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**RACISM TOWARDS AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY
AS REFLECTED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS*:
BLACK AESTHETIC CRITICISM**

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ABSTRACT

The study of the African American community always circulates among the issues of race, racism, discrimination, slavery, and oppression. All these issues become the grand themes of African American literature. These literary works could be studied and covered under the scope of Black Aesthetic criticism. One of the prominent works of African American literature is an autobiography of Maya Angelou entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). This autobiography portrays Angelou's childhood experiences which brings up the issues of race, racism, and oppression. This paper aims to analyze the kinds of racism experienced by the African American community and their struggle against it as depicted in the book. To provide a thorough discussion of the matter, critical race theory was employed as the method of analysis. The result is drawn based on the basic tenets of critical race theory proposed by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001); everyday racism, interest convergence, the social construction of race, differential realization, intersectionality, and voice of Color. The findings show the struggle of African American community against racism which are expressed through the act of ignorance, promoting intelligence, communal efforts, resistance, promoting social movement, and stepping forward to voice their experience through African American literature.

Keywords: *Black Aesthetic criticism; race; racism; Maya Angelou; critical race theory*

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INTRODUCTION

African American community experiences a wide range of occurrences that shape their ways of perceiving the world. The vast majority of African Americans were

brought to America and forced to work as slaves. This initial experience leads to the tradition of suppression. African American turns into an oppressed group while the White exercises their power over them in the situation of systemic oppression. This situation

depicts any unjust treatment where “one group denies another group access to the resources of society” (Collins, 2000, p. 4). According to Collins (2000), some factors act as the major catalysts for oppression, including race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, and ethnicity (p. 4). African Americans struggle to develop their community and position themselves in American society which has a long history of racism (Tidwell, 1990). Historically, the root of racism, particularly towards African Americans, lies in the belief that African Americans should be excluded from social, political, and economic participation as well as exploited for economic gain because that is part of the natural order (Tidwell, 1990). Tidwell (1990) argues that this belief, which is articulated during the Jim Crow era, has caused America to pay for the cost of racism; starting from sociopolitical, economic, to cultural cost. Culturally, African Americans must deal with discriminatory treatments, including suppression of the intellectual tradition. Scott (1985) states that the act of suppressing the knowledge of any oppressed group eases the dominant group to rule because it indicates that “subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization” (as cited in Collins, 2000, p. 3). This historical binary black/white paradigm indeed meets with criticism and invites further discussion. Guess (2006) states that scholars have problematized the duality of race which is socially constructed and widely analyzed to show how most Americans perceive race (p. 670). On one hand, most White Americans think of racism as a thing of the past since they neither believe it nor feel guilty about it (McConahay et al., 1981, p. 578). On the other hand, modern racism theories suggest that “there is a kind of racism in America that takes the form of racial prejudice plus traditional,

conservative values” (Sniderman et al., 1991, p. 423). Considering those two perspectives, without limiting others, there are enough proofs that African Americans experience life differently from their White counterparts. Thus, they are working for a way to voice their experience, including their struggle, to wider communities. One of the ways is through literature, which could be analyzed further under the scope of Black Aesthetic criticism. All these historical backgrounds cause much of African American literature deals with racism, including the work of Maya Angelou entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is the first out of seven autobiographies of Maya Angelou who is known as an American poet, award-winning author, as well as civil rights activist (Bauer & Wightman, 2020). She is an African American woman whose works explore various themes ranging from economic, racial, to sexual oppression. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* explores those themes, particularly Angelou's struggle to fight for liberation from racism and misogyny (Sethi, 2013). The title of this book is taken from a poem entitled *Sympathy* by one of Angelou's favorite writers, Paul Laurence Dunbar, an African American poet. It reflects a bird that is stuck in a cage. Yet, more specifically, the big theme of this poem is about a lack of freedom. It stands in line with the theme of Angelou's autobiography. Angelou describes her life from the age of 3 to 16 in which she experienced such a traumatic childhood and led her to turn into an insecure black girl. The issues described in Angelou's autobiography also cover rape and racism. Angelou does not only focus on the traumatic events of her childhood, but she also explores her strength to be an African American woman. This literary work was aimed as a way

to cope with her struggle against racism and oppressed society (Bauer & Wightman, 2020). To put it in a wider context, this autobiography works not merely as a depiction of an African American woman's life, but also as a portrayal of African American's struggle, in general, in dealing with oppressed society. Besides, this work was published in 1969; a period when Black Aesthetic criticism started to emerge from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s (Leitch, 2010, p. 421). Thus, this work does not only focus on Angelou's struggle as an individual, but it also portrays the life struggle of the African American community in general. Based on those reasons, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou is relevant to be discussed as a way for African Americans to gain their voice through literature. Furthermore, this work of African American literature could be discussed under the scope of Black Aesthetic criticism.

The works of literature are ranging from written form; poem and novel, for instance, to oral form; as in drama and songs. Literature itself is considered an art that people could enjoy through their senses. This art comes as a result of creative processes. On the other hand, literary study differs from literature since it deals more with science rather than art (Wellek & Warren, 1954, p. 3). One of the methods in literary study involves literary criticism which aims to research literary works based on theory and practice "with matters of opinion and faith" (Wellek & Warren, 1954, p. 31). Literary criticism, particularly in America since the 1930s, experiences a struggle between the formalistic school of criticism and cultural-based criticism. The former focuses on linguistic, rhetorical, as well as epistemological ways of thinking, while the latter covers the sociological, psychological, and political realm in analyzing the literary

works (Leitch, 2010, p. 13). One of the types of literary criticism which emphasizes more on cultural-based criticism is Black Aesthetic criticism.

As could be inferred from its name, Black Aesthetic criticism deals with Black art. Black art in this context is defined as any literary works which are created by African American artists and responsible for their community (Leitch, 2010, p. 421). Black art's standard is rooted in African American communal life in which it is considered to be entirely different from White-Euro American aesthetic. Since almost all of literary criticism that has emerged previously is derived from White and Eurocentric perspective, African American critics work on the ideas of creating a specific method to analyze Black art. This method is considered essential among the African American community as a way to achieve unity and strength based on their cultural root (Leitch, 2010, p. 421). This paper aims to analyze the kinds of oppression done by the Whites to the African American community, as depicted in the work of Maya Angelou; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). Moreover, the ways taken by the African American community to fight against oppression is also discussed. To achieve a comprehensive discussion in the matter, the method of Black Aesthetic criticism is employed.

In order to meet the goal of this paper and provide a thorough explanation of the topic being discussed, the Black Aesthetic mode of criticism is employed as the main method of analysis. This criticism focuses on literary works of African American artists which portray the original experience of their community. In analyzing the literary work of Maya Angelou entitled *I Know Why the Caged*

Bird Sings (1969), the sociological, historical, and cultural approaches are also being employed as the supporting method. These approaches are in line with Cruse’s judgment that African American situations should be seen through many sides which could then lead to specific approaches (as cited in Leitch, 2010, p. 430). Moreover, in analyzing African American literary works, Cullen and Hughes, African-American writers, highlight the political views and the social role of African American writers in an oppressed and racist society since those matters could influence the literary style of the writers (as cited in Tyson, 2006, p. 364).

In particular, this study employs the critical race theory as an approach in discussing the matter. This theory first emerged as a critique of constitutional law as well as humanities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3; Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7). Since this paper aims to analyze the sociological, historical, and cultural background of White oppression to the African American community, the critical race theory as a critique of humanity is deeply performed. As could be inferred from its name, this theory deals more with the topic which is relevant to race (Tyson, 2006, p. 368). Tyson (2006) states that this theory examines the matter of race which is reflected in everyday lives and studies common assumptions about race that concerning racism (p. 369). Specifically, the means of critical race theory which is proposed by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) is being employed for deepening the analysis in this research. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) emphasize the ways the African American community experiences life differently because of their race (p. 10). In developing this theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) offer some basic

tenets which are agreed by many critical race theorists (p. 6). There are six basic tenets of the critical race theory, according to Delgado and Stefancic, which becomes the foundation of analyzing the topic of study:

- a. Everyday racism; racism does not always happen in more visible forms as physical or verbal attacks of people of color or the oppression by white supremacist groups, but it could also happen in more emotionally draining and stress-provoking forms as in the everyday lives of people of color.
- b. Interest convergence; the practice of racism often converges, or overlaps, with the interest or desires of the Whites. These interests and desires depict how dominant society practices racism since they are willing to advance themselves financially and to feel better psychologically.
- c. The social construction of race; race is portrayed as socially rather than biologically produced since it reflects the beliefs and definitions about race at different times. The beliefs and definitions of race change when economic and social pressure change.
- d. Differential racialization; this term describes how dominant society racializes or defines the racial characteristics of different minority groups at different times.
- e. Intersectionality; race does not stand alone in defining an individual, yet it intersects with other notions as gender, class, sexual and political orientation, and personal history to form the identity of each individual.
- f. Voice of Color; it refers to a belief that minority thinkers and writers have a better position rather than the Whites to voice up as well as write and speak about race and

racism since they have the first-hand experience on the matters (p. 6-9).

All those tenets of critical race theory by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) are explored and discussed thoroughly to meet the objectives of the study.

DISCUSSION

Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory in Portraying Black's Struggle against Racism and Oppression

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969) depicts some kinds of racism and oppression done by the Whites to African American community. Besides, this book also delivers the ways taken by the African American community to fight against racism and oppressed society. Both issues are presented through the elaboration of six basic tenets of critical race theory which are proposed by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) to portray the African American community's struggle against racism and oppression, based on Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

a. Everyday Racism

The setting of time in this autobiography is from the 1930s through the 1950s. This time depicts a great political and economic condition that badly influences the life of African Americans; the Great Depression and the New Deal. The condition worsened the situation of the African American community in any field, ranging from economic to racist culture. Angelou (1969) describes the first assumption of the African American community about the Great Depression that "it was for whitefolks, so it had nothing to do with them" (p. 50). African American community thought they would not be hit by

the Depression as seriously as the Whites, yet soon they realized that the Depression did not discriminate. Economically, the African American community experienced difficulties in selling their main products, such as cotton, since the White owners dropped the payment:

The Depression must have hit the white section of Stamps with cyclonic impact, but it seeped into the Black area slowly, like a thief with misgivings. ... I think that everyone thought that the Depression, like everything else, was for the whitefolks, so it had nothing to do with them. ... It was when the owners of cotton fields dropped the payment of ten cents for a pound of cotton to eight, seven and finally five that the Negro community realized that the Depression, at least, did not discriminate (Angelou, 1969, pp. 50–51).

Culturally, everyday racism increased to the point that the African American community was treated differently only because of their skin color. Angelou depicts the way a group of powhitetrash kids treated her grandmother badly which then resulted in her lifelong paranoia of the Whites. The powhitetrash was a term used by Angelou in her book to portray the poverty-stricken white. Her grandmother, whom she called Momma in the book, was mocked by those powhitetrash kids who basically were at the same age as Angelou. They were aping Momma and made fun of her only because they accidentally met her and she was black.

They came finally to stand on the ground in front of Momma. At first they pretended seriousness. Then one of them wrapped her right arm in the crook of her left, pushed out her mouth and started to hum. I realized that she was apping my grandmother. Another said, "Naw, Helen, you ain't standing like her. This here's it." Then she lifted her chest, folded her arms and mocked that strange

carriage that Annie Henderson (*Angelou’s grandmother*). Another laughed, “Naw, you can’t do it. Your mouth ain’t pooched out enough. It’s like this.” (Angelou, 1969, pp. 30–31)

This type of racism becomes a common act that happened on an everyday basis during that era of the Great Depression. This act was seen as the Whites’ way to cope with the difficult situation; although they were not in a good shape economically, they considered themselves to be in a better shape than the African American community. In facing that kind of racism, Momma, as a reflection of most African American community at that time, tried to ignore it by focusing on doing other activities to divert her attention away. Momma kept singing a song at a steady pace to steady her nerves until the powwhiterash kids stopped their action.

... I could see that the arms of Momma’s apron jiggled from the vibrations of her humming. But her knees seemed to have locked as if they would never bend again. She sang on. No louder than before, but no softer either. No slower or faster. (Angelou, 1969, p. 31)

This act of ignorance of the African American community while they were experiencing everyday racism by the Whites performed as their struggle against racism, for they could control themselves and did not easily get provoked by it. Collins (2000) argues that the act of ignorance and silence should not be regarded as submissiveness, yet it is a form of consciousness that raises the inside ideas (p. 98). In the modern time, along with the legacy of historical activism through either social movement or Black art, African American community starts to gain courage to stand for their rights and voice. Eventually, their past experience of racial discrimination is seen as a wake up call for their community to

voice up while controlling themselves at the same time.

b. Interest Convergence

Interest convergence reflects the Whites’ ways of performing racism which converges with their interest to be advanced than the African American community. Angelou depicts this tenet with a situation in which she felt humiliated by the Whites during her graduation. Angelou and her brother, along with most African American kids in her area, attended the black school in town named Lafayette County Training School. This school was predominantly occupied by African American community, starting from its students to its teachers and school workers. Angelou shared her experience in her school which also developed her character as she started to understand her identity as African American. The realization of how her race was despised by majority group flooded in when she had her graduation. Graduation became an event which had been waited by not only the prospective graduates but also the whole family and community. Angelou (1969) even described that, “(t)he children in Stamps trembled visibly with anticipation. Some adults were excited too, but to be certain the whole young population had come down with graduation epidemic” (p. 169). However, this moment of joy turned into bitterness as the Whites tried to approach African American community for the sake of their mere interest. It was shown by two White men, one of them was Mr. Edward Donleavy, who suddenly came to Angelou’s graduation. At first, he seemed to praise African American kids and the community as a whole in his speech. He even offered betterment for their school in particular.

He told us of the wonderful changes we children in Stamps had in store. The Central School (naturally, the White school was Central) had already been granted improvements that would be in use in the fall. ... He went on to praise us. He went on to say how he had bragged that “one of the best basketball players at Fist sank his first ball here at Lafayette County Training School.” (Angelou, 1969, pp. 178–179)

His speech had a tendency to give a proper appreciation for African American community, particularly as an example to the kids who just graduated. Through his speech, this White man seemed to offer the idea of racial equality that underlined the contribution of African American community. In fact, it turned out to be a tendencious speech as this idea was presented because it converged with the personal interest of Mr. Donleavy. He tried to mingle and be accepted in African American community because of political interest.

Donleavy was running for election, and assured our parents that if he won we would count on having the only colored paved playing field in that part of Arkansas. ... He finished, and since there was no need to give any more than the most perfunctory thank-you’s, ... (t)hey left with the attitude that now they were off to something really important. (Angelou, 1969, p. 181)

Instead of feeling appreciated, this speech showed how the Whites portrayed the role of African American community. By Donleavy’s speech, Angelou realized that there was a huge racial gap that was internalized in the Whites counterparts.

The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys (the girls weren’t even in on it)

would try to be Jesse Owens (*an athlete*) and Joe Louises (*a boxer*). Owens and the Brown Bomber were great heroes in our world, but what school official in the white-goddom of Little Rock had the right to decide that those two men must be our only heroes? (Angelou, 1969, p. 179)

This realization reflected the social norms and beliefs that African American community could not hold a reputable position in that era. They were seen as “maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen” and when they wanted to hold a higher position based on the social norm, it would sound “farcical and presumptuous” (Angelou, 1969, p. 180). This statement should not be seen as job degrading, in which some jobs were considered lower than others. Instead, it shows that some jobs were exclusively performed by some racial groups. Thus, even if the Whites, who were pictured as electorate candidates in Angelou’s book, seemed to offer promising future to African American community, it was considered as a mere political agenda. Mr. Donleavy tried to gain voice from African American community, yet his speech showed that he looked down at their community. African American community has struggled for racial equality and the Whites could provide support whenever it converges with their interest. This practice could still be seen occassionally in modern era whenever political ceremonies are held. In struggling over this issue, African American community start to pave their ways in the educational and intellectual realm. By realizing their own identity, they promote intelligence as the new ways to achieve racial equality which has become their objectives over years of struggle.

c. The Social Construction of Race

In her book, Angelou gives a clear description of how her race, the African American community, was seen as inferior to the Whites. This belief was constructed by the social and cultural realm of that era. As stated in her book, Angelou (1969) described the segregation in Stamps, Arkansas as “so complete” since most African American children did not know exactly how the Whites looked like (p. 25). They believed that the Whites were different from them, even Angelou described her lack of knowledge of the Whites by stating “I couldn’t force myself to think of them as people”. For little Angelou at that time, people were those who lived in her area, while the Whites as “the strange pale creatures” were not considered as folks; they were “whitefolks”.

People were those who lived on my side of town. I didn’t like them all, or, in fact, any of them very much, but they were people. These others, the strange pale creatures that lived in their alien unlife, weren’t considered folks. They were whitefolks (Angelou, 1969, p. 26).

This view of the racial matter was not a sudden norm that was attached to each person since they were born. This might be the result of years of beliefs passed from one generation to another. In the context of Angelou’s book, she lived in an area predominantly occupied by the African American community. She lived separately from the Whites which made her believe that she was the explorer “walking without weapons into man-eating animal’s territory” when she passed the White part of town:

... the last stop before whitefolksville, we had to cross the pond and adventure the railroad tracks. We were explorers walking without weapons into man-eating animal’s territory. In Stamps the

segregation was so complete that most Black children didn’t really, absolutely know what whites looked like (Angelou, 1969, p. 25).

She was taught, from the beginning, not to interact with the Whites. Even, she was asked to go and hide anytime the Whites came to her area. All these beliefs and habits were built by people in her community. This was a social construction. African American community was taught to be cautious with their White counterparts and this rule worked the other way around even since very young age. This caution does not emerge without reasons; their community works in the way that puts racial issue on the surface because their social norms are constructed that way. Since these norms are socially constructed, communal efforts are needed to mitigate these racial issues.

d. Differential Racialization

In her book, Angelou portrays the differential racialization in terms of the threats of violence from racist groups. These threats are experienced exclusively by African American community as a minority group which might be experienced differently by other racial groups in the United States. In the context of Angelou’s book, the Whites who belong to a white supremacist group are pictured as the racist. They are members of the organization called Ku Klux Klan which is also known as KKK. This organization was first formed in the South by former Confederate veterans in 1865. It was widely known for its underground movement which promoted violence, particularly against African American community. As a white supremacist group, its main objective is to ensure the domination of Whites community over other racial groups. In meeting its

objective, KKK performs the act of violence, intimidation, and repression towards other racial groups which they consider as threats, particularly African American community.

Angelou depicts the struggle of African American community when facing the KKK, which might be completely different from other racial groups. As described in the book, when a former sheriff named Mr. Steward told Momma that the KKK would come to their area, it created a sense of fear to Angelou and her family:

... I heard him say to Momma, "Annie, tell Willie (*Angelou's uncle*) he better lay low tonight. A crazy nigger messed with a white lady today. Some of the boys'll be coming over here later." Even after the slow drag of years, I remember the sense of fear which filled my mouth with hot, dry air, and made my body light (Angelou, 1969, pp. 17–18).

During that period of time, African American men were pictured as criminals and terrifying predators who could perform the act of violence towards helpless targets, particularly White women (Pilgrim, 2000). In this modern era, a number of literature portrays that issue as the main theme of discussion. This belief was deeply rooted in the White community which made them believe that African American men were very dangerous and deserved punishment. As a further action, this belief became the very point which was used by the KKK to justify their act of violence towards African American community. African American men, in particular, and African American community in general struggled hard because of this belief. Angelou's depiction of the KKK reflected her community's struggle in dealing with this organization and its brutal actions;

The "boys"? Those cement faces and eyes of hate that burned the clothes off you if they happened to see you lounging on the main street downtown on Saturday. Boys? It seemed that youth never happened to them. Boys? No, rather men who were covered with graves' dust and age without beauty or learning. The ugliness and rottenness of old abominations (Angelou, 1969, p. 18).

On one hand, the words of caution by the former sheriff might save African American men in Angelou's area since they got warning to perform the act of prevention. On the other hand, it showed an unspoken rule in the South area that the KKK could exercise their power freely over African American community. This situation enabled this racist group to create their own rule which could only be applied to African American community, particularly African American men. Angelou portrayed her uneasy feeling towards Mr. Steward's caution which might reflect the differential racialization in her community.

His confidence that my uncle and every other Black man who heard of the Klan's coming ride would scurry under their houses to hide in chicken droppings was too humiliating to hear. Without waiting for Momma's thanks, he rode out of the yard, sure that things were as they should be and that he was a gentle squire, saving those deserving serfs from the laws of the land, which he condoned. (Angelou, 1969, p. 18)

In dealing with this situation, Angelou depicted in her book that her uncle, and all of the African American men in that area, needed to hide in their houses as the act of prevention. If the "boys" found them at that night, they would surely be lynched. These "laws of the land" were exercised by the KKK as the white supremacist group to control African

American community. Other racial groups might not experience these kinds of laws. Although African American community was repressed even in their land, they tried to resist by building a strong community. Their community got stronger since they always gathered occasionally and Momma’s store was one of the places that turned to be a safe place for them. At first, they might not even realize that their gathering would build their own community. In the end, it could become the foundation of their struggle. This act of resistance would then lead to their participation in social movements aimed for fighting their rights and equality of all racial groups.

e. Intersectionality

Since one’s identity is not only based on race alone, other factors intersect with the shaping of someone’s identity; class, sex, sexual and political orientation, as well as personal history. This idea is discussed under the concept of intersectionality. This concept is also developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw (1989) emphasizes more on the intersection of race and gender which greatly affect the life struggle of African American women, in particular, against discriminatory acts. In the case of Angelou’s book, she provides a portrayal of how her identity was defined both by her race and also her sex or gender. Being born as an African American woman, she had to fight against racism towards the African American community in general as well as to struggle for gender equality as a woman (Leitch, 2010, p. 438). At the beginning of the book, Angelou described her feeling as a black little girl who desired to have white’s characteristics. She stated, “I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody’s

dream of what was right with the world” (Angelou, 1969, p. 2). By this statement, Angelou showed her belief that “white equals good and black equals bad”. She kept comparing her skinny legs with the legs of the Whites, her kinky black hair with long and blonde hair, and her dirt skin color with the fair one. She believed that what was considered beautiful by society was all the things that she did not have; long legs, blonde hair, and fair skin.

Wouldn’t they be surprised when one day I woke out of my black ugly dream, and my real hair, which was long and blond, would take the place of the kinky mass that Momma wouldn’t let me straighten? My light-blue eyes were going to hypnotize them ... because my eyes were so small and squinty. ... Because I was really white and because a cruel fairy stepmother, who was understandably jealous of my beauty, had turned me into a too-big Negro girl, with nappy black hair, broad feet and a space between her teeth that would hold a number-two pencil (Angelou, 1969, pp. 2–3).

