SUPERHEROINES AND STEREOTYPES

A QUEER POSTFEMINIST RESEARCH INTO THE SERIES OF ARROWVERSE

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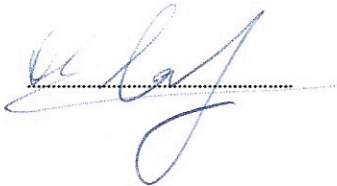
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Abstract

Since the new millennium, there has been an enormous increase in audio-visual adaptations of superhero comic books (Garcia-Escriva, 2018). Not only the amount of audio-visual adaptations has increased, but also the number of female superheroes that are represented (Curtis & Cardo, 2018). Women in superhero movies tend to be depicted in a stereotyped and sexualized manner which also might influence how the audience perceives gender (Pennel and Behm-Morawitz, 2015). Research within feminist media studies mainly focuses on the under- and misrepresentation of gender in popular culture in general but research surrounding the representation of gender from a queer postfeminist and intersectional perspective within the superhero genre is rare. Therefore, this research aims to analyse the representation of female superheroes that assume a leading role in the series of *Arrowverse* from a queer postfeminist, intersectional perspective. This research can be situated within the critical paradigm and consists of a qualitative, ideological and formal textual analysis of a selection of episodes and sequences of several *Arrowverse* series. The literature review reveals that third wave feminism and especially queer postfeminism are important discourses to study popular culture, and more specifically, the superhero genre. On the one hand, superheroes tend to exaggerate female sexuality to stress that women can be female and powerful. On the other hand, the stability of gender categories is increasingly challenged and undermined (Tate, 2008). Moreover, more non-heterosexual superheroines and superheroines of colour are represented in various ways. We can conclude that therefore, gendered identities are both affirmed and challenged in contemporary comics and, consequently, the superhero genre is full of tensions and contradictions (Gibson, 2015). The textual analysis of the series seems to confirm this finding and reveals that predominantly positive representations on the level of gender, sexuality, and race in relation to a queer postfeminist framework were encountered and that the superhero series of the *Arrowverse* that were analysed try to provide a space for reimagining and thus attempting to change society towards a more inclusive and equal environment (Stabile, 2009), but that there are still improvements possible, especially in the case of *Arrow,* on the level of sexuality and race*.*

1. Introduction

The United States and more specifically Hollywood play an important role in the dissemination of popular culture globally (Erigha, 2015). However, Erigha (2015) states that especially white men have the privilege of creating the narratives and myths that circulate in Hollywood. Narratives created by women and racial/LGBTQ+ minorities are less prominently present or even non-existent. Research into the cultural production of Hollywood concludes that this problematic trend results in limited opportunities for women and minorities. This, in turn, results in more stereotypes and a lack of diversity in movies and series (Erigha, 2015). Women and minorities are systematically excluded or only represented in minor roles or roles characterized by traditional stereotypes. These stereotypes are important for the social construction of reality by the greater public (Eschholz, Bufkin & Long, 2002).

This is also the case when it comes to the representation of women as superheroes. In the 1930s, superhero comic books became immensely popular, this popularity resulted in the first audio-visual adaptation into the superhero movie 'Superman' in Hollywood in 1978. Since the beginning of the new millennium, there has been an enormous increase in the amount of audio-visual adaptations of superhero comics in the United States (Garcia-Escriva, 2018). On top of that, more and more female superheroes are represented in comic books (Curtis & Cardo, 2018) and this trend also starts to become increasingly prominent in movies and series about superheroes.

However, a study of Pennel and Behm-Morawitz (2015) states that women in superhero movies are often portrayed in a stereotypical and sexualized manner and that this influences the way women perceive gender. Watching aggressive and attractive female protagonists results in stereotypical masculine and feminine gender role expectations for women (Taylor & Setters, 2011). Despite these findings and the popularity of the genre, research into the representation of female superheroes in movies and series and its underlaying ideology is rare. In addition, few studies take a queer postfeminist and/or intersectional perspective.

Queer postfeminism is a framework that acknowledges that being feminine or being portrayed in a sexual manner is not necessarily stereotypical and can be empowering but also does not exclude that other, non-feminine gender performances can be empowering or stereotypical. Therefore, the subject that is analysed must always be studied on an individual level with attention for the context in which the representation

occurs (Gerhard, 2005). The term 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1990) is also crucial for this research and refers to the idea that identity consists of more than only gender. Representation of women can vary a great amount because of differences on other axes of the identity including race and sexuality which intersect with gender. This research, therefore, focuses on the representation of female superheroes in series according to a queer postfeminist framework and takes into account the intersectionality of gender with race and sexuality.

As a result, this research proposes an analysis of the representation of female superheroes that assume a central role in *Arrowverse*, an American media franchise of The CW, an American television network, centred around several audio-visual adaptations of the superhero comics of DC Comics. *Arrowverse* is well known for its diversity in characters, based on the representation of gender as well as the representation of race and sexuality (Holloway, 2017; Kelly, 2018), but scientific research that confirms this does not yet exist.

The objective of this paper is to formulate an answer for the main research question: 'How are female superheroes, that assume a central role in the live-action series of *Arrowverse* (series of The CW based on DC Comics, including *Arrow*; *The Flash*; *Supergirl*; *Legends of Tomorrow* and *Batwoman*), represented from an intersectional perspective?' The sub-question that must help answer the main question is: 'Do these series reiterate and/or resist queer postfeminist ideas from an intersectional perspective?'

These questions will be answered by conducting a qualitative textual analysis (both formal and ideological) of the series that were previously mentioned. This research is situated within the critical paradigm and the field of feminist media studies and starts with an extensive literature review of the most relevant authors and thinkers within this field to provide a theoretical framework that will serve as the foundation of this research. Subsequently, the research design is further explained, and a textual analysis is conducted of the series of the shared fictional universe *Arrowverse*. These series include, in chronological order of release, *Arrow* (2012); *The Flash* (2014); *Supergirl* (2015); *Legends of Tomorrow* (2016) and *Batwoman* (2019). This research concludes with a discussion of the results.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Situating Feminist Media Studies

Feminist media studies serve as the foundational framework for this research surrounding gender stereotypes. According to Longman (2013), researchers within this field are particularly interested in the representation of gender in and surrounding media and are concerned with researching how culture and education influence the construction of gender and gender inequalities. Gender, in this context, is understood to be a construct, something that is learned through socialization and interaction, thus, not biologically determined. Media and other social institutions including education are important in developing a gender identity and perceptions surrounding gender in society. Feminist studies inform feminist media studies, but whereas feminist studies focus on gender in various aspects of society, feminist media studies are mainly concerned with studying how media produce, reproduce or possibly challenge gender stereotypes and inequalities (Longman, 2013).

Feminist activism has always been interwoven with feminist studies and consequently also with feminist media studies. As a result, research concerning genders is most of the times inherently political. The idea that gender-based discrimination and inequalities are not a consequence of biology but is a construct and can change, forms the foundation for feminist activism (Longman, 2013). However, feminism is rather diverse, as three major feminist waves can be distinguished with the beginning of the twentieth century as a starting point. Second wave or liberal feminism (1960-1990) and third wave, post or popular feminism (1990-…) are the most relevant for this research as feminist media studies emerged in parallel with these waves (Longman, 2013). Of course, feminism is much more diverse and goes beyond simply studying gender in media, but as this is not the focus of this research, this will not be further discussed.

The first feminist wave (1900-1960) was mainly a movement against inequality and discrimination of women. Women in Europe and North America protested the unequal treatment of women and aimed at increasing specific women's rights such as receiving the right to vote (Longman, 2013). As previously mentioned, second and third wave feminism are the most important feminist waves for this research, therefore, this paper will not further elaborate on first wave feminism. According to Gill (2007), second wave feminists experienced the emergence of traditional media including television. Since then, the world

has only become more saturated with media, information and communication technologies (Gill, 2007). The first research of gender in media was mainly concerned with the stereotypical and underrepresentation of women in media. Gill (2007) states that, according to a transmission model of media, media are agents of social control that transfer stereotypical and ideological values about women and femininity. The author goes on to say that media do not reflect reality but are actively involved in constructing that reality (Gill, 2007). Consequently, masculinity and femininity are not pre-existing categories but are actively produced and reproduced by media. Gender is an ongoing discursive construction rather than a fixed position (Gill, 2007). Liberal (second wave) feminists considered women's lives as distorted by these gender stereotypes and restrictive roles. Therefore, these had to be combated to help women move into previously male-dominated domains. Gauntlett (2008) states that mass media used to be very stereotypical: a much greater quantity of men was shown, and these were in most cases also portrayed as being more active, decisive, courageous, intelligent and resourceful compared to women. There were some cases in which females were portrayed as clever, brave and challenging but these remained exceptions to the norm (Gauntlett, 2008).

Society, representations and gender, in general, have evolved since the 1970s. Not only media representations of gender have changed but also the feminist ideas that are used to understand and critique them (Gill, 2007). Since the 1970s feminist media scholarship has become increasingly diverse and heterogeneous and also started to acknowledge the role of the audience in interpreting media texts (Gill, 2007). However, this does not diminish the importance of good and non-stereotypical representations. Gill (2007) states that in the context of the 1960s and 1970s, in which women were systematically trivialized, condemned and symbolically annihilated in media, the call for more positive images made perfect sense (Gill, 2007). According to the author, such a positive image may include one where women are not shown as unintelligent, narcissistic and dependent and also requires more diversity (Gill, 2007). Nevertheless, scholars have a hard time agreeing on what a positive representation actually entails. The more diverse feminist media studies become, the harder it is to answer this question.

In the 1990s, second wave feminism was heavily criticised for its false universalism. According to third wave feminists, the previous wave started from the experience of a group of privileged, First World, middle-class, white, heterosexual women who considered their experiences of womanhood as universally shared (Gill, 2007). Crenshaw (1990) coined the term 'intersectionality' to stress the idea that the identity of a person consists of different axes, which can influence how a person experiences discrimination. Consequently, the experiences of white, straight, middle-class women with discrimination are different from, for example, the

experiences of non-white and non-heterosexual women (Crenshaw, 1990). This was not taken into account in second wave feminism so third-wave feminism can be considered as a solution for this blind spot. Instead of fighting for the rights of a homogenous group of women, feminist activism has become much more diverse and takes into account that all women possibly experience discrimination differently. Intersectionality theory has gained more importance in feminist media studies and consequently, new theories concerning gender have emerged, including queer postfeminism, which is used to conduct this research and thus will be further discussed in the next paragraphs.

2.1.2 Queer Postfeminism

According to Gauntlett (2008), a lot has changed in the last twenty or thirty years. Whereas popular media were often considered as trying to push people back into traditional categories and resist social change, today they can be seen as a force for change (Gauntlett, 2008). As Gauntlett (2008) states:

'The traditional images of women as housewives or low-status workers were kick-boxed out of the picture by the feisty, successful 'girl power' icons of the late 1990s, and since then, images of confident, successful and assertive women have seemed entirely normal. Meanwhile, the masculine ideals of absolute toughness, stubborn self-reliance and emotional silence have been shaken by a new emphasis on men's emotions, need for advice and the problems of masculinity'.

The author goes on to say that traditional gender categories are of course not gone, but across the general media landscape change is occurring and more space is created for a greater diversity of identities (Gauntlett, 2008). These trends can also be linked to the increase in female superheroes in popular culture.

To study these new trends surrounding gender in media and more specifically the representation of female superheroes in popular culture, queer postfeminism can be considered a valuable framework. To fully understand the meaning of queer postfeminism one must first acquire an understanding of the two theories that form the basis of queer postfeminism: queer theory and postfeminism, therefore, the following paragraphs will first elaborate on these two theories. These paragraphs will be followed by a short elaboration on intersectionality theory as for this paper this theory is considered the third most important theory that, combined with postfeminism and queer theory, will form the basis of this research.

Postfeminism is a well-known framework within feminist media studies for analysing popular culture and emphasises the changes previously mentioned. A great amount of literature is available on this topic.

However, scholars often do not agree on how to interpret postfeminism which makes it difficult to apply the concept in actual research. The next paragraphs will elaborate on the various possibilities of interpreting postfeminism in relation to the research of several authors.

Within feminist media studies, three main interpretations of postfeminism can be distinguished. Adriaens & Van Bauwel (2014, p. 175) state that 'The prefix 'post' in the word 'postfeminism' causes a lot of discussions'. They state that whereas some authors consider postfeminism as after feminism or anti-feminism, other authors interpret it as related to feminism to stress how the feminist discourse is evolving (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). A third possible interpretation is to consider postfeminism as a backlash against feminism, a discourse that gets rid of feminism all together (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). However, the interpretations of postfeminism as anti-feminism and as a backlash against feminism seem to have similar qualities, therefore these will be considered as one and the same for this paper.

Postfeminism as anti-feminism or a backlash against feminism is mainly supported by authors including Faludi (1991) and McRobbie (2004). Faludi (1991) and McRobbie (2004) argue that postfeminism is a discourse that undermines feminism to establish a new gender regime. According to the authors, this is a result of the conviction that equality is achieved in contemporary society because of the political activism of second-wave feminists, hence feminism is no longer needed and therefore being feminist is considered mutually exclusive with being successful. McRobbie (2004) goes on to say that within such a discourse female individualisation and reflexive modernisation are stressed, which both refer to the increasing freedom of choice for young women. These women can and are also expected to make their own choices but are consequently also responsible for their own failure, which gives rise to new anxieties including loneliness, the stigma of remaining single and the uncertainties of not finding a good partner, thus also the fear of missing the chance of having children. McRobbie (2004) states that as a consequence, women are required to be self-monitoring subjects that endlessly reflect as they are confronted with the burden of self-management.

Other authors including Modleski (2014), Greer (2014) and Munford (2004) consider postfeminism as a smart marketing trick to increase sales by using representations of empowered women. According to Modleski (2014), postfeminism depoliticizes and marginalizes political goals and as such brings us back to a pre-feminist world. The authors previously mentioned have a rather negative interpretation of postfeminism as 'after feminism' or even as a backlash against feminism. This heavily contrasts with the

arguments of the following authors, who believe that postfeminism refers to a new kind of feminism. This will be further explored in the next paragraph.

In contrast to the previous interpretations of postfeminism, Brooks (2006), Brunsdon (1993), Moseley and Hollows (2006), Lotz (2001), Braithwaite (2002) and Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) advocate seeing postfeminism as a new way of understanding feminism or 'feminism evolving'. According to Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014), postfeminism must be understood in relation to discourses of capitalism and neoliberalism and considered as an individual struggle rather than a political one. As stated by Adriaens and van Bauwel (2014, p. 179) 'Postfeminism is a discourse that gives women the opportunity to be feminine, attractive, and a feminist at the same time. It is a new form of empowerment, adjusted to the actual societal context'. Postfeminism must be considered as a pluralistic and contradictory form of feminism (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). The next paragraphs will mainly elaborate on the list of fundaments provided by Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) as their paper serves as a crucial foundational work to understand postfeminism. They unite different interpretations of postfeminism by various scholars and operationalize these interpretations into a list of fundaments which can be used for actual research.

Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) give an overview of the fundaments of postfeminism according to different scholars starting with consumer culture which is a tool to achieve power, pleasure and self-esteem. Consuming allows women to develop an identity and receive societal acceptation, shopping is perceived as fun and relaxing and even sex is considered as something that can be consumed. Fashion is also an important fundament of postfeminism as it refers to a cultural interpretation of gender difference. Fashion is necessary for constructing a female subjectivity and is considered as a performative process. Fashion can be a symbol of power and a source of pleasure; this is often called fashion feminism (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014).

Another fundament is (sexual) pleasure which refers to the fundamental right of sexual freedom, meaning that women are able to initiate and decline sexual encounters without any negative consequences and that female orgasms, masturbation and sex toys are no longer perceived as taboo. Women are allowed to experiment with different kinds of sexuality without being judged for certain sexual behaviours. Women use sexuality as a powerful tool to achieve their goals and this does not only apply to heterosexual women but also applies to lesbians and bisexuals (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014).

Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) go on to say that individual choice is highly valued in postfeminism, as individual rights are considered more valuable than those of the community. Women are allowed to be happy with themselves, so self-esteem is considered important and women are also expected to make their own choices which are respected by others. Independence in this context is crucial: women are expected to be autonomous and financially independent. This idea forms a paradox with retreatism, which is a concept to describe the process in which successful and highly educated women decide to stop working and become a housewife to show their power. Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014) link this to postfeminist homemaking or hyper domesticity which refers to a traditional lifestyle centralised around a female homemaker-figure, implying an embedded paradox which is characteristic for postfeminism (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014).

Subsequently, the authors state that within postfeminism there is also a renewed focus on the female body in which women strive for a better, slimmer and fitter body. Age is considered a threat and plastic surgery is a possibility to counter this threat which is not exclusively for women but also available for men. Humour is often used to make taboo subjects more acceptable and discussable; techniques include manipulation of the flexibility of language and playing with different narrative forms with the objective of creating new associations. Patriarchal notions of femininity can be broken by the use of humour (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014).

Hybridism is the eight fundament mentioned by Adriaens & Van Bauwel (2014) and refers to the idea that everyone has a multiplex of identities which can contradict and stresses the flexibility of an identity and the possibility of change. According to the authors, androgyny is often linked to this concept and refers to the blurring of boundaries between masculinity and femininity because people are capable of taking up feminine and masculine traits at the same time. This can be done at the level of style and physical appearance but also on the level of the role a person takes on. This process addresses the fact that people cannot be divided into binary categories and can be considered as genderbending in which transvestism is considered as an extreme form. The last fundament the authors mention is 'technology'. Women are perceived as powerful and successful if they succeed in acquiring knowledge about new communication technologies and media (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014).

Another scholar, Lotz (2001, p. 115-116), distinguishes four different attributes of postfeminism that can be considered complementary to the previously listed fundaments : 'Narratives that explore the diverse

relations to power women inhabit' (postfeminist shows represent complex female characters that differ from each other and take into account all possible axes of the identity that influence female experiences and social opportunities), 'depictions of varied feminist solutions and loose organizations of activism' (women with multiple defined identities require new strategies for activism as a result of different relations to power), 'narratives that deconstruct binary categories of gender and sexuality, instead of viewing these categories as flexible and indistinct' (postfeminism draws on queer theory and authors such as Judith Butler to illustrate how culturally created categories including woman, man, heterosexual and homosexual can be contested by transgendered, transsexual and bisexual characters) and 'the way situations illustrating the contemporary struggles faced by women and feminists are raised and examined within series' (such as marriage, divorce, the biological clock and finding a husband).

