



AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF SUPERHEROES IN *THE BOYS* SERIES

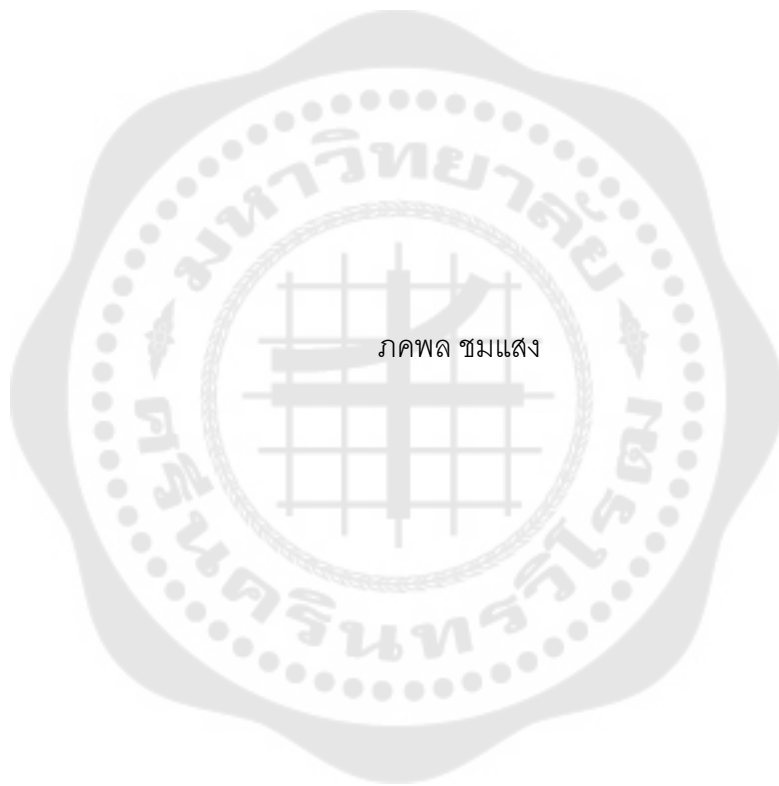


PAKAPOL CHOMSAENG

Graduate School Srinakharinwirot University

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การวิเคราะห์การเปลี่ยนรูปเปอร์ฮีโร่เป็นสินค้าในซีรีส์ The Boys



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ลิขสิทธิ์ของมหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ

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PAKAPOL CHOMSAENG

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMMODIFICATION OF SUPERHEROES IN *THE BOYS* SERIES

BY
PAKAPOL CHOMSAENG

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.....
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chatchai Ekpanyaskul, MD.)

Dean of Graduate School

.....
ORAL DEFENSE COMMITTEE

..... Major-advisor

(Dr.Nanthanoot Udomlamun)

..... Chair

(Asst. Prof. Dr.Suriyan Panlay)

..... Committee

(Dr.Watthana Suksiripakonchai)

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This study is an analysis of the Amazon Prime Video television series, *The Boys* (Season One) by Eric Kripke in order to identify how corporate capitalism is portrayed in the series and how the commodification of superheroes in a capitalist society can corrupt the concepts of heroes and superheroes. In a capitalist world, many big global companies gain profits through the exploitation of labour and ideas. Many companies implement corporate social responsibility projects and publicize them as an evidence of their contribution to social and community development, with the ultimate aim of building a positive public image of the company and making more money. Meanwhile, the exploitative nature of capitalism is rarely visible to the eyes of the public. *The Boys* depicts the exploitative nature of capitalism in parallel with the portrayals of corrupted superheroes. The series introduces a world in which superheroes do not selflessly save the world, they only perform their 'heroic acts' for money and popularity. Through an in-depth analysis and discussion of corporate capitalism, commodification and hero culture, the study concludes that Vought International has created a vicious cycle in which superheroes are created and commodified for the benefits of the company which spends the profits on the creation of more superheroes. The process results in a change in the consciences of the superheroes. Aiming for money and popularity, they become selfish and start to drift from their heroic path, and some even perform non-heroic acts to maintain their status in the society.

Keyword : *The Boys*, hero, superhero, corporate capitalism, commodification

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Fiction writers may generally choose to portray human life and society through written works. However, unlike books that require more time to digest, films have gained more popularity for the integration of visual and sound elements to be delivered instantly to the audience. Nowadays, due to the popularity of films, many written works have been adapted into screenplays for movies or television series, yet they maintain their ability to portray human lives and cultures as well as having an impact on audiences in a similar manner to other works of art. Tom Sherak, the former Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, stated in an interview that, "Film is a reflection of society, both present and past. I think the film and its innovations sometimes have to catch up to society but sometimes it leads society too" (Shah, 2011). Thus, it seems undeniable that movies and television series can simultaneously lead and reflect a society in positive or negative ways.

In the last decade, superhero movies have been the most popular movie genre. According to NYFA (2017), highest-grossing films are almost exclusively superhero films due to opportunities for escapism from the everyday, advanced special effects, and larger comic-book fan bases. Films and television series also make some comic book characters become recognizable for the non-comic fans since watching is easier than reading. For example, before *Iron Man* (2008) came out and made the character become an "A-lister", this character used to be considered as a "B-list" character, not like Spider-man, Superman, or Batman that are well-known among the non-comic fans (Evans, 2018).

Superhero movies are usually set in a fantasy world where a superhero is typically a good guy who tries to save the world without pursuing for wealth or fame. However, in real life, we are living in a capitalist world where wages and profits are crucial factors. Many companies implement corporate social responsibility projects and

publicize them as evidence of their contribution to social and community development with the aim of building positive company images and making more profits. Meanwhile, the exploitative nature of capitalism is rarely visible to the public eye.