This belief stayed in her mind and influenced the way she saw herself and shaped her identity. However, as she grew older, she realized that her value was not determined by her looks. She realized that she needed to work on other characteristics which were far more important than feeling sorry for her born-look. She turned to be a woman who understood that her worth was not defined by the stereotypical traits built by the Whites. This was her struggle to get free from the intersectionality, both because of her race and gender.

In this modern era, this belief of ‘beauty’ norms is still held by society in general and the African American community in particular. African American women start to promote a

counter-narrative of this belief through a cultural movement known as 'Black is Beautiful'. This movement emerged firstly as a slogan of a fashion show held in 1962. Meeting with huge enthusiasm and acceptance, this fashion show becomes a regular and the movement of 'Black is Beautiful' turns into black nationalism (Sayej, 2019).

f. Voice of Color

Angelou writes her autobiography as a way to cope with traumatic childhood experiences. At first, she did not want to write about events that happened to her years ago. Yet, James Baldwin and Jules Feiffer, two of her friends, challenged her by saying that writing her experience in a form of autobiography as literature was an impossible thing to work on for her (Lanzendorfer, 2017). Angelou accepted this challenge by working on her first autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. When it was first published in 1969, it became a best-seller book and even turned to be one of the most widely read and taught books originally written by an African American (Bauer & Wightman, 2020). One of the reasons behind this high acceptance and recognition is because it was among the first books that honestly portrays the life of an African American woman who experienced racism first-hand. Maya Angelou holds a better position in writing and speaking up about the issue of race and racism than the White writers because she was directly present in and affected by that situation. She has a privilege to voice up about race and racism, something that is not possessed by the Whites, and many African Americans. This argument is also in line with the nature of Black Aesthetic which helps African American artists "to create, maintain, navigate, and

understand" the life experiences of their community (Taylor, 2010, p. 1).

All the basic tenets of critical race theory proposed by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) could be used to discuss and analyze the kinds of oppression experienced by the African American community as well as their struggle against it. Angelou's experiences are not limited to the events which are discussed in this paper. There are many other events and experiences related to race, racism, rape, and oppression that happened to Angelou, particularly during her childhood in the south. Yet, the events which are discussed in this paper could perform as portrayals of how the African American community was oppressed by the Whites, how this oppressed society badly affected African Americans, and how hard the African American community struggled against the oppression.

CONCLUSION

Black Aesthetic criticism acts as a way to respect African American artists as well as African American literature. It gives a chance for African American literature in any form, ranging from poems to songs, to be treated at the same level as White literature. This type of criticism stands on a belief that the African American community should create their own version of literature as well as literary study which have no relation with the Whites. Like any other literary criticisms, Black Aesthetic also reaches its peak during the mid-1960s to 1970s when many works of African American artists emerged as a way to depict their situation in such an oppressed society. However, there are also various debates from African American artists and theorists over this criticism. The radical ones insist on segregating Black literature from the Whites

since based on their perspective, Black literature could only be analyzed by the African American community alone. Meanwhile, others try to give ways for any literary critics, regardless of their race and skin color, to conduct a study on Black literature since literature is universal. These debates stay over the years, yet in this modern era, Black Aesthetic criticism turns into one of the most prominent American literary criticism, not only among Black literary critics but also for all critics.

The analysis of Maya Angelou's autobiography entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* under the scope of Black Aesthetic criticism could result in a better understanding of the ways the society worked for either the African American community or the Whites. The discussion in this research shows that the African American community experiences racism in daily basis as the result of years of oppression by the Whites. This racism could be portrayed through five basic tenets proposed by Delgado and Stefancic (2001). Although the issue of racism seems to be inevitable for African American community, various struggles have been done to fight it. If in the past era African American community tend to rely on the act of ignorance, they have gained courage to take actions in this modern era, one of which is through 'Black is Beautiful' movement. These actions should be amplified to achieve more significant changes. Moreover, authorities should take part to tackle racism in American society. After all, the issue of racism is not the problem of African American community alone; it has been society's responsibility.

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CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM AS IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN AMERICAN DYSTOPIAN NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Literature reflects the history of people's lives, which includes lifestyle, culture, language, desires, and important events in people's lives. Dystopia novels cannot be separated from discussions about authoritarian government, restraints on people's freedom, criticism of the development of technology and information, exploitation and the class system, and the arbitrariness of the rulers. Despite telling a bad world, Dystopian novels proved popular in America, a country that promised freedom, equality, and freedom to its citizens. The possibility of different realities captured by American popular novelists who differ from their imaginations gave birth to dystopian novels that are popular in American society. Thus, this study is important to analyse Capitalism and Socialism as ideological constructions in American dystopian novels through *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Uglies*, and *The Hunger Games*. This research will formulate an understanding of whether or not American dystopian novels confirm or negate the ideology of Capitalism and the ideology of Socialism.

Keywords: *capitalism; dystopia; ideology; literature; socialism*

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INTRODUCTION

Literature is a part of human life. The journey of the American nation is also recorded in American literature. American

literature tells the story of the journey of the American people since the Puritans came and left the Americas, which was influenced by a combination of myths brought by the first

Europeans from their homelands and new myths that they acquired in new lands, the historical journey of the American people, and the thoughts of the nation. The authors of early American literature recounted in their literature that this new land had the qualities of a "promised land" that promised a better life for a chosen nation or "God's Chosen People". Thus, Utopia literature in America is influenced by the American dream or what is known as the American Dream, which writer James Truslow Adams in his *Epic of America* (1931) described as a dream about a better, richer for everyone, with opportunities for each according to his abilities or achievements.

Thoughts about cracks in utopian thinking occurred also at the end of the 19th century which was a resistance to the central utopian concept of a perfect life. Between 1870 and 1910, a new middle class developed in the United States, and for this class and its supporters an entirely new ideology was needed. This new middle class is not a class of property holders. Its members are the proletariat, which are managers, engineers, professional bureaucrats, and technicians of all kinds. To these people, Puritan moralism and the Puritan social and political order so long admired were deemed incompatible with the new rationalized order. American Puritanism has been identified with a particular set of attitudes toward material success, emphasizing industry and the pursuit of wealth, thereby creating a widening social gap between the rich and the poor. Such an ethic, creates a living modern Capitalism, which is the true protection of the entire economic and social order. Besides, various events that attacked America such as war, economic crisis, and terrorist attacks faded Utopia thinking and

brought the Utopia trend to the Dystopian trend occurred at the end of the 19th century.

Narratives about Capitalism and Socialism have been the subject of reflection and have been put into literary works by American literary writers since the late 1800s. In this year, Utopia writers or known as conservative Utopias such as Arthur Bird Looking Forward, Dream of the United States in 1999 narrated America as a world role model and therefore American Capitalism must be spread throughout the world. A dystopian novel, *Piano Player* (1952), depicts America as a state version of Capitalism, in which the state functions as a corporation that controls the means of production. The supercomputer, EPICAC XIV, runs the economy, and machines eliminate the need for human labour. This led the workers at Ilium to try to destroy the machines that had replaced them and humiliated them. However, due to manipulation and propaganda about the importance of technology, these workers abandoned their revolution and started rebuilding machines. As a result, they recreate the conditions that allow the upper class to maintain its power in society. At the same time that socialist thought emerged in the midst of labour strife and anarchist violence, *The Republic of the Future* (1887) was a Dystopian satire depicting a socialist society in which every trace of inequality has been carefully removed. In this novel, technological advances have created the possibility of material abundance with minimal labour requirements.

The successful revolution in America at the end of the nineteenth century had brought the socialists to power and were able to transform economic and social life to fulfil their egalitarian ideals. But after a century and a half of Socialism successfully eradicated

competition and inequality, creativity and innovation became paralyzed. Socialism which is predicted to be better than Capitalism is in fact inseparable from the control system of the rulers which is nothing but the hallmark of Capitalism. The ideological contradiction of Capitalism and Socialism also continues to be an interesting debate in America, which is expressed in American dystopian novels in the following years.

This study is aimed to analyse Capitalism and Socialism as ideological constructions in American dystopian novels. The novels in this study are *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Uglies*, and *The Hunger Games*. The twists of these two ideologies are conveyed by the author through story narratives and conflicts in the novel.

Capitalism Ideology

The term “capitalist”, which means owner of capital, appears earlier than the term “capitalism” and dates back to the mid-17th century. “Capitalism” comes from the word capital, which evolved from *capitale*, a late Latin word based on *caput*, meaning “head”, which is also the origin of “movable property” and “livestock” in the sense of movable property. *Capitale* appeared in the 12th to 13th centuries to refer to a fund, stock of merchandise, amount of money or money that carries interest or profit. In 1283, the term referred to wealth, money, funds, goods, assets, property, and so on. Capitalism is an economic system based on ownership of capital to control production and earn profits (Zimbalist, 1988). The main characteristics of Capitalism include private or group ownership, capital accumulation, labour wages, price systems and competitive markets. In a capitalist market economy, the owners of

capital are the determinants of production and investment policies even though the prices and distribution of goods and services are determined by competition in the market.

The earliest use of the term “Capitalism” in its modern sense is attributed to Louis Blanc in 1850 who referred to the appropriation of capital by some to the exclusion of others and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1861 who referred to an economic and social regime in which capital, sources of income, generally not owned by those who make it work through their labour. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels referred to the “capitalist system” and to the “capitalist mode of production”.

Capitalism according to Karl Marx is characterized by the division of labour and the means of production, private ownership of the means of production, legal freedom of workers, generalization of production, and the exchange of goods. The asymmetry of power is embedded in the system because it is created by three agents: pure workers, owners of the means of production, and owners of natural resources. Meanwhile, workers take part in the production process to earn wages which they will use for consumption, and natural resource owners tend to increase their income to buy luxury goods. The goal of the capitalist is the maximum expansion of capital or capital in competition with other capitalists. The way the owner of capital to achieve this goal is to maximize profits, namely to maximize the difference in the value of the goods sold and the value of the means of production used (Marx, 1993).

Critics of Capitalism argue that Capitalism establishes power in the hands of the existing minority capitalist class through the exploitation of the majority working class

and their labour; prioritize profits over social goods, natural resources and the environment. They lead to inequality, corruption and economic instability. Proponents of Capitalism argue that it provides better products and innovations through competition, promotes pluralism and decentralization of power, spreads wealth to all productive people who then invests in useful enterprises based on market demand, enables flexible incentive systems where efficiency and sustainability are priorities to protect capital, create strong economic growth and generate productivity and prosperity that greatly benefit society. In a capitalist system, although the government protects private property and guarantees the right of citizens to choose their jobs, it also does not prevent companies from determining the wages they will pay and the prices they will charge for their products. At the urging of capitalists, many countries have minimum wage laws and minimum safety standards. Under some versions of capitalism, large corporations can form almost monopolies in some industries. In many countries, public utilities such as electricity, materials heating, fuel and communications can operate as monopolies under government regulation because of the high economies of scale. Government agencies set service standards in many industries, such as airlines and broadcasting, and fund programs. In addition, governments regulate capital flows and use financial tools such as interest rates to control factors such as inflation and unemployment (Baptist & Hyman, 2014).

The influence of technological developments is another issue related to Capitalism. Technologies designed to cut labour costs will create permanent unemployment. Since these social and ecological challenges arise from the

tremendous power of technology, they can be seen as a side effect of socialist and capitalist growth (Boldizzoni, 2020).

Socialism Ideology

Socialism, which comes from the word *socius* or *society*, emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This ideology emerged as a reaction to the ideology of Capitalism which caused the industrial revolution in England because of the disparity between the bourgeoisie (owners of capital) who had a high standard of living and the proletariat (workers) who had a low standard of living due to their low salary. With the emergence of the Social Revolution, the ideology of Socialism emerged which is a political, social, and economic philosophy that includes various economic and social systems characterized by social ownership of the means of production and workers. It includes the political theories and movements associated with such a system. Social ownership can be public, collective, cooperative, or equity. Although there is no single definition that encapsulates the many types of Socialism, social ownership is one element in common (Busky, 2000).

Socialists have applied the ideals and principles of equality, democracy, individual freedom, self-realization, and community or solidarity. Regarding equality, they have proposed a strong version of the equality of opportunity principle according to which everyone should broadly have equal access to the material and social means necessary to lead a thriving life (Wright, 2010). Socialists also embrace democratic ideals, which require that people have equal access to the necessary means to participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives (Wright, 2010). Many socialists say that democratic

participation should be available not only at the level of government institutions, but also in various economic arenas, such as within companies.

Socialists are also committed to the importance of individual freedom from domination to self-determination and benefit from that choice. Individual freedom is believed to be able to foster creativity and productivity to be able to contribute to society (Elster, 1986). Socialists often emphasize the idea of community or solidarity so that they regard the interests and welfare of others as important. People must recognize the positive duty of supporting others, or, as Einstein (1949) put it, a sense of responsibility for others. Or, as Cohen puts it, people should care, and, if necessary and possible, care for each other, and also care that they care for each other. Community is sometimes presented as a moral ideal which is not in itself a demand for justice but can be used to dampen the problematic outcomes permitted by some demands of justice (such as the inequalities of outcomes permitted by the luck-egalitarian principle of equality of opportunity (Cohen 2009). However, community is sometimes presented in the socialist view as a demand for justice itself. Some socialists also take solidarity as partly shaping the desired form of social freedom in which people can not only advance their own good but also to act with and for others.

Mark (2016) mentions that Capitalism persists in American society because in a capitalist economy, incentives are the most important. This is what makes Capitalism persist, meanwhile, socialism tends to fail because under socialism, incentives play a minimal role or are ignored altogether.

The theory of Capitalism and Socialism is an important part of this research. Capitalism is confronted with Socialism because the two ideologies are contradictory in terms of property, class system, and exploitation. These three values are also presented by the author in American dystopian novels. Thus, the theory of Capitalism and Socialism can be used to answer the first research questions about ideology in American popular literature through American dystopian novels.

DISCUSSION

This study presents a discussion of Capitalism and Socialism as the ideological constructions of *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Uglies*, and *The Hunger Games* novels. The main characteristics of Capitalism which include private or class ownership, capital accumulation, labour wages, price systems and competitive markets for profit by policy makers are continuously presented in these dystopian novels. (Zimbalist, 1988; Hyman & Baptist, 2014). In addition to Capitalism, an economic and social system characterized by social ownership of the means of production and workers as the hallmark of Socialism is also presented in these American dystopian novels. In the conflict between Capitalism and Socialism, the arena of contestation lies in property, class system, and exploitation (Zimbalist, 1998). In the dystopian novels used in this study, the opposite of these two ideologies is conveyed by the author through story narratives and conflicts in the novel.

Ownership as an Arena of Contestation of Capitalism and Socialism

Ownership as an arena for the contestation of Capitalism and Socialism is

divided into two types, namely private or group ownership and public ownership. In the capitalist system, ownership of the means of production is controlled by individuals or groups, so that private ownership and recognition of property rights are the main characteristics of Capitalism (Zimbalist, 1988). Whereas in the Socialist system private ownership is considered to limit the potential of the productive forces in the economy. With no need for capital accumulation and a class of owners, private property in the means of production is considered an outdated form of economic organization which must be replaced by free association of individuals based on public or common ownership of these socialized assets (Engels, 2010).

In *Fahrenheit 451*, every citizen is narrated to have the freedom to have something according to his wishes. There is freedom to choose work, school and property. This matter described by Bradbury through a narration about the existence of various types of work, ranging from firefighters, drivers, police, teachers, students, housewives as the characters in the novel. In addition, the display of large advertising billboards is a description given by Bradbury how everyone in Bradbury society has the right to manage their finances, choose, and own things (Bradbury, 1983, p. 7). With the existence of freedom and progress in terms of trade which is marked by the development of commercial advertising, Bradbury seems to show that the people in *Fahrenheit 451* are people who live in a free economy. This is emphasized again by Bradbury through the high demand for tertiary needs such as large televisions that fill the walls of the house which is also a societal trend in *Fahrenheit 451*. The view on the importance of television ownership is represented by Mildred, Guy Montag's wife,

who continues to demand Montag to use 1/3 of his salary, two thousand dollars, to buy the 4th Wall-TV in his house (Bradbury, 1953, p. 15). The market competition caused by the consumptive lifestyle of the people gives the impression that the economic flow in the people at *Fahrenheit 451* is going well. Bradbury shows that ownership of capital and property is the right of everyone, and this according to Zimbalist is one of the characteristics of Capitalism (Zimbalist, 1988).

Although Bradbury narrates the freedom of ownership over the individual, Bradbury also illustrates in his novel the control and power of ownership by the government. Although the people in *Fahrenheit* have rights to own something, the government keeps close looks on everything to make sure that everything is under the government's control, like television programs and news, education system and sole control over the legal apparatus, namely firefighters, police and teachers by the authorities.

Government's control in *Fahrenheit 451* also includes television and radio programs identified with Mildred who every day of her life only has an interest in watching TV and listening to the radio. "The living-room; what a good job of labeling that was now. No matter when he came in, the walls were always talking to Mildred (Bradbury, 1983, p. 42)." Entertainment programs make the viewers portray the characters in his TV program as their family and in that family they find their world. The world Montag's wife lives in with Montag becomes a fictional world because there is no communication between the two. On the other hand, life on television with characters he refers to as "family" is real life. Mildred's obsession with electronic media cannot be separated from the influence of the

government that provides access to the media, “the new medium of television promoted middle-class cultural values as normative through commercials and family-oriented shows. In *The Dark Ages*, no single force has as much effect in socializing with Americans in shaping tastes, habits by smoothing regional and ethnic differences as television. By diverting people's attention to electronic media, the government in *Fahrenheit 451* creates a barrier between citizens and even intervenes in family communication. The inability of society in the novel *Fahrenheit 451* to communicate or socialize, makes society compartmentalized in their respective activities and thoughts. They don't realize or care about the world outside them, so they don't know government programs. They have no other choice but to accept the government's recommendations and regulations. This makes it easier for the government in this novel to control the people.

The mastery of television as a mass media as well as a medium of information is also described in the novel *The Hunger Games*. The government controls the mass media through censorship and propaganda. The annual battle of '*The Hunger Games*' which is considered an annual festival for the citizens of the 'Capitol' is broadcast live through television, as a censor of the resistance of the district residents to the arbitrariness of the 'Capitol', as well as propaganda of the absolute power and power of the 'Capitol' against the citizens. district by destroying their children in a life-and-death struggle but is considered a festival by the 'Capitol' (Collins, 2005, p. 19).

In contrast to Bradbury's narration in *Fahrenheit 451*, where individual ownership is still permitted by the government, Collins, like

Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*, provides a minimalist narrative of individual ownership in *The Hunger Games* novels. Every citizen in the district had almost no ownership whatsoever. Instead, the residents of this district have been exploited for their strength for the benefit of the rich Capitol community. This is in accordance with what was said by James (2000) that in general, Capitalism as an economic system and mode of production includes the accumulation of capital, namely production for profit and accumulation as an implicit goal of all or most of the production; narrowing or eliminating production previously carried out on social or private household grounds; commodity production i.e. production for exchange in the market and for maximizing exchange value-not value in use, and private ownership.

Government's control over the people in *Fahrenheit 451* can also be recognized through its control over the legal apparatus like firefighter and police. In *Fahrenheit 451*, firefighters are used by the state as a means of executing power. It can be seen from the shifting of their functions from extinguishing fires to starting fires. Their tasks are set clearly at the very beginning, “Established, 1790, to burn English-influenced books in the Colonies. First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin.”
RULE 1. Answer the alarm swiftly. 2. Start the fire swiftly. 3. Burn everything. 4. Report back to firehouse immediately. 5. Stand alert for other alarms (Bradbury, 1953, p. 32).” By referring to Benjamin Franklin, the intention of manipulating information is obvious as if Franklin agreed to the firefighter's job description. Bradbury mentions Franklin here to refer to the Union Fire Company, also known as Benjamin Franklin's Bucket Brigade, which was a voluntary firefighting organization formed in 1736 (Chaplin, 2007).

Unfortunately, in this novel, Beatty is portrayed by Bradbury as distorting the history of the firefighting organization which was originally formed to extinguish fires. In addition to controlling the fire department, Bradbury in *Fahrenheit 451* narrates another major institution controlled by the government is the police. The police, who are supposed to protect the public interest, is used by government to pass the state's interest, namely securing the burning of books as a censor of knowledge to the public. This can be seen from the burning of a book owner who tried to defend his books (Bradbury, 1983, p. 34).

The security officers, who were given the name “Angel” which, when referring to the Bible as “protectors”, were transformed by the government into “guardians” for the government's purposes, namely ensuring the compliance of the handmaids. Thus, the control of the state apparatus is also described by Atwood in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The control of the state apparatus is also narrated by Westerfeld in *Uglies*. Through “Special Circumstances” who claim to be the guardians of the city's security and stability for the welfare of the entire community, but who actually act as executors to ensure that everything goes according to the government's plan and provide punishment for lawbreakers, namely for those who refuse to serve plastic surgery and choose to live freely outside the system (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 107). Like the malfunctions of the police in the *Fahrenheit 451*, Special Circumstances are also used by the government to hunt down and destroy people who are considered dangerous. The same thing goes with “Angels” in *The Handmaid's Tale* and in *The Hunger Games*. The “Peacekeepers” which become extensions of the government to control and punish the disobeyed citizens. Thus, government

ownership of vital state organs, in this case the police or security guards, is narrated in American dystopian novels.

In addition to the fields of communication and security, the governments described in the Dystopian novels also control education and manipulate knowledge. The government intends the public to be uneducated or uncritical, so it is easy to fall prey to public propaganda. Schools are used by the authorities to manipulate historical knowledge in accordance with the government's desire so that the younger generation records history that is actually not correct. Knowledge that is inhibited and blocked by dominating the school is a form of Capitalism that appears in *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Uglies*. By mastering the school, the ruler can launch propaganda to create compliance because the knowledge people have is limited and controlled. Strong government intervention is indeed a feature of Capitalism which is increasingly spreading in the Western world (Hyman and Baptist, 2014). Bradbury, Westerfeld, and Collins seem to attach great importance to government intervention, thus embodying this in their novels. Schools, which seem to enhance young generations' knowledge, are just covers to make people believe that citizens have rights to be knowledgeable. The facts are the schools either focus on students' pleasure like only giving Physical Educations, comic books, and movies like in *The Fahrenheit 451*, or became tools of propaganda by giving false information like in *Uglies* and *The Hinger Games*.

