture. In 'Journey's End,'

indigenous culture is represented as essentially homogenous. They are described simply as ‘American Indians’, indicating the assumed uniformity in all North American indigenous cultures. As film studies scholar, Edward Buscombe notes in his book *‘Injuns:’ Native Americans in the Movies*, the diversity of Native America is uniformly denied in filmic representations of Indian life, with only a fraction of Native American tribes appearing in American cinema (24). When Native Americans do appear on screen, their representation is rarely geographically and culturally accurate (Buscombe 25). As Churchill suggests, such is the nature of “movieland’s mythic creation” in which “[a]ll native values and beliefs appear lumped together into a single homogenous and consistent whole, regardless of actual variance and distinction” (236). Moreover, indigenous spirituality is depicted in the episode as both ahistorical and naive, consisting of vision quests and the apparent sacredness of everything. Despite ‘Journey’s End’ taking place 500 years in the future, the indigenous settlers are depicted, as they so frequently are in popular culture, in traditional dress, wearing beads, moccasins and feathers. Centuries may have passed but nonetheless the Native Americans of Dorvan V looked ready to “gallop across the plains in a breechcloth and feathered headdress” (Francis 20). This is, as Buscombe describes, not unique to *Trek*, but rather indicative of filmic representations of Native Americans which appear frozen in time (25). As Buscombe argues, the tendency is to represent Native Americans in film as ahistorical and immutable, unchanged by even great passages of time and leaps and bounds of technological progress. In actuality, First Nations have a rich cultural history which experienced great change both *before* and after Columbus arrived in North America. However, the common practice in American cinema, as with *Trek*, is to deny such history, to portray First Nations in stereotypical and contexts regardless of the period in which the film

takes place (Buscombe 25). As Buscombe argues, the tendency to portray First Nations as though they are perpetually trapped at the turn of the century communicates to white audiences that “unlike the rest of society, Indians have not developed since the nineteenth century” (25).

While Picard explicitly expresses a ‘respect’ for the indigenous settlers “cultural beliefs” in ‘Journey’s End’, when questioned by his second in command, Commander Riker if he believes it himself, he immediately declares “Of course not” (Journey’s End). Once again indigeneity is marginalized. Patronizing assurances of ‘respect’ notwithstanding, the sentiment in *Trek* is abundantly clear: indigenous cultural beliefs are little more than the ritualistic faith of an ancient and inert culture.

What is particularly meaningful in the representation of indigeneity on *Star Trek* is the way in which it constructs and reinforces the “imaginary Indian” (Francis 20). As Francis explains, the ‘Indian’ is both literally and figuratively a construction of the European imagination (20). In as much, *Trek* constructs the ‘Indian’, not to represent American indigeneity, but rather to establish a foil for its ideological centre, the idealization and normalization of whiteness. This practice is made all the more so later in the *Trek* series when, in *Voyager* there is a permanent crew member who is indigenous.

*Whiteness, Science and Indigeneity: Captain Janeway, Commander Chakotay and the Delta Quadrant in Star Trek: Voyager*

*Star Trek* is a program guided by a narrative of idealized political liberalism and scientific rationalism. On *Trek* science is nothing less than the ultimate moral and political authority. As Collins asserts, the future universe of the *Star Trek* saga “is one where idealistic images of contemporary liberal values become actualized everywhere: reason

reigns over passion, science rules over mysticism; technology is an unqualified good; the “progress” of the human subject is a given” (140-1). However, the liberal, scientific future imagined by *Trek* is also a distinctly white one, in which the salvation of humanity through science is manifest through the adoption of white, Western culture.

On *Star Trek: Voyager*, Captain Janeway is the personification of the *Trekian* ideal, raised on an ethos of science as the ultimate tool of human progress. As Janeway’s father, a Starfleet scientist himself, tells her, “I raised you to be a doubter and skeptic, to look at the world with a scientist’s eye” (Coda). A Starfleet graduate, Captain Janeway is initially trained as a science officer and remains a scientist even in her role as Captain on *Voyager*. As Roberts argues, as Captain of *Voyager* Janeway is both scientist and leader, “in charge of a ship that...has “research facilities [that are] the most advanced in Starfleet”” (Innocence) (203 2000a). In as much as Janeway embodies the role of scientist, she personified the idealization of whiteness on *Trek*. Janeway, like Kirk in *TOS*, “is the ultimate “neutral” human” according to the *Trek* narrative; a white, Midwestern American (Wagner and Lundeen 173). Her authority and scientific expertise on *Voyager* are unquestioned, no less, as Casavant suggests, because her mostly non-white crew members are situated in distinctly marginal roles (190).

The representation of Janeway as a premier scientist is significant, given the long history of science as a masculinized endeavor (Jowett 29). In this way, Janeway offers a significant challenge to the long tradition in literature and science fiction to the male scientist archetype. Popular representations of science have traditionally been masculinized and have accordingly had considerable effect in shaping ideas about gender and science (Jowett 31). As Roberts argues, science has been represented not only as decidedly male,

but as essentially incompatible with women (279, 2000b). In a critique of the woman-as-scientist in science fiction, Roberts argues the female scientist is frequently depicted as “a failure as a woman” and “a failure at human relations, unattractive, even deformed by her intellect” (279, 2000b). These representations of science as essentially male and of the woman scientist as unfeminine, whether in fiction or not, work to discourage women from practicing science and create hostile environments for those who do (Roberts 279, 2000b). As such, positive representations of the woman-as-scientist, like that of Captain Janeway do considerable cultural work in reshaping ideas of who can and should practice science.

However, representations of science go beyond ideas of who belongs in the lab and who does not. Science has incredible social, cultural and moral authority in our society. As Roberts argues, “science’s cultural preeminence hardly needs arguing”; “science is now the source of legitimacy for ideology” (8 1999). Thus, it is critical to examine the ways in popular representations construct science and the scientist, particularly for the ideas they communicate about gender and race.

Given the idealization of science in *Star Trek* and the conservative history of the representational politics of science, it is particularly significant to examine the ways in which science is gendered and raced in the supposedly liberal *Star Trek* universe. I would suggest, while we can read *Star Trek*, and appropriately so, as challenging traditional discourses of the scientist as inherently male we must also closely examine the ways in which whiteness underpins that challenge. I would argue by doing so we draw out and make visible the way in which liberalism, as embodied by *Star Trek*, is itself raced and gendered in problematic ways. Revisiting the introductory chapter of this thesis, I would argue it is in these moments that we can complicate an analysis of representations in *Star Trek*. In other

words, we can see the ways that *Star Trek* offers a progressive or ‘feminist’ future, in its representations of women as scientists but that it relies on the continuation of racist and colonialist discourses to do so. In as much, we see, as Shaw suggests, the struggle in *Star Trek* “to extrapolate a benign and egalitarian future from the self-deception of neo-liberalism” (66). In other words, *Star Trek* struggles to imagine an egalitarian future by extrapolating liberal ideology without acknowledging the patriarchal and racist ideology at work within liberalism itself.

In the context of *Star Trek: Voyager*, Captain Janeway embodies this self-defeating struggle. As Janeway challenges the representation of the scientist-as-male, she reinforces the idealization of whiteness as progressive and scientific. The corollary of such is, of course, the representation of racialization as backward and regressive, which as I have and will argue, is frequent in *Star Trek*. The construction of Janeway as the white scientist is established in large part through the parallel construction of Commander Chakotay, who symbolizes the ‘backwardness’ of indigeneity.

Where Captain Janeway represents a challenge to traditional discourses of the masculinity of science and demonstrates the progressive longing in *Star Trek*, representations of Commander Chakotay indicate the continuation of dominant colonial ideology. Commander Chakotay, *Voyager*'s second in command, is *Star Trek*'s first and only Native American character (Booker 124, 2004). Chakotay's Native American heritage is central to his character. Indicating the essentialized construction of indigeneity on *Star Trek*, virtually all *Voyager* episodes which centre on Chakotay revolve around his cultural and spiritual practices. However, like the indigenous settlers of Dorvan V in *TNG*, Chakotay's indigeneity is distinctly generic. The limited specificity to Chakotay's cultural and spiritual

practices is indicative of his role as “imaginary Indian”, constructed almost entirely as a white mediation of indigeneity (Francis 86). Consequently, Chakotay’s spiritual practices, consisting of spirit guides, vision quests and healing rituals, are more like “a New Age vision of generic Native American spirituality” than any authentic indigenous practice (McLaren and Porter 102). Aside from the characterization of his indigenous spirituality, that Chakotay has religious practices is significant in his positioning in the *Trek* narrative. As noted by McLaren and Porter, the marginalization of religion and spirituality on *Star Trek* is considerable (101). Significantly, prior to *Voyager*, characters with religious or spiritual beliefs, like Spock of *TOS*, Worf of *TNG*, and of *DS9*, have all been non-human or alien beings (McLaren and Porter 102). Chakotay is the first human character on the *Star Trek* series to hold religious or spiritual values. That religiosity has in the past been confined to alien characters, but is now extended to a Native American human is significant. However, given, as McLaren and Porter note, that Chakotay Native spirituality is both Othered and essentialized on *Voyager*, I would argue his religiosity is less a normalization of spirituality on *Star Trek* than an affirmation of the alien-ness of indigeneity (102).

The Otherness and marginalization of Chakotay’s indigeneity is particularly visible in the second season episode ‘Resolutions’. Moreover, I would suggest in ‘Resolutions’ not only is Chakotay’s indigeneity on display, but so is Janeway’s whiteness. As Chakotay embodies and reifies colonial discourses of indigeneity, he does so to reinforce Janeway’s progressive and scientific whiteness.

‘Resolutions’ finds Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay stranded on an alien planet after mysteriously contracting an apparently incurable virus. While on the alien planet the virus is immobilized, however, without a cure, Captain Janeway and Commander

Chakotay will have to remain there, leaving *Voyager* to continue its journey back to the Alpha Quadrant without them. While Janeway and Chakotay are eventually rescued after the crew of *Voyager* obtains a treatment regime from a race of aliens with advanced medical knowledge, much of the episode is dedicated to Janeway and Chakotay's new life on the planet. For most of 'Resolutions', Captain Janeway is preoccupied with the task of investigating the virus which has infected them, with hope of finding a cure and returning to *Voyager*. Using medical technology beamed down from *Voyager* Janeway spends "12 hours a day, seven days a week" performing various scientific research (Resolutions). While Janeway makes constant reference to her longing to rejoin the ship and her discomfort with 'roughing it', Chakotay is accepting of their life on the new planet. In fact, Chakotay seems right at home in the wooded environment of the alien planet. Using hitherto absent carpentry skills, Chakotay spends his days building furniture from wood and creating sand art. Embracing their new life, Chakotay encourages Janeway to give up her research, telling her "My people have a saying: even the eagle must know when to sleep" (Resolutions). Whether this is in fact a saying for any indigenous group seems doubtful given the erroneous and stereotypical approach *Star Trek* takes to indigenous culture. That *Star Trek* willingly misrepresents indigeneity to serve narrative function is indicative of the ways in which truth gives way to myth in the construction of indigeneity on television. As Churchill asserts, "It is inevitable that the native be reduced from reality to strange amalgamation of dress, speech, custom and belief. All vestiges of truth...give way...before the onslaught of moveland's mythic creation" (236-7). Devoid of any actual cultural significance indigeneity on *Star Trek* becomes little more than plot device.