The main focus of this study is the first season of Amazon Prime Video original series *The Boys* (2019) produced by Eric Kripke. The series is based on Garth Ennis' 2016 comic book series with the same title. The series is set in a fictional world where superhumans or "supes" are real, and are employed and become assets of a corporate company, Vought International. The company is portrayed as an evil American capitalist corporate or a supes agency that benefits from selling the services of their superhero employees and their related merchandises. From the outside, "supes" may look like decent people, but most of them are actually corrupt, and not heroic. Moreover, Vought International also tries to infiltrate the Government by supplying their superheroes to the military. The protagonists in this are a group of people without super-powers who casually call themselves "The Boys," and who attempt revenge on the Company and the supes.

Contrary to most superhero films and series in which superheroes are idealistically portrayed, following the fundamental belief that heroes are good, and villains are bad, *The Boys* introduces a story of corrupt superheroes in a capitalist world echoing that which we may find ourselves inhabiting. A company such as Vought International can manipulate the idea of the Hero and use it as a tool to earn benefits. Accepted notions of the hero and the superhero are, therefore, in question. Some people with superpowers do not become superheroes because they want to do selfless good deeds, but rather to gain money and reputation. This inevitably leads to the question, "How can we define a hero?" This can be an important question in our present world where the 'hero' is still regarded as a role model.

2. Purpose of Study

This study will analyse *The Boys* TV series by examining the definitions and characteristics of the hero and the superhero, the meaning and characteristics of

corporate capitalism, and the definitions and processes of commodification in order to discuss how corporate capitalism may impact the popularly accepted terms 'hero' and 'superhero'. Significantly, this research will help readers and movie audiences understand the concept of the Superhero and raise their awareness of how capitalism can taint and exploit the concept.

3. Research Questions

Based on the background and the purposes of study, this research will answer these following questions:

1. How is the idea of corporate capitalism portrayed in *The Boys Series*?
2. How does the commodification of superheroes in a capitalist world corrupt the idea of the hero and the superhero as portrayed in *The Boys Series*?

4. Definition of Terms

Hero – A person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great.

Superhero – A character in a film or a story who has special strength and uses it to do good things and help other people.

Corporate Capitalism – A term used in social science and economics to describe a capitalist marketplace characterized by the dominance of hierarchical, bureaucratic corporations.

Commodification – The fact that something is treated or considered as a commodity (= a product that can be bought and sold).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Definitions and Characteristics of Heroes and Superheroes

According to *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*, a “hero” refers to a person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great. Each person may have a different idea of the ‘hero’ in their mind. There are several studies on heroes and they have provided different definitions for a hero. Franco, Blau, and Zimbardo (2011) described and summarized the characteristics of the hero into 5 points. First, they would act for the service of others who are in need, whether it is for an individual, a group, or a community. Second, they would perform voluntarily. Third, they would recognize the potential risk or sacrifice that they made by taking these actions. Fourth, they would accept the fate of their sacrifice. Fifth, they would engage in these actions without any expectation of reward or external gain. In their study, Franco et al. (2011) also added that heroes normally had their own personal rules or beliefs. These beliefs are the core of their heroism and they would sacrifice themselves to maintain those principles.

In addition, on the characteristics of heroes, Kinsella, Ritchie, and Igou (2015) stated that heroes have 12 central traits which consist of moral integrity, bravery, conviction, courage, self-sacrifice, selflessness, determination, inspirational, helpfulness, protectiveness, honesty and strength. Staats et al. (2009) suggest that heroes would concern themselves with others’ well-being and have higher levels of empathy. These heroes believe that compassion makes people do heroic acts by rushing to help people in danger without hesitation. They also need to understand others from their perspective in order to understand the suffering of others in need. All three studies may have different views of the principles of hero, but they all suggest that being a hero is about committing to a quest and helping others even when they may put themselves in danger.

A “superhero” is a fictional or film character who has special strength and uses it to do noble things and to help other people (“Superhero,” 2020). The superhero film genre can be regarded as a sub-genre of hero films. MasterClass (2020) describes a superhero plot in which superheroes appear in different fictional genres – novels, films, or “the hallmark of the superhero genre, the comic book”. They add that the Great Depression and World War II eras are considered to be the golden age of superhero comics by many literary historians. Escapist plots, high moral beliefs, and the comic books’ cheap prices were most likely amongst the main factors which made superhero comic books attract such large audiences.

Stan Lee (2013), a legendary comic book writer, editor, publisher, and producer, stated that a superhero is “a person who does heroic deeds and has the ability to do them in a way that a normal person couldn’t”. As a superhero, you must possess a more extraordinary power than anyone could have, and you must use the power for a good cause.

According to Morris and Morris (2010), superheroes have more extraordinary powers and abilities than normal people do. They would stand by justice, help the weak, and use their powers benevolently to defeat evil. They also suggested that people usually do not notice real life heroes like police, firefighters or doctors as much as superheroes in fiction because people usually think of these occupations as performing a common duty. The principle of the classic superhero plot is simply the battle of Good versus Evil. The superhero normally follows the same principles as a typical hero, but they would have some extraordinary elements that make them outstanding and outshine that other, more typical hero. Those elements may include fancy costumes, a supernatural ability, or a charismatic personality.

2. Corporate Capitalism

Corporate capitalism can be characterized by “industrialization and the dominance of big businesses, and policies which have allowed investors to invest with

limited liability” (Misachi, 2017). These dominant corporations could impact a society in both positive and negative ways when the society is driven by money.