In the 1900s and 2000s, books were an important part of society. In *Fahrenheit 451*, all books except comics and books about sex are burnt. In *Uglies*, old books that are no

longer allowed to exist in society are destroyed or burned by the new government (Westerfeld, 2005, p. 202). Both Bradbury and Atwood mention about 'knowledge is power'. Thus, people who have books will be knowledgeable, and have the potential to have power or power. Burning books can be interpreted as an effort to inhibit people from being knowledgeable, so that they do not have power. The government as the sole of power in these dystopia novels suppress to maintain obedience and control in society by banning people to be knowledgeable.

In addition to schools, the government in the novel *Fahrenheit 451* is also described as controlling health institutions like hospitals as public facilities. In *Fahrenheit 451* government provides two machines to cope overdose cases as the number of people committing suicides as the result of mental stress is increasing. a common case in society in novels, and therefore the government has prepared two machines to deal with this. Instead of preventing the stress faced by its citizens, the government with its property prefers to deal with the problems that arise as a result of this pressure (Bradbury, 1983, p. 13). The same thing about mastery of ownership in the health sector is also expressed by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Given the privilege of examining the health and fertility of handmaids, and of keeping records of their health, the doctors take advantage of their position to abuse these women, with the desire to have sexual intercourse with them and to give the lure of pregnancy as pregnancy is the only thing that can saved these handmaids for further punishments (Atwood, 1985, p. 52).

In a capitalist system, property is supposed to be privately controlled, and the government protects private ownership rights

to property, without government interference (Zimbalist 1988). But what happens is that private ownership of property is allowed, but remains under state control. What happened in *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Uglies*, and *The Hunger Games* is in line with the Marxist thought that the state controls the main sectors of the economy such as production, health care to be returned to the public interest (Horvart, 1982). However, in the world of Dystopia *Fahrenheit 451*, this Marxist thought does not apply fully because the government's control over public property is not used for public purposes, but as a means of public control to obey the government. This kind of depiction is well described in the novel *Animal Farm*, where control of public facilities and property is only enjoyed for the benefit of certain groups namely the rulers, who are depicted by pig characters, while other animals only contribute to production and not results. Socialists view the relationship of private property as limiting the potential of the productive forces in the economy. According to socialists, private property becomes obsolete when it concentrates on centralized and socialized institutions based on the appropriation of private income, but based on cooperative cooperation and internal planning in the allocation of inputs, until the role of capitalists becomes redundant (Wolff, 2014). With no need for capital accumulation and a class of owners, private property in the means of production is considered an outdated form of economic organization which must be replaced by free associations of individuals based on public or common ownership of these socialized assets (Engels, 2010). In these American dystopian novels, although the government allows the ownership of individual property, this individual and public ownership is controlled by the government.

Thus, there are ideological contradictions between Capitalism and Socialism in this novel.

Class System in Society as an Arena for the Contest of Capitalism and Socialism

The next thing that becomes the arena for the contestation of Capitalism and Socialism in American dystopian novels is the class system. In Marxist theory, the capitalist stage of production consists of two main classes: the bourgeoisie, that is, the capitalists who own the means of production, and the proletariat or working class, which has to sell their own labour-power. It is the fundamental economic structure of work and property, a condition of inequality normalized and reproduced through cultural ideologies. Thus, the proletariat is forced into a position of subservience by the forces of capital, which have stripped the means of production from branding (Andrew, 1983; Breisser, 2001). In contrast to the class system built on the ideology of Capitalism, Socialism puts forward a classless society. Classless society refers to a society in which no one is born into a social class. Such differences in wealth, income, education, culture or social networks may arise and will only be determined by the experiences and achievements of individuals in such societies. In societies where class has been abolished, it is usually the result of a voluntary decision by the membership to form such a society to abolish the pre-existing class structure in society. The abolition of social classes and the establishment of a classless society are the main goals of libertarian Socialism (Beck, 2007). In American dystopian novels, the class system conflict is raised by the authors of dystopian novels in their novels.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury shows the division of the class system, although the depiction is done explicitly. In the narrative of the story, the government in *Fahrenheit 451* tries to abolish the class system by controlling all public facilities and giving equal treatment to everyone. The government drives people's thinking with the same ideology, by blocking access to knowledge through burning books and blocking information, so that people are directed to an understanding that has been controlled by the government, feels they are in the same social class, and already lives in happiness. *“Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy, because the facts of that sort don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with.”* (Bradbury, 1983, p. 58).

However, Bradbury in his novel does not really present a classless society, which characterizes the ideology of Socialism. On the other hand, with an authoritarian government, in which every citizen was forced to follow the rules, Bradbury produced a class system in *Fahrenheit 451*. The bourgeoisie in *Fahrenheit 451* was hidden from the ordinary proletariat, behind its agents, the firefighters. The government consciousness at *Fahrenheit 451*, emphasized the distance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and focused the tension between the people. In the novel, the firefighters are used as a "repressive structure". Firefighter is used as a method of control by supporting and spreading dominant class ideology.

Similar to *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts the social struggles of various classes in a Dystopian world where politics and the rank and power of different classes are considered important. In this case,

Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* divides the class system into three, namely the upper-class system who gets higher opportunities and positions and can own goods that should be prohibited by the government, middle class society represented by professional workers such as doctors, lawyers, writers, whose job is to serve the upper class, and the lower class system, i.e., lowly, unskilled workers. Underneath all that, are women, who are further classified according to their social class, namely the wives of officials, handmaids, maids, and unwomen.

From the beginning of the novel, the division of women according to their social class is obvious. "*At the bottom of the stairs there's a hat-and-umbrella stand...There are several umbrellas in it: black, for the Commander, blue, for the Commander's Wife, and the one assigned to me, which is red* (Atwood, 1985, p. 15)." Thus, colours distinguish people from one another.

As the story progresses in *The Handmaid's Tale*, differences in social class can be in the description of houses, cars and some characters that represent class in society. This shows how Capitalism works and other people are exploited according to capitalist interests. Althusser believed that Capitalism seeks to produce maximum commodities at the lowest prices and highest profits. Naturally, this is in line with the increasing exploitation of labour (Althusser, 1971).

The economy has always been an effective weapon for the ruling class to maintain their position in society. By exploiting the ignorance of the dominated class, rulers make other classes look inferior so that they can claim power and be responsible for work and labour (Althusser, 1970). The

handmaid also stands as a symbol of the proletariat, subjugated by the bourgeoisie to the point of slavery, violently indoctrinated in a psychologically destructive way, and denied its basic freedoms. In Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred experiences his daily life under a bourgeois theocratic regime ruled by religious fundamentalists. The commanders are the system leaders. The experience of this female servant reveals the gap or rather the true character of the religious readers in her society or rather the true picture of the people who will become the maidservants. He will spend his life in service and devotion to the spiritual leaders of the Republic of Gilead who are representatives of God. Gilead's bourgeois society can be observed using religion in such a way as to achieve political control over the proletariat which it may lack. Lois W. Banner points out that religion has long been used as a means of controlling population (Banner, 1973). It is an effective political tool cloaked in scriptures, sacraments, and other dogmatic devices that deceive the devout into believing and following a dogma.

Westerfeld in *Uglies* presents the class system opposition of Socialism and Capitalism. In order to create a classless society, the government in *Uglies* requires all teenagers to undergo plastic surgery on their 16th birthday. By leading up to plastic surgery at the age of 16, Westerfeld is actually that the class system is narrated in *Uglies*. *Uglies* are described as a group of people who are quarantined in separate places, with limited access, and low social status. While Pretties are people who have successfully undergone plastic surgery and have the right to live in luxury, pleasure, and the sufficiency of the necessities of life. Unlike the previous two novels, in *Uglies*, Westerfeld does not mention the domination of the class, or the Pretties,

over the lower class, the *Uglies*. This is because the control that is highlighted in this novel lies in the ruler or government, which is outside the life of the people of these two classes.

Different from the previous dystopian novels, in *The Hunger Games*, Collins directly divides the Panem people into two class systems, namely rich to poor. The richest are those who live in the Capitol, while the poorest are those from the District. The higher the district number, the poorer the condition of the district. The Capitol represents the bourgeois Capitol which owns the means of production employs wage laborers and controls the state, and is the ruling class, while the district represents the proletariat (workers) which is defined as a class that does not own the means of production, and owns nothing but its labour-power. The people of the Capitol lived in luxury and freedom, while the people of the district were poor and oppressed.

In these American dystopian novels, there is a class system conflict in the arena of Capitalism and Socialism. Although initially the ruler intended to create a classless society, as narrated in *Fahrenheit 451* and *Uglies*, the class system still exists in the narratives of these novels. The Dystopian society in these novels is divided into two major groups, namely the bourgeois class or the dominant class in control, and the proletariat class which is under the bourgeois class.

Exploitation as an Arena for the Contest of Capitalism and Socialism

Exploitation refers to the act of taking advantage of others without giving them fair compensation. Exploitation is common in Capitalism. Exploitation has become a feature of all class society, which is divided into two

main classes, the exploited class which produces wealth and the exploiter class which takes over it. Under Capitalism, most needs are met, at least for those who can afford them, with commodities being goods and services produced for sale in the market. Working class people, who do not have the means to produce and sell commodities, have one commodity they can sell: their labour, their ability to work. In this way, workers are forced to sell themselves to some parts of the capitalist to get money to buy necessities of life. On the other hand, Socialism does not carry the principle of exploitation. Socialists apply the principles of equality, democracy, individual freedom, self-realization, and community or solidarity. Regarding equality, they have proposed a strong version of the equality of opportunity principle according to which everyone should “broadly have equal access to the material and social means necessary to lead a thriving life” (Wright, 2010).

In *Fahrenheit 451*'s own novel society, that exploitation exists in the form of mass exploitation. In particular, society is subtly exploited by the government which manipulates its people to do things that can benefit the government, namely the mass media provided by the government which continues to feed the public with false information that deceives people into doing the government's dirty work without any complaints. The government in the novel *Fahrenheit 451* tries to brainwash its people and manipulate them into believing that knowledge is not needed by society and does not guarantee their happiness, but that obedience and submission to all government decisions is the best way to obtain happiness.

The exploitation that Atwood clearly narrates in his novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Through this novel, Atwood explores the female body in the economic exploitation of women. Patriarchs in the Republic Gilead isolated the women and then transferred them to domestic suburbs. In the Republic of Gilead, humans are not equal, not all men are first class citizens because some men are second class citizens, but all women are third class citizens. To reaffirm male dominance in the Republic of Gilead, men control women who are judged to be potentially threatening and subversive. In this novel, women are laid off from jobs which refer to their independence to be independent with their own income, prohibited from owning property or accessing assets, and made virtual prisoners in their homes. The imprisonment of women paved the way for the Gilead institution for a class system, with clear standards of behaviour, dress, and responsibility. However, as in all Dystopian societies, this class system is actually an instrument of oppression, especially for women.

As told by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Collins in *The Hunger Games* also exposes the exploits of the Capitol to the districts. Panem is divided into thirteen districts where each district is required to surrender most of its wealth and products to the government located in the Capitol. The people in the districts suffer from poverty and destitution coupled with the fear of making the typology of power in *The Hunger Games* called Lucks includes power, authority and manipulation. The Capitol is described as a large city located in the Rocky Mountains centred on 13 districts, the number of districts in which the country was formed. There, people lead a prosperous life and provide them with a luxurious lifestyle. They indulge in choices in life that offer a variety of exotic foods and fashionable clothes. Meanwhile,

people in the district live on little food. The balance of power works exclusively in favour of the capital which enjoys all the prerogatives as a result of the concentration of power, while the other districts lag behind in all aspects of life. Exploitation is carried out massively through the game "*The Hunger Games*", which involves twenty-four young people from the districts in a bloody game at stake for their lives, in exchange for "tessera", which is the staple material for the survival of their families (Collins, 2008, pp. 13-4).

This bloody game that was broadcast live on television, in which parents were forced to watch their children killed in this brutal way caused fear and trauma to the district residents. District people have undoubtedly given in to the government on the one hand and, just as importantly, they have developed a government phobia, a fear that makes them unable to resist or even have time to resist. In "Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison" (1977) Foucault explains that if the economics of exploitation separates power and products from work, it can be said that disciplinary coercion establishes within the body the linking relationship between increased proficiency and increased dominance (Foucault, 1977). The Capitol maximizes the exploitation of physical strength through the continuous work the district residents have to do and also through *The Hunger Games*. Anyone who violates government laws. According to Sarah Collinson, because the identity and wealth of the district residents were violated, they were vulnerable and powerless, therefore the Capitol dominated the district and severely punished them for taking their products and identities. Power and powerlessness determine the distribution of access to food and other key commodities and assets between and within

different groups. Those who lack power cannot protect their basic political, economic and social rights, and may not be able to protect themselves from violence. The exploitation of the district residents is not only physical, but also psychological, that is, psychologically controls and infiltrates human existence and keeps it from its basic psychological balance, thereby separating humans and even dividing humans from themselves. Dividing humans separately, psychologically, makes humans weak and unable to carry out a revolution.

Thus, in American dystopian novels, American authors put forward the narrative of exploitation as one of the hallmarks of Capitalism. The weak are exploited by the strong for the benefit of the strong, while the weak are increasingly being oppressed and get nothing. This exploit that characterizes Capitalism is recounted in *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Hunger Games*.

From the explanation above, Capitalism and Socialism are two ideologies that are consistently narrated by the authors of American dystopian novels in their dystopian novels. In the conflict between Capitalism and Socialism, the arena of contestation lies in property, class system, and exploitation. In the ideology of Capitalism, ownership is controlled and used for personal or certain group interests, while in the ideology of Socialism, ownership is for the benefit of the people.

CONCLUSION

Through this study, American dystopian novels confirm the application of the ideology of Capitalism which refers to the control of property by the rulers, class differences in

society, and exploitation as proposed by Zimbalist (1998). The thought of Capitalism was originally closely related to American conservative utopian thinking. This utopian writer believes that America is the role model of the world and therefore American Capitalism should be spread throughout the world. Dystopian literature, which is often said to contain criticism of society may present the idea of Capitalism as a critique and satire on the practice of Capitalism in America.

By confirming the ideology of Capitalism, American dystopian novels negate the ideology of Socialism which refers to equality, equality, and the absence of a class system as advocated by Wright (2010). Dystopia which is often said to be anti-Utopia should negate capitalist ideas and be open to socialist ideas. But in American dystopian novels, this is negated. In fact, Dystopian novels re-emerge the ideas of Capitalism which are implemented by authoritarian governments.

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FEMSLASH FANFICTION AND LESBIANISM: EFFORTS TO EMPOWER AND EXPRESS ASIAN AMERICAN WOMAN SEXUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The existence of fan fiction nowadays shows more progressive development especially in this digital era when people does not only use internet for communicating and socializing across time and space but they also show their creativity, one of them is by writing a fan fiction. By writing fan fiction in online platforms, people get the opportunity to express their interests and their identities. This opportunity is also obtained by minority groups such as LGBTQ+ where they can express their identity through fan fiction. LGBTQ+ community utilizes online platform as the tool that brings benefit for them. In this case, writing fan fiction in online platforms allows people to create the preferable representation of minority groups and empower them as the part of LGBTQ+ community. This phenomenon can be seen through a website named Asianfanfics.com which shows an increasing number of fan fictions especially the ones with lesbian related tags such as girl x girl, lesbian, and femslash. Particularly, through the femslash subgenre, people use fan fiction to question the heteronormativity. Regarding to this phenomenon, an interview was conducted by choosing three Asian American fan fiction writers from Asianfanfics.com as the interviewees. Furthermore, by using gender theory and intersectionality, this article focuses on how fan fiction becomes a safe space to express their sexual identities and how lesbian relationship is viewed by Asian families.

Keywords: *Asian American; empowerment; fan fiction; femslash; LGBTQ+; sexuality; women*

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the technology especially internet helps to increase the life quality of human, it is also believed

creating major shifting of the way people treat minority groups, including LGBTQ+ people. In this era of new media, LGBTQ+ culture has been spread globally

(Mokhtar, Sukeri, & Latiff, 2019). Janczak (2017) stated that one of the most beneficial contributions of social media is bringing positive impact on marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community. With the rise of social media, the LGBTQ+ community was able to find different ways to use this as a platform or place to express themselves. Research has also investigated how sexual minorities use social media to portray and develop their personal identities online (Alfasi, 2019; Brandes & Levin, 2014; Duguay, 2016; Fox & Ralston, 2016; Hillier & Harrison, 2007; & Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014a, b). To be able to express and portray their identities online, they utilize internet and social media. Within social media, there are various widely known platforms to share ideas like social networking sites, review sites, video hosting sites and community blog / blogging platforms (writing sites). This research focuses on the use of fan fiction sites in expressing sexual identity.

Fan fiction serves many functions. Klink (2017) argued fan fiction allowed fans to create better representation of minority groups, or that it is a rebellion against the entertainment industry. We have mixed feelings about this argument: fan fiction isn't always unwelcome to the entertainment industry, and it definitely hasn't been equally kind to all underrepresented minorities. Thus, the cyberspace is believed to be a safe space to express the minority groups' sexual identity. Janczak (2017) stated that one of the most beneficial contributions of social media is bringing positive impact on marginalized groups like the LGBTQ+ community. With the rise of social media, the LGBTQ+ community was able to find different ways to use this as a platform or place to express

themselves. Research has also investigated how sexual minorities use social media to portray and develop their personal identities online (Alfasi, 2019; Brandes & Levin, 2014; Duguay, 2016; Fox & Ralston, 2016; Hillier & Harrison, 2007; & Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014a, b). Social media provided chance to connect with people who have had the same experiences; it showed how vast and varied the community was. Social media within this context takes a role in accommodating particular community and being a safe sphere for the LGBTQ+ community, but it also has had a positive contribution on the culture. This article tries to answer how fan fiction becomes a tool to express the sexual identity of minority group (woman), especially lesbian and challenging the heteronormativity that applies in society. Gender theory and intersectionality were employed to make sense the depiction of lesbianism within fan fiction works on fan fiction writing site: Asianfanfics.com.

To do the analysis, this research is using qualitative method. Based on Creswell (2014), qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and refer to diverse designs. Three fan fiction (fem slash fan fictions) writers that are interviewed, JN, DK and TS. They have shown significant involvement with the fem slash writing activities in connection to their sexuality and their being as Asian descendants who live in the US. Following Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014), the data analysis process is divided into 3 main steps namely data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing. Data analysis procedure that is done within this research is started with creating a condensed data by selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the interviews. Data

display within this research is presented in form of detailed explanation of the condensed data to lead the conclusion.

DISCUSSION

The Struggle against Heteronormativity: The Asian American LGBTQ+ Movement

Nowadays, when talking about the expression of sexuality, the LGBTQ+ community tends to be more vocal and open about their sexual identity. Since the emergence of LGBTQ+ rights movement, the legalization of same-sex marriage, and the expression of sexual freedom in popular culture, it seems that the talk on sexuality is no longer being a taboo thing. However, it is still undeniably true that the struggle on expressing ones sexuality still exists. In fact, seeing how media tries to portray LGBTQ+ does not only show the attempts on the normalization of sexual freedom itself but also indicates the never ending struggle going on in the society especially for LGBTQ+ community in order to fight for their rights against the social discrimination.

The discussion on the social discrimination towards LGBTQ+ community leads to the social belief on heteronormativity. Heteronormativity itself refers to the belief on heterosexuality especially on gender binary associated natural roles and how people match their assigned sex (van der Toorn et al., p. 160). Basically, heteronormativity rules the whole gender relation which is also the result of the patriarchal system in a society. In this case, it is believed to be natural when men and women always stick to their gender roles. As a matter of fact, this patriarchal system then triggered the reaction especially from women which resulted in the emergence of Feminist movement since the nineteenth century.

Initially, the emergence of Feminist movement focused on women's equal rights in every social aspect. This movement is the response toward the male domination in the society and the discrimination experienced by women. Furthermore, this movement is gradually seen as human rights movement which gets further response from other community including LGBTQ+ community.

Back to the idea of heteronormativity, Feminism and LGBTQ+ movement criticize the inequality between men and women. Similar to Feminist movement, LGBTQ+ rights movement criticizes the discrimination towards LGBTQ+ community which comes in a form of homophobic and trans phobic attitude from the mainstream. In an article on the relation between Feminism and LGBTQ+, it is stated that:

the basis for homophobic and trans phobic attitudes is the inequality between men and women. In our society, men and women are still depicted as Venus and Mars, black and white, two polar opposites that may complement one another but are not equal (Kushnarenko, 2019).

From this statement, it can be understood how the inequality between men and women leads to the discrimination towards LGBTQ+ movement which is seen as the deviation from the heteronormativity itself. In this case, not only rules the supposedly normal roles for men and women in a society, heteronormativity also emphasizes the idea of opposite sexual attraction between men and women. According to heteronormativity, it is only normal when men and women are attracted to the opposite gender and this idea puts the LGBTQ+ people in the abnormal side which somehow justifies the rejection and discrimination towards LGBTQ+ community.

Even before claiming the label as LGBTQ+ community, the word “queer” was taken as the umbrella term which is used to be an insult for non-heteronormative individuals that later on became popular because it underlines the fluidity of gender and sexuality (Los Angeles Conservancy, 2020). Related to this, a feminist psychologist named Lisa Diamond explains that:

people can be sexually fluid; at some point in your life, you could feel completely straight, while at other times, you might feel attracted to the same-sex. Demeaning terms are harmful and make you feel like you were doing something abnormal. It’s OK for our identities to be in flux; not everyone has an identity that remains the same (Cochrane, 2016).

In this case, there is an ongoing debate on sexual identity especially when it comes to the existence of LGBTQ+ community against the heteronormativity which once again also emphasizes the ongoing struggle for the LGBTQ+ individuals. They have to live with fear of doing something wrong or being accused as abnormal individuals among the society. This is also the reason behind the hesitation of coming out as a homosexual even to their family and the uncertainty of whether they would be accepted by the society or not.

Despite of the struggle and the obstacle that they have to overcome, the LGBTQ+ community keeps fighting for their rights and this fight has been going on for decades. Since 1900s until now, there are some monumental events which mark the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement particularly in America. The establishment of gay rights groups such as the Society for Human Rights in 1924 and the Mattachine Society in 1950 with its 1966 ‘Sip-in’ protest in New York City, also the 1969 act of confrontations called Stonewall riots or

Stonewall uprising commemorate the beginning of LGBTQ+ civil rights movement in the United States (Webster, 2019). Since then, the LGBTQ+ community together with contemporary feminist and anti-racist movements seeks for social transformation.