Whereas authors including Adriaens & Van Bauwel (2014) have a rather positive evaluation of postfeminism, Moseley & Read (2002) do not explicitly evaluate the framework but mainly elaborate on the ideas of Dow, which includes the statement that postfeminism deconstructs the boundaries between the private and the public and between being feminist and being feminine. According to Moseley and Read (2002), Dow considers this subversive for stereotyped representations of feminism and for the gendered division between public and private. Dow also claims that postfeminism rejects the monolithic definition of femininity and feminism and creates various opportunities for identification (Moseley & Read, 2002). According to Moseley & Read (2002) this translates in popular culture in terms of body type (soft, vulnerable, girly, long curly hair), attitude and lifestyle (softly spoken, clean living, healthy, power dressing in function of oneself) but also through feminine aesthetics (glossy, special effects, camera angle, mise-en-scène, voice-over and music). However, the authors state that these aspects can be recuperated by the patriarchy and thus can be possibly stripped of their emancipatory potential (Moseley & Read, 2002).

These stands can be used when studying popular culture within the field of feminist media studies and can be considered complementary. When using a postfeminist framework within research, postfeminism should be considered as empowering and having emancipatory potential but accompanying rising anxieties – as elaborated on by McRobbie (2004) - should also be taken into account. Postfeminism is contradictory and complex and should always be interpreted within the specific context in which popular culture is analysed.

Besides postfeminism, queer theory serves as a relevant theoretical framework to study gender. In 1990 Judith Butler stated that not only gender but also sex is a construct. Gender is not fixed and can be performed in various ways just as the body can be interpreted in different ways. Her concept performativity refers to the idea that femininity and masculinity are not performed because they are part of our gender identity, but they become part of our gender identity because they are performed. Not only gender can be performed but all axes of our identity require a certain performance including race and sexual orientation (Butler, 1990, 2004).

These formations may have been learned but can also be broken and challenged. Gauntlett (2008) states that mass media can spread non-traditional images and in that way challenge traditional notions of gender, race and sexual orientation that constrain people in how they can behave, dress and perform in society (Gauntlett, 2008).

Queer theory mainly focuses on subverting traditional gender identities and emphasizing other possible identities. Since the 1990s scales are used to interpret sexual identity. According to Shively and De Cecco (1993), a sexual identity consists of biological sex, gender identity, social sex role and sexual orientation. These parts of the identity are not bipolar but can be seen as a continuum (in which the extremes are feminine and masculine, heterosexual and homosexual but in which there is room for diversity in terms of bisexual, androgyne and non-binary identities). Consequently, within this theory, not only gender diversity but also diversity in sexual orientations is stressed and this assumption can be expanded to every axe of the identity that requires a certain performance. Thus, inequalities can be challenged by breaking traditional expectations as well as by using these traditional expectations for your own advantage.

This vision of gender can be combined with the framework of postfeminism. Gerhard (2005) gives this combination the name 'queer postfeminism' and brings us to the most crucial framework for this research. According to the author, this term refers to women benefiting from the social and cultural achievements of second wave feminism and is related to the exploration of women's sexual equality. Gerhard (2005, p. 37) states that 'Women, if they so choose, can work, talk and have sex "like men" while still maintaining all the privileges associated with being an attractive woman'. Gerhard (2005) claims that postfeminism can be used complementary with the narrative possibilities offered by queerness which include attempts to neutralise and normalise binaries of sexuality and gender (Gerhard, 2005). This paper follows Gerhard's (2005) definition of queer postfeminism and interprets queer postfeminism as a framework that

acknowledges that being feminine or being portrayed in a sexual manner is not necessarily stereotypical and can be empowering but also does not exclude that other, non-feminine gender performances can be empowering or stereotypical. Therefore, the subject that is analysed must always be studied on an individual level with attention for the context in which the representation occurs.

Besides postfeminism and queer theory, combined in queer postfeminism, intersectionality theory should also be considered when studying gender. As previously mentioned, third wave feminism arose as a critique of second wave feminism for not acknowledging the different axes of womanhood and focusing too much on one kind of women: white, heterosexual, middle-class women. Intersectionality is a term coined by Crenshaw (1990) and is now frequently used to study gender. As Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008, p. 5) state: *'In the traditional sense, intersectionality theory avoids essentializing a single analytical category of identity by attending to other interlocking categories. In a non-traditional way, intersectionality enables us to stretch our thinking about gender and feminism to include the impact of context and to pay attention to interlocking oppressions and privileges across various contexts.'*

Women are thus considered to have multiple identities, as a consequence, how women face oppression is dependent on the context and the different axes of their identity. Women of colour, as an example, would face different kinds of oppressions than white women depending on the context. Therefore, when studying gender, scholars should always take into account the individuality and the context of the women they study rather than embedding research in a universal collective experience as 'woman' (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008; Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012). Scholars that use an intersectional approach to study gender are in most cases likely to use the term 'feminisms' instead of 'feminism' as this acknowledges the diversity in the experience of gender. What can be considered relevant from this short elaboration on intersectionality theory is that parallel to gender other subfields must also be taken into account in research surrounding gender if the diversity of experiences with oppression of different women is to be understood. Such subfields can include ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion (Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012). However, the focus of this paper will mainly be gender in combination with the subfields race and sexual orientation due to the limitations of the units of analysis and as a consequence, this paper will also only elaborate on the two previously mentioned subfields. This choice will be further motivated in the research design.

Queer postfeminism is thus a useful framework to study representations of gender in popular culture and will be applied (in combination with intersectionality theory, hence the focus on race and sexual orientation) in this research surrounding the representations of superheroines as Tate (2008) states that female superheroes tend to exaggerate female sexuality to emphasize the combination between women and power. According to the author, these superheroines stress that they are strong and are capable of saving themselves and thus can be a hero as well as female. This stresses that the masculine is not always controlling (referring to the male gaze of Sara Mulvey) and the feminine is not always passive. The author goes on to say that male and female attributes, that were previously considered as entirely separate, are today combined. The stability of gender categories is increasingly challenged and undermined. However, when women exhibit male attributes, counterbalancing occurs by stressing other female attributes (Tate, 2008). Through this process, men try to re-establish hegemonic masculinity and the accompanying dominant position that is threatened to be subverted by strong and powerful women. According to Foucault's interpretation of power, women can challenge the dominant power, but the dominant group will try to resist this attempt (Beritela, 2007). Therefore, gendered identities are both affirmed and challenged in contemporary comics and, consequently, the superhero genre is full of tensions and contradictions (Gibson, 2015). The next paragraphs will further elaborate on the representation of gender in the superhero genre.

2.2   Superheroines and Stereotypes

According to McCallister et al. (2006), comic books and comic book-based films have been very popular since the 1930s, but even more today. Due to new technology, superhero films and series have become a major success for Hollywood movie studios. Meslow (2012) states that audio-visual adaptations of comic books are immensely successful because the comic books themselves provide an extensive fan base. Parallel with the increasing success of comic books (adaptations), feminist activism continues to grow and evolve. Yet female superheroes are underrepresented and, in most cases, do not assume a central role in comic book storylines. Only storylines surrounding Wonder Woman were frequently published in the last 40 years (Palmer, 2005).

In the last few years, there has been an increase in primary female characters in comic books (Palmer, 2005). Palmer (2005) states, that whereas the comic book market has traditionally been dominated by a male audience and male superheroes, emerging strong female superheroes further inspire feminist

activism. These superheroes also set the standard for strong female characters in other contexts of popular culture and entertainment. According to Palmer (2005), research surrounding female superheroes is ambiguous: while some authors praise the emancipatory potential of these characters, others associate sexual objectivation and victimization with these heroic women (Palmer, 2005). As previously stated, gender representation in popular culture can have a great influence on real-world perceptions. Media can impact beliefs and expectations surrounding gender roles (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008, 2009). Yet, women are underrepresented (Carroll, 1990; Erigha, 2015) and due to the novelty of female superhero characters, the interest of audiences for these characters is particularly high (Musen & Treusman, 1990). As a consequence, an analysis of the representation of these female superheroes in contemporary popular culture can be considered valuable.

Women in the superhero genre are under- and misrepresented. Signorielli (2011) states that two-thirds of the superhero characters consist of muscular males and one-third of average sized females. The representation of strong female characters in comics has always been shaped by the preconceptions of masculine creators of how women should behave (Robbins, 1996). As Robbins (1996) states, their excuse for not adding strong female characters is that women do not read comics. As a consequence, the few representations of superheroines are in most cases highly stereotypical. Sadri (2014) claims that superhero comics can be considered as consisting of a monomythical structure through which patriarchal structures are continuously disseminated and reinforced. As a consequence, Sadri (2014) concludes that female superheroes continue to struggle to achieve some sort of parity of visibility, agency and fair treatment with their male counterparts. Their appearance is crucial in verifying and identifying their sexuality and is thus often exaggerated into extremes (Demarest, 2010). The following paragraphs will list some common stereotypes and characteristics that occur in the superhero genre. This paper argues, from a queer postfeminist perspective, that these stereotypes do not necessarily need to be interpreted as negative but can also be empowering depending on the context in which they appear and the way in which they are reimagined in contemporary popular culture.

2.2.1 Roles, Physical Appearance and Clothing

Robbins (1996) provides us with a detailed history of female superheroes in comic books from the 1940s until the 1990s. She states that, traditionally, comic book heroines are very short-lived and serve as sidekicks for the male superhero, in most cases their mere role is being 'the girlfriend' that must be rescued

by this male hero (Robbins, 1996). Signorielli (2011) conducted a research surrounding the representation of gender in fall prime time broadcasting between 2000 and 2008. According to this research, female superheroes are in most cases expected to be emotional, attractive and concerned about their personal appearance. They appear less angry and often have a (male) mentor, less frequently they appear in a leadership position. Demarest (2010) analysed superheroes by conducting interviews with students, by analysing texts of companies who produce these superheroes and by examining other research. He states that the physical appearance of superheroines often consists of promoting their sexuality by pronouncing their extreme hourglass figures (large bust and hips, small waist). Long hair is also a characteristic aspect. Male superheroes tend to be taller, more muscular and have wide shoulders and narrow hips. They also tend to have darker hair and skin, be shaven and have a strong jawline (Demarest, 2010).

The clothing superheroines wear serves to differentiate in ranks and importance and serves to pronounce their physical appearance. Superheroines' clothing consists of full-length bodysuits or can be more revealing, the main function is to draw attention to their bust, hips and waist. They rarely have insignia and almost never wear flat shoes. For Demarest (2010) this raises the question of how these women are expected to fight and run in high heels and boots. On the other hand, men wear tight jumpsuits that accentuate their muscles and wear a cape or belt that stresses their narrow waist and wide shoulders. Boots are also often carried as these pronounce their muscular calves (Demarest, 2010).

2.2.2   Behaviour, Romantic Relationships and Superpowers

Demarest (2010) states that male and female superheroes do not only differ concerning their physical appearance but also differ in behaviour and romantic relationships. When male superheroes communicate, this will in most cases concern stressing their strengths and abilities. This contradicts with females for whom communication is mostly used to express their secondary role in relation to men and also serves to downplay their intelligence and serves as a cry for support. Superheroines also tend to have a greater amount of failed relationships in comparison to male superheroes. Male superheroes are expected to save a damsel in distress and are more likely to end up in a relationship with or married to the women they save.

In terms of how superpowers are gained and wielded, male superheroes tend to have inherent powers which they acquired without any help, whereas women tend to be gifted powers by men or do not have any special powers at all (Demarest, 2010) – however, Robbins (1996) might consider this as empowering

because this could demonstrate that superpowers are not necessary for a woman to become a superheroine, thus any powers a woman might have are the result of excessive training, something that can be achieved by any woman with comparable training.

Demarest (2010) goes on to say that male superheroes tend to have offensive powers which require to take initiative, these can be powers including laser eyes, super strength, super healing or an armoured shell. On the other hand, female superheroes tend to use powers in a defensive way, waiting behind men, and thus confirming the traditional gender-role division. These powers can include telekinesis, weather control, matter phasing and supersonic voice (Demarest, 2010).

Stabile (2009) analysed several series and movies to look into sexism in the superhero genre and claims that superheroines are not only restricted when it comes to which kind of powers they can wield and how they gained these powers but are also restricted when using their powers, as this is often more difficult for women than men. Superheroines tend to be the heroes that do not understand how to control their powers or have to deal with multiple personality disorders (this refers to an evil persona taking control over their body when using their powers), as a consequence superheroines rarely express joy in using powers (Stabile, 2009).

2.2.3   The Protection Narrative

Gendered lines of protection remain present, in which men are the heroes and women are the victims, this undermines women's ability to protect themselves and reinforces sexist discourses. Female bodies are not represented as active but as vulnerable and breakable (Stabile, 2009). However, this genre can be an important base for subverting traditional stereotypes. As Stabile (2009, p. 90) states:

'Science fiction, fantasy, and superhero narratives provide important places for imagining different here-and-nows; for defamiliarizing social problems and exploring them in a context that offers fresh insights and radical visions of the future…Cultural producers might begin to imagine and value forms of heroism that transcend the old, tired stereotype of the damsel in distress'.

Representation of female superheroes, just as feminism and the representation of women in general, has changed in the last decades. As previously stated, there is an increase in female superheroes and representation is ambiguous. A superhero's identity is fragmented and fluid (Jackson, 1981) and these multiple identities have been reinterpreted and constantly revisited throughout the years. Therefore, the

previously stated observations must not necessarily be considered as stereotypical but can also be interpreted from a queer postfeminist perspective in which femininity can be considered empowering and gendered assumptions can be subverted in various ways. However, an intersectional perspective is needed, and gender is not the sole axe on which representations of women must be analysed. Change doesn't merely occur on the axe of gender but similarly on the axes of race and sexuality as there are not only more superheroines but there is also an increase in representation concerning black and LGBTQ female superheroes - although they are still underrepresented and the genre has a history of excluding and trivializing minorities (Gibson, Huxley & Ormrod, 2015). The next paragraphs will further elaborate on the representation of female LGBTQ and racial minorities in audio-visual media and more specifically in the superhero genre.

2.3   An Intersectional Perspective

2.3.1   LGBTQ minorities (within the superhero genre)

According to Gauntlett (2008), gay and lesbian characters are experiencing a greater amount of acceptance within mainstream television shows, whereas before the 1990s they remained practically hidden. Although there is an increase in LGBTQ representations in traditional (audio-visual) media, it often remains problematic (Davis, 2008). McInroy and Craig (2017) state, based on research of Davis (2008), Padva (2008) and Raley & Lucas (2006), that LGBTQ people have consistently been stereotyped as comic relief, villains and/or criminals, mentally and/or physically ill, and victims of violence. These stereotypes are still prevalent and continue to contribute to homophobia and heterosexism. They also state, based on research of Dhoest & Simons (2012) and GLAAD (2015), that representations of LGBTQ males outnumber females and that there is a lack of diverse representations including transgender and non-binary genders, diverse ages, races and socio-economic statuses. In most cases, LGBTQ characters are portrayed as struggling with their identity in which sexual orientation is overemphasized and seen as something that needs to be dealt with (McInroy and Craig, 2017). Both transgender and bisexual characters are also underrepresented and the later are overwhelmingly female and depicted as confused or curious (Raley and Lucas, 2006; McInroy and Craig, 2017).

McInroy and Craig (2017) advocate reducing the focus on sexual orientation as the defining feature of a character's identity, and to include more socio-demographic diversity and less extreme gender

representations. A lack of diverse representation is thought to result in LGBTQ young people having few role models which might influence identity validation in a negative way (McInroy and Craig, 2017; Dhoest and Simons, 2012; Fouts and Inch, 2005).

Superheroes, in this context, are expected to represent the ideal of a gender, but LGBTQ superheroes challenge these ideals (Corin & Schott, 2015). Murray (2015) states that lesbianism can be interpreted as subverting the patriarchy and destabilizing male desire and the heterosexual ideal. A coming out narrative is less frequently used in the superhero genre, which can be considered positive as: 'coming out necessarily means reproducing the closet from which the coming out has been performed, and in effect this coming out must be continually repeated' (Murray, 2015, p. 176) but on the other hand the presence of lesbianism is as such not acknowledged and thus excluded from the discourse (Murray, 2015). However, research concerning LGBTQ superheroes, and especially heroines, is rare.

2.3.2   Women of Colour (within the superhero genre)

When it comes to ethnical and racial minorities, third wave feminism heavily criticized second wave feminists for not including the different axes of a woman's identity in feminist activism. Not only bisexual, lesbian and transgender women were excluded but also women of colour. Women of colour were often not included in feminist research and were also reduced to the notion of 'the average Third World Woman' by white feminists. Mohanty (1994) stated that all women who were not white or Western were reduced to a simplified monolithic subject, suppressed by the patriarchy. By portraying these women as a group of uneducated, poor, domestic and victimized objects, white women could portray themselves in relation to this group as educated, modern and free subjects. As Brooks and Hébert (2006) state: 'just as gender is a social construct through which society defines what it means to be masculine or feminine, race is also a social construction. Race can no longer be seen as a biological category, and it has little basis in science or genetics'.

When it comes to representations in audio-visual media, women of colour are often stereotypically represented. According to Hudson (1998), these stereotypes do not only influence how these women are perceived by others, but also distort how they perceive themselves. Since the 1990s representations have become more mixed and are more comparable to other groups. However, in some dimensions, representations of women of colour still differ from those of white women. Black characters are more likely

to be less respected and to be more provocatively and unprofessionally dressed (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2017). Latino characters are only represented in a restricted set of roles including criminals, exotic lovers/sex objects, servants/blue collar workers, and unintelligent objects of ridicule (Greenberg & Baptista-Fernandez, 1980; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2017). According to Brooks and Hébert (2006), African-American women are mostly objectified as sexual commodities instead of romantic characters and is feminine beauty related to light skin, straight hair, thinness, youthfulness and middle-class status.

When it comes to Black male superheroes, advancements have been made in terms of numbers and in how they are represented, but when it comes to women, the development has been slower (Brown, 2013). Brown (2013, p. 137) states that 'nearly all comic book heroines who are identified as ethnic minorities are treated as erotic spectacles and as hypersexual 'others'. The author goes on to say that in comic books, minority representation is in most cases restricted to Latina, Asian and Black characters and Black superheroines are mainly depicted according to Afrocentric stereotypes related to nature, mysticism and totemism (Brown, 2013).

However, Brown (2013) states that although Black superheroines might reinforce racial stereotypes, they also have the potential to be progressive and empowering by representing strong and heroic Black females. According to the author, tales about Black superheroines frequently mobilize traditional stereotypes as these stories include mysticism, nature as a central plot point and powers closely associated with animals, but can rise above these stereotypes by representing more than wild, bestial, hypersexual spectacles, by representing these women as independent, intelligent and strong (physically and spiritually) and by avoiding racist and sexist stereotypes (Brown, 2013).