Later, the distinction between Chakotay's commitment to make a home on the new planet and Janeway's relentless pursuit to find a cure and get back to *Voyager* is revisited:

Janeway: I'm going to check the insect traps in Beta Four. What are you up to now?

Chakotay: Making headboards. I noticed you sometimes sit up in your bed and read, I figured you might as well be comfortable.

Janeway: That's very thoughtful of you, Chakotay. You've done so many things to make our life here easier. The cooking for example, I hate to cook!

Chakotay: But what I do makes you uncomfortable, doesn't it? Every time I do something that adds a personal touch to the shelter you resist it.

Janeway: Sometimes, it feels as though you've given up. You're focused on making a home here, instead of finding a cure that will let us leave.

Chakotay: I can't sacrifice the present for a future that may never happen. The reality of the situation is that we may never leave here. So yes, I'm trying to make a home, something that's more than a plain grey box.

Janeway: Someday I may have to let go, but not today okay? I tried a new glucose bait in the traps, I have a feeling this might be the day I have a breakthrough!

This exchange is particularly illustrative. Not only are colonial lines drawn between whiteness, indigeneity and science, but significantly between whiteness and progress. It is not simply that Janeway engages with and embraces science, but that Janeway strives to progress. Through Chakotay, indigeneity is constructed not only as naturalistic and primitive but as static, content in (and thereby restricted to) the past.

The juxtaposition between Janeway's scientific pursuits and her lack of ease in the wooded environment and Chakotay's hominess and craftsmanship is indicative of the colonial logic at work in their representational regimes. 'Resolutions' draws frequently on tropes of whiteness as progressive, scientific and civilized and indigeneity as wild and primitive. As cultural representatives, Janeway and Chakotay reify colonial distinctions between whiteness and indigeneity. Janeway embraces science, reinforcing ideas of whiteness as technologically progressive. On the contrary, Chakotay rejects the scientific approach, indicating the primitive nature of indigeneity.

Moreover, I would argue, in 'Resolutions' Chakotay's indigeneity is distinctly essentialized. Despite being a Starfleet graduate and a former officer, Chakotay seems to revert instantly to the 'primitive Native', at home in the wild forests of their new planet. Despite having a replicator, Chakotay *builds* a canoe from wood he has harvested from the forest. Where Chakotay might have developed these skills is unknown, although no doubt the viewer is left to assume it is culturally endowed. Like an image frozen in time, Chakotay is as Churchill describes "a creature of another time" (232). Like the American Indians on Dorvan V, Chakotay is hardly different from contemporary idealizations of Native American. A culture deeply essentialized, Chakotay embodies stereotypes of indigeneity as deeply tied to nature (Kilpatrick xvii). On the contrary, Janeway embodies ideas of whiteness and civilization. Demonstrating the civilized nature of whiteness, Janeway is uncomfortable on the planet, longing to return to the modern and scientific *Voyager*. As Said suggests, the Other in this context indigeneity, is essentialized and de-historicized while whiteness embodies progress and mutability (Wagner and Lundeen 177). In as much, Janeway as the scientist not only symbolizes the technological superiority of Euro-American culture but its

liberal success. Janeway is the *woman* scientist. No longer trapped in patriarchal gender roles (she hates to cook!), Euro-American culture, as embodied by Janeway, has progressed: she is the liberated white woman. Once again *Star Trek* demonstrates its colonial logic, essentializing Chakotay in his primitive and ancient indigenous culture, liberating Janeway through progressive whiteness.

The nature of Janeway's representation as the white woman scientist is particularly significant if we revisit Jowett's assertion about the representational power of the woman scientist. As Jowett suggests, the real and fictional woman scientist struggles to reshape popular ideas of the masculinity of science (31). While Janeway does as much, she concomitantly reinforces ideas of the whiteness of science. In as much, the subversive power of the woman scientist on *Voyager* is muted given the colonial ideology which it reinforces.

#### *The Ultimate Final Frontier: Janeway in the Delta Quadrant*

If, as I have argued, space is an allegory for the American frontier and the colonial adventures, the Delta Quadrant, the space in which *Voyager* takes place, is the ultimate "Final Frontier". Seventy-five thousand light years away from Alpha Quadrant, from which our band of explorers hail, the Delta Quadrant is uncharted, unknown, and heretofore unexplored by the Federation. As Booker writes, "*Voyager* literally travels where no one from Starfleet has gone before" (126, 2004). The Delta Quadrant is filled with unknown alien species, few of which meet Federation standards of technological expertise and political and moral evolution. Accordingly, the Delta Quadrant brims with colonial tropes of Otherness, filled with a motley crew of dangerous, backward and naïve alien others. The infantilized and innocent Ocampan, the barbaric and technologically inferior Kazon, the cruel

and efficient Borg. As the embodiment of Federation values, Janeway is the civilizing force, much like Kirk in *TOS*, filled with Federation bravo and self-assuredness.

As such, I would suggest Janeway's exploration in the Delta Quadrant can be read as distinctly neo-colonial. In reading the neo-colonial narrative in *Voyager* I would draw a parallel between the Federation's mission in the Delta Quadrant and the neo-colonial mission Sherene Razack identifies in the Canadian peacekeeping in Somalia. In her book *Dark Threats & White Knights*, Razack explores the racist and imperial discourses which construct our understanding of the peacekeeping mission in Somalia (2004). As Razack suggests, the violence of peacekeeping has been largely forgiven and eventually forgotten. In its place is a distinctly colonial and racialized mythology of the innocent West obligated to discipline the barbaric East (2004). In as much, Razack argues peacekeeping maintains "a colour line" between the White Knights of the West and the Dark Threat of the Third World (n. pag. 2004). In the context of the *Trek* narrative I would suggest the Federation, as the already established allegory for white Western cultural identity, embody the representational identity of the White Knight. In distinction to the barbaric and backward final frontier, Janeway and her crew, like the members of the peacekeeping alliance in Somalia who align against 'evil', "come to know themselves as members of a more advanced race whose values of democracy and peace simply are not shared by others" (Razack 16, 2004).

The two part *Voyager* episode 'Equinox' is particularly illustrative of the new imperialism described by Razack in *Dark Threats*. In 'Equinox' the *Voyager* crew comes across another Federation vessel in the Delta Quadrant, the *Equinox*, brought there, like *Voyager*, by the Caretaker. However, as Janeway discovers, the *Equinox* has not stuck, as they have, to Federation values. In fact, the crew of the *Equinox* is harvesting and

murdering aliens of an unknown Delta Quadrant species. Converting the alien bodies into fuel to power their warp drive, the *Equinox* has succumb to the savagery of the Delta Quadrant. In this way, the *Equinox* is understood much like the Canadian peacekeepers in Somalia, their brutality and cruelty explained by their “brush with absolute evil” (Razack 17, 2004). The Federation crew of the *Equinox*, like the peacekeepers in Somalia, have ‘lost it’, descending into the savagery that surrounds them. This story, of traumatized peacekeepers and/or Federation explorers, is an inherently colonial one. Lost in the Delta quadrant among apparently brutal and uncivilized races, ‘*Equinox*’ is laden with metaphors of the heart of darkness, reiterating colonialist anxieties about places and spaces so corrupt with savagery that even the good must fall. As Razack explains, this narrative “depends for its coherency on the logic of rational men and women from white nations who encounter people and things in the south that are beyond rationality, things that can literally drive them mad” (18, 2004). If as I have argued, the Federation is an allegory for white Western nations and the Delta Quadrant an allegory for the frontier/colonial land, then the ongoing colonial logic of *Star Trek* is once again laid bare.

In as much as the Delta Quadrant is an allegory for the frontier, I would argue it can similarly be read through the captivity narrative in which, the innocent white colonizer is ‘captured’ by the Indians (Kilpatrick 2). As Razack explains, the captivity narrative is one which symbolizes the dark nature of the ‘savage’ and the redemptive strength of whiteness. As both *Voyager* and the *Equinox* have been stranded in the Delta Quadrant, they are in a sense ‘captive’, far from civilization, traveling through dark and dangerous territory. Where the *Equinox* has succumbed to the spiritual threat of the Indian/Delta Quadrant, *Voyager* has

persevered. In her perseverance, *Voyager* “vindicates both her own moral character and the power of the values she symbolizes” (Razack 17, 2004).

Continuing a reading of the Delta Quadrant as the frontier/colonial land, I would argue the figure of the liberated white women in Captain Janeway is particularly significant. In as much as Janeway is the expert woman scientist, she is also the liberated woman Captain, the pinnacle of authority and leadership. In this way, Captain Janeway mirrors the imperial Western woman, constructed as liberated in opposition to her imperiled sister of East/Delta Quadrant. Here I draw again on the work of Sherene Razack, in this case her book *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. As Razack argues, in the colonial narrative gender itself operates as a “technology of empire” through which the West predicates its claim to modernity and legitimizes its civilizing projects (Razack 18, 2008). The contemporary enactment of the imperial project, the War on Terror, rests on the Orientalist representations of Muslim women as abject victims and of Muslim men as ultrapatriarchal and rapaciously violent, informing, justifying and reinforcing the ‘threat’ posed by the Muslim man to the West. The apparent gender exceptionalism of the West, personified by the liberated white woman, mark the West as exceptionally tolerant and egalitarian. In essence, representations of ‘the East’ as barbaric and patriarchal serve both to mark the ‘West’ as civilized and tolerant and to animate and justify imperial projects. In Janeway we find the embodiment of the discourse of white Western woman as liberated. Projected into the future, Janeway enacts Western gender exceptionalism, in which only in the distinctly white future which *Star Trek* creates, are (white) women starship captains.

Janeway is not only the liberated but also the liberating white figure. In the premier episode of *Voyager*, ‘Caretaker’ Janeway rescues the feminized Ocampa from the attacks of

the brutal and backward Kazon. In this way, Janeway repeats the Imperial narrative as we read the vulnerable and feminized Ocampo as signifiers for ‘imperiled Muslim women’ and the violent and patriarchal Kazon as signifiers for ‘dangerous Muslim men’. However, not only is Janeway the imperial force but the liberated woman as imperial force, solidifying the narrative in *Star Trek* of the white, liberated woman as a mechanism of Western imperialism and colonialism.