Around 1970s-‘80s, two remarkable figures named Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera advocated the discriminated LGBTQ+ individuals, established the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries for homeless LGBTQ+ youth and sex workers, marched and lobbied for the rights of HIV-positive people through ACT UP organization, also opposed the exclusion of transgenders from New York’s 2002 Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (Li, 2021).

These figures are only two examples among so many figures that fight for the LGBTQ+ civil rights. Finally, they make a groundbreaking achievement for LGBTQ+ rights and civil rights law with the legalization of same-sex marriage since 2003 after activists, celebrities, and public relations campaigns swayed public opinion toward LGBTQ+ community. But, not stopping there, the movement still marching on especially on the attempt to oppose the heteronormativity and to find justice, equality, and dignity for LGBTQ+ community in the society.

It is clear enough that one of the main goals of the LGBTQ+ movement is to normalizing the homosexuality as a part of sexual freedom. Opposing the heteronormativity, the LGBTQ+ movement attempts to change the label of ‘abnormal’ from the LGBTQ+ individuals. However, when talking about the normalization of homosexuality or same-sex relationship, there is an idea that the homosexuality has never been ‘abnormal’ in the first place. In an article

on the normalization of LGBTQ+, it is stated that:

in other times and places, humans understood much better than today that sexual attraction and gender expression are varied and often fluid. [...] Sexual practices are almost always highly regulated in any given culture. It's often been the case, however, that cultures have existed in which people understood quite well that same-sex attraction was a normal part of the human experience (Finn, 2019).

Through this article, it can be understood how heteronormativity is seen as the act of de-normalization of homosexuality. It is assumed that the change of perspective on seeing the sexual attraction and gender expression happened as the result of Western colonization and the spread of Christianity. It is known that the impact of the colonization and Christianity was very strong and attached to other cultures to the point where they actually adopt the same ideas on seeing things including seeing the sexual attraction and gender expression based on heteronormativity.

However, some cultures historically believed on the fluidity of gender expression. Among all ethnics around the world, Asians are the ethnic group with their own history on homosexuality. Asian countries such as Japan, China, and India even have their own historical traces on homosexuality. In details, Wong explains that:

the Kama Sutra has a chapter of explicit instructions on gay sex. In imperial China, many Han dynasty rulers were bisexual or homosexual. Scholars Bret Hinsch and Li Yinhe note that tales of homoerotic relationships, such as those of Long Yang and Emperor Ai of Han, were widely known and valorized throughout Chinese history. Lesbian and gay partnerships were meanwhile

ubiquitous throughout the Ashikaga and Edo era Japan, even under the most repressive, feudalistic rule of its political history.

However, when we reflect to the current situation, the issue of homosexuality in Asian countries is still on a debate. In Japan, for example, even though there are no laws in prohibiting the discrimination based on gender expression, there is a progress on several aspects such as politic, education, health, and employment which shows recognition of same-sex partnership and fulfills their rights as citizens. Meanwhile, in China, the government even strictly bans the LGBTQ+-related contents on social media under the pretext of "clean cyberspace" and shows more control over the LGBTQ+ community (Chen, 2018). It can be perceived how heteronormativity is deeply rooted in the current society. No matter how hard they try, the LGBTQ+ individuals keep finding difficulties, obstacles, and discriminations. The fact that they have cultural knowledge on the fluidity of gender expression does not even affect the current belief on heteronormativity. As a matter of fact, the LGBTQ+ community has to start fighting all over again for something that actually has never been believed as "abnormal" in the first place and the progress on recognizing the same-sex relationship is not the result of looking back at the cultural knowledge itself but because of the current movement from LGBTQ+ community.

Put it into American context, Asian Americans are also the ones who voice out the LGBTQ+ rights. Even before the Stonewall riots and other LGBTQ+ movements, the queer Asian Americans already participated in Civil Rights movement, anti-war movement, women's and earlier gay liberation movements. However, being one of the ethnic

minorities in America doubles up the struggle for queer Asian Americans. During that time, the LGBTQ+ community was dominated by white Americans. There was no community established for queer Asian Americans because not many Asians reveal their sexual identity due to the anti-racism movement during that time. In an article, a journalist and an activist named Daniel C. Tsang (2006) shares his experience as the part of queer Asian American movement and writes:

although I was active in both Asian and in gay groups, I had a sense of isolation since the gay group was largely white, and there was practically no other gay Asian with whom I could identify, except for the official “gay advocate” at the university, Jim Toy. He was hired by the university to serve gay students, but he was not widely known as Asian and certainly wasn’t active in the Asian American Movement that had emerged by then (227).

Through this, it can be understood how queer Asian Americans had to go through alienation. Some of them even have to either hide their sexual identity or not to be associated in Asian American movement because the combination of these two identities was not conceivable for many people at that time.

However, just like other LGBTQ+ community, queer Asian Americans keep expressing their rights against heteronormativity. Not only through rally, demonstration, or riots, they find their way through various media. Around 1980s and 1990s, newspaper, magazine, and literature were the media for queer Asian Americans to express their sexuality. In an article on the history of queer Asian American activism, Amy Sueyoshi (2016) mentions some examples such as:

Phoenix Rising as first Asian American lesbian newsletter, [...] Kitty Tsui with her poetry and the book *The Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire* as the first book from Chinese American lesbian, [...] single-authored books from lesbians poets and writers including Merle Woo and Chea Villanueva, [...] the portrait of Kitty Tsui in lesbian erotica magazine *On Our Backs* in 1988 and 1990, as well as in *New York City’s Village Voice* as first Asian lesbian to appear on the cover, also [...] her book titled *Breathless* in 1995 with intense scenes of pleasure, pain, and Chinese food, which won the Firecracker Alternative Book Award (20-22).

Those are the few examples of the way queer Asian Americans express their sexuality despite of the rejection and discrimination towards them. Not only that, these works also gain attention from other LGBTQ+ community especially the white activists on seeing queer Asian Americans as the part of LGBTQ+ movement itself. Up to this point, it can be seen that the LGBTQ+ movement does not stop on demonstrations but they also spread the movement to mass media. Nowadays, we can see how the media such as television, newspaper, magazine, film, and literature portray the LGBTQ+ community which makes their existence even stronger than before.

Among those mass media, literature might be the most preferable media for LGBTQ+ movement. Through the previous examples, the LGBTQ+ individuals even started to publicly show their sexual identity through their own literary works. Just like starting a demonstration, writing their own story as the LGBTQ+ individuals is a step they can take to proclaim their existence. As if to say that when other mass media ignore their existence, then it is better for them to pave

their own way. Names like Misa Sugiura, Franny Choi, Aminah Mae Safi, Esmé Weijun Wang, Hieu Minh Nguyen, Yanyi, Rahul Mehta, Ryka Aoki, and many others are contemporary Asian American writers who enliven the queer literature. Most of them present stories on the self-discovery, struggles and discriminations experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals. Their stories can also be the media for them to share the similar experiences with the readers especially the LGBTQ+ ones. Moreover, with the increasing number of queer writers, the increasing number of literary works written, and the increasing interest from the readers, that's where the LGBTQ+ community gains recognition from the society even though they are still classified as a minority group. The same thing happened with the portrayal of LGBTQ+ community through other mass media. So, the more mass media portray the LGBTQ+ community, the bigger the chance for them to be recognized by the society and slightly shift the belief on heteronormativity.

Unfortunately, when talking about queer Asian Americans on mass media, it is undeniably true that they get lesser chance than the others. When it comes to stories about Asian Americans, the heteronormativity is still very domineering. For example, in an article on Asian American LGBTQ+ stories in Hollywood, Lakshmi Gandhi (2021) explains that:

another recent study on Asian American representation in Hollywood found that only 3.4 percent of Hollywood's top-grossing movies featured Asian American or Pacific Islander leads and that none of the films studied featured an LGBTQ Asian American or Pacific Islander lead. That number is an indication of how hard it is to get producers and studios to invest in stories

about queer Asian Americans in particular.

By reading statements above, it is reaffirmed how Asian Americans are still struggling to find their place in mass media and it is even harder for the queer ones to even show their existence. This problem still arises in connection with the previously mentioned issue of being identified as Asian Americans as well as queers which also triggers overly complex issues of race, gender, and sexuality. It also means that queer Asian Americans in particular will feel totally unrepresented and it will be more difficult for them to socially express their sexual identity compared to the others.

However, back to the use of literature as the media for queer Asian Americans to express their sexual identity against heteronormativity, there is a particular type of literature especially for audiences or readers who are not only identify themselves as queers but also the ones who accept and understand the idea of same sex relationship. It is understandable that not everybody has the opportunity to find a publisher and actually publish their own literary works like the previous queer writers mentioned above. But, there is a form of literature called fan fiction which can be another alternative media for them to express their experience and understanding on homosexuality. Derived from its name, fan fiction is a literature written by fans as a creative response towards existing popular culture. According to Francesca Coppa (2017), fan fiction is defined as:

creative material featuring characters [from] works whose copyright is held by others [and] a kind of safety valve: a substitute for desires that could not be articulated, much less acted out, in our real world.

Through fan fiction, anyone can create a whole new story using the existing works and being creative by shifting the plot lines, specifying the characterization, even creating a new universe for the story. When it comes to LGBTQ+ individuals, fan fiction can be the place for them to express their sexual identity. For those who experience the alienation and discrimination, especially queer Asian Americans, can write down their thoughts and express their desires without worrying about being judged by the society. When all mass media out there is still dominated by heteronormativity, they can turn into fan fiction and create their own world. In creating a fan fiction the LGBTQ+ individuals are not bound by any rules including heteronormativity. Besides being creative and imaginative, through fan fiction, the LGBTQ+ individuals get together as a community where they can share their experience and interest on same sex relationship.

In a study titled *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006), Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse state that “fan fiction is primarily written by women, of all ages and sexual identities, and tends to explore – or ‘ship’ – intimate and romantic relationships between characters.” It is common knowledge how difficult it is for women to freely express themselves including expressing their thoughts about sexuality. Particularly, the Asian Americans, who are still struggling with their cultural identity as Asian women, need a media like fan fiction to express themselves and free from the patriarchal culture. In this case, even though they live in the United States where women nowadays can socially express themselves, the Asian American women do not get the same opportunity compared to women from other ethnics. The chance is even smaller for the

Asian American lesbians. Bound by the strong patriarchal culture and the heteronormativity, Asian American lesbians have to hide their sexual identity even from their family. As the ones who experience sexual discrimination, Asian American lesbians can use fan fiction to express their sexual identity and desire. Moreover, among many genres of fan fiction, there is one particular genre called femslash which specializes on girl x girl relationship. Not only be able to express their sexual identity, Asian American lesbians are able to oppose the heteronormativity especially when the other media does not pay much attention on represent the Asian American lesbians. Therefore, in the next sub chapter, we will discuss further about femslash as the safe place for the Asian American lesbians to express their sexual identity against heteronormativity.

Fem Slash Fan Fiction as The Safe Space For Lesbians To Express Their Sexuality

In the fan fiction, there is a subgenre known as fem slash. Typically, characters featured in fem slash are heterosexual in the canon (reality) universe. According to Oxford Lexico Dictionary (2021), fem slash is defined as a genre of fiction, chiefly published online, in which female characters who appear together in film, television, or other popular media are portrayed as having a sexual relationship. Similarly, Cambridge Online Dictionary (2021) also defines also defines fem slash as a genre of fan fiction or work written about TV, film, or book characters by their fans) in which two female characters are imagined to have a sexual relationship. In slash fan fiction, women authors question and defy the heteronormative structure of the source text, pairing up male characters who have no

change of becoming partners in Canon. More importantly, slash authors often do this in spite of the original copyright owners, who deny any possibility of homoerotic developments in the source text (Kustritz, 2003).

In relation to women sexuality's expression, the fan fiction writing (especially slash fan fiction/ fem slash fiction) is near to the explicit sexual content. Thus, it leads to the debate related to pornography issue. As we all know, that explicit sexual content is commonly stigmatized and misunderstood as porn content. Writing works like fem slash fan fiction is not a porn action. To avoid the debate and misunderstanding in, some academics and activists distinguish between 'pornography' as exploitative material and 'erotica' as empowering (Wilson-Kovacs, 2009). Schorn (2012) identifies a latest rise in commercial feminist and queer porn explicitly framed by its maker as an act of resistance opposing exploitative mainstream pornography.

Historically, pornography was seen as violence against women, and gave rise to various anti-pornography movements initiated by feminists in 1970s. Pornography is considered to be an industry devoted to heterosexual men and to use women as sex objects. Pornography has placed women only as objects for men to enjoy, as if women are not human beings or sexual beings. Because of this anti-pornography movement, a term called erotica emerged. Erotica is used to refer to works that are sexually explicit but there is no violence against women in the work thus, the word 'erotica' then began to be used to distinguish sexually explicit work from pornography (Tyas, 2019).

Another issue comes for being a part of the LGBTQ+ community with the Asian social background. Homosexuality is still illegal in some countries where same-sex intercourse can be punished by fines, caning or prison sentences (Choy, 2019). Even as LGBTQ+ rights are increasingly recognized in the region, the community still faces discrimination and stigma in societies that promote traditional and conservative family values. Furthermore, related to the gender and sexuality issue, Friedman (2007) states although lesbians have achieved greater visibility and, in some countries, increased equality, they are routinely discriminated. This discrimination all too often takes the form of social denigration and physical violence. The shape of social denigration and physical violence could be seen in form of experiencing forced institutionalization in mental rehabilitation clinics, electro shock treatment as aversion therapy, sexual harassment in school and at work, threats of rape to make you straight, school expulsions, eviction by landlords, police kidnapping, family violence, and media stigmatization.

Lesbians face discrimination in the workplace because of their gender and their sexual orientation. Employment and job promotions are denied if women look too masculine. Male coworkers stalk and sexually harass lesbians who are unable to report for fear of backlash and retaliation. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ people in Asia (including lesbians) face violence in the "private" space—by members of core and extended family, community, and religious groups (Commission, Violence On The Basis of SOGI Against Non Heteronormative Women in Asia, 2010). This violence includes beatings, home confinement, ostracism, mental and psychological abuse, verbal abuse, forced

marriage, corrective rape and in some cases killings to bring back family pride and honor. The fear of family and community violence is often worsened by police involvement, it could be seen on event when police officers join forces with family members to break up lesbian couples by arresting, detaining and intimidating them. In some cases, charges of kidnapping, trafficking or child abuse are brought against one of the partners. Police officers also charge lesbians under sodomy laws even if the law does not explicitly include lesbianism.

Compounding the situation is the state's lack of due diligence in applying existing laws that penalize domestic violence and sexual violence to LGBTQ+ people who are victimized, thus denying them access to complaint mechanisms and opportunities for redress. Victims do not hope to these rules for protection because they experience duality lives, and exposing the violence invites disagreement, refusal, discrimination and other shape of violence. Such a vicious cycle allows violence to stay unknown, undetected, and unchecked. In some instances, media does report on suicide pacts or foiled same sex marriages, but the coverage does not name what happened as abuse or suppression of rights. Instead, the media publicity support the stigma against LGBTQ+ people and makes them the object of ridicule and shame.

Within Asian-American Lesbians itself, similar phenomena also happened. For many Asian Americans and their families, navigating the intersection between the two identities can become a balancing act between finding strength in their lived experiences and family tradition and managing the burdens that can arise from an emphasis on putting family above the individual is the constant challenge

they face although the acceptance for LGBTQ+ people in the US is better than other regions (Truong 2019).

The discrimination that is experienced by lesbians becomes multiple when they are experiencing the intersectionality. Being woman with various attributes of minority makes woman experiences intersectional discrimination (Smith, 2016). To begin with, the study of intersectionality is complex. It starts with an understanding that each subject has multiple identifiers (such as race, religion, sex, class, and any other social marker) and that these shape the various ways in which subjects make sense of their surroundings and live their lives. Intersectionality has been used to explain both individual- and group-level social phenomena (Jr, 2006).

Experiencing intersectionality is bringing a greater challenge for lesbians themselves, especially when we are living in the patriarchal society. The discrimination of being lesbians with intersectionality is inevitable. Lesbians of color face a society brimming with unjust prejudice related to their racial, gender and sexual statuses (Bridges, Selvidge, & Matthews, 2003). It is happened because the concept of heteronormativity is constructed by patriarchy. Lesbians have worked tirelessly toward achieving legitimacy as human beings, as women, as mothers, and as life partners in the eyes of an obstinate heteronormative majority. Lesbians have felt the pain of being judged as less than human and being deemed unworthy of basic human rights. Lesbians know the pain of discrimination in key areas such as employment, housing, and healthcare. Lesbians have shed tears at vigils for hospitalized or deceased sisters that were victims of violence and hate crimes (Aragon,

2006). Furthermore, women in homosexual relationships may not be treated equally as gay men, but this is usually only when they present themselves as femme (or traditionally feminine in appearance). For femme women in lesbian relationships, the blend of homophobia and misogyny they are subjected to is often based on men believing that the relationship exists for their sexual gratification (Williamson, 2015). Another challenge that is experienced by women and lesbians is being objectified. Women are heavily sexualized in media, and lesbian women experience this equally, and sometimes at greater rates, than heterosexual women (Tebbe, Moradi, Connelly, Lenzen, & Flores., 2018).

A similar challenge also experienced by women and lesbian in cyberspace. Cyberspace tends to take a developing part of the social realities of many people today. Cyberspace, until now, has not managed to neutralize gender: on the contrary, it appears to be organized by the patriarchal forms, which exist in Real Life (RL) (Boudourides & Drakou, 2000). Hence it causes to consistently produce the gender norms in cyberspace that also applied in offline sphere. When women are transferred in cyberspace, they become a site for the imagination of virtual men who play through the fantasies of embodied men (Boudourides & Drakou, 2000). This could be because lesbians experience a more diverse set of objectification tactics than heterosexual women (Kozee. & Tylka, 2006). Lesbian relationships have become increasingly co - modified, exploited, and hyper sexualized by popular media, most often targeting male consumers' ideals of being sexually involved with two (or more) women at one time (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Studies have found that sexual minority women are

primarily sexualized by men (Tebbe, Moradi, Connelly, Lenzen, & Flores., 2018).

However, cyberspace is also believed to be a safe place to express one's self including minorities. As Marciano (2014) states for marginalized and stigmatized groups who face discrimination, online environments are particularly appealing because they provide a mediated experience that is easier to control and maneuver. Social media is used as platform to express Lesbians' as well as LGBTQ+ community's true selves. LGBTQ+ people use social media as a place to express themselves and consider it as a safe-space to express their identity freely. They actively voice out their idea about rights and self-expression. As Russel (2002) said below:

The Internet has provided sexual minority with a safe place in which to explore identities, come out to one another, and tell their stories ... Such free spaces characterize the 'virtual communities' of sexual minority that have recently emerged, creating opportunities for the development of relationships and identities that are not supported in the other contexts of their lives (p. 258).

Furthermore, Fan fiction comes as an alternative way to solve the problem mentioned above faced by women (lesbians). It happens because Fan fiction is unique (Koehm, 2018). In this way, fan fiction can be a safe space for minority groups that historically have not had such a space available to them. In the fem slash fan fiction works one of the most common themes found is lesbian relationship.

The finding from the conducted interviews with fem slash fan fiction writers related to fem slash fan fiction writing as the way to express their sexuality showed varied results. The first author named DK who is

actively writing since 2013, stated that her love firstly inspired DK as a fan of her favorite idol girl group from South Korea as the reason why she decided to start writing fan fiction. DK writes fem slash works within the fan fiction writing site. That answer is in line with the definition that said fan fiction fan fiction is the creative utilization and modification of existing popular media texts by fans who take stories, worlds, and/or characters as starting points and create their own stories based on their imagination (Reißmann, Stock, Kaiser, Isenberg, & Nieland, 2017).

DK mostly chooses comedy, romance and drama as the themes she writes in her fem slash fiction. Furthermore, DK stated that by using fan fiction writing site as medium for writing fem slash fan fiction, DK feels she is given more space and chance to express herself in free manner (especially her sexuality and her sexual orientation). DK added that she feels safe because in the online sphere there is none of her real life family, friends, or colleagues. As cited from the interview excerpt below:

“I feel safe to write in online sphere since my family, my friends and office mates aren’t there, and I can write the ideas I wanna share freely” (Interview with DK on April ,13 2021).

Thus, DK feels braver and more comfortable to express her true self (including her sexuality) through the fem slash fiction she writes. DK sometimes also uses the real-life characters within the works she produces. Meanwhile, when DK was asked about responses she got from the reader, she answered that she got support from her readers. Unlike in her real life who is still opposing and think that talking and expressing one’s sexuality (including the different sexual orientation) is impolite, taboo and

unacceptable since DK comes from and lives in Asian conservative family. Within online sphere, DK added that she never being discriminated by other authors nor readers. Furthermore, DK explained that the supportive readers and writing environment makes her feel comfortable, enthusiastic and enjoy to produce fem slash fan fictions as the way to express her sexuality (and her sexual orientation as well). Regarding to the erotic/explicit sexual content within her works, DK explained since the fan fiction writing site makes her feel safe (and keep her being anonymous) DK argued that it is the shape of her maturity as woman, not a pervert thing nor glorifying pornography. As she said below:

“Writing an erotic story is different to a thing called as being pervert, it is our expression of maturity as mature woman” (Interview with DK on April,13 2021).

The next interview with author named AO revealed that AO found fan fiction writing site helped her a lot in expressing her true self and her sexuality. AO who is active in the fan fiction writing and reading since 2015. AO limited herself in writing fem slash fan fictions only. Similar to DK, AO is inspired by her favorite idol group as the inspiration in writing stories. AO explained by writing fan fiction, it made her feel free to express herself. AO feels comfortable because within online space, there is no one judge her sexuality. In fan fiction writing site, AO feels free to be herself, not wearing mask like in her real life, as she said on the interview:

“I feel the freedom, no one judge me, I can be myself and it makes me comfortable” (Interview with AO, 14 April 2021).

In writing fan fictions, she prefers to put romance and action as the theme. Similar to DK, AO stated that online space supports her

and no one discriminates her when she tries to express her sexuality through the works she write. AO said that within her real life, her environment is quite conservative and really praising the heteronormative values. In short she said that her environment is homophobic, that became reason why she feels more comfortable of expressing herself in online world rather than real world.

“Although US is starting to accept the homosexuality, My family is homophobic. Being Asian descent, my self is making me to be careful in managing my behavior. So I realized that I do have this intersection attributes inside me. Being Asian sometimes I experience the cat calling, I cannot imagine if I declare my sexuality in my offline, maybe I’ll be cursed, bullied..I am afraid of that” (Interview with AO, 14 April 2021).