2.4   Conclusion

Not only women in general but especially superheroines are underrepresented and, in most cases, stereotypically depicted (Carroll, 1990; Robbins, 1996; Demarest, 2010; Signorielli, 2011; Sadri, 2014; Erigha, 2015). However, in the last decades, representations started to evolve (Palmer, 2015). Although superheroines are still underrepresented and often stereotypical, gender boundaries are increasingly subverted and extreme femininity can be used as a tool against patriarchal domination (Gibson, 2015). As superheroines are expected to embody the ideal of gender, diversity within this genre is crucial, not only

surrounding gender representations but also concerning racial and sexual minorities (Brown, 2013; Corin & Schott, 2015; Murray, 2015). Superhero narratives provide a space for reimagining and thus attempting to change society towards a more inclusive and equal environment (Stabile, 2009). This research analyses to which extent the series of *Arrowverse* partake in reimagining gender, sexuality and race-related stereotypes and consequently to which extent the series serve as a positive force for social change. The next section further elaborates on the research design of this paper.

3. Research Design

3.1   Research Questions and Research Method

This research consists of a textual analysis including a formal and ideological analysis (McKee, 2003; Larsen, 2013; Turner, 2005) of the series of *Arrowverse* and is situated within the critical paradigm. Researchers within this paradigm believe in the co-existence of different realities and assume that meaning is constructed through the interaction of the researcher with its subject. Therefore, knowledge can never be entirely objective, and results are always influenced by the researcher (Willis, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The objective of a textual analysis is to research how reality is represented and to uncover underlying ideological assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This method seems to be the most adequate for this paper as this research is mainly concerned with the underlying ideology (queer postfeminism and intersectionality theory, thus the ideological analysis) and the format used to support the dominant ideology in these specific series (the formal analysis). The advantage of this research method is that it offers the possibility to do an in-depth analysis of a limited amount of sequences, which is also the case in this analysis. This might result in a more limited generalizability of the results; however, this is not a problem as generalizability is not the main objective of this study. The objective is to draw conclusions on *Arrowverse* level or even more specifically on the level of individual series and not for the superhero genre in general.

A textual analysis is conducted to acquire in-depth insights into the underlaying ideologies in these series especially related to gender, sexuality and race. These axes of identity are chosen as these seem to be the most prominently represented in academic research and the series and thus also provide a more interesting basis for research. Other axes of identity such as religion and disability are little or not represented. Due to the lack of time and resources not all axes can be included, and choices have to be made regarding the most interesting subjects of analysis.

The main research question that this research aims to answer is: 'How are female superheroes, that assume a central role in the live-action series of *Arrowverse* (series of The CW based on DC Comics, including *Arrow*; *The Flash*; *Supergirl*; *Legends of Tomorrow* and *Batwoman*), represented from an intersectional perspective?' The sub-question that must help answer the main question is: 'Do these series reiterate and/or resist queer postfeminist ideas from an intersectional perspective?'

3.2   Research Grid and Strategy of Analysis

The research grid for this analysis consists of three themes, each which furthermore consists of two sublevels. The themes gender, sexuality and race are analysed on a formal and on an ideological level. On the formal level, narrative, mise-en-scène, cinematography and sound are taken into account. During the analysis, it soon became clear that cinematography and sound were often less relevant to analyse in depth in every sequence as they appeared to be very repetitive. Therefore, these elements are only mentioned in the beginning of the analysis and discussed in general for the *Arrowverse*. This formal textual analysis serves as a basis to uncover the underlying dominant ideology of the series. The main research method is the ideological textual analysis; however, the formal elements are crucial to interpret the representations. Therefore, a formal textual analysis is considered necessary to conduct a thorough ideological textual analysis. This research tries to uncover whether representations of women in the series are stereotypical and/or empowering on the basis of gender, sexuality and race in relation to the discourse of queer postfeminism. The grid in the attachments (8.1) elaborates on this research' understanding of what is considered stereotypical (negative) and empowering (positive) (with regard to gender, sexuality and race) within a queer postfeminist discourse. The terms negative and positive should not be considered a value statement about the representations and underlying ideology but are chosen to facilitate the process of naming which dominant ideology is present.

The grid to be used for this analysis is constructed based on findings of various authors mentioned in the previous literature review. For the theme gender these are Butler (1990), Shively and De Cecco (1993), Robbins (1996), Lotz (2001), Mosely and Read (2002), McRobbie (2004), Gerhard (2005), Tate (2008), Stabile (2009), Demarest (2010), Signorielli (2011) and Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014). For the theme sexuality, the authors include Jackson (1981), Raley and Lucas (2006), Corin and Schott (2015), Murray (2015) and McInroy and Craig (2017). For the theme race the authors are Greenberg and Baptista-Fernandez (1980), Mastro and Greenberg (2000), Brooks and Hébert (2006), Brown (2013) and Tukachinsky, Mastro and Yarchi (2017). A detailed overview of each author's contribution to the research grid (8.2) and the research grid itself (8.1) can be consulted in the attachments.

For the actual analysis a registration form is made, starting with a short summary of every series and every season of each series to provide researchers with the necessary background information of the units of analysis. In chronological order, each sequence that is analysed is put in the grid organised per series and

season. The specific episode and timeframe of that sequence in that episode is specified. A short description of every sequence is included followed by a formal and ideological textual analysis of the sequence on the three levels previously mentioned: gender, sexuality and race (if represented in the sequence as not all axes of identity might be present in each sequence). No software such as Nvivo is used since it can only be considered valuable for research that requires a great amount of open coding. Due to the grid that is constructed, open coding does not occur frequently and Nvivo is considered less valuable for this research.

The grid (8.1) that is constructed guides this analysis. For each season a conclusion is made based on the results of analysis of every sequence in that season with regard to the main research question. After the analysis of all seasons and series, trends are distinguished and discussed on *Arrowverse* level. The registration form facilitates reducing the amount of data and making clear conclusions. The conclusions on sequence-level, series-level and arrowverse-level are included in this paper. For a specific overview of the analysis, the registration form can be consulted electronically as the document is too large to be attached to this paper. The anticipation is that these results can be a valuable contribution to the field of media studies as there is a lack of research surrounding the representation of gender in the audio-visual superhero genre. As this genre also has an influence on the interpretation of gender in real life this research can also provide valuable insights surrounding gender in today's society.

3.3   Selection of Cases

This research consists of an in-depth analysis of the series of *Arrowverse* which consists of five series. *Arrowverse* is an American media franchise of The CW, an American television network mainly focused on programming for teenagers and young adults. The series are live-action audio-visual adaptations of the superhero comics of DC Comics. Superheroes including 'The Green Arrow', 'Supergirl', 'The Flash' and 'Black Canary' are brought to life. These characters share a universe, called the *Arrowverse*, but the stories unfold separately with the exception of the annual crossover event in which the superheroes join forces to save the world. The first series to be released was *Arrow* (2012), the second one was *The Flash* (2014), soon followed by *Supergirl* (2015), *Legends of Tomorrow* (2016) and *Batwoman* (2019).

The CW has created the image of being a diverse television network, both behind as in front of the camera (Holloway, 2017; Kelly, 2018). This analysis focuses on what happens in front of the camera, specifically focusing on female superhero characters that are possibly not straight or white. What comes to mind are

characters including the highly intelligent 'Felicity Smoak', the bisexual captain 'Sara Lance', the strong, powerful 'Supergirl' and her lesbian, fearless sister 'Alex Danvers'. Superheroine 'Amaya Jiwe' and leader of team Flash 'Iris West', two women of colour, can also not be forgotten. These series are mainly produced for adolescent audiences, are quite successful (until now, the series have been renewed every year and are available on Netflix in many countries) and represent a wide variety in gender and minorities, thus they present an interesting object of study when focusing on the representation of female superheroes from an intersectional perspective.

In the first round of analysis, the series are watched, and notes are made concerning the relevance of each episode/sequence. Due to the lack of time and resources, the decision is made to only analyse two series of the franchise, *Arrow* and *Supergirl*, as these appear to be the most interesting subjects of study. This conclusion is made based on the first round of analysis as the two series seem to be highly contrasting to each other and therefore valuable as they provide this research with a diverse and broad scope. The crossover episodes are also analysed as this provides the possibility to take into account the characters of the other series without analysing the entire series. As such, these other characters can still be analysed and taken into account. Because of this decision, results should be interpreted with caution as not all series are completely analysed. The results are mainly applicable for the series *Arrow*, *Supergirl* and the crossovers.

Out of every season, several relevant sequences are distinguished based on the presence of positive and/or negative representation according to queer postfeminism as defined in the research grid (8.1). The notes that were made in the first round of analysis guides this process. Out of those sequences a selection is made for an in-depth textual analysis based on relevance with regard to the research questions (extremely stereotypical or non-stereotypical portrayal in relation to queer postfeminism). A sequence is selected when it fits this criterium: at least three formal aspects on the level of gender, sexuality and/or race are present in the sequence and concerns at least one of the leading female characters (however, she should not be physically present). These aspects can be considered both stereotypical and/or not stereotypical according to queer postfeminism. Every season of the two series that are analysed was taken into account to create the possibility to recognise evolutions in the representations but only some episodes/sequences are actually analysed as an analysis of all episodes/sequences is practically unfeasible due to the number of cases and episodes. An overview of the cases that are analysed can be consulted in the attachments (8.3).

3.4   Reliability and Validity

As previously stated, results should be interpreted with caution and the context of this analysis should be taken into account. Due to the limited amount of time and resources and the research method that is used to conduct this research only a limited amount of cases is analysed. Only two series of the *Arrowverse* and the crossovers are taken into account which means the results are only valid for the series and crossovers that are analysed and not for the *Arrowverse* in general. To draw conclusions on *Arrowverse* level the remaining series (*The Flash, Legends Of Tomorrow* and *Batwoman*) should also be analysed. However, the analysis of the crossovers can already indicate certain trends that could possibly be found in the remaining series and can serve as a starting point for further analysis. These results can thus not be generalized as they are only valid for these series because of the limited amount of cases that are analysed. This should not be considered a problem as generalizing these results is not the objective of this research.

Every season of the series that are analysed is taken into account, but only a limited amount of sequences is selected per season. This is a result of the limited amount of time, but especially because of the selection process. Only episodes that stand out in the first round of analysis are considered and only sequences that contain a leading female character and at least three elements (as defined in the grid) in relation to queer postfeminism are selected. A different researcher could thus make a different selection based on the same criteria. The selection process is consequently inherently subjective which is not necessarily problematic for this type of research but should be considered when interpreting the results. These results are therefore not exhaustive and different researchers might draw different conclusions (even if they selected exactly the same sequences). The seasons that were released in October 2019 are also not included as these seasons would not have been fully released by the time this paper had to be finished (thus season 8 of *Arrow* and season 5 of *Supergirl* are not included, as a result the crossover that aired during these seasons is also not a part of the analysis). This analysis can thus only be considered reliable for the sequences and seasons that are analysed and should be interpreted with caution as a subjective element is always part of a qualitative research.

4. Results

The next part of this research paper will elaborate on the results of the analyses both on the level of the seasons and the series as in general. The first series to be analysed was *Arrow*, the second one was *Supergirl* and the crossovers were analysed third. Trends in relation to queer postfeminism were distinguished and will be discussed separately. The next paragraph will elaborate on the results of the formal textual analysis as these elements can be considered necessary to understand and interpret the ideological analysis. For a more detailed overview of the analysis, the registration form can be consulted in attachments.

4.1   The *Arrowverse*

To uncover and understand the underlying ideologies in the *Arrowverse*, a general understanding of the series and its aesthetics can be considered valuable. *Arrow* and *Supergirl* are two entirely different series but have some commonalities that bind them together in the *Arrowverse.* The main narrative of *Arrow* focuses on the vigilante the Green Arrow, who operates in the shadows and tries to save Star City with the help of his team. Supergirl, however, focuses on a refugee alien from Krypton who decides to use her extraordinary powers to keep National City safe. Both the Green Arrow and Supergirl have covert identities to keep themselves and their loved ones save as both vigilantes and aliens are feared by the general public. To keep their real identities a secret they use a costume, as do most of their team members.
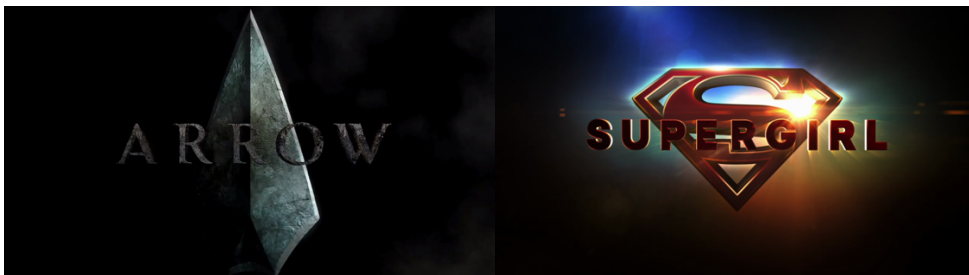
Arrow and Supergirl Logo

Both series have several recurring locations and sounds. All episodes of every series start with a series-specific jingle and logo which reoccurs sometimes during the episodes. The scenes commonly take place at home, in a team hideout, and a company. For *Arrow,* these locations include Oliver and Felicity's apartment(s), the team's bunker, the police station, and Palmer Tech. For *Supergirl,* these locations include

Kara and Alex's apartments, the DEO, CatCo, and L-Corp. Fighting scenes in both series most of the time take place in abandoned buildings, warehouses, and on the street (in alleyways). However, in *Arrow,* these scenes frequently take place by night and in *Supergirl* more frequently by day stressing the differences between vigilantes and superheroes. Every series also has its specific locations which include The League of Assassins headquarters, Argus and Thea's club in *Arrow* and an alien bar and the Fortress of Solitude in *Supergirl.* These locations often seem to be bathed in light in *Supergirl* and rather dark in *Arrow*. Scenes in both series seem to be accompanied by similar types of music and sound. During fight scenes, suspenseful music is used to increase tension and during emotional scenes, slower and more emotional music is used to heighten what happens on screen. *Supergirl* uses music with lyrics more often than *Arrow.*

Oliver's versus Supergirl's apartment

Although the series take place on different earths (*Arrow* on Earth 1 and *Supergirl* on Earth 38) several elements bind the series together such as the crossovers and little details including the presence of a *Big Belly Burger* fast-food chain on every planet, which all superheroes appear to be very fond of. The stories unfold separately with the exception of an annual crossover in which the superheroes join forces to save the world. During the analysis of the two series and the crossovers, several trends were uncovered which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.2   Fashion, Power and Costumes

Fashion is considered an important source of power both within the *Arrowverse* series as within the queer postfeminist framework. As discussed by Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014), Moseley and Read (2002) and Gerhard (2005) fashion can be used to stress the combination of femininity and power and to subvert traditional gender boundaries. The following paragraph will discuss to which extent *Arrow, Supergirl* and the crossovers engage with this usage of fashion. Team Supergirl and Team Arrow change significantly over the seasons but the dynamic between men and women remains important throughout the seasons with

the consequence that women are in most cases dressed rather feminine whereas men are dressed rather masculine.

Oliver Queen (The Green Arrow) and John Diggle (Spartan) are the first male members of Team Arrow and remain the core of that team together with Felicity Smoak (Overwatch), the first female member. The team expands throughout the seasons and includes new members such as Roy Harper (Arsenal), Thea Queen (Speedy), Laurel and Sara Lance (The Black Canaries), Rene Ramirez (Wild Dog), Curtis Holt (Mister Terrific) and Dinah Drake (Third Black Canary). Other recurring characters are Nyssa Al Ghul (Heir to the Demon), Emiko Queen (Oliver Queen's sister), Mia Queen (Oliver and Felicity's daughter, also known as Blackstar) and Laurel Lance's doppelgänger (Black Siren).

In the first seasons, Felicity, Thea, and Laurel can be considered the main female characters. Felicity is an IT employee for Oliver's company and joins his team as his expert in technology. Her superhero name is Overwatch and she guides the missions from in the team's hideout. She is frequently wearing heels and colourful dresses with matching lipstick. She has blonde hair which she wears in a ponytail or loose, she wears glasses and has a piercing in the helix of her ear. She does not have a superhero costume as she rarely joins the team in the field and also has no superpowers except her intelligence. Thea is Oliver's younger sister who loves partying. She is troubled but after falling in love with Roy Harper, who joins team Arrow and takes the fall for Oliver, she takes over Roy's costume and joins the team too. During the day she is frequently wearing dresses, blouses, and heels. She has short hair and likes to wear it loose; she also often wears make-up. In the field, her superhero name is Speedy, and she wears an adapted version of Roy's red costume. The costume consists of red and black leather pants and a red and black leather jacket. She wears a hood, face mask and a bow just like her brother Oliver.

Laurel is a lawyer and ex-girlfriend of Oliver. Their relationship is tense in the beginning as Oliver cheated on Laurel with her sister Sara which she found out after Sara died on Oliver's boat. In most cases, she is dressed in business casual clothes which are often feminine. She wears dresses, heels, make-up and her long hair loose. She joins Team Arrow as The Black Canary to honour her sister, the first Black Canary, after Sara's death. Her costume differs slightly from Sara's, they both wear black leather pants and a black leather jacket but whereas Sara wears a big cleavage top, Laurel has a jacket that is closed up to her chin. They both wear a black face mask and use a baton for fighting.

Sara Lance has a quite complicated story. After supposedly dying during the shipwreck of a boat of the Queens, she was rescued by Nyssa Al Ghul, the daughter of the leader of The League of Assassins. She engaged in a romantic relationship with Nyssa and was trained to be an assassin. When she later returned to Star City, she became a vigilante called The Black Canary. She was killed which resulted in Laurel taking over her role as Black Canary. However, Laurel could not deal with the grief and resurrected Sara in a magical well called the Lazarus Pit. Sara came back with blood lust and left the team to learn to deal with that lust. She was later recruited by Rip Hunter to become a part of Team Legends on the series *Legends of Tomorrow*. She becomes the captain of a time-traveling spaceship called the Waverider and is called The White Canary (which is also followed by a costume change from her black costume to a similar white costume but without the face mask and with her hair combed backward). When she is not wearing her costume, she is in most cases dressed more masculine than other female characters. She often wears black pants, grey shirts and sweaters, and a black leather jacket. All characters that were previously mentioned do not have any superpowers besides their intelligence or fighting skills as a result of extensive training.

The Black Canaries (Sara and Laurel) and Thea Queen

Other characters include Dinah Drake, who becomes the third Black Canary after Laurel's death and wears a similar black leather costume. The main difference is that Dinah is a meta-human who has a supersonic cry. Evil Laurel Lance, Laurel's doppelgänger from a parallel universe, who is called Black Siren, also has a supersonic cry. She starts out as a criminal but chooses the right path in the end. Her costume consists of a black leather bodysuit and cape, she wears heels, a choker and her hair loose. When she is not in costume, she is often dressed feminine and likes to experiment with different looks. Emiko and Mia Queen also play a minor but important role in the series. Emiko is Oliver's long-lost sister and takes over his role as a vigilante. She wears a replica of his suit at first but later changes into an Asian inspired brown and purple costume, also carrying a bow as a weapon. She turns out to be a high-profile criminal that has fooled Team Arrow into thinking she was on their side. Mia is Oliver and Felicity's daughter, who takes over their role as

a vigilante in the future. She is also known as Blackstar and wears black pants and a black leather jacket into the field. She carries a bow and arrow like her father but can also dress very feminine like her mother. Lyla Michaels is another recurring character; she is married to John Diggle and is the director of the secret government facility Argus. She is in most cases dressed in a business suit and heels, she has rather short hair and wears Argus protective gear in the field.