Misachi (2017) also added that big corporations can have powers and influence over their government in corporate capitalism society. Moreover, many government policies and decisions also help these large businesses. Corporate capitalism could also lead to inequalities, unemployment, and the repression of workers. On a more positive side, this system can benefit the broad economy as it is “likely to experience a higher income growth”. However, the system encourages people to desire more and more profits.

One of several countries that run on the corporate capitalist system is the U.S.A., which could be seen as the epicenter of capitalism worldwide. Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, and Ryan (2007) describe the characteristics of American Corporate Capitalism or ACC as the system in which particular individuals (e.g., shareholders) privately own the property.

The basis of ACC is that “members of society will be provided with the opportunity to get what they want (i.e., a profit, a wage, and/or a product) through competing with each other and pursuing their self-interests”. The competition could lead to the best quality goods and services being offered at the lowest price for the consumers, which would be good for the whole society (Kasser et al., 2007). ACC is, thus, a system that encourages everyone in the cycle - capitalists, laborers, or consumers - to gain more profit, and then they can spend the money that they gain for their own self-interest. In doing so, people become ignorant towards the benefit of others.

Fundamentally, the system of ACC works best when “capitalists, laborers, and consumers are each able to pursue their own self-interest to the maximum extent possible” (Kasser et al., 2007). It means that the capitalists have more interest in the benefits than creating products and hired laborers for the social good. The owner of products will try to maximize the profit by lowering wages. On the other hand, the laborers also act for themselves by selling their skills, time, and energy not for social

good but for the highest salary instead. Consumers also pursue their self-interest by using their own incomes to buy what they want. They want to buy products at the lowest prices possible, ignoring the ensuing lower profits of the capitalist and the lower wages of the laborers which may arise (Kasser et al., 2007).

3. Commodification

The term “commodification” is the process in which a thing or a person is treated or considered as a commodity (“Commodification,” 2020). Commodification is “the act of taking something’s original form and commercializing it, turning it into an object of trade and capital” (Haenfler, 2017). It was seen as “expropriating the means of production from much of the population in order to create a supply of laborers who must labor in order to purchase, and consumers unable to produce for their direct use” (Butsch, 1984, 217). However, the increasing of mainstream norms meant that it became an “assessment on human value and worth” (Greaves, Hill, & Maisuria, 2007, 61), making it a thing that everyone expects to have. In the capitalist economic system, commodification is one of the instruments for gaining money for the capitalists. Both material and immaterial things can be transformed into commodities.

From a Marxist viewpoint, commodities are the external things that are produced to satisfy human desires, whether those desires are necessary for human life or not. According to Karl Marx, as translated by Dragstedt (1976) a commodity is “an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The very nature of these needs.... makes no difference” (7). Marx suggested that humans become obsessed with commodifying things, which leads to the increase of the value of the products. He stated that “the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities, [...] is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (Appelrouth & Edles, 2020, 63).

In relation to commodification, there are two sociological processes: diffusion and defusion. Diffusion is the process of spreading unknown products into a wider society. When the market recognizes a product, the business owner starts “the process of advertising and promoting that thing to the public” (Haenfler, 2017). On the other

hand, defusion is the process of “watering down” or rebranding the products. Businesses use defusion to alter the meanings and commodify things that have already existed, but might not be popular in the market, by magnifying the strength and minimizing the weakness of those products. “In doing this, they were able to present certain ‘enjoyable’ parts of identities and leave out other aspects, constructing the identity or item to be more marketable” (Haenfler, 2017). These two processes are very crucial for capitalists to sell the commodity. Diffusion usually helps introduce the products to the consumers while defusion reintroduces the products to the market. As a result, these processes enable the capitalists to earn more money from creating product images and drawing the attention of the consumers.

4. Related Studies

There are several related studies to this research. In regards to the concept of hero and meaning of hero, James Simms from Otterbein University described the attributes of the Hero through time in his paper “The Eternal Hero: A Study of the Evolution of the Literary Character Throughout History”. The research was about the evolution of the value of the Hero in each era. He stated that “each era has its own values, so each character reflects those values” and those values came from the understanding of the author of what the hero should be (Simms, 2017, 2).

As for commodification, Harold Dawson from Marshall University explained how people commodify tragedy in the film industry in his paper “The Commodification of Tragedy: A Critical Examination of Contemporary Film”. The research examines how film companies change tragedy into entertainment for box-office profits. He stated that “film and documentary-style cinematic productions are objects for consumption that present tragedy as a simplistic and distorted spectacle of simulated reality” and films like *Titanic*, *United 93*, and *We Are...Marshall!* “share the conspicuous traits of distortion in historical facts through fictionalization of the event and reduction of complexity carried out by the entertainment industry” (Dawson, 2007, 2).

Superhero films also can reflect other issues, such as female sexualization and its impacts on people. In “The Empowering (Super) Heroine? The Effects of Sexualized Female Characters in Superhero Films on Women”, Pennell and Behm-Morawitz (2015) examined the short-term effects of exposure to sexualized female characters in superhero films on viewers’ beliefs on gender roles, body esteem, and self-objectification (281) since women characters in American action films tend to be exploited by being focused on only for their sexuality. This results in “decreasing egalitarian gender role beliefs and self-esteem”, accompanied by “a greater belief in the importance of body competence to the self-concept for women who were exposed to the superheroine characters” (Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015, 218).