Regarding to the explicit scenes in her works, AO stated that it is the way to enjoy life. Inserting adult scenes is not promoting the pornography, but it is a form of being expressive and loving self, as cited from the interview, *“Yeah, It is one of my ways to enjoy things in life”* (Interview with AO, 14 April 2021).

The last interview is with author named JN. The interview discovered that JN is actively being both reader and writer in fan fiction site since 2015. JN explained that she is into fem slash and lesbian fan fiction genre. JN got the inspiration for the fan fictions’ idea from her favorite artists in Korean showbiz industry. Similar to DK and AO, JN said by writing fan fictions she feels safe and free to express the thing that she tries to hide from her real life, her different sexual orientation as lesbian. In writing fem slash fan fictions, JN chooses romance, family and friendships as the main themes of her works. JN also feels

comfortable and accepted in cyber space like fan fiction writing site.

“I feel safe and accepted here in the online writing platform, so I can freely share my aspiration thru my works” (Interview with JN, 15 April 2021).

Because of the sense of support and acceptance, it made JN feels comfortable to express herself, her sexuality and her sexual orientation as lesbian. JN considered online space as her sanctuary and safe space to express her true self, similar to DK and AO. In the cyber space like fan fiction writing site, JN got supports and rarely (almost never) got critiques. Hence, JN feels that fan fiction writing site is a very safe place to express herself, as a place for self-actualization.

In short, from the interview above, it could be concluded that the fan fiction writing sites could be a safe space for lesbians to express their sexuality. They feel free to express their ideas and aspiration as the act of showing their sexuality. It is in line with Russel (2005) and Marciano (2014) which states for marginalized and stigmatized groups who face discrimination, online environments are particularly appealing because they provide a mediated experience that is easier to control and maneuver since those interviewees are easily controlling their freedom to freely express their sexuality as lesbians in the online sphere.

CONCLUSION

Regarding to the fan fiction as the safe space to express lesbians sexuality, from the data gathered above, there are some conclusion that could be drawn. First, being lesbian in Asian American family is still considering bringing hardship and challenging for woman, especially lesbian. The intersection of being Asian American woman

with different sexual orientation make them discriminated and receiving different treatment in real life. Second, Asian American women find that online space like fan fiction writing site is considering as a safe space to express their true-self, including their sexuality. Third, writing fem slash is considering as a way to express themselves and their sexuality (including their sexual orientation), and lastly, writing fem slash fan fictions could be used as a tool to be empowered, challenging the heteronormativity and intersectionality in patriarchal society.

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**MORE THAN A HOUSE:
A GENDER ANALYSIS OF LAHSA'S *THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (VAWA)*
HOUSING POLICY**

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ABSTRACT

Homelessness is a chronic problem worldwide, including in the United States. The country's biggest homeless population occupies major cities like New York and Los Angeles. The fight against homelessness in L.A. has been going on for years, with the homeless population flooding places like Venice Beach, Echo Park, Hollywood, and its most famous homeless encampment, Skid Row. One of the groups constantly vulnerable to the threat of homelessness are women, and the intersection between women's homelessness and domestic violence remains to be a challenging subject. Enriching previous scholarship, this paper critically analyzes housing programs targeting female domestic violence survivors in Los Angeles. In order to get an in-depth examination, the focus is directed to the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Housing Policy* managed by the *Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)*. The paper employs gender theory to examine the program's shortcomings. Using Jeff Hearn's conception of the 'public men,' this paper proposes that the program's limitations stem from the prevailing patriarchy, which cultivates from home and extends to public policy through the domination of men. Furthermore, the policy is insufficient in combatting women's homelessness due to the absence of programs such as trauma centers, financial security & education program, and childcare unit that are vital to address the unique experience of domestic violence survivors. Thus, evaluation of the housing policy is immediately needed to overcome the problem of homelessness due to domestic violence.

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INTRODUCTION

A housing facility is one of the basic needs of every human. Homelessness, however, remains a chronic problem globally, including in the United States. *The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development* detailed in a 2021 report that, at the beginning of 2020, more than 580,000 people were homeless nationally, increasing by 2.2% from 2019 (Thrush, para. 1-3). The problem is also even more prevalent in states with major populations. For example, approximately 28% of the homeless cases—a staggering number of 161,548 people—were reported from California. Additionally, the number represented more than half of all unsheltered homeless people in the country at 51% or 113,660 (McCarthy, 2021, para. 2)—increasing by around 17% from 2018 (Levin and Botts, 2019, para. 5). Meanwhile, one in every four homeless populations recorded resides in either New York City or Los Angeles (McCarthy, 2021, para. 2). In Los Angeles alone, there are 66,436 homeless people in the city, creating huge slum areas (LAHSA, 2020). Homeless encampments are concentrated in several places such as Skid Row, Venice Beach, Echo Park, and Hollywood.

Homelessness is also a multi-faceted issue. It involves underlying economic and social factors, such as poverty, unaffordable housing, undetermined mental and physical health, substance addiction, and the breakdown of community and family (Mago, Morden, et al., 2013, p. 2). In addition, homelessness creates numerous social problems such as shantytowns, the destruction of public facilities, and high crime rates within a community. On a personal level, it deprives individuals of safety, health, hygiene, and

dignity. Meanwhile, efforts to house the population are constantly met with challenges, ranging from ineffective policies, lack of funding and space, even the sheer number of unsheltered individuals. Therefore, homeless prevention and re-housing programs remain to be a tough challenge.

One of the groups constantly vulnerable to the threat of homelessness is females. Despite the reported lower number of female homelessness compared to males—30% to 70% (*State of Homelessness: 2020 Edition*, 2020), women's homelessness remains a critical issue due to its inherently distinctive nature. For example, women frequently face issues such as childcare, feminine hygiene, and physical as well as sexual abuse. In addition, the presumption that women have equal pathways through homelessness as men is indefensible as women experience homelessness because of domestic or gender-based violence at a far higher incidence than males (Bretherton, 2017, p.6). Looking at these realities, research on homelessness continues to be an interesting facet of American Studies. Research covering current issues of homelessness, focusing particularly on women's homelessness, therefore, would add new insights into the conversation.

Another noteworthy aspect of women's homelessness is its intersection with domestic violence. *Neighborhood Data for Social Change* reported in 2019 that more than half (56%) of homeless women in Los Angeles were survivors of domestic violence. Social circumstances, such as the breakdown of a relationship or domestic abuse, are primary push factors for around 44% of unsheltered homeless women (2020, para. 10-12). Similarly, *LAist* reported that about 40% of homeless women in Los Angeles claim they

had been abused in the recent year (2021, para. 2). In 2017, 8,350 homeless women in Los Angeles were reported to be survivors of domestic violence, and only 2,295 of them were sheltered. In October 2018, a report disclosed that 1,788 women specifically became homeless for fleeing abuse, while 6,213 homeless women experienced domestic violence in the past but did not necessarily become homeless due to it—most also remain unhoused. In 2019, while the number of homeless from fleeing domestic violence decreased to 1,480, the number of women who experienced domestic violence rose to 7,865 people, and most are still unsheltered in both categories—1,330 and 6,436, respectively (LAHSA, 2020).

Many scholars have conducted research to find out the connection between women's homelessness and domestic violence. Joan Zorza (1991) wrote that 42% of families became homeless in Philadelphia because of domestic violence. Meanwhile, a report for Ford Foundation claimed that domestic violence had forced 50% of homeless women and children to flee from their houses (Schneider in Zorza, 1991, p. 421). Many studies are also concerned with homeless policies and programs. Although it seems to help the survivors, many still require more reviews, observations, and even renewal (Baker, 2010; Mullins, 1994; Thomas et al., 2020). Baker et al. (2010), for example, concluded that there is a lack of coordination between the systems of homeless housing programs and domestic violence programs. While housing programs focused on sheltering, domestic violence programs focused on advocacy and emotional support. Likewise, Botein and Hetling (2010) argued that the vital point of housing programs for domestic violence survivors is not only about

providing a shelter or a house but also making sure the survivors gain an independent life.

Enriching previous scholarship, this paper will critically analyze housing programs targeted for domestic violence survivors in Los Angeles, which is chosen for its huge homeless population. In order to get an in-depth examination, the focus will mainly be directed to the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Housing Policy* managed by the *Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)*, one of the key players in the city's fight against homelessness. Established in 1993, it is the primary agency of the *Los Angeles Continuum of Care*, which is responsible for managing \$243 million funding for different homeless-focused organizations around the county. In addition, LAHSA organizes homeless count, outreach programs, and others aimed at providing homeless people with housing stability and self-sufficiency. Due to the organization's vital role in homeless prevention efforts in Los Angeles, LAHSA's policy can best illustrate the encompassing approach to the housing crisis in the city. A critical analysis of LAHSA's approach to homelessness, therefore, becomes essential. This article argues that despite its aims to ensure the non-discriminatory treatment of survivors across the board—including those of domestic violence—the housing program remains unsatisfactory in several ways.

Taking a step further, the paper will also employ gender theory to examine the root of the program's shortcomings, more specifically focusing on the unequal power relations between males and females in society. Using Jeff Hearn's conception of the 'public men,'—*Men in The Public Eye*, 1992—this paper proposes that the program's

inadequacies and setbacks stem from the prevailing patriarchy, which cultivates from home and extends to public policy through the historical domination of men. His theory of hegemony of men also helps make sense of the persisting problems by looking at how patriarchy operates both at the personal and public levels.

The primary data are taken from LAHSA Female Persons Data Summary from 2017-2019, which details the Housing Protections Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) policy. The research begins by listing regulations addressing issues related to domestic violence, both in the past and present moments, within the policy’s scope. From there, the program’s shortcomings are closely identified. Lastly, these shortcomings are critically examined using gender theory, more specifically Jeff Hearn’s conception of public men and hegemony of men in public.

DISCUSSION

As a response to the growing problem of women’s homelessness, LAHSA initiated a housing program under the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)* authorization in 2018. The program is aimed to establish safe housing, both permanent and transitional, based on the procedure and protections of VAWA. LAHSA also collaborated with National Alliance for Safe Housing (NASH) and National Housing Law Project (NHLP) to implement an emergency transfer policy for participants when necessary (LAHSA, 2018, para. 4). While this housing program comprehensively deals with those who experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and human trafficking, this research primarily centers around how the program manages survivors of domestic violence.

There are several policy items included in the Housing Protections Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) which specifically address possible cases related to domestic violence survivors:

No.	Policy Item	Notes
1	The housing providers are not allowed to deny admission or assistance if the applicant is qualified for the program (LAHSA, 2018, p. 4).	
2	The housing providers may not threaten, deny assistance, terminate, or evict the participant of this program for being a domestic violence survivor (LAHSA, 2018, p. 4).	
3	The housing providers are not allowed to make direct interpretations of any criminal action as the cause of denying housing assistance for the participants who had experienced domestic violence (LAHSA, 2018, p. 5).	
4	The housing providers shall conduct a bifurcation or an eviction for abusers or perpetrators who participate in this program without taking the benefit of the other participants. However, the housing providers should assist those who are not eligible for the program to enroll for the other program under VAWA. The participant has to establish eligibility in 12 months. (LAHSA, 2018, p. 5).	If participants are unable to do so, providers must provide assistance or direct participants to appropriate programs.

5	The housing providers may not subject survivors currently affiliated with or victims of domestic violence to a higher standard in determining assistance eligibility, termination, or eviction during the program (LAHSA, 2018, p. 5).	
6	The housing providers are not allowed to terminate the program for the participant/s who leave or move to another housing unit with or without prior notice if the participant/s is endangered, threatened, or traumatized by residing at the provided housing unit (LAHSA, 2018, p. 5).	
7	The housing providers must not terminate the participant from the program whenever there is any property damage or destruction caused by the abuser or perpetrator in the dwelling unit (LAHSA, 2018, p. 5).	
8	The housing providers shall not terminate their housing program assistance whenever the participant does not meet the lease obligations due to the direct effect of coercive control by the abuser or the perpetrator, such as unauthorized occupancy or unreported income (LAHSA, 2018, p. 5).	
9	The housing providers shall take any economic claim to recover the cost regarding the property damage caused by any domestic violence action. The claim will be against the abuser or the perpetrator (LAHSA, 2018, p. 6)	

Table 1. Housing Protections Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Policy Items

The policy necessitates housing providers involved in this program to ensure that the housing environment is safe for those who experienced domestic violence (LAHSA, 2018, p. 1). The housing provider is defined as an entity or an individual which has the responsibility to establish a housing program under the administration of VAWA, including sponsors, Public Housing Agencies (PHA), mortgagors, owners, local and state governments, both profit and non-profit organizations (LAHSA, 2018, p. 2). On the other hand, under the VAWA policy, survivors of domestic violence are required to prove that they are eligible to receive housing assistance. There are two options offered, first, by submitting self-certification provided by the housing providers—if participants had communicated to the housing providers directly. Secondly, by enclosing notes or records from the officials or professionals such as medical record, police report, court

records, counselor statements, lists of documentation of the violation by a mental health professional, and other trusted document which is substantially credible to validate the domestic abuse (LAHSA, 2018, pp. 6-7). In addition, whenever there is conflicting documentation between two participants claiming as the victims of domestic violence, the housing providers shall require the third-party documents within 30 calendar days (LAHSA, 2018, p. 8).

Under this policy, it is also possible for LAHSA to conduct an emergency transfer plan as needed by participants depending on their safety in the housing unit. To request a transfer, participants must write to the housing providers and affirm the existence of threat or further abuse if the participant stays. The housing providers may not ask for another requirement to fulfill if a participant is eligible through the evidence from the third party.

However, the housing providers cannot guarantee the approval of the transfer request as well as the duration of the transfer process (LAHSA, 2018, pp. 8-9).

The bifurcation of a lease is also maintained in this housing policy. The housing providers were allowed to separate the lease by evicting or terminating the assistance and housing rights whenever a participant engages in domestic violence crimes. Other household members may inherit the housing lease as long as they are eligible; otherwise, housing providers should help them fulfill the housing eligibility or assist them in finding a suitable housing program (LAHSA, 2018, p. 11).

Furthermore, the 2018 LAHSA housing policy under VAWA helps arrange needed assistance for domestic violence survivors. For example, the housing providers shall change the lock upon a written request by the participants as a matter of protection. It is provided after a copy of the court order, or police report is given to the housing providers by the protected participants. In addition, the housing providers shall also help the eligible participant to look for another secure housing unit if there were no available units under their ownership or to assist the participant in contacting any organization which focuses on domestic violence cases to make sure that the participants would get supportive services (LAHSA, 2018, p. 11).

LAHSA's housing policy under VAWA principally ensures that housing providers create a safe environment for participants who survived domestic violence by providing preventive precautions from abusers or perpetrators (LAHSA, 2018, p. 12). Ultimately, this policy is non-discriminatory:

everyone eligible should not be differentiated, denied, subjected, or discriminated against in accessing or receiving this program (LAHSA, 2018, p. 12).

Lack of Focus on Women in LAHSA's VAWA Program

One of the main reasons for establishing a housing policy is to reduce homelessness by providing domestic violence survivors with housing protection. However, as previous research discussed, secure housing alone is not sufficient. Another critical aspect of housing programs is helping survivors gain independence to reduce the risk of falling back into the cycle of violence. Moreover, the complex nature of domestic violence also complicates the process. Generally, abuse within the home can be categorized into physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and economic abuse (Slabbert & Green, 2013, p. 236). Each of them generates different complications, and very rarely does a survivor only experiences one aspect of abuse. For example, many survivors were reported to suffer from mental health issues, such as PTSD and depression, as consequences of domestic violence (Baker, 2010, p. 162). Overcoming homelessness caused by domestic violence, therefore, requires more thorough treatment.

Although Housing Protection under VAWA sufficiently aids in secure housing, it still lacks a comprehensive program that can effectively target women homelessness, particularly domestic violence survivors. Bleiweis and Ahmed (2020) suggested that housing policy under VAWA should build support infrastructure to heal the survivors. The support infrastructures ought to stop at its earliest sign of violence, such as: minimizing

the economic barriers and all economic costs of the survivors; create a solid support system on health and safety; block the root causes of violence; and strengthen the network of trained professionals to handle the survivors (Bleiweis and Ahmed, 2020, para. 6). Examined from this angle, there are several gender-specific problems overlooked by the housing policy established under VAWA by LAHSA, such as:

a. Trauma Center or Site-Based Trauma Healing

Trauma is a significant part of domestic violence survivors' experience, and its debilitating effects often hinder their progress. For women who survived domestic violence, becoming homeless is overwhelmingly traumatic (Hopper, Bassuk, Olivet, 2010, p. 80), and they are at a higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Bassuk in DeCandia, et al., n.d, p. 3). The responses to trauma such as depression, PTSD, or immobility linger even after housing is secured. Sullivan and Olsen argued that without getting assistance to overcome their violence trauma, the effort to secure housing could be meaningless (2017, p. 188). In addition, in their 2019-released survey to L.A.'s homeless women population, Downtown Women's Center reported that around 20% of respondents cited lack of mental health services as an obstacle to being permanently housed (p. 16). DWC further emphasized the urgent need to have trauma-informed services that help women battle the mental health issues stemming from violence—including of domestic nature, as experienced by 50.7% of women surveyed (p. 30). Regrettably, in LAHSA's housing program, there is no specific trauma-healing

program for the survivors of domestic violence, either integrated or site-based.

In assisting homeless women survivors of domestic violence, the policymakers should also consider the long-term trauma recovery, which is often overlooked (Hopper, Bassuk, Olivet, 2010, p. 81). For instance, in the DWC report, 40% of respondents felt that housing resources often misunderstood their history of trauma (p. 40). Another recent research on domestic violence and homelessness in L.A.—whose 74% of research subjects are women survivors—also reported that trauma both from domestic violence and housing instability are deeply felt by survivors (People's Health Solution, 2020, p. 3). When homeless service providers do not integrate trauma-healing programs, survivors can find it difficult to seek help outside, as many might still be shadowed by fear or are on the run from their abusers. Logan, for example, noted that between 50% and 60% of partner violence victims reported stalking by their abusers (2010, p. 8) Milaney et al. also noted in their research that despite already leaving their partners, fear for safety from abusers continues to linger in survivors (2017, p. 8). Many movements from different locations, for instance, can create additional risk of them being discovered. In addition, PTSD and depression can also result in the inability to move forward and actively seek help. When trauma-healing is integrated into the housing system and help is offered actively, survivors can receive the push to take the first step toward healing. Moreover, trauma centers can also be beneficial for staff. Without proper knowledge of trauma and its signs, housing participants can easily be misunderstood. Traces of PTSD, for example, can be misconstrued as violence or non-cooperative behaviors.

Thus, integrating site-based trauma healing is significant for any housing policy. In addition to helping survivors get appropriate treatment, it can ensure that the housing unit staff are adequately trained to handle cases of domestic violence-centered homelessness. It should be ensured that assistance is available to help women overcome their trauma and prepare them to rebuild their lives and escape homelessness.

b. Financial Security & Education Program

It is essential for housing unit providers to provide access to higher education and a financial security program through employment or entrepreneurship mentoring. It is reported that 78% to 99% of female domestic violence survivors become homeless due to financial dependency or financial abuse (Johnston and Subrahmanyam, 2018, p. 1). As a direct consequence, financial abuse disempowers the ability of domestic violence survivors to have a stable life after leaving the perpetrators (Johnston and Subrahmanyam, 2018, p. 1). For example, a study found that 29% out of 434 homeless women were trapped in survival sex—using sex as a trading commodity for food, a place to stay overnight, money, drugs, or alcohol, or other needs to survive (Young and Fredericksen, 2017, p. 15). Additionally, lack of access to high-wage jobs is the associated factor that puts women in housing insecurity, making them vulnerable to homelessness (Lakam, 2020, para. 6).

Women often went through financial abuse before escaping from domestic violence. *LAist*, for example, reported that domestic violence cases experienced by women are almost always accompanied by financial abuse (2021, para. 18). In addition,

National Network to End Domestic Violence noted that financial abuse occurs in 99% of domestic violence cases (para. 2). Around 83% of survivors also reported that their ability to work was interrupted by abusive partners (Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Fact Sheet, 2021, p. 2). Substantively, financial dependency is the top reason survivors choose to stay with abusers (Sanders and Schnabel, Strube; in Postmus et al., 2018, p. 2). Financial abuse can include but is not limited to controlling how money is spent, prohibiting women from opening or accessing a bank account, banning survivors from working and or attending job training, sabotaging employment opportunities, excluding victims in investments or banking decisions, and withholding money (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2017, Forms of Financial Abuse, para. 2). Due to this abuse, many women escape while untrained and without job experience. Downtown Women’s Center (2019) reported that 21% of homeless women in L.A. considered a lack of employment training as a hurdle in obtaining permanent housing (p. 16). Approximately 94% of survivors of domestic violence interviewed also experienced stress due to the inability to purchase basic necessities (p. 28). Providing working skills and job opportunities, therefore, are significant aspects of helping women be financially independent and be able to continue their life purposefully, so they can truly escape from homelessness physically and mentally. However, the housing policy under VAWA by LAHSA turned domestic violence survivors away by not accommodating this financial vulnerability.

Job training and employment programs aim to maintain good jobs so they can get paid a living wage and advance their career

(Correia, 2000, p. 10). The job training and employment program would help survivors who were financially abused and developed no other skill aside from being housewives during their abusive relationship. Through these programs, survivors are trained for the workplace and given a chance to pursue a career. Another option is providing entrepreneurship programs for survivors, so they are able to create their own income opportunities. *The Women Business Opportunity Program*, run by Elizabeth Stone House in Boston, for example, has a complete entrepreneurship program for women who want to be self-employed by starting a micro business. The program is designed for those who have completed the economic literacy course, which gives women the knowledge of economics and finances (Correia, 2000, p. 20). It also provides 24 training weeks, business consultation, and facilitating new business establishments. Later, the graduates would open businesses such as hair and nail salons, catering services, translation, and interpreting services (Correia, 2000, p. 16). By establishing job training and employment programs and or entrepreneurship programs, the women have the option to choose which one is more suitable for them—to be employed or self-employed. Most importantly, the program they pick can help them become financially independent so they will not be trapped in financial abuse in the future.

