Master's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Art and Media Studies

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Star Trek's Conflicting Politics

A History of Sexism, Racism, and Homophobia

Master's thesis in Film Studies
Supervisor: Lukas R.A Wilde
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English Thesis Description:

Star Trek is a franchise that has become known for it's liberal ideals. However, sometimes it has faltered in its quest to depict a brighter future without racism, sexism, and homophobia. Through the analysis of the characters Seven of Nine, Chakotay, and Soren this thesis will seek to discover the behind-the-scenes factors that may have led to problematic depictions of race, gender, and sexuality. The thesis will take you on a brief history of the entire Star Trek franchise and the greater TV industry as a whole, to gain a deeper understanding as to how the characters Seven of Nine, Chakotay, and Soren became so problematic. The analysis of these three characters will be used to gain a greater understanding of the problems with Star Trek as a whole, while also acknowledging it's strengths. The goal of the thesis is not to discredit the good Star Trek has done, but rather to acknowledge its faults in the hopes of being able to call them out if they were to happen again. It also acknowledges the fact that the franchise has always been liberal, despite it's sometimes problematic past.

Norsk Oppgavebeskrivelse:

Star Trek er en serie som har blitt kjent for sine liberale idealer. Noen ganger har den dessverre feilet i sin oppgave med å vise en lysere fremtid uten rasisme, sexisme, og homofobi. Denne oppgaven vill forsøke å finne ut grunnene bak de mulige rasistiske, sexistiske og homofobiske skildringene i Star Trek. Dette vill gjøres ved å analysere karakterene Seven of Nine, Chakotay, og Soren. Oppgaven vill gå igjennom historien til Star Trek og TV industrien, i håp om å finne svaret på hvorfor disse tre karakterene kan være sett på som problematiske. Analysen av disse tre karakterene vill bli brukt for å få en forståelse av problemene med Star Trek i sin helhet. Målet med oppgaven er å avdekke de mer problematiske elementene i serien. Dens mål er ikke å undertrykke det gode serien har gjort, men den søker en forståelse av seriens fortid for å bekrefte at den alltid har vært liberal, samtidig som den kan anerkjenne at den har vært problematisk til tider. Denne master oppgaven er skrevet på Engelsk.

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1 Introduction

This thesis will study the misogynistic history of Star Trek. A franchise that has always prided itself on its progressive nature. My focus will be on production studies. I seek to discover the behind-the-scenes factors that may have led to problematic depictions of minority figures and women, in an otherwise inclusive franchise.

My thesis will be formatted through the lens of three-character studies. The female character Seven of Nine from *Star Trek Voyager* (1995-2001) will be studied for the subject of sexism. Chakotay, a native American character also originating from *Voyager*, will be studied for the subject of Racism. Lastly, the character Soren from the episode *The Outcast* (Scheerer, 1992) in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) will be analysed to gain an understanding of homophobia within the franchise.

To understand these subjects properly I must lay the groundwork for their historical contexts. I will therefore split the thesis into 10 parts, excluding the table of contents, introduction, and reference list. Chapter 2 will give you an overview of several references that will be used to formulate my argument throughout the rest of the thesis. Chapter 3 summarises Star Trek's history with progressive political topics, and Chapter 4 introduces the characters that will be the subject of this analysis.

The rest of the text will be split into segments of two chapters. The analysis of Sexism in Star Trek consists of Chapters 5 and 6. Chapters 7 and 8 will do the same for racism and Chapters 9 and 10 follow the same formulate with homophobia.

By the time I reach the conclusion, I hope to have gained an understanding as to why a seemingly progressive franchise like Star Trek could end up with racist, sexist, and homophobic depictions. My current hypothesis is that it was caused by conflicting ideals between the writers and producers behind the scenes. Alongside historic stereotypes subconsciously influencing the way certain groups of people were written.

2. Literature

Before I begin my analysis, I must first lay the groundwork for what literature I will reference throughout the text. This chapter is split into 11 parts that will introduce the various sources used in the thesis. To formulate my argument, I must draw from other studies made on these subjects. These studies can help me analyse the characters from a production standpoint. I will summarize and explain the reasons why I believe these references will be useful for my thesis. I will utilize the APA 7th reference style throughout the text. Everything from books, articles, movies, TV shows, and YouTube videos will be referenced in this thesis. Some screenshots from various episodes of Star Trek will also be utilized as examples for my arguments, these screenshots will be credited per the instructions of APA 7th.

2.1 The Fifty-Year Mission: The First 25 Years & The Next 25 Years (Mark A. Altman & Edward Gross, 2016).

My main source of information for what happened on the production of various Star Trek shows will be taken from the books *The Fifty-Year Mission: The First 25 Years* and *The Next 25 Years* written by Edward Gross and Mark A. Altman. Both books were released on the same day in 2016. To make it clear which of the books I am referencing I will refer to the authors in the order they appear on the cover. On *The First 25 Years* Gross appears first, while on *The Next 25 Years,* Altman appears first. Whenever I have Gross first, I am referring to the first book. When I put Altman's name first, I am referencing the second book.

The books contain first-hand accounts from actors, producers, writers, and other staff who worked on Star Trek. They give every party involved an equal opportunity to tell their story. dVictims of racism, sexism, homophobia, and abuse are all allowed to freely talk about their experiences. They also allowed producers to defend themselves against these accusations. This gives the books a greater sense of reliability. It takes no sides and attempt to create as accurate a picture of the series' history as possible. Outside of first-hand accounts, there exists no concrete evidence of misogynistic behaviour happening on set. However, by allowing everyone to speak freely, we can get a sense of who is telling the truth by comparing several people's accounts.

When analysing the homophobic depiction of Soren I will use the part of the books focusing on *The Next Generation* (1987-1994). More specifically I will reference the short sections that focus on the episode *The Outcast* (Scheerer, 1992). These sections go from pages 163 to 182, and 249 to 264. They outline some of the most problematic changes that the producers mandated for the show. It is told from the perspective of several people, including writers, actors, and even producers.

Part 4 of the book focuses on *Star Trek Voyager*. This part lasts from page 411 to 551. Several pages from this chapter will be used to analyse the problematic nature of the characters Chakotay and Seven of Nine. Actor Robert Beltran interspersed his personal experiences and concerns with portraying Chakotay several times throughout the chapter. He conveyed his concerns about potentially getting in trouble for depicting a Native American character as a non-native actor. He also worried that his portrayal might have been stereotypical, flat, and one-dimensional.

The character analysis of Seven of Nine will focus on the objectification of her character. I will use the same parts of the book as Chakotay to find more information about her situation. Seven of Nine was played by actress Jeri Ryan, who constantly showcased her admiration for the character throughout the chapter. However, she also talked about her displeasure with her costume.

2.2 Sexism and the Male Gaze.

Several sources will be used for the analysis of sexism in the film and TV industry. The thesis will look into what the Male Gaze is, and how Star Trek has appealed to it over the years. One of the main sources that will be used to understand the male gaze is Isabelle Fol's Book *The Dominance of the Male Gaze in Hollywood* (2004). In this book she not only explains what the male gaze is, but she also discusses how widely spread it has historically been. Fol explained how films have often objectified women for the pleasure of men, and the potentially damaging effects this could have on people's psyche. Her text touched upon how fiction can warp our view of reality. If films depict women with perfect hourglass-shaped bodies and revealing outfits, society will potentially start believing that's how women should look.

Laura Mulvey was the person who coined the term “Male Gaze”. Her 1975 essay on the matter, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* outlined her gripes with the power fantasy of the Male Gaze. This text will be used to formulate my explanations for what the Male Gaze was during the early years of feminist film studies. Fol’s text will give us a more modern perspective of how the term male gaze changed over time. Sarah Vanbuskirk’s 2022 article *What Is the Male Gaze?* outlined the meaning and history of the phrase, and will be used to further understand the concept.

Pamela Hutchinson’s 2017 *The Guardian* article *Moguls and Starlets: 100 years of Hollywood’s corrosive, systemic Sexism* will be my main source of information about the historic abuse of women in films. Several other articles will be used to confirm their findings on the subjects. Such as Minnah Stein’s WMC article that goes into more detail about the 1920s era of Hollywood’s treatment of women; and Ginger Abbot’s 2021 *Raindance* report on why women are still not safe in the modern film industry.

2.3 Thinking Sex, Doing Gender, Watching Film (Theresa L. Geller, 2018).

By studying Theresa L. Geller’s text *Thinking Sex, Doing Gender, Watching Film* from *The Anthem Handbook of Screen Theory* I will seek to gain a better understanding as to why the character of Seven of Nine can be seen as problematic. I will also use the text to help me look at the parts of her character that coincide with typical feminist ideals. I am doing this to show the conflict between the feminist way she was written and the problematic way she was presented on screen.

Her text stated that feminist film theory started growing during the 1960s and 70s. It put a heavy empathise on how women were presented visually in films. They criticized how female characters were often only used as eye candy (P. 50-52, 54). This can still be seen in the 80s and 90s. For example, Seven of Nine was depicted wearing a skin-tight catsuit so she could further appeal to the male gaze.

After the 70s, feminist film studies moved beyond the visual and started studying the depiction of female characters as a whole. It became vital for feminist film studies to focus on the psychology of the characters. If they were strong, why were they strong? Were they well written and stood on their own, or just a fantasy for men? If they were weak, was it a psychological reason as to why they were weak? Or were they just a damsel in distress (P 56-57)? By applying this to Seven of Nine we can see that she is a character with quite a lot of

psychological trauma. She got assimilated into the Borg collective at the age of 8. She was not freed from their influence until she was an adult. Seven of Nine therefore sought a maternal figure in the character of Catherin Janeway, who could teach her what it meant to be human. Despite this trauma, she was a three-dimensional character who worked through it rather than letting it be a crutch. There is however a conflict between how she was written and how she was presented visually.

2.4 Queer History.

Long Tran's 2019 essay *Queer History Through a Hollywood Lens* from *Augsburg Honors Review: Vol. 12, Article 9* will serve as a source of information about the homophobic history of Hollywood. Her 10-page essay outlines some of the most important events in the Queer history. She does this through the lens of modern period pieces. The text uses these films as an outlet to discuss the dichogamy between the past and present history of Queer culture in films. I seek to gain a better understanding of important historic factors that may have caused the turbulent history of Queer culture in Films. Such as the creation and subsequent abolishment of the Motion Picture Production Code; the AIDS crisis; and the hardships that queer people still struggle with today.

In 2022 Patrick Kelleher made an article for PinkNews that gave a quick summary of the problematic history Hollywood has had with LGBTQ representation. Author Dan Craig made a similar article for Bristol University, bringing up more examples throughout history. By combining the knowledge of the two articles I seek to form a more comprehensive history of Hollywood's problematic past and present relationship with queer people. When looking into more specific parts of LGBTQ history I will use other articles that specifically focus on these aspects. For example, *Variety*'s 2019 article about *How Hollywood Is (and Isn't) Getting Better at LGBTQ Inclusion.*

Many of the sources mentioned above talks about the impact the Hays Code had on queer representation. The Hays Code was also known as the Motion Picture Production Code. It dictated what could and could not be shown in films between 1934 and 1968. Maria Lewis' ACMI article *Early Hollywood and the Hays Code* will be used to find information on the negative impact the Code had on queer representation.

Queer coding is another aspect often mentioned in the above articles. I will look into how, and why Hollywood has queer-coded their characters. Through the combination of the previously mentioned references, and *Elizabeth Duarte's* 2022 Medium article on the matter, I seek to uncover the homophobic origin of queer coding. I will use this knowledge to showcase how it affected Soren's characterization in Star Trek.

Lastly, to understand the turbulent queer history of Hollywood, I must also understand the real-world historic context of the situation. I will utilize CNN's 2023 timeline of all the most important events in American LGBTQ history from 1924 up to 2023 to gain more knowledge on this subject. For more specific historic events I will reference the History Channel's extensive library of articles on Queer history. Most specifically their article on the US Army's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, and their timeline of the AIDS crisis.

2.5 Queer Production Studies (Eve Ng, 2021).

To gain a better understanding of Soren's character I will be looking at Eve Ng's text on *Queer Production Studies.* It can help clarify why it is so important to get queer representation right, and how Soren's character failed. Eve Ng claims that an influx of LGBTQ crew members on productions can help shape and create more well-rounded Queer characters (Ng, 2021, p 1, 5-6). It is unknown how many people working on S*tar Trek the Next Generation* (1987-1994) were part of the LGBTQ community. Chances are however low that any queer writers influenced the creation of Soren. She was written by the straight woman Jeri Taylor, and it is known that the straight male producers demanded several changes to the character. Soren's representation may have been better had they taken more feedback from the LGBTQ community during the creation of the character.

Queer characters started appearing more frequently in television around the 1990s. Ng argues that many of these characters were not created for inclusivity. They were stereotypes whose function was to appeal to straight young adults who were looking for more edgy and grown-up material to watch. This implied that Television producers at the time did not see LGBTQ people as something appropriate for children (Ng, 2021 p 3). Soren's episode of Star Trek first aired in 1992, near the beginning of queer characters' emergence on Television. This meant that the episode was released during a time when queer characters were still looked at as something for "adults" and not appropriate for children.

2.6 Gender and Sexuality in Star Trek: Allegories of Desire in the Television Series and Films (David Greven, 2009).

David Greven's 2009 book *Gender and Sexuality in Star Trek* touches upon many of the same subjects as this thesis. Page 9 to page 33 focuses on the male gaze in the original Star Trek show. My thesis will not focus much on the original Star Trek series, but what Greven says about the male gaze in TOS can be applied to my analysis of Seven of Nine. It can also help me understand how the franchise has improved since then.

Pages 34 to 47 tackle the homoerotic undertones of Kirk and Spock's relationship in TOS; the clear pansexual vibes of Commander William T. Riker in TNG, and even a short section on Soren. Greven's insight into how the franchise had treated queer-coded characters throughout the years could help me formulate my arguments as to why the writers felt the need to hide the queerness of these characters.

Pages 97 to 117 focus on masculinity and race depiction in the franchise. Here Greven reflects on the toxic masculine traits often given to male leads like Captain Kirk. It also focuses on the franchise's innate desire to showcase a progressive world where people of all skin colours and genders get along. Chakotay's problematic depiction gets brought up a lot in this section, as he represents many masculine traits used in Star Trek as well as being a problematic racial stereotype.

Pages 165 to 186 are about *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) and its depiction of women. Greven argues that *Voyager* greatly progressed the depiction of women in the franchise. In huge parts due to including the female lead, Captain Janeway. He does however point out the inherent male gaze intentions behind Seven of Nine's sexually provocative outfit. Several parts of Greven's book are useful for my thesis. It will be one of the most referenced sources throughout the text due to the relevancy it has to several of the topics I will touch upon.

2.7 Race History in Hollywood.

To stitch together a comprehensive, but brief, overview of Hollywood's history of Racism I will utilise several articles on the subject. Althea Manasan and Mary O'Connell's documentary series, as well as their CBC article on the subject, will be one of my main sources of information. Their documentary series and article take a deep dive into black representation in films over 100 years of history.

Several other articles will be used to confirm their findings. Meher Tatna's 2022 *Golden Globes* article *Racist Hollywood: Hollywood's Disgraceful Past* will come in useful when researching the early history of Hollywood. Drew Harwell's 2016 *Washington Post* article *The Staggering Numbers That Prove That Hollywood Has a Race Problem* will help me understand how the industry has progressed since then.

One of the characters I will analyse from Star Trek is the Native American character Chakotay. To understand why he was depicted the way he was I must also understand the historical background of how Native Americans have been depicted in the past. Sandra Hale Schulman's 2023 *Smithsonian* article and Martin Berny's 2020 essay detailing the subject will be my main sources of information about the "Indian" stereotype. The 2016 New Vision article *The Brilliant Way Native Americans Fought Racism in Westerns* will also be used to showcase how Native Americans fought against these stereotypes.

2.8 Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance (Manthia Diawara, 1988)

As a white person, it is important to note that I cannot speak for minorities' experiences. I can try to understand their perspective, but I can never truly know how minorities feel. I therefore believe it is important for me to consider the experience of someone from a minority group. In 1988 Manthia Diawara wrote an essay about his experience as a black male spectator. I will be using his text as an example when trying to formulate my argument.

Diawara does not speak for everyone, but as a black person, he has more authority in speaking about these subjects than I. In his essay, he formulates a compelling argument that male black characters have often been depicted as monstrous criminals. He believed that these depictions could hurt the reputation of black men for decades to come. Diawara stated that the media we consume may have a subconscious effect on how we view the world. Depicting black men as violent criminals could therefor further strengthen many white people's racist beliefs.

2.9 The Whiteness of Science Fiction and the Speculative Fiction of Blackness (André M. Carrington, 2016).

The character analysis of Chakotay from *Star Trek Voyager* (1995-2001) will focus on the racist implications of how he was depicted. To gain an understanding of how the portrayal of the character could be seen as racist I also need to gain an understanding of Sci-fi's history of racism. André M. Carrington's 2016 book *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Science Fiction* focuses on this topic. I will mainly look at the first chapter *The Whiteness of Science Fiction and the Speculative Fiction of Blackness.* This chapter goes into detail about the inherent racist origin of science-fiction. This text can be particularly useful because Carrington often uses Star Trek as an example.

He argues that stories about minorities do not necessarily have to bring up the oppression that such groups have suffered. However, telling stories of this nature is still important to create a better world. Racism in media could also be countered by creating well-rounded, non-stereotypical, and racially diverse characters. These characters should also be written by people from that minority group, even if it's just in an advisory role (P. 13).

When Carrington speaks of "The Whiteness of Science Fiction" he refers to the overrepresentation of white experiences written into Sci-fi. This is because the majority of science-fiction writers were white. It has led to uneven representation of people's experiences, only showing the white perspective of the world. This may have caused many problematic depictions of minority groups (P. 16-18).

All three characters that will be analysed were written in the 90s. This means I will be looking at the past actions of predominantly white people from a time quite different from ours. Carrington argues that when analysing minority groups, we focus too much on the past, and forget about the present (P. 21-24). It is important to learn from these past mistakes. I will therefore briefly focus on how the show's progressive nature has changed over the years since then.

2.10 Star Trek's History with Race

Several interviews with cast and crew taken from StarTrek.com, ScreenRant, and CBR will be used alongside statements published in Gross and Altman's books, to formulate a coherent timeline of Star Trek's history with race. Joshua M. Patton also made an article in 2023 that claimed Star Trek had always been "woke". It criticises meaningless complaints conservative

fans had about modern Star Trek. Many have claimed that modern Star Trek has become "woke garbage" because it is inclusive. Patton counters these complaints by highlighting examples of Star Trek's past inclusivity. In 2020 Swapna Krishna similarly pointed out what she believed Star Trek could teach us about diversity.

Contrary to these articles, Ryan Britt argued in 2022 that Star Trek failed to reach these inclusive and liberal ideals. Britt's article claimed that Star Trek had often tried to be inclusive, but sometimes fell short of expectations. I will also briefly look at what David Golumbia had to say about Star Trek's inherent whiteness in his essay about the series. He argued that despite its diverse cast, Star Trek mostly focused on its white crew members. However, he also claimed that the series contained plenty of progressive episodes. Such as *Let That Be Your Last Battlefield* (Taylor, 1969). An episode he meant had an important message about equality and progress.

2.11 Engaging Characters (Murray Smith, 1995).

To gain an understanding of how to analyse the characters I will use Murray Smith's 1995 book "*Engaging Characters*". In Chapters 3 to 6 Smith outlines the three major elements that make a character engaging. Recognition. Alignment, and Allegiance. These three categories will be important for my final analysis of the characters.

In chapter 4 from pages 110 to 118, Murray discusses Recognition. The concept revolves around recognising the difference between a side character and the main character. This is usually done through character design, camera focus, and dialogue. A good character can be recognized by their distinct character traits. If the story does a bad job of giving a character recognizable character traits we may forget them.