Team Supergirl consists at the beginning of only Kara Danvers, also known as Kara Zor-El (Supergirl) and her (work)friends James Olsen and Winn Shott. Only Supergirl goes into the field until James decides he wants to become a vigilante called Guardian. Kara works as an assistant and later as a reporter at CatCo and dresses business casual when she goes to work. She wears both pants and pencil skirts, often in light colours combined with a blouse or cardigan. She always wears glasses (similarly to Superman) and her hair in a ponytail, bun or pulled back when she is in public. This should help her keep her identity a secret as she does not wear a mask as Supergirl. When she changes into her Supergirl costume or uses her powers she takes off her glasses and wears her hair loose. Her costume consists of a blue, long-sleeved top, a red skirt, tights, red boots, and a red cape. She has the same insignia as Superman on her chest which is the crest of the House of El (her family crest). Her suit gets destroyed in season 5 (which was not included in the analysis) and is replaced by a blue full-body suit which still has the insignia, the red cape, and the red boots.

Supergirl season 1 to 4 versus Supergirl Season 5

When she starts to work for a secret government facility, called the DEO, she starts to work with her adoptive sister Alex Danvers. Alex also appears to be dressed business casual, but only rarely wears a dress or skirt. She often wears a brown leather jacket and she has short, red hair which keeps getting shorter throughout the seasons. She wears a black DEO outfit into the field and only starts to wear a costume in

season 3. This is a black full-body costume with enough possibilities to attach guns and other weapons. Two other important characters are Cat Grant, Kara's boss and leader of the media empire CatCo and Lena Luthor, sister of Lex Luthor and the new CEO of L-Corp who tries to get rid of the bad Luthor name. Both Cat and Lena are always shown to be very feminine, they are dressed up and wear dresses or pencil skirts with blouses. They wear make-up, jewellery, and high heels. Lena wears her hair in a bun, ponytail or loose whereas Cat always wears it loose.

Other characters include Maggie Sawyer, a police agent, and Alex's first girlfriend. She rarely wears dresses and skirts and is in most cases shown in a police outfit or wearing black pants with a black leather jacket. Samantha Aries (also known as Sam) is Lena's new CFO when she needs someone to run L-Corp while she is running CatCo. Sam is always shown in business casual clothes (a suit in most cases) or pants and a sweater. She has an evil alter ego called Reign who wears a black bodysuit with an insignia, a black cape, and a black face mask. Nia Nall is a new member of Team Supergirl and is also known as Dreamer as she has dreaming powers. She is a transgender woman who also works at CatCo and is always dressed very feminine. As dreamer, she wears a blue and white bodysuit and a blue facemask. The other male characters of the team are Mon-El (strength but not similar to Supergirl), J'onn Jonz (powers are flying and strength) and Brainy (super-computer intelligence).

Reign and Dreamer

During the crossovers, other female characters from the other *Arrowverse* series are also included such as Amaya Jiwe (The Vixen), Charlie, Zari Tomaz, Iris West, Caitlin Snow (Killer Frost) and Kate Kane (Batwoman). The first three characters appear on the series *Legends Of Tomorrows,* a series that focuses on Team Legends*.* The team travels through time on their ship called the *Waverider* and tries to protect history from

other time travellers who intend to change the past. Amaya Jiwe is a female superhero of colour who was born in Zambesi and was part of the Justice League of America before joining the Legends in the 1940s. She carries an earth totem that allows her to channel the powers of animals and she wears a brown bodysuit with a yellow patch on her chest. Mari, a character that appears one time on *Arrow*, is her granddaughter and wears the same costume and totem as Amaya. Charlie is another Legend and is portrayed by the same actor that portrays Amaya. She is a shapeshifter that shapeshifted into Amaya's body and then appeared to be unable to change back. Even though she resembles Amaya, her character differs immensely. She does not have a costume and is always dressed in punk-related clothes. Zari Tomaz also is a Legend and is a woman of colour and a Muslim. She is the new engineer of the Legends after the departure of their former engineer and takes care of the ship. She has a lot of knowledge about technology, partly because she is from the future, and occasionally engages in hacktivism. She carries an air totem which allows her to manipulate wind and does not normally wear a costume. In one crossover she was shown wearing a costume as she wanted to fit in with the other superheroes, it was a black full-body costume with yellow traces. She often combines feminine and masculine traits through her fashion choices.

Iris West and Caitlin Snow are characters that are featured on *The Flash.* Iris is Barry's (The Flash) childhood friend and also becomes his romantic partner and wife. She is a journalist, starts to work with Team Flash and even becomes its leader throughout the seasons. She does not have any special powers or a costume and is dressed rather feminine most of the times. Caitlin Snow is an employee at Star Labs and helps Barry master his powers after he was hit by lightning. She has a lot of knowledge about biology and medicine and as a consequence she is the one taking care of superheroes when they get hurt. She has an alter ego Killer Frost, which she was born with, who takes control when she is scared or mad and can manipulate ice. She struggles with her alter ego in the beginning, trying to restrain her powers, not enjoying them but accepts that Killer Frost is a part of her throughout the seasons. Caitlin is always dressed rather feminine; Killer Frost wears a blue and black costume consisting of pants and a jacket. Her hair turns white and her lips blue when her alter ego takes control.

Killer Frost

Kate Kane is a character introduced on *Batwoman*. When Batman, her cousin, disappears she takes on his role to protect Gotham and becomes Batwoman. She wears an altered version of Batman's suit and wears a red wig. She has no powers except the skills she gained during training. Kate is always dressed rather masculine, has tattoos and short hair. She also is a lesbian woman which is the reason why she was kicked out of military training.

Batwoman

The majority of the female heroes thus seems to be represented rather and often even extremely feminine, wearing dresses, heels, and make-up. Especially in *Supergirl*, feminine fashion is very predominantly present. The only characters that challenge this femininity are Maggie and to a lesser extent Alex. In *Arrow*, the main focus is on a male hero and extreme femininity is used as a contrast with this predominantly male team. Sara is one of the first characters to challenge this extreme femininity by combining masculine and feminine traits in terms of fashion. In the crossovers, more women who combine masculine and feminine traits are represented including characters such as Kate Kane, Zari Tomaz, and Charlie.

On *Arrow,* women seem to possess superpowers more often than men, none of the characters have superpowers until Dinah Drake, a meta-human, joins their team. Laurel's doppelgänger possesses the same powers as Dinah, a sonic cry. These are not superpowers they were born with but are the consequence of a particle accelerator explosion in Central City (*The Flash*). On *Supergirl,* the characters with powers are Kara, J'onn, Superman and later also Dreamer, Reign, and Brainy. These powers originate only in aliens as they moved to earth and are influenced by a different sun, without that sun, the aliens are turned

powerless. Kara and Superman possess several different powers such as super strength, flying, laser eyes, X-ray vision and being bulletproof. Reign also possesses those same powers; however, she is Sam's alter ego which Sam is unaware of. Sam is not able to enjoy her powers as when she uses them her evil alter ego takes control over her body. Dreamer was born with her dreaming powers (she dreams events before they happen) as these are passed on from mother to daughter. All these powers can both be used in offense and defence and were not gifted by a man. In the crossovers, other female characters with superpowers are included such as Zari and Amaya who are gifted powers by a totem that is passed on from generation to generation. Caitlin also has powers when she takes the form of Killer Frost and Charlie has the ability to shapeshift, they were born with these powers. The other leading female characters in both series and the crossovers do not possess superpowers, only powers resulting from intelligence or excessive training. Alex, Thea, Laurel, Sara, Kate, and Mia were trained to be warriors whereas Lena, Iris, and Felicity compensate for their lack of fighting skills with their intelligence and knowledge about technology.

The costumes used when going into the field seem to have a lot of similarities. Most superheroes, both men and women, wear full-length bodysuits. On *Arrow,* these suits have dark colours and include a mask or a hood to cover their identity. On *Supergirl,* the suits more often have lighter colours (except those of the DEO) and less often include a mask (except Dreamer's and Reign's costume). On *Supergirl,* superheroes wear capes and carry an insignia, which does not appear on *Arrow.* Supergirl is the only superhero with a costume consisting of a skirt, however, this skirt is replaced by a full-length bodysuit in season 5.

Female Superheroes from left to right: Killer Frost, Sara Lance, Supergirl with Alex Danvers behind her, Felicity Smoak with Iris West behind her, Zari Tomaz, Dinah Drake, Amaya Jiwe

On *Arrow,* bows and arrows, batons and guns are the most used weapons and even characters with powers use these weapons such as Dinah who also uses a baton for fighting. On *Supergirl,* superpowers are considered as the most important weapon, these superheroes with powers often do not use other weapons besides their powers. Characters without powers, such as Alex, commonly use guns for fighting. Intelligence and technology can also be considered as a weapon as intelligent characters such as Felicity and Lena compensate for their lack of fighting skills with their intelligence, often translated in the inventing of technologies that can help their team. Felicity becomes part of Team *Arrow* because of her knowledge and develops special arrows, technology, and suits for the team. Lena also helps Supergirl with her intelligence by building technology that can help save the world in season 2 and by developing a costume that shields Supergirl from Kryptonite (the only substance that can hurt Supergirl) in season 4.

4.3   To Save Or Not To Save

This next paragraph will elaborate on the fundaments that were distinguished in the literature review and included in the research grid that was used for the analysis. In the *Arrowverse* series, several fundaments of queer postfeminism are encountered although *Arrow* and *Supergirl* engage with these fundaments differently.

Vulnerable Women And Their Male Rescuers

The first seasons of *Arrow* start out with rather traditional and stereotypical representations according to queer postfeminism. Concluding from the sequences that were analysed, women are often considered in need of protection and not able to make their own choices which confirms the research of authors such as Robbins (1996), Stabile (2009), Demarest (2011) and Signorielli (2011) in which they claim that women in the superhero genre are represented as vulnerable and in need of saving, often only playing the role of the girlfriend who must be saved and as in need of a male mentor. This also clashes with the fundaments of queer postfeminism such as independence and individual choice (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). In the sequence *Party Scene,* Oliver confronts Thea about her lifestyle and takes her drugs away. Her choice is taken away from her and she is considered to require protection. In the sequence *Mission,* Felicity goes into the field and needs John and Oliver's help with the physical activities. John has to save her when something goes wrong. In *Mentor* John tries to teach Felicity how to fight, but she does not seem to succeed. Quintin and Oliver constantly try to protect Laurel. In *Protective Custody* and *Family fight*, Quintin tries to protect Laurel and convince her to drop a case as a lawyer. He fears she is in too much danger and wants to shield

her from it. In *Break-In,* Oliver and John save Laurel from intruders in her apartment. The protection narrative and the role of the male mentor are elements that occur throughout the entire season.

However, this does not mean that these women are represented as passive. In *Party Scene,* Thea ignores Oliver when he judges her lifestyle. In *Protective Custody* and *Family Fight,* Laurel argues with her father. He wants her to drop a case that might put her in danger, but she does not listen to him and continues to do her job. She believes she should be able to put herself in danger for her job just as much as her father does as a police officer. In *The Fight,* Laurel breaks up a fight between a group of men and Oliver and Tommy by defeating one man herself. In *Mission,* Felicity compensates her lack of physical abilities and field experience with her (technological) intelligence. She is an unmissable part of the team as she is the only one of the team with a great amount of computer intelligence and is crucial for the successful completion of the missions. The previously mentioned stereotypical representations are thus often countered. Thea, Laurel, and Felicity are also in most cases dressed very feminine. They have long hair, wear make-up, dresses and heels. As such, they stress the combination of strength and femininity when they resist the men in their life. This fits the queer postfeminist framework perfectly and confirms Moseley and Read's (2002) research in which they state that postfeminism deconstructs boundaries between the feminine and the feminist.

These acts of resistance are often countered by the men who try to restrain Thea, Felicity, and Laurel. Men still end up saving these women or winning the argument. In *Break-In,* Oliver and John had to protect Laurel. In *Party Scene* Oliver took away Thea's drugs, thus taking the choice away from her and winning the argument. In *Mission* Felicity had to be saved by John. In the end, these women still need protection and the help of their male mentors.

The Force That Changes The Dynamic: Sara Lance

However, the representation of women in *Arrow* evolves throughout the seasons with the first turning point in season 2 when Sara Lance is added to the narrative. Sara is the second female member of the team and is completely different from Felicity. She is dressed less feminine and is strong and able to defend herself. In *The workout* Sara works out just like Oliver does frequently and in *Training,* she trains with John and Oliver on the same skill level as they do. She bonds with them over scars and is 'one of the boys'. However, she is never dressed extremely masculine, nor feminine. One could say she has to become more masculine to infiltrate in a male-dominated domain but also never becomes extremely masculine. She combines being tough with being vulnerable. This is illustrated in *Vigilantes Cry Too* in which she cries about a beautiful

moment with her sister. This can be linked to the fundament hybridism which refers to the blurring of boundaries between masculinity and femininity (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014) and counters the previously mentioned research of Robbins (1996), Stabile (2009), Demarest (2011) and Signorielli (2011) but demonstrates the claim that women do not need superpowers to become a superhero but can gain enough power from excessive training (Robbins, 1996).

Oliver: "Arrow, knife, knife, lots of bullets but no grenades" - John: "I got myself a new bullet, 9mm, right there" - Sara: "38 and mostly swords and a spear"
Felicity: "Well, I have a scar! It's in my mouth, I had my wisdom teeth removed when I was 16, 3 stitches! They were badly impacted" - Sara: "You're still cute"
S2E14 - Arrow

Felicity is not one of the boys like Sara as she cannot fight and cannot go into the field with them. She feels left out in *Training* and tries to join the conversation in which she fails. In *Advice From Sara,* Felicity trains to keep up with Sara and is hostile when Sara tries to help her. Oliver also does not understand why Felicity is wearing a work-out outfit. She is considered to be the brains of the team but is not considered as someone who can defend herself. Felicity combines femininity with intelligence but not with physical strength. She still needs saving which contrasts with Sara who can take care of herself. Therefore, there is a mixed representation on the level of gender in relation to the framework of queer postfeminism. Sara is represented as strong and not in need of saving and she challenges binaries of gender by not being extremely feminine nor masculine. Felicity is more feminine than Sara but does not combine this with power as she is often considered vulnerable and in need of protection (Stabile, 2009). More often she combines her femininity with her intelligence and as such counters her lack of physical skills. On some levels, Felicity is thus more stereotypical represented but on other levels also represented as empowered.

Girl Power On Team Arrow

After season 2 the representation of women starts to change. Laurel and Thea learn to fight with the objective of eventually becoming a part of Team Arrow. This considers a slow change in representation as Laurel was denied training in the beginning. In *The New Canary,* Laurel was beaten up and promises her dad to never fight again and in *No Male Mentor,* Oliver refuses to teach Laurel how to fight. However, Laurel

resists Oliver and her dad's attempts to keep her from taking over Sara's role as the Black Canary and does not give up. The first person to acknowledge her potential is Nyssa in *Potential* who also ends up training Laurel. In *Laurel Fights,* she is portrayed as autonomously patrolling the streets and helping Oliver when he could not catch a criminal. Even though she helped him with his mission Oliver gets mad because she is putting her life in danger, she does not listen and reminds him that this is not his decision. Thea also receives training from her father, a former member of the League of Assassins, and joins Team Arrow in the sequence *Speedy.* Oliver has to give in and accept Laurel and Thea in his team and when Sara returns for a short time the team consists for the first time of more female than male heroes. In *Rescuing Ray,* the team consists of more women than men and even Felicity joins them in the field. In *Finding William* and *Defeating Darkh,* Laurel and Thea defeat several guards while at the same time Mari helps Oliver with saving his son. In *Team Practice,* Thea, Oliver, John, and Laurel train together. The women are defeated first and Oliver is the one that ends up being the last one standing. Even though the strengths and abilities of the female heroes are stressed and it is shown that they value their independence and freedom of choice by not letting the men tell them what to do (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014), they are still often considered to be vulnerable and must fight to counter this protection narrative (Stabile, 2009).

Oliver: "I told you I didn't want you out here"
Laurel: "And I told you it wasn't your call to make"
S3E13 - Arrow

Starting from season 5, these women are portrayed as strong and sometimes even stronger than the male heroes in the narrative. After receiving training and having to fight for their place on the team they are finally valued and respected for their skills. In *Black Siren,* it is Felicity who hits Black Siren, in *Dinah,* Dinah defeats two men and criticizes their behaviour, in *The Good Woman,* Dinah, and Thea fight to protect Oliver and in *Don't Grab Women,* Dinah counters an attack by a man and says he should not grab women without permission. There are several other sequences in which the strengths and independence of the female superheroes are stressed such as *The Break* In, *The* Bomb, *The New Leader, Conflict, Secret Weapon, Roy is Back and Lyla and John.*

From IT-girl To Vigilante: Felicity Smoak

Felicity's character evolves as she offers to carry Oliver's burden for the first time and ignores him when he asks her not to in *The Burden.* She is also mad when Oliver ruins her mission because he thought she needed protection and makes clear she is not pleased and actually wanted to keep him safe in *Ghost Mirror Drive.* This dynamic in which Oliver tries to keep Felicity out of the field and safe and her ignoring his wishes frequently returns for example also in *Infiltration* in which she risks her life to hack some files. When Oliver confronts her about this, she tells him off by saying they are married, and a team and he is not the only one who is allowed to put his life in danger.

"Oliver, you don't get to judge me" – "You just shot a man in our living room" – "Something you've done a million times...While you were gone, I had to figure out how to survive, and I am glad that I did because the old me, she was weak"
*S7E8 - Arrow*

Even though Felicity started out as the weaker one of the team who required protection, this narrative is almost entirely countered in season 7. She gets pregnant, runs her own company and combines this with the life of a vigilante. She learned to protect herself and her family during the time Oliver was in prison and not there to protect her, which is illustrated in *Woz and Jobs*, *Fight Back, Felicity's Baby, The Intruder, New Parent, and Stronger Than Diaz*. Other strong women are also included in this season such as Emiko and Mia. In *Emiko, Renée's Advice* and *The Leader* the strength of Emiko is portrayed, and it is stressed that she does not require protection or anyone telling her what to do. She also appears to be the leader of a secret society and not the victim of that society. In *Mia Smoak* we see how Mia is trained by Nyssa from a young age, her strength and abilities are also stressed in *The Wall, Army of Men* and *New Generation.* She appears to be the reflection of her father Oliver whereas her half-brother William has the intelligence of Felicity.