### *Conclusion*

I began this chapter with an illustration of the colonial narrative at the heart of the *Star Trek* text. As I have suggested, the colonial project within *Star Trek* is significant, particularly because *Star Trek* personifies the idealized liberal project. In other words, the narrative of colonial exploration within *Star Trek* is meaningful particularly because *Star Trek* is a program which professes to put into practice the liberating progressivism of liberal ideology. This reading of *Star Trek*’s liberalism, particularly its postfeminist ethos in tandem with its (neo)colonial ethic is significant. *Star Trek: The Original Series* is, after all, the program which produced the first interracial kiss on television (Shaw 66). Moreover, successive embodiments of the *Star Trek* series have addressed and critiqued racial, gender and material inequality. It has even been argued that *Star Trek* takes a reflexive and reparative approach to our colonial past, most ostensibly through its credos of non-interventionist exploration, the Prime Directive (Russell and Wolski 2007). However, as I have argued, despite its progressive moments *Star Trek* frequently reproduces the inequalities it so desperately struggles to project beyond. While *Star Trek* may imagine a brilliant techno-future of the 24<sup>th</sup> century with female scientists and starship captains and

multiracial/multispecies crews, it never manages to suppress self-deceptions of contemporary neo-liberalism” and neocolonialism (Shaw 66).

As I have argued, the complex logic of neo-colonialism in *Star Trek* is imbedded directly into its “ongoing mission” to both “seek out new civilizations” and “to boldly go where no one has gone before”. This mission is of course, a paradox, which as Fulton suggests, is only reconcilable “through the lens of frontier ideology, which grants new civilizations existence only to the extent that the originary culture has “found” them” (n. pag.).

Moreover, the Federation and the future itself, is one which professes an eventual coalescence around white Western culture as the apex of human development. It seems only the indigenous cultures of North America remain, although not to demonstrate the enduring nature of their rich culture but rather to serve as a foil, to reflect back the technological progress made by the rest of (white) humanity. As I have argued, the neo-colonial discourse of *Star Trek* is literally personified by the characters of Commander Chakotay and Captain Janeway of *Star Trek: Voyager*. Chakotay demonstrates the patronizing rendition of indigeneity so common in popular culture. Culturally generic, Chakotay is the ‘imaginary Indian’ constructed to suit the rhetorical needs of colonial ideology. Janeway, on the contrary, embodies progressive whiteness, her scientific knowledge drawn and reinforced by and through Chakotay’s essentialized indigeneity. Janeway’s character in particular illustrates the contemporary neocolonial project, in which Western superiority is personified by its liberal postfeminist ethos. It is again, in this moment, *Star Trek’s* liberal humanism is exposed as bringing some in and leaving others out.

The tension between *Star Trek's* postfeminist ethic and its embodiment of colonial ideology is read particularly well through the work of Sherene Razack. In this way, Janeway's journey through the Delta Quadrant, the definitive "final frontier", exemplifies contemporary neo-colonial mythology. Threatened on all sides by backwards brutality, personifying liberal civilization Janeway journeys home to the Alpha Quadrant, like the white peacekeepers in Somalia, confronted and driven mad by the savagery of the Other. Likewise, as the white woman scientist, Janeway establishes not only the progressive and scientific superiority of whiteness over indigeneity, but of imperial Western nations over the East.

‘Crippling’ the Future: Reading Queerness and Disability in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Star Trek: Voyager*

“I never knew what a friend was until I met Geordi. He spoke to me as though I were human; he treated me no different from anyone else. He accepted me for what I am and that, I have learned, is friendship.”

(Data, The Next Phase, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*)

In the *Star Trek: The Next Generation Companion*, Larry Nemecek wrote of the pioneering history of progressive representations on the series (1992). Nowhere else on television, Nemecek argued, had we seen “the intelligent and fair-minded depiction of various sexes, races, and ethnic groups, including alien” (194). However, absent in *Trek*’s pioneering vision of the future was the representation of same-sex desire, either human or alien. Given *Trek*’s history of progressive representation of social and political issues, its silence on gay rights and queer existence is significant. As Roberts suggests, in *Sexual Generations*, that *TNG* failed to articulate a sexually diverse future is particularly notable given that gay rights were of great public debate at the time of its air (1987-1994) (108, 1999). It seemed, according to Joyrich, the *Trekian* ethos of ‘infinite diversity in infinite combinations’ didn’t stretch to anything resembling sexual diversity (1996).

While much has been said about the lack of visible same-sex desire in *Star Trek*’s utopian future, little has been written about *Trek*’s sticky relationship with disability. As Kanar writes in “No Ramps in Space: The Inability to Envision Accessibility in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*,” *Trek* has at best a spotty inclusion of disabled characters in the series as a whole (257). As Kanar argues, the exclusion of disability on *Trek*, and I would add that of diverse sexualities, contributes to the belief that disabled and queer lives are rare, both now and in the future (2000). That *Star Trek* imagines disability so rarely in the twenty-fourth century not only speaks to its isolation in contemporary society, but to the ways in which

disabled people are written out of our collective future. Unlike the ever evolving representations of race and gender on *Trek*, representations of disability, however rare, have changed little since *TOS* (Kantar 245). In as much as *Trek* rarely engages with disability on screen, it is similarly ignored in the analytical work written about the series. Where there is, perhaps, regular acknowledgment of *Trek's* failure to openly represent a sexually diverse future, there appears to be virtual silence concerning *Trek's* failure to significantly question discourses of ableism and accessibility in the future. As such, this chapter looks to counter not only the academic silence concerning disability in *Star Trek* but also to open up the possibility that *Trek* can in fact be read in a way that celebrates queered and (dis)abled lives. In doing so, this work looks to complicate the monolithic accounts of *Trek*, which read the text as wholly heteronormative and ableist. Given the dearth of queer- and disability-focused work on *Trek*, this chapter is written to expand our collective knowledge both of *Trek* itself and of how disability and queerness are represented and understood in popular culture. Moreover, extending the theoretical work of queer disability theorist Robert McRuer, this chapter will take an intersectional approach, exploring the ways in which sexuality and ability are intimately connected in popular imagination and dominant ideology.

The analysis of popular culture and television in particular is significant in examining the cultural construction of disability and sexuality. As critical disability scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argue, narrative is central to understanding how disability is constructed and circulated in popular discourses (Murray 4). In other words, discourses surrounding disability and, I would add, queerness, are shaped in and by popular media, far more than “policies and personal interaction” (Murray 4). As has been noted, *Trek* is a particularly potent artifact of popular culture (Penley 1997). With epic proportions of

cultural saturation and a distinctly liberal ideology (structured by the principles of progress, reason, individualism and tolerance) *Trek* presents a critical opportunity to engage with identity politics and popular culture at its most culturally salient. Given the incredible representational power of television and the importance of deconstructing those most culturally persuasive images, *Star Trek* offers a critical look at what it means to be queered and disabled in contemporary society.

As such, in as much as this chapter is about reading queerness and disability into *Star Trek* I am also looking to ask what those representations mean. In other words, while this chapter asks how queerness and disability are represented, I also make a claim for a crip reading of *Trek*, in which disability and queerness are seen to challenge compulsive heterosexuality and ablebodiedness in complex and productive ways. In order to do so, I examine two *Trek* characters, *TNG* character Data and *Voyager* character Seven of Nine. Neither Data nor Seven of Nine have visible or recognized disabilities within the *Trek* universe. However, I would argue both Data and Seven can be read as ‘disabled’ in that they express non-neurotypical behaviour and affect. I make this claim not simply on the basis of the similarity between the behaviours of these characters and typical behavioural traits of non-neurotypical or autistic people. Rather, I make this claim because of the relationship autistic people have drawn between themselves and these *Trek* characters. As Rachel Groner writes in *Sex as ‘Spock’: Autism, Sex and Autobiographical Narrative*, the *Star Trek* metaphor is one made often by the autistic authors she examined. As Groner notes, many autistic authors draw parallels between their own experiences and those of *Trek* characters’ who experience difficulty recognizing and feeling typical human emotional experiences (264). As Groner writes, “these characters are relentlessly logical beings who do not

recognize or feel human emotions and instead rely on fact and figures to negotiate social relationships. For this reason, many autistic writers compare themselves to these characters” (264). As such, in this chapter I read both Data and Seven’s exceptional logic and rationality and concomitant difficulty (or inability) to express and experience emotional feelings as symbolic of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and thus these characters as disabled. I will note, however, as Groner and Baron-Cohen do, that ASD is not in itself *ipso facto* a disability. Instead, autism, like all ‘disability’, is socially and culturally constructed and represented in ways defined by normative ableist ways of being. As Baron-Cohen writes

people with [ASD] might not necessarily be disabled in an environment in which an exact mind, attracted to detecting small details is an advantage. In the social world there is no great benefit to such a precise eye for detail, but in the world of math, computing, cataloguing, music, linguistics, crafts, engineering or science, such as eye for detail can lead to success rather than disability (qtd. in Groner 266).

Baron-Cohen’s acknowledgement is no where more true than in the *Trek* universe where the exacting eye and unerring proficiency of both Data and Seven consistently result in their respective crews being wrenched from the jaws of death just in the nick of time. However, in the larger cultural scheme the non-typical behaviour of both Data and Seven is recognized as socially ‘disabling’ and is generally a theme for both characters in the respective series.

As I question what representations of disability and sexuality on *Star Trek* mean, I look to Robert McRuer’s crip theory to provide a theoretical account for the relationship between queerness and disability in culture. As noted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, McRuer’s crip theory is a coming together of critical disability studies and queer theory in which McRuer suggests an intimate connection between compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality. According to McRuer, the idealization of normalcy produces the compulsive nature of both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, in

which each is contingent on the other. As McRuer writes, heterosexuality and disability are entwined in a

complex process of conflation and stereotype: people with disabilities are often understood as somehow queer (as paradoxical stereotypes of the asexual or oversexual person with disabilities would suggest), while queers are often understood as somehow disabled (an ongoing medicalization of identity similar to what people with disabilities more generally encounter, would suggest) (qtd. in Groner 265).