The relationship of the superhero and capitalism was also illustrated in *Capitalist Superheroes: Caped Crusaders in the Neoliberal Age* (2012) by Dan Hassler-Forest, who claimed that there are connections between political agendas and heroes and superheroes in each decade. For example, in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan’s aggressive conservative values are exemplified in films such as Sylvester Stallone’s *First Blood* (1982) or Arnold Schwarzenegger’s *Predator* (1987). These films portrayed “the “hard-bodied” image of masculinity that functioned as symbolic embodiments of the Reagan Doctrine” (Hassler-Forest, 2012). On the other hand, the neoliberal agenda of the Bush Doctrine after 9/11 was reflected in 2000s superhero films such as *Spider-man* (2002) or *Superman Returns* (2006). They presented the U.S. as “a heroic force that operates in the arena of global geopolitics in the same way that superheroes regulate their fantasy worlds” (Hassler-Forest, 2012).

The topic of the commodification of superheroes is relatively new, especially in the field of written analyses, and there should be more study on this topic since the entertainment industry uses the idea of the Hero, which is a reflection of the cultural values of people, as a means of enhancing profits.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research is both a textual analysis and a qualitative research. It will contain an analysis of all eight episodes of Amazon Prime Video original series *The Boys* season 1 (2019) by Eric Kripke. This series is very special in the superhero genre since it is rare to see superhero films or series that reflect or critique the capitalist system. Most serious superhero films usually concern themselves with the morality or the authority of the superhero. For example, *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and *Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) both talk about the authority and the limits of the duties of superheroes, or The Dark Knight Trilogy that explores the question of morality. Some of them might talk about capitalism, but they do so only superficially, and not as a central topic. *The Boys* is not only a portrayal of the morality and the authority of the superhero as are other films, but also the first that depicts capitalism in the superhero genre as its theme.

The series is popular in a comic fan community and it was ranked among the most watched Amazon Prime Video original series ever, only two weeks after its release. The show currently has an 84% rating on Rotten Tomatoes with an audience score of 94% and “anecdotally [*The Boys*] seems to be a driver of much online discussion” (Bojalad, 2019). Very positive feedback has been given for the way the series incorporates the idea of the hero into a recognizably capitalist world. Therefore, the study aims to analyze topics of corporate capitalism, commodification and the idea of hero/superheroes in the series.

In the series premiere, Hughie Campbell suffers from PTSD after his girlfriend, Robin is accidentally killed by a high-speed superhero, A-Train. Meanwhile, Annie January a.k.a. "Starlight" is accepted to join the superhero group The Seven. At the Vought's Tower, she is introduced to the Deep, who blackmails her for oral sex on him. The vigilante named Billy Butcher offers Hughie a chance to get revenge on superheroes. Butcher asks Hughie to take the settlement money and to secretly place a

surveillance at Seven's HQ, but he initially refuses the offer. Later, Starlight meets Hughie by coincidence. They encourage each other to stand up for themselves and face their challenges. Hughie decides to go with Butcher's plan, but Invincible superhero, Translucent discovers the surveillance and follows him. Butcher arrives and helps Hughie capture Translucent. Elsewhere, Homelander kills all passengers on the Baltimore's mayor's plane after the mayor tried to blackmail Vought.

In the second episode, Butcher and Hughie take Translucent to Butcher's old friend, Frenchie, who makes a special bullet to pierce the supe's skin, but it does not work. Madelyn Stillwell, vice president of Vought, uses Doppelganger, supe who can change his appearance to anyone, to blackmail Senator Calhoun into allowing a vote that can make superheroes work in the military. Frenchie places bombs in Translucent's anal, who confesses that before A-Train killed Robin he was with his girlfriend Popclaw. Finally, Translucent manages to free himself and talks Hughie into letting him go. However, with his rage for the supes, Hughie triggers the bomb, killing Translucent.

In the third episode, Starlight gains popularity for stopping a rape, but it leads to her new sexier costume that Stillwell wants her to embrace. She rejects, but Stillwell insists that she has to change her look if she still wants her place in The Seven. Butcher brings in another old crewmate, Mother's Milk (MM), to surveillance on Popclaw. They find that A-Train takes a drug called Compound V. Butcher wants to expose them, but needs proofs. A-Train uses Compound V to enhance his performance and beat another speedster in a race. He publicly announces that he is single which breaks Popclaw's heart. "The Boys" find her high on Compound V, killing her landlord while having sex with him. They blackmail her for an information source.

In the fourth episode, following Popclaw's source, "the Boys" find "The Female", a Japanese woman who is imprisoned by mafias as a test subject. Frenchie frees her, but she runs off. Stillwell sends Homelander and Queen Maeve to rescue a hijacked plane, but Homelander accidentally destroys the control panel. He gives up and let the plane crash, making Maeve to leave with him. Later, Frenchie finds the Female, and makes a bond with her. A-Train attacks her, but Frenchie distracts him by using the

crowds, allowing her to escape. "The Boys" find her, and knock her out with a gas. Homelander use the plane crash to push for militarized supes.

In the fifth episode, at the "Believe Expo", Butcher sends Hughie to meet Ezekiel, their next lead. After A-Train kills Popclaw for betraying him, he returns to her apartment and finds surveillance footage of Frenchie. Hughie blackmails Ezekiel for information about Compound V. Starlight breaks script to speak openly on Christianity, her sexual assault, and the life under her corporate employer. At hospital, Butcher and MM discover Vought is using Compound V on babies to create supes, making the belief that supes are born naturally is a lie. Black Noir, member of The Seven, tracks down Frenchie and in attempting to escape, Frenchie frees the Female out of sympathy. She fights and killed by Black Noir to protect Frenchie, but he finds out that she can heal herself.