Another important program is providing access to higher education. From the same research conducted by DWC, 14% of homeless women interviewed stated that educational opportunities contributed to the difficulty of accessing permanent housing (2019). Additionally, women who can access a higher education level can potentially earn higher income (Correia, 2000, p. 22). *Parents*

as Scholars program, run by the Maine Department of Human Resources, is a good example. The state-funded program offered eligible parents who wanted to join a two- or four-year college a financial aid up to \$3500 for each academic year, with additional support services like childcare, dental care, books, supplies, clothing, and uniforms (Correia, 2000, p. 22). Thus, after finishing the program, participants, especially women, are expected to have a long-term and stable career path. A similar program can be a significant stepping stone for homeless women who need to independently secure their daily needs after leaving abusive partners.

c. **Child Care Support**

Another aspect often overlooked in homeless prevention programs is childcare. Many women escape domestic violence with children as dependents, which adds to their already vulnerable condition. To facilitate their needs, especially for women with small kids, childcare support must be integrated into the housing facility. In addition, women with children, especially small ones, often find it difficult to access other empowerment programs. Without friends or relatives to look after their small children, it is hard to attend classes and work full-time—or take care of their own mental health issues. For instance, Milaney et al. (2017, p. 8) identified in their research that women who were victims of domestic abuse often face anxiety on employment due to the need to care for their children, which has now become an aspect they are independently responsible for. Meanwhile, National Coalition for the Homeless noted the importance of affordable childcare to end homelessness in families, stating that “in order to work, families with

children need access to quality childcare that they can afford, and adequate transportation” (Homeless Families with Children, 2009, para. 17). National Alliance to End Homelessness expressed the same sentiment, believing that supports such as childcare and early childhood services are crucial in helping family units—including single mothers—end homelessness (2021, para. 6). Unfortunately, in LAHSA’s VAWA housing policy, childcare support is largely unregulated.

Childcare support can help homeless women in two different ways. First, it gives more room for mothers to join other empowerment programs. Taking care of children’s emotional and physical well-being requires dedication and time. It is almost impossible for women to concentrate on working full-time or studying while caring for their small children all day. With the childcare unit integrated into the housing facility, mothers are given the time to develop as trained professionals or volunteers to safely nurture their kids. In addition, childcare can be extremely costly. Most women escape from domestic violence with no financial resources, and without proper assistance, they are forced to neglect their children’s comfort and health. Even small support such as shared toys and a safe playing room can create a difference in their life.

It is also necessary for housing units to provide childcare support to help parents deal with their children’s trauma in order to end the vicious cycle of violence at home. Children are emotionally vulnerable due to the impact of domestic violence. For example, a national survey in 2001 indicated that in 50% out of 6000 American families, men who violated their wives were potentially abusive to their children (Edleson in Bragg, 2003, p. 7).

Moreover, even though the children indirectly experience the violence, the memories and exposure of the traumatic events would influence their social and emotional behavior (Helping Victims of Domestic Violence and Their Children, 2010, para. 6).

According to National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2010), there are short-term and long-term responses from children who experienced domestic violence. Short-term responses include children withdrawing from other people, becoming easily nervous or startled, having nightmares or insomnia, and having sudden tantrums. Whereas the long-term effects are self-destructive behavior, substance abuse, impulsive acts through risky sex behavior, depression and anxiety, low self-esteem, chronic health abuse, and violent and criminal behavior (pp. 2-3). Childcare support, therefore, can help children get proper psychological assistance from professionals. It aids their recovery from trauma and helps them grow as emotionally healthy individuals. It will also give mothers more opportunity to deal with their own trauma, eventually cutting the cycle of violence.

Integrating childcare support in housing units helps ensure that survivors with children have the means to participate in empowerment programs, both by providing them with time to self-develop and professional help for their children.

All the points above illustrate the different points not explicitly regulated by LAHSA in its 2018 housing policy under VAWA. The Housing Protections Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is inadequate in that it only focuses on one component in addressing women’s

homelessness despite the inherent complexity of the issue. Women's homelessness is unique, even more so for survivors of domestic violence, as it involves a cycle of violence and abuse. If it fails to accommodate those gender-specific vulnerabilities, such as financial dependence and child-rearing, the policy will put women at risk of returning to homelessness and abuse.

The Hegemony of Men in Public

LAHSA's failure to see the loopholes in their VAWA housing program raises a bigger question in homeless prevention measures aimed specifically at women. Despite claiming to accommodate domestic violence survivors, the underlying problem with the program is that it seems to completely disregard their specific needs, such as help for financial independence and trauma healing. It also fails to meet women's particular essentials, specifically concerning children they brought with during escape. We believe that gender theory can provide a valuable lens for examining this gap in policymaking and how patriarchy operates both at the personal and public levels.

Jeff Hearn's notion of public patriarchy and public men are essential concepts to use in analyzing how patriarchy bleeds into governmental policies, in this case, in how women's homelessness is inadequately approached. Hearn's conception of 'public men' (1992) is instrumental. He argues that historically, men have extended their domination to the public sphere, and they "... have come to dominate women in 'modern,' 'patriarchal' ways, over and above, in part replacing the ways of familial, privately based patriarchy..." (Hearn, 2004, p. 6). While patriarchy often creates violence in private

relationships—such as between father and daughter, husband and wife, Hearn argues that those private ideas that are nurtured at home eventually extend to how males approach their relationship in public. A patriarchal male in a teaching position, for example, will show his gender bias in the classroom. Likewise, an employer with deep-seated patriarchal values will likely reflect those ideas in the workplace, resulting in possible discrimination against female employees. In addition, decision-making that involves multiple individuals with similar thought processes results in highly biased choices. Eventually, as the patriarchy is collectively brought from home by individuals in influential positions, it culminates into misogynistic policies.

Men's domination extends outside of the home and into society through control in vital sectors. Many aspects of the public domain, such as law, media, state, economy, and many other institutions, are mostly dominated by men as they occupy central and leading positions. This extension of patriarchy continuously shapes societal values around women, including in government policymaking—including that which aims to tackle domestic violence cases and homelessness. For decades, individual patriarchal values were internalized and culminated into 'public patriarchy,' affecting how government policies are made (Hearn, 2004, p. 51). As the legacy and discrimination continue, the patriarchal values, welfare operating system, and responses to domestic violence cases have resulted in the removal of the agency from homeless women survivors of domestic violence (Neale; Casey, et al.; McNaughton-Nicolls; in Bretherton, 2017, p. 6).

The concept of “hegemony of men” could also be used to approach the question of unequal power in policy making. Hegemony can be understood as “the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just set role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). As Hearn (2004) argues:

Men’s power and dominance can be structural and interpersonal, public and/or private, accepted and taken-for-granted and/or recognized and resisted, obvious or subtle. It also includes violations and violences of all the various kinds (p. 51).

As the domination over women penetrates the public spheres, men have the power to collectively create policies that regulate women’s actions based exclusively on their lens. It leads to the ignorance of the complex and specific dimensions of women’s homelessness in homeless policies. Although women in recent years have been more welcomed in prominent positions, historically, the presence of women in policymaking is widely underrepresented, and it results in a deep-rooted, complex web of patriarchy in governmental policies. Women’s fights in changing this reality are far from done.

The housing policy under VAWA by LAHSA was created in collaboration with the National Alliance for Safe Housing (NASH) and National Housing Law Project (NHLP). In LAHSA, the committee members are responsible for creating budgetary, funding, planning, and program policies, including housing under VAWA. It is important to note that between 2017 and 2018, three out of four of LAHSA’s Policy and Planning Committee members were male. It was also identical in the Programs and Evaluation committee. Male members also chaired both committees.

During the same period, on a higher organizational level, the executive director of LAHSA was also a male. In addition, six out of ten administration members were also men (Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority, 2017-2018). It shows that male dominance was still quite apparent in LAHSA’s organizational management at the time of the policy development. Therefore, the housing policy under VAWA by LAHSA’s dismissal of problems commonly experienced by women can be explained through the perspective of male hegemony.

Historically, the role of caregiver has been relegated exclusively to women. Patriarchy strictly divides gender roles, presuming women to take care of all domestic work, including managing children’s educational, health, and emotional needs. Males, therefore, are often absent in the process except for matters concerning money. It can be expected then that the policy, significantly controlled by the male perspective in its making, falls short of considering childcare as a vital aspect of one’s life. As males are seldom inhibited by child-caring in pursuing a professional career, they fail to see how it is increasingly difficult to pursue financial stability without proper help in looking after one’s kid, which is vital to escaping homelessness.

Lack of working skills and job experience is also an attribute greatly dismissed by the policy. While women today have great access to employment, there are still those who are—either forced through abuse or entirely by choice—never worked outside of the domestic sphere. On the contrary, again, due to the strict male vs. female gender roles, working skills and experiences are almost always expected of

men. Therefore, the concept of an individual walking through adulthood without proper skillset might be foreign from a male-dominated perspective. In policymaking, this is reflected in the expectation that female domestic violence survivors can directly jump into job-seeking without needing proper assistance. It exhibits insensitivity to problems experienced by most women in abusive relationships. Therefore, it can be argued that women's specific needs are not accommodated in this housing policy due to the internalization of patriarchy and male perspective in the public sphere, which results in government policymaking failing to use the proper approach to examine the underlying problem in women homelessness.

When women flee from domestic violence, many find it impossible to achieve immediate economic stability, which eventually traps them into homelessness. Due to the inherent violence in abusive relationships, the experience of these homeless women is vastly different in nature from men. Homeless women, for example, are at high risk of stigmatization, marginalization, and alienation by society (Barrow and Laborde; Connolly; Gustafson; in Savage, 2016, p. 45). Consequently, policymaking related to homeless women, specifically survivors of domestic violence, should also be approached from a gendered perspective sensitive to women's needs. It is possible that due to the ingrained public patriarchy, and the hegemony of men in public, a policy fails to adequately assess the target's needs and create regulations that are ineffective or even perpetuate further violence. Therefore, it is imperative that we actively map out areas where patriarchy lives on in homeless prevention and re-housing policies to create a

successful approach to eradicate women's homelessness.

CONCLUSION

Although providing shelter remains a priority for homeless prevention and rehabilitation programs, a safe house alone is insufficient to truly stop the cycle of homelessness, particularly in women homelessness cases from domestic abuse. While housing can offer cushions, without proper complementary measures, women are at risk of falling back into life on the street—and, in extension, abuse and violence. Housing policy for domestic violence survivors in the Housing Protections Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) by LAHSA is inadequate due to its inability to meet the specific needs of women survivors. Furthermore, it is dismissive of essential necessities, such as childcare, trauma center, and employment training, inhibiting women from gaining financial independence. Therefore, many women who flee from domestic violence could not overcome their homelessness thoroughly, and the number of homeless women in Los Angeles remains high. A year after the policy was established, the number of women who lived unsheltered due to domestic violence reached a thousand people, precisely 1,480. Furthermore, the number of women who experienced domestic violence rose to 7,865 people, and most are still unsheltered, which indicates that the housing policy is ineffective in solving women's homelessness due to domestic violence in the county of Los Angeles.

The lack of prioritizing women's needs signifies persisting patriarchal values in Los Angeles policymaking. Examined from the perspective of gender theory, the program fails

to facilitate women survivors who need to heal from the trauma, access education and financial independence, and or require child care assistance due to policy making being influenced by a historically male-dominated perspective. Thus, the absence of a female perspective is deeply felt in the program. The housing policy needs to be evaluated thoroughly, both by the stakeholders or the women participants in the program, as it still fails to assist homeless women to empower themselves. Through various gender-conscious measures, it is hoped that upcoming housing policies for domestic violence survivors can accommodate the needs of women. Thus, not only simply providing housing for survivors of domestic violence, but the program can also systematically empower them to rebuild their life again without falling into the trap of domestic violence and homelessness.

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RETHINKING THE 'TRUTH' OF IDENTITY: DISSECTING QUEERNESS AND EMO SUBCULTURE IN NETFLIX'S *THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY*

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the presence of LGBTQ+ community in the media has gone through noticeable change. It is a challenge for online streaming services like Netflix to represent as many communities and subcultures as they can, because accessibility comes with more diverse audience. While many LGBTQ+ characters have been put in the spotlight, those who identify beyond binaries are still arguably underrepresented, especially the ones that belong to socially degraded subculture like emo. *The Umbrella Academy* is a TV show rooted in emo subculture that feature LGBTQ+ superhero characters, Klaus Hargreeves and Vanya Hargreeves, who do not fully associate with the label "gay", "lesbian", or "bisexual". This study employs what Judith Butler asserts, that gender expressions and practices of desire go beyond binaries, to see how emo subculture engages queerness as rejection to rigid classification of gender identities and sexual practices, as well as a tool to oppose conservatism, especially of previous generations. The discussion reveals that contrary to the popular belief that perceives emo as the culture of straight middle-class white boys, the show perceives emo subculture through the characters' rejection to absolute identification. The characters show rejection through clothing, behavior, mannerism, and verbal statements. The characters also show opposition to conservatism, which include traditional gender roles, traditional superhero narratives, masculine-feminine polarity, and the 'truth' of identity.

Keywords: *emo; LGBTQ+; media; progressive identities; queer*

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INTRODUCTION

Looking back ten to thirty years ago, young audience was served with films that featured beloved and iconic protagonists even to this day. Young girls were presented with movies and TV series that gave Cher Horowitz

(*Clueless*, 1995), Elle Woods (*Legally Blonde*, 2001), Kate Heron (*Mean Girls*, 2004), and Beca Mitchell (*Pitch Perfect*, 2012) to look up to. Young boys looked up to superheroes like Iron Man, Captain America, Spider-Man, Batman, Superman, and many other characters

with similar complex backstories. The mentioned main characters are depicted as the underdogs in the wrong crowd before their character developments take in. These main characters aim to seek for acceptance and purposes for being “different”, either by fitting in or being formed in a special group. I put the word different in parentheses because despite the underdog status, these popular films still feature normal-looking and normally-behaved characters that are mostly beautiful and thin, handsome and muscular, often rich, able-bodied, cis-gendered, and heterosexual. Additionally, the main-characterization in all the mentioned movies has created gender-based classification. Women-led movies like romantic comedies and chick flicks are dubbed as girl’s movies, while superhero or action-fueled movies are dubbed as boy’s movies.

What the audience misses from these films is who the actual underdogs are, the outcasts that are more relatable to underrepresented young audience in real life, which somehow rarely made it as the main characters. These characters are typically present to fill in the subplots, like Damian from *Mean Girls*, Christian from *Clueless*, Enrique from *Legally Blonde*, and Cynthia from *Pitch Perfect*. The similarity of these characters? They are all members of LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, the said characters do not usually act, look, or behave like the main characters or what people considered “normal” Some side characters are also members of underrepresented groups or subcultures, or both. Even as recent as 2021, there is hardly an explicitly LGBTQ+ character that serves as the lead character in popular superhero movies. We see canonically LGBTQ+ characters like Valkyrie from *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) and Negasonic Teenage Warhead from *Deadpool 2* (2018), but they act

as superhero sidekicks. These side characters blur the line between the two classifications, in which given these side characters became main characters, there would be clash between femininity and masculinity. When LGBTQ+ character steps up as the lead, instead of labelling the movie as girl’s movie or boy’s movie, they are labelled as “gay movie” or “LGBT movie”.

As summarized by Dye (2020), representation of LGBTQ+ in media was suppressed initially because several production codes over the years had prohibited inclusion of sex perversion to ensure the films shown in theaters portrayed “correct thinking” to the audience. Homosexuality was practically banned in American theaters until 1982, nearly a decade after homosexuality was no longer considered mental illness in 1974 (p. 52). Even then, most LGBTQ+ characters were put in the background as a statement to support the main character’s personality and development. Since the Supreme Court of the United States lifted the bans on same-sex marriage in all fifty states in 2015, discussions on inclusivity in media, especially in movies and TV shows targeted for young audience, have been taking place in many platforms. Netflix as one of the biggest streaming services right now is known for their attempt to be as diverse as possible into their original movies and series. Nowadays we see quite amount of LGBTQ+ characters being the lead of a movie or TV series. However, there are still very few contemporary movies and TV shows with LGBTQ+ lead that is not about being LGBTQ+ or about coming out. The same goes to LGBTQ+ character that is also a part of underrepresented groups, like mental health sufferers, violence survivors, and people with substance use disorder, as well as socially

degraded subcultures like geek, emo, goth, and nerd.

One of Netflix’s original shows that feature main LGBTQ+ characters that are also parts of underrepresented groups is *The Umbrella Academy*. The show first aired on Netflix in 2019, about seven ex-superhero siblings that once were famous, but grow apart as they get older. *The Umbrella Academy*’s characters, storyline, and aesthetics are built from emo subculture. According to De Boise (2014), the term emo was initially used to identify music with distorted guitar and strained vocals, which was part of hardcore scene in 1980s Washington DC. Emo emerged from American suburbs to articulate opposition to conservatism among middle-class, especially of the parent generation, with emotional lyrics and sound (pp. 226-227). However, the term emo has now been simplified as an umbrella term to identify alternative music or people with interest in alternative music, such as punk, pop-punk, punk rock, grunge, and others, as well as their lifestyle and aesthetics. Their lyrics often bring up issues that mainstream music does not, like broken-home kids, abusive parents, addiction problems, mental health issues, political stances, and others. With its presence over decades, emo is not only limited to preference of genres of music, but it has become an alternative ideology.

The Umbrella Academy is an adaptation of Dark Horse comic series with the same title. The comic series is co-created by Gerard Way, the lead singer of My Chemical Romance, one of the world’s biggest bands in the emo scene. The identity of the creator of *The Umbrella Academy* plays major key in creating the characters. In his interview with Rolling Stone, the singer admitted that the main characters,

the Hargreeves siblings, are inspired by My Chemical Romance:

A band especially is a dysfunctional family, so there’s little bits of me in all the characters, there’s bits of some of the guys in some of those characters and the different roles that we would play in the band and how those roles would change sometimes. We were in a big pressure cooker of fame and notoriety and the characters experience that in the comic and the show (Way, 2019).

Being the manifestation of himself and the other band members, the main characters are portrayed like stereotypical emo. Every single one of the Hargreeves siblings is an adult with alienation problems. They were raised by an abusive and controlling father, were traumatized by violent missions, and had to deal with fame and high expectations at very young age. All of the Hargreeves’ personalities are what the viewers, consisting many of Way’s fans and people of emo community in general, find relatable. Unlike the Avengers or Justice League members with godly, other-worldly, charming superhero personas, *The Umbrella Academy* consist of problematic, broke, estranged siblings whose glorious, heroic days are over.

Among seven main characters, there are two that are known to be members of LGBTQ+ community, Klaus Hargreeves and Vanya Hargreeves. While all the siblings are haunted by traumatic childhood and abusive parent, Klaus and Vanya also deal with external problems caused by their sexual and gender identities. What makes Klaus and Vanya different from the aforementioned side characters is that they do not have absolute identification. Neither Klaus nor Vanya identifies as ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘bisexual’, although they explicitly have same-sex love

interests in the series. This resonates with Judith Butler's (1990) words, pertaining what Foucault ironically called 'truth' of sex, that coherent identities and coherent gender norms are produced through regulatory practices (p. 23). Butler criticized the idea of masculinity and femininity as expressive attributes of male and female as they explain the followings:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist"—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. "Follow" in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality. Indeed, precisely because certain kinds of "gender identities" fail to conform to those norms of cultural intelligibility, they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain (pp. 23-24).

What Butler states belongs to what Warner (2011) identifies as queer theory, as it studies and theorizes gender and sexual practices outside of heterosexuality and challenge the belief that heterosexual practices are normal (p. x-xi).

The objectives of this study are to discuss how the characters from emo TV show portray queerness as the resistance to the 'truth' of identity, as well as to answer the following question: How do the media depict progressive identities as opposition to conservatism through the portrayal of *The Umbrella Academy* characters?

This study is conducted with the perspective of post-nationalism within the approach of American Studies. As Rowe (2000) asserts, post-nationalism is a critic to

the belief that the United States is inherently exceptional than others. Post-nationalism emerged as scholars started to acknowledge various cultural influences that were involved in the change in the social formations of what is called "national culture" (p. 24). Post-nationalist concedes that American Studies must admit the presence of socially constructed hierarchies in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion. LGBTQ+ community is placed under the gender and sexuality hierarchy as the minor culture in a dominant social system. Thus, queer theory is in scope.

There are several discussions both on gender and sexual identities and on emo subculture prior to this study. Schmitt (2011) explores dress and behavior of the emo subculture, including feminine-masculine clothing and gender and sexual identities. De Boise (2014) analyzes how masculinity and gender equality evolve in emo subculture. Discourse on LGBTQ+ youth in media like films are discussed Dye's (2020) article about how coming-out and reactions to coming-out are perceived in contemporary movies. These previous studies, however, have not yet specifically covered how non-identifying/queer individuals within emo subculture are depicted in mainstream media like Netflix, especially as characters with esteemed roles like superheroes.

The data for this study are obtained by examining the presentation of the characters in Netflix series *The Umbrella Academy*, including their dialogs, visuals, and behaviors. As of September 2021, the show consists of two seasons, with ten episodes in each season. Thus, both airing seasons are covered in this study as the primary data. Sources like

journals, books, and online publications are used to support the purpose of this study.

To fulfill its objectives, this study is conducted using qualitative research. Creswell (1997) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem (p. 44). In this case, Klaus Hargreeves and Vanya Hargreeves are fictional characters that represent humans, and Netflix’s *The Umbrella Academy* acts as the media. Thus, exploring the depiction of gender and sexual identities of the characters is considered a process of understanding social and human problem.

DISCUSSION

Before diving into the discussion on Klaus and Vanya, it is important to underline that family and upbringing are two major contributing factors on the characters’ developments. Thus, understanding the context of this show is necessary. The Hargreeves siblings do not have the most conventional start in life. They were born on the same day in different places around the world, to women with no sign of pregnancy before. They were adopted by eccentric billionaire Sir Reginald Hargreeves when they were babies. Reginald then formed a group of child superheroes called The Umbrella Academy, where he controlled and trained them as kids and threw them under the spotlight. Unlike other superhero movies and TV series, one should expect no heroic actions of saving millions of lives or protecting cities with their power as the center of the story, as usually seen in Marvel or DC movies. It mainly highlights the internal conflicts in the family while using their remaining power and solidarity to prevent the upcoming apocalypse.

The story starts later when they are all thirty years old, about fifteen years after the death of one of their siblings, Ben (Number Six), which caused the fallout of the team. The estranged siblings are forced to reunite after the news of their father’s death. It is essential to highlight once again that Klaus and Vanya are not the only characters with alienation problem. The rest of the siblings are also considered the underdogs outside their family. They grew up under the confinement of his adoptive father who constantly manipulated and forced them into dangerous missions, which are too deadly and traumatizing for children. Their only mother figure is a robot maid, who takes care of the siblings more humanly than Reginald does. Reginald does not even bother giving them names and only calls them by number. Those practices of abuse and dehumanization can be summarized in one sentence as Reginald’s dialogue as follows: "Despite years of training and weeks of preparation, you allowed Number Six to die on this mission," (s. 2, ep. 10, 01:32).