In other words, the system of compulsory heterosexuality, which compels its adherence and produces queerness as its contingency, is interwoven with a system of compulsive ablebodiedness, which likewise produces disability (McRuer 2). Each draws on the other, especially in America, where as Michael Warner writes “being normal probably outranks all other social aspiration” (qtd. in McRuer 7). In as much as both heterosexuality and ablebodiedness rest on a foundation of “normal relations” (i.e. ‘normal’ relations between the sexes and ‘normal’ bodily capabilities) each mutually compels their adherence as they consolidate heteronormative ablebodied subjectivity. As McRuer writes, the compulsory system demands an affirmative answer to the (sometimes) unspoken question “Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?” (9). However, as McRuer notes, (as Butler did before him concerning heterosexuality) ablebodiedness is itself a fundamentally unattainable possibility and thus is always in danger of collapse. In response, crip theory speaks back to hegemonic representations of queer and disabled bodies, pushing the precarious nature of compulsive heterosexuality and compulsive ablebodiedness ever more toward crisis. As McRuer writes, “[i]deally, crip theory might function – like the term “queer” itself – “oppositionally and relationally but not necessarily substantively, not as a positivity but as a positionality, not as a thing, but as a resistance to the norm”” (Halperin 66 qtd. in McRuer 31). In other words, crip theory is always about imagining alternative queer

and disabled bodies and lives, resisting their containment and disrupting the performance of able-bodied heterosexuality. Thus, a crip reading of *Star Trek* looks for the ways the text constructs and positions disability and queerness as desirable and thus pushes forward the crisis in compulsive able-bodied heterosexuality. In this chapter, I explore these very moments as well as those in which our ‘disabled’ characters resist heterosexuality by questioning and rejecting normative narratives of sex, love and pleasure and by embracing the queerness of disability. Of course, this is not always possible. However, I look to these moments not to deny the presence of compulsive able-bodiedness and heteronormativity in *Star Trek*, but rather to recognize the meaningful experiences we find when popular culture resists dominant discourses and gives voice to alternative bodies and lives.

It is in this spirit that I look to queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003) and her reparative approach to critical reading. According to Sedgwick a reparative reading is one that emphasizes the possibility of pleasure and hope in critical reading. I employ Sedgwick’s reparative approach in the hope of countering the largely suspicious nature of much of the (little) work written on queerness and disability in *Star Trek*. As such, the reparative approach is taken both to acknowledge the queer pleasure that undoubtedly exists in *Trek* (no less proven by its large queer fan base), but also to recognize the ways that communities which are so routinely marginalized and disavowed in mainstream media find subsistence, joy and resistance in popular culture.

#### *Resistance is Not Futile: ‘Crippling’ Seven of Nine*

One of *Voyager*’s most popular and remembered cast members, Seven of Nine, is both an intellectual and visual spectacle. Her buxom figure is met with a cold affect and a

flawless, almost robotic intellect. Born human but raised by Borg, Seven is a cyborg, unusually preoccupied by the search for 'perfection', scientific and otherwise. While the majority of Seven's 'Borg' implants have been removed, she is visibly marked by a remaining metallic ocular implant above her left eye and Borg assimilation tubes on her left hand. To survive, Seven relies on billions of Borg nanoprobes, which maintain her remaining internal Borg implants and require weekly maintenance by the ship's Doctor. A former drone and unwillingly separated from the collective, Seven is a reluctant member of the *Voyager* crew. She struggles at times to understand and interact with her crewmates. Rebuffing the sympathetic behaviour of others, Seven exhibits little interest in displays of affection or emotion and generally navigates her relationships with crewmembers through the practiced application of rationality and logic.

While Seven's behaviour is rendered simply peculiar to her crewmates, I would suggest a more productive interpretation would be to read Seven as an autistic character. While autism and autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are frequently referred to in popular media (Murray 11), I would take this moment to briefly describe it as its misrepresentation lends to the domination of ableist narratives of autism. The misrepresentation of autism in media, both television and print are linked directly to the ableist rhetoric which informs our cultural understanding of normative neurological and physical ways of being. Autism is described in the medical community as a neurological disorder that manifests in a variety of cognitive, sensory and social behaviours deemed non-typical to most (neurotypical or NT) people (Groner 266). For example, autistic individuals may be particularly sensitive to certain stimuli, like a particular smell, sound or touch. Autistic individuals also typically have difficulty developing and maintaining relationships as many find unspoken

communication, like body language, to be difficult to read and imitate (Groner 266, Lawson 19). Correctly referred to as autism spectrum disorders (ASD) the behaviour of autistic individuals has a wide range, from exceptionally high levels of intellect to severe cognitive delay. As Murray notes in *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination*, the range of behaviours which may constitute autism are likely just as diverse as those which constitute neuro-typical subjectivity (3). In reading Seven as autistic, I connect her significant cognitive abilities, her photographic memory and her ease in absorbing and ordering large amounts of information to typical ‘high-functioning’ autistic behaviour (Groner 266). Likewise, I read Seven’s struggles with interpersonal interaction as another common experience of ASD, as the emotional experiences of her crewmates frequently baffle or frustrate her. In reading Seven as autistic I would argue, as Murray does in his examination of autism in Melville and Dickens, that it is not simply the addition of another variable to compliment a critical textual analysis of *Trek*, but rather to suggest that there are “different possibilities as to what th[e] stor[y] might *mean*” (Murray 12). In other words, if we read Seven as autistic we may read the story of *Star Trek* in a vastly different way than it is currently understood. No longer is a *Star Trek* a future in which disability is largely eliminated through technological and medical ‘advancement’ but rather a future where ‘disability’ not only exists but flourishes.

The representation of Seven on *Trek* moves beyond the stereotypical ‘tragic’ representations of autism on television (Murray 2). Rather, Seven offers a narrative of disability, which, if not in whole at least in part, significantly resists dominant discourses of disability as constituting a lack. In the alternative, Seven is represented as resisting her

‘humanization’ (which in *Trek* is coded as ‘normalization’) and significantly challenging the heteronormative narrative foisted upon her.

Much of what constitutes Seven’s resistance to compulsive heteronormativity and compulsive ablebodiedness is her resistance to the normative performance of gendered behaviour. In as much, Seven is not ‘queered’ by virtue of same-sex desire, but rather by her resistance and failure to conform to an imperative ableist, heteronormative life. Reading Seven as productively queered relies on her (dis)ability to, as Groner argues, give voice to the “strangeness and unintelligibility of gender and sexual norms” (270). In this way, as she resists the performance of compulsive heteronormativity and ablebodiedness, Seven “point[s] to fictiveness of NT heteronormativity” (Groner 270). In other words, as Seven articulates her ‘crippled’ life as both possible and desirable, she thereby disrupts the compulsivity of heterosexuality and ablebodiedness. In as much as Seven resists love, sex, monogamy, heterosexuality, etc. she demonstrate that compulsive ablebodied heterosexuality can, in fact, be rejected.

Seven’s resistance to or ‘failure’ to perform normative heterosexual femininity is highlighted in *Voyager* episode ‘Revulsion’. In ‘Revulsion,’ Ensign Harry Kim and Seven of Nine are dispatched to upgrade the astrometrics lab together. Standing in the Jefferey’s tube Ensign Kim, clearly attracted to Seven, attempts to make small talk, asking Seven what she likes to do with her spare time. Seven responds by detailing her impressive technical and scientific studies, concluding that when she has finished these she likes to “contemplate her existence” (Revulsion). Clearly a little put off, Ensign Kim questions Seven’s habit of spending her time off duty alone. To this, Seven responds simply with a look, confirming that she has no interest in socializing with Ensign Kim or any of her other crewmates. In as

much as Seven refuses to flirt back with Ensign Kim, she denies the normative feminine response; that is, to receive and respond to men's romantic interests. Her intension is more than clear, as the scene is obviously meant both to establish Ensign Kim's unrequited feelings for Seven and Seven's concurrent disdain for 'human' social ritual. Not dissuaded by Seven's apparent disinterest, Ensign Kim invites Seven to the mess hall to continue their project on the ship's astrometrics lab. After hours with the hall darkly lit, Ensign Kim attempts to set a romantic mood. Reporting to the mess hall, Seven immediately declares the lighting "insufficient" for her purposes and refuses to sit with Ensign Kim, preferring to stand, declaring that "comfort is irrelevant, we are here to work" (Revulsion). When Ensign Kim suggests a visit to the ship's holodeck to watch a beautiful Katarian moonrise, Seven responds with amusing and exacting honesty:

Seven: Beauty is irrelevant. Unless you wish to change the nature of our affiliation?

Ensign Kim: What do you mean?

Seven: I may be new to individuality but I am not ignorant to human behaviour. I've noticed your attempts to engage me in idle conversation and I see the way your pupils dilate when you look at my body.

Ensign Kim: (*nervously*) I don't know what you're talking about!

Seven: Obviously you've suggested a trip to the holodeck in the hopes of creating a romantic mood. Are you in love with me Ensign?

Ensign Kim: Well, no!

Seven: Then you wish to copulate?

Ensign Kim: No! I mean...I don't know what I mean!

Seven: These elaborate rituals of deception! I didn't realize becoming human again would be such a challenge. Sexuality is particularly complex, as Borg we had no need for seduction, no time for single cell fertilization. We saw a species we wanted and we assimilated it. Nevertheless, I am willing to explore my humanity. Take off your clothes!

In response to Seven's direct invitation for sex, Ensign Kim panics and fumbles a refusal. Seven responds in the affirmative without a hint of embarrassment and suggests Ensign Kim recall her when he is interested in working on the astrometrics project. While Seven's behaviour is likely meant to demonstrate to the audience her strangeness and the lengths from which she will have to come to regain her 'humanity', I would suggest it also demonstrates the 'strangeness' of heteronormative romance. By highlighting the "elaborate rituals of deception", Seven points to the arbitrary nature of gendered interactions. Ensign Kim is clearly sexually attracted to Seven, as his discussion with another crewmate establishes early in the episode. However, Kim is only comfortable pursuing his attraction to Seven under the guise of romantic ritual and is distinctly off put when Seven contravenes normative gendered behaviour and rejects both her feminized role as passive participant and simultaneously resists expected emotive responses to the situation. On the contrary, Seven approaches her 'copulation' with Ensign Kim outside the dominant heterosexual narrative of love and romance as necessary for sex or sexual activity. As Groner argues, there is something decidedly queer about the expression of sexuality that occurs outside or disconnected from heteronormative discourses of sex, love and pleasure (275). Moreover, that Seven suggests that human sex is not universal and epitomic but rather one alternative in

a scheme of endless choices (including Borg assimilation), she rearticulates sex in a decidedly denaturalized and queer way.

Seven's questioning of romantic ritual is continued in episode twenty-two of season four, 'Unforgettable'. In 'Unforgettable' *Voyager* encounters a secretive species of aliens, the Ramoran, who are forgotten by those they encounter immediately after their departure. While this episode revolves around a developing romance between a fleeing Ramoran woman, Kellin and *Voyager*'s second in command, Chakotay, Seven's struggle to make sense of their relationship is meaningful in a discussion of queerness and disability in *Voyager*. Discussing their new shipmate, Seven, again in the company of Ensign Kim, questions the flirtation between Chakotay and Kellin:

Seven: When you mentioned Commander Chakotay's name she flushed. He did the same when he saw her.

