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“Playing at Being a Superhero: Trish Walker in *Jessica Jones*”

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## **Abstract**

The superhero fantasy *Jessica Jones* completed its third and final season having offered a sustained and unusual exploration of (dis)ability, social responsibility and the female superhero. In this essay, I discuss the character of Trish Walker, *Jessica Jones*'s adoptive sister and friend, to consider how the series positions the two women in terms of gender, action and justice. Trish Walker's ambition is to be a superhero, like *Jessica*. She increases her agility and strength, first through the drug IGH, then through a medical experiment, becoming a new version of the comic book vigilante *Hellcat* (Marvel 1944/1976). After her mother is murdered in Season Three, however, Trish follows a troubling path of punishment and revenge without ethical restraint. Here, I consider how we can best interpret her story: as a critique of the scope of roles available to female characters, as a “dark play” (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015) revenge experience, or, as an exploration of how far fantasy superheroes can go for justice and still remain heroic? In other words, what are, or should be, the limits of power for female action super heroes?

*Keywords:* Trish Walker, *Jessica Jones*, feminism, female superheroes, dark play

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# Playing at Being a Superhero

*Trish Walker in Jessica Jones*

## Introduction

Adapted from the comic book *Alias* (Bendis and Gaydos 2001–2004), Season One of the superhero fantasy series *Jessica Jones* (Marvel 2015–2018) explores various tensions surrounding power, inequality and intersectionality, engaging issues surrounding the popular framing of gender, race and the superhero, and foregrounding complexities in attitudes towards disability and super ability through its character ensemble. Erika Chung points out that preconceptions of “who can be a superhero and what a superhero can look like” do matter in terms of overcoming naturalised social and cultural inequalities (2019, 6), citing the Pakistani-American comic book character Ms. Marvel (Marvel 2013–2014) as a nuanced intersectional figure who offers an empowering example of leadership, agency and power (2019, 8). The first season of *Jessica Jones* has been criticised for its complicity with ableism and white blindness, for example in its portraits of Malcom Ducasse (Eka Darville) and Luke Cage (Mike Coulter) (Rakes 2019, 87–89). As media commentator Princess Weekes pointed out, “the men of color that do exist in the show... live in service to white women” (13 March 2018, *The Mary Sue*). One of the merits of the series, however, is the way it develops the character of Jessica Jones as an unconventional super being who overcomes many of the obstacles and constraints that women face, such as dismissive attitudes, exploitation and coercive control. Damaged by childhood experiences, Jessica Jones refuses to accept the apparent fragility of femininity, offering alternative imaginative possibilities for young female readers and viewers. What are we to make, then, of her adoptive sister and ally, Trish Walker, as a female combat figure who possesses the outward accoutrements of traditional female superhero representation but struggles to discern acts of justice from violent revenge?

A recasting of the Marvel Comics character Patsy Walker and her alter ego Hellcat (Marvel 1944/1972/1976), Trish Walker is a recovering drug addict and former child TV star, exploited by her mother – talent agent Dorothy Walker (Rebecca de Mornay). Unable to fully shake off her TV persona as cute little “Patsy”, Trish becomes a radio presenter and media personality. However, she nurses a secret ambition to become a “super” like her adoptive sister Jessica Jones. At first Trish seems to be “play-acting” the superhero role as she learns kickboxing in an attempt to increase her physical capacity. As the series moves from Season One to Season Two, she becomes increasingly desperate and determined, willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve her goals.