Pages 142 to 165 are dedicated to the definition of alignment. Alignment is the way we are given access to a character's mind. It is not about whether you agree with a character, but rather how the character keeps you in the action of the film. In other words, alignment is the focus put on a certain character. We align ourselves with the people we follow throughout the story.

Chapter 6 ranges from pages 187 to 216. It explains the distinction between alignment and allegiance. I need to understand this distinction before I go into my character analysis. According to Smith, we can align ourselves with a character we do not morally agree with. This is because the story guides us to align with them. Allegiance is when you can empathize

and sympathize with a character because your moral beliefs line up. You can for example align yourself with the murderous main character in *Joker* (Phillips, 2019) because the film follows his perspective. However, we do not have an allegiance to him as his reprehensible murderous acts are not something we should agree with. If a character has similar beliefs or behaviours to you, you are more likely to ally with them. However, your allegiance to the characters may change throughout the story. This change may occur because the character itself has changed to something you can no longer agree with. Whether or not you ally yourself with them can greatly impact the viewer's engagement with the character. For example, the alliance the audience has with Seven of Nine in *Voyager* changes over time. When the audience was first introduced to her character, she was a mindless, murderous drone. Most people would not ally themselves with this individual. When she got turned back into a human, our alliance changed.

3 Star Trek

This chapter will serve as an introduction to the history of the Star Trek franchise and its politics.

3.1 A Brief History of Star Trek

Star Trek is a Sci-fi Adventure franchise created by Gene Roddenberry. The original show debuted on television in 1966. It depicted a future where humanity had discovered space travel and formed an alliance with other alien species. The show followed a crew of space explorers who were on a five-year-long mission of exploration to discover new planets and species no one had seen before (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 54).

The original Star Trek show ran for three seasons and met with moderate success. The rise of Star Wars led to the return of Star Trek in 1979 in their first theatrical movie, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Wise, 1979). The movie was successful enough to spawn nine sequels, as well as a successful reboot trilogy in 2009.

The success of the movies eventually allowed the franchise to return to the TV screen in 1987. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* was set 100 years after the original series and attempted to capture the same magic with a new cast of characters. It's premier was met with massive success and the series ran for seven whole seasons (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 26). *The Next Generation* eventually had four theatrical movies themselves, as well as a spin-off series called *Deep Space Nine*.

DS9 debuted in 1993 and was very different from what had come before. Rather than focusing on a crew of space explorers, DS9 was set on a space station. This setting prevented the writers from relying on new alien planets and species in each episode to keep the show engaging. The writers had to come up with new and creative ways to tell stories in the limited space they were given. They had to abandon the traditional episodic structure of the franchise to focus on a more serialised story structure. *Deep Space Nine* had multi-season spanning story arcs and a more deeply developed supporting cast than any Star Trek show before it (Altman & Gross, 2016, p. 411-114. 425-427).

DS9 ran for seven successful seasons, but when TNG ended many audience members longed for the traditional episodic space exploration format. The series *Star Trek: Voyager* was created in 1995 for this exact purpose. *Voyager* ran alongside DS9 and followed a crew of space explorers who got stranded 70000 lightyears away from home. The show followed their slow journey back home. The writers used this as an excuse to return to form. Focusing most of the episodes on space exploration and the discovery of new and exciting planets (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 469-470, 551-552).

After *Voyager* ended its seven-season run the prequel series *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005) quickly followed. *Enterprise* was the opposite of TNG. It was set 100 years before the original Star Trek series. Still showing a future that was more technologically advanced than ours, but less technologically and socially advanced than any other Star Trek show. Enterprise blended real-world modern technology with the futuristic technology of Star Trek, to create a believable transition period between the two (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 643-646).

Star Trek: Enterprise was not met with the same success as previous entries in the series. The show was cut short in 2005 after only four seasons (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 642-643, 716, 729-730). The franchise took a break for a few years before returning to the silver screen in J.J Abrams' action-packed blockbuster reboot in 2009. The movie was extremely successful and spawned two sequels (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 26, 742-745). Because of the newfound interest in the franchise, the show returned to Television, 12 whole years after the cancellation of *Enterprise*. It returned with the 2017 show, *Star Trek: Discovery.* Witch also spawned a series of sequels and spin-offs. Including a follow-up series to TNG, called *Picard* (2020-2023) (Hibberd, 2017).

3.2 Politics

Star Trek has always had a political agenda. Its creator Gene Roddenberry had a strained relationship with the network because of his liberal political views. His previous show *The Lieutenant* (1963-1964) had gotten cancelled because he decided to tackle subjects of racial prejudice. A subject that the network deemed too sensitive to talk about on TV. Roddenberry dreamed of a brighter future without prejudice. When he created Star Trek, he wanted to tell stories that tackled themes of prejudice without the network catching on (Gross & Altman, 2016, p. 62-66).

In Star Trek, he created a future where all forms of prejudice had disappeared from humanity. This allowed him to tackle these sensitive topics through the perspective of aliens in the distant future. It was a way for him to showcase the real injustices in the world, while still getting around the censures. For example, in the episode *Let That Be Your Last Battlefield* (Wallerstein & Taylor, 1969) he tackled racial prejudice through two aliens who looked and sounded almost the exact same. Their only difference was that one of them was black on the right side of their face, while the other was black on the left. Because of this slight difference in skin colour one of them announces itself superior to the other. The episode ended with showcasing the consequences of such a racial war. The destruction of the aliens' home planet. The message was not subtle, but by utilising aliens rather than humans it was enough to trick the network into not noticing what was going on. However, Roddenberry once stated that while the network won't notice the message, the audience watching will, and that's what's important (Gross & Altmann, 2016, p 66, 217-220).

The show was also quite progressive in its depiction of women. Several women are shown working on the spaceship USS-Enterprise. One of these women was a black woman who held the high rank of lieutenant. Firmly showing Star Trek's idealist world where race and gender no longer matter for what position of power you may possess.

The squeal shows continued to tackle subjects of social prejudice in hopes of creating a better, brighter, and more accepting future. Even after Roddenberry's death shows like DS9 and *Voyager* revolutionised the series by having its first black captain in DS9, and its first female captain in *Voyager* (Altman & Gross, 2016, p. 432-435, 553-554).

The franchise is also no stranger to tackling topics relating to sexuality. Such as the episode *Rejoined* (Brooks, 1995) from season four of *Deep Space Nine.* In this episode, the character Dax gets rejoined with a lover from one of her past lives. This lover is a woman, and none of the characters have anything against women being together. However, the law of Dax's people states that entering relationships with people from their past lives is strictly forbidden. It is utilised to show a future where homophobia is no more. While still telling a meaningful message about homophobia through the metaphorical tabu of lovers from past lives.

DS9 have several episodes tackling racial and gender prejudice. For example, the episode *Far Beyond the Stars* (Brooks, 1998). In it we saw the cast in a 1950s setting where they were all science-fiction authors working for a magazine. When the magazine was offered an article in the paper only the white male authors are allowed to participate in the picture. All the female and black writers were excluded. The black author was also told to change one of his character's ethnicities into a white man (Altman & Gross, 2016, p. 524-526).

Star Trek has never shied away from having political messages rallying against racism, sexism, and homophobia. However, there are several instances throughout the franchise that seem to contradict the liberal ideals of the show. This thesis will explore the behind-the-scenes factors that may have caused this to happened. This will be done through the analysis of three characters representing the subjects, sexism, racism, and homophobia.

4 The Characters

This chapter is a quick introduction to the three characters that will be analysed throughout the thesis. I will also explain which subject of oppression they represent.

4.1 Seven of Nine

Seven of Nine was played by the actress Jeri Ryan. She first appeared in the season four premiere of *Star Trek: Voyager*. She was a part of the evil Borg collective. A hive mind of cybernetic and organic components that were created through the assimilation of organic beings. Their only desire was to seek out and assimilate all forms of organic life to create what they deem as the ultimate life form. At the end of the two-part episode *Scorpion* (Kolbe, 1997) the holographic doctor onboard the USS Voyager helped de-assimilate Seven of Nine back into her human form. After this she was quickly added to the main cast of characters for the rest of the series. Seven of Nine was only a child when she first got assimilated. She was later liberated as an adult. The collective was everything she had ever known. She naturally had some challenges with adjusting to human society. The older Captain Janeway became her mother figure and taught her what it meant to be human (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 620).

Despite her difficulties adjusting to human society, her years of experience with the Borg had given her extensive combat abilities, as well as an unrivalled intellect. She was strong, smart, and knew how to handle herself in a fight. Seven of Nine was a thin attractive woman who wore a skin-tight outfit with a corset underneath. She also donned very impractical high heels that she was often seen running and fighting with. The actress Jeri Ryan has often been vocal about her disdain for this outfit. She was dressed impractically because the character was created to bring some sex appeal to the show (Greven, 2009, p 165-166, 181) (Seibold, 2023). The juxtaposition between how competently Seven of Nine had been written and how she was presented visually will be the basis for my argument about sexism in Star Trek.

4.2 Chakotay

Chakotay was a character from *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001). He was originally the leader of a rebel group that fought for the freedom of his people against the Cardassian empire. However, when his ship got destroyed after being stranded 70000 lightyears from home, he was forced to team up with the crew of the USS Voyager to survive. The first mate of the USS Voyager died when they got stranded, and due to Chakotay's experience with commanding a crew, and his ability to keep his shipmates in line, he was given the position of first mate (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 559-561).

Chakotay quickly formed a friendship with Captain Janeway, and his friendly and charming nature helped the two crews assimilate with each other quickly. He was a Native American man that prided himself on his roots. He bore a tribal tattoo on his face and believed in many mystical powers. His deep connection to his ancestry tied into why he joined the resistance against the Cardasians. They had invaded his planet and pushed his people out of their territories to create their "colonies". A parallel to the injustices that real Native Americans have faced in the past (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 558, 577-588).

Chakotay was a Native American character played by the Mexican actor Robert Beltran. His character often fell into the stereotypical, with his talk of Native American legends and behaviours. Made worse by the fact that he was written by white people who got their knowledge of Native American people from someone who was later revealed to be a fraud (Archer, 2023). Through the analysis of the stereotypical depiction of Chakotay, I will attempt to uncover how a character who was seemingly created to give the show more diversity, ended up as a potentially racist depiction of the minority group in question.

4.3 Soren

Soren is a one-off character from the episode *The Outcast* (Scheenrer, 1992). She came from a planet where identifying as either male or female had been outlawed. Everyone on the planet identifies by they/them pronouns. However, certain groups of people felt they identified as either male or female, but if they went public, they would be sent to a "rehabilitation" camp. Soren identified as female and was encouraged by the character Commander Riker to be herself. The episode ended with her arrest. She was subsequently sent to be "rehabilitated" and eventually accepted her "wrong doings".

On the outside, it can be seen as a progressive episode that tackled both gay and trans rights. However, the ending seemed to indicate that it was “correct” for these people to hide who they were, which seemingly went against the rest of the episode’s progressive message. The plan for the episode was originally to cast a male actor for the role. This would have strengthened the progressive pro-LGBTQ+ message of the episode. However, this idea was ultimately abandoned (Altman & Gross, 2016, p. 236-237) (Bullard, 2022). The analysis of Soren will therefore explore the behind-the-scenes factors that led to the potentially homophobic ending of the episode.

5 Sexism

This chapter will explore the history of sexism in the film and TV industry. I seek to understand why depictions of women have historically been very problematic. This will be studied through the exploration of the male gaze. The chapter will also briefly explore Star Trek's relationship with gender roles.

5.1 A Brief history of sexism in film and TV

Hollywood has a long history of manipulative and abusive behaviour towards female workers. This harassment often came from men who abused their power to get away with inappropriate behaviour towards women. Unfortunately, It has become so normalised in the industry that people have made light-hearted jokes at women's expense for years. Journalist Pamela Hutchinson states that even as recent as 2013 Seth McFarland joked that "you… ladies no longer have to pretend to be attracted to Harvey Weinstein" (Hutchinson, 2017) when he introduced the best supporting actress nominees at the 2013 Oscars. Weinstein was a big Hollywood producer who later got exposed for sexually harassing several women over the decades. His crimes were not uncovered until Journalist Jodi Kantor exposed him in a New York Times article on October 5th, 2017. Hutchinson's article was published only two weeks later. McFarland's joke predates Weinstein's exposure by almost five years. This indicated that people in the industry were aware of his crimes. At the very least, it showed that it was widely accepted in the industry that women needed to bow down to the commands of men (Hutchinson, 2017) (Kantor & Twohey, 2017).

The expectations for women have been like this since the birth of Hollywood. Early superstars such as Shirley Temple, Marlyn Menrow and Judy Garland have often talked about the sexual harassment they had to endure at a very young age. This usually came from the much older white studio executives and producers. If the women refused to go along with these inappropriate demands, they would often lose their chance at a job. This practice became so normalised and well-known that the saying "casting couch" was born. A phrase usually used to describe the practice of women performing sexual favours to achieve their goals in the industry (Hutchinson, 2017).

The promise of fame and riches attracted many hopeful young women to early Hollywood. Unfortunately, the boom in Hollywood's popularity also meant the competition was fierce. According to some actresses, if they were more willing to follow inappropriate demands, they had a higher chance of getting the role. The danger of this corrupt environment became known to the public as early as the 1920s. Studio executives often attempted to hide controversies from their audience. One measure taken to promote the false narrative that Hollywood was a safe space for women was the creation of dorms exclusively for female actors. These dorms did not help protect women. They were only set in place to trick the public into believing Hollywood was safer (Hutchinson, 2017).

The situation worsened in the 1920s when women's influence within the industry became less valued in the transition from silent films to talkies (Stein, 2019). Whenever controversies became public the studios often lobbied against the young women by trying to destroy their career and reputation. This was done through lies and conjecture about their character. The truth for many of these manipulative situations did not come to light until after the 2000s. In this period several journalists started digging into the tragic past of Hollywood's abuse. Unfortunately, the industry still tried to hide the truth of their dirty past. Eddie Mannix was a man known for covering up many of these sexual assault incidents. He was recently depicted in a movie called *Hail Caesar!* (Coen & Coen 2016). The movie ignored his controversial actions and made him out to be a more light-hearted individual. If anything, this depiction showcased Hollywood's desperation to sanitise its history (Hutchinson, 2017).

Female actors have also been abused in non-sexual ways. Many studios offered contracts that allowed them to control everything actresses said and did. If they refused to sign, they would be denied the role. These contracts allowed the studio to control the actress' entire image. Many actresses were forced to change their names, usually because they did not sound American enough. This also tied into the systematic racism that could be found in the industry. If someone were not a white American, they could be seen as unsellable to the average consumer (Hutchinson, 2017). In recent years the industry has become a lot safer for women. Especially after the #metoo movement. However, freelance author Ginger Abbot claims the industry still has a way to go. It can still be considered an unsafe and misogynistic working environment even today (Abbot, 2021).

To make a positive change in the industry they must create a safe and harassment-free environment for people of all genders. Research shows that 94% of women working within the film industry have experienced a form of sexual harassment in the workplace. Sometimes these incidents are dealt with, but they are also often ignored. To get more well-rounded female characters, this needs to change. Women must be allowed to reach positions of influence in the industry. They can offer a different perspective from men, helping them create more beloved three-dimensional female characters. Achieving this can be hard if they do not strive to create a safe and harassment-free work environment (Abbot, 2021).

With the sexism in the film industry there also comes a degree of ageism. Younger women are often seen as more desirable in Hollywood, while men are not held to this standard. The age gap between men and women is often quite large. Most of the time it is a younger woman who is romantically involved with an older man (Hutchinson, 2017). This might be why the production of Star Trek Voyager decided to make the character Chakotay played by the, at the time, 47-year-old actor Robert Beltran, romantically involved with Seven of Nine, played by the significantly younger 32-year-old Jeri Ryan. Rather than with Captain Janeway, played by Kate Mulgrew, who was only one year younger than Beltran.

Journalist Ginger Abbot claims that the industry has progressed for the better, but that women should not be satisfied with these minor steps of progress. The #metoo movement managed to remove some sexual predators from the industry, but the impact women have had on creative input in Hollywood has increased minimally. According to Abbot, the number of female directors in Hollywood has only increased by 8% since the #metoo movement started (Abbot, 2021).

Many were under the assumption that the #metoo movement would make it easier for women to reach a position of power in the film industry. However, Minnah Stein states in a WMC article that a 2017 study show “women made up just 17% of the behind-the-scenes… workforce between 2015-2016… 96% had no women cinematographers, 92% had no women directors, 79% had no women editors, 77% had no women writers,..., and 34% had no women producers” (Stein, 2019). This showcases that women were still a minority in the film industry as recently as 2017.

Films play a big part in shaping cultural norms. The normalisation of the “casting couch” helped enforce negative stereotypes about women needing to bow down to men’s demands, as well as depicting them as greedy gold diggers. In reality they were actually victims of systematic oppression (Hutchinson, 2017). The industry needs to start fronting diversity in its content to improve the world’s view of women and minorities. This would also help increase their enjoyment of media as they can finally see someone they relate to on screen. It is therefore important to increase the amount of female and minority workers in the film and TV industry (Abbot, 2021).

5.2 The Male Gaze

The Male Gaze is the concept of women in media being represented as eye candy for the male audience. It puts heavy emphasis on the desires of the men watching, rather than creating well-rounded female characters (Vanbuskirk, 2022) (Greven, 2009, p, 17-23).

The Male Gaze is a phrase that originates from feminist theory. It suggests that male writers and producers often created female characters that were only meant to exist to appeal to the male desire. These objectified female characters could serve to reinforce the stereotype that men were superior to women (Vanbuskirk, 2022).

Women have always been objectified in our historically male-dominated world. In everything from literature to films. For example, back in classical Hollywood, they used to smear Vaseline on the camera lens when doing close-ups of female characters. This was done to make the women look more beautiful and desirable to the men in the audience (Oliver, 2015). It can be argued that the Male Gaze still affects the industry today. For example, The 2013 film *The Wolf of Wall Street*, which was directed by a man (Martin Scorsese) has been criticised for its sexualization of Margot Robbie’s character (Sampson, 2015). More recently there was the HBO show *The Idol* (2023) that advertised itself as a show about female empowerment. The show has been widely criticised for only trying to appeal to the Male Gaze, rather than attracting the audience they claimed to empower (Ali, 2023) (Rathore, 2023).

Men have objectified women for decades, but the term “Male Gaze” was not widely discussed until feminist film historian Laura Mulvey coined the term in 1975. In her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* she argued that women were often depicted as nothing more than helpless sexual objects for the male characters to conquer (Jackson, 2023) (Vanbuskirk, 2022).

Mulvey suggested that the male audience had historically been the target demographic for most film and TV products. Film-makers often focused on satisfying the straight male need for a power fantasy. By doing this the film forced the people of other genders and sexualities to watch women through the lens of a straight man. The reliance on the male experience while watching films could run the risk of alienating non-male viewers (Sampson, 2015) (Greven, 2009, p, 17-23).

Women often possessed a passive role in fiction, often symbolising a motivation for the more active male lead. Screenwriter and critic Rachael Sampson said that this depiction of women could potentially reinforce the harmful stereotype in society that “men do the looking, and women are to be looked at” (Sampson, 2015). Focusing on women’s beauty rather than their strength could make the female spectators feel disconnected from the narrative. It is therefore important for the industry to create diverse and engaging characters of all genders and ethnicities, or else they run the risk of alienating a part of the audience. Laura Mulvey once wrote that “the female spectator may feel so out of key with the pleasure on offer, with its ‘masculinisation’, that the spell of fascination is broken” (Jackson, 2023).