Ensign Kim: What are you saying?

Seven: I suspect the Commander and Kellin are engaged in a courtship ritual. It seems an unnecessary and complicated precursor to the act of procreation.

Ensign Kim: (laughs). I know you think so but trust me, some people need those rituals.

Seven: Explain.

Ensign Kim: It's usually considered a good idea if two people get to know each other before they become...intimate.

Seven: Why is that?

Ensign Kim: (*pauses to think*). Because it's more comfortable. You spend some time together, you laugh, you talk. That makes it easier to get...closer.

Seven: But the end result is the same, is it not?

Ensign Kim: ...Well...I guess so.

Seven: Then I fail to see what is accomplished by all the talk.

Ensign Kim: Seven, if you don't get it then I can't explain it to you.

Seven: Obviously!

Once again Seven's questioning demonstrates the strange and contrived nature of human (or alien) romantic ritual. As Ensign Kim struggles to explain the logic of 'getting to know one another', not only does he fail to convince Seven, but in many ways his failure stands to undermine heteronormativity itself. No longer is Seven simply strange for 'not getting it' but rather the rituals themselves are exposed for their own strangeness and unnaturalness. In other words, those rituals, of dating, or 'getting to know one another' which underpin monogamous (and puritanical) heterosexual interaction and which are largely unquestioned or unqualified, are in this moment exposed as, perhaps, not as absolute after all. Moreover, Seven's questioning in, and of itself, counters the unspoken assumption of the naturalness and inevitability of heteronormative romantic ritual. That Seven even raises questions (and doubts) establishes the possibility of alternatives to heterosexual 'romance' and as McRuer argues, this is critical role of crip theory: to push forward the crisis in heteronormative able-bodiedness by pointing to the moments of failure and suggesting alternatives.

In these moments of questioning, where Seven reorients the heteronormative narrative and rewrites normative sexual practices as undesirable or inaccessible. As discussed earlier, much of what makes autism a disability in social and sexual contexts "arises from a perceived failure to read and correctly perform heteronormative codes of sexual behaviour –

or, from an intractable awareness of the illogic and arbitrariness of these codes” (Groner 270). In this sense Seven is ‘disabled’ by her inability (or unwillingness) to accept the arbitrary nature of heteronormative behaviour. In as much, Seven resists compulsive ablebodiedness and heterosexuality not only by questioning heteronormative romantic rituals, but also by refusing to accept the illogical explanations offered by her colleagues.

Seven’s questioning extends beyond the mere practices of flirtatious behaviour and delves right to the heart of heteronormativity. In the episode ‘Course: Oblivion’ an alternative universe *Voyager* ship is traveling through the Delta Quadrant made entirely of biomimetic life forms who look and act just like the real *Voyager* crew. On the alternative *Voyager* central characters Tom Paris and B’Elanna Torres get married and are preparing for their honeymoon. As Seven will replace B’Elanna as Chief Engineer during her time away - the two are shown crawling through a Jefferies tube repairing the subsidiary injector core. Discussing Seven’s possible future romantic prospects, Seven rejects the necessity of marriage or monogamy. Instead Seven states she intends to “stay open to social situations with a wide variety of individuals” (Course: Oblivion). In explanation, Seven declares: “I do not wish to be dependent on anyone. By marrying, one limits one’s romantic interactions to a single individual, a circumstance which implies extreme monotony” (Course: Oblivion’). Again, I would argue Seven’s resistance to monogamy, marriage and traditional gender roles takes a decidedly queer edge. By refusing monogamy (and rather cleverly with a play on the word monotony) and marriage, Seven undoes the compulsivity of heteronormativity, simply by demonstrating that it *can* be refused. Her claims to a possibly polyamorous or non-monogamous lifestyle present a radical critique of compulsory monogamy. As transnational queer theorist Jinhana K. Haritaworn explains, the politics and practices of polyamory and

non-monogamy themselves demonstrate the ways in which family, kinship, and intimate relationships are socially constructed in normative ways (518). As Seven makes a claim for polyamory as not only a possible but a desirable lifestyle, she counters heteronormative discourses which represent polyamory as dysfunctional and pathological (Haritaworn 518) and makes a claim for the desirability of queer lives. Moreover, I would argue Seven's polyamorous desire disrupts traditional gendered expectations of women as chaste and naturally monogamous as she states her interest in being *open* to a *wide* variety of individuals. Likewise, I would argue Seven resists the "pervasive assumption of asexuality that informs dominant cultural representations of autism" as she makes her own claim to a sexual life (Groner 273).

Seven illustrates a particularly dynamic resistance to normative sexual and body politics on *Trek*, even in the moments when she appears to be reinforcing them. *Star Trek* and *Voyager* in particular are not without ableist and heteronormative impulses and any discussion of sexuality and disability on *Trek* would be remiss without acknowledging as much. The relationship between compulsive heteronormativity and compulsive ablebodiedness is nowhere more clear than in *Voyager's* readings of 'humanness' through Seven of Nine. As has been discussed earlier in this work, Seven's character in *Voyager* is one who is largely meant to mediate the human experience. As Graham explains,

Born human, but raised by Borg, Seven of Nine in *Voyager* must relearn all the complexities of human behavior, such as social interaction, solitude and companionship, individual responsibility and collective loyalty. They all stand within the tradition...of the foreigner or alien who serves as critical foil to the taken-for-granted assumptions of the host culture (133)

As Seven is 'humanized' (i.e. normalized), the relationship between queerness and disability in dominant discourse becomes ever more clear. Seven's humanizing (by virtue of learning

or relearning typical human behaviour) is akin to a process of ‘normalization’, a washing away of Seven’s ‘Borg’/autistic behaviour. Importantly, as Seven is ‘humanized’, she begins to comply with traditional heteronormative behaviour (femininity, longing for romance, partnership, etc.) and her disability is ‘overcome’, both in her personality and body. In other words, as Seven ‘overcomes’ her social and emotional difficulties (read as her disability), she is sexually recuperated, drawn toward heterosexual romance and motherhood and importantly, her visibly effacing Borg implants disappear. The visual representation of Seven is significant as, I would argue, the relationship between disability and gender is particularly illustrative in Seven’s visible Borg markings. While I have argued here that it is Seven’s behavioural differences which construct her as ‘disabled’, I would additionally suggest it is her Borg implants which visually signify her as Other and reinforce her disabled-ness. In this sense, both her cognitive abilities and her Borg implants prevent Seven from satisfying cultural norms, gendered and otherwise. That Seven is a woman is significant in terms of understanding the intersection of gender and disability in her (dis)abled cyborg body. As feminist disability scholar Rosemary Garland-Thompson would argue, the disciplinary nature by which women’s bodies are evaluated is linked to discourses of disability in which it is imperative that women’s bodies appear both ‘normal’ and ‘beautiful’ (24). In as much as Seven is marked by her Borg implants she is distinctly not ‘normal’. This is made particularly clear in the episode ‘Unimatrix Zero’, as described earlier, when Captain Janeway acknowledges Seven’s differing appearance in the alternate universe in which the episode takes place. In ‘Unimatrix Zero’, Seven discovers she previously had a relationship with another Borg drone, Axum, a discovery of Seven’s heterosexuality essentially unbeknownst to herself or her crew beforehand. Significantly,

Seven appears on *Unimatrix Zero* literally different than on board the ship. Seven no longer wears her dermaplastic catsuit and rather importantly, appears without her visible Borg implants. Notably her more ‘human’ appearance is brought on not simply by the alternative reality but by her active choice. As Axum tells Seven when she first appears in the virtual reality world that is *Unimatrix Zero*, “here we can look however we choose” (*Unimatrix Zero*). In as much, Axum articulates the narrative of choice critical to both discourses of compulsive heterosexuality and compulsive ablebodiedness: that the never ceasing stride toward normalcy is both necessary and possible. The fictive nature of choice aside, Seven’s ‘choice’ to appear without her Borg implants affirms the expectation of compulsive ablebodiedness that in the end, ‘they’ would always rather be like ‘us’. In the dialogue of ‘*Unimatrix Zero*’ both Janeway and Seven unselfconsciously point to Seven’s more human (or ‘normal’) appearance. Remarking after they emerge from *Unimatrix Zero* Captain Janeway and Seven have a particularly illustrative exchange:

Captain Janeway: I couldn’t help but notice you were a little different in *Unimatrix Zero* and I don’t mean your lack of Borg implants. You seemed more...

Seven of Nine: Human.

Captain Janeway: If you don’t mind my saying so, it suited you.

Contrary to Janeway’s assertion, I would argue Seven’s more ‘human’ appearance is directly related to her lack of Borg implants. That Seven’s burgeoning heterosexuality and her growing humanity appear to coalesce at this moment when she is unencumbered by her

implants is meaningful. It is indicative of the ableist and heteronormative narrative in *Trek* which, as Seven is humanized/normalized, she is also heterosexualized, visibly manifesting itself by unmarking Seven's gendered body and rewriting her as 'normal'; socially, sexually and physically. In this moment, the compulsive nature of heterosexual ablebodiedness is unmistakably evident. As Seven is rewritten as ablebodied, both in her appearance and in her affect, she is necessarily 'straightened', drawn toward heterosexuality as though it is inescapable. This is, of course, McRuer's larger argument in *Crip Theory*, that heterosexuality and ablebodiedness are inexorably intertwined and interdependent through the language and context of 'normal relations' (8).

In addition, the construction of Seven of Nine as a crippled character in *Trek* relies no less on a particular politics of racialization and disability. In a context in which women's bodies are mediated through a disciplinary structure which demands simultaneously both normalcy and beauty, the inflection of race and whiteness is ever present. As discussed earlier, it is remarkable that Seven is not only the personification of hegemonic feminine beauty but also *white* feminine beauty. Seven's whiteness is significant in understanding how her function as a crip character plays out, on screen and for audiences. As Garland-Thomas writes, "Race, gender, disability, and sexuality augment one another...to produce a spectacle of embodied Otherness that is simultaneously sensational, sentimental, and pathological" (21). In as much as racialization augments disability, Seven's cripness is cloistered by whiteness. In other words, in as much as Seven's atypical affect Others her on *Trek*, she is normalized by her embodiment of hegemonic white femininity. While Seven may be queered by *Trek* she is tolerated and made safe for audience consumption

(particularly male audience consumption) by her heteronormative sexual appeal and her visual representation of Hollywood's white, feminine ideal.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, Seven is ultimately largely recuperated from her crippled existence. In learning to approach sex and gender in a normative manner Seven fulfills gendered expectation of motherhood, monogamy, and love. However, Seven is never *fully* recuperated in part because her visible Borg implants never really disappear. While Seven is imagined as without her implants at various key moments in the series, these moments are always temporary and illusionary. As such, I would argue Seven's implants serve to mark her tense position between disability and ability, between heteronormativity and queerness. At the very least, Seven's frequent 'missteps', relapses into failed femininity, serve as televisual light posts highlighting and even celebrating the existence of crippled lives in the future. In other words, despite Seven's apparent recuperation, *Voyager* is largely a series mapped by Seven's refusal of compulsive heteronormativity and able-bodiedness and her claims to a rich crippled life which serve an ever-valuable purpose to crippled *Trek* fans who hold onto characters like Seven as a validation of queer and disabled lives in popular culture. Moreover, for the viewer who looks for those moments in *Trek* when the utopianism of the future includes queer and crippled lives, I would argue the unconvincing nature of Seven's last minute dive into heterosexual monogamy serves to reinforce the unconvincing nature of compulsory heteronormative able-bodiedness itself.