Trish eventually attains heightened physical powers, first with the use of a dangerous combat-enhancing drug called IGH, manufactured by the Industrial Garments and Handling company (S1), and later by submitting herself to an illicit medical experiment (S2: E13, “AKA. Playland”). Through intensive practice she improves her new agility, endurance and strength (S3), with the aim of becoming a justice vigilante, working with Jessica to protect victims of crime. Convinced she is on the side of the just, Trish begins spending her nights fighting villains on the streets. However, after her mother is gruesomely murdered (S3: E8, “AKA Camera Friendly”), she is overwhelmed with fury and sets out on a path of punishment and revenge without ethical restraint. The series offers the characters of Trish and Jessica as an answer to the limited scope of female action combat roles, where desire for autonomy and social responsibility must be weighed against the imperative to act against violence and tyranny at all costs. Trish’s transformation, in this sense, may be seen as a form of “dark play” (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015), via which the audience is vicariously invited to see how it feels to take revenge. Throughout its three seasons, however, *Jessica Jones* asks, how far can a female fantasy superhero go in the perceived interests of justice and still remain heroic? In other words, what are, or should be, the limits of power?

## Playing the Superhero

Catherine Baker suggests that the “spectatorship and stardom” encapsulated in the figure of the female superhero is highly influential in popular culture, visualising embodied diversity in the sphere of

combat and leadership (Baker 2018, 361). The first television series in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) to be made specifically for an adult audience and to feature a female superhero as a lead character, *Jessica Jones* (Marvel 2015–2018) deals in various ways with the issues that surround female power and embodiment, as citizens and as super-powered vigilantes. The series completed three seasons before it was withdrawn by its network. Notable for having a female showrunner, Melissa Rosenberg, several women writers, and, in its second season, all women directors, among the show's progressive aims are its portrayal of "super" characters that resist standard screen stereotypes (Green, Howell, Schubart 2016), particularly through its female roles, and storylines that set out to show how acceptance and cooperation can make everyone stronger (Rakes 2019).

The series interweaves play and referentiality to construct a contemporary take on the superhero story. This is evident in its use of the narrative technique of retroactive continuity, commonly used in fantasy entertainment production arenas such as the MCU, whereby established characters and story elements are retrospectively altered to build new story lines. The technique is also essential for how *Jessica Jones* produces its self-conscious engagement with genre hybridity, as it adapts and extends the persona of the original comic book character Jessica Jones, also known as (AKA) Jewel from *Alias* by Bendis and Gaydos (2001–2004). Rich in allusion to hard-boiled detective fiction, noir cinema, fantasy comics, urban gothic spaces and jazz soundscapes, the series offers its audiences a horror-infused take on the classic noir thriller, super-charged with Jones's extra abilities and witty sarcasm. *Jessica Jones* also encompasses a playful yet serious view of monstrosity and gendered violence, taken to extremes by the super-villain Kevin Thompson, AKA Kilgrave (David Tennant) for whom games, surprises and frightful jokes are a vehicle for his blithe impulse to wield mind-control over his victims. The series reconstructs these original characters for a more contemporary cultural moment that reflects public outrage about gendered violence, expressed, for example, by the #metoo movement, fears about "big pharma", and ongoing tensions in American popular culture between individual and public responsibility. Its narrative elements are set against the aerial scaffolds and chiaroscuro hallways of New York City's Hell's Kitchen, booby-trapped with the personal and ethical pressure points that its characters must negotiate to survive.

When we first meet Jessica, she is recovering from a year-long abduction at the hands of Kilgrave, who had forced her to maim and kill others for his personal entertainment. Jessica is played by Ritter as the cynical super-detective, struggling to reconcile her strength and agility with an all too human vulnerability to psychosexual abuse. She gains her superpowers as a teenager after a chemical spill, when her parents' car accidentally collides with a delivery truck (S2: E7, "AKA. I want your Cray Cray"). She is told that the other members of her family were killed and she is the only one to survive. In the original comic book, the crash is with a military convoy carrying radioactive material. In the television series, however, the truck bears the logo "GT Agrochemical", a company name that appears in several MCU storylines. We learn that Jessica was taken to the covert IGH facility, notorious within the MCU for its transhuman genetic and chemical engineering experiments (Fandom/MCU, n.d.). She survives toxicity and a coma to find she has gained astonishing strength and can leap great heights. She also has enhanced sensory perceptions, resilience and rapid healing, but her new condition turns out to be as much a trap as it is a liberation when she falls prey to Kilgrave's manipulations. After escaping her bondage to Kilgrave (S1: E3, "AKA I Have No Spleen"), Jessica lives in secret as an outsider superhero with a day job as a private investigator. She sports a hard, cynical exterior but is also a humanitarian with a strong sense of justice and concern for helping others without seeking recognition for herself. The foil for Jones's edgy personality is her adoptive sister, Trish Walker, the troubled golden girl who can never escape the adult burden of her childhood fame. As Season One opens, Trish is the only person who knows what Jessica has been through. She is also desperate to be more like Jessica, by gaining the strength and potency she lacked as a bruised, exploited child.