In the sixth episode, "the Boys" find out that Vought make super-babies since 1971. After the speech at the Believe Expo, Stillwell wants to keep Starlight in order, but she refuses and states that firing her after speaking out would hurt Vought's image. Stillwell makes The Deep apologizes to Starlight and the public and sends him to small town, for a sabbatical. Butcher tells Hughie that his wife went missing for many years after Homelander raped her. Telepath Mesmer forced to help Frenchie and MM to see into the Female's mind, learning her name is Kimiko and that she was kidnapped by a terrorist group. They also learn that Vought send Compound V to terrorists to push their agenda for militarizing supes. Butcher tells CIA, but when Raynor refuses to target Homelander, he calls off the deal. Mesmer gives Homelander intel of "the Boys".

In the seventh episode, Hughie and Starlight are now in relationship. Homelander accuses Starlight of co-conspiracy with Hughie and "the Boys", but Maeve defends her. Homelander asks Vought scientist, Dr. Jonah Vogelbaum about Becca, who informs him she was pregnant with his child, but he claims than both died and Vought covered it up. Butcher asks Raynor to protect Hughie and MM's families in exchange for evidence. As Raynor charges Stillwell and Vought, she learns about the

super terrorist "Naqib". Starlight confronts Hughie, who explains Vought's use of Compound V before Butcher arrives and shoots her.

In the season finale, the Boys become fugitives. Colonel Grace Mallory, "the Boys" old boss, tells them about Stillwell and Homelander relationship and warns Hughie about Butcher's desire for revenge. MM, Frenchie, and Kimiko get arrested in their safe house. Hughie asks Starlight to help, but she refuses. Fortunately, Maeve talks to Starlight, asking her to be whoever she want to be. Homelander tells to Stillwell that he secretly made the super-terrorists. Hughie tries to helps Frenchie, MM, Kimiko, before Starlight decides to help them. A-Train arrives and fight with her, but A-Train's drug overdose makes him having a heart attack. Hughie tries to save the one who killed his girlfriend, but Starlight takes over so he can escape. Butcher takes Stillwell hostage and attaches her with the bombs to bait Homelander. The hero reveal that he tortured Vogelbaum for the truth about Becca. He kills Stillwell himself for lying to him and saves Butcher from his suicidal explosion. He takes Butcher to where Becca has been secretly raising Homelander's son.

The study will be an analysis of all eight episodes of the series by exploring the characteristics of heroes and the superhero, the idea of corporate capitalism, and the process of commodification to understand the idea of corporate capitalism as it is portrayed in the series and how that system and the commodification of superheroes in a capitalist world corrupts the idea of the hero, which can lead to the exploitation of people in the society. This study will only contain an analysis of the first season. The information that is revealed in later seasons will not be included.

CHAPTER IV

ANAYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. A Corporate Capitalist World in *The Boys*

The Boys depicts the idea of corporate capitalism through a portrayal of an American multi-billion-dollar company, Vought International, and its businesses. The story of *The Boys* is set in a fictional world where some people possess special abilities, or are “super-abled”. They became superheroes protecting civilians who have no super powers. However, these superheroes, or “supes” in short, do not work as non-profit heroes rather as paid employees of Vought International.

In the fictional world of *The Boys*, the society is driven by the hero culture propagated by the superhero agency behind it. As a megacorporation, Vought International plays a major role in the society. The company fits with the definition of corporate capitalism. Misachi (2017) defines the meaning of corporate capitalism as “a capitalist market economy dominated by hierarchical and bureaucratic corporations that control the factors of production and the amount of profits they generate”. For American Corporate Capitalism, shareholders will privately own the property (Kasser et al., 2007). In the first episode, the series introduces Madelyn Stillwell, Vought’s Senior Vice President of Hero Management at the Company’s Annual Shareholder’s Meeting, who summarizes an increase of net income and profit that they gain from the superhero business. She states, “thanks to the 200 plus superheroes in the Vought family. We see a bright future ahead, where there is a Vought hero in every town” (Kripke, 2019a). This shows that the goal of Vought International is to expand the network of “supes” around the United States, which means the more supes, the more money for Vought. Obviously, seen as an example of an American Corporate Capitalist, Vought International shows “the private ownership of property by particular individuals” (Kasser et al., 2007), or shareholders in this case. As a Natural characteristic of American Corporate Capitalist, they invest resources of their own to purchase something and then use that property as “a means of producing some good or service” (Kasser et al., 2007), with a goal to gain

the income. Vought benefits from their resources, the supes, in the production of superhero services and goods including licensed superhero merchandise.

Vought tries to play God in this society by becoming the wealthiest, most powerful capitalist in the world. The series reveals the manipulative nature of the Company. To create superheroes, which is arguably the most popular aspect of the story at this point, Vought International develops "Compound V", a chemical substance that gives people super-powers. However, the experiment is kept a secret from the public. To add value to their product, the Company creates a narrative in which the supes are chosen by God and their super-power is innate. Donna, the mother of a leading character Starlight, admits to her daughter that she allowed the Company to inject her daughter with Compound V when she was a child. Evidently, Vought does not only commodify people with super-powers, but also produces super heroes for sale. All super-abled kids, growing up in the hero cultural environment and aspiring to be superheroes, finally become employees of Vought international. This manufacturing cycle makes uncountable profits for Vought and impacts the society as a whole.

The emergence of Vought superheroes also changes the society. The superheroes become special, not only because of their power, but also by their growing social status. They become celebrities and a topic of people's everyday conversation. As Marx said of commodities: "the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2020, 83), everything about the superheroes becomes more valuable. People become obsessed with all these real-life superheroes, and it is not about their "use-value", but rather about their "sign-value". Baudrillard (1988) explains that in "order to become an object of consumption, the object must become a sign..." (37), and they can add sign-value to the product by advertising. Superheroes appear on television, in the movies, or even on boxes of cereal. Like Hollywood superstars or world-famous athletes, superheroes need managers. This is how Vought International takes a role as the biggest superhero management company in the world. All children injected by Compound V share the same idea that they are chosen by God and destined to become superheroes when

they grow up. For example, Starlight entered a supes pageant, Miss Hero, in her hometown when she was young.