### *Doing Data*

Like Seven of Nine, Data is one of the most well-known and well-liked characters of the *Star Trek* series. However, unlike Seven, Data is an android, an entirely cybernetic automaton made to look and act like human beings (Graham 137). A commissioned science

officer on the *USS Enterprise*, Data is a member of the bridge crew on *TNG* and a character around which many episodes focus. Created by Doctor Noonien Soong, Data has been made to resemble and imitate human beings. This imitation comes remarkably close, however Data struggles with the subtleties of human social interaction. While Data's positronic brain is exceptional in its abilities, giving Data an "encyclopedic accuracy" which far outweighs that of his crewmates he has no capacity to experience human emotion, a much lamented loss for Data (Hark 60). Frequently compared to *TOS*'s much-loved half-human, half-Vulcan Spock, Data (like Seven of Nine) exists in the *Trek* universe largely as a comment on humanness in an age of technological advancement and interspecies procreation. However, where Spock is known for his unending struggle to suppress his human side, "Data yearns from the beginning to be human" (Hark 64). Despite his longing for humanness, Data frequently struggles to understand or perform human emotion, often, like Seven applying logic and rationality to complex and arbitrary human behaviour. Much like Seven in *Voyager*, Data is the consummate Other in *TNG*, a distinctly troubled subjectivity rooted in *Trek*'s ableist impulses and anxiety about the future of humanness. However, I would argue in Data's representation on *Trek*, we can find a distinctly crippled representation of the future and as such, I would make the claim for a productive reading of Data as autistic/disabled in the *Trek* universe. Again, I would qualify Data's 'disabled' reading in the context of a frequently ableist cultural lens. As was noted earlier, while Data's incredible cognitive abilities frequently rescue his crew from certain doom, Data's struggle with and yearning for complex emotional experiences often render his unique affect as 'disabled' and it is from this point which we contextualize his ability.

Despite Data's apparent longing for humanity and 'disabled' coding, there are many instances in *TNG* where Data successfully positions queer and disabled lives as desirable. Like that of Seven, as a non-human character on *Trek* Data's sexuality is distinctly queered in interesting and meaningful ways that I would argue give breath to crippled representations on television and in our imagined future.

The queering/cripping of Data begins early in *TNG*, appearing in the second episode of the series, 'The Naked Now'. In 'The Naked Now', an intoxicant has taken over the ship, altering the crew's behaviour so that many appear as though they were drunk. One of the first crew members to be affected is Chief of Security Lt. Tasha, who shortly after intoxication engages Data in a sexual encounter. The pairing of Yar and Data is particularly interesting, as Yar is, as Roberts suggests, one of the few *Trek* characters who fans have read as possibly queer (109, 1999, Tulloch 219). Yar's queering is intimately connected to her butch presentation on *TNG*, as Chief of Security, she is the only central female character with a position on the ship outside a traditional helping (feminized) profession. Unlike the other central female characters, Yar wears the standard Starfleet uniform, with closely cropped hair and wearing no makeup. Yar's masculinization is made nowhere more apparent than when during 'The Naked Now', she is discovered in Troi's quarters trying on dresses and is rushed to sickbay at this apparently peculiar behaviour. Despite the apparently heterosexual nature of the encounter between Yar and Data, I would argue there is a way to read this relationship as queered. Both Data and Yar resist traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity, both in this instance and later in series. It is Yar, after all, who seduces and pursues Data. As Roberts suggests, "Both characters abandon their rigidity and Tasha acts out a masculine role of aggressive seducer while Data acts the role of

acquiescent female” (96, 1999). While Roberts assumes the feminizing of Data is indicative of *Trek*’s patriarchal mistrust of all things alien and machine, I would suggest a broader interpretation, one where Data’s gender bending indicates a queering of Data individually and of *Trek* generally.

The queering of Data continues later in the series when, in the episode ‘In Theory’, Data begins a relationship with fellow crewmate Jenna D’Sora. Apparently close friends, although this is the only time D’Sora appears in *TNG*, Data is shown comforting D’Sora after a painful breakup and socializing with her in orchestra practice and at Ten Forward, the ship’s bar. Later in the episode D’Sora attempts to pursue a relationship with Data after reflecting on his kind and attentive nature. Like many of the autistic authors in Groner’s work, Data approaches his relationship with D’Sora as a sexual and romantic “research project” (272). As Groner quotes autistic writer Dawn Prince-Hughes, “To me, sex was an exercise to be mastered...[It was] intellectual in nature” (qtd. in Groner 271). Accordingly, as Prince-Hughes describes, she performed extensive research into sexual relationships, watching and reading pornography, reading sex manuals and asking friends and coworkers detailed questions (Groner 271). Like Prince-Hughes, Data is shown querying his fellow bridgecrew members about a possible relationship with D’Sora and later researching human romantic relationships through “theory [and] experiential reference” (In Theory). Accordingly, Data develops a program for romantic relationships, with a “specific subroutine for Jenna” (In Theory). However, Data like Prince-Hughes is unsuccessful despite his practiced application of “the logic of sex and love” (Groner 271). In some ways Data appears inadequate because he cannot genuinely feel or experience the emotions that go along with romantic love. However, I would argue, Data fails for much the same reason that

Groner notes of Prince-Hugh, that he performs his role “too well” (271). In other words, in applying logic and rationality and the expected male gender role, Data performs masculinity to a robotic tee and thus makes visible the constructed nature of gender identity. Data demonstrates the mask of heterosexual masculinity; that it is nothing more or less than a performance, which with the appropriate ‘subroutine’ can be mastered. In fact, the simple fact that Data can run ‘heterosexual masculinity’ as a ‘program’ points to the un-naturalness of gender itself. If masculinity, as we are so often told, is an expression of innate biological and physiological factors then, it stands to reason, there is no possibility for an android such as Data, without feeling or biology, to enact masculinity. Yet, ‘In Theory’ demonstrates not only the possibility of, but the actual *performance* of, heterosexual masculinity in a way that leaves the viewer wondering whether gender identity is, itself, artificial.

As Data wades into romantic ritual and ‘fails’ he exposes the strangeness of heteronormative romance. For example, fretting that he has not paid Jenna enough compliments, Data informs her as he awkwardly strokes her head that her “hair is looking particularly silky tonight” (In Theory). In an absurd interaction, Data tells D’Sora “Darling, you remain as aesthetically pleasing as the first day we met. I believe I am the most fortunate sentient in this sector of the galaxy” (Wilcox 85). As Wilcox suggests, “any man who has ever used a prefabricated line is rendered ridiculous by Data’s artificial suavity” (85). The oddness of Data’s vocabulary lends itself to the strangeness of romantic encounter. In the way that Data makes ‘the line’ appear absurd (however inadvertently) he makes the romantic ritual appear equally as strange. As Data attempts to fulfill the gendered expectations of heterosexual romance and utterly fails, I would argue he exposes those exact expectations to critique and mockery from the viewer. The absurdity of Data’s behaviour

aside, what is particularly interesting is that D'Sora can't explain to Data what about his actions is inappropriate.

D'Sora: Data, there is just something strange about the way you're acting!

Data: Am I not behaving as a solicitous mate?

D'Sora: Well, yes but...

In other words, neither D'Sora nor Data can understand why his performed masculinity appears so strange. Much of the interaction between D'Sora and Data is like that of Seven on *Voyager*, in which Data's performance of heterosexual masculinity does more to point to the strange and constructed nature of masculinity than it does to Data himself. Significantly, the strangeness of Data's effusive comments about D'Sora 'silky hair' and the like, highlight the absurd interactions between the *TNG*'s resident hetero-masculine archetype Commander Riker and the various female alien and crew members he solicits. As Groner argues, "by taking gendered norms to their logical extremes [we] reveal the absurdity of these norms and thus, as Butler might argue, threaten their undoing" (271). In as much, as Data performs (and with Data it truly is a performance) heteronormative masculinity, not only does he lay bare the constructed nature of gender itself but also the absurd logic by which it operates. As such, a crip reading of 'In Theory' demonstrates one of the many ways in which Data and *Trek* (whether purposefully or inadvertently) pushes compulsive heteronormativity and ablebodiedness ever more toward crisis and reveals (if only for a moment) the absurdity of the logic at its root.