## **Politics or Praxis**

For Trish, physical empowerment represents the only way to reclaim a sense of validation. Secretly, she begins intensive fight training in Season One but quickly reaches the limits of her capacity to act against powerful others. She tries to support Jessica's efforts to defeat Kilgrave, yet quickly realises that she can't match the strength of her adopted sister. Only after she meets Will Simpson (Will Travel) of the NYPD, a

veteran who is compelled to take a pharmaceutical regime of “combat enhancers”, does she see the possibility of transcending her ordinary human physique (S1: E9, “AKA Sin Bin”). Still determined to do what she can, even without Jessica’s sanction, as the first season of the series unfolds, Trish experiences at first hand how serious Kilgrave’s destructive power really is when he uses mind-control to manipulate her to gain control over Jessica (S1: E9 & E10, “AKA 1,000 Cuts”). Trish feels her lack of power at this moment so sharply that she steals an inhaler from Will that dispenses the combat-enhancing drugs (S1: E10). Thus begins her intensive journey towards a new kind of addiction, not just to drugs, but to a new idea of herself as the avenging angel who has survived hell itself.

Refusing to follow the line that Jessica walks, between cynicism, heroism and care for others, Trish’s investment in becoming “super” quickly takes her beyond the ontology of play. More than an immersion in the pleasure of embodied self-actualisation, or a fierce desire to compete with Jessica, Trish’s actions can also be seen as political: an attempt to refuse the body-politics of thin, weak, blonde femininity and to free herself from the apparatus of patriarchy imposed via the mechanism of her mother’s drive to succeed.

The series alerts us to Trish’s resistant stance after Jessica wins an arm-wrestling match with an unpleasantly persistent barfly in Season One: “[M]en and power: it’s seriously a disease” (S1: E11, “AKA I’ve Got the Blues”). By the third season, Trish is presented in contrast to Jessica as a dark vigilante figure. Although we know Jessica is “capable of violence, and has cause to use it, her rare expressions of violence are either visually muted or comically framed, and they are always narratively followed by reminders of her susceptibility to male assault” (Philips 2021, 8). After she kills Reva Connors under the spell of Kilgrave’s mind-controlling powers, her deep remorse and trauma breaks the spell (S1: E6, “AKA You’re a Winner”). Once in control of her own mind, she is determined to avoid fatal violence in future. Menaka Philips argues that Jessica ultimately conforms with a gendered account of violence, whereby social expectations of female submissiveness and tolerance of male aggression prevents physical intervention by women to overturn dominance (2021). This construct is partially disrupted when Trish begins “taking the law into her own hands and summarily executing targets” (Philips 2021, 8).

By contrast, Jessica's position can also be regarded as one of social responsibility. Willing to break the law to help victims in individual cases, Jessica also works with the authorities to address dangers of magnitude, such as when she helps Detective Eddy Costa (John Ventimiglia) to track the serial killer Gregory Salinger (Jeremy Bobb) in Season Three. Jessica chooses the role of protector and tries to balance social accountability with her ability to rescue victims and apprehend criminals. Jessica's story arc reflects a narrative of survival and escape from covert control, reflecting all-too-common patterns of gendered violence that she now works to prevent (Green 2019; MacDonald 2019). Part of her appeal as a character is the blend of strength, vulnerability and sarcastic wit that allows her to help people and to deal with her own trauma.