Mixed Representations

Even though there are a lot of sequences which indicate that there is an evolution from rather stereotypical representations in the first seasons to more positive representations in the last seasons, mixed and more

stereotypical representations also occur in the last seasons such as Laurel dying and Thea quitting the team as she does not like what the violence is turning her in to which confirms Robbins (1996) claim that female superheroes are often short-lived. Dinah is also represented in various manners. On the one hand, she is represented as a strong and capable leader such as in *Conflict, The New Diggle, The New Leader, Rebellion Group* and *Without Her Cry.* She is often claimed to be a good leader, she is portrayed as equally strong without her superpowers and as a symbol for young women. On the other hand, Rene also challenges this representation in *The New Diggle* and *The New Leader* which Dinah never counters herself. In *The New Leader,* Rene says Dinah does not have enough field experience to lead the mission as such using communication to downplay her strengths (Demarest, 2010). Felicity counters this by saying she had police training, tactical training, and superpowers but Dinah dismisses this by saying it does not matter who leads as long as they succeed. In *Without Her Cry,* it is Rene who says Dinah is equally qualified and an example for young girls without her cry which counters previous representations.

Nyssa Al Ghul is another example of a mixed representation. She was first introduced as the ex-girlfriend of Sara Lance and Heir to the Demon (the daughter of the leader) of The League Of Assassins. She is represented as restrained by her father, her skills and intelligence are downplayed, she is not deemed fit to be the next leader and is forced into an arranged marriage by her father in *Legacy* and *Bride to the Demon*. She spends most of the seasons fighting her father and the league's restraints and even though she is trained to be an assassin needs Oliver to fight her fight to finally become the leader of the league in *The New Ra's.*
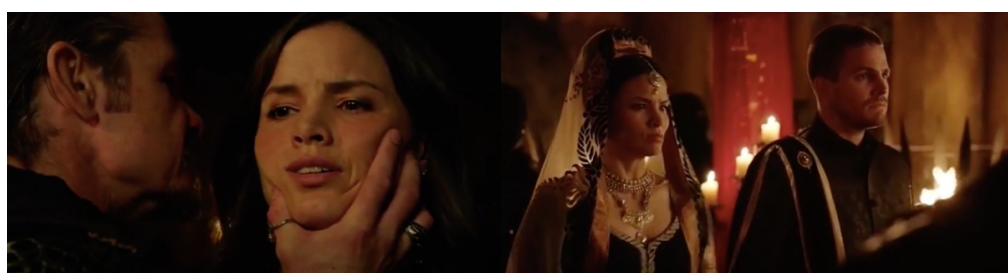
Nyssa's father: "I expect you to marry Al Sah-Him because it is my will. You defy that
and I will see you suffer the pain of a thousand deaths"
S3E22 - Arrow

After becoming the leader, she uses her power to dismantle the league and free everyone from its restraints. After this event, she is represented as stronger than ever and capable of defending herself as is demonstrated in *Not Her Type* and *Sisters* in which she defeats her sister and stresses that she is finally free

of the league and her father. Nyssa's story has similarities to what Laurel went through to become part of the team but is driven into extremes. One could argue that this is a practice used to criticize these misogynistic events, however, as it is represented as a problem of the league the underlying ideology could imply that such events are not part of everyday life or at least not of the Western society.

Supergirl Fights The Patriarchy

The dynamic in *Supergirl* is different from *Arrow* as women are the central focus of the narrative from the beginning. Whereas women in *Arrow* were first included as the sidekicks or girlfriends in need of saving, Supergirl is immediately portrayed as an independent and active character that wants to be a hero. Feminism is from the beginning strongly embedded in the series both implicitly as explicitly. Both Kara and Alex, the main female leads, are represented as living on their own, having jobs and ambitions and providing for themselves. This stresses their independence, individual choice, and capability of earning their own living from the beginning (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). Even though these fundaments were also partly present in *Arrow* at the beginning of the series, these were not focussed on and were most of the times countered by the men in the narrative. The men in *Supergirl* fulfil the position of the sidekick, a position that was reserved for women in *Arrow* (Robbins, 1996)*.*

The main obstacle that needs to be conquered on *Supergirl* is the patriarchy. Kara was always taught that using her powers on earth would put herself and her family in danger, she suppressed her powers even though she felt the need to use them and follow her ambitions which is expressed in *Blind Date*. When she finally decides to become Supergirl she receives mixed feedback both from her family as the broader public. Whereas some people are happy with a hero that can protect National City, the majority compares her to Superman and consequently deems her unfit to be a superhero. In *Guardian Angel,* Alex expresses that Kara's choice to use her powers in public was a mistake and in *I'm Her,* Winn assumed that Kara was trying to tell him that she is a lesbian woman rather than 'coming out' as Supergirl. In *DEO, First Alien Battle,* and *Just a Girl,* it is illustrated to which extent Supergirl's powers and strength are questioned until she even starts to doubt herself. As such, communication is used to downplay her strengths and abilities (Demarest, 2010). The first season mainly focuses on Kara learning to be Supergirl and trying to win the respect and trust of the public while constantly being compared to her cousin Superman. In *Fire* and *Training,* it is shown that Supergirl is not ready to deal with bigger threats and requires training from her sister who does not have superpowers but did receive years of training. In *Learning Girl* and *Team Supergirl,* Cat explains to Kara why Supergirl is failing as according to her she is taking on too much, too fast. Kara takes this advice and

asks her friends and sidekicks James and Winn to help her with her first missions from the sidelines. In *Superman,* James calls Superman to save Supergirl which Supergirl is not pleased with, however, Alex stresses that Kara's story is just beginning and that she will be saving Superman one day.

Cat Grant's Explicit Feminism

Cat Grant, Kara's boss, plays an interesting role in explicitly addressing the patriarchal obstacles Supergirl faces. In *Supergirl,* Kara confronts Cat after she chooses to name the mystery woman Supergirl in her magazine as she believes this to be anti-feminist. Cat responds that she combines being a girl with being Kara's boss, powerful, rich, hot and smart so if Kara perceives Supergirl as less than excellent then the problem lies with Kara. In *Learning Curve,* Cat says she is tired of hearing about Superman as everyone knows women have to work twice as hard to be perceived as half as good as a man. In *Cultural Suicide,* Cat states women can never get angry at work even though men can. Women cannot afford this as this would be cultural and professional suicide which confirms the research of Robbins (1996) in which is claimed that women often appear less angry than men. This is again confirmed in season 2 in *Negotiating Peace* as Cat stresses that they are not testosterone-driven windbags boasting about their big guns and do not need to measure anything. She claims that women are above this pettiness and can do everything they want; she proposes coming up with a harmonious solution for world peace. Cat can be perceived as Kara's mentor and by openly stressing the obstacles that women face in everyday life also criticizes these patriarchal notions.

Kara: "If we call her Supergirl, something less than what she is, doesn't that make us guilty of being anti-feminist?"
Cat: "What do you think is so bad about girl? I'm a girl, and your boss and powerful and rich and hot and smart. So, if you perceive Supergirl as anything less than excellent isn't the real problem you?"
S1E1 - Supergirl

At the end of season 1, Supergirl saves the world and is finally considered worthy of her name, Kara is also promoted at CatCo. It took a whole season for Supergirl to prove herself and gain the respect of the broader public and to be perceived as equally strong and capable as Superman. However, because of the openly criticizing of the patriarchy and stressing this comparison to Superman and the obstacles Supergirl has to

conquer, one could argue this narrative tries to reflect struggles women face in everyday life because of patriarchal notions that are still in place and as such tries to bring attention to this problem.

These obstacles also return in the following seasons. In *New Boss,* Kara has to prove that she is a good reporter to her new boss in which she succeeds at the end of the season in *Good Job.* Kara is also confronted with misogynistic behaviour when another alien, Mon-El, lands on earth and needs Kara as his mentor to learn how to fit in. In *Mike, Finding A New Mentor, Starting Over, New Superhero, Mating, Mxzyptlk and Fake Superman,* Mon-El's patriarchal notions and how Kara tries to counter these is illustrated. Kara makes progress as Mon-El's mentor and she succeeds in teaching him about earthly customs and being less misogynistic which leads to a romantic relationship between Kara and Mon-El as is illustrated in *Girl Issues* and *Kiss And Make Up.* In *Change,* it is even stressed how Mon-El changed by making Kara breakfast and doing the laundry while she is at work which heavily contrasts with the first portrayals of Mon-El as misogynistic.

Other characters also encounter obstacles. In *Business Deal, One Stubborn Sexist, New Owner,* and *Powerful Women,* Lena is confronted by a sexist male business owner. She has to confront him and even buys CatCo to confirm her power. Alex is also confronted with obstacles that mainly concern her sexuality on which will be further elaborated in one of the following sections.

Reversing The Protection Narrative

Supergirl reverses the traditional protection narrative (Stabile, 2009) by being the one who does not need saving but saves others, both men and women. In *New Superhero,* Kara trains Mon-El and continuously defeats him. In *Fighting Hank,* she has to protect Lena and a male guard from an intruder. In *Guardian,* she gets mad at James for becoming Guardian and putting his life in danger as he will never be as strong as her and is more likely to get hurt. In *Mxzyptlk, Fake Superman,* and *Kiss And Make Up,* she gets rid of Mxzy and Mon-El who are fighting over her by countering their misogynistic behaviour and solving the problem herself. In *Rescuing Lena* and *Nanobots,* she helps Lena counter a threat. She even has to fight Superman and wins in *Superman vs. Supergirl* which results in Superman coming to the realization that Supergirl is stronger than him and openly admitting this in *Defeated At Full Strength* and *Stronger.* In *Hero,* it is stressed that both Supergirl and Kara accomplished great things and it is said that women are strong because they can be vulnerable. Not only Supergirl but also Lena reverses the protection narrative. In *Argument,* she tries

to protect James which they argue about. She ends up using her power as his boss against him for his own safety. Nia does a similar thing in *Pizza* in which she protects Brainy from violent men who tried to hurt him.

Alex is also represented as strong and not in need of saving. In *Intimidation* and *In Charge,* she is represented as intimidating and capable of leading the DEO. In *Fighting WorldKillers, Target* and *Pursuit,* Alex's strengths and abilities are stressed as she receives her own superhero suit and catches someone targeting her by herself. In *New Director,* she is promoted to be the director of the DEO because of her abilities and also because of the possibility of combining this job with motherhood as it involves less fieldwork and thus less direct dangers.

Strength And Vulnerability Are Not Mutually Exclusive

Alex, Supergirl and Lena continuously grow, get stronger and more intelligent, thus also more powerful. In *Work,* Alex is working as the new director of the DEO and training her employees when the president visits her and compliments her work. In *Fighting Worldkillers,* Lena illustrates her intelligence by taking control of a futuristic spaceship and showcasing the same amount of intelligence as a super-computer from the future. In *Mercy* and *Confrontation,* Lena illustrates that she is not only intelligent, which her brother always feared, but also able to defend herself. In *Trio,* Supergirl, Alex and Lena work together to defeat a robot and uncover Lex Luthor's plans. In *Red Daughter,* Lena and Kara uncover his plans to inform the team and defeat him together with the help of all team members in *Lex Luthor.*

They are not solely represented as strong but also often combine this with vulnerability and femininity (Moseley & Read, 2002), a characteristic that was stressed to be the strength of women by Cat in *Hero.* Kara, Alex, and Lena help Sam with defeating her evil alter ego Reign. In *Panic Attacks* and *Sam* Kara is shown to be vulnerable after losing Mon-El and suffering from panic attacks but receiving support from her sister and best friend Lena. In *Helping Lena* and *Sweetheart,* Lena needs help from her friends to counter an attack from Edge which threatens to ruin her reputation and is represented as vulnerable. In *Space Mission,* Supergirl puts together a team of female superheroes to join her on a mission in space as she will need them as back up because she will not have powers once she leaves earth and thus will be vulnerable. These women are shown to have each other's backs and protect each other when they are in need of help. This is again reiterated in *Lex Luthor* in which both men and women work together to defeat Lex.

Sexual Pleasure For Women

Sexual pleasure is also a fundament that appears in both series and the crossovers (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014)*.* In *A Friend's Help,* Laurel is encouraged to meet and have sex with other men. In *No Strings Attached,* Thea tries to make clear that kissing a man does not mean they are a couple. Evil Laurel often uses sex and consequently also fashion to seduce her victims. In *Secret,* Evil Laurel seduces and kills a man. In *Blow Kiss,* she uses blowing kisses as an analogy for using her power and in *Secret Weapon,* it is stressed that she uses her looks to get what she wants. In *Déjà Vu,* Felicity and Sara openly flirt. In *Blind Date* and *Date,* Kara and Alex go on dates, the last one as a means to get information out of a man. In *Alien Fight Club,* Alex goes undercover with Maggie and they pretend to be a couple. In *Finding a New Mentor,* Eve and Mon-El are caught having sex in a printing room at work. In *My Shirt,* it is stated that Maggie slept at Alex's apartment. In *Kiss and Make Up, Gentleman* and *All Through The Night,* the romantic and sexual relationship between Mon-El and Kara and between Alex and Maggie is stressed. In *Girls' Night,* Sam, Lena, Alex, Maggie, and Kara openly talk about relationships and one-night stands. In *Hottie* and *First Team Meeting,* Iris expresses her attraction towards Oliver and in *Heroes,* Rory and Sara express their attraction towards the president. In *One-Night Stand,* Alex and Sara sleep together which Kara perceives as behaviour of healthy, single ladies. In *Dating,* Alex is encouraged to go out on dates and in *Baby,* the sexual relationship between Lois and Superman is stressed. In *Gideon's Update* and *Shapeshifting,* Charlie openly flirts with Gideon and Zari and in *SOS,* Sara and Ava's sexual relationship is stressed.

Alex: "I had a one-night stand, it's horrible, it's such a guy thing to do, I'm a horrible, terrible guy!"
Kara: "No, you're a healthy single lady!"
S3E8 Supergirl

The Mind As A Superpower

Besides a focus on strength, the mind is also often considered as an important fundament that defines who is a superhero. There are several examples of heroes who do not possess powers, nor received excessive training in fighting but are considered as a hero because of their intelligence and knowledge such as Felicity and Lena. This intelligence is in most cases expressed through extensive knowledge of technology. According to Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014), women who succeed in acquiring knowledge about new communication technologies and media can be considered powerful and successful. As such, women who

do not possess superpowers, nor practical skills as a result of training, can still be considered empowered. In *Mission, New Cover, Normal People, Playing Poker, DNA Test, Woz And Jobs, The New Hood, Felicity's Baby,* and *New Parent,* Felicity's knowledge of technology is stressed and in *Hot Wheels,* it is stated that Felicity's superpower is in her head. In *Nanobots, Confrontation,* and *Lex Luthor,* Lena's technological knowledge is stressed.

When referring to the focus on the mind, not only intelligence is a fundament which is frequently focused on, but mental health is also an issue that reoccurs frequently. In *Arrow* season 2, Laurel develops an addiction to alcohol and drugs after the death of her sister and Thea is resurrected with blood lust and experiences problems with coping with it, she later quits the team because of her incapability to handle this blood lust. Sara was also resurrected with that same blood lust and without a soul which had to be restored by a warlock. She also decides to leave the team after not being able to cope with the lust and she still struggles with that part of herself on *Legends Of Tomorrow*. Supergirl also experiences mental health problems after losing Mon-El and has to deal with panic attacks, she opens up about this problem in *Panic Attacks.*

Some characters also experience the presence of an alter ego with whom they have to share a body and mind. Caitlin had a difficult time with dealing with her alter ego Killer Frost at first and tried to restrain her powers as illustrated in *First Team Meeting* but later accepts her alter ego and actively uses her powers such as in *Attack.* Sam has to deal with her evil alter ego Reign who has the objective to destroy the world and possesses the same powers as Supergirl as is illustrated in *Reign* and *Fighting Worldkillers.* Sam ends up fighting back and defeating Reign, losing her powers in the process. Both Caitlin and Sam struggle with these multiple personality disorders and cannot enjoy their powers at first which confirms the research of Stabile (2009).

Cisco: "I think it's time you introduced these guys to your mean roommate"
S3E8 Supergirl

Crossover Parallels

The first crossovers mainly focus on the coming together of Team Arrow and Team Flash or Team Flash and Team Supergirl. The crossovers are often used to introduce new spin-offs and consequently get more complicated when more series are released and included. Whereas the first crossover only took into account two different teams on the same earth, later crossovers consist easily of twenty superheroes, five joined teams and several different parallel earths. Because of the large number of characters, there are only several superheroes that are represented as leading characters and as leading the combined teams. In the first crossovers, these are mainly Barry and Oliver, later also joined by Sara, leader of Team Legends. Other characters can be considered the sidekicks or included for comic relief.

When the teams join forces, they can be divided into the brains and the muscles. Some characters combine their intelligence to solve cases and guide the teams from the sidelines (Caitlin, Cisco, Felicity) and other characters go into the field (Barry, Oliver, Sara, Supergirl...). The actual leaders are in most cases the ones that join the field missions (Oliver, Barry, Sara) but the leaders on the sidelines are also considered important (Felicity) as illustrated in *First Team Meeting* and *Defeating The Aliens*. Both the brains and the muscles need each other for the mission to succeed. However, this line is often crossed as Felicity, Iris, Cisco, and Caitlin are sometimes forced to go into the field and save the others, certainly after Cisco and Caitlin discover they have powers such as in *Attack* and *Save Kara*.

When Supergirl is introduced she is at first not understood or believed in, but she wins their trust and after a while is considered as an equal or even as stronger than the other characters. In *Wrong Earth,* Barry saves Kara as he believes she requires protection, in *Meeting Supergirl* the team questions why Kara is super, in *Normal,* Oliver refuses to work with her and in *Skirt,* Rory refuses to call Kara Supergirl and starts to call her skirt. This narrative is later countered in *Training With Supergirl, Defeating The Aliens, Hero,* and, *Celebration.* Supergirl even renders Superman unnecessary because of her powers and skills which is illustrated in *Baby* in which Superman says he is leaving earth to raise his child and because he knows earth does not need him when it has Supergirl.

Jax: "What Makes her so super?" - Supergirl
illustrates her superpowers - John: "I'm
convinced"
S3E8 – The Flash

Parallels between the series often occur in the crossovers, such as Cisco and Felicity, who have similar jobs and intelligence and are often included as comic relief such as in *On Fire, Which Guns,* and *First Time Travel,* stressing the presence of the fundament humour (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). There is a parallel dynamic between Iris and Barry, Oliver and Felicity as these are relationships which they never believed would work out. However, they marry each other at the same time in W*edding.* When Batwoman is introduced in *The Book*, there is also a parallel with Supergirl (in terms of backstory) stressing that together they would make World's Finest team.

In the seventh crossover in *The Farm* and *Baby*, Lois brings a feminist element to the narrative by talking about the pay gap, about her work ambitions and about why Kara is more equipped to save the world because she is a woman. Another character, Lyla, who is mainly included in the first crossovers in which women such as Sara and Alex were not yet included, represents the female power in those episodes. In *Boomerang,* she defends herself and others and in *Meeting With The President,* she counters patriarchal obstacles. Especially when the crossovers get more diverse, they move from a more traditional representation of women to a much more diverse representation, by also having women in charge, respected and even considered stronger in the case of Supergirl such as in *How Did I Do That* (Sara saves John and Oliver)*, Fight Like Women* (Barry proposes to settle things as women)*, Sweetheart* (Rene thanks Supergirl for saving him)*, Defeating The Aliens, Heroes, Finding Millie* (Supergirl is mad when Barry wants to kick in the door)*, Firestorm* (Caitlin was the brains behind the serum)*, Attack* (both men and women fight back)*, Instincts* (Sara calms Alex and protects her team)*, Shields* (Zari, Amaya and Killer Frost board the Nazi Waverider)*, Batwoman, The Book* (Batwoman helps the team with their mission) and *Badass In Every World* (Alex fights Barry).

4.4 Bending steel and gender

Hybridism, genderbending or androgyny are fundaments that were also frequently detected in the *Arrowverse* series (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). Although, the majority of the female characters are in most cases represented as rather feminine, both in looks and behaviour, boundaries between masculinity and femininity are also often blurred. Characters within the *Arrowverse* are hard to divide into binary categories as characters who appear to be predominantly feminine sometimes also embody more masculine traits and the other way around.

As previously mentioned, the first character on *Arrow* to explicitly challenge gender binaries is Sara Lance. This is illustrated by the way she likes to dress, which is less predominantly feminine than other characters, and by how she is accepted in Team Arrow as one of the boys. In *Workout,* she illustrates that she has the same strengths and abilities as Oliver Queen by performing exercises similar to those in Oliver's workout routine. This reference returns in season 7 in *Déjà Vu* in which Felicity encounters Sara training in the hideout which she says brings back memories. In *Training,* Sara trains with the male team members and bonds over their scars resulting in Felicity feeling left out. On the other hand, Sara is often also portrayed as vulnerable such as in *Vigilantes Cry Too* and more feminine such as in *One Night Stand* and *More Into Girls* in which she wears a dress, make-up, and heels.

Felicity, John and Oliver watch Sara train –
Felicity: "She's been doing that for like an
hour"
S2E13 - Arrow

On *Supergirl,* Alex and Maggie are characters that engage most frequently in genderbending (mostly in terms of fashion), however, other characters such as Supergirl also often engage in the practice. Expressing emotions and being vulnerable is a theme that reoccurs frequently throughout the seasons. Kara, Alex, and Maggie regularly portray difficulties with expressing their emotions but in most cases find the courage to express them eventually. In *Coming Out,* Alex has difficulties with telling Kara about her feelings for Maggie. In *Feelings,* Kara suppresses her feelings for Mon-El but does encourage him to talk about his feelings as he believes he did something wrong before when he admitted he liked her. In *Kicked Out,* Alex encourages Maggie to open up about what is bothering her instead of letting her run away. In *Give Me Away,* Alex tries to hide her emotions so the other employees of the DEO would not know she is capable of crying and in *Panic Attacks,* Alex talks to Kara about the panic attacks that Kara was having and trying to hide from Alex. The female characters combine being strong and vulnerable and balance expressing and hiding their emotions from others, thus combining masculine and feminine traits. With the introduction of Batwoman

in the seventh crossover, another genderbending character is included in the narrative as Kate Kane embodies masculine traits both in her behaviour and use of fashion but also often includes feminine traits such as wearing a necklace in *Batwoman* and wearing a long red wig as Batwoman in *The Book*.

Alex: "We used to talk to each other about this stuff, why didn't you tell me
you were having panic attacks?" - Kara: "Because I didn't want you to
worry" - Alex: "You fight the most dangerous and evil people on the planet
so I'm kind of always gonna worry" - Kara: "I don't know how to fight this
one"
S3E2 - Supergirl

The practice of genderbending does not only occur surrounding female characters, but also occurs in relation to the representation of male characters such as in *Hot Wheels* in which Oliver cooks for Felicity and takes care of her after her accident and in *Team Practice* in which John stresses not to have as much time left for training since he has to take care of a toddler. In *Gentleman,* Kara brings Mon-El flowers after coming back from her work as Supergirl and in *Change,* Mon-El cooks for Kara and decides to do the laundry while Kara is at work. In *Good Job,* Kara is represented as a good reporter but not a good baker as her male boss often bakes and dislikes her pastries and in *Intimidation,* Alex intimidates Winn without even talking so he would tell Kara's secret.

Kara leaves for work - Mon-El: "I'll get a jumpstart on that laundry!"
S2E17 - Supergirl

Especially in the crossover episodes, genderbending by male characters occurs such as in *Vandal Savage* in which Cisco accuses Thea of being jealous of his well nurtured and long hair and in *First Time Travel* in which Cisco admits to liking Princess Bride. In *On Fire, Which Guns?, Meeting Supergirl,* and *Wedding,* it is illustrated that John has trouble processing the fact that some heroes have superpowers and is not strong enough to handle the supernatural as he always has to vomit after being transported by Barry. Barry also engages in genderbending such as in *Fight Like Women* in which he proposes to settle a fight as women, in *Wedding,* when Iris tells a story about how Barry helped her with her ballet performance and in *Badass In Every World* in which he cannot counter an attack of Alex and must admit she is a badass in every world.

Exaggerated Femininity And Charlie's Angels

In some cases, the opposite of genderbending also occurs and an exaggeration of feminine and masculine traits can be found. In *The President,* Kara asks if she should get a blow out before meeting the president, in *Hit Me Baby,* Kara acts as if she is lost and needs help as a distraction while playing One More Time (Britney Spears) on her car radio and in *The Farm,* Oliver starts puffing his chest when he meets Superman. There are often also Charlie's Angels references included in the narrative such as in *Charlie's Angels* in which Felicity compares Dinah, Sara and herself to Charlie's Angels but without the casual sexism and in *SOS* in which Sara, Ava, and Gideon end up in a different timeline and become The Sirens of Space Time, a reference to Charlie's Angels which includes exaggerated femininity and differs significantly from their normal characters. It could be argued that these are acts of counterbalancing (Tate, 2008), however, these traits seem to be extremely exaggerated possibly with the purpose to include a humorous element (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014) and as such criticize stereotypical representations. This theory can be further confirmed as these acts of counterbalancing are in most cases countered such as in *The Farm* in which Barry calls Oliver out on puffing his chest, in *Hit Me Baby* as the representation was used as a distraction so Kara and her team could defeat their enemies and in *SOS* in which they are represented as strong and capable of defending themselves on top of the stereotypical representation.

Sara: "All right ladies, weapons check!" – Ava: "Way ahead of you babe!" – Gideon:
"My pistol is hot and ready"
S4E8 – Legends of Tomorrow

Even though the majority of characters sometimes engage in genderbending, it seems that predominantly LGBTQ+ characters portray masculine traits such as Alex, Sara, Maggie, and Kate. On the representation of sexuality and race in the *Arrowverse* will be elaborated in the next paragraphs.

4.5   Intersections

When taking into account the intersectionality of sexuality and gender, representations of LGBTQ+ women seem to differ across the series of the *Arrowverse* but female characters seem to consist of predominantly white, heterosexual women in all series. However, some characters identify as LGBTQ+ and subvert certain boundaries surrounding sexuality. On *Arrow,* Sara Lance and Nyssa Al Ghul are the only female characters that identify as non-straight of which Sara identifies as bisexual and Nyssa Al Ghul's sexuality is never explicitly disclosed besides through her relationship with Sara. Besides the focus on their former relationship in the second season of *Arrow*, non-heterosexual women are not frequently represented because of the transfer of Sara from *Arrow* to *Legends Of Tomorrow* and the only sporadic representation of Nyssa after Sara's departure in which she is often not portrayed as having romantic interests. The only other references to women with sexualities that differ from heterosexuality are those in *Evil Laurel* in which Evil Laurel considers a female victim so beautiful she wanted to hold her hand while she died, followed by Rene wondering if she also seduced that victim before killing her similarly to Laurel's other victims and in *Déjà Vu* in which Sara and Felicity flirt referring to the first time they met when Sara constantly said Felicity was cute.

Felicity: "And I always wondered,
were you flirting with me all
those times you said I was cute?"
Sara: "Why, were you into it?"
Felicity: "Of course, it's you!"
S7E18 - Arrow

Even though a great amount of diverse representations concerning sexuality is not present on *Arrow,* how Sara and Nyssa were portrayed can be considered rather positive according to a queer postfeminist framework. Sara is assumed to be a bisexual woman because she has both dated men and women such as Nyssa and Oliver, but she never explicitly comes out. Her sexuality is made public by an old girlfriend visiting and trying to convince her to come back to The League. Sara is never portrayed as struggling with her

identity and never fully discloses she is bisexual. She is not systematically portrayed as extremely masculine or butch but combines both masculine and feminine characteristics (as stated in the previous paragraph she is one of the boys but is also often portrayed as vulnerable and emotional). Her sexual orientation is not overemphasized as it is never a topic of discussion. In *The Unexpected Kiss*, Oliver says she does not need to explain after seeing her and Nyssa kiss. In *The Break Up*, the conversation between Nyssa and Sara is represented as normal and their sexuality is never mentioned. In *Coming Out*, Sara asks her father if he is upset that she has an ex-girlfriend. Her father answers that he honestly is happy she had someone who cared for her all this time she was missing. She is not struggling with her sexuality and it is not considered as something that must be dealt with. This positive representation continues on *Legends of Tomorrow* in which she dates both men and women and becomes the leader of Team Legends, however further research concerning this series is necessary for drawing conclusions surrounding the representation of sexuality on *Legends Of Tomorrow*.
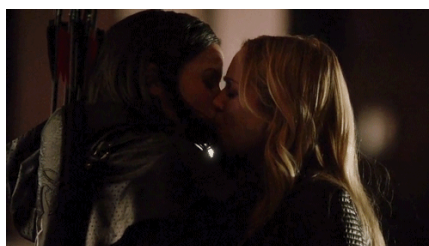
Sara: "I can explain" - Oliver: "You don't have to, but you're not leaving, I don't trust her" - Sara: "Then, trust me" S2E13 - Arrow

Coming Out And Other Struggles

The representation of Sara on *Arrow* and *Legends of Tomorrow* differs from the representation of LGBTQ+ women on *Supergirl.* On the one hand, LGBTQ+ women are more steadily represented throughout the seasons of *Supergirl* in comparison to *Arrow* but on the other hand, LGBTQ+ characters appear to struggle more with their sexuality than on *Arrow.* Alex Danvers comes to terms with her sexuality, comes out and starts to date Maggie in the second season of *Supergirl.* Alex struggles with her sexuality, incapable of admitting to herself she might like women. In *Not Into Girls,* she is shaken when Maggie assumes Alex is a lesbian woman like herself. In *Confused,* Alex opens up to Maggie about how there might be some truth to her earlier comment, however, she does not dare to repeat that comment. Alex evolves from not admitting she is a lesbian woman to accepting her sexuality and openly dating a woman. In *Coming Out* and *Talk To*

Me, she tells Kara about her feelings for Maggie, still having a hard time admitting she is attracted to girls and running away during the conversation the first time. After hearing Kara's apology for not creating an environment in which she could talk about this and Kara's support, Alex finds the courage to kiss Maggie in *Not A Couple.* However, she is rejected but finds support with her sister and later also with her mom after coming out to her in *Telling Eliza.* Her mother already guessed Alex was in love with Maggie and immediately countered Alex's fear that she would have trouble with her daughter being gay. Alex ends up truly accepting herself and her sexuality in *New Normal* and officially starts a relationship with Maggie in *Kiss The Girls We Want To Kiss.* Other coming-out stories include her coming out to her friends in *New Partner* who seem surprised to see her with a woman but react acceptingly, Mon-El not even noticing that two women in a relationship is something special on earth and her coming out to her father in *Family* who states that times have changed but that no man would have been good enough for Alex. After Alex's coming-out her sexuality is less focused on and her relationship with Maggie and later her relationship with Kelly is represented as entirely normal as illustrated in *My Shirt, Kiss And Make Up, Brian, All Through The Night, Girls' Night,* and *Boyfriends And Girlfriends.*

Alex: "I can't do this without you"
Kara: "You don't have to. So, what about Maggie? What's she like?"
S2E6- Supergirl

Maggie is also represented with a coming-out story during her teenage years after which she was kicked out of the house. She often states that she felt like an outsider, especially growing up as a non-white and non-straight girl in Nebraska which is illustrated in *Alien Bar*. The difficult relationship with her family is stressed several times such as in *Kicked Out* in which she explains how she was kicked out of the house as a teenager and in *Bridal Shower* in which her dad leaves her bridal shower after not being able to accept her relationship with a woman. He claims that homosexuals are even more hated than Mexicans in the USA and that he worked hard to make sure his children never endured such kind of hatred; therefore, he cannot stand her choice to be with a woman. Maggie counters his statement by saying she is accepted for who she is and by breaking off contact with him.

The representation of sexuality on *Supergirl* seems to be focused on Alex's struggle with her sexuality and how sexuality is something that should be dealt with in Maggie's case. However, Alex ends up accepting herself and Maggie removes disapproving people out of her life which can be interpreted as focusing on the obstacles which LGBTQ+ women encounter in their everyday life and thus addressing these problems.

Maggie: "I'm accepted for who I am, the world is different now" - Maggie's dad: "They're building a wall to keep us out because in their minds we're nothing but rapists and murderers! The only thing they hate more than a Mexicano is a homosexual!" S3E3 - Supergirl

In the crossovers, same-sex relationships are sometimes also included such as the one-night stand of Alex and Sara in *Scotch* and *One-Night Stand* and in *More Into Girls* in which Sara tells Laurel she is more attracted to girls. Homophobia is also presented as an obstacle in the sixth crossover as in *Earth X,* Sara states to like both men and women during her time on a Nazi earth after which she is said to have compulsions and therefore must be killed. However, this seems to be portrayed as a problem of Nazis on another earth rather than a common problem in everyday life.

A Transgender Story

In the series, there are not solely representations of lesbian and bisexual women but also of a transgender woman and a woman who is assumed to be queer or pansexual. On *Supergirl,* Nia Nall, a transgender woman, is introduced in the fourth season. In *Trans,* Nia tells her boss that she is a transgender woman and is deeply concerned about increasing hate crimes against aliens in National City thus believes James should write an editorial to address the problem. In *Dreamer,* Nia tells Kara about her story while driving home to her family. She shares that her town was very pro-inclusion which helped her while growing up as an alien and a transgender woman and that her family was very accepting and helped her transition at a young age.

This narrative is slightly countered in *The Gift, The Next Dreamer* and *Not A Real Woman* as Nia did not tell her family that she inherited the dreaming powers which only one woman of every generation can inherit, and her family automatically assumes her sister will inherit the powers. When they realize Nia inherited the powers, her mother apologizes for being so blind and realizes Nia was meant to be the next dreamer and

her daughter. Her sister, however, cannot deal with the notion that she is not inheriting the powers and believes it to be impossible as Nia is not a real woman.

The fact that Nia's family did not consider the possibility that Nia could inherit the powers and that her sister does not think of Nia as a real woman can be interpreted as a rather negative representation. However, Nia's mother does acknowledge she was wrong and ultimately Nia is the daughter inheriting the power thus confirming she is a real woman which counters the previous narrative. Besides these examples, there are no other mentions of Nia's transgender identity.

Nia's sister: "How did you of all people get the powers, they're supposed to be passed on from mother to daughter! So, how did someone like you get them? You're not even a real woman!"
S4E11 - Supergirl

Another LGBTQ+ character is Charlie on *Legends of Tomorrow* who was included in the special mid-season finale. Her sexuality is never explicitly confirmed; however, it is insinuated that she is not solely attracted to men or women and could be considered queer or pansexual. In *Gideon's Update,* Charlie flirts with the physical version of the AI of the Waverider, Gideon and in *Shapeshifter,* she enjoys that Zari perceives her as attractive. For a more in-depth analysis of her sexuality, an analysis of *Legends Of Tomorrow* is required.

Besides the previously mentioned obstacles that LGBTQ+ women seem to encounter, sexuality is not predominantly focused on even if LGBTQ+ characters are included, and same-sex relationships are represented similarly to opposite-sex relationships as well in *Arrow, Supergirl* as the crossovers (McInroy and Craig, 2017).

The Search For Women Of Colour

When it comes to race, representation becomes less diverse as the series predominantly focus on white women. On *Arrow,* the only women of color are Nyssa and Mari of which Nyssa was not a leading, but a recurring character and Mari was only included in one episode. On *Supergirl,* Maggie was the first non-white leading women, now followed by Kelly who has a leading role in the fifth season which was not

included in the analysis. In the crossover episodes, there seems to be more diversity as Amaya, Charlie, Zari (*Legends of Tomorrow*) and Iris (*The Flash*) are included who are all women of colour. In most cases, race is not explicitly focused on with the exception of the character Maggie. As previously stated, she felt like an outcast as she is not only a lesbian woman but also Mexican. In *Bridal Shower,* her father stresses that Mexicans and homosexuals are discriminated and that it is not getting better as they are trying to build a wall to keep Mexicans from coming to the USA. Maggie counters his argument by stressing she is accepted for who she is and decides to break off contact with her father. Maggie presents discrimination against race and sexuality as a problem of her father and her birthplace Nebraska and considers herself as accepted. She is also represented as a strong character who is able to defend herself such as in *Alien Bar, Alien Fight Club, Kidnapped* and *Brian.*

Nyssa, Amaya, and Mari are also represented as strong and able to defend themselves as was previously argued but their race is not explicitly stressed. Amaya and her granddaughter Mari are represented in an interesting manner as they are the earth totem bearers. When focusing on their powers and costume, Brown's (2013) theory that black superheroines are mainly depicted according to Afrocentric stereotypes related to nature, mysticism and totemism seems to be confirmed. However, they do rise above these stereotypes and are represented as strong, independent and intelligent (Brown, 2013) as is illustrated in *The Vixen, Finding William, Defeating Darkh,* and *Shields.* Iris*,* Charlie and Zari's race also does not seem to be focused on and they appear to be represented as strong and independent such as in *Shields* and *SOS*. However, their characters were only included in one crossover or mid-season finale, thus further analysis of their respective series is needed to draw conclusions.