Commodification by Vought International plays a big part in the society. To earn more profits, Vought International commodifies their superhero services and products. As a commodity, it means that people need money to buy a product and service. When superheroes become assets of Vought, everything can be sold as merchandise, including superhero films that dominate the box office and a superhero theme park in Paris. The Company's aquatic hero, The Deep, becomes the presenter of the Oceanland aquarium. Christian-hero, Ezekiel, preaches to the public at the Christian Expo with \$170 entry tickets. This superhero culture is similar to the celebrity culture of our own real world. Celebrity culture is "a symbiotic business relationship from which performers obtain wealth, honors, and social power in exchange for selling a sense of intimacy to audiences" (Schickel, 1985). Celebrities, or superheroes in this case, become the tools for the megacompany to gain money and social power. People can look around and see them everywhere as a part of their life and all of that means money. "We are Vought. We make heroes super" (Kripke, 2019a) is not just a gimmicky slogan, but is what the Company really does.

The fundamentals of commodification include the concepts of diffusion and defusion, and in *The Boys* Vought uses both of them. Diffusion is "the process of spreading styles, ideas, values, and norms into a wider society" (Haenfler, 2017). To diffuse the superhero culture, Vought introduces the world's greatest superhero team called "The Seven", which is a parody of a Hollywood superhero team, The Justice League from DC Comics. As a result of diffusion, supes all over the country dream to be part of The Seven. Starlight, a newly recruited supe, describes the selection process: "they are auditioning girls nationwide" (Kripke, 2019a). One member of The Seven is Homelander, a Superman-counterpart, who is the face of the company and the leader of the team. He is probably the best representative of an idealistic American, a handsome white man with blonde hair and blue eyes who dresses in red, white, and blue, with an

American flag as a cape. His name obviously represents patriotism. He is the number one superhero, not only because of his power, but also his popularity.

As for the process of defusion, Vought defuses some supes by minimizing some unpopular characteristics and maximizing those they want people to see. Defusion is “the process of depoliticizing or ‘watering down’ the values, meanings, ideals, and subversive potential of a group” (Haenfler, 2017). Queen Maeve is introduced, alongside Homelander, as the number-two superhero with a strong female character. People usually see them as an ideal superhero couple. What Vought does is to accentuate her strong female looks and conceal her sexuality and drinking habit. People do not know that she is gay and alcoholic as the Company believes it might have an impact on her popularity among fans.

Another example of how Vought uses diffusion and defusion to introduce their superheroes to the market is Starlight. At first, Vought introduces her to the press as an innocent young girl from a Midwest small town with a girl-next-door personality. With a unique character strategically crafted by the Company that also forces her to say she is still a virgin. Starlight becomes popular among Christians and those who are politically conservative. On the other hand, to raise her popularity among young fans, Vought also makes use of a defusion process by dressing her in a sexier costume to attract men and empower her among women fans at the same time.

Vought International not only commodifies the character of Starlight, but also commodifies her tragedy for money. Citizen Starlight is a television series or film by Vought Studio involuntarily starring Starlight. The show uses her sexual assault by The Deep as a central theme, creating the image of a strong woman to empower her, but they use this tragic incident in her life without her permission. The target of this show is obviously profits largely by way of Starlight’s fans. According to “The Commodification of Tragedy: A Critical Examination of Contemporary Film” by Harold Dawson (2007), “Since the commodity is the cultural artifact of capitalist society through which people attach meaning, the symbolic representation of tragedy as an article of exchange becomes muddled with distortions in reality” (42). Vought International takes what happened to

Starlight and retells the story while Starlight, the victim, is not an active part of the creation, which leads to factual discrepancies. Citizen Starlight is the appropriation of the tragedy without the victim's consent, distorting the reality, and glorifying Starlight for entertainment and profit.

Vought International also commodifies superhero services. Archetypically, saving people in need is a basic duty of a superhero; however, if you need help from a Vought superhero, you need to pay for the service. This is shown in the first episode. During the meeting of Madelyn Stillwell and the Mayor from Baltimore, Stillwell tries to convince the mayor to hire a supe named Nubian Prince as the city's hero for \$300 million per year, including full PR support and a share of merchandising. She suggests that Nubian Prince who does not have a military look should fit Baltimore's demographics. She points out that despite his black skin color, white people will love him. Therefore, through commodification of superheroes and their services, the Company gains plenty of profits as Stillwell states at the shareholders meeting that, "it is without a doubt a good time to be in the superhero business" (Kripke, 2019a).

As a reflection of the real world, a racial issue is found in the world of superheroes. Among seven members, there are five white supes, one black supe, and one supe of an unidentified race. The majority of whites in the Seven reflect the popularity of white supes in the society. As for the rest, it can be considered that Vought might use them to create diversity in the Seven. The series also emphasizes the condition of A-Train as the only black supe of the team that even as the member of the world famous The Seven, he is still racially discriminated against. Clair and Denis (2015) defined racism as "individual- and group-level processes and structures that are implicated in the reproduction of racial inequality". Racism comes from the racial bias which is "a conscious or unconscious prejudice against an individual or group based on their identity" (Collins, 2018). In *The Boys*, after his leg got broken, A-Train, who was not wearing his usual costume was mistaken as a criminal by the security guard. This scene clearly shows his fragmented identity. When his costume is taken away, the guard sees him as a black guy who might steal something from the store. To the security guard,

black people are more likely to commit crime. This also shows that people still judge others from their appearance and hence the costume is an integral part of a superhero's identity.