Trish's appeal, on the other hand, centres on her passionate determination to make a difference. Flawed and excessive as her methods turn out to be, her story arc does arguably offer a more radical portrait of the female superhero through her refusal to perform the nice girl or glamorous victim. At first, Trish's pursuit of fight technique brings with it a sense of intense joy through enhanced physical performance. She gains confidence and strength, determined to help Jessica to neutralise Kilgrave (S1: E5, "AKA The Sandwich Saved Me" & E7, "AKA Top Shelf Perverts"). She experiences something closer to her step-sister's independence by using IGH and play-acting the part of Hellcat. By the middle of Season Two, however, her human vulnerability and the power imbalance between herself and the "supers" tips Trish towards desperation. Her frustration is compounded by Jessica's attempts to protect her from harm. She becomes addicted to IGH, irritable, and increasingly obsessed with the idea of permanently gaining enough strength to match Jessica, finally undergoing a dangerous medical enhancement procedure, hoping to release herself from what she perceives as her constraints.

## **Power Plays**

Carl Jung developed the notion that individuation encompasses working with a "shadow" self (Jung 1963). From this perspective, acknowledging less acceptable aspects of one's personality that have been repressed due to social codes and/or cognitive dissonance can help a person become more fully self-actualised and creative (Jung



1963; Nisenson 2017). In Trish's case, a childhood damaged by constant pressure from her mother to be perfect has undermined her autonomy, heightened her impulse to please others and fuelled her longing to be powerful, like her step-sister, Jessica. Acknowledging and acting on her need to feel powerful can be seen as a way for Trish to work with her "shadow self". Trish's initial actions have the potential to enhance collaboration and relationality (Rakes 2019, 84–85), but her impetus after the first season is to become more violent and self-involved. Another way to understand the role of Trish in *Jessica Jones*, then, might be to see her as a game figure who engages in a form of "dark play" (Linderoth and Mortensen 2015) in order to act out the experience of ultimate power. As in a game, audience members can follow along with Trish, vicariously playing out and adapting her story for our own life narratives.

In their study of heroes and violence in video games Linderoth and Mortensen refer to "dark play" as an aspect of game play that may be regarded as "problematic, subversive, controversial, deviant or tasteless" (2015, 4). The game is a way of experimenting with disruptive social codes, whereby, because the actions are not "real", ethical mores may be suspended or overturned. Glas argues, further, that the risks of dark play are reflected in the cognitive dissonance invoked by genre conventions where even the "hero" kills sometimes hundreds of adversaries (2015, 33). Drawing on cinematic traditions, moral polarization and sensationalism are commonplace vehicles for action video game entertainment; however, game design can work to resist an ethically vacuous imperative (Glas 2015, 34–35), and by extension, so can screen drama.

Play is in some sense an inherently disruptive behaviour, breaking through the patterns of ordered daily life, bringing energy and sometimes rebelliousness into public spaces and private lives. If we conceive of play as a way of, at least temporarily, deactivating social hierarchies of power (Agamben 2007, 85–87), we can regard Trish as enacting "a praxis of potentiality" (Benn 2013, 45), through which she refuses to conform to the limits and demands placed upon her as child. In Season Three she captures her experience of that childhood when she says defiantly to her mother, Dorothy:

Try being a little kid whose mother's mood swings end up in bruises.  
Or the teen who's pimped out by the person who is supposed to

protect her. Now I can protect other little girls from that. I can protect a lot of people from a lot of bad things. I am this way because you made me this way. (S3: E6, “A.K.A Sorry Face”)

Held, as a child, in the vice of Dorothy’s vicarious hunger for success, Trish still longs to exist on her own terms, without giving in to her mother’s expectations. Becoming “super” promises to help her break away from her childhood persona as the cute little TV star “Patsy” and express the sense of selfhood that has been buried under the pressure to meet her mother’s needs. It is also a way of rehearsing her desire for the freedom and creativity of untrammelled play. In other words, through her efforts to become “super”, Trish is trying out what it feels like to become recognised as more than an exploited little girl.