I would likewise make the claim for a crippled reading of ‘The Offspring’, a third season episode of *TNG* in which Data becomes a father to an android child he creates. ‘The Offspring’ offers a validation of crippled parenting in which Data and his crew represent crippled fatherhood as natural, normal and desirable. Similarly, Data’s claims to parenthood also resists traditional gender roles, in which men are very infrequently represented as longing for parenthood. Likewise, Lal (Data’s daughter) herself, stakes a claim for the constructed nature of gender as she is initially represented as an androgynous, specie-less android child who is left to choose her appearance and gender for herself. ‘The Offspring’ opens with Data revealing his creation to Lt. LaForge, Counselor Troi and Ensign Crusher. Calling his child Lal (Hindi for ‘beloved’), Data explains that following a cybernetics conference he constructed Lal using the same methodology used for his positronic brain. In this sense, Lal is the closest living thing to Data, a being of the same construction as himself and, in her infancy much like a child. Shocked by Lal, Captain Picard angrily tells Data: “I would have liked to have been consulted!” (The Offspring). Data responds with confusion: “I have not observed anyone else on board consulting you about their procreation Captain” (The Offspring). This exchange between Captain Picard and Data is particularly telling. Much in the way that dominant discourse questions the desirability of disabled parenthood, the Captain questions Data’s new found fatherhood. Data’s blunt responses to the Captain’s ableist assumption directly resists dominant discourse and points to the inequitable exclusion of disabled people from parenthood. ‘The Offspring’ is clear in its sympathetic representation of Data’s ‘crippled’ fatherhood. Questioning of Data’s fatherhood, first by Captain Picard and later by Starfleet command, is represented as little more than human bigotry. In other words, *Trek* represents android/disabled fatherhood both as desirable and

worthy but also as undeserving of ableist judgment. As the episode progresses and Starfleet Command seeks control of Lal, who is, after all, the first functional android since the creation of Data, *Trek* offers a significant resistance to ableist discourses of ‘fit’ parenthood. As ‘The Offspring’ progresses a defense is mounted by the *Enterprise* crew in opposition to Starfleet Command’s demand for custody of Lal. This defense significantly parallels that made in *TNG* episode ‘Measure of Man’, in which Data’s status as a sentient being is established. In both these episodes a claim is successfully made for the full personhood of Data and Lal, with all the associated rights therein. Each of these moments in *Trek*, when the lives of both Data and Lal are established as full and desired, point to a ‘cripped’ reading of *Star Trek*. As we read Data as a surrogate for a crippled parent or person, the validation *Trek* offers for Data’s choices demonstrates not only a willingness to represent crippled lives but also to do so in a manner that far surpasses the ableist and homophobic politics of our time. Importantly, I would argue ‘The Offspring’ embodies what many *Trek* fans recognize as the profound power of utopian vision. *Star Trek* utopianism is significant in the sense that it allows us, as viewers both to imagine an alternative to the social order we live in and to recognize the limitations of the contemporary space we occupy (Jenkins 192, 2004). As Richard Dyer writes in *Only Entertainment*, “Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and may be realized” (18, 1992). In the way that *Trek* represents Data’s crippled fatherhood as not only valid, but valuable, it does significant productive work, not only in imagining a future where crippled lives are celebrated but in forcing its audience to recognize the ways in which they are marginalized now. As Jenkins argues, science fiction as a genre builds upon the utopian possibilities providing a space for audiences who have minimal

stake in the status quo and for whom “the possibility of profound social change would be a desirable fantasy” (Jenkins 193, 2004). In other words, *Trek* provides for its crippled audience a moment in popular culture where their lives and bodies can be visible and in which their visibility is neither strange nor particular.

The visibility of Data’s crippled life is no less clear in his friendship with the ship’s Chief Engineer, Geordi La Forge. The friendship between Data and Geordi is one of the strongest on *TNG* and certainly represents the most significant relationship either character develops. I would argue, much as I did of the relationship between Captain Janeway and Seven of Nine, that a queer reading of this relationship is not only possible but also infinitely more convincing than any heterosexual narrative offered by *Trek*. The strength of the relationship between Geordi and Data is demonstrated when in the episode ‘The Next Phase’ Geordi is believed to have died in a transporter malfunction and it is Data who requests to organize his memorial service. In the course of ‘The Next Phase’, Data describes his relationship with Geordi and the significant impact he had on Data’s development. The strength of Geordi and Data’s relationship mirrors that of a familial bond but in itself denies the heteronormative assumption that marriage and romantic relationships are the epitome of personal closeness. In this way, all of *Trek* resists the compulsive heterosexuality of the nuclear family in that virtually all members of both *TNG* and *Voyager* are single, many without relationships with family at all. However, in both series the crew recognize one another as their chosen family in a decidedly queer way. This ‘queering’ is decidedly more ‘crip’ in the relationship between Data and Geordi, as both disabled characters each celebrate the other for their whole being. As Data remarks in memory of his friend: “I never knew what a friend was until I met Geordi. He spoke to me as though I were human; he

treated me no different from anyone else. He accepted me for what I am and that, I have learned, is friendship” (The Next Phase). As Data is largely read as disabled through his inability to be human, that Geordi “spoke to [him] as though [he] were human” is understood as a demonstration of the way in which Data and Geordi’s relationship moves past the ableist mentality of the many of *TNG* crew and speaks to the possibility of friendships and relationships beyond ableist and heteronormative frames.

However, Data’s function as crippled emissary in *Trek* is not without its complications. If we think about Data as Graham does, as “metaphor for ourselves”, then, as with disability and sexuality, race becomes a critical point of focus (133). As Graham argues, as an android, Data functions as a refraction of “‘our’ exemplary and normative humanity” (133) and it is this longing for humanness that most distinctly illuminates race and whiteness in *Trek*. In the *Trek* universe humanness represents the apex of sentient life form evolution (Wagner and Lundeen 171) however, ‘humanness’ itself is largely conflated with white, heterosexual, rational masculinity. As such, *Trek*’s vision of exemplary humanity is “ultimately a vision of homogeneity, rather than radical diversity” (Graham 141). In this sense, *Trek* reinforces the relationship between heteronormativity, ableism and whiteness. Each fundamentally rely on discourses of ‘normalcy’ and collectively underpin the abstract human in Western thought. In as much as Data longs for ‘humanness’, he simultaneously longs for whiteness.

Data’s longing for humanness and whiteness indicates the normative regime of heteronormative, able-bodied whiteness in *Trek* and in our larger popular culture. As McRuer argues, we live in a culture which represents and understands heteronormative able-bodiedness as preferable and fundamentally “what we all, collectively, are aiming for”

(9). As McRuer argues compulsory able-bodied heteronormativity “demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, “Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?” (9). I would suggest that in *Trek* this question is extended to include whiteness. As discussed in the preceding chapter of this thesis, *Trek* glorifies few things in its 24<sup>th</sup> Century universe as it does whiteness. In *Trek* where the human is the apex of galactic evolution whiteness is the sine qua non of humanness. Thus I would argue as Data longs for humanness, he also symbolically longs for heterosexual, able-bodied whiteness and thus embodies in *Trek* the affirmative answer to the question of which McRuer speaks.

The conflation of whiteness, able-bodiedness and heteronormativity is particularly visible in the *Next Generation* feature film, *First Contact*. In the dramatic climax of *First Contact*, Data, captured by the Borg Queen is mocked for his “imperfect” less-than human state. In an attempt to win Data’s allegiance, the Borg Queen gives Data a taste of what he has always wanted: a graft of human skin. In a scene filled with sexual metaphor (the Borg Queen leans down and seductively blows on Data’s new skin, causing the hairs to stand on end and for Data to groan in pleasure) there is significant racial metaphor (Greven 11). This gift of human skin is of course *white* skin, as anything else would be virtually unthinkable in the *Trek* universe. As Greven writes, the “Borg Queen doesn’t just give Data the gift of human flesh but *the gift of white male skin*” (111). In this moment, *Trek* secures the symbolic relationship between humanness, heterosexuality and whiteness, each constituent parts of the idealized subject.

The relationship between whiteness, disability and queerness is again illustrated through Lal, Data’s daughter in the episode ‘The Offspring’. Lal, like Data, is an android,

however unlike Data, Lal has been given “more *realistic* eye and skin colouring” (The Offspring). As such, Lal passes for human, unlike Data who is marked among his crew by his yellow opalescent eyes and skin. That Lal, with her *white* skin is more ‘realistic’ is again a moment in which *Trek*, through Data, secures and reiterates the valuation of whiteness to “real” personhood and citizenship.

As Data socializes Lal to life on the *Enterprise* he encourages Lal to “supplement her innate android behavior with simulated human responses” (Wilcox 77) for example, blinking and eating. The emulation of human beings Data tells Lal is essential: “we must strive to be more than we are” (Greven 116). This striving for humanness/ablebodiedness/whiteness is linked in *Trek*, as in popular culture, to heteronormativity. As Greven argues, the longing for humanness is tied to multiple allegoric projects – Data is at once the racialized Other, internalizing white supremacist idealizations and at the same time the sexual Other, longing for normative heterosexuality (116). ‘The Offspring’ ruminates on the intersections between whiteness and cripness, drawing out and reinforcing *Trek*’s construction of the normative subject. As Lal is initially created by Data as both genderless and speciesless it is up to Lal to chose her own identity. As Data, Troi and Lal walk the down a corridor of the *Enterprise* Lal identifies the gender of passing crew members. Reflecting on herself, Lal identifies as “gender neuter – inadequate”. The apparent inadequacy of Lal’s gender non-conformity is indicative not only of the significance of gender to full humanness or wholeness in *Trek* but of *Trek*’s necessary investment in the heterosexual binary. As Troi says to Lal, gender is a heady topic, “Whatever you decide will be yours for a lifetime. It’s a decision that will affect how people interrelated with you”. The significance of the scene, of Data, Troi and Lal identifying male and female Starfleet officer harkens to a deeper context of sexual

difference as *the* determining factor for human interaction, presumably because in the *Trek* universe heterosexuality is the only explicit model of erotic and romantic love. This point is driven home when later in the episode Lal is seen in Ten Forward observing a young couple flirting and kissing. Ten Forward's bartender alien wise-woman Guinan, instructs Lal in the ways of heterosexual romance so astutely that when Riker walks into the bar Lal embraces him passionately. The significance of this moment should not be lost. Unlike Data, Lal can pass, not simply as white but as ablebodied, as she masters the art of human emotion and heterosexual ritual. Thus, as Lal escapes 'crippness' she is embraced wholly by heteronormative ablebodied whiteness and by her ability to pass as possibly fully human. In many ways, Lal, like Seven, symbolizes the possible recuperation of heterosexual, ablebodied whiteness. Regardless, both through Lal and through Data we understand the intimate connection between race, disability and sexuality in *Trek*, each refracting and reflecting on the other in sometimes deeply problematic ways.

Additionally, while I would argue that an interpretation of Data as the racialized Other is significant and meaningful, it again seems no accident that Data is played by a white actor (Brent Spiner). It is both Data's whiteness and his longing for whiteness which mitigate his crippled identity for mainstream audiences and make his filmic representation all the more possible. That Data is played by a white actor is, in part, indicative of the serialized representation of non-normative subjectivities in film and television representation (Magnet 171). As Shoshana Magnet notes in *Erasing Queerness/Constraining Disability: Representations of Queers with Disabilities in Frida and Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun*, film and television often fail to represent truly intersectional identities and Data is certainly an example of this difficulty on *Star Trek*.

The representation of Data, much like that of Seven is not without its ableist pitfalls. However, while Data's character on *Trek* is one organized largely around the goal of becoming human (a rhetorical metaphor for ableist versions of 'normalization') this doesn't necessarily undermine a 'crippled' reading of Data. While Data may strive to experience human emotion, his 'disabled' life is one that is generally represented on *Trek* as both full and celebrated. Unlike much of the narrative of disability in mainstream media that centers around a discourse of tragedy and suffering, Data's 'crippled' life on *Trek* is full of adventure and acceptance, friendship and fatherhood. Like Seven, Data is a lightpost for crippled lives on television, a moment in popular culture that queer and disabled fans can hold onto as their lives are valued and validated in a culture that is so frequently bent on silencing crippled lives.