2. The Corrupted Heroes and the Oppressed Villains

Being a hero is all about saving others even they have to risk themselves. "Hero Killer" Stain, the character from a famous Japanese superhero animation series *My Hero Academia* once said, regarding being a hero, that in doing heroic acts, you have to save others without "getting trapped by your own hate and acting out of pure self-interest... makes you the furthest thing from a hero" and "hero is a title reserved for those who perform truly great feats. Too many are undeserving... Just money worshipers playing hero" (Horikoshi, 2017). The anime has a theme similar to *The Boys*, as it is also set in a society where superheroes work is closer to a conventional job. This statement fits with the greed of superheroes portrayed in *The Boys*. Corporate capitalism of Vought International has exploited the concept of hero and supes are corrupted by the capitalist system. Their ultimate goal is popularity and money. A characteristic of workers in the American corporate capitalism is that they "act in their own self-interest, selling their time, energy, and skills not for the social good but instead for the highest possible wage" (Kasser et al., 2007). Since a hero should have "performed [their heroic act] voluntarily" and "engage in these actions without any expectation of reward or external gain" (Franco et al., 2011), superheroes who perform their duty for money are not regarded as heroes. However, a paid hero becomes normalized in a society misled by an American Corporation such as Vought International which is one of the "owners of the means of production [who] are not expected to create products and hire laborers for the social good, but rather as a means of creating profit and accumulating further capital for their own self-interest" (Kasser et al., 2007). A money-minded superhero can be seen in a scene where Translucent, a member of The Seven, mentions about copyright infringement as a serious crime that would cost Vought \$1.2 billion per year and would also impact his income.

The Seven become the new gods of this time who are worshipped and also have almost absolute power to control and influence the society. The Seven meeting room is decorated with Greek and Roman art which may imply that they are the Olympian gods of this time. Like the Olympians, the Seven are worshipped by people. In the past, people might worship the gods by burning foodstuffs or sacrificing animals, but in the modern age, in a capitalist society, they can worship their new gods by buying their products. The more money in the supes' wallets means more influence of the supes in the society. With their vast popularity, they have the power to influence the society as they and Vought please. In the capitalist society, money is power. With this system, superheroes gain money from doing good, and this absolute power can be corrupted.

Apart from the device of mainstream marketing, Vought International also tries to manipulate society by infiltrating the government. One of the goals of Vought is to send supes into the US military. Interfering with the US government by Vought can be considered a 'regulatory capture'. This means that regulatory agencies are "dominated" by the industries that they should regulate (Kenton, 2019). Stillwell takes control of the government by blackmail, in order to pass a vote for supes in the military. Vought and Madelyn Stillwell goal also pass forward to Homelander. He uses a plane crash as a point to blame the terrorists and asks the government to let Vought's supes be part of US military. This could become a threat to the transparency of the state.

2.1 The Corrupted (Super)hero: Homelander

Like capitalism, Homelander does not exist naturally. Being created and raised by scientists in Vought lab, Homelander was crafted as an ideal image of a white American male. The most popular and powerful supe in the world, he is the leader of the Seven whose looks and character attract the mainstream market. It cannot be denied that he is going to be one of the most valuable assets of Vought. His character can be compared to Superman from DC Comics and Captain America from Marvel Comics for being characters that embody nationalism, patriotism, popularity, and leadership. He has almost identical power and on-camera personality as Superman while his costume

and his origin are similar to Captain America. However, while Superman and Captain America are created as classic heroes, Homelander is not. Anthony Starr, the actor who plays Homelander, commented in an interview that his character is “basically an inversion of Captain America meets Superman [with] a big dose of craziness” (Sarnier, 2019). Being raised in the lab without parents, Homelander has a traumatic memory of childhood, making him want to be loved. This desire for love contributes to an Oedipus complex, a complicated mother/lover relationship with Madelyn Stillwell whom he thinks loves him while she thinks of him as Vought’s best-selling product. Her goal becomes his goal. This makes him do everything for her, to feel her love. As a face of the company, he will do anything to maintain the number one hero image, and that includes killing people. In the first episode, he kills the mayor from Baltimore because he tried to blackmail Madelyn about compound V, in the process destroying the mayor’s plane and killing everyone on board. His god-like power that can kill everyone in a second and his unstable personality makes every scene so intense as he can lose it any time. However, he never shows that side to the press since he loves to be praised by the people. He develops a God complex or Narcissistic Personality Disorder. People with the God complex will be defined as having “arrogance, extreme self-centeredness, a great need to be loved and admired by others, grandiose fantasies as well as envy, lack of interest and empathy for others” (Zara & Özdemir, 2018, 30). Being created as Vought’s most powerful hero makes him become an egoistic person who thinks he is superior to all others. As he says, “I’m Homelander, and I can do whatever the f-ck I want” (Kripke, 2019b). Moreover, he is also alienated as a property of Vought. Everything he does in front of the camera is because he wants to be loved, but he is still treated like Vought’s greatest asset. Madelyn does not really love him for who he is but for his usefulness to Vought. When he knows that she does not really love him and lies to him about his son, he kills her immediately. Vought creates Homelander as a tool to gain money but his unnatural birth leads to his corrupted personality and the end of Madelyn Stillwell.