The pressure to perform, from which Trish has suffered since childhood, echoes what Rakes identifies, with reference to Kafer (2013) as one of the lies of patriarchy – belief in the imperative of individual achievement (2019, 77). Rather, they argue, “we cannot be who and what we are without others” (2019, 77). It is only when Jessica and Trish work together, often with others, that they can ultimately overcome their enemies. What defines the enemy and how they should be dealt with, however, remains a complex question that the series sustains through to its final moments.

A critical moment for the step-sisters occurs when Jessica’s mother Alisa – a damaged kidnap victim made hyper-violent through experiments conducted by “GT Agrochemical” – kidnaps her daughter and attempts to escape her incarceration (S2: E13). After an adrenaline-fuelled pursuit, Trish shoots Alisa fatally (S2: E13). The moment she “rescues” Jessica is Trish’s apotheosis. Finally, she has become the rescuing avenger. For Jessica, however, her mother’s death is a tragedy from which she now must try to recover a second time.

From this point forward, in Season Three, their relationship becomes strained as Trish begins to lose her sense of reward and abandons a humanistic perspective. Her actions become ritualised and compulsive, causing further excessive damage to herself and those around her. Trish’s shift from child star to glamorous radio host to nighttime vigilante evokes Stephen Karpman’s model of the “Drama triangle” (1968), in which an individual may “switch” through the different role positions of victim, rescuer and persecutor. Once persecuted by her mother to play the “good” little girl of television

stardom, Trish again seeks recognition and approval in a new role of victim become rescuer. The intensity of her power addiction, however, leads her into the role of avenger and persecutor as the brutal vigilante “Hellcat”. Ultimately, however, Trish’s methods are unsustainable as they cannot address the social and political structures of violence or the need for an equal and fair rule of law.

The narrative elements and characters that feature in *Jessica Jones* are used across transmedia properties within the MCU, including graphic fiction, television series, movies and video games. To enter the MCU as a realm of fantasy fiction via any of these properties is, arguably, to accept the contract of play, or play-acting, as a condition of engagement. However, when audiences, particularly young audiences, spend many hours a day participating in fantasy realms they may come to identify strongly with the characters and their experiences, in ways that can let them lose sight of real-world community values and significantly shape assumptions including acceptance of violence and gender stereotypical behaviours. As Coyne et al. observe:

Superheroes have many positive qualities, such as saving, protecting, and defending those in peril; however, our research suggests that exposure to such programs during the preschool years may be a cause for concern; given the associations with heightened male-stereotyped play and weapon play over time. (2014, 427)

A series like *Jessica Jones* can contribute to discussion about the roles and expectations of women in relation to crime and punishment and whether there are times to work beyond, as well as within, the law. In considering these issues, the series wrestles with a number of ethical questions, the most striking of which concerns Trish Walker’s descent into vengeance during Season Three and Jessica’s difficult decision to turn her in to the police. The culmination of the series thus breaks the frame of the play space, presenting a final dilemma in order to comment on contradictions, tensions and oppressions that characterise aspects of contemporary American society.

The identities of Trish and Jessica both entail some areas of departure from their source materials in comic books such as *Alias*, *Miss America* and *Avengers* (Bendis & Gaydos 2001–2004; Little & Atkinson 1944; Englehart et al. 1976). Jessica remains an outsider who helps people, operating outside the law with an independent ethical

code, but abandons her superhero alter ego “Jewel” as a rejection of sexualised female superhero glamour (S1:E5; “AKA The Sandwich Saved Me”). The character of Trish Walker reflects key aspects of her original, Patsy and Hellcat, but also transforms herself in *Jessica Jones* as an independent “powerhouse” (Frankel 2018, 208) struggling to grasp the ethical implications of her transformation. As Hellcat, she offers a figure of rebellion against authority that many audience members may identify with, including vicarious payback for injustice, but goes too far in acting out her rage.