### *Conclusion*

I began this chapter with a discussion of the ways in which the *Star Trek* series and its academic critiques have left out the lives of queer and disabled people. This discussion is meant both to challenge the prevailing idea that *Trek* and the academy that critiques it, is universally inclusive. *Star Trek* itself has fallen short of its liberal idealism, constructing a future that does little to counter the silence in popular culture of queer and disabled lives. This chapter serves not to contradict these assertions but rather to complicate them. Moments of validation and celebration of queer and crippled lives exist in *Star Trek*, as I have demonstrated here, and in taking up those moments we recognize not only the pleasure crippled audiences feel watching *Star Trek* but also how those moments and the celebration of those moments are a part of resisting heteronormative and ableist discourses. As I argue, both Data and Seven exist in the *Star Trek* universe to celebrate the full lives of crippled

people and those moments can be held onto, replayed and expanded upon in the extra-textual *Trek* mega-text in profoundly meaningful ways.

### Conclusion

“The truth about stories is, that’s all we are.”  
(Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*)

If *Star Trek* were good at nothing else it would still be remarkable for its storytelling. A universe so detailed and complete, *Star Trek* “utterly supersedes both in depth and breadth the science fictions which have come before” (Richards 4). *Star Trek* is a significant moment in the history of television and in the cannon of science fiction but, as I argue here, also of cultural production. Not only are phrases like “Beam Me Up, Scotty” and “the Final Frontier” understood across the globe but the profoundly complex representational politics of *Star Trek*, a unique text which is particularly culturally salient, give us meaningful insight into our politics and social selves. As Chris Gregory notes in *Parallel Narratives*, *Star Trek* is more than a television series, it part of who we are and who we will become (2000). Moreover, as Constance Penley writes in her book *NASA/TREK* about the relationship between the American space program and the *Star Trek* series, *Star Trek* “represents one of the most important populist sites for debating issues of the human and everyday relations to

science and technology” (99). As Penley argues ““going into space” – both the actuality of it and its science fiction realization – has become the prime metaphor through which we try to make sense of the world of science and technology and imagine a place for ourselves in it” (4-5). In other words, *Star Trek* may be good story telling it is not *just* good storytelling. That said, writing about television is not an easy task. As Harrison et al note in *Enterprise Zones: Critical Perspectives on Star Trek*, just when you think you have something definitive to say about television, it changes (2). Moreover, there exists an anxiety in popular culture and television studies about the legitimacy of our subject matter and our critical project. As Henry Jenkins, author of *Textual Poachers*, an ethnographic study of *Star Trek* fan writing, explains, the anxiety for television researchers is often that “our object of study is...too trivial, that it is not worth talking about after all” (qtd. in Relke xi). However, as Mimi White describes in *Ideological Analysis in Television* the study of how ideology operates through television is incredibly important. As White notes, “A mass art form like television provides a crucial arena for ideological analysis precisely because it represents the intersection of economic-industrial interests, an elaborate textual system, and a leisure-entertainment activity” (127). As such, there is significant scholarly work on the relationship between power and popular culture and this is no less so for *Star Trek*. This thesis has included the work of many critical scholars whose subject is *Star Trek*. For example, in *Drones, Clones and Alpha Babes: Retrofitting Star Trek’s Humanism in Post 9/11* Diane Relke rereads the *Trek* narrative in light of the American invasion of Baghdad and draws ideological and rhetorical links between both projects. Likewise, in *Star Trek and History: Race-ing Toward a White Future* Leonard Bernardi examines the racial politics at the heart of *Star Trek* drawing connections between the representation of race and whiteness

on television and the way identities are formed socially and politically. While both Relke and Bernardi make compelling cases for the study of *Star Trek*, it seems to me the slash writers (fans who write homoerotic *Star Trek* fan fiction) in Penley's *NASA/TREK* explain the importance of writing about television in the most convincing and simplistic way. Answering the question of why *Trek*, they respond emphatically "We write in relation to what's out there and what's out there is television" (Penley 147).

As one of the most successful science fiction texts *Star Trek* is a particularly salient and rich cultural artifact. As *Star Trek* writes our 24<sup>th</sup> century future it projects and illuminates contemporary values of gender, race, sexuality and (dis)ability. As *Star Trek* constructs, interprets and circulates ideas of contemporary subjectivity, it offers a comment on popular science. As Penley demonstrates in *NASA/TREK*, *Star Trek*'s inability to successfully imagine women in space is in many ways mirrored by NASA's tokenistic and sexist approach to the possibility and the reality of female astronauts (1997). The relationship between *Star Trek* and popular science is an important one. Science is the preeminent source of legitimacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, informing political, social and religious discourses which shape our lives. As such, the ways in which science and science fiction imagine our future inform how we relate to one another. After all, as Donna Haraway has memorably said, "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (197). As I have argued in this thesis, Haraway's sentiment is particularly visible in *Star Trek*, itself a grand mediator of the popular imagination of the human, the artificial, and the post-human. *Star Trek* does exactly as popular science dictates, it goes into space but it keeps our feet on the ground (Penley 10). *Star Trek* imagines our future and in so doing tells us something about ourselves. In other words, *Star Trek* is both popular science

and cultural producer. Thus it is through an examination of *Star Trek*, that we can see ourselves a little more clearly. However, the stories that *Star Trek* tells are themselves complex and contradictory, both remarkably liberatory and crushingly narrow-minded. In this thesis, I have both exposed and honoured those contradictions in an effort to expose the ways in which ideology functions through popular culture, the ways it shapes our ideas about race, gender, disability and sexuality and shapes our political and scientific possibilities.

The complexity of the ideological narrative in the *Star Trek* universe is one of the most significant points of its in this thesis. In each chapter I have explored the ways in which *Star Trek* complicates simplistic readings. As I have argued, *Star Trek*'s complexity is in part connected to its guiding liberalism and its reliance on a political vision which imagines itself as outside normative gender, race and sexuality systems. Of course liberalism is itself value laden and its self-deception and the contradiction within manifest themselves in the representation politics of *Star Trek*. A program lauded for its multiracial cast, *Star Trek* imagines a future where whiteness has culturally engulfed humanity. Trekking through the stars, both *The Next Generation* and *Voyager* symbolize the colonial narrative of exploration, discovery and dominance. The intersection of *Star Trek*'s racist and colonialist ideologies is no where more clear than in *Voyager* characters Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay. The only female starship captain and the only indigenous character on *Star Trek*, Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay illustrate the pain and pleasure of the *Star Trek* narrative. As a starship captain and a première scientist Kathryn Janeway embodies *Star Trek*'s challenge to the traditional discourses of science as the domain of men. However, Captain Janeway's scientific prowess is frequently rhetorically

and symbolically substantiated by the patronizing and racist rendition of Commander Chakotay's essentialized indigeneity. Such is the nature of *Star Trek's* liberalism and its liberal feminism. The "fantasy" world of *Star Trek* is much like our own, where the facile equality of political liberalism extends itself to the few and not the many.

The complexity of *Star Trek's* representational politics is again visible in its construction of Seven of Nine as the "cyborg babe" with encyclopedic knowledge and bone-crushing strength. Seven is the unquestioned hero of the *Voyager* series, struggling to recuperate her humanity while rescuing her shipmates from calamity and certain death. And yet, Seven is a character constantly being redressed and redrawn by hegemonic femininity. The feminist potentialities of Seven of Nine are often contained and repackaged, sublimating her to the traditions of conservative femininity through maternity, motherhood and heterosexuality.

I cite the cases of Seven of Nine, Captain Janeway and Commander Chakotay to acknowledge the inextricable connection in *Star Trek* to contemporary ideology. However, this thesis is intended to critically engage with and challenge monolithic representations of *Star Trek* as essentially conservative (as often cited by academics) or progressive (as often cited by fans). In this thesis, I have continued the challenge in feminist media studies and popular culture studies to read texts, television and otherwise, with a dynamic focus, allowing, as queer theorist Eve Koslowski Sedgwick suggests, for both critical and reparative readings. I take the reparative approach in the final chapter of this thesis, exploring a crippled reading of *TNG* character Data and *Voyager* character Seven of Nine. While I read both Data and Seven in a celebratory light, as a moment in popular culture where the lives of queer and disabled people are represented as dynamic, full, and worthy, their representation

is no less complex. Readings of both Data and Seven are complicated by discourses of normalcy which reinforce compulsive heteronormative ablebodiedness whiteness. As *Star Trek* constructs characters who so often offer brave and defiant critiques of heteronormative ablebodiedness, it is done in a televisual universe which idealizes those very same things.

That *Star Trek*'s progressivism does not live up to the cheerleading of its fans is not unsurprising. It is hard to imagine a series surviving as long as the *Star Trek* saga has if it had eschewed all of television dominant representational modes. However, there exist many moments in *Star Trek* mega text that offer truly progressive insight. It is these moments which explain not only *Star Trek*'s immense popularity but its unique popularity in mainstream science fiction with female and queer audiences. As Henry Jenkins, author of *Textual Poachers Television Fans and Participatory Culture* argues, the question of why fans don't walk away from *Star Trek* when it doesn't live up to their political aspirations (as is so for many queer, (dis)abled, and female fans) fails to understand the relationship fans have with *Star Trek* and its particular scientific utopianism. As Jenkins writes,

*Star Trek* has been a consistent presence in their lives for more than twenty-five years, a text which has offered them endless amounts of pleasure and fascination, even if it has not always delivered all they want from it. *Star Trek* continues to be important as a utopian space for their fantasies, still offering them a taste of 'what utopia feels like' even if it refuses to show them what (*their*) utopia might look like (qtd. in Tulloch 220).

This is the nature of *Star Trek*: it often seems to sit on the ideological fence, allowing just enough room for contradictory but mutually existing potential readings. However, I would not argue *Star Trek* is ambivalent; while its representational politics are diverse it often authorizes one interpretation over the other. As Dana Cloud notes, and I have observed in *Star Trek*,

often instead of polysemy (openness to multiple oppositional interpretations), popular texts offer viewers a multiplicitous but *structured* meaning system in which instances of multivocality are complementary parts of the system's overall hegemonic design (qtd. in Projansky and Vande Berg 36).

What this thesis seeks to do is recognize, critique and celebrate the diversity of *Trek* readings, both the paranoid and reparative possibilities keeping in mind its role in reproducing hegemonic systems of power in popular culture. There are moments of crushing sexism, racism, ableism and homophobia in *Star Trek*. However, there exists moments, perhaps fewer and rarer, where *Star Trek* offers, in the thick of a popular culture that so often denigrates marginalized lives, hope and pleasure on television. *Star Trek* embodies the struggle of marginalized communities in popular culture, for recognition and for substantive equality in a liberal political environment and for critical inquiry in limited media models we live with but also for celebration for the moments in which the norm is transgressed.

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