According to film theorist Theresa Geller, Male Gaze theory emerged due to the rising focus on feminist film studies in the 1970s. Mulvey may have been the first to coin the term “male gaze”, but she was not the first to talk about the concept. Many feminist film theorists pointed out the problematic empathies most films had on women’s bodies. Female characters were often only used to look attractive. This was done through close-up’s focusing on the most intimate parts of a woman’s body. Such as her face, lips, legs etc. As well as having sexualized outfits, like skintight uniforms, or short skirts. Eventually feminist film studies started focusing on things beyond the body. They acknowledged that female characters could be sexy and engaging at the same time. Focusing more on the psychological rather than the physical (Geller, 2018, p 50-57).

Many scholars argue that visual mediums such as films can help shape our view of the world. Therefore, if you were to see a female character with a perfect hourglass shape, big lips and flawless skin, it could make you believe that's how women were supposed to look (Jackson, 2023) (Fol, 2004, p. 9-10). The male gaze can therefore hurt society, as the media we consume can have a subconscious effect on how we view the world. It can potentially lead to men developing more misogynistic tendencies, and a strong belief that women should look and act a certain way to please them. By appealing to the male gaze, the industry can unintentionally halt progression as they strengthen the white male perspective of the world The male gaze can also hurt women's psychological well-being. It could make them believe they must act and look a certain way to be accepted in society as a "proper" woman. It creates an environment that breeds the harmful belief that men are superior to women (Vanbuskirk, 2022).

Films may also have a subconscious effect on younger viewer's thoughts and opinions. Having sexist tropes and characteristics in a show aimed at children could subconsciously instil a belief in them that a certain gender must act a certain way (Abbot, 2021). Take for example Disney princesses. They are designed to look "perfect". This can instil unrealistic beauty standards for young girls who grow up watching those movies (Sampson, 2015).

A common means used to appeal to the Male Gaze is to make the female characters wear sexualised outfits while utilizing provocative camera angles. However, society has also traditionally valued the pureness of a woman's virginity. If a woman were to sleep around, she would be looked down upon. At the same time, men were given the freedom to sleep around as much as they wanted. Hollywood glorified purity in women while contradicting themselves by sexualizing them regularly (Fol, 2004, p. 8-9).

In Isabelle Fol's 2004 book *The Dominance of the Male Gaze* she acknowledges that the male-dominated film industry was still reliant on captivating the audience through the sexualization of women as recently as the early 2000s (Fol, 2004, p. 1-3, 30-31, 38). The industry has fortunately improved a lot in recent years. We are starting to see more well-rounded and strong female characters. For example, the strong character of Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* (Ross, 2012). However, even here a love triangle between Katniss and two strong male supporting characters can be found. Possibly indicating that the male gaze could not be completely shaken off, even in this franchise about an empowered woman.

Sarah Vanbuskirk wrote in an article about the Male Gaze in 2022 that sometimes even when the female character is written in a stronger role, the way she dresses might often be impractical for the job. This is because when men try to empower women they might subconsciously, or sometimes even consciously, appeal to the Male Gaze. “They wear heels and tight dresses (even if they are police detectives who may need to pursue a suspect) and while they may be shown in a variety of contexts, their primary motivation rests on being the helper, eye candy, or romantic interest” (Vanbuskirk, 2022).

Seven of Nine from *Star Trek Voyager* (1995-2001) can be used as an example of this practice. She is written to be strong and independent. Yet, her attire is skin-tight and revealing. She also wears high heels that are highly impractical for the action-paced space adventures she usually sets out on. Her skintight outfit and perfectly fit figure might also give people a skewed view of how women should look. This thesis will focus on analysing the character of Seven of Nine to understand the juxtaposition between the way her character was written, and the way her character’s appearance was presented visually.

5.3 Star Trek and Gender

Gene Roddenberry, the creator of Star Trek, had an idealised vision of the future where all forms of prejudice had been eradicated from human society. He wanted to create a brighter future without racism or sexism (Gross & Altman, 2016, p. 31, 35-39, 46-47, 66, 114). This message was already present as early as the show’s first Pilot, *The Cage* (Butler, 1965). In this episode, we see the female character named “Number One” in a strong position of power traditionally not possessed by women at the time. Not only was she a core member of the bridge crew, but she was also the second in command (Gross & Altman, 2016, p. 31, 37-39, 76).

Star Trek has always prided itself on its progressive nature. However, it is important to note that it was the 1960s and certain sexist archetypes were still prevalent, even in Star Trek. For example, at the end of *The Cage,* a love triangle between the strong male hero Captain Pike, and the two female characters Number One and Yeoman J.M. Colt gets established. This made the women objects of desire for the male hero. They had a passive role throughout the episode, and only observed the actions of the male hero (Vanbuskirk, 2022). It also showcases Roddenberry’s conflicting beliefs that men and women should be equal while at the same time seeing women as “sex objects” (Gross & Altman, 2016, p. 38).

The pilot was not picked up by the network, but Roddenberry was given the rare chance of creating a second pilot for the show. Alongside this chance, there came several demands for changes that needed to be made to the show. One of the demands was the removal of the character “Number One”. The studio believed that the potential audience of the show would not be able to buy the idea of a woman in such a high position of power (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 31, 60, 85-86, 90). It was however important for Roddenberry to keep women a part of the bridge crew. He wanted to keep his vision of a non-prejudice future alive. This led to the creation of the communications officer Uhura. She was a black woman who was not in the same position of power as “Number One” but her central part on the bridge crew was revolutionary (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 36, 86, 114) (Greven, 209, p. 98). The addition of such a strong central black woman on the crew gave young girls someone to look up to. Uhura had the power to inspire young girls to believe they could also achieve such a position in the future. Madison Spencer Engle who has been a fan of Star Trek ever since she was a child said in an interview with StarTrek.com that “I continued to appreciate Uhura and her presence as a woman in leadership on the bridge”. This was in reference to how much Uhurah inspired her while growing up during the 70s (Stobie, 2020). Even the successful black actress Whoopi Goldberg said in a 2018 interview that the presence of Uhurah’s character was one of her biggest inspirations for getting into acting (Academy of Motion Picture Arts, 2018, Timestamp: 37:50).

Despite its effort to shine women in a more progressive light the show still struggled with giving the female characters a more active role. Uhura was often just delegated to giving and receiving messages to and from the rest of the bridge crew. On the rare occasion when she was a part of the away team, she usually had to be rescued by one of her male co-stars. The case was the same for many of the other women who went on away missions in the early days of Star Trek (Gross & Altman, 2016, p. 110) (Ottens, 2019). “In the early episodes, the female characters were often there to be rescued by a male officer,” said Engle in her 2020 interview with StarTrek.com. She also brings up that “It was also how my childhood friends acted out the episodes - I was always the lieutenant in need of saving” (Stobie, 2020). This indicates that how we perceive gender roles can be shaped by what we see on film and TV. Especially when we are in our younger formative years.

The women in the original Star Trek series were forced to wear short skirt uniforms. The short-skirted uniforms were an invention of Gene Roddenberry himself, and this forced dress code did not seem to fit with his idealist vision of an equal future. Rod Roddenberry, Gene's son, said in an interview about his father that "He loved women… so that came out very clearly in all of *Star Trek*, but I think he was also under the belief that by women wearing short skirts, and choosing to do so, they were empowering themself." (Gross & Altman, 2016, p. 36-38). Gene Roddenberry's conflicting attitude towards women eventually changed. Leonard Nimoy who played Spock on the show has stated that his attitude towards women started as "mini-skirted, big boobed, sex objects for the men to play with" but he did point out that Roddenberry eventually changed his attitude towards women, which allowed him to focus more on the idealist progressive future that he originally envisioned (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 37-39).

The issue of the wardrobe of the female characters was later addressed in Star Trek's sequel show *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994). In this series, both men and women can be seen wearing the same uniforms. In certain episodes they even made the men wear dresses, as that is the official party attire for men working in Starfleet. The human men on the crew did not question wearing a dress, as it was seen as normal.

However, one female crewmember is not given the courtesy of being allowed to wear the same uniform as the men. The character Deanna Troi, played by actress Marina Sirtis, is seen wearing a low-cut skin-tight outfit for most of the show. This outfit showed a lot of skin, and her top was made to show off the actress' breasts. The producers tried to appeal to the Male Gaze by sexualizing Deanna's outfit (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 100-102) (Vaux, 2021). It wasn't until the season 6 episode *Chain of Command* (Sheerer, 1992) that Deanna was seen wearing the same uniform as the rest of the crew. She continued to wear the regular crew uniform for the remainder of the series. This episode also marked the point where Deanna's character started having a more active role in the episodes.

It is therefore baffling to see the reduced role she got in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* movies. The most significant impact she had in the films was an uncomfortable and unnecessary "rape" scene in *Star Trek 10: Nemesis* (Baird, 2002). In this scene, the mind-reading villain Shinzon invades Deanna's mind to mentally have "sex" with her. This deeply disturbing scene turned Deanna into another victim that the male leads had to avenge. Deanna never got the chance to avenge herself, that role was given to the male character Captain

Picard. This isn't even the first instance in *The Next Generation* where Deanna had been raped. In the season 2 episode *The Child* (Bowman, 1988) she gets unwillingly impregnated by an alien, and in the episode *Violations* (Gray, 1992) from season 5, she gets mentally raped again. These offensive violations of the character showcased the little care that was put into her for most of the show, but by the sixth season, it was believed the character had moved beyond these things. The character's feminist progression unfortunately regressed from the season finale in 1994 to the release of *Nemesis* in 2002 (Brett, 2020).

The little care the producers of the movies had for the female stars from the show is even more apparent with the character of Doctor Beverley Crusher. She was played by the actress Gates McFadden. Crusher had been one of the main characters of the show from the beginning. Besides taking a short break from the show between seasons 1 and 3 (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 150-153). She was not the only woman who left the show after season 1. Actress Denise Crosby who played Tasha Yar left because she felt her character was not given enough to do, and simply became window dressing (Veltman, Vaux, & Loughlin 2024). McFadden felt the same about her role and therefore decided to leave the show. However, she later returned for a full-time role in season 3 and onward. McFadden's role was unfortunately reduced to little more than just a background character in the movies. Made even worse by the fact that both McFadden and Marina Sirtis went to the producers to demand a pay raise. They were simply told to take it or leave it because they were replaceable (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 317-318) (Bastidas, 2020, Timestamp: 1:07:59).

In the third Star Trek show *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999). Both female leads were strong women in powerful positions. Kira Nerys, played by Nana Visitor, officially became the second in command on the show. This was the first time a woman had been in such a high position of power since the pilot episode in 1965. She had a temper but was headstrong and knew how to handle herself in a fight. Jadzia Dax, played by Terry Ferrell, was the science officer on Deep Space Nine. She was naturally very intelligent for reaching such a position. She also had a strong and healthy platonic friendship with the male Commander Benjamin Sisko. Jadzia was also known for freely sleeping around, but not in an overly objectifying way. Both female characters were active participants in the action of the show (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 448-457).

Even on the set of *Deep Space Nine* sexist behaviour occurred. This eventually led to the departure of Terry Ferrell at the end of the sixth season. She had only been contracted for six seasons, and when it came time to negotiate for a seventh season, she was denied a pay raise. Ferrell decided that the sexual harassment she received from the male producer Rick Berman was no longer worth the pay, and therefore she decided to not renew her contract (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 518-522). In the book *The Fifty-Year Mission: The Next 25 Years* Ferrell has been quoted saying "The problems with me leaving were with Rick Berman…, he's just very misogynistic. He'd comment on your bra size not being voluptuous… he would say something about, 'Well, you're just, like, flat. Look at Christine over there. She has the perfect breasts right there." (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 519). Rick Berman was the executive producer of Star Trek ever since TNG aired in 1987, all the way up until *Star Trek Enterprise* ended in 2005. A lot of the most problematic depictions of women in the show were often influenced by Berman. Many of the women credited him directly for being their reason for leaving the show (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 4-5, 246-247, 518-522) (Veltman, Melzer & Patton 2024).

In recent years more strong female protagonists have been seen in Star Trek. Uhurah returned in J.J Abram's 2009 Star Trek reboot film. Here she was no longer depicted as a damsel in distress. In this adaptation, she was already a strong and capable officer even before Kirk joined Starfleet. In *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017-2024) Sonequa Martin-Green played Captain Michael Burnham. The series first black female captain. Burnham was strong and independent, but not flawless. She made mistakes but was not used for sex appeal. Micheal Burnham was a well-rounded character who did not let gender biases get in the way of her job. Number One even returned in *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* (2022-Ongoing) where she was finally allowed to take on the role of second in command.

Star Trek has had a turbulent relationship with its depiction of gender. The writer's belief in a better, more progressive future has been in constant feud with the more conservative views of the producers. It wanted to showcase women as equal to men, but it also tried to appeal to the Male Gaze.

Star Trek: Voyager was the first show in the series to have a female captain as its star, Captain Catherine Janeway. A strong middle-aged woman who commands her ship with excellence, without the need of sexualising her. However, even here the fight between the writer's vision, and the producer's desires was fought, and by season 4 they were forced to write in a character that could bring in more sex appeal. The other Star Trek shows around the same time had a conventionally attractive female character. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) had Deanna Troi and *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) had Jadzia Dax. *Voyager* (1995-2001) had female characters, but none were deemed fit for the role. Janeway was too old, Belana was too brutish, and Kes was too innocent. That is why they introduced the character of Seven of Nine (Altman & Gross, 2016, p. 553-554, 619). The next chapter will analyse the juxtaposition between Seven of Nine's strongly written character and her origin as a "sex object".

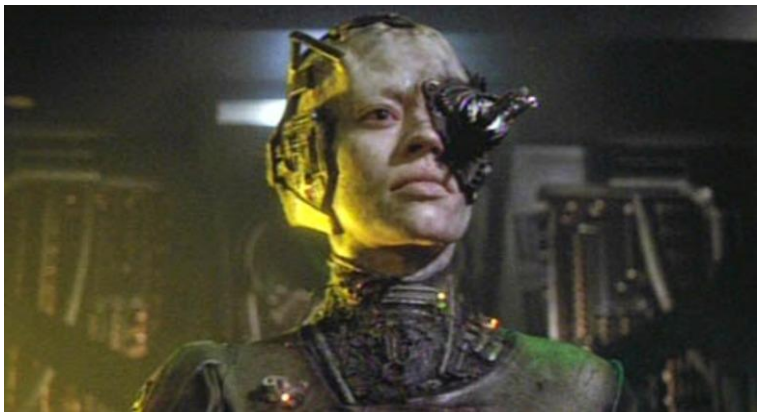
6 Seven of Nine

In this chapter, I will closely analyse the characterisation of Seven of Nine and the juxtaposition between how she acts and how she is presented visually. Later in the chapter, I tackle the conflict between the writers' and the producers' intent for the character. I will also look at what Jeri Ryan, the actress who played the character, thought of her characterisation in the show. I seek to gain an understanding as to why a seemingly progressive show like Star Trek could end up with problematic sexism even as late as the 1990s.

6.1 The Character

Seven of Nine became a part of the main cast of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) at the beginning of season 4. She was first introduced in *Scorpion, Part II* (Kolbi, 1997). She was originally a part of the evil Borg collective. A race of cybernetic and biological hybrids that travelled the universe to eliminate all forms of biological life. They attempted to achieve this goal by capturing intelligent biological lifeforms and assimilating them into their robotic collective. In the assimilation process, their victims lose their individuality. They become mindless drones who solely dedicate themselves to the collective.

Seven of Nine got assimilated as a child. The Borg collective was the only thing she had ever known. In her first appearance, she was cold, calculated, and manipulative. She was willing to do anything, no matter how brutal it may be. Her only goal was to help the collective. Seven of Nine's brutality was reflected in her character design. She had a bold head, cold grey skin, and rusty robotic parts attached to her face and body. She was literally and figuratively a monster.



(Figure 1). Seven of Nine as a Borg in *Star Trek Voyager: Season 4, Episode 1: Scorpion, Part II. (Kolbi, 1997).*

In the episode *Scorpion, Part II* (Kolbi, 1997) the Borg were forced to form a temporary alliance with the crew of the USS Voyager to defeat a common enemy. They succeeded in defeating the threat and Seven of Nine was prepared to betray the humanoid crew onboard the Voyager. The crew had fortunately prepared for this possibility and managed to escape the grasp of the Borg.

At the end of the episode, the ship's Doctor helped give Seven of Nine her individuality back, by disconnecting her from the Borg collective and removing most of her robotic parts. From this point forward she became a part of the main cast of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001). Some claim she became the de facto main character of the show. Jeri Ryan's co-star Robert Beltran was very vocal about his disdain for her character taking away the spotlight from others in the show (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 612).

Many episodes had Seven of Nine as the main focal point. It was a character with a great concept that had the potential for a lot of character development. Due to being assimilated into the Borg collective at such a young age, she struggled to adjust to human society. She kept some of her Borg qualities, such as her advanced intellect and extraordinary strength. Intellectually and physically she was an adult, but socially and emotionally she was naive and inexperienced. Her actress, Jeri Ryan, stated in an interview that she believed one of the most intriguing aspects of Seven of Nine was her childlike wonder about the world (Trekmovie.com, 2010).

Several episodes of *Voyager* focused on crew members helping Seven of Nine understand her newfound emotions. She formed particularly strong bonds with the characters The Doctor and Captain Janeway. The Doctor was a holographic medical assistant who was forced to become the ship's doctor after the human doctor died. The premise of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) is that a Starfleet crew gets stranded 70,000 lightyears away from home. Because of this, no one could replace the human doctor, leaving them no other alternative than to utilize the ship's medical assistance program. After having been activated for a prolonged period of time, The Doctor eventually developed sentience. Many of his episodes focused on learning how to handle his newfound emotions. He eventually became a well-regarded and respected member of the crew.

Seven of Nine's strong friendship with The Doctor was formed because of their similar emotionless past. Both characters had to go through the same struggles of learning how to handle their newfound sentience. When Seven of Nine joined the crew, The Doctor had already been activated for four years. He had learned much about life and emotions during this time, and he became a mentor figure for Seven of Nine. He helped her to more easily handle situations that he previously had to handle on his own (Fan, 2019) (Oxman, 2023).

This can be seen in the episode *Someone to Watch Over Me* (McNeill, 1999). In this episode, Seven of Nine becomes fixated on understanding the emotion of love. She is experiencing jealousy at seeing happy couples around her, but she does not understand why. The Doctor had some romantic experiences in previous episodes and offered to teach her about love. As the episode progressed, he believed he was falling in love with her. In his naivety, he made a bet with another crew member that he could win her heart. When Seven of Nine eventually found out about the bet she was understandably angry and upset. She believed The Doctor was only toying with her hard-to-control emotions. Near the end of the episode, they reconciled. Seven of Nine realized that The Doctor would never intentionally hurt her feelings. In the end, they both agreed to stay friends (Oxman, 2023). Seven of Nine learned how to handle anger and jealousy in the episode. She did not find a romantic partner, but she learned that there are several forms of love. The love you have for your friends is equally as important. Seven of Nine forgiving The Doctor and choosing to stay friends with him also impacted his character. He learned to appreciate the importance of platonic love between friends. Seven of Nine is a dynamic character that develops through the help of others, as well as having a profound effect on the development of the characters around her.

Seven of Nine learns and grows throughout the show with the help of her friends. In the episode, *The Raven* (Burton, 1997) she is diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after a series of flashbacks to her time with the Borg. Throughout the episode, The Doctor and Captain Janeway help her work through her trauma. Captain Janeway became a sort of surrogate mother figure to Seven of Nine. In several episodes, Janeway helped Seven of Nine understand her emotions through motherly advice (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 611).