Rather than staying connected with the drive to help others in trouble through her physical prowess, by the end of Season Three Trish is portrayed as emotionally disconnected from those around her and estranged from any sense of a balanced public justice informed by principles of fairness and law. Instead of working with the shadows of rage and resentment through self-acknowledgement to gain potency and acceptance, she remains full of fury, increasingly convinced that killing those whom she perceives to be culpable is her only solution. First, Trish shoots Alisa, believing this to be a decisive act that is necessary to protect Jessica (S2: E13). In episode nine of Season Three she goes further, murdering Officer Nussbaumer, convinced she cannot trust the legal system. Trish kills again after her mother Dorothy’s murder, killing both Montero (S3: E 11, “AKA Hellcat”) and Salinger (S3: E12, “A.K.A A Lotta Worms”), as she adds vengeance and mother loss to unresolved memories of childhood suffering. Meanwhile, Jessica works with Detective Eddy Costa to facilitate her arrest. Finally, Trish is faced with the realisation that she has, in some sense, become the thing she railed against (S3: E13, “AKA Everything”).

## Identifying with Trish Walker

Baker remarks with reference to Stacey (1994) that, “visual representation in popular culture consists not only of characters’ bodies but also of the bodies of performers/stars, and of spectators affective relationships towards the performers on screen (Baker 2019, 361). This layered potential for identification contributes to complex viewer reactions to the persona of Trish in *Jessica Jones* as she moves from being the pretty talk show host who can only play at being a superhero in Season One towards her assertion of a newly empowered identity. Her struggle to grasp the ethical basis of the limits to power is impor-

tant here, especially the distinctions between virtuous or malicious combat.

Fans and commentators have reacted differently, some very strongly, to Trish's pathway into aggression and her eventual imprisonment for murder. Writing for *Hypable*, Karen Rought railed against the character's moral lapse: "[S]he has become someone whose warped perception convinces her she's a good person when she's the exact opposite ... She made the wrong play and she lost her sister because of it" (June 5, 2020). "Sandy C." in *Fansided*, asked, "[W]hy couldn't Trish just do good with what she had?" (2019, n.d.), comparing the third season to the darkening story arc of Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones*. Sam Stone makes the same comparison in a review for *CBR*, but with a different response, citing Trish's "unhappy childhood, turbulent teens" and the trauma of her later experiences as explanation for her turn to crime (22 June, 2019). Further, in spite of its overt critique of gendered violence, the series rehearses some tropes of gendered difference in relation to the characters of Jessica and Trish. As Philips notes, in failing "to present the gendered vulnerability that attends Jones's use of violence in the series", Trish refuses to conform to the frame of conventional femininity (Philips 2021, 8), allowing Jessica to remain the more sympathetic of the two characters.

In this sense, we may see Trish as being trapped within the "spectacle" of the superhero, unable to assert her autonomous needs and desires because she rejects the script of femininity which proscribes female brutality and invulnerability. Debord argues that the "spectacle is, by definition, immune from human activity" (qtd in Clemens, 166), a one-way simulacrum of impossibility that *Jessica Jones* purports to undercut by commenting on the exaggerated feminine stereotypes of the superhero fantasy realm. The contrast between Jessica and Trish is not a simple one and Trish is not alone in her use of violence. Macdonald reminds us that, at times, Jessica also "operates through anger and violence in order to draw attention to and ultimately stop various patriarchal abuses of power waged against those who are most vulnerable" (2019). However, Jessica makes conscious efforts to contain violence rather than perpetrate it. She avoids killing, except when in the grip of Kilgrave's power, until the end of Season One, when her only possible course of action is to snap Kilgrave's neck, putting an end to his ravaging campaign to possess her ("S1:13, "AKA Smile"). Further, as Nicholas Moll observes, in comparison with its

origin text *Alias*, *Jessica Jones* does subvert "hierarchies of gender, class and ideology frequently enshrined in costumed adventure narratives (2020, 28).