The Hargreeves siblings are adults when the show starts, but the times that were filled with violence, mental and verbal abuse, disappearance of Number Five, and the constant blame over Ben’s death happened in their teenage years, which shaped their grey moralities as they grew up. For context, Luther (Number One) is isolated by his father and releases his anger through physical fights. He is the only one who never actually left the academy. Diego (Number Two) develops superhero complex from years of his father’s pressure. Allison (Number Three) is a divorced woman who misuses her mind-controlling power to get anything she wants. Klaus (Number Four) has serious substance abuse problem and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) since Reginald always

pushed his abilities to communicate with the dead. Number Five had been trapped in the future and came back as a 58-year-old assassin in a 13-year-old body, so despite being the oldest and the smartest, his physical appearance makes it hard for his siblings to take him seriously. Ben (Number Six) is a ghost who can only communicate with and be visible to Klaus, who is rarely sober. Lastly, Vanya (Number Seven), has been told by her father that she is ordinary her whole life. Reginald also makes the other siblings believe that Vanya does not have power, except Allison, who was forced to mind-control her into thinking that she is powerless when, in fact, Vanya's ability is the most powerful and most dangerous. This makes Vanya the most distant sibling among the others, because she has always been excluded from trainings and missions.

Each of the siblings has different coping mechanism, but they all, except Luther, end up quitting the academy, leading to estrangement from each other and from society in general to live as ordinary people. Their feelings of vulnerability and willingness to express their post-rebellion identity fit what Bailey (2005) describes as emo (p. 1), with Reginald as what De Boise (2014) calls the parent generation (p. 227). Their expression, according to Schmitt (2011), taps the social dissatisfaction and alienation, which continue and are modified in emo in the solitude and loneliness (p. 11). The portrayal of the Hargreeves as the underdogs signifies as bold statement to audience that they are different than the others. As LGBTQ+ characters, however, Klaus and Vanya are depicted to be the most relevant to emo subculture.

Queerness as a Rejection to Absolute Identification

Emo subculture can seem very heteronormative at a glance. Due to its history rooting in groups of middle-class Caucasian boys in the suburbs, emo subculture is often associated with masculinity and heteronormative culture. Columnist Sherman (2020), criticizes the presence of sexism and toxic masculinity in emo subculture, which has been infiltrated by gender existentialists and unbalanced power that celebrate cis-male biology, which "informs expressions of masculinity in emo performance". Furthermore, with its similarity to rock scene, emo scene which consists of loud music, male-dominated artists, dark attires, and lyrics about heterosexual relationships, creates a belief that makes emo subculture seem as if it belongs in the heterosexual men's realm. Meanwhile, LGBTQ+ men is often highly associated with "less masculine" subcultures like boybands, musical theater, and pop music. The gender-based classification shows its presence once again, constructing gender-based stereotypes in the music genres itself, as well as their respective culture and aesthetics.

The 'Q' in LGBTQ+ can stand for both queer and questioning. There is empirical evidence that contemporary teenagers are "post-gay" (Russell et al., 2009, p. 888). It is a state where non-heterosexual youths conceive themselves as questioning, queer, exploring, providing their own labels, or not labelling themselves at all. Although in different places and times the term 'queer' is often used as a slur to mock someone who is assumedly homosexual, the term itself generally signifies as a broader term that is used to identify various people within the spectrum of non-heterosexuality.

It is important to acknowledge that although both Klaus and Vanya are no longer self-discovering teenagers, there is always room for exploration for practices of desire and subversion of identity at any age (Butler, 1990, p. 99-100). As outlined previously, the creator of the show is an important element in the making of the story and the characters in *The Umbrella Academy*. The creator of the show, Gerard Way, does not fully associate himself with masculinity, as quoted from his statement in Reddit AMA (2014) as follows:

I have always identified a fair amount with the female gender, and began at a certain point in [My Chemical Romance] to express this through my look and performance style. So it’s no surprise that all of my inspirations and style influences were pushing gender boundaries. [...] Masculinity to me has always made me feel like it wasn’t right for me.” (Way, 2014).

Discussions about sexuality and gender identities are very casual in this show. Despite being involved in same-sex relationships, both Klaus and Vanya, never explicitly put labels on themselves. It is mentioned in the show that Klaus also has consensual sex with a woman in season two. It is also shown that Klaus can be polyamorous as well, which means to get romantically and/or sexually involved with more than one person simultaneously. Vanya’s love interest in the entire season one is a man, while in season two her love interest is a woman. Their siblings, on the other hand, never question, label, or talk about Klaus and Vanya’s sexuality either, for example, as seen in the following dialog:

[Diego:] Is this about conjuring the one you lost? What was *her* name?

[Klaus:] His name was Dave. We soldiered together in the A Shau Valley, in the Mountain of the Crouching Beast.

[Diego:] Well, Dave must have been a very special person, to put up with all your weird-ass shit. (s. 1, ep. 6, 28:25)

Diego’s line in the dialog, assuming Klaus was romantically or sexually involved with a woman, shows the absence of definition in Klaus’ sexuality. This can also be seen as the creators’ way of telling the audience that there is no queer-coding regarding Klaus’ character, pointing out to media’s recognition of the presence of post-gay.

The answer to the questions on why queer and emo subculture are close is the presence of transgression. This is contrary to the belief that perceives emo as the culture of straight middle-class white boys. The transgression in the series can be seen in the first episode of season one. Before the team disbands, the Hargreeves are monitored 24 hours a day by their father and his assistant. Reginald clamors them with tight schedule and strict rules, that the siblings cannot make their own decisions. They are required to wear uniforms even inside the house. Even their pajamas are coordinated. That is why after they leave, Klaus and Vanya are through fulfilling rules, because Reginald’s confinement, which represents traditional societal rules in real life that lead people to think that there are certain ways to exist, does not apply outside the academy. This resonates what Schmitt (2011) says about emo as a subculture that

consists of male and female youths transgressing beyond standard dress and expectations, often presenting androgynous look as male and female “emo kids” share similar hair- and clothing styles. Though not specifically queer in gendered and/or sexual identification, the term “emo”, like the term “queer”, resists definition and is consistently in flux (p. 3).

The way Klaus and Vanya oppose traditional norms is seen through both of their appearance and behavior. On the first appearance of Klaus in the introduction scene, Klaus is seen walking out of a rehabilitation center with the remnant of eyeliner on his eyes, channeling the signature looks of alternative musicians that are known for their excessive use of eye makeup like Gerard Way himself, Avril Lavigne, and Billie Joe Armstrong. This small detail on Klaus' look is not just a minor trivial matter, but a major part of his expression because, unlike the musicians, Klaus' look is not intended for performance. For someone who just left a rehabilitation center after quite some time, Klaus keeping make up set with him, and using it especially, shows that he makes a bold statement that he is who he wants him to be through his appearance. In many occasions he is also seen wearing feminine clothing items like tight leather pants, high-heeled boots, skirts, crop tees, hair pins, furry coat, and scarves. Since the show also involves time travels, Klaus' appearance changes as well to adjust to what is considered more appropriate in the era. In the first season, Klaus accidentally time-travels to 1968 Vietnam, where he meets his love interest Dave. He fights in the war, wears masculine clothing and shows masculine behavior just as what a soldier is like in general. When he comes back to 2019, Klaus' clothing and behavior mostly sit on the grey area. Sometimes they switch between feminine and masculine, and sometimes the combination of both. In season two, which is set in 1963 Dallas, Klaus is seen again adjusting to clothing that is more appropriate for the time period, since blatant queerness is not as acceptable as it is in 2019.

The same goes with Vanya. Since her first appearance until the end of the latest

season, Vanya's clothing is always masculine or gender-neutral, except in the flashback scenes when she still has to wear uniforms. Post-academy Vanya is always seen wearing sweaters, men's shirts, coats, and loose fit jeans. Even in formal occasions, Vanya opts for wearing suits rather than formal dresses. I find Vanya's appearance and mannerism resemble what Bailey et al. (2002) describes as tomboy, where girls are "more likely than other girls to prefer associating with boys". This, Bailey adds, shows the presence of two areas in gender identity, one is the degree of comfort with the assigned sex and the other is the desire to be a member of other sex. (p. 333-334). In regards to femininity and masculinity traits in practices of desire, Vanya's roles switch, depending on who she is with. Referring to Bem's Sex Role Inventory (1974, p. 156), Vanya shows more feminine traits like gentle, shy, sensitive, soft spoken, gullible, and warm when she is with a man. Meanwhile, with a woman, she shows more masculine traits like analytical, assertive, dominant, willing to take stands, and willing to take risks, especially when Vanya's love interest is a married woman living through the 60s. The way Vanya positions herself in relationships amplifies her fluidity in gender and sexual practices.

Now this is a reminder that so far, in the first two seasons of *The Umbrella Academy*, Vanya is referred to with she/her pronouns. However, the use of she/her and he/him pronouns does not always imply absolute binary identification on someone's gender identity. It is also crucial to acknowledge that Elliot Page, the actor who plays Vanya in *The Umbrella Academy*, came out as a transgender in December 2020. In today's climate, where the identity of a performer in the media is important to correctly represent particular

group or community, it becomes principal to not always fully separate a fictional character and who portrays it. Thus, it is highly possible for the show to explore more on Vanya’s practices of desire, as well as her gender identity.

Klaus and Vanya’s non-traditional practices of desire recall Butler’s statement in the previous chapter where they criticize the idea of coherent identities and gender norms. The characters’ actions, choices, and appearances have made statement that their gender and sexual identities are, in fact, not definitive. The rejection of traditional social rules on genders and sexuality has opened up more possibilities to what ‘truth’ of identity really is. It has opened the doors to discussions on the presence of gender and sexual identities beyond the binaries, which then becomes recognized and eventually accepted in the society to the point where actual people with such identification are acknowledged and represented in the media.

Progressive Identity as an Opposition to Conservatism

After a brief discussion on underrepresented groups in media in the previous chapter, let us visit the year 2018, where *Black Panther* was released. After the presence of several black superheroes serving as the main characters’ sidekicks many years prior, *Black Panther* created historical momentum in film industry as the first superhero movie that features black superhero as the titular character. For once, a movie with predominantly black actors is not widely labelled as “black movie” as they did *The Color Purple* (1985), *Dream Girls* (2006), and *Straight Outta Compton* (2015). Following the release of *Black Panther*, the talk of

representation in the media once again arose, this time about a movie featuring black main character that is not about being black. *Black Panther* is a “superhero movie”.

The success of *Black Panther* has broadened the road to normalization of the idea that any individual from minority groups can be a superhero. Like *Black Panther*, *The Umbrella Academy* also seeks out the way to put characters from various ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations to the spotlight. However, when a character is not especially from dominant culture, they have to work harder to live up to certain standards to fulfill the “traditional” superhero characteristics: tall, beautiful and sexy, macho and muscular, smart, strong, brave, and morally straight. According to Moriarty (2013), although personifications of superheroes change over the years, their main characteristics have remained the same (p. 6). Di Paolo (2011) describes superhero narratives as follows:

Superhero narratives, as they are traditionally understood, involve colourfully garbed heroic icons that demonstrate uncanny strength, intelligence, supernatural powers, and near infallibility. (p.2)

The visual depiction of superheroes has always been formulaic. Popular male superheroes, including Black Panther, have mostly met the traditional standards of superhero narratives that Di Paolo explicates. Male superheroes are often portrayed shirtless or flexing their muscles on screen to show their masculinity, showing leadership, competing on who is more skilled in combat, stronger, and more intelligent, like what we see between Iron Man, Captain America, and Winter Soldier in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and Batman and Superman in *Batman v*

Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016), constructing a popular belief that male superheroes are always macho. Meanwhile, as minorities in a male-dominated culture, female superheroes have to work harder to fulfill certain standards to get what it takes to what makes a superhero a hero. Following the release of *Captain Marvel* (2019), the movie was widely criticized for “forcing feminism” by introducing female superhero that is portrayed as strong and powerful rather than sexy or pretty like her predecessor Wonder Woman and Black Widow. Female superheroes are often oversexualized, with their skin-tight suits and their hour-glass feature. In some cases, strong female superheroes showing off “badassery” are dubbed as the symbol of feminism.

Then, what standards do queer heroes like Klaus and Vanya have to satisfy? The portrayal of Klaus and Vanya’s progressive identities is used by the media as one of the tools to oppose traditional social rules, both in superhero narratives and social settings. With shows like *The Umbrella Academy*, comic book fans are served with fresh, alternative superhero story that does not only emphasize on power and being a hero, but also highlights how reality is for those heroes as human beings, along with their human problems. With their respective problems, the Hargreeves develop sense of belonging after finding their common ground post-academy. This fits what Way (2020) describes as subversion, where an alternate group does not get stopped by the rules of society (p. 114). For Klaus and Vanya especially, they are the furthest among the other Hargreeves from most of the traditional superhero characteristics. Luther, Diego, and Allison still fulfill some of the traditional superhero visuals: tall, muscular, attractive, fast, and strong. Number Five looks prim and

dapper, is very smart and has great leadership quality. Klaus and Vanya, on the other hand, can relate to each other when it comes to their self-esteem compared to their siblings, especially in heroic actions. The following dialog is an example of what Feenstra et al. (2020) describes as “impostor syndrome”, where some individuals feel as if they were inferior because they were parts of marginalized groups, but ended up in esteemed roles and position (p. 1):

[Klaus:] You can count me out.

[Allison:] Klaus!

[Klaus:] What? You guys should save her. You’re great at all the hero shit. Listen, Vanya would understand, ‘cause she has realistic expectations of what I am. (s. 2, ep. 9, 00:26)

Klaus and Vanya’s inferiority is also depicted in their presentation on screen, including their appearance and choices. Klaus is lean and unkempt, a drug addict, a hippie, and lazy. Vanya is petite and does not have typical superheroine body. Vanya wears men’s shirts instead of tight leather suit, but at the same time she is not macho, and despite possessing the strongest power, Vanya is not skilled in physical fights or combat strategies like her sister Allison. Instead of showing strength, intelligence, and badassery, Klaus and Vanya tend to avoid using their powers, look sad, stressed out, and tired most of the time. Furthermore, Klaus and Vanya are the only siblings who have to deal with drugs. As Reginald’s way to suppress Vanya’s power, he manipulates her into thinking that she is sick, so she has to take medication since as long as she can remember. Meanwhile Klaus is addicted to drugs because he wants to block his ability to see the dead. At one point, both withdraw from drugs and medication for separate reasons. Klaus sobers up when attempting to communicate with his deceased

father, while Vanya was incited by her ex-boyfriend to quit medication. As they get off drugs, it gets harder to control their power, especially for Vanya. Their suffering puts them in the same boat, pulling them even closer to solitude and loneliness compared to their other siblings.

While the rest of the siblings show willingness to save the world, Klaus and Vanya would mostly rather be left out. In some occasions, while the others, despite their differences, try their best to cooperate, Klaus and Vanya put their own interests above the others, causing the missions to lag. Lastly, Klaus and Vanya are too ambiguous to be associated with machoism or symbol of feminism, or even be associated with superhero at all.

In social settings, Klaus and Vanya’s gender and sexual identities are considered minority. In the incorrect places and times, people consider them not normal, or even wrong. In 2019 setting, individuals like Klaus and Vanya are arguably accepted. However, as season two is entirely set in 1960s, Klaus and Vanya are used as media’s tools to oppose conservatism. In 1963, Klaus is set to trace back Dave before he signs up to the military to prevent him from dying in the Vietnam War, and Vanya is set to build a relationship with Sissy, a woman who is married to typical 60s conservative husband. This storyline is also used on their other sister, Allison, who is a black woman. The creators of the show utilize the “what-if” storyline by sending off marginalized people with 2019 mindset and upbringing to 1960s Texas, a red Southern state, where homosexuality is still widely despised and civil rights movements are still taking place.

The opposition to conservatism is indivisible with the show’s emo root. Emo subculture is known for their inclusivity of all races, nationalities, sexualities, and genders. Recently, the members of the community, including the musicians, also participate in raising voices and awareness for social and political issues like climate change, equality, Black Lives Matter, and impeachment of President Trump. Klaus and Vanya’s opposition to conservatism is not as obvious as Allison’s, who jumps right into the civil rights movement by doing sit-ins and marches. Klaus and Vanya are faced with conservative individuals, but their opposition is more a personal matter rather than a collective interest.

In opposing conservatism, Vanya is more subtle than Klaus. Sissy’s husband compares Vanya to a sick cow that can cause a plague, implying that homosexuality is a transmissible disease. Although Vanya shows her opposition, she does not do anything else other than expressing disapproval (s2, ep. 7, 20:24). Since women are seen inferior in the 1960s, Vanya is aware that further confrontation may put her and Sissy in danger because their position as women put them in powerlessness. Instead of fighting Carl in attempt to be with Sissy, Vanya tries to save her from an unhappy marriage by plotting to take Sissy with her to 2019, where they do not have to hide anything anymore or pretend to be people they are not. Her opposition to conservatism can be seen through her dialog with Sissy as follows:

[Vanya:] We need to leave before Carl gets back.

[Sissy:] I need to talk to him first.

[Vanya:] There isn’t enough time.

[Sissy:] He’s my husband. I owe him an explanation.

[Vanya:] You don’t owe him anything!
(s. 2, eps. 7, 36:17)

Her lines show a rejection towards Sissy's concept of traditional gender roles in marriage, where she thinks she needs Carl to know everything she does because he is her husband, no matter how bad he treats her. Vanya tries to push her 2019 mindset to Sissy that women do not owe men anything, even when he is the husband.

Klaus and Vanya show their opposition to conservatism in their different ways. While Vanya is more cautious with how people in the 60s see same-sex relationships, Klaus is more impetuous. He does not try to hide his queerness even in public. He also openly expresses his heartfelt confession to young Dave, who does not know who Klaus is yet, in front of Dave's conservative uncle Brian. Klaus is also shown rejecting the binary polarity, as seen in the following dialog between him and Brian after his homophobic remarks:

[Brian:] Do you know this... clown?

[Dave:] Um, he bought pink paint at the store.

[Brian:] Pink paint. Makes sense.

[Klaus:] You know, pink can actually be masculine in the right setting. (s.2, ep. 4, 15:45)

Apart of expressing himself openly, he also promotes normalization of sexual practices outside of heterosexuality. Using his knowledge about the future, he gains hundreds of followers to start a cult and make them believe that he is a prophet. He uses his influence to encourage the propriety of unconventional sex practices that are frowned upon at that time, like same-sex intercourse, swingers, and polyamory.

Queer characters like Klaus and Vanya, especially in superhero films, are burdened with quite amount of challenge. Netflix, as one

of supposedly progressive media in the present, has demonstrated its attempt to recognize the presence of progressive identities and the rejection of traditional social norms that some younger generations consider outdated. Netflix has its fair share to feature them in their original works, including *The Umbrella Academy*. As kids look upon a superhero as the epitome of a good person, there would always be rejection especially from parents' generation who disagree, because in reality, there are always opposing groups regarding what media promote as diversity and representations. Nevertheless, although they are given the choice to not be parts of *The Umbrella Academy*, Klaus and Vanya stay with their family. At the end of the day, no matter what they identify with, Klaus and Vanya are still superheroes who save the world.

CONCLUSION

The presence of queerness and emo subculture is the result of collective voices among youth with the same dissatisfaction in traditional social setting and/or dominating culture. This study finds that emo subculture is perceived in *The Umbrella Academy* by validating characters with progressive sexual and gender identities to depict subversion or alternative groups that do not follow traditional social rules. This is contrary to the popular assumption that associates emo subculture with heteronormativity and specifically masculinity.

The existence of group of people that do not identify themselves with certain gender and sexual identity, as well as self-discovering people who long for approval, create a comfort space. It is a progress for these individuals that their representations are featured in popular

media, especially when one of the creators, who is a prominent figure in the said subculture, is given the space and opportunity to embody their works. Movements on equality in the past decades definitely have its impacts in representation of LGBTQ+. Not only is that homosexuality no longer perceived as something wrong or taboo, the presence of progressive gender and sexual identity is starting to get its recognition as well due to several factors like the creators of the work itself and due to the demand from audience.

Nowadays, LGBTQ+ characters start getting their roles as the hero, the captain, the teacher, or even the killer, instead of just “the gay one”, which could possibly be invalidating for characters who identify as other labels. Of course there is still a long way to go, considering many films still use stereotypes to portray LGBTQ+ characters. Nevertheless, movies and TV shows are powerful tools that can educate and at the same time provide entertainment. Since the existence of online streaming platforms makes it easier to access films today, the range of the audience that can consume these films have broadened. The more diversity that is present in the audience, the more challenging it is for film industries to represent as many groups and communities as possible. Movies and TV shows can be used as media to show acknowledgement to the presence of underrepresented communities and subcultures. Besides, in the era of technology and internet, it is possible for film industries to utilize their works as platforms to oppose traditional social rules, as a way to educate their viewers that not everything is black and white, even in the most subtle ways. Gender and sexual identities are fluid, and traditional social rules are politically and culturally constructed beliefs that can be rethought and reevaluated. With the movies and TV shows

that are presented in accessible media, young audience should be able to feel validated, seen, and accepted for the way they identify and express themselves.

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FASHION AND COMMODIFICATION: AN ANALYSIS ON THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON OF SUPREME

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ABSTRACT

Globalization is the global information spread and people interconnectivity. It is driven by technological developments in transportation and communication, removing cultural boundaries among nations. Cultural differences are increasingly less tangible and visible in all cultural products, including in fashion. Due to globalization, fashion brands that originate in a certain country can open stores across multiple continents. The invention of the Internet further widens their accessibility by consumers in any part of the world. However, globalization also brings an affordability gap between the upper and the lower classes. Nonetheless, fashion brands can also take advantage of this economic difference in appealing to their consumers. One of those brands is Supreme. Founded in 1994, it became the most sought-after hypebeast brand among street-fashion enthusiasts worldwide. How do they do it in less than 30 years is interesting to analyze. To answer this objective, this article is conducted from the cultural studies standpoint and the case study method. There are three formulas of positioning it adopts in order to grow globally: (1) the commodification African-American community, (2) the use of celebrity endorsement, and (3) the hype of limited-edition releases. Supreme sells oversized streetwear, heavily influenced by Hip-hop culture, a music genre rooted in the lives of African Americans. The brand makes use of celebrities, especially rappers, to endorse its clothes and accessories. It also continually makes headlines by releasing limited-edition products as well as collaborating with well-known figures and brands.