A characteristic of a hero is someone who engages in a quest to help “others who are in need, whether it is for an individual, a group, or a community” (Franco et al.,

2011). However, Homelander is a hero who manages to create an unnecessary quest simply to boost his own popularity and empower himself. This action comes from his Oedipus complex and God complex, leading to a Hero syndrome or Hero complex. Hero syndrome is “a phenomenon affecting people who seek heroism or recognition, usually by creating a desperate situation which they can resolve and subsequently receive the accolades from” (Cross, 2014). He manipulates the concept of the hero’s quest by shipping a Compound V substance to a terrorist to create super villains. For an unlimited income, the terrorist will create villains for supes to fight with to guarantee a long-lasting superhero business, as he said to Madelyn Stillwell, “Now, we have villains all over the globe that only we can fight. In sequel after sequel...after sequel” (Kripke, 2019c). As a hero, one needs a quest. Joseph Campbell (2008) describes in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* the basic narrative pattern of the story of a hero. The story of the hero will begin with a departure. Starting with the status quo, the hero will receive a quest or mission. He or she will start their journey to accomplish great deeds with a goal like “Theseus when he arrived in his father's city, Athens, and heard the horrible history of the Minotaur” (48). As long as there are villains, superheroes will always be needed. The corporate capitalism makes these superheroes drift apart from the traditional path of a hero.

2.2 The Exploited Traditional (Super)hero(ine): Starlight

However, there is yet another character, Starlight, who can be regarded as a modern-day representation of a traditional hero. Unlike Homelander, she is raised as a good Christian. She wholeheartedly believes that her power is God-given. With this belief, she performs heroic acts that match those of traditional heroes. Starlight demonstrates all twelve traits of the hero as suggested by Kinsella et al. (2015). For example, she becomes an “inspiration” for kids who want to be like her. Despite being raised as a religious Christian, she has “courage” and “honesty” to say what is on her mind and opposes some parts of the bible. Another example of her “bravery” is seen when she tells the public that she was sexually assaulted by her teammate. She also

shows a sense of “self-sacrifice” when she decides to help people despite jeopardizing herself. She is just a person who grows up with an idea of the ‘hero’ and really wants to save the world. As she says, “why would you get into this business if not to save the world? That’s all I have ever wanted. And that’s why I have always wanted to be in The Seven” (Kripke, 2019a).

Unfortunately, their high status in the society also creates a false consciousness among the supes. This has been gradually corrupting Starlight who dreams about becoming one of The Seven. In the beginning of the series, she complies with the Company’s policy in order to realize her dream and to maintain her position in The Seven despite having to reinvent herself involuntarily with the new sexy costume. Her dream of becoming a superhero might be the only thing that makes her struggle away from being a ‘real’ hero in the original sense. She has to allow Vought to redesign her costume to be sexier and more male friendly, otherwise she will lose her place in The Seven. This could be considered female sexual objectification. From the long-sleeved body suit and skirt, Vought changes her costume to a one-piece swimming suit-like sleeveless V neck that shows her thighs and cleavage for a more revealing look to attract men fans. She did not approve of this new suit at all, according to this scene:

Vought Marketing: It’s totally you. It’s bold, it’s brave, it’s feminist.

Starlight: How is that feminist?

Vought Marketing: Empowering. It says you’re confident in your own skin, and you’re not afraid to show it. Most importantly, it tells the story of your transformation, of what you’re going through.

Starlight: How do you know what I’m going through, exactly?

(Kripke, 2019d)

Similar to A-Train, Starlight’s identity is also fragmented. The focus is placed on her body “in a way that her mind or personality are not adequately acknowledged”. Her body is separated from her person and is thought of as representing the woman (Bartky, 2015, 130). However, she finally realises the kind of superhero she wants to be. It shows in the scene where Madelyn Stillwell asks her “then why don’t you burn the sparkly outfit

and become a cop?” and tells Starlight to do her job as celebrity superhero. Starlight declines and responds “no red carpets, not reality TV, and no Noxzema commercial. And I want my old uniform back. I’m gonna save people” (Kripke, 2019e).

However, it cannot be denied that the members of The Seven reflect the patriarchy. There are only two white female members: Starlight and Queen Maeve. They are the only two female supes who have names and more than one minute of screen time. This portrays a society in which male supes are more popular, which also resonates with the proportion of men and women in Hollywood superhero films which is also heavy on the male side; for example, in *Justice League* (2017) there is only one female superhero, Wonder Woman, while *The Avengers* (2012) features only Black Widow. It also reflects male privilege in the society. Male privilege is “The assumption that being a male in a patriarchal society gives a boy/man greater access to resources—economic and political—including sexual access to women’s bodies and labor” (Myers, 2013). In this series, male privilege allows male supes to have more power in the superhero society. When male superheroes are more popular, Vought might give more chance for male supes for better money while female supes are reserved only for the niche market and to represent diversity.

The male superheroes in the Seven also exploit the women in the team with sexual harassment. Translucent, who has a power to become invisible mostly spends his time in women’s toilets to peek at them while they are using the toilet. The Deep is another hero who abuses his authority. On Starlight’s first day as a member of The Seven, he sexually assaults her after she confesses that she has a crush on him, as he thinks she would want to have sex with him. The Deep uses the hierarchical structure of the supes community for his advantage when he sexually assaults Starlight who later decides to call him out, tarnishing his image as a supe, resulting in his suspension and relocation.

Patriarchal and capitalist exploitation also creates solidarity and empathy among the oppressed. Another female character, Queen Maeve, who has succumbed to the patriarchal system told Starlight to endure. Maeve has lived in a patriarchal system long

enough to know that male supes always get what they want. In the beginning of the first episode, she stops a criminal truck and catches the criminals, but it is Homelander who gets all the credits. In the end, Maeve changes as