An example of this can be found in the episode *Think Tank* (O'Hara, 1999) from season 5 of *Voyager* (1995-2001). In the episode, the crew are being hunted by ruthless bounty hunters. A group of genius aliens offer to help them out of their predicament, in exchange for Seven of Nine. A deal that Janeway refuses to go along with. Seven of Nine, who is used to always prioritising the better good of her "collective" tried to reason with Captain Janeway to let her go with the aliens. The captain eventually agreed to let Seven of Nine leave, but only if it is what she truly wanted to do, not just because she felt obligated to do so, to help the rest of the crew.

"If you do choose to go. Make sure it is what you want, not what you think is best for Voyager." - Captain Kathryn Janeway, *Think Tank* (O'Hara, 1999) *Star Trek Voyager* (1995-2001) season 5 episode 20.

With the help of Captain Janeway, Seven of Nine finally stopped seeing the Voyager crew as a hivemind where the needs of the many triumphed over the needs of the few. She learned that it is okay to have your own needs and wants, even if it may seem selfish. Seven of Nine was often helped by other characters to grow, however, she was also a character that could develop independently from others.

When she first joined Voyager, she often distanced herself from the rest of the crew. After living most of her life as a Borg she struggled to shake off some of her more robotic tendencies. As the show went on, she started opening up to more people. By the time the show had reached its final season, she saw the crew as her own family. An example of an episode that showcased her strong independent character was the episode *One* (Biller, 1998).

In this episode, the crew must be put into stasis for a month to avoid getting irradiated. Because of her robotic implants, Seven of Nine was the only human crew member unaffected by the radiation. She was therefore tasked with taking care of the crew while they were in stasis. In the beginning, she had the holographic Doctor as a companion, but when the radiation started affecting the ship's computers, he was forced to temporarily deactivate. Leaving her completely alone for the first time in her life. The loneliness eventually went to her head, and she started hallucinating people who were not there. Through her strong willpower, she overcame the hallucinations, and in turn her fear of being alone. Her desire to protect the crew was stronger than her fear. She is also left with a newfound appreciation for the company of the people around her. Ending the episode with her happily socializing with other members of the crew.

Seven of Nine was overall a strong, well-written, and developed character. Unfortunately, even a character as competently written as Seven of Nine did not manage to avoid some more problematic and sexist tropes. As the show went on it seemed like the showrunners ran out of things to do with her. Possibly to breathe new life into the character they made her "adopt" four Borg children at the end of the episode *Collective* (Liddi, 2000). On one hand, it seems like the natural progression of her character. Becoming the surrogate mother to these children allowed her to teach them everything that she had learned. As argued by Jennifer Boudinot in her StarTrek.com article, this storyline does allow Seven of Nine to take on the same role that Captain Janeway had for her (Boudinot, 2020). On the other hand, it can also further the sexist stereotype that a woman's end goal in life is to become a mother.

The lack of care put into Seven of Nine towards the end of the series is especially noticeable in the show's finale, *Endgame* (Kroeker, 2001). In this episode, her entire story revolves around her secret romantic relationship with Voyager's second-in-command, Chakotay. The romance comes out of nowhere. There is no build-up, and the characters lack the chemistry to make it feel believable. This plot point may have its roots in the sexist belief that a woman's primary objective in a story is to be an object for the man to achieve. As Mulvey explains in her essay about The Male Gaze, women are often depicted in film and TV as objects for the man to obtain, even when they are strong (Jackson, 2023) (Vanbuskirk, 2022).

What certainly appealed to Mulvey's definition of the Male Gaze was Seven of Nine's provocative outfit. After getting most of her robotic components removed, Seven of Nine did not wear the regular Star Fleet uniform. She wore a skintight outfit, with a corset and high heels. A very impractical outfit for a character that often went out in the field to explore and fight. This provocative outfit showed that Seven of Nine's primary function in the show was to appeal to the male gaze (Jackson, 2023) (Vanbuskirk, 2022).

However, as Theresa L. Geller points out in her essay *Thinking Sex, Doing Gender, Watching Film* there is more to a character than the visual element. A character can appeal to the male gaze and still be engaging. If we look beyond the visual pleasure Seven of Nine may bring to men, we can find a deep and well written character. She has suffered a lot of psychological trauma from her time with the Borg, but she does not let that stop her from fighting alongside the rest of the crew. She is also deeply intelligent and compassionate. She may have seemed perfect, but she struggled a lot with basic human interactions because of her years as a Borg, and this gave her plenty of room for development (Geller, 2018, p 50-57).

(Figure 2). Seven of Nine publicity photo (1997). By Julie Dennis.

We can better understand Seven of Nine as a character through Murray Smith's Recognition, Alignment, and Allegiance theory. Recognition is the factors that makes us notice the difference between a main character and a side character. This is often done through dialogue, camera movements and character designs. We can for example recognise Seven of Nine as a main character due to the heavy emphasis many episodes of the show put on her character. Even as a Borg, where she was supposed to blend in with the rest of the collective, the show made it clear that she was an important character. The episode had a heavier emphasis on Seven of Nine's character than any of the other Borg, and the dialogue implied that it was possible to separate a human from the Borg collective. This made it clear to the viewer that she would become an important character in the show. Seven of Nine's outfit might have been a bit problematic, but her unique character design did help separate her from the rest of the crew, further emphasising her importance (Smith, 1995, p 82, 110-118).

Alignment theory is about what characters we get to see the perspectives of. When we align ourselves with a character it does not mean we necessarily agree with their beliefs. It simply means it is the character we are currently following the perspective of. This gives us a better understanding of the ongoing story and the character's psyche. Several episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) followed Seven of Nine's perspective. By making her the vehicle of progress the show allowed us to get a closer look at her actions and beliefs, which helped us decide if we wanted to ally ourselves with her character (Smith, 1995, p 83, 142-150).

Alignment and Alliance go hand in hand, but they are not the same. Alignment is only about whether we follow the perspective of a character or not. Alliance emphasizes if we can relate to and agree with a character. In other words, you can align yourself with a character without necessarily allying with them. If your morals do not agree with a character's action you may not ally yourself with them, but you can still align yourself with them. Your Alliance with a character may also change throughout a story. This might be affected by character growth or new information about them that you were not aware of before. In many ways, it is similar to sympathy and empathy. You can sympathize with the struggles of a person who has done something you morally disagreed with, but you may not empathize with them. Our Alliance with Seven of Nine changed over the course of her introductory episode. By learning new things about her character, we eventually started empathising with her. When she was first introduced, we did not ally ourselves with the character. She was cold, calculated, murderous, and evil. As the episode progressed our alignment with her allowed us to learn more about her character, which made us sympathise with the fact that she was assimilated as a young child. We eventually started to empathise with her plight as a victim. By the time she got de-assimilated at the end of the episode, our alliance with her had shifted into allying ourselves with her (Smith, 1995, p 84, 187-192).

6.2 The Actress

Seven of Nine was played by the actress Jeri Ryan. She was 29 years old when she got the role and was 32 when the show ended. Ryan has been very vocal about her love for the character. She even returned 20 years later to play the character in *Star Trek: Picard* (2020-2023) (Harris, 2010).

Jeri Ryan was hesitant to take on the role. She had never watched Star Trek before and therefore decided to watch an episode to understand what the show was about. According to Ryan, the one episode she watched was one of the worst things she had ever seen. She feared that taking on the role would ruin her career forever. However, the producers Rick Berman and Brannon Braga convinced her to join the show by showing her the early scripts of her first few stories. They told Ryan about their vision for the character, and it was enough to convince her to stay (Altman & Gross, 2016, p. 609-610).

Jeri Ryan thought Seven of Nine's traumatic past as a Borg seemed interesting and she loved how strong, intelligent, and independent the character was. She saw the character as a positive female role model for girls to look up to (Altman & Gross, 2016, p. 610-612). Ryan believed that one of the most intriguing aspects of her character was the childlike wonder she displayed while learning about humanity. She had a young son at the time and his fascination for learning about the world was similar to that of Seven of Nine (Trekmovie.com, 2010).

Even with her love for the character she still had some grievances about her characterisation. She hated her uncomfortable and sexualised outfit. It was a skintight catsuit with a corset. According to Ryan, it was extremely uncomfortable to wear, especially because of the tight corset. It was hard for her to breathe in the outfit, and she was often on the brink of passing out on set. Jeri Ryan has claimed that she hated the outfit and wanted to burn it after the show ended (StarTrek.com, 2011).

Ryan has also voiced her dislike of Seven of Nine's romance with Chakotay. She felt it came out of nowhere and that it did not feel believable due to the lack of chemistry between the two characters. Once the actors found out about the writers' intentions of putting the two characters together, they begged them to write some build-up. This never happened, and the actors decided to try to hint at it through their own performances (Startrek.com, 2011) (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 637) (Roget, 2014, timestamp 30:30-31:10).

6.3 Writers VS Producers

The juxtaposition between the strong characterisation of Seven of Nine and her sexualized costume can be traced back to a conflict between the writers and the producers. The executive producers on the show were Brannon Braga and Rick Berman. The addition of Seven of Nine was Braga's suggestion, but making her a sex symbol was Berman's idea. The ratings of the show were dropping, and the producers believed the low ratings were due to the lack of sex appeal. The provocative outfit Jeri Ryan had to wear came as a direct result of the producer's mandate to add more sex appeal to the show. Seven of Nine needed to be something the men could gaze at. They gave her this outfit in hopes of increasing viewership, and it worked (Robinson & Wright, 2022, p 115-118) (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 606-608, 617-620).

Despite Seven of Nine being forced into the show her introduction into the main cast manged to feel natural. However, behind the scenes, they were met with several challenges. Adding a completely new cast member to a show full of already underdeveloped characters was seen as

a problem. The producers were therefore forced to remove someone from the show (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 619). The Asian character Harry Kim was considered, but an article in *Time Magazine* declared his actor, Garret Wang, as one of the top 50 most beautiful people in the world. This article is believed to have saved his role on the show (Hanson, 2021). Harry Kim's character being saved because the public deemed him to be attractive, could further strengthen the argument that the producers preferred conventionally attractive people.

The character they wrote out of the show was the alien girl Kes (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 614). She was written out in the episode *The Gift* (Williams, 1997). This was the episode that immediately followed Seven of Nine's introduction. Earlier in the show Kes had discovered she had psychic abilities. In *The Gift* she left Voyager to protect the crew from her increasingly out-of-control powers. The storyline felt rushed and out of nowhere. It showcased how the writing of the show suffered from studio mandates.

Seven of Nine became the focus of many storylines after her introduction. This led to a conflict between the actresses Kate Mulgrew and Jeri Ryan. Mulgrew's character, Captain Janeway, was supposed to be the protagonist of the show. Once Seven of Nine was introduced all the attention was directed towards her. This conflict was not noticeable on screen, as the two characters had a close and familial bond in the show. However, in real life, the actresses despised each other. Jeri Ryan has been very vocal about her feud with Mulgrew. She felt mistreated on set, as Kate Mulgrew was often rude and aggressive towards her for no reason. Mulgrew was in her 40s during *Star Trek Voyager*. She was not happy about the addition of Seven of Nine. She felt replaced by a younger, and sexier woman. Mulgrew thought the producers did not believe an older woman could carry the interest of the viewers (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 613-615, 623) (Roget, 2014, timestamp 52:00-59:00). This could be seen as an indication of the sexist belief that the older a woman gets the less desirable she becomes. As mentioned by film critic Pamela Hutchinson, men were often not given the same treatment. The older a man got, the bigger the age gap became in their romantic relationships on screen (Hutchinson, 2017). This may explain why there was a romance between Chakotay and Seven of Nine. They chose to pair up the at the time 48-year-old actor Robert Beltran, and the 33-year-old actress Jeri Ryan. Rather than pairing Chakotay with Captain Janeway.

It seems that many of the problematic writing issues with Seven of Nine were caused by demands from the producers. The writers had no power over the costume design of the character, and certain storylines were impossible for them to save. The character of Seven of Nine appealed heavily to the male gaze, and it seemed to mostly be the fault of the male producers Brannon Braga and Rick Berman. Despite this, she was still a strong and well written character. This can mostly be contributed to the writers and the excellent performance from Jeri Ryan.

7 Racism

The film and TV industry has a long history of racism. This chapter will give a brief overview of this history. I will later take a closer look at Hollywood's historical depictions of Native Americans, to gain an understanding as to how the Native American Star Trek character Chakotay ended up being mishandled. The chapter will end with an overview of Star Trek's history of racism.

7.1 A Brief History of Racism in Hollywood.

Since the beginning of the American film industry there have been racist depictions of minority groups. This was often done through stereotyping. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica stereotyping is when you assume people or things in a group act the same as each other. For example, if you assume everyone of a certain ethnicity would act a specific way, it would be a form of racist stereotyping. Racial stereotypes have historically been used in films and TV to ridicule and undermine non-white people. These stereotypical depictions helped strengthen the views white people had of their own "superiority" (Tatna, 2022) (Jones, 2019).

In the early days of Hollywood black people were rarely hired. This led to possibly the most problematic part of Hollywood's racist history, Blackface. This was the practice of a white actor painting their face black to play a black character. They usually made their lips look bigger and redder to play on the stereotype that black people had big mouths. These characters were used to ridicule black people, by typically using them as comedic relief. On occasions when the characters were used for serious subject matters, they were often shown to be villains. Furthering the racist beliefs that black people were "evil" (Kaur, 2019). When they cast black actors, they were usually depicted as stereotypes, such as the mammy. The mammy was shown as an overweight middle-aged black woman who spoke in a stereotypical "black" dialect and had an attitude. She worked for rich white people and was often seen caring for their children and cleaning their houses. They were very loyal to their white employers, in many ways taking on the typical "slave" role. The mammy tried to sanitise America's history of slavery. They did not feel oppressed and were happy in their role as "servants". The stereotypical nature of the Mammy was often used for comedic effect, but it was also utilized to strengthen the racist belief that black people were beneath white people (Pilgrim, 2000) (Jones, 2019).

An early example of racist depictions in Hollywood was the movie *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffiths, 1915). This movie depicted black men as monstrous rapists while depicting the white man as a saviour. It is a movie that infamously frames the KKK as patriots who will save America from the black "menace" (Tatna, 2022). Griffiths hired very few black actors for the movie. Most black characters were played by white men in blackface. The only black actor in the movie was Madame Sul-Te-Wan. She played the Mammy in several of his films, including *The Birth of a Nation.* Showing that even when Griffiths hired black actors it was only to represent racist stereotypes (Jones, 2019) (Hunt, 2020).

The Birth of a Nation (Griffiths, 1915) has been credited for revolutionising the way movies were made by creating the Hollywood model. It was a trailblazer in visual storytelling. Creating a three-act structure for movies that is still used today. The movie was a huge success among the white audience at the time. The negative depictions of black people strengthened the white public's racist views (Tatna, 2022) (Manasan & O'Connell, 2021) (NPR, 2015).

In his essay *Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance*, black film historian Manthia Diawara brings forth one of the most problematic scenes from the film. A scene he named the "Gus chase". In this sequence, a black man played by a white actor in blackface chases an innocent white girl to her death. The "black" character is trying to force himself upon the white girl, and in his pursuit of her, he accidentally chases her off a cliff. Diawara chose this segment to illustrate the way the film framed black men as "evil rapists" (Diawara, 1988, p 67-71).

The Birth of a Nation (Griffiths, 1915) was heavily criticised by black audience members for glorifying the KKK and slavery. The backlash from the black community eventually led to the creation of several movie companies run by black people. This was done not only in retaliation to Griffiths' work, but also towards the racist depictions often done in Hollywood as a whole. The most famous of these early black filmmakers was Oscar Micheaux, who was met with great success (Tatna, 2022). Micheaux was unfortunately an outlier. It was rare for black creators to be met with success. The industry was still predominantly white. As the years progressed more black actors and directors were let into the industry. This steadily increased up until the Second World War. The US government wanted to encourage black people to join the war efforts by creating propaganda films aimed at a black audience (Manasan & O'Connell, 2021).

After the war, the influx of black actors in the industry decreased. The industry shifted its focus to stories about the struggles of white women. Manasan and O'Connell say in their article *From Servants to Outlaws: 100 Years of Black Representation in Hollywood* that it was theorized "Hollywood deliberately focused on narratives of white women to avoid controversy over how Black people were being portrayed" (Manasan & O'Connell, 2021). In other words, the white writers did not know how to write non-stereotypical black people, and yet black writers were rarely employed. When black actors were cast during this period, they were typically lighter-skinned. The darker their skin was the less likely they were to be hired (Manasan & O'Connel, 2021).

An influx of black talent was hired during the 1960s. By the 70s it had become normal for actors of colour to be involved in film and TV. This led to the rise of the "Blaxploitation" genre. These movies stopped depicting black people as the weak servants of white men. In Blaxploitation films the black man was in power, and they were often quite violent. Many films in the genre were seen as power fantasies where the strong black man finally took down their white oppressors. It was a genre that tackled themes of racism and oppression. Blaxploitation films gave black characters a position of power they had not been allowed to hold before. Despite this, many in the black community criticised Blaxploitation films for depicting black men as violent criminals with little depth (Manasan & O'Connel, 2021) (Maynard, 2000) (Diawara, 1988, p 67-75).

By the 1980s Blaxploitation movies were mostly out of fashion. The public wanted to move on to more human depictions of black men (Maynard, 2000). The 80s had the birth of the blockbuster, and with this, a steady increase of black workers in the industry. However, Hollywood was still predominantly white. Diawara argues that the blockbusters of the 80s still mostly appealed to the white male audience. Movies like *Rocky II* (Stallone, 1979) *48 Hrs* (Hill, 1982), and *Ghostbusters* (Reitman, 1984) all featured a cast with black actors in lead roles. Despite this, the black character often played second fiddle to the white lead. For example, Eddie Murphy's character in *48 Hrs* is mostly played for laughs. He is the comedic relief, while his white co-star is the action hero (Diawara, 1988, p 70-71).

Mathia Diawara also criticised films with a completely black cast, such as *A Soldier Story* (Jewison, 1984) and *The Color Purple* (Spielberg, 1985). *A Soldier Story* follows the investigation of the murder of a black soldier in the US military. It attempts to tell a narrative about the racist oppression of black culture in the American army. However, Diawara believes the message gets a bit lost when it is revealed that the murderer was a black man all along (Diawara, 1988, p 72-73). *The Color Purple* has been heralded for telling a narrative about the struggles black women have faced, not just as a minority, but also as women. However, Diawara criticised the film for portraying black men as violent abusers. He compared a scene from the movie with the "Gus chase" from *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffiths, 1915). The scene in question features a deranged black man chasing a woman through the forest, very reminiscent of the chase in Griffiths' film. The black man's intent to rape the woman is clear, and Diawara argues the film furthered the racist stereotype that black men were dangerous criminals (Diawara, 1988, p 74-75).

Considering the topic of this thesis it is also important to look at the sci-fi genre's relationship with race. Black film historian André M. Carrington argued in his 2016 book *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* that the genre has an inherent history of whiteness. According to Carrington the genre has traditionally had a white male protagonist who travel around the galaxy encountering weird and hostile alien beings. Minority actors were rarely hired in the lead role, and these hostile alien creatures could be seen as a metaphor for "the evil" minorities in the real world (Carrington, 2016, p 10-15).

He also argued that Sci-fi has always had predominantly white writers, producers, and directors. This can cause issues when they try to write minority characters as they only have the perspective of white people. Even if the white writers attempted to create an engaging minority character they may have unintentionally sorted to stereotypes. When referring to "The whiteness of science fiction" Carrington was mainly talking about this majority of white writers. He believed the only way for sci-fi to have good minority characters was to hire writers of all ethnicities. A white writer will never truly be able to capture the experience of a minority figure, which is why hiring minorities is important (Carrington, 2016, p 16-20).

In modern day, minority groups are starting to gain the recognition they deserve. Minority actors, writers, and directors are hired more frequently, and many completely minority-led projects are starting to gain Universal acclaim. This can be seen with the massive success of movies such as *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (Kwan & Scheinert, 2023), *Crazy Rich Asians* (Chu, 2018), and *Parasite* (Joon-ho, 2019). All of which have been nominated for several Oscars. This is however a recent development. Big events such as the Oscars have been criticized in the past for favouring movies made by white people (Manasan & O'Connel, 2021) (Harwell, 2016).

Despite the success of these movies, statistics show that the industry is still predominantly white. In 2016 Drew Harwell reported in *The New York Post* that there was still an ongoing racial divide in the American film industry. He reported on the massive split in diversity that could be found at the Oscars. The voters at the Academy consisted of writers, directors and critics from the film industry. Most of these voters were elderly white men. This led to a racial bias where they often voted for people who were of the same ethnicity as them. Making it harder for projects made by minority groups to gain recognition (Harwell, 2016). The academy claimed this was an issue with the industry as a whole. They believed the lack of diversity in the film industry was at fault for their predominantly white-voting jury. (Harwell, 2016).

In 2022 Eunice Esomonu made a follow-up article to Harwell's 2016 report. She wanted to find out if the industry had improved since then. Esomonu claims that diversity in Hollywood movies increased from 13% in 2015 to 32% in 2019. This significant increase did not translate into big changes at the academy. The diversity rate only increased from 10% to 19% at the Oscars from 2015 to 2019 (Esomunu, 2022).

In recent years more minority groups have gotten the chance to write, produce, and direct in Hollywood. However, there is still more improvement to be done. This section has focused on the racist depictions of black people in films. However, other minority groups have also been misrepresented by film and TV. The next section will go into detail about the racist stereotypes utilized by Hollywood to ridicule Native Americans.

7.2 Cowboys and “Indians”

Native Americans have been stereotyped as red-skinned savages who wear bird feathers and believe in magical superstitions. They were often presented as brutal people who raped and pillaged the “civilised” settlements of the white man (Schulman, 2023) (New Visions, 2016).

Stereotypical Native Americans were often used in Cowboy Westerns. The Native Americans were presented as primitive savages who attacked the white men with axes, bows, and arrows. While the “civilized” cowboys retaliated with more “sophisticated” and advanced weapons such as guns and dynamite. Western films often had a white male hero who had to save the girl from the “red-skinned” “savages” (Schulman, 2023) (Berny, 2020, p 6-7).

Most of the Native American representation came from Westers. Hollywood may have placed Natives exclusively in an 1800s setting to create a false narrative of them being a thing of the past. This may have invalidated the present-day struggles of Native Americans in the eyes of the white public (Schulman, 2023) (Berny, 2020, p 6-7).

Native Americans have a darker skin tone than the white population of America. However, their skin is not as dark as African Americans. To self-identify themselves around white people, the Native Americans came up with the idea of referring to their skin as red. Referring to Native Americans as “red-skinned” is seen as offensive in the modern day. This is because of the negative historical connotations of the term. White people often depicted Native Americans with cartoonishly red skin. Their skin colour was used for mockery and eventually turned into a slur (Shapira, 2016).

Non-native actors often played Native American characters. This practice was deemed acceptable for far longer than blackface. It lasted into the 90s and the early 2000s. The white writers and directors rarely cared about creating an accurate depiction of Native American culture, even when they hired real native actors. According to a 2016 article by New Visions, most white directors rarely paid attention to what language Native Americans were speaking. Many Native actors were cast to play someone from a completely different tribe from their own. This often led to the tribe speaking the completely wrong native language. Some Native actors were told to do their lines in English, and then the footage later got reversed in post-production. This made them sound more stereotypically “Indian” from a white perspective. (New Visions, 2016).

The Native Americans' history of being slaughtered and pushed out of their territories was largely ignored in film and TV up until recently. Natives were often used as guides, servants, or opponents to the white protagonist. If the story was not about the white man defeating the "savage" "Indian", it was about the white man utilising a Native American as a guide for his journey. It was rare to see a native in the lead role (Schulman, 2023) (New Visions, 2016).

Some old Western filmmakers were known for being pro-Native American. John Ford is an example of a director who made many Western movies that were sympathetic towards the struggle of the Native people. Unfortunately, even in Ford's films they rarely had the lead role. He was also guilty of utilising Native American actors who did not come from the tribe that he was trying to depict (New Visions, 2016).

John Ford was not the only director who showed compassion for the Native American people in his films. A 1990 *Washington Post* article by Michael Wilmington highlighted early examples of movies that focused on the struggles of the native people. For example, *The Vanishing American* (Seitz, 1925). A movie following a Native American man's fight for freedom; or the 1936 movie *Ramona* (King). A romantic drama focusing on the taboo marriage between a Native American man and a white woman. However, even these movies could be criticised for having harmful depictions of Native Americans. The native characters in these films were played by white actors. The War Chief in *Ramona* (1936, King) was played by the white actor Don Ameche. The Native American man who fought for his freedom in *The Vanishing American* (Seitz, 1925) was played by the white actor Richard Dix (Wilmington, 1990).

Disney has been widely criticised for its depictions of Native American people. One of the most infamous examples is their depiction of a stereotypical Native American tribe in their 1953 adaptation of *Peter Pan* (Luske, Geronimi, & Jackson). The Native Americans, or "Indians" as they were wrongfully called, were shown as primitive people who wore weird garbs and had cartoonishly red skin. They even happily sang a song about their red skin while they danced around a fire. The movie presented them as "less intelligent" by making them speak in broken English. It has also been criticised for deemphasising the struggles of the Native American people by placing them in a fairytale setting among mermaids and fairies. Presenting Native Americans as a "work of fiction" rather than real people (Laskow, 2014) (Rosewood, 2020).

By the 1990s Native Americans were no longer depicted as savages. They were however still often referred to as “Indians”. A movie from the 90s that is often criticised for being guilty of misrepresenting Native American people is Disney’s *Pocahontas* (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995). The movie gets rid of many racist tropes such as the red skin, and lower intelligence. However, where *Pocahontas* falters is in its depiction of the conflict between the Native Americans and the European settlers. The movie told a historically inaccurate depiction of a horrible and bloody event. Instead of focusing on the struggles that the Native American people faced during that period, the movie aimed to be a romantic drama with a happy ending where everyone got along (Rosewood, 2020).

Film and TV have a long history of misrepresenting Native Americans. While they have improved recently, this was a problem far into the 90s and early 2000s. This also translated into Star Trek and their depiction of Chakotay.

7.3 Star Trek and Race

Star Trek has often tackled topics pertaining to race issues. Especially those concerning black people's struggles in a predominantly white America. Gene Roddenberry, the creator of the franchise, was a vocal supporter of the black community's fight for equality. His first TV show *The Lieutenant* (1963-1964) was cancelled after he decided to make an episode that directly focused on the ongoing race riots that were happening in America at the time. The network did not like commenting on real-world current events and therefore cancelled the show (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 38, 61-62).

When Roddenberry created *Star Trek*, he still wanted to tackle these issues, but he realized he had to be more subtle to avoid cancellation. He has been quoted saying “I had to be subtle enough for the message to go over the heads of the censors, but clear enough for the viewers to understand” (Gross & Altman, 2016 p 66-67). That is how *Star Trek* ended up with episodes like *Let That Be Your Last Battlefield* (Taylor, 1969). In this episode, the crew of the spacecraft USS Enterprise encountered two seemingly identical aliens who were at war with each other. The only difference between the two people were that one was black on the right side of their face, and the other was black on the left. Their conflict was entirely based on the colour of their skin. The crew of the Enterprise did not understand why they would fight over such a thing. They tried to de-escalate the conflict but to no avail. The episode ended with the two aliens realizing that their entire civilization had been destroyed because of this conflict.

The episode was a clear metaphor for the ongoing race struggle between white and black people in America. It told a message about the importance of equality, and not judging people based on the colour of their skin (Golumbia, 1996, p 80-85) (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 217, 220). This message flew over the heads of the censors. Utilizing aliens in a futuristic setting made the conflict feel far removed from reality. Allowing Roddenberry to freely spread his message about equality (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 66-67, 117-118).

The progressive nature of the show also translated into the show's cast. The main bridge crew consisted of people of many different races. They were all treated like equals and worked like a team. Sulu, the helmsman of the ship, was an Asian man played by renowned Japanese American actor George Takei. His co-pilot was a Russian man named Pavel Chekov. This was during the height of the Cold War. Having a Russian man on the crew strengthened Roddenberry's message about peace and equality among all races on Earth. The bridge crew even had an alien among them, Spock. He was played by the white actor Leonard Nimoy. Spock was accepted by the crew despite being a different race with a different culture. Out of fear of backlash from the consumers, the studio ordered Roddenberry to remove Spock's pointy ears from all promotional material. This was quickly changed when they realized Spock was the most popular character on the show (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 36-39, 113, 225) (Krishna, 2020).

One of the most significant additions to the crew was the black woman Uhura. She was played by actress Nichelle Nichols who had previously worked with Roddenberry on *The Lieutenant* (1963-1964). Uhura was the communications officer on the ship and was a revolutionary addition to the cast, not only because she was black, but also because she was a woman (Greven, 209, p. 98). Whoopi Goldberg has stated that Nichelle was her main influence for pursuing a career in acting. According to Goldberg black people could not be seen on TV before Uhura, especially not in such a vital role (Academy of Motion Picture Arts, 2018, Timestamp: 37:50).

Star Trek is often credited for featuring the first-ever interracial kiss on Television. The kiss was between Lieutenant Uhura and Captain Kirk. It has been heralded as a huge progressive step forward for Television. However, CNN journalist Sheena McKenzie posted an article in 2015 that proved that the famous Star Trek kiss was not the first interracial kiss on television. This credit could be given to the BBC TV play *You in Your Small Corner* (Whatham, 1962) (McKenzie, 2015) (Gross & Altman, 2016, p 214, 217, 220).

The importance of the Star Trek kiss can however not be understated. It helped push the boundaries on what could be shown on mainstream television for years to come. That being said, the kiss is not entirely unproblematic. I rarely see people talk about the circumstances of the kiss. It occurred in the episode *Plato's Stepchildren* (Alexander, 1968). In this episode, the crew got mind-controlled by an alien species who used them as puppets for their own amusement. At one point Kirk and Uhura are forced to kiss. He tried to resist but was unsuccessful. They both kiss un-consensually. Perhaps then, the kiss might not be as progressive as it seemed. It at least seems the writers were afraid to fully commit to a real romance between a black and a white character. There is no doubt that the kiss was an important moment in TV history, but it is not unproblematic. Star Trek historian Ryan Britt agrees on this point. In a 2022 article, he noted the problematic nature of the kiss, stating that "Any way you slice it, a Black woman being forced to kiss a white man isn't exactly progress" (Britt, 2022).

This statement can be applied to the entirety of the original *Star Trek* series. Many aspects of the show seemingly conflict with Roddenberry's progressive vision of the future. An example is the depiction of the iconic alien adversary known as the Klingons. In their first appearance, they looked far from the iconic designs that they are known for today. In the original *Star Trek* series, they looked like regular humans with dark skin. Most of the Klingon characters were played by white actors, in something that looked very similar to the practice of blackface. The Klingons also resembled Asian stereotypes often utilised in old Hollywood. They had big bushy eyebrows, long moustaches, goatees, and pointy eyes. The problematic nature of the Klingons was not made better by their depiction as evil savages who only desired war (Vaux, 2023) (Gender, 2020, Timestamps: 02:48-14:40).

(Figure 3). Klingon from *Star Trek The Original Series* Season 1 Episode 26: *Errand of Mercy* (Newland, 1967).

The show also had problematic depictions of Native Americans. One of the most infamous episodes of the series is *The Paradise Syndrom* (Taylor, 1968). In the episode, Captain Kirk got amnesia while investigating a primitive planet occupied by Native Americans. While suffering from memory loss Kirk befriended the local tribe and fell in love with a native woman. The problematic part of the episode comes from its depiction of the native people. They are shown to be primitive and stupid people who worship the white man as a god. Instead of showing the white settlers as oppressors, the episode romanticised their relationship with the natives. The episode ended with the tribe accusing Kirk of being a false god, and in savage anger they attack him and his pregnant wife. They are shown to be wild mindless savages who are willing to harm an innocent pregnant woman. At the end of the episode, Kirk's pregnant wife dies in his arms. It is a dark and depressing ending that misrepresented the Native American people as primitive savages (Kanzler, 2021).

These problematic elements prove André Carrington's point about the importance of having a diverse group of writers and producers to create well rounded minority characters. Most of the staff working on Star Trek were white. Roddenberry himself was a white man. He wrote the show with the intentions of showing an inclusive future with no racism. However, because he was a white man he fell into many of the same trappings that other white writers had done in the past (Carrington, 2016, p 15-20).

The cast may have been diverse, but the focus of the show was still mainly on the white characters Captain Kirk, Doctor McCoy, and Spock. Writers naturally gravitate towards people of the same ethnicity as themselves. It is easier to successfully write someone you yourself can relate to. Further proving this point is the Star Trek series *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999). It had a diverse crew of writers and directors from several different ethnicities. The show has become known as one of the most progressive shows in the franchise. In huge part due to the help of the black actor Avery Brooks. He not only played the main protagonist of the show, but he also wrote and directed several episodes of the series. It made his character Benjamin Sisko one of the most well-developed black characters in the history of the franchise (Carrington, 2016, p 10-20).

Star Trek's revival series *The Next Generation* (1987-1994) continued Roddenberry's vision of creating a more progressive future. The main cast had a diverse group of people consisting of an almost equal amount of male and female leads. They even had an android named Data on the crew. He took a very similar role to Spock. He represented an alien entity that was

different from the human crew but was still treated like an equal. The show's lead engineer is the blind black man LeForge. Not only giving representation to black people but disabled people as well. The previously mentioned actress Whoopie Goldberg was also given an important recurring role on the show. One of the most significant additions to the crew was the Klingon, Worf. He was played by the black actor Michael Dorn. The Klingons no longer looked like white men in offensive makeup, and now looked like a proper alien. Having a Klingon member on the crew served to represent the progression Star Trek had made since the 60s. The Klingons were shown to be a well-rounded race of people, with their own culture and beliefs, not just wild savages. The characters on the show treated their culture with just as much respect as their own (Krishna, 2020) (Hulshult, 2024).

(Figure 4). Worf the Klingon in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 7, episode 11: *Parallels* (Wiemer, 1993).

The Next Generation (1987-1994) had a big cast of minority actors, but even TNG faltered at times. One of the most infamous episodes in the series is the season 1 episode *Code of Honor* (Mayberry & Landau, 1987). In the episode, the crew encountered an alien planet ruled by black men. They were presented as sexist and primitive people who wore stereotypical Arabian clothing, spoke with a broken accent, and had multiple wives. The leader of the planet even kidnapped a woman and tried to claim her as his property (Hulshult, 2023) (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 81-82). The episode's depiction of black people was reminiscent of how early Hollywood used to show the black man as a violent savage who came to harm the white men's women (Diawara, 1988, p 67-75).

Despite a few problematic episodes, *The Next Generation* (1987-1994) was for the most part progressive. For example, the episode *The Measure of a Man* (Scheerer, 1989). In this episode, the android crewmate Data gets put on trial to see if he can be considered his own person, or the property of Starfleet. The episode ends with the court deeming him a free individual and not property. Some people seeing Data as property could be seen as a metaphor for slavery. The conclusion makes it clear that everyone deserves the right to freedom no matter the circumstances of their birth.

Deep Space Nine (1993-1999) was the first Star Trek series with a black character as its main lead. The show was not afraid to directly tackle race issues without resorting to subtlety and metaphor. *Far Beyond the Stars* (Brooks, 1998) is one of the most famous episodes from the series. It is set in 1950s America and therefore tackled many racial issues of the time, such as police brutality and racial profiling in the workplace. It followed the character, Benny Russel. A black man who worked as a writer for a science fiction magazine. Due to his skin colour, he was not allowed to participate in any photographs with other staff members. His boss feared they would face backlash from their readers if they knew they had a black writer on staff. Benny later wrote a story for the magazine featuring a black space captain. Everyone on staff loved the story, but his editor demanded he change the ethnicity of the protagonist. When Russel refused, he was fired from his job. Perhaps the most shocking aspect of the episode is its depiction of police brutality. Early in the episode, two police officers harassed Benny. They later return to brutally beat him up. The episode was released in 1998, long before the Black Lives Matter movement had started. It showed that police brutality is not a recent problem, and the episode is unfortunately as relevant today as it was back then (Jesudason, 2022) (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 524-526).

Star Trek: Voyager (1995-2001) and *Enterprise* (2001-2005) tackled race issues more subtly than *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999). Both kept the tradition of a diverse cast consisting of all types of people (and aliens) of various races. Both shows had black and Asian cast members among them. However, they have been criticised for pushing their minority cast members to the side for the benefit of the white characters. The Asian actor Garrett Wang and the Mexican actor Robert Beltran have both been vocal about how disappointed they were with the static nature of their characters (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 585–586, 601-603, 612-613) (Seibold, 2022). Garret Wang also stated at a convention panel in 2014 that he once asked to direct an episode but was rejected. At that point, he was the first actor to ever be rejected for a directorial role. Several times throughout the panel he voiced his displeasure with his

suggestions for his character always being ignored (Roget, 2015, Timestamp, 46:45-48:44). Asian actress Linda Park and black actor Anthony Montgomery have stated they had similar concerns about their characters on *Star Trek: Enterprise* (Carrington, 2022) (Seibold, 2022). Montgomery's character was particularly pushed to the wayside. Becoming one of the least developed characters on the show, bordering on becoming a background character.

Modern Star Trek shows have been criticised for becoming "too political" with their inclusion of all genders, skin colours and cultures. However, Star Trek has always been inclusive and political. At its core, it is a liberal franchise that has always had a message about acceptance and equality (Patton, 2023). The franchise has unfortunately fallen short of this in some regards. An example of this is their handling of the Native American character Chakotay, in *Star Trek Voyager* (1995-2001).

8 Chakotay

In this chapter I will briefly analyse the lack of characterisation given to Chakotay in *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001). To understand what went wrong I will look into what his actor Robert Beltran thought about the character and the behind-the-scenes factors that led to his underdevelopment.

8.1 The Character

Chakotay was a Native American character on the show *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001). He was played by the Mexican actor Robert Beltran and served as the second in command on the show. Chakotay started as a very promising character. In *Voyager*'s first episode *Caretaker* (Kolbe, 1995) he was the leader of a rebel group who had taken up the fight against the Cardassian Empire. The Cardassians were an alien species who expanded their empire by settling on occupied planets. The pacifist Federation of Planets refused to fight them, which eventually led to the creation of the rebellion. Chakotay's Native American heritage could have been used as his motivation for joining the rebel army. Their history of being pushed out of their territory by the white settlers is very similar to what the Cardassians did. However, this parallel was never brought up in the show. The *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994) episode *Journey's End* (Allen, 1994) did tackle this connection directly. The episode focused on a Native American settlement that was forced out of their territory by the Cardassians, which started the spark of rebellion in the natives.

At the beginning of *Caretaker* (Kolbe, 1995) Chakotay's ship was destroyed and he alongside his crew were stranded 70,000 lightyears away from home. Their only hope of survival was to cooperate with the crew of a Federation ship that had also been stranded. The ship was called the USS Voyager. To keep the peace between the two crews the captain of the Voyager, Kathryn Janeway, promoted Chakotay to be her second in command. Having a crew of rebels working together with a crew of protocol-driven individuals, had the potential for interesting character conflicts. The series could have shown two very different crews that were initially struggling to work together. Later showing them growing closer through shared experiences. Unfortunately, after the first episode, there was no conflict in sight. The two crews integrated seamlessly with each other.

Chakotay could have been a more rebellious leader who often ignored the captain's orders. This would have been a great source of conflict between him and the more by-the-book leader Captain Janeway. However, this is not what we got. Already by the second story of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) Chakotay's rebellious characteristics were all removed. The name of the story was *Parallax* (Friedman, 1995) and it featured one of the rare instances of conflict between the two crews. In the episode, Captain Janeway had to pick a new chief engineer. Two candidates were competing for the position. B'elanna from the rebel crew and Joe from the Federation. This would have been a perfect opportunity to show the conflicting views of Janeway and Chakotay, as they both could have shown biases toward their own crewmen. However, Chakotay does not try to defy Janeway's authority, he now deeply respects the chain of command. They act like close friends who have known each other for years. This friendship with Janeway is one of the most endearing aspects of Chakotay's character, in huge part due to the chemistry between the two actors. They feel like real friends who trust each other implicitly. It is however unfortunate that there was no build-up or character development that led up to this point. André Bormanis who worked as the scientific consultant on the production of *Star Trek: Voyager* agreed with this sentiment. He said "The premise of the show was pretty interesting … stranded 70,000 lightyears away from Earth. We have to find our way back and we have this block of rebels on the ship who are opposed to Starfleet. These two factions have to figure out how to work together" (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 557-558). He then proceeds to state "That's not what the show became. fairly quickly it became like Chakotay is the first officer and he has a cordial relationship with Captain Janeway" (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 558).

Chakotay felt like a completely different character from this point forward. All his character development happened off-screen. This protocol-driven depiction of the character would not change throughout the entire seven-year run of *Voyager*. Chakotay-centred episodes in the show opted not to focus on his rebel past, but rather on his Native American origin. Chakotay's background could have been used to explore his motivations for joining the rebellion. However, what we ended up with was a Native American stereotype instead. Chakotay became an example of the old Hollywood stereotype often referred to as the "Nobel Indian". His character became the wise Native American man who believed in spiritualistic magic and animal spirits. His characteristics were similar to Native American stereotypes utilized by white filmmakers to present natives as primitive people (New Visions, 2016).

For example, in the episode *Initiations* (Kolbe, 1995) Chakotay goes on a journey to perform a magical ritual to honour his dead father. Another example is in the episode *The Cloud* (Livingston, 1995) where Chakotay helps council Captain Janeway through her mental health struggles, by helping her find her "animal guide". This episode also marks another missed opportunity for Chakotay's character development. The whole crew is struggling mentally from the stress and isolation of being stranded 70,000 lightyears away from home. One of the few characters that seemed unaffected was Chakotay. The episode missed the opportunity of giving the viewers a better understanding of the character by taking a closer look at his psyche.

The episode *Tattoo* (Singer, 1995) tried to explore his Native American background more closely. In the episode, we learned that in his youth, Chakotay had rejected his Native American roots. Through learning about his tribe young Chakotay gained a newfound respect for his culture, and eventually accepted his Native American origin. He embraced them as an important part of his identity, and it helped give Chakotay some much-needed depth. The episode is however not entirely unproblematic. The tribe is shown to be less technologically advanced than the rest of the Star Trek universe, making them seem like a primitive people. The language they spoke was not based on any existing native language. This was made worse by the fact that many of the Native American characters were played by white actors. Such as Chakotay's father, who was played by the white actor Henry Darrow. These are all methods white filmmakers have used in the past to dehumanize Native Americans (Schulman, 2023) (Wilmington, 1990) (New Visions, 2016). Possibly the most dehumanizing part of the episode is the reveal that the tribe were descendants of an ancient alien species. Quite literally dehumanizing them, similar to how *Peter Pan* (Luske, Geronimi & Jackson, 1953) framed Native Americans as mystical otherworldly beings, rather than real people (Laskow, 2014) (Rosewood, 2020).

Looking at Murray Smith's definition of recognition we can recognise that Chakotay was an important character in episodes like *Tattoo* (Singer, 1995) and *Initiations* (Kolbe, 1995). Despite their problematic depiction of Native American culture, they at least emphasized the importance of his character. They made it clear to the audience that he was one of the main protagonists. However, as the show went on this became less clear as they slowly stopped focusing on his character. Eventually, you could only recognize his "importance" through his unique character design. While he wore a normal Starfleet uniform, he was always recognizable from his big tribal facial tattoo (Smith, 1995, p 82, 110-118).

(Figure 5). Chakotay on the bridge in *Star Trek Voyager: Season 7, Episode 16: Workforce, Part II. (Dawson, 2001)*

To begin with, we align ourselves quite often with Chakotay, but as the show progressed our alignment moved away from Chakotay and over to Seven of Nine. This made it difficult for an audience member to ally with Chakotay. He did not commit any atrocious acts that people may have disagreed with, but the lack of focus given to the character made it hard to form a proper opinion on his relatability. The lack of characterization actively hurt the audience's enjoyment of the character. Even Native Americans may have had a hard time relating to the character due to the stereotypical and inaccurate depiction of their culture that was seen on the show. *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) therefore failed to create an engaging character according to Murray Smith's definition of the term. We cannot ally ourselves with Chakotay, we did not get the chance to align ourselves with him, and it became hard to recognize him towards the end of the show (Smith, 1995, p 83-84, 142-150, 187-192).

The writers seemed to have had no idea what to do with Chakotay. This portion of the chapter has focused a lot on what he could have been, rather than what he was. This is because there isn't much to say about Chakotay. He is a character surrounded by missed opportunities. He had the potential to be a well-developed character but ended up becoming an "Indian" stereotype. Chakotay was a static character whose whole personality revolved around being the "Native American". Robert Beltran was not pleased with the lack of development his character received, and he has not been afraid to be vocal about his grievances.

8.2 The Actor

Chakotay was played by the Mexican actor Robert Beltran. This is a problematic casting choice as it continued the trend of casting non-native actors to play Native American characters. The production staff on *Voyager* were aware of the controversial choice of casting a non-Native American. They justified their decision by explaining that at the time there were only a handful of Native American actors who were a part of the "Screen Actors' Guild of America" which made casting the character extremely difficult (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 560). Rick Berman, the executive producer of *Voyager* tried to justify the casting choice by saying "Beltran, who is of Mexican heritage, … had a somewhat Native American look to him" (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 560). Berman is most likely talking about Beltran's darker skin tone.

Robert Beltran was initially very excited to play the role. The script for the pilot apparently immediately sold him on the premise of the show. Beltran loved the idea of the character and saw Chakotay as someone with a lot of potential for development. He believed Chakotay had the potential to become a deep and complex character through the exploration of his past and his conflicting ideals with Starfleet (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 561). Robert Beltran quickly became disappointed in the way the characters were handled on the show. He felt they played the show too safe, and believed they should have focused on the conflict between the two crews for at least one or two seasons before making them act like a family. Beltran firmly believed that the key to any good show was character conflict, something he felt was sorely lacking in *Voyager* (Altman, & Gross, 2016, p 589, 601).

Robert Beltran admitted that despite his disappointment in the show, he did belive it had a few good stories in the first three seasons. He especially liked episodes that focused on the relationship between characters, as it gave them that little bit of development that he felt most of them needed. Beltran liked Chakotay's relationship with Janeway, he felt they had the type of chemistry that was sorely lacking with any other character on the show (Seibold, 2022).

Robert Beltran did not like the addition of Seven of Nine. He believed she overshadowed the rest of the crew. *Voyager* (1995-2001) became all about Seven of Nine and Captain Janeway. Chakotay and the other recurring cast were put on the sideline. He also felt the addition of Seven of Nine ruined Janeway's character. He stated that from that point forward Janeway became an "all-knowing" character that never made any mistakes. In his eyes, the stories became more formulaic with no stakes (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 612-613) (Seibold, 2022).

Robert Beltran eventually grew completely disinterested in the series, and this was noticeable in his performance. He lost all passion for the show and became known for being quite stubborn on set. Producer Brannon Braga claims that Beltran started “phoning in his performances”. Beltran admitted to not caring about doing a good performance by stating “It’s my duty as an actor to do the best I can with the material I am given, but if you want me to be enthusiastic about it, it is a bit above my duties as an actor” (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 602-603).

He has been vocal publicly about his disdain for the show, and his disappointment with his character. Even during the show’s time on the air, he often talked about his grievances in interviews. Many fans feared that Beltran would eventually get fired because of this. Rumours circulated that he was purposefully trying to get booted from the show. Beltran denied these rumours and simply stated that he did not fear being fired. In a 2012 interview with StarTrek.com, he explained that his goal was never to get fired, but if they did kick him off the show he would not care (StarTrek.com, 2012). Robert Beltran stayed on for all seven years of the show. He was very relieved when the series was nearing its end. He even started advocating for getting fewer scenes, as he believed it was too late for them to give Chakotay any character development (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 613). Towards the end of the series, the writers had no idea what to do with the character. This may explain why he was given a romantic subplot with Seven of Nine in the show’s finale. Most fans were let down by this development as they felt it came out of nowhere. Robert Beltran agreed with this sentiment as he believed it had no build-up. According to him, Chakotay and Seven of Nine barely had any scenes together before that point (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 637).

Despite his animosity towards the show Beltran never let that sully his relationship with his fellow cast members. His conflict was with the writers and producers. He had an especially strained relationship with the producers Brannon Braga and Rick Berman. He did not like the direction they were taking with the show after their co-producer Jeri Taylor left. Beltran respected Taylor and believed the show went downhill when Berman and Braga gained full control (StarTrek.com, 2012) (Seibold, 2022). The producers were aware of Beltran’s disappointment in the character. Berman stated that he believed Beltran “was frustrated his character never became as big as he had hoped”. His co-producer Brennon Braga said that he believed Beltran’s frustrations with his character is what led to his phoned-in performance (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 561, 602).

The only thing that kept Beltran attached to the show was his relationship with his co-stars. They had a close friendship and despite his anger towards the producers he never let that affect everyone else on set (StarTrek.com, 2012). The cast quickly became friends and according to Beltran, there was no conflict between them for the first few years of the show. When Jeri Ryan joined the series, a rift was formed in the cast's relationship. There was a big conflict between the actresses Jeri Ryan (Seven of Nine) and Kate Mulgrew (Captain Janeway) that shook the whole cast. Despite Robert Beltran's destain for the Seven of Nine character he never let it affect his friendship with Jeri Ryan. He always wanted to make peace with everyone on set. In one incident several actors wanted to complain about Jeri Ryan's character to the producer Rick Berman. They planned to do this without Ryan's knowledge. Beltran told them he wanted nothing to do with it, as he believed talking behind a coworker's back was wrong (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 585, 603, 616).

Robert Beltran's disdain for his character led to a nonchalant attitude on set. His belief that the writers and producers did not care about his character caused him to lose interest in the show. This led to a phoned-in performance that can partly explain why Chakotay was such an underdeveloped character. What I have not discussed is the cause behind the problematic depiction of Native Americans that could be found in the show. That is the focus of the next section of the chapter.

8.3 The Scammer

The producers of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) decided to get a Native American consultant to work on the show. The man they hired was Jamake Highwater. He was the Native American consultant for several American TV productions at the time. His job was to make sure they accurately represented Native American culture on the show (Archer, 2023). Yet somehow, they still managed to present native characters as stereotypes. This is because Jamake Highwater was a fraud. For decades he had claimed to be a part of the indigenous Cherokee tribe of America. This turned out to be a lie. His birth name was Jackie Marks, and he was a white man with no genetic ties to any Native American community, and therefore had no idea what he was talking about. This may then explain why Chakotay became such a stereotype (Archer, 2023) (Jacobs, 2018).

The producers are not entirely blameless. Highwater was exposed for being a fraud as early as the 1980s. *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001) did not enter production until the mid-90s. If they had done a proper background check on Jamake Highwater they would have quickly discovered the truth. They did not bother doing real research about Native American culture and trusted Highwater to do the job for them (Archer, 2023).

It can be argued that the lack of background checks on Highwater comes down to racism. The white producers might not have cared about representation, and only hired a consultant to make it seem like it (Archer, 2023). Jamake Highwater was allowed to go around his whole career causing damage to Native American representation in media. He worked as a consultant on several projects where he tricked the white population into believing his wild tales about "Indian" culture (Jacobs, 2018).

Jackie Marks established himself as Jamake Highwater sometime in the 1960s. Under the Highwater name, he wrote many books about what he said was "Native American culture". To hide his identity, he claimed to be adopted, which explained why his parents were white. However, in the 80s a real Native American writer named Hank Adams investigated Jamake Highwater's family history and found no trace of Native American ties. He published an exposé on Highwater in 1984, but even after this article was published, Jamake managed to get high-profile work as a "Native American" consultant (Jacobs, 2018) (Archer, 2023).

Jamake Highwater (Jackie Marks) died in 2001. In his obituary, he was referred to as a "Native American". This angered Hank Adams, who had known for decades that Highwater was a fraud. Shortly after the publication of the obituary, Adams sent a letter to the editor of *The New York Times,* where he detailed all his findings on Jamake Highwater. This time people listened, but it was too late. Highwater was already dead, and he had been allowed to cause damage to the reputation of Native Americans his whole career (Jacobs, 2018).

Highwater's influence on the early development of Chakotay may have sabotaged the character for the rest of the show. The focus on Chakotay's heritage lessened throughout the series, but when it did, the writers did not know what to do with the character. As mentioned by the Producer Brannon Braga, the decreasing role Chakotay had on the show caused frustration for his actor Robert Beltran. This led to a phoned-in performance which caused the character to suffer (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 602).

Jamake Highwater may have triggered a domino effect that damaged Chakotay's character. This led to Robert Beltran eventually stopping to care about his performance, and the whole show suffered for it. Chakotay is now remembered for being a stereotype rather than a well-rounded character. Robert Beltran originally gave the character a lot of charm, but unfortunate behind-the-scenes factors eventually ruined the character's potential.

9 Homophobia

This chapter will give a brief overview of typical homophobic depictions that's been used in Film and TV. I will explain certain stereotypes that have often been used to negatively represent the LGBTQ community. In this overview, I will also take a brief look at the transphobic history of the American Film and TV industry, before transitioning into Star Trek's history with queer representation.

9.1 A Brief History of Homophobia in Film and TV

Historically Hollywood has handled LGBTQ characters in their films by ignoring their existence. It was rare to see any minority characters in early Hollywood, especially queer people. According to journalist Patrick Kelleher, only some dared to tackle the subject, such as the 1934 film *Wonder Bar* (Bacon & Berkeley) which famously featured a scene of two men dancing together (Kelleher, 2022). LGBTQ representation was rare, but not unheard of. Author, Long Tran, argued the history of queer representation in film can be traced all the way back to an 1895 short film that also showed two men dancing together. The lack of queer characters in Hollywood got worse once the Motion Picture Production Code was introduced in 1934 (Tran, 2019, p 130-131).

The Motion Picture Production Code was also known as the Hays Code. It was a set of rules movies had to follow in America. It was introduced by the republican politician William Hays, whom the code later was named after. The purpose of the code was to prohibit "immoral" acts from being shown in films. Being gay was seen as one of these "immoral" acts. The code was introduced out of fear that movies were corrupting the minds of the youth. To get your film shown in theatres across America you had to gain their "stamp of approval". Queer journalist Patrick Kelleher claimed that European cinema was more accepting of queer culture during this period. This may have been because they did not need to follow the Motion Picture Production Code. However, if the European filmmakers wanted to reach an American audience, they had to follow the code (Kelleher, 2022) (Lewis, 2021) (Doherty, 1999, p 348-363). The code was abolished in 1968, but during the years it was in effect queer representation was kept to a minimum. The existence of gay people was implied rather than implicitly stated. This was often done through stereotyping or queer coding (Cragg, 2022) (Tran, 2019, p 130-131).

Queer coding is a term used to describe characters that are depicted with typical gay traits but have a non-confirmed sexuality. Many writers utilised queer coding to get around the Hays code's censorship. It heavily relied on gay stereotypes such as male characters with more feminine traits, or female characters with more masculine traits. Feminine men in films were often shown to be weaker than masculine men. This could front a false narrative that gay men were not "real" men. Queer-coded characters were often depicted as antagonists. The Hays code was typically more lenient on what was allowed to do with villainous characters. This is because the story's antagonist was supposed to do immoral acts. If a villain did something that the code deemed "immoral" it was sometimes okay. Characters that participated in "immoral" acts had to be punished at the end. However, even villains were not allowed to be openly gay, which is why they had to be implied. The restrictions of the Hays Code damaged the LGBTQ community's reputation for decades to come. It cultivated harmful stereotypes about the "weakness" of gay men and framed the community as bad villainous people (Henderson, 2021) (Doherty, 1999, p 348-363) (Lewis, 2021) (Duarte, 2022).

When The Hays Code was abolished in 1968 it was no longer forbidden to have gay characters in films. Despite this, it was still rare for them to appear in movies throughout the 70s. An exception is the cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975). This film could not have come out during the Haze Code. It was more explicit with its depiction of queerness and sexual themes than most movies released before it. Characters in the film were allowed to be openly gay, lesbian, bi, and transexual. The movie gave queer people a sexual freedom they were never allowed to experience before. Most notable was the inclusion of the trans character Frank, who was played by the famous actor Tim Curry. The film has become heralded as a cult classic milestone for queer representation in media (Schrock, 2022).

The 60s and 70s were liberating decades for the LGBTQ community in America. With the legalization of gay relationships in 1961; the Stonewall riots that fought for gay rights in 1969; and the birth of Queer studies in the 1970s, it seemed America was become a safer place for gay people (CNN, 2023) (Tran, 2019, p 134). Homophobia was once again on the rise in the 1980s. This was in large part due to the spread of misinformation about the AIDS epidemic. Propaganda made people believe that the disease was only spread through anal intercourse. Many believed it was God punishing gay men for "sinning". In reality it could be spread through any form of sexual intercourse, but the mainstream media continued to spread misinformation that damaged the gay community's reputation (History.com, 2021).

The 70s had a steady increase in LGBTQ representation in Hollywood. When the AIDS crisis started in the 1980s this stopped. Queer characters during this decade were kept to a minimum. Hollywood executives feared backlash for having gay characters in their films during the ongoing AIDS epidemic. In 1988 all depictions of gay characters were banned from schools in the UK. This severely limited what could be shown in films and TV targeted towards a younger audience. The UK was a big market for the American film industry, so the law heavily affected them as well (Cragg, 2022) (Kelleher, 2022).

Several examples of queer censorship done on children's television can be found in the Anime, *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997). In its original Japanese release, the characters Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune were a lesbian couple. In America, this was deemed inappropriate for a show aimed at kids. To mitigate this, they made the characters cousins instead. Ironically, this change made the characters even more inappropriate, as the two characters were closer than any cousins should be, bordering on incestuous. This was not the first-time queer characters had been removed from Sailor Moon. In the Japanese release of the show, two female villains were implied to be in a relationship. In its Western release, they changed the gender of one of the villains (Garcia, 2022).

Children's media has largely ignored queer themes. Material choosing to tackle these themes often utilized queer coding to achieve it. Many Disney villains have been interpreted as being queer-coded. Captain Hook and Smee's relationship in *Peter Pan* (Luske, Geronimi, & Jackson, 1953) has been interpreted as a romantic partnership. The interpretation is supported by Hook's more feminine way of talking, dressing, and moving. Ratcliffe from *Pocahontas* (Goldberg & Gabriel, 1995) has similarly been called out on his inherent queerness in those regards. Then there is the queer coding of Ursala from *The Little Mermaid* (Musker & Clements, 1989). Her character design and mannerisms were based on the famous drag queen Divine. Drag queens are men who dress up as women when they perform, it is not the same as being transsexual. Transsexual women identify as women, while drag queens usually identify as men. Ursula has become known as a trans icon despite her drag influence. This may be because Ursula undeniably identifies as a woman (Lopez, 2018) (Zornosa, 2023). All the noted examples were antagonists. Having queer-coded villains was normal for a long time, but it can be seen as problematic as it framed queer people as the "bad guys". Most problematic is Hook's constant hunt for the underaged boy Peter Pan, which could potentially tie into the old homophobic belief that gay men were paedophiles (Henderson, 2022) (Schlatter & Steinback, 2011).

In recent years children's media has become more open to depicting LGBTQ characters. Such as the queer-coded relationship between the two female characters Korra and Asami in *The Legend of Korra* (2012-2014). Their relationship was heavily implied but was never confirmed in the show. It was later made official in the series' sequel comics. Despite this, *Washington Post* reporter Madison Dong argued in a 2020 article that *The Legend of Korra* paved the way for other kids cartoons to feature more openly queer characters. Such as a lesbian couple in *Steven Universe* (2013-2019), who eventually got married in the episode *Reunited* (Johnston & Artinian, 2018). There are also plentiful of queer characters in Netflix's *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018-2020). The Princesses Netossa and Spinnerella are married; the character Bow, has two dads; there is a non-binary character; and the main character Adora confesses her love for her rival Catra in the show's finale (Dong, 2020).

Disney has also become more open to depicting non-antagonistic queer characters. *Gravity Falls* (2012-2016) featured two heavily queer-coded cops. How they talked and acted towards each other implied they were more than professional partners. Another prominent example can be found in the Disney Channel show *The Owl House* (2020-2023). The series featured a prominent romance between the main character Luz and her girlfriend Amity. It's a heartwarming enemies-to-lovers story that took time to build up a believable and wholesome relationship. The show handled the romance the same way they would a straight couple. It did not make a big deal about their gender, they were just two people who loved each other (Guha, 2022).

Recent Disney films have tried to appeal to the LGBTQ audience. Big-budget projects such as *Beauty and the Beast* (Condon, 2017), *Star Wars: Episode 9* (J.J Abrams, 2019) and *Onward* (Scanlon, 2020) all supposedly featured Disney's "first" openly queer character. The purpose of this claim was to attract an LGBTQ audience. However, they have been heavily criticised for only giving these characters minor scenes that are easily altered for releases in homophobic countries (Anderson, 2022).

Asyia Iftikhar wrote an article for *Pink News* where she ranked the 10 best queer characters in Disney films. Disney's goal of removing the gay aspect of these characters is apparent from the fact that 6 out of the 10 characters only had a few seconds of screen time. 3 out of the remaining 4 characters only had brief scenes tackling their sexuality. Only one character on the list had a central role and was openly gay throughout the whole film (Iftikhar, 2023).

There was an especially big rise of gay characters on TV in the 90s. They were mostly used in TV sitcoms. To begin with, their function was to be a humorous stereotype. They were the token gay characters. These stereotypes may have been purposely malicious to villainise queer people. Not all 90s depictions of LGBTQ people were negative. The gay journalist Matt Baume claims that one of the most progressive shows at the time was *Fraiser* (1993-2004). The series had many episodes centred around gay characters. Over an 11-year run, the series kept improving its depiction of the queer community. Matt Baume argued that *Fraiser* helped pave the way for other shows to do the same (Baume, 2019).

In 1999 CNN reporter Donna Freydkin published an article that gave an overview of the gay characters that could be found on television. She claimed gay people used to be one-off characters, but by the end of the 90s, they had become a part of the recurring cast. One of the most prominent gay characters in Television at the time was Jack from *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003). He was a well-rounded character who was openly gay for most of the show's run. Jack had an entire story arc about coming out, and when he did, he was given tones of support from all his friends and family. Being gay was a part of his character, but it did not define him. He was an individual, not a stereotype. According to Freydkin many gay people were motivated to come out to their family because of Jack's character (Freydkin, 1999).

The 90s also had an influx of trans characters on television. One of the most prominent examples was Chandler's "Dad" in *Friends* (1994-2004). This was also one of the most problematic trans characters of the 90s. She was a trans woman and should have been referred to as his mother. However, the show kept misgendering her as "dad". This was a decision the people who worked on the show have admitted to regretting (Urban, 2022).

Twin Peaks (1990-1991) featured the trans character, Denise Bryson. She was quite a progressive inclusion for the time. Bryson did not get misgendered by people in the show, and her old friends and colleagues accepted her for who she was. She was depicted as a strong and competent FBI agent who did not let her gender identity get in the way of her job. However, the character was not entirely unproblematic. They did not hire a real trans person for the role. The straight male actor David Duchovny was cast to play Denise Bryson. She therefore had many typical male features such as a deeper voice, bigger muscles, and more body hair (Reynolds, 2017). However historically it has been common to cast non-trans actors to play trans characters. For example, Frank from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975) was played by the cisgender man Tim Curry.

Despite some problematic elements, the 90s era of television was an important stepping stone for queer representation in media. It undeniably paved the way for more LGBTQ people to be let into the industry. According to *Variety* "there have never been more cable TV channels with empowered gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender protagonists than it is today" (Setoodeh & Wagmeister, 2019) They also rightfully state that the industry still has a way to go. In many ways, it has improved since the 90s, but LGBTQ workers have been vocal about still being mistreated on several productions due to their sexuality. Not helped by the fact that many modern productions still heavily rely on gay stereotypes (Setoodeh & Wagmeister, 2019). The next section of the chapter will explain these stereotypes and why they are harmful. It will also look closer at more modern examples of homophobic stereotypes that have been used on TV.

9.2 Stereotyping

The English Oxford Dictionary defines a stereotype as "an oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing". When I refer to stereotypes related to queer characters, I look for certain traits that are often overused to present LGBTQ characters in a simplified manner. These stereotypes create a false image of what queer people are like. By utilizing stereotypes, a character can often become one-dimensional. Their whole character will then revolve around their sexuality, rather than being a well-rounded individual.

There are several different queer stereotypes. Gay men have often been depicted as more feminine than straight men. They are shown walking with swaying hips, talking with a dainty squeamish voice, and wearing extravagant clothing. Gay men were typically shown to be timid and feminine compared to straight men. They became similar to typical female characters often seen in films (Bashforth, 2022) (Boysen, Fisher, Dejesus, Vogel & Madon, 2011, p. 330-331). These stereotypical tropes were often used by filmmakers when queer coding their characters. Take for example the queer-coded villains from Disney films. Hook's extravagant fashion sense from *Peter Pan* (Luske, Geronimi & Jackson, 1953), Scar's swaying hips in *The Lion King* (Minkoff & Allers, 1994), or Ratcliffe's dainty and timid assistant in *Pocahontas* (Goldberg & Gabriel, 1995) are all examples of queer coded characters that use these tropes.

Similarly, lesbian characters have been depicted as more masculine than straight women. They are often shown dressed in "manly" clothing. This has been used to make queer women seem less desirable. On the other end of the spectrum, the more feminine depictions of lesbians have often been used to appeal to the male gaze. They were made for the enjoyment of men rather than the actual lesbian audience (Jacobsen, 2020). An example of this can be found in the movie *American Pie 2* (Rogers, 2001). The male character Stifler sleeps with two lesbian women at the end of the film. The film presented the two women as a sexually attractive "trophy" for the straight man, rather than being progressive.

In recent years more films have been made that specifically cater to the queer audience. However, even these have been criticised for appealing to the male gaze. *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (Kechiche, 2013), *The Handmaiden* (Chan-wook, 2016), and *Atomic Blonde* (Leitch, 2017) are all films that tell beautiful stories about women falling in love with each other. However, they were all directed by straight men, and have been heavily criticised for having graphic sex scenes that only seem to exist to appeal to the male gaze. The sex scenes focus more on the sexiness of the act rather than the romantic aspects. Which further proves the possible misogyny involved (Jacobson, 2020).

Some recent films have been praised for showing lesbian women as more than just a sex object. Emily Jacobson praised the films *Thelma* (Trier, 2017) and *Carol* (Haynes, 2015) for featuring heart wrenching and believable lesbian romances that managed to contain sex scenes that did not fetishise their characters (Jacobson, 2020).

Children's media has also been more accepting of having lesbian characters. Such as the previously mentioned examples Luz and Amity, Korra and Asami, Adora and Catra etc. Unfortunately, gay men have not been given the same treatment. Queer male characters have often been designated as background characters. Such as Bow's parents in *She-Ra* (2017-2020), or the cops in *Gravity Falls* (2012-2016).

Trans characters are even rarer to see represented in films and TV. Trans men (female to male) rarely get represented in media. The few times they do get represented their presentation is often similar to the "manly" lesbian stereotype. Trans women (male to female) have appeared more frequently. However, their depiction has often been very offensive. Men in drag and trans women were used interchangeably. Straight men were commonly hired to play trans women. This strengthened stereotype of trans women having deeper voices, harrier bodies, and bigger muscles than other women. When they were not played by men they were

often played by non-trans women. Films like *Naked Gun 3 ⅓* (Segal, 1994), *Ace Ventura* (Shadyac, 1994), and *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996) all featured scenes where a male character got seduced by a woman, only for them to later be disgusted when they found out she had a penis. The scenes ridiculed them while fronting the transphobic belief that trans women were "disgusting" and should be "shunned". These movies, whether intentionally or not, showed trans women as sexual predators who tricked men into sleeping with them. Scenes like these may have cultivated a harmful false belief that trans women were sexual predators (Lopez, 2018) (Talusan, 2016) (Bashforth, 2022).

Modern-day cinema has become better at straying away from stereotypical LGBTQ characters. Unfortunately, some stereotypical depictions remain. For example, In *The Hangover: Part II* (Phillips, 2011) we can find a scene reminiscent of the transphobic scenes often seen in 90s comedies. Halfway through the film, a character finds out he slept with a woman while drunk. The rest of the characters celebrate his achievement. Their joy transitions into disgust once they find out that she was trans. It turned the trans character's existence into a joke and continued the harmful stereotype that trans women were predators who took advantage of vulnerable men (Talusan, 2016).

Shows like *Modern Family* (2009-2020) have been praised for having gay leads. It helped normalise gay people by giving them a prominent role on television in the early 2010s. However, even they have been criticised for utilising gay stereotypes. For example, the gay couple in *Modern Family* spoke with a stereotypically "girly" infliction, walked with swaying hips, and loved to gossip. While some gay people may act this way, these tropes are ultimately harmful as they generalize a whole group of individuals. Turning them into stereotypes that may have affected how queer people were treated in real life (Shu, 2017).

What André Carrington said about *The whiteness of Science Fiction* can also be relevant to this. He talked about the importance of having a diverse group of writers from all types of minority groups to avoid creating problematic and stereotypical characters. He is mostly looking at it from a black person's perspective, but what he says can also be applied to queer writers. If film and TV wants to improve its LGBTQ representation, they must also hire queer writers on staff (Carrington, 2016, p 15-20).

The harm that can be done by using stereotypes to depict queer characters cannot be understated. Homophobic people will often use these stereotypes to justify their hateful beliefs. This makes the world a less safe place for queer people to exist. In fear of being bullied or harassed for who they are, fewer LGBTQ people will dare to come out. Not being able to express themselves fully can be detrimental to their mental health. Stereotyping may also be harmful to their mental health because they feel they must act a certain way to be accepted as gay. Not to mention the intense gender role pressure put on them to dress a certain way to be considered "male" or "female" (Boysen, Fisher, Dejesus, Vogel & Madon, 2011, p 331-332).

9.3 Star Trek and Homophobia

During the original Star Trek series, the way they handled the existence of gay people was to not talk about them at all. Despite this, the show ended up with some unintentional queer representation through the character of Sulu. Hikaru Sulu was the helmsman on the USS Enterprise in *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-1969). He was played by the gay Asian actor George Takei. He had not yet come out at the time of the show's release, but the significance of having a gay and Asian actor in their cast cannot be understated. In the J.J Abrams Star Trek reboot they canonical made the character gay. Interestingly, George Takei did not like this change. He believed Sulu was never intended to be gay, and implying so would be disrespectful to Gene Roddenberry's original vision (Shoard, 2016). Roddenberry has admitted that he was originally against the idea of having gay characters in Star Trek. Later he came to regret this decision and actively tried to include a gay character on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994). He was unfortunately unsuccessful with achieving this before his death (Greven, 2009, p. 40) (McNally, 2020).

There has been speculation if Captain Kirk's relationship with his first mate Spock in *Star Trek: TOS* (1966-1969) was more than platonic. In his book *Gender and Sexuality in Star Trek,* David Greven notes that several scholars have speculated about the homoerotic relationship between the two characters. Their bond was deeper than most men on TV at the time. Spock's people, the Vulcans, were known for separating themselves from their emotions, but Spock showed a strong love for Kirk that seemed to conflict with this alien nature. (Greven, 2009, p 5-8). The show never explicitly stated that their relationship was romantic, but several examples can be found that hinted at the possibility. In the episode *Amok Times* (Pevney, 1967) Spock showed an uncharacteristic burst of joy when he realised

Kirk was still alive after believing he was dead. In the episode *Shore Leave* (Sparr, 1966) a female ensign gave Kirk a back massage. He enjoyed the massage, believing it was given by Spock. When he realized who was giving it, he lost interest. Greven argued that Spock's famous death scene in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (Meyer, 1982) can also be seen as "a metaphor for being a closeted homosexual". His argument entails that the glass separating Kirk and Spock can be seen as a metaphor for the social barrier keeping gay people from coming out (Greven, 2009, p 6, 139).

Gene Roddenberry actively tried to include a gay character on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994). Unfortunately, he no longer had power over the franchise. The reigns had been handed over to the producers Rick Berman and Michael Piller (Greven, 2009, p. 40). This meant that *The Next Generation* had a lack of gay representation. The show had a few attempts at including queer characters, but these attempts often fell short of expectations. A noteworthy example is the episode *The Host* (Rush, 1991) where Doctor Beverley Crusher fell in love with a man who was a part of an alien race called the Trill. A species consisting of two beings with a symbiotic relationship. One is the body, and the other is the mind. In the episode, the body dies, and the mind needs to find a new host. The new host is later revealed to be a woman. This can be interpreted as a metaphor for the Trill being transexual. Doctor Crusher responded to this revelation with shock and anger. She was appalled by it, and immediately broke off the relationship. It is not inherently transphobic for a straight woman not wanting to date someone of the same gender. However, it was her aggressive response to the situation that came across as quite problematic (Roberts, 1999, p 115) (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995, p 252-255).

An episode of TNG that has been praised for its pro-trans message is *The Offspring* (Frakes, 1990). In this episode, the android Data, who himself identifies as a male robot, wanted to experience the joy of parenthood. He therefore decided to create an android child. The android was originally a genderless creature with no distinct features. When asked why he did not give his child a more human appearance he said, "I have decided to let my child pick their own gender and appearance". It's a progressive pro-trans message that is strengthened by the fact that the genderless child started with a deeper and manlier voice. When the child chose their gender, they were warned that it was a permanent change. The child chose a female appearance and gained a more feminine look and voice. These things combined could be interpreted as a metaphor for gender transitions (Greven, 2009, p 112-116) (McNally, 2020).

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (1993-1999) became known for tackling subjects that other shows in the franchise did not dare to. This included stories about the LGBTQ community. An example from the show is the use of the Trill character Jadzia Dax. In the season 2 episode, *Blood Oath* (Kolbe, 1994) she gets reunited with an old friend who knew her when she inhabited the male body Curzon Dax. Her friend greets her with her old name. Jadzia then proceeded to correct him, and he happily changed to her new name. It is a scene that affirmed for Jadzia that her friend loved her no matter what her gender identity was, while more heavily hinting at the metaphoric trans nature of the Trill.

Possibly the most famous example of queer representation in DS9 comes from the episode *Rejoined* (Brooks, 1995). In the episode, Dax got reunited with a lover from a past host. They now both inhabited female bodies, it was not forbidden for Trill to be in queer relationships however, their love was forbidden because it was illegal for Trill to get together with a lover from a past life. Their forbidden love could be interpreted as a metaphor for the struggles many gay people had to go through to be with the one they loved. The episode is also notable for featuring Star Trek's first gay kiss, as Jadzia and her past lover share a passionate moment (McNally, 2020). Unfortunately, the episode ended with the two characters going their separate ways after accepting the problematic laws of their people. Despite the progressive nature of the episode, the ending conveyed a confused message that seemed to imply that gay people should stay in the closet.

(Figure 6). Jadzia Dax and Lenara Kahn kissing in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: Season 4, Episode 5: Rejoined. (Brooks, 1995)*

Despite the big step forward *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) took in its queer representation, the two following shows *Voyager* (1995-2001) and *Enterprise* (2001-2004) had a surprising lack of LGBTQ storylines. It was not until the modern day that Star Trek had proper Queer representation. The first officially gay couple in Star Trek did not appear until *Star Trek: Discovery* in 2017. The gay characters Paul and Hugh are not presented as "token gay" stereotypes. They are well-rounded people who are presented as being more than just their sexuality. Their sexual orientation is a part of them, but it does not define them. Later in the show they introduce a trans character. Similarly to past trans representation, the character is a Trill, but rather than implying the transition it is made official (McNally, 2020). In *Star Trek: Picard* (2020-2023) the character Seven of Nine from *Voyager* gets confirmed to canonically be bisexual. She has a girlfriend in *Picard*, which is notable due to the lack of LGBTQ representation seen on her show of origin.

10 Soren

To understand Soren's character, you must also understand the episode she is from. This chapter will analyse the episode, its message, and the character itself. Soren has been praised for being a progressive character, but she has also been criticised for being problematic. I will therefore look into the behind-the-scenes factors that may have been the cause for the mixed reactions.

10.1 The Episode

Soren only appeared in the episode *The Outcast* (Scheerer, 1992) from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994). In this episode, the crew of the USS Enterprise encountered the J'naii people. An alien species that only identified as non-binary. The J'naii had left the concept of gender behind and had learned to reproduce asexually. They saw gender as primitive and perverted. Their genderless society was reflected in their character designs. Everyone wore the same gender-neutral robes that covered their whole body. All J'naii also had the same sterile looking bowl cuts, or hoods covering their hair. The need to cover up showed how ashamed the J'naii were of their own bodies.

(Figure 7): Group of J'naii at Soren's court hearing in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 5, Episode 17: *The Outcast* (Scheerer, 1992).

Commander William Riker, one of the main protagonists of the series, needed help understanding their culture. He befriended a young J'naii named Soren. She taught him much about their culture, but what interested him the most was learning about their rejection of gender. Soren eventually confided in Riker about a traumatic memory from her childhood where she witnessed a young child be ridiculed, bullied, and eventually dragged to a conversion camp for claiming to be a boy. Soren explained that some individuals did identify as male or female, but by doing so they broke the greatest taboo on their planet. Anyone who dared to identify as any gender would be imprisoned or sent to "conversion camps".

Riker eventually fell in love with Soren, and as they grew closer, he realised she was one of the people who secretly identified as female. She reciprocated his feelings, but their love was forbidden. When her people discovered her relationship with Riker, she was put on trial. Soren was initially only tried for partaking in a romantic relationship. However, when Commander Riker attempted to take all the blame, she stepped up on the podium and defended him. This was followed by a rousing speech from Soren acknowledging her gender identity and her acceptance of that.
"I was born female, and I always felt this way. I am not sick for feeling this way. I do not need to be cured. What I need is your understanding and your compassion" - Soren.

Identifying as any gender was their greatest taboo, and the speech did not do much to sway the judge's decision. Soren got sentenced to spend time in a conversion camp. The government wished to eradicate her more "rebellious" and "perverted" tendencies. At the end of the episode, Riker broke Soren out of the camp. However, she no longer wished to leave. She had accepted her people's laws, and confessed to Riker she believed they were right. She had been "wrong" for thinking she was female. Soren willingly returned to the conversion camp and left Riker heartbroken.

10.2 The Character

Soren was a young character who struggled with her gender identity. She grew up in a conservative and oppressive society where all forms of gender identity had been outlawed. She identified as female, and the struggle to accept her gender and sexuality was at the core of her character. She was shy, quiet, and withdrawn. Soren seemed emotionless, but a sense of sadness was hidden behind her cold exterior. She always had doubts about the rules of her society, but she knew to keep them to herself. The sadness was caused by her ongoing

struggles with her gender identity. Her cold demeanour and body dysmorphia was reflected in her character design. Soren wore colourless robes that covered up her whole body. Her skin was grey and lifeless. The choice of a colourless outfit may have been to avoid sticking out from the rest of the J'naii. Her cold behaviour was most likely a front to avoid persecution.

(Figure 8): Soren standing up at her trial in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* Season 5, Episode 17: *The Outcast* (Scheerer, 1992).

As a child, Soren witnessed her people forcibly take a young boy to conversion therapy for speaking out about his gender. When he returned, he was a shell of his former self. He had been brainwashed into "accepting" the error of his ways. As someone who identified as female, this naturally left Soren with a lot of trauma. She feared being sent to the camps if she were to ever come out.

Soren eventually realised she had a romantic and sexual attraction to the male character Commander William Riker. She felt ashamed of her feelings. Society had taught her that romantic relationships were disgusting, perverse and forbidden. Commander Riker taught her it was okay to fall in love with someone, no matter their gender identity. Through his encouragement, she gained the confidence to be herself, eventually leading to a romantic relationship blossoming between the two. Soren's relationship with Riker made her happy and confident, but she doubted it would last. Her change in demeanour did not go unnoticed by her people, and when their relationship was discovered, she was put on trial for her "crimes".

At first, Riker tried to deflect all the blame onto himself, but in a display of confidence and self-growth, Soren stood up to the court and held a rousing speech about her gender identity. She confidently stated that she was a woman and there was nothing wrong with that.
"I am not sick for feeling this way. I do not need to be cured" - Soren.
It was a far cry from the shy and withdrawn person she used to be. Soren had been given the confidence to speak out against her oppressors and tried to take control of her own faith. Author David Greven saw this speech as a clear allegory for an oppressed gay person coming out of the closet (Greven, 2009, p 40). Despite her efforts to convince the judges, the court still sent her to a conversion camp. Bafflingly the episode ended with Soren admitting that she was "mistaken" for believed she was female. After her experience in the conversion camp, she claimed to have been "wrong" about being a woman and returned to her old shy and withdrawn self. Throwing out all her character growth.

At first, Soren's character design may have made it hard for viewers to recognise her as an important character. I believe this was done intentionally to indicate to the audience that Soren was hiding her true self. Fearing being shunned for being a woman she chose to blend into the crowd. The show made us recognise Soren as an important character through the focus it had on her storyline. Our alignment in her episode was with Soren and Commander Riker. We mostly followed their actions and developments throughout the episode. It gave us a window into what Soren truly thought of herself (Smith, 1995, p 82-83, 110-118, 142-150).

Soren's Alliance is a bit more complicated. Many queer people could most likely relate to Soren's struggle with fitting into a society that would shun her if they knew who she was. Her need to keep her gender hidden to be accepted is a narrative many queer people could ally themselves with. Soren's heartwarming coming-out story may have seemed encouraging for many LGBTQ audience members. However, her sudden shift to accepting her people's laws about gender may have served to alienate and shift the queer audience's alliance away from her. The complicated part about discussing the audience's alliance with Soren relates to this ending. The ending could potentially be polarising for many viewers. Some may stop allying themselves with Soren, while others may also relate to her experience of being forced back into the closet. Author Robin Roberts argued that the ending of the episode may have properly shown the true brainwashing horrors of the camps. Therefore, possibly making Soren a character more people could form an alliance with (Smith, 1995, p 84, 187-192) (Roberts, 1999, p 123).

Soren was a well-written, and developer character who went through a lot of growth. Her struggles with accepting her gender and sexuality is something many LGBTQ people can relate to. It is therefore baffling to see the episode end with Soren's character being reset back to default. Because of this, the episode tells a confused message about what it thinks is right or wrong about the LGBTQ community. This confused message is what the next section of the chapter will try to gain an understanding of.

10.3 The Message

The Outcast (Scheerer, 1992) has been praised for its allegorical similarities to the struggle of gay people. Soren's struggles to accept her sexuality in a society that would shun her for it, ran parallel to the real-world struggles many queer people had gone through. For decades it was illegal in most countries to be in same-sex relationships. Similarly to how the J'naii made any sort of relationship forbidden. Soren's journey to accept herself for who she was, and to come out publicly about it can be seen as an allegory for a gay person coming out of the closet. Her committing the "crime" of being female also has its real-world parallel to the prosecution of gay people which is still happening in many countries around the world today (Greven, 2009, p 39-44). A gruesome parallel to the real world is the conversion camp that Soren gets sent to. Conversion camps are a real thing that still exists in many countries. The purpose of these camps is similar to the one shown in the episode. They exist to turn homosexual people away from being gay (Schindler, 2016).

According to several people involved in the episode's production, these real-world parallels were intentional. The writer of the episode, Jeri Taylor, was an executive producer on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-1994). She was passionate about writing a queer-centred story for the show. Even though she was not gay, she felt it was important to spread a possessive message about acceptance and tolerance towards people of all genders and sexualities. She has been quoted saying "Although I am not gay, I am female, and I know some of the feelings of what it is like being judged on a basis other than who I am" (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 236-237).

Author Robin Roberts argues in her book *Sexual Generations: Star Trek the Next Generation and Gender* (1999) that Soren's prosecution was similar to what was happening in the US military at the time. In the '90s the US Army started a "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding people's sexuality. It was supposed to prevent gay people from being banned from the US

military. However, the policy simply declared that the Army would no longer ask people about their sexuality, in exchange for queer people not talking about it at all. If they were to be revealed as homosexuals they could be kicked out of the military. In other words, the policy allowed gay people to join the army if they kept their sexuality hidden (Roberts, 1999, p 122-124) (Pruitt, 2018).

Roberts also argued that Soren staying in the closet to fit into society directly paralleled what gay people had to do in the US military. When a gay person got expelled from the US Army due to their sexuality, they were often put on trial to be discharged. This is similar to Soren's trial for her gender. Historically gay people were often put on trial for their sexuality, and many doctors in the 40s and 50s classified being gay as a mental illness. Many gay men and women were sent to asylums and correctional facilities for the "crime" of being queer. The world view of the J'naii in the episode was similar. They saw any form of gender or sexuality as a mental disease. They sent many people to correctional facilities to "cure" them of their "illness" (Roberts, 1999, p 122-124) (Pruitt, 2018). The line "I am not sick for feeling this way. I do not need to be cured" from Soren's speech at the trial makes this connection explicitly clear. They saw her sexuality as an illness, but it was not.

Soren also functioned as an allegory for trans people. She wishes to transition into a different gender. She was born into a body that did not belong to her. The only way to take ownership of her body was to transition into the woman she was always meant to be. It was the only way for her to be happy and comfortable in her own skin. Soren's shyness may have come from the discomfort of her body image. The openness Soren had at the trial showcased a newfound confidence which proved she finally felt comfortable with herself (Schindler, 2016).

The episode has been praised for its pro-gay message, but it has also been heavily criticised for sending mixed messages. For most of its runtime, it seems to spread a positive message about accepting your sexuality no matter what society may think of it. However, Soren eventually accepted the "error" of her ways. She conformed to her societal expectations of not being open about her gender. This can make it seem like the episode attempted to convey a problematic message that implied they thought gay people should stay in the closet. If this interpretation of the message were to be believed, the episode also would send a pro-conversion camp message. Because Soren believed her gender identity and attraction to Riker was "wrong" after her "therapy" (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995, p 255-256) (Schindler, 2016).

On the contrary, it has been argued that the tragic ending did not endorse conversion camps. It showcased their inhumane nature. When Riker attempted to rescue Soren, she acted robotic and soulless. They had removed her individuality. By doing this the episode could potentially have hinted at the monstrous horrors of the camps. Robin Roberts believed Commander Riker's sadness for Soren rejoining her conservative community, could have been a metaphor for the pain gay people had to endure by staying in the closet (Robins, 1999, p 123).

Some have expressed a concern that the episode was only made to get a gay episode out of the way. If the producers ever got criticised for not having LGBTQ representation in the show they could always point to this episode. It has become known as the "gay episode", but it did not do much to further queer representation in Star Trek. *The Outcast* was the first and last episode in TNG to tackle gay rights. The show has been criticised for not daring to include any human queer characters. By only using alien species like the J'naii and the Trill the show ran the risk of framing these issues as "alien" or "fictional" (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995, p 238) (Roberts, 1999 p 118, 121-123). Eve Ng argued in her essay about *Queer Production Studies* that many LGBTQ characters were not made to appeal to the queer audience, but rather to fill a quota, and make the show feel more "Mature" (Ng, 2021, p 3-4). This seems to match with peoples theories of *The Outcast* only being made to fill a quota.

The Outcast attempted to tell a progressive story about accepting your sexuality. It succeeded in many ways but also fell short in some regards. It has been criticised for not committing to its message. Soren's casting could be seen as especially problematic. She was played by the female actress Melinda Culea. Many believed Soren should have been played by a man. It would have been a big step forward for the gay rights movement if Commander Riker fell in love with a masculine character. Casting a man in the role also would have strengthened the episode's pro-trans message. Many of the episode's faults can be blamed on the producers meddling with the script and casting (Robins, 1999, p 118) (Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995, 285).

10.4 Studio Meddling

Many of *The Outcast*'s more problematic elements can be blamed on the show's producers. The episode was written by the female producer Jeri Taylor. She has stated that as a woman she felt it was important to spread a message of acceptance of who you are. Taylor was not gay, but she said she knew "the feeling of being judged on a basis other than what and who you are" (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 237). Despite being a producer on the show Taylor did

not get to do everything she originally wanted with the episode. Her male co-producers Brannon Braga and Rick Berman interfered with many of her plans. As men they undermined Talor's power, which fittingly proved the importance of the episode's message of acceptance and equality.

Brannon Braga and Rick Berman have expressed their pride for the episode. They have also claimed that many attempts before this had been made to include LGBTQ characters in the show (Altman & Gross, 2016, p 236-237, 276). In later years Brannon Braga has regretted the lack of gay characters in his Star Trek shows. He claimed they feared alienating their conservative fans by adding a gay character to the crew. He did defend his shows for at least metaphorically tackling gay rights in several episodes (Pascale, 2011).

Jeri Talor originally wanted to hire a man to play the role of Soren. It is unknown whether Soren still would have identified as a woman. Had this been the case it could have been a huge step forward for trans representation. Even if they chose to make the character a man it would have strengthened the pro-gay message that the episode tried to convey. It featured a romance between the male Commander William Riker and the female Soren. If she was played by a man, it would have made the episode's message much clearer. Jonathan Frakes, who played Commander Riker, wanted them to cast a man in the role. He has always been vocal about his disappointment in their decision not to. Despite not being gay, he was willing to kiss a man, to strengthen the episode's pro-LGBTQ message. Frakes has always been a supporter of the LGBTQ community. However, Brannon Braga and Rick Berman felt their audience were not ready to see two men kiss (Bullard, 2022) (Pascale, 2011) (Gross & Altman, 1995, p 240).

It is also important to note that the blame for problems with the episode cannot be solely put on Berman and Braga. Jeri Taylor may have written the episode with the best of intentions, but she was not gay herself and could not possibly have known what the queer experience truly felt like. Soren could have been less problematic had a gay person written her, or if they had sought guidance from an LGBTQ individual. A queer person may have noticed the problematic nature of the ending and lobbied to change it. As Eve Ng stated to truly get proper LGBTQ representation in film and TV the industry must hire queer people. A queer person can offer up a different perspective from the straight staff. Witch could make the represent the LGBTQ community has on screen more accurate (Ng, 2021, p 1, 5-6).

In conclusion, *The Outcast* may be a bit problematic at points, but at its core, it tried to convey a message about acceptance of other's sexuality. The writer wrote the story with the best of intentions, but the message got lost with its seemingly pro-conversion camp ending. The casting of Soren further served to distance the episode from its intended message. By casting a woman, the episode weakened its pro-LGBTQ narrative by presenting the romance through a hetero relationship. Had Soren been a man, and the ending been different, the episode could have potentially been a stepping stone for more gay representation. As it stands, it hid its message under alien metaphors that turned gay people into "otherworldly" creatures.

11 Conclusion

In conclusion, Star Trek has always strived to be progressive. Conservative fans have complained about the "political correctness" of modern Star Trek. This criticism is completely unfounded. Undoubtedly, the franchise has always leaned politically to the left. From Gene Roddenberry's humble beginnings as a black rights activist when making the *Lieutenant* (1963-1964). To the gay couple in *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017-2024), the franchise has many examples of its progressiveness.

The series' origin lies in liberal ideals of a progressive future without racism, sexism, homophobia, hunger, poverty, and war. From its beginning, it had a diverse cast of characters of all races and genders. Several storylines from the original series and its sequel shows tackled these subjects in a progressive manner.

Unfortunately, the series often fell short of its progressive expectations. Most of the production staff had historically been white straight men despite its diverse cast of characters. This led to the franchise often being predominantly influenced by the white experience. Despite starting the series in the hopes of bettering race relations in America, Roddenberry was subconsciously influenced by his own white biases. By not seeking the perspective of actual minorities it actively hurt his own message.

The same can also be said for his depiction of women. Roddenberry wished to give women a position of power but was prevented by the studio from making a woman the second in command. His fight for women's rights was weakened by the sexualized short-skirted outfits the women in his show were forced to wear. He was also originally quite opposed to featuring any gay characters in his shows.

Roddenberry cannot entirely be blamed for all of Star Trek's problems. Studio meddling prevented him from tackling many of the racial themes he wanted. His original show *The Lieutenant* (1963-1964) was cancelled for tackling the ongoing race riots in America at the time. This forced him to take a more subtle approach to his message of racial equality. Roddenberry was also originally planning to have a woman as the second in command on the ship, but the studio once again forced him to let go of this decision. His previously mentioned aversion to queer characters had also changed by the 1980s.

The three characters analysed in this thesis were Seven of Nine, Chakotay, and Soren. They represented sexism, racism, and homophobia. The characters were written in the 90s, shortly after Gene Roddenberry's death. He did not influence the creation of these characters. The problematic nature of the characters can mostly be blamed on the interference of the straight white producers Brannon Braga and Rick Berman.

During their tenure as producers, Star Trek had some of the most progressive storylines in the franchise. However, this was mostly due to the writers' persistence on pushing the progressiveness of the series. Berman and Braga often held the writers back from doing many of the things they wanted to do. This came from a lack of care for diversity, but also out of fear of backlash from the fans.

Chakotay's stereotypical Native American nature came as a direct result of their lack of care for diversity. Their desire to add sex appeal to *Star Trek Voyager* (1995-2001) led to the creation of Seven of Nine's skintight outfit, and their fear of backlash influenced the controversial ending of *The Outcast* (Scheerer, 1992).

Having two straight white men in charge of the franchise hindered its potential for progressiveness, but the writers kept pushing the boundaries for what progressive stories could be told in the series. Many of these writers were helped by the liberal female producer Jeri Taylor. She naturally held a lot of power over the franchise. Unfortunately, she was barely involved with *Voyager*, and by the time *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005) rolled around she was no longer involved. Taylor leaving the production staff profoundly influenced the series' depiction of women. Seven of Nine from *Voyager* and T'pol from *Enterprise* were both treated like sex objects.

In recent years Star Trek has become better at creating well-rounded and inclusive characters. In huge part due to a bigger crew of diverse writers, producers, and actors. It is however important to remember that Star Trek has always strived to be progressive and inclusive. Unfortunately, it has sometimes failed to live up to its liberal ideals. It's a franchise that has always had progressive roots but has been dragged down by studio mandates and meddling producers. By keeping them accountable for their actions, we may hopefully prevent these things from happening again.

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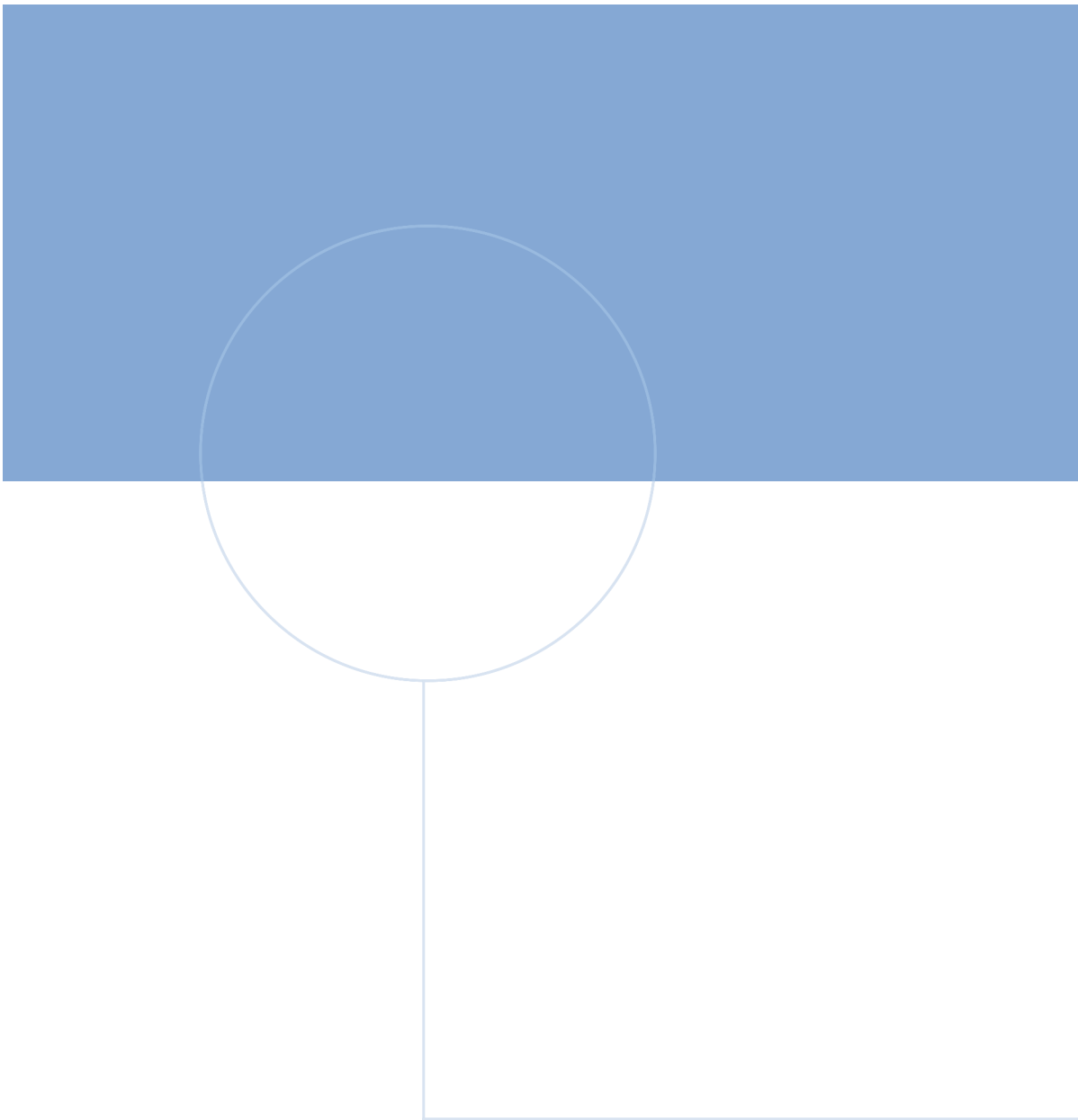

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