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INTRODUCTION

In general terminology, globalization is the global spread of information as well as global interconnectivity. It is a phenomenon of time experienced by all countries around the world since the middle of the 20th century. Transportation and communication technologies remove the boundaries among countries. The public can easily access content from other countries through various media platforms.

Furthermore, Freedman (1999, p. 156) and Woods (2000, p. 78) define globalization as a set of various quantitative and qualitative developments. It ranges from a dramatic increase in international transactions, especially in finance, to the international and spatial reorganization of production. It thus can be seen from the global harmonization of tastes and standards, liberalization, deregulation, privatization, the arrival of new information technologies, the global diffusion of information, values, and ideas, massive population transfers, trends towards a universal world culture, and the spread of a worldwide preference for democracy.

Consequently, globalization has also caused the spread of products and jobs across national borders and cultures, affecting all vital sectors. As stated by Giddens (1990, p. 364), it refers to the intensified global-scale social relations that connect locality with globality. What happens at the local stage shapes and is shaped by events in other hemispheres and vice versa. Globalization has different effects on the economy, politics, environment, and culture with different intensities.

Concerning culture, cultural globalization greatly influences a country's

identity. Cultural globalization is the spread of ideas, meanings, and values in certain ways to nations across the globe and their citizens. In most cases, it is characterized by shared consumption of cultural products through the media. Its process thus depends on the speed and ease of access to information and communication flows.

Undoubtedly, globalization is an extraordinary and valuable, yet frightening and destructive occurrence. These contradicting effects can happen simultaneously and rapidly. It allows developed countries, as the source of globalization (Adhitya & Wulandari, 2020, p. 187). This advantage then enables them to successfully influence the culture of the developing countries.

Inevitably, developed countries are culturally synonymous with western qualities. It is because they are the main controllers and drivers of international communication. As a result, developing countries are becoming more and more identical to white-centric characteristics. Cultural gaps among them are increasingly less tangible and visible. This erosion can be seen in all cultural products, especially fashion.

Fashion was one of the first industries to went global. As it is closely intertwined with lifestyle, the effects of globalization in the worldwide free-trade sector are felt in the fashion industry. Fashion brands originated in a country open stores across multiple continents. The invention of the Internet further widens their accessibility.

However, the damaging impacts of globalization are apparent in the fashion industry. According to Grusky (2014, p. 47), one main distinguishing feature of the fashion industry is its ability to differentiate between

different social classes. The affordability gap in fashion consumption between the lower and upper classes causes social differentiation. Nonetheless, fashion brands can also take advantage of this difference in appealing to their consumers. The exclusivity and luxury of high-end fashion brands become a magnet for fashionista enthusiasts to gravitate towards. One of the brands to do so in targeting their consumers and pricing their products is Supreme.

Supreme is a fashion brand founded by James Jebbia in New York City in April 1994. Categorized as a streetwear brand, it initially only released T-shirts. It soon expanded to designing hoodies, sweatshirts, sweatpants, shoes, bags, hats, jewelry, and skate-related products. Targeting the youth generation, it is now considered cool and popular. The youth's interest in the brand is not only visible on its physical retails but also on its online presence.

Supreme fans make use of the Internet to create their own community. Countless social media platforms, such as Instagram and Twitter, and websites are solely dedicated to the brand. A few of Supreme's most notable communities in cyberspace are a website addressed www.supremecommunity.com, an Instagram account named @SupCommunity, and an iPhone app called Supreme Community. Their activities range from discussing the brand and reselling their collection. They also talk about leaks on the brand's upcoming releases and collaborations as they prepare to snatch every last piece of its new arrivals.

This monumental success makes it categorized as a 'hypebeast' brand. Derived from the streetwear culture, hype beast is defined as slang for people obsessed, or

'beast', with everything kinship, or 'hype' (Beltran, 2018). The most vivid hype-beast characteristic is seen through their appearance. One of their signature styles is wearing pieces by a particular brand with its logo from head to toe. They always dress up their appearance in order to steal people's attention and stand out from the crowd. The obsession of the hypebeast community towards Supreme places it among the top 10 fashion brands of 2019 by the biggest hypebeast community website, www.hypebeast.com (Ho, 2019).

In less than its 30-year span, Supreme has been put on the same level as Gucci, Balenciaga and Dior. This rise is remarkable, as the established high-end brands have been around for more than a century. It has also been deemed a "legendary global status" (Sullivan, 2017). A question then comes to mind, how do they do it?. As a company, Supreme is said to have a different approach from other fashion brands. They thus always make headlines around the world from time to time. The brand itself and how it achieves such notoriety are interesting to analyze.

In analyzing this objective, the standpoint of cultural studies is used in this article. According to Fiske (1990, p. ii), cultural studies is the study of culture, its processes, practice, meaning and significance in various contexts, especially of popular culture. Cultural studies position all knowledge with the eclectic method, including knowledge integrated with culture, marking practice, representation, discourse, authority, articulation, text, reading, and consumption. In cultural studies, culture is considered a commodity. This commodification sees cultures for either their exchange values or sign-exchange values. A certain culture and its characteristics are thus being commodified in

order to gain profit through purchases (Tyson, 2006, p. 62).

The consumers who purchase commodified cultural products are seen as active agents. Although the production of popular culture is in the hands of transnational capitalist companies, meaning that the products are constantly produced, changed, and regulated by the cultural gatekeepers, they are consumed by consumers who impassively make decisions. Their desire for commodities might manifest into a need that can never be fully gratified. Therefore, cultural studies assume that there is no need to lament and romanticize traditional culture and actively engage the audience in the international market (Barker, 2004).

Furthermore, the consumers' consumption drives an economic system based on the production and circulation of commodities (Jenkins, 2010, p. 965). Commodification is then examined regarding their relation to power and how it affects various cultural, socio-political, economic, scientific and legal conditions. The power held by the producers of commodified culture is heightened due to globalization with how it spreads and interconnects production, distribution, and consumption by the help of technologies across the world. Mann (2013, p. 11) also emphasizes that globalization involves the extension of distinct ideological, military, and political power relations from developed to developing countries. The state of interactions, communications and exchanges, the complexity and size of the networks involved, and the sheer volume of trades give multinational companies that operate and market across the globe a quadruple profit.

At its core, globalization refers to the universalization of the world system, including consumers' consumption. Its aim is for people all around the world to purchase the same commodified cultural products. The consumption of the commodified culture and its characteristics from one country to another generates uniformity (Safri, 2015, p. 50). This cultural globalization then leads to exchanging the norms, values, customs, and habits, damaging those of local culture due to the penetration of foreign culture (Sztompka, 2007, p. 108).

The global popularity of Supreme that penetrates globally is analyzed using a case study method. It is a strategy and an empirical inquiry investigating phenomena within their real-life context. The method is based on an in-depth investigation of an individual, group, or event to explore the causes of underlying principles. Yin (1994, p. 9) explains that the variety in the field of interest, the distinctive need for case study research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. Usually done in a field setting, it gives the opportunity to focus on a case and retain its holistic and real-world perspective, such as when studying individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, international relations and maturation of industries.

In addition, the primary data are from Supreme advertisements on its website www.supremenewyork.com and Instagram @supremenewyork. These sources are chosen because they are directly managed by Supreme, signifying how the brand wants to be perceived by its consumers and the general public. The collected data are in the form of photos and screenshots. Meanwhile, the secondary data are gathered from journals,

articles, and videos from reputable sources. This methodology is employed to discover the formula of positioning it adopts to grow globally and the driving factors contributing to it.

DISCUSSION

Supreme is one of the first streetwear brands to emerge in the fashion scene. From a small shop in the SoHo neighborhood, Manhattan, Supreme has manifested into a global fashion powerhouse. Staggering price tags on its comfortable clothes and casual accessories label it a luxury streetwear brand. However, instead of decreasing their enthusiasm, consumers worldwide are even more drawn to spend their money on its products. The expensiveness adds to the exclusivity of the brand because not every fan can purchase their products.

Besides this sales and marketing strategy in pricing, other formulas successfully taking Supreme into the stratospheric status it is today. After vigilant observation of cyber channels, there are three other carefully calculated formulas Supreme employs that can also be discovered. They are its commodification of the African-American community, its use of celebrity endorsement, and its hype of limited-edition releases.

The Commodification of the African-American Community

Cultural commodification is defined as an act of turning culture and/or its elements into a sellable commodity. When carried out by a member outside of that culture, it can either be understood as appreciation or appropriation. Cultural appreciation is thought of as a way to respectfully preserve a certain culture from being abandoned by its people,

whereas cultural appropriation is deemed a deed to shamelessly gain profit or humor by taking advantage or making fun of the said culture (Holmes, 2016).

Cultural commodification can be found not only in contrasting cultures from across the globe. Both cultures can co-exist in the same society. People of the dominant culture often commodify less recognized subcultures. It can be seen in the case of Supreme.

Supreme was not meant to be a fashion brand. It was first created as a shop catering to the blooming New York skate crowd (Houston & Fennell 2021). In the decades prior to the 1990s, skateboarding was a niche sport. Skaters and those interested in the subculture were their initial target consumers. The shop sold skateboards, spare parts and gears from established skate brands. Conveniently located with iconic skate spots, such as the Astor Place cube and the Brooklyn Banks nearby, it saw a moderate feat.

What took it to succeed internationally was when Supreme was shifted to be the fashion brand. However, cultural commodification can be intensely felt in the brand's success. Jebbia, who had neither design education nor experience, appointed a team of five designers, namely Brendon Babenzien, Geoff Heath, and Augie Galan. They decided to release a more street-style aesthetic as he saw the subculture as a promising business opportunity.

The first collection released consisted of “three T-shirts: one featuring an image of Robert de Niro from *Taxi Driver*, another showcasing a photo of a skater with an afro, and one with the store's much coveted box logo” (Takanashi, 2020). Henceforth, skaters and skate enthusiasts throughout the US have

been seen wearing one (Brewer, 2021). Graphic t-shirts have been a staple in the brand's releases ever since.



Figure 1 & 2. Supreme Graphic T-shirts

Street fashion is “indisputably associated” with Hip-hop, the music that stemmed from the lives of African Americans. Both cultural products are deemed the “area where keeping it real is held in high regard” (Cochrane, 2017). Over the years, as the genre acquires more popularity from the general American audience in the 1990s, so does Supreme. With the world getting more globalized each day, the more the brand is recognized globally.

Furthermore, Supreme's commodification of the African-American community can also be seen from the cutting of its clothes. The brand opts for baggy clothes. The reasons are to give freedom for

skaters to move as well as offer protection upon falling. This choice is indifferent to other types of sports involving intricate bodily movements. For example, figure skaters and gymnasts are clad in skin-tight clothing, as the extra fabric will restrict their movement. Meanwhile, the assumption of its protection is arguable because its tops are made of light cotton.



Figure 3, 4 & 5. Supreme Oversized Clothes

Besides the branded shirts and T-shirts, its pants also use baggy cuttings. Both skate shorts and cargo pants have become its main designs, alongside hoodies and tracksuits. Moreover, the level of bagginess Supreme apparels are designed deserves to be paid attention to. Sizing the brand uses diverts significantly from the standard of the US size guide, resulting in oversized clothes. Oversize clothing is entangled with the African-American community.

Coming off of slavery and segregation, most African-American families were averagely below the poverty line. Besides food and housing, clothing was another basic need difficult to attain. Most of them relied on clothes donation, both from charity institutions, e.g., Goodwill, and their own relatives. Therefore, hand-me-downs were common in African-American households. As the clothes given were of larger fits, they became too big when worn by the younger ones.

Throughout the 1990s to 2000s, oversized clothing became a huge trend. Numerous fashion brands, especially streetwear ones, began adopting it in their collections. Unarguably, Supreme is the most successful brand in doing so. Ranging from top to bottom, Supreme never skips oversized pieces from their releases every season.

Supreme's commodification of the African-American community can be perceived as oversized streetwear is closely associated with Hip-hop. Looking at the people behind the brand, Jebbia, a white man, can be considered to take advantage of African-American characteristics for his own financial gains. He and his brand commodify

the remain of racial disparity for the sake of economic success.

The Use of Celebrity Endorsement

Among other high-end fashion brands that have been around for centuries, Supreme's birth pales in comparison. However, since the last two decades, the brand has been catching up to them. Today, it is often put alongside or even in direct competition with them. One of the most significant ways for Supreme to do so is by celebrity endorsement.

Endorsement is a public declaration of approval or support from a well-known figure to someone or something. It was initially applied in the field of politics indicating backing for candidates or policies. The term then became widely employed in the realm of marketing. According to U.S. Federal Trade Commission or FTC (2009):

an endorsement means any advertising message (including verbal statements, demonstrations, or depictions of the name, signature, likeness or other identifying personal characteristics of an individual or the name or seal of an organization) that consumers are likely to believe reflects the opinions, beliefs, findings, or experiences of a party other than the sponsoring advertiser, even if the views expressed by that party are identical to those of the sponsoring advertiser.

Over the years, researches have shown that this marketing technique gives favorable results in sales directly.

Instead of rolling celebrity endorsement the traditional ways, such as TV, magazine and billboard ads, Supreme uses famous celebrities to endorse its products in the realm of social media, by the likes of Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. They are seen posting Supreme products for their millions of

followers on their social media pages to see. One of the celebrities whose endorsements have significantly strengthened Supreme image throughout the global scale is Kanye West.

West is an award-winning rapper, songwriter and producer. He is also recently recognized as a fashion designer and entrepreneur. Prior to releasing his own subbrand with Adidas named Yeezy, he has frequently been making appearances clad in Supreme products on highly-publicized occasions, including award ceremonies, album releases and family events. His social media posts are not simply personal entries sharing his day-to-day activities but strategically calculated larger-than-life images.



Figure 6, 7 & 8. Kanye West wearing Supreme

West is vastly influential to Supreme's rise to a global street style brand that it is dubbed as 'Kanye Effect'. The moment he is seen wearing Supreme, his fans instantly idolize the brand as well. It is because the more consumers are being exposed to a brand, the more likely they are going to develop an association with it (Waring, 2018). West has successfully earned the brand a high degree of recognition, trust, respect or awareness. Deshmukh (in Schiffer, 2017) states that he is "to be seen as not just a face of the brand, but integral to the brand itself".

Furthermore, as an African-American hip-hop star, West's role in globalizing Supreme reinforces that the brand commodifies the community. As stated by Markman (in Schiffer, 2017), "high-end fashion designers used to turn their nose up at hip-hop; now, they have to respect the influence [it wields], whether they like it or not". In addition, it is not only West who heavily endorses Supreme. Other African-American hip-hop stars can also be easily spotted uploading what appears to be endorsements for the brand. To name a few are A\$AP Rocky, Travis Scott and Jaden Smith.

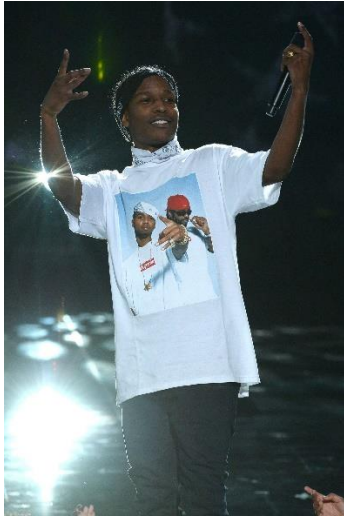


Figure. 9, 10 & 11. African-American Hip-hop Stars

It is also worth noting that Supreme never officially names any celebrities, particularly African-American hip-hop stars, as their brand ambassadors. However, the endorsements from the current African-American famous personalities have cemented Supreme as a central part of the hip-hop scene, despite having no roots from the African-American culture. Such covert advertising has the ability to be relatable to a wide variety of people than ordinary advertising does. The ads then become some sort of aspiration, far beyond merely a promotion.

The Hype of Limited Edition Releases

Besides commodifying African-American characteristics and using hip-hop star endorsement, Supreme makes a name for itself with a different approach. Other brands keep filling their offline and online stores with an unlimited stock of products in selling as many as they can to boost revenue. On the contrary, Supreme is known globally for releasing a limited amount of products. As explained by Jebbia (in O'Brien, 2009):

We've never really been supply-demand anyway. It's not like when we're making something, we make only six of them. But if we can sell 600, I make 400. We've always been like that—at least for the past seven or eight years. For every season, we put in a lot of work to try to create exciting stuff.

Supreme has been shaping itself to be exclusive. The brand does not rely on how many products are sold, but rather on how much each product is sold for. On the one hand, it limits its scope of consumers. On the other hand, it appeals to the upper-class demographic.

The hype of its limited-edition can be identified from its first collection that

consisted of only three t-shirts (Takanashi, 2020). Subsequently, it created a regulation for future release, called 'one-limit-per-style'. It means that if a shirt comes out in black, red, and gray, each consumer can only get it on color. Therefore, if they want it in other colors, they need to get two other people to stand in line to get it for them.

On top of that rule, not everyone can come to the Supreme stores at their convenience. While other fashion brands continuously open their stores in every big city worldwide, Supreme insists on having a handful of stores. Until recently, there are only 13 Supreme stores around the world (Mahadevan, 2021). Moreover, in order to get the chance to step into its stores, as described by Magnaye (in Houston & Fennell, 2021):

you go to the Supreme website, you enter your basic information: your name, email, phone number, and credit-card number. Then, they'll send you a text later in the day to let you know if you've been selected to stand in line. Then on Wednesday, they'll send you a text telling you the time and store to report to. And on Thursday, you go to the store at the time that you're given.

Supreme brings these layers of exclusivity to its online store. Its website does not actually sell its products. It only shows the date and time of release for its new collections. However, as soon as they are released, they are sold out instantly. The website then goes to its 'coming soon' mode.

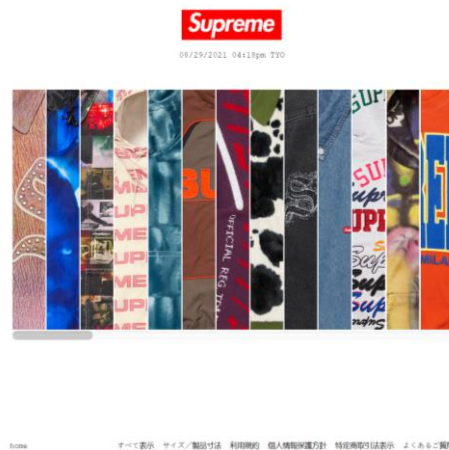


Figure 12. Supreme Website

Additionally, Supreme enhances its level of exclusivity by collaborating with other fashion brands. From one collection to another, it has collaborated both with other street-style and high-end luxury brands. Supreme's brand collaborators include Supreme are BAPE, Spalding, Rimowa, Nike, Louis Vuitton, Jean-Paul Gautier, Vans, The North Face, Comme de Garcons, Levi's, Timberland, Lacoste, Dover Street Market and Stone Island (Wilson, 2017).



Figure 13. Louis Vuitton x Supreme Collection



Figure 14. Nike x Supreme Collection



Figure 14. Supreme x Commes De Garcon Collection

Supreme first collaborated with Sarcastic as early as 1998, only four years after its founding. Moreover, its list of collaborations is composed of well-established brands. Those brands have been around much longer than Supreme, and their consumers are loyal. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Supreme piggybacked on its collaborators in widening its name to the consumers of said collaborators.

Aside from fashion brands, Supreme also collaborates with food and beverage brands. It released a cookie with Oreo and a bottled drink with HydraPak. In 2020, Supreme released lipstick in collaboration with a make-up brand, Pat McGrath. By collaborating with

these brands, Supreme broadens its recognition beyond the fashion people, as well as exceeding age, gender, domicile and interest.



Figure 15. Supreme x Oreo Collaboration



Figure 16. Supreme x HydraPak Collaboration



Figure 17. Supreme x Pat McGrath

From the brand's track record, it can be understood that Supreme's products are purposefully difficult to get ahold of. This strategy thus makes their products to be in high demand. Its collaboration products are even harder to grab. The unfulfilled demand of the consumers results in the resale practice.

Consumers queuing for Supreme products are actually buying to be sold again. Those who do not get the products from Supreme directly can buy from the resellers. Meanwhile, those who do can resell for an inflated price.

Supreme resell has become a lucrative business. As an instance is a 21-year old Londoner, Lydia Clear. Clear “spent a total of £300 on hoodies and T-shirts and made a profit of £1,000”. Starting when she was only 15 years old, “she spends about two hours a day reselling, and makes about £1,000 profit every month” (Bearne, 2017). To list a few of renowned buy-and-sell websites are Strictlypreme, StockX, Grailed, Dedop and a Facebook group called The 444Basement.

Supreme’s approach in limiting the number of products it sells and enticing other brands to collaborate builds anticipation among its consumers. They are even willing to spend more money than what Supreme originally sells for. This eagerness creates a resell industry in itself. Its products are not only considered as a piece of clothing and accessory, but also have become collectors’ items.

CONCLUSION

The impact of globalization in the last 20 years has dramatically disrupted the production, distribution and marketing sides of the fashion industry. In order to succeed, fashion brands must continually adapt to the ever-changing innovations globalization brings. A brand that has been successfully growing in the past two decades is Supreme. The brand has gone to amass a cult-like following around the world, while at the same time created a high-end streetwear image.

After careful observation of the brand’s history via its website and social media, it can be concluded that three approaches help Supreme rising as a global phenomenon. The first approach is by commodifying the African-American community. It uses characteristics of African-American culture in its products, e.g., oversized clothes. The second approach is by using celebrity endorsement. The oversized clothes it releases are then worn by African-American hip-hop stars, notably Kanye West, to be posted on their social media platforms.

The last but not least approach is releasing a limited amount of products, either by itself or by collaborating with other brands. It results in the hype around the brand every time it releases a new collection. The combination of these approaches keeps the price of its products high and the consumers devotedly admiring.

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2. Types of article suitable for publication include the following; research report (laboratory, field, archives), conceptual ideas, studies, theory applications.
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As Rowe (2014) asserts, "'Transnationalism' also refers to American Studies done by international scholars outside the U.S. especially scholarship that emphasizes the influence of the U.S. abroad" (p. 1)

This research assigns the researcher to be the key instrument in his or her own research (Creswell, 2009, p. 211).

The New York Times (2020) interviewed their gay readers to reveal about the dynamics of gay relationship:

I am in a same-sex relationship, and we are regularly flummoxed by how our heterosexual parent friends don't split nighttime child care and sleep loss...In our house, parents are parents. There is no artificial distinction like fathers do this and mothers do that.

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