5. Conclusion

In general, there seems to be an equal amount of representation of women and men (Carroll, 1990; Palmer, 2005; Erigha, 2015), even though *Arrow* focuses predominantly on male characters in contrast to *Supergirl* which mainly has female characters in the leading roles. Subsequently, Team Arrow consists of a male leader and Team Supergirl does not have only one leader but focuses on both Kara and Alex. From the beginning of the series, *Supergirl* addresses the obstacles which Supergirl has to conquer to become a hero, thus focusing on her superhero role whereas *Arrow* mainly considers women to be the sidekicks or girlfriends of the superheroes (Robbins, 1996; Sadri, 2014). Nevertheless, the female characters in both series are considered to be vulnerable and in need of protection and need to prove themselves if they want to be respected as a hero (Stabile, 2009). Supergirl counters this protection narrative rather fast and even reverses it in the following seasons whereas the female characters in *Arrow* take several seasons to train and join Team Arrow, also countering but never explicitly reversing the protection narrative. The main difference between the two series is that female characters on *Supergirl* are represented as strong, independent, having individual choice and as able to protect themselves (Robbins, 1996; Stabile, 2009; Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014) from the beginning but were not necessarily acknowledged as such by the outside world and thus considered vulnerable and in need of saving whereas female characters on *Arrow* could actually not protect themselves in most cases and only later in the series learned to fight and counter the protection narrative. This difference is especially illustrated by the main focus on feminism in *Supergirl* especially through the explicit criticizing of the patriarchy by the character Cat Grant.

Most women also seem to be portrayed as rather feminine, thus combining their (gained) power and independence with feminine characteristics which can be considered as a core fundament of queer postfeminism (Moseley & Read, 2002). However, traditional gender binaries are also challenged by the presence of genderbending and hybridism both by feminine and less feminine female characters, which confirms the queer in queer postfeminism (Butler, 1990; Shively & De Cecco, 1993; Lotz, 2001; Gerhard, 2005; Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). This is especially visible for all female characters when analysing their superhero costumes as these appear to be very similar to those of the male characters as they also wear bodysuits, boots, belts, and often capes. Even though there are differences in colours, weapons, superpowers, and face masks these seem to differ more between series than between sexes (vigilantes versus superheroes). The only character who significantly dresses feminine as a superhero is Supergirl, thus

combining her femininity and her strengths and abilities as a superhero. However, in season 5 she also starts to wear a costume that resembles those of the other superheroes (Demarest, 2010).

The opposite phenomenon of exaggerating feminine characteristics also occurs (Demarest, 2010), however, often in a humorous manner which can be interpreted as criticizing stereotypes. This does not imply that more stereotypical representations are not present in the series as especially in *Arrow* various mixed representations and acts of counterbalancing (Beritela, 2007; Tate, 2008) are encountered. Such acts are also present in *Supergirl* but often intended as a critique of the patriarchy rather than as an objective to strip female characters of their power (Gibson, 2015). As such, extreme femininity is often also used as a means to reach a certain goal and can be interpreted as an instrumental power and can be linked to sexual pleasure which is often (but most of the time implicitly) stressed (Adriaens & Van Bauwel).

Concerning the strengths and abilities of female characters, most of the characters are considered to either have superpowers or skills as a result of excessive training which are only in some cases gifted by a male mentor (Robbins, 1996; Demarest, 2010, Signorielli, 2011). This can be interpreted as empowering with the exception of the female characters that seem to struggle with their powers and possibly also struggle with an evil alter ego or their mental health (Stabile, 2009). Female characters that do not embody any of the above-mentioned skills are mainly represented as intelligent, often linked to excessive knowledge of technology (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014).

From an intersectional perspective, representation of LGBTQ+ women and women of colour differs across the series and the crossovers. *Arrow* does not represent a great amount of non-white and non-straight female characters in contrast with *Supergirl* in which these characters are more continuously represented throughout the seasons. The crossover episodes include even more diverse female characters as the few non-white and non-straight characters from the different series are brought together (Gauntlett, 2008). Several characters combine being non-white with a non-straight sexuality and bisexual and transgender characters are also included (Raley and Lucas, 2006; McInroy and Craig, 2017). Even though the amount of LGBTQ+ women and women of colour that is included in the series is rather low, the ones that are included seem to be represented in a diverse and rather positive manner according to a queer postfeminist framework. These characters are often leading characters with a diverse backstory and thus not solely included as comic relief, villains, victims of violence or mentally/physically ill (McInroy and Craig, 2017) nor as sex objects, servants or as objects of ridicule (Greenberg & Baptista-Fernandez, 1980; Brooks and Hébert,

2006; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2017). However, LGBTQ+ women seem to embody more masculine traits in comparison to their straight counterparts, but they are also not represented as solely embodying masculine traits and are often the characters that challenge gender binaries and combine masculine and feminine characteristics, thus are not systematically represented as butch. In *Arrow* and the crossovers, a coming-out narrative is not included, and sexuality is not something that is emphasized, struggled with or considered to be dealt with. This can be considered positive as a coming-out narrative only reproduces the closet (Murray, 2015). This contrasts with *Supergirl* in which sexuality is represented as something that can be struggled with or can be considered as something to be dealt with and a coming-out narrative is included (McInroy and Craig, 2017). Deducing from the way *Supergirl* acknowledges and criticizes the patriarchy, this representation can also be considered as focusing on obstacles encountered by LGBTQ+ women in everyday life to bring attention to the problem which contrasts with *Arrow* which mainly presents such problems as obstacles that are not encountered in the 'real world'.

Race is also not focused on in *Arrow* and the crossovers but is addressed in *Supergirl* in the form of immigration and discrimination combined with being non-straight. In the series and crossovers, there are only a few women of colour, specifically African American women, included and the majority of these women are linked to nature, mysticism, and totemism (Brown, 2013). This should not necessarily be interpreted as problematic as these women appear to rise above these stereotypes and combine these with strength, independence and, intelligence (Brown, 2013). However, most women of colour were characters that only appeared on the crossovers as these are characters from other series than *Arrow* or *Supergirl*. Further research into the other series of the *Arrowverse* is needed to draw more in-depth conclusions surrounding these characters.

To formulate an answer for the main research question: 'How are female superheroes, that assume a central role in the live-action series of *Arrowverse* (series of The CW based on DC Comics, including *Arrow*; *The Flash*; *Supergirl*; *Legends of Tomorrow* and *Batwoman*), represented from an intersectional perspective?' the sub-question: 'Do these series reiterate and/or resist queer postfeminist ideas from an intersectional perspective?' must be answered first. On the level of gender, several fundaments of queer postfeminism were encountered during the analysis of the series *Arrow* and *Supergirl* and the crossovers such as independence, individual choice, sexual pleasure, humour, hybridism, technology and, fashion. However, it appears that *Supergirl* more explicitly engages with queer postfeminism by often combining feminism and femininity while at the same time challenging boundaries of gender and sexuality and from

the beginning including female characters in leading roles and leadership positions. *Arrow* focuses more on male characteristics and only in later seasons start to focus on the gained strength and power of female characters which can be combined with feminine traits, thus more predominantly engaging with rather stereotypical representations of women according to a queer postfeminist framework. Nevertheless, in both series and the crossovers women are (eventually) represented as strong and able to defend themselves and are not merely included as sidekicks, thus countering the protection narrative.

This representation of women as free and active subjects with freedom of choice is not explicitly accompanied by increasing anxieties such as loneliness, the stigma of remaining single or missing the chance to have children. However, even when women are represented as empowered mixed representations occur which can be interpreted as counterbalancing in some cases but also as criticizing patriarchal obstacles of which the latter is encountered in *Supergirl* more frequently. This confirms Gibson's (2015) statement that gendered identities are both affirmed and challenged in contemporary comics and that, consequently, the superhero genre is full of tensions and contradictions. However, it seems that especially *Supergirl* and later also *Arrow* more frequently try to challenge patriarchal notions and gendered identities rather than affirm them.

From an intersectional perspective, it could be argued that LGBTQ+ women and women of colour are still underrepresented, but especially *Supergirl* starts to include more diverse representations of female characters. The LGBTQ+ female characters and female characters of colour seem to be represented in leading roles and as diverse characters in which their race and sexuality is often not stressed or represented as a problem and is often combined with positive representations on the level of gender. However, *Supergirl* tends to address problems women with a different sexuality and race encounter similarly as it tends to address patriarchal obstacles whereas *Arrow* and the crossovers tend to avoid such problematics or present is it as a problem which is not present in this world or in contemporary Western society.

It can be concluded that especially *Supergirl* and to a lesser extent *Arrow* and the crossovers reiterate queer postfeminist ideas and that female superheroes who assume a central role in the live-action series of Arrowverse are consequently represented in a rather empowered manner. However, representation is diverse, mixed representations also occur and even though an intersectional perspective is taken into account and LGBTQ+ women and women of colour are represented in a rather positive manner, they are

still underrepresented. Especially on the level of sexuality and race, improvement in terms of the number of diverse characters that are included is still needed, more with regard to *Arrow* than to *Supergirl.*

To answer the main research question, it can be concluded that predominantly positive representations on the level of gender, sexuality, and race in relation to a queer postfeminist framework were encountered and that the superhero series of the *Arrowverse* that were analysed try to provide a space for reimagining and thus attempting to change society towards a more inclusive and equal environment (Stabile, 2009), but that there are still improvements possible, especially in the case of *Arrow,* on the level of sexuality and race*.*

6. Discussion

The previously mentioned results confirm that the superhero genre can serve as an environment for reimagining society as a more equal and inclusive environment. However, only two series were subjected to an in-depth analysis, and as illustrated in this research, series in the same genre, of the same television network, based on comic books of the same publisher can differ significantly with regard to the representation of gender, sexuality, and race. Therefore, every series must be analysed separately and drawing conclusions on a general level is difficult. Research into the other series of the *Arrowverse* and other audio-visual adaptations of DC Comics and Marvel Comics can be considered valuable (from an intersectional perspective, especially *Batwoman* which focuses on Kate Kane and her sexual orientation as a lesbian woman and *Black Lightning* which focuses on a family of Black superheroes including a Black, lesbian superheroine can be considered interesting). Comparative research between audio-visual adaptations of DC Comics and Marvel Comics might also be an interesting perspective for further research especially as the popularity of this genre is growing fast accompanied by an increase in the amount of audio-visual adaptations which results in an interesting competition between the different publishers of comic books. This analysis also mainly focuses on female leading characters, however, to fully understand the representation of gender it might be interesting to conduct a second analysis of the same series with a focus on the male leading characters. Such research would make it possible to compare the representation of men and women and as such provide further insights into the representation of gender. Besides qualitative in-depth research, quantitative research into the genre can also provide interesting insights. This research can be considered as a starting point for further analysis concerning this genre.

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8. Attachments

8.1 Research Grid

Theme 1: Gender	
Formal textual analysis	
Positive representation	**Traditional, stereotypical or negative representation**

Narrative
 	
 • Fundaments of (Queer) postfeminism:
   o Consumer culture
   o Fashion
   o Independence
   o (Sexual) pleasure
   o Individual choice
   o Humour
   o Hybridism
   o Technology
   o Renewed focus on the female body
 • Attitude:
   o Confident to declare anxieties that accompany freedom of choice
   o Avoidance of aggressive and overtly traditional men
   o Enjoying sexuality without the fear of a sexual double standard
   o Capable of earning own living
   o Shame in not finding a husband is countered by sexual self-confidence (no husband does not mean going without men)
 • Specific for superheroines:
   o Leadership, no (male) mentor
   o Leading role in series
   o Strengths and abilities are stressed
   o Intelligent
   o Capable of saving themselves, not in need of a male rescuer
   o Represented as active
   o No or healthy relationships
	Narrative
	
	 • Gender is driven into extremes, although this might be considered empowering
	 • Anxieties that accompany freedom of choice are stressed
	 • Attitude:
	   o Emotional, attractive females concerned about personal appearance
	   o Females are less angry than men
	 • Specific for superheroines:
	   o Superheroines are short-lived and/or a man's sidekick or girlfriend that needs saving
	   o Female bodies are considered vulnerable and breakable and therefore are considered as victims in need of saving (protection narrative)
	   o Superheroines have a male mentor
	   o Communication is in function of downplaying superheroines' intelligence or serves as a cry for help instead of for stressing their strengths and abilities

Mise-en-scène • <u>Body type:</u> soft, vulnerable, girly, long curly hair or tall and muscular • <u>Lifestyle:</u> healthy, clean, softly spoken	*Mise-en-scène* • <u>Body type:</u> long and curly hair, hourglass figure (large bust and hips, small waist) which is pronounced by clothing, not as

• **Clothing:** power dressing in function of oneself and not another • **Powers:** inherent, offensive powers, not gifted by a man. In control of those powers and joy in using them. When no powers, extensive training and extraordinary skills replace the absence of powers	muscular as men (bodies are more breakable) • **Clothing:** Full-length bodysuits or revealing clothing that brings attention to their body, no insignia and high heels or boots • **Powers:** no inherent powers but powers are gifted by a man. These powers are used defensively. Superheroines are not in control of these powers and often must cope with personality disorders when using them, consequently, they often find no joy in using powers
Cinematography • (Feminine) aesthetics (special effects, glossy)	*Cinematography* • Aesthetics • Camera angle
Sound • Non-diegetic music, voice-over	*Sound* • Non-diegetic music, voice-over

Ideological textual analysis	
Positive representation	**Traditional, stereotypical or negative representation**

• Stressed individualism within a neoliberal and capitalist society (women are free subjects with freedom of choice)
• Feminism and femininity are not considered mutually exclusive but can be combined and even exaggerated to emphasize the combination between women and power (boundaries between feminine and feminist, public and private are deconstructed)
• There is no monolithic definition of being feminist, various opportunities for female identification are present (female characters who are complex and distinct from one another despite the commonality of womanhood)
• Binaries of sexuality are neutralised/challenged, diversity in gender is represented (scales of biological sex, gender identity, social sex role and sexual orientation: transgendered, transsexual and bisexual characters contest culturally created categories)
• Count of males does not exceed females
	• Stressed individualism within a neoliberal and capitalist society (women are free subjects with freedom of choice) leads to increasing anxieties including:
	   o Loneliness
	   o The stigma of remaining single
	   o Uncertainties of finding a good partner
	   o Missing the chance to have children (biological clock)
	• Feminism and femininity are considered to be mutually exclusive, women are expected to 'become masculine' to infiltrate previously male-dominated domains. You cannot be feminine and successful at the same time
	• Femininity can be empowering but can also be recuperated by the patriarchy and stripped of its emancipatory potential
	• Counterbalancing occurs when gender binaries are challenged, women's female aspects are exaggerated to compensate for their male attributes
	• Count of males exceeds females

Theme 2: Sexuality

Formal textual analysis	
Positive representation	**Traditional, stereotypical or negative representation**
Narrative • LGBTQ+ people are not included as comic relief or are not villains, criminals, victims of violence or mentally/physically ill • LGBTQ+ are not struggling with their identity, their identity is not considered as something that must be dealt with	*Narrative* • LGBTQ+ people are included as comic relief or are villains, criminals, victims of violence or mentally/physically ill • LGBTQ+ are struggling with their identity, their identity is considered as something that must be dealt with
Mise-en-scène • LGBTQ+ people are not stereotypically portrayed or dressed (Lesbians or bisexuals are not systematically portrayed as masculine/butch or wearing masculine clothes)	*Mise-en-scène* • LGBTQ+ people are stereotypically portrayed or dressed (Lesbians or bisexuals are systematically portrayed as masculine/butch or wearing masculine clothes)
Cinematography • Aesthetics • Camera angle	*Cinematography* • Aesthetics • Camera angle
Sound • Non-diegetic music, voice-over	*Sound* • Non-diegetic music, voice-over

Ideological textual analysis	
Positive representation	**Traditional, stereotypical or negative representation**
• LGBTQ+ people are represented • The representation of LGBTQ+ people is diverse referring to transgender and non-binary genders, bisexual identities (not represented as curious or confused), diverse ages, races and socio-economic statuses • Sexual orientation is not overemphasized	• LGBTQ+ people are not or underrepresented • The representation of LGBTQ+ people is not diverse referring to transgender and non-binary genders, bisexual identities (not represented as curious or confused), diverse ages, races and socio-economic statuses • Sexual orientation is overemphasized

Theme 3: Race	

Formal textual analysis	
Positive representation	**Traditional, stereotypical or negative representation**
Narrative • Ethnic/racial minorities are not portrayed as criminals, sex objects, servants, blue collar workers, objects of ridicule and as unintelligent • The portrayal of ethnic and racial minorities rises above (Afrocentric) stereotypes (nature, mysticism, totemism) by representing more than wild, bestial, hypersexual spectacles, and by being represented as independent, intelligent and strong (physically and spiritually) and by avoiding racist and sexist stereotypes	*Narrative* • Ethnic/racial minorities are portrayed as criminals, sex objects, servants, blue collar workers, objects of ridicule and as unintelligent • The portrayal of ethnic and racial minorities does not rise above (Afrocentric) stereotypes (nature, mysticism, totemism) by representing these minorities as wild, bestial, hypersexual spectacles, and by not being represented as independent, intelligent and strong (physically and spiritually) and by not avoiding racist and sexist stereotypes
Mise-en-scène • Ethnic/racial minorities are not systematically more provocatively and unprofessionally dressed	*Mise-en-scène* • Ethnic/racial minorities are systematically more provocatively and unprofessionally dressed
Cinematography • Aesthetics • Camera angle	*Cinematography* • Aesthetics • Camera angle
Sound • Non-diegetic music, voice-over	*Sound* • Non-diegetic music, voice-over

Ideological textual analysis	
Positive representation	**Traditional, stereotypical or negative representation**
• Ethnic/racial minorities are represented as diverse subjects and are respected • Feminine beauty is not necessarily related to light skin, straight hair, thinness, youthfulness and middle-class status.	• Ethnic/racial minorities are not represented as diverse subjects and are not respected • Feminine beauty is related to light skin, straight hair, thinness, youthfulness and middle-class status.

8.2 Overview of Author Contributions

Gender	
Author	**Contribution**
Butler (1990)	Performativity, queer theory
Shively and De Cecco (1993)	Sexual identity consists of four aspects that must be seen as a continuum
Robbins (1996)	Physical appearance, clothing, behaviour, romantic relationships and superpowers of superheroes
Lotz (2001)	Attributes of postfeminism
Mosely and Read (2002)	Attributes of postfeminism
McRobbie (2004)	Attributes of postfeminism
Gerhard (2005)	Queer postfeminism
Tate (2008)	Superheroines and female sexuality, counterbalancing
Stabile (2009)	Behaviour, romantic relationships and superpowers of superheroes, protection narrative
Demarest (2010)	Physical appearance, clothing, behaviour, romantic relationships and superpowers of superheroes
Signorielli (2011)	Physical appearance and clothing of superheroes
Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2014)	Attributes of postfeminism

Sexuality	
Author	**Contribution**
Raley and Lucas (2006)	LGBTQ stereotypes
Corin and Schott (2015)	LGBTQ superheroes
Murray (2015)	LGBTQ s superheroes
McInroy and Craig (2017)	LGBTQ stereotypes

Race	
Author	**Contribution**
Greenberg and Baptista-Fernandez (1980)	Stereotypes concerning women of colour
Mastro and Greenberg (2000)	Stereotypes concerning women of colour
Brooks and Hébert (2006)	Stereotypes concerning women of colour
Brown (2013)	Stereotypes concerning superheroines of colour
Tukachinsky, Mastro and Yarchi (2017)	Stereotypes concerning women of colour

8.3 Selection of Cases

Date of release/ cases that were analysed	Arrow	The Flash	Supergirl	Legends of Tomorrow	Batwoman
2012	*Season 1* Ep 1; 2; 13; 16; 22				
2013	*Season 2* Ep 2; 3; 4; 13; 14				
2014	*Season 3* Ep 3; 4; 5; 8; 13; 16; 21; 22; 23	*Season 1* Ep 8			
2015	*Season 4* Ep 3; 6; 8; 11; 13; 15; 17	*Season 2* Ep 8	*Season 1* Ep 1; 2; 3; 4; 6; 10; 18; 20		
2016	*Season 5* Ep 1; 2; 5; 7; 8; 9; 10; 15; 16; 18; 19; 23	*Season 3* Ep 8; 17	*Season 2* Ep 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 20; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 17; 18; 21; 22	*Season 1* *Season 2* Ep. 7	
2017	*Season 6* Ep 2; 4; 7; 8; 10; 14; 15; 19; 22	*Season 4* Ep 8	*Season 3* Ep 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 10; 11; 12; 17; 20; 23	*Season 3* Ep 8	
2018	*Season 7* Ep 1; 4; 8; 9; 10; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 20; 22	*Season 5* Ep 9	*Season 4* Ep 1; 2; 6; 9; 11; 13; 17; 20; 22	*Season 4* Ep 8	
2019	*Season 8**	*Season 6**	*Season 5**	*Season 5**	*Season 1**

*To be released

Arrow			
Season 1 Party scene (E1: 28:24-29:52) Protective Custody (E2: 17:30-18:42) Break In (E2: 25:27-26:27) Family Fight (E2: 29:15-30:34) A Friend's Help (E3: 9:56-11:07) The Fight (E3: 21:13-22:28) Fight Like A Girl (E13: 23:00-24:38) Mentor (E16: 3:04-3:32) Mission (E22: 23:30-30:18)	**Season 3** The New Canary (E3: 24:03-26:33) No Male Mentor (E3: 35:32-37:23) Potential (E4: 35:41-36:48) Normal People (E5: 0-3:38) The Hacker (E5: 34:26-34:55) No Strings Attached (E8: 8:39-8:48) Laurel Fights (E13: 1:10-1:57) The Legacy (E16: 20:29-21:59) Bride To The Demon (E21: 32:50-35:37) The Confrontation (E22: 17:33-19:07) Atom (E23: 32:03-32:37) Speedy (E23: 37:46-39:08)	**Season 5** The Statue (E1: 15:50-17:14) Not Just A Pretty Face (E2: 29:37-31:09) Cuter Than The Green Guy (E5: 1:51-2:59) Baston (E7: 1:32-2:15) The Ghost (E7: 15:46-16:17) DNA Test (E9: 16:51-17:24) Black Siren (E10: 34:29-35:37) Dinah (E10: 40:40-41:25) The Good Woman (E15: 11:49-13:06) The Hacker (E16: 25:55-27:13) The New Diggle (E18: 21:06-21:39) The Burden (E19: 20:03-22:50) Don't Grab Women (E19: 32:00-32:22) Not Her Type (E23: 2:58-3:53) Sisters (E23: 23:10-25:03)	**Season 7** Fight back (E1: 33:07-35:49) Torture (E4: 3:22-5:08) Emiko (E8: 0-1:25) The Intruder (E8: 20:58-24:34) The New Hood (E10: 10:20-11:46) Felicity's Baby (E14: 17:15-19:07) Renée's Advice (E14: 23:00-24:07) Stronger Than Diaz (E14: 33:08-33:45) Career (E14: 35:05-36:01) Without Her Cry (E15: 24:08-25:52) Mia Smoak (E16: 1:21-2:23) The Wall (E16: 8:16-9:53) William's New Assistant (E16: 18:03-19:47) An Army Of Men (E16: 32:39-35:22) New Parent (E17: 3:37-3:50) Canaries (E18: 13:40-15:50) Déjà Vu (E18: 19:27-21:00) Rebellion Group (E18: 24:49-26:59) Charlie's Angels (E18: 37:42-38:39) The Leader (E20: 23:30-24:27) New Generation (E22: 12:48-14:09)
Season 2 New Cover (E2: 12:08-13:55) Bait (E3: 20:38-21:29) New Vigilante (E4: 11:23-13:11) The Workout (E13: 5:58-7:23) The Unexpected Kiss (E13: 9:43-11:41) The Break Up (E13: 13:57-15:57) Coming Out (E13: 23:26-24:56) Training (E14: 3:51-5:28) Advice From Sara (E14: 12:18-13:20) Vigilantes Cry Too (E14: 38:36-39:40)	**Season 4** Playing Poker (E3: 30:49-32:44) Rescuing Ray (E6: 29:40-33:38) Hot Wheels (E11: 1:08-2:75) The New Ra's (E13: 29:03-33:28) The Vixen (E15: 9:59-12:23) Finding William (E15: 18:00-20:17) Defeating Darkh (E15: 29:39-32:33) Team Practice (E17: 0:41-1:40)	**Season 6** FBI (E2: 17:05-18:46) Woz And Jobs (E2: 33:42-35:08) Secret (E4: 0:02-1:42) Aleyna (E4: 7:27-8:25) Evil Laurel (E4: 13:13-15:26) Ghost Mirror Drive (E4: 15:44-18:38) The Lieutenant (E7: 2:48-3:19) The Break-in (E7: 6:40-8:06) The New Leader (E7: 29:48-30:20) The Bomb (E7: 32:08-33:09) Blow Kiss (E10: 0:31-2:06) Conflict (E14: 32:52-33:41)	

		Roy Is Back (E15: 14:19-18:41)	
		Secret Weapon (E19: 15:18-18:46)	
		Infiltration (E22: 21:22-28:20)	
		Lyla And John (E22: 33:40-34:02)	

Supergirl	
<u>Season 1</u>	<u>Season 2</u>
Blind Date (E1: 8:48-10:14)	New Boss (E2: 14:10-18:48)
Guardian Angel (E1:13:38-16:25)	The President (E3: 2:12-3:34)
I'm Her (E1: 16:26-20:22)	Alien Bar (E3: 16:56-20:15)
Costume (E1: 21:53-24:24)	Alien Fight Club (E4: 13:41-14:42)
DEO (E1: 25:59-26:23)	Mike (E5: 10:23-12:15)
Supergirl (E1: 27:24-30:21)	Not Into Girls (E5: 15:28-16:53)
First Alien Battle (E1: 31:12-34:25)	Finding A New Mentor (E5: 16:53-18:31)
Just A Girl (E1: 38:40-41:05)	Starting Over (E5: 37:01-38:36)
Just As Formidable (E1: 43:39-44:41)	Confused (E5: 38:36-40:48)
Fire (E2: 2:32-4:54)	New Superhero (E6: 8:54-10:07)
Training (E2: 12:44-14:45)	Coming Out (E6: 8:54-13:51)
Learning Curve (E2: 14:53-17:09)	Talk To Me (E6: 19:16-22:14)
Team Supergirl (E2: 19:29-21:28)	Not A Couple (E6: 38:25-41:13)
Superman (E3: 24:56-27:15)	Mating (E7: 36:54-39:08)
Livewire (E4: 3:00-7:09)	Telling Eliza (E8: 17:51-19:16)
Cultural suicide (E6: 21:44-23:43)	Fighting Hank (E8: 21:52-23:38)
Date (E10: 20:00-21:47)	New Normal (E8: 26:29-27:56)
Promotion (E20: 34:33-37:17)	Kiss the Girls We Want to Kiss (E8: 38:50-40:56)
<u>Season 3</u>	My Shirt (E9: 3:13-5:25)
Business deal (E1: 6:05-8:59)	Guardian (E10: 17:05-20:06)
One Stubborn Sexist (E1: 11:06-12:41)	Feelings (E11: 1:08-3:05)
New Owner (E1: 35:20-37:44)	Birthday (E11: 34:41-37:45)
Give Me Away (E1: 38:08-39:49)	New Partner (E12: 3:13-5:18)
Intimidation (E2: 23:58-24:30)	Lena Luthor (E12: 5:14-6:54)
Panic Attacks (E2: 25:36-28:16)	Mxzyptlk (E13: 0:56-4:18)
Sam (E2: 37:15-40:20)	Bullies (E13: 6:56-8:19)
Bridal Shower (E3: 23:53-28:05)	Fake Superman (E13: 14:55-18:46)
Hit Me Baby (E3: 32:52-35:35)	Girl Issues (E13: 18:46-19:13)
Rhao (E4: 5:10-7:16)	Kicked Out (E13: 20:09-22:16)
Girls' Night (E4: 12:55-14:43)	Kiss And Make Up (E13: 37:05-41:45)
All Through The Night (E5: 15:40-16:38)	Gentleman (E14: 1:02-4:44)
Helping Lena (E5: 16:38-21:00)	Family (E14: 12:19-14:05)
In Charge (E7: 17:34-18:07)	Kidnapped (E15: 7:36-9:03)
Reign (E10: 3:57-5:52)	Brian (E15: 20:21-21:59)
Space Mission (E11: 12:00-15:03)	Rescuing Lena (E15: 26:01-26:53)
Powerful Women (E12: 5:04-6:29)	Change (E17: 1:10-2:34)
Sweetheart (E12: 29:55-30:43)	Nanobots (E18: 31:24-35:24)
Fighting worldkillers (E17: 28:09-35:16)	Good Job (E18: 38:46-40:42)
Target (E20: 8:07-10:45)	Negotiating Peace (E21: 11:02-13:52)
Pursuit (E20: 32:09-34:09)	Superman vs. Supergirl (E22: 3:38-5:45)
New Director (E23: 32:55-35:21)	Defeated At Full Strength (E22: 9:27-10:03)
<u>Season 4</u>	Stronger (E22: 32:33-26)
Work (E1: 1:56-4:34)	Hero (E22: 36:17-39:48)
Mercy (E2: 12:56-14:31)	
Pizza (E2: 14:41-17:03)	
Trans (E2: 18:12-21:21)	
Confrontation (E2: 27:40-29:33)	
Argument (E6: 8:59-11:02)	
Dreamer (E11: 8:01-9:25)	
The gift (E11: 13:30-14:39)	
The Next Dreamer (E11: 21:08-23:43)	
Not A Real Woman (E11: 35:44-38:35)	
First Training (E13: 8:32-9:28)	
Distraction (E13: 30:30-31:09)	
Trio (E17: 26:32-28:39)	

Red Daughter (E20: 30:50-31:35)
Lex Luthor (E22: 24:43-31:13)
Boyfriends And Girlfriends (E22: 35:43-36:46)

Crossovers	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3	Part 4
CO1: Flash vs. Arrow (2014)	The Flash (S1/E8) On Fire (P1: 9:36-12:29) Coffee (P1: 14:57-16:08) Get The Girl (P1: 36:48-37:51)	Arrow (S3/E8) Boomerang (P2: 23:17-25:35) Hottie (P2: 26:49-27:59)		
CO 2: Legends (2015)	The Flash (S2/E8) Which guns? (P1: 8:01-10:02) Vandal Savage (P1: 14:04-18:34)	Arrow (S4/E8) Suit Up (P2: 21:35-22:08) Second Chance (P2: 32:56-34:14) William (P2: 39:50-42:40)		
CO 3: World's Finest (2015)	Supergirl (S1/E18) Wrong Earth (P1: 5:44-8:36) Meet The Fastest Man Alive (P1: 10:25-14:11) Fight Like Women (P1: 31:03-35:17) Join Forces (P1: 36:37-38:37)			
CO 4: Invasion (2016)	The Flash (S3/E8) Meeting Supergirl (P1: 11:28-12:10) First Team Meeting (P1: 12:30-15:11) Training With Supergirl (P1: 20:04-20:20) Meeting With The President (P1: 20:27-21:33) Dispute (P1: 25:53-28:50) Skirt (P1: 28:50-30:02) Mind Control (P1: 35:07-40:02)	Arrow (S5/E8) More Into Girls (P2: 11:34-11:42) How Did I Do That (P2: 22:15-22:42) Sweetheart (P2: 24:19-25:26) Fly (P2: 37:35-39:31)	Legends Of Tomorrow (S2/E7) Normal (P3: 3:05-4:09) First Time Travel (P3: 5:49-6:33) Saving An Alien (P3: 17:18-18:33) Defeating The Aliens (P3: 31:39-33:55) Heroes (P3: 34:17-35:09) Celebration (P3: 35:09-37:25)	
CO 5: Duet (2016)	The Flash (S3/E17) Finding Millie (P1: 17:24-18:36) Dads (P1: 23:44-29:05) Sing (P1: 37:42-39:00)			
CO 6: Crisis On Earth (2017)	Supergirl (S3/E8) Firestorm (P1: 13:57-15:18) Scotch (P1: 16:07-17:01) One-Night Stand (P1: 24:18-28:31) Attack (P1: 33:09-37:33)	Arrow (S6/E8) The Reich (P2: 24:23-25:27)	The Flash (S4/E8) Earth X (P3: 5:36-7:16) Save Kara (P3: 13:16-14:20) Instincts (P3: 20:59-22:50)	Legends Of Tomorrow (S3/E8) Fine (P4: 20:13-20:33) Stronger Together (P4: 20:36-22:29) Shields (P4: 26:30-27:39) Man Of Steel (P4: 30:39-31:08) Saying Goodbye (P4: 34:35-35:23) Wedding (P4: 36:27-41:44)
CO 7: Elseworlds (2018)	The Flash (S5/E9) The Farm (P1: 20:16-24:11)	Arrow (S7/E9) Batwoman (P2: 11:47-12:48) The Book (P2: 27:21-33:26)	Supergirl (S4/E9) Superman (P3: 4:42-7:11) Dating (P3: 13:33-15:03) Pinky Swear (P3: 16:18-19:14) Badass In Every World (P3: 20:05-21:22) Baby (P3: 35:28-40:11)	Legends Of Tomorrow (S4/E8) Gideon's Update (4:49-5:28) SOS (18:08-20:05) Shapeshifter (39:15-40:03)

8.4 Dutch Summary of Research Paper

Stripverhalen over superhelden kennen sinds de jaren 1930 een enorme stijging in populariteit (Garcia-Escriva, 2018). Sinds de jaren 2000 vindt er ook een enorme stijging plaats in het aantal audiovisuele adaptaties van die stripverhalen (Garcia-Escriva, 2018). Daarnaast neemt het aantal vrouwen dat wordt gerepresenteerd in dit genre sterk toe (Curtis & Cardo, 2018), maar veel onderzoek naar de representatie van gender in audiovisuele adaptaties van stripverhalen over superhelden bestaat nog niet. Pennel and Behm-Morawitz (2015) beweren echter dat vrouwen in superheldenfilms vaak stereotiep en geseksualiseerd worden voorgesteld, dit zou ook de genderperceptie van het publiek van deze films beïnvloeden. Dit onderzoek stelt bijgevolg een analyse voor van de *Arrowverse* series (*Arrow, The Flash, Supergirl, Legends of Tomorrow en Batwoman*) om onderzoek omtrent gender in dit genre te verrijken. Hierbij staat een intersectioneel perspectief centraal en worden ook seksualiteit en ras als bepalende componenten beschouwd die de representaties van vrouwen in dit genre mee kunnen vormgeven. Het onderzoek zal bestaan uit een kwalitatieve, ideologische en formele tekstuele analyse van de series in kwestie om de centrale onderzoeksvraag (Hoe worden vrouwelijke superhelden, die een hoofdrol bekleden in de series uit *Arrowverse* (series van The CW gebaseerd op DC Comics, waaronder *Arrow; The Flash; Supergirl; Legends of Tomorrow* en *Batwoman*) gerepresenteerd vanuit een intersectioneel perspectief?) te helpen beantwoorden. Dit onderzoek start met een uitgebreide literatuurstudie om het onderzoeksveld te schetsen, namelijk dat van de feministische mediastudies. Na een algemene situering van het veld en aan te geven dat de derde feministische golf als de meest relevante wordt beschouwd voor dit onderzoek, wordt er uitgeweid over 'queer postfeminisme' en 'intersectionaliteit' als relevante kaders om de series te analyseren. Dit wordt gekoppeld aan onderzoek omtrent superhelden met betrekking tot uiterlijk, kleren, gedrag, relaties, krachten en 'the protection narrative'. Vervolgens wordt er ook dieper ingegaan op onderzoek omtrent seksualiteit en ras en wordt er een koppeling gemaakt naar het genre van de superhelden. De literatuurstudie wordt afgesloten met een conclusie waarin de belangrijkste resultaten nog eens worden opgesomd vooraleer over te gaan naar het research design. In het research design wordt de methode en de cases verder toegelicht. Daarnaast wordt ook verwezen naar drie tabellen die achteraan zijn toegevoegd. De eerste tabel betreft een operationalisatie van de belangrijkste bevindingen uit de literatuurstudie om deze effectief te kunnen gebruiken in het onderzoek. Deze zijn onderverdeeld in drie thema's, namelijk, gender, seksualiteit en ras. De tweede tabel kan als aanvullend worden beschouwd aangezien deze tabel specifiek toelicht welke auteur welke bijdrage heeft geleverd voor de eerste tabel. De

derde tabel geeft een overzicht van de verschillende afleveringen en sequenties die werden geanalyseerd. Het vierde deel van dit onderzoek behandelt uitgebreid de resultaten van het onderzoek en bestaat uit verschillende sub-delen. Eerst worden enkele algemene formele tekstuele elementen van de series toegelicht om vervolgens dieper in te gaan op de kledij en superkrachten van de personages. In het daaropvolgende onderdeel wordt samengevat hoe de series *Arrow* en *Supergirl* op een verschillende manier in interactie treden met het 'protection narrative' en hoe dit evolueert doorheen de seizoenen. Expliciet feminisme, het combineren van sterkte met kwetsbaarheid, intelligentie en seksueel genot zijn ook fundamenten die afzonderlijk besproken worden. Daaropvolgend wordt er een aparte sectie geweid aan het bespreken van de dynamieken in de crossover-afleveringen, 'hybridism' en intersectionaliteit. De paper eindigt met een conclusie en discussie van de resultaten. Er kan worden geconcludeerd dat vrouwelijke personages uit de geanalyseerde series volgens een queer postfeministisch kader positief worden voorgesteld, zowel op het niveau van gender, seksualiteit als ras. De *Arrowverse* series proberen dus ruimte te creëren voor positievere representaties om zo een inclusievere en meer gelijke maatschappij te bevorderen, maar verbetering op vlak van representatie is nog steeds mogelijk, zeker op vlak van seksualiteit en ras in de serie *Arrow*. De referenties en bijlagen zijn terug te vinden in de zevende en achtste sectie.