Owens remarks that "the heroines that are condemned as villains are often brought down because of the extent of their mental trauma" (2020, 12). Indeed, both Jessica and Trish reflect the ongoing trauma that is often experienced by women in a context of physical or psychologically induced repressive violence (Travers 2021, 180). Perhaps more is at stake with Trish's story, however, if we see her as an exploratory female action figure who tests the limits of the traditional role as the superhero sidekick. Through Trish we can imagine becoming a woman who accepts anger, who casts aside vulnerability and chooses to occupy the role of protector, judge and executioner. That she goes too far and judges too quickly is undeniable, showing the risk of individual vigilantism. Nevertheless, in bringing her fury and ambition to the field as a combat figure, her character arguably expresses the desires of so many women whose lives have been damaged. Trish and Jessica are thus, to some extent, trapped in a narrative of containment, in spite of their efforts to resist. Even as Trish realises that she has somehow "become the bad guy" (S3: E13) we can regard this as a double reflection, not just of her violence, but also of the social framing that still constrains representations of powerful women. At the end of the series, therefore, the viewer is positioned to question the virtue and authenticity of Trish's aims, even as she strives to become what she hopes will be her best self.

Rikke Schubart suggests that fantasy allows us to comment on our own world, to create "visions of the impossible, both good and bad, utopian and dystopian", in order to prepare for the future and even make new kinds of futures possible (2020). The lens of monstrosity offers a way for storytellers to exaggerate and distort settings, events, characters and relationships to show alternative ways of seeing. The technique of exaggeration can be used to thrill and scare readers and viewers, and sometimes also for comedic relief. This can help to create a very entertaining way of involving audiences in stories that often boil down to the same kinds of problems and questions all women face in our daily lives: are we strong enough for the challenges that face us? How do we live with each other and ourselves? These are questions that plague Jones, who sees herself partly as a monster for being unable to resist Kilgrave's bidding. Trish's flaw is that she

doesn't come to this point of self-reflexivity, particularly in relation to social justice, until after she is arrested. She lacks balance and restraint because she is too caught up in trying to write a story of heroism for herself. Only at the very end of the final season does it dawn on her that she has become the very thing she tried to fight against (S3: E13).

The television drama series *Jessica Jones* features a highly engaging ensemble of characters, with the central figure of Jessica Jones as an unconventional super being who overcomes many of the obstacles and constraints that women face. While the central figure, Jessica Jones, stands out as an anti-hero (Maren 2020) with a talent for sarcasm, it is the character of Trish Walker that in many ways gives the series its critical edge. She repeatedly reminds Jessica that Kilgrave's covert control is a feminist issue and that social institutions have struggled to provide women with safety and equity. Both Jessica and Trish are damaged by childhood experiences and, while Jessica is the first to resist feminine conformity, Trish, as her accidentally acquired powers begin to manifest, sets out to show that she can attain the strength and agility to fight back against oppressive violence. Her difficulty lies in recognising the difference between rescue and social transformation, civic responsibility and private vengeance. Something of an experiment for the MCU in terms of audience engagement, as a whole, a weakness of the series is that it focuses attention on white middle class women and blurs the socio-political positioning of its less empowered black characters. As Rajivi Mythili puts it, the show is, at least partly, "a story about white feminism's ghosts" (Mythili 2022, 80). The role of Trish Walker as the exploited blonde media personality in search of a more meaningful alter ego nevertheless also serves to demonstrate why a feminist approach is still vital, albeit one that also must take relative privilege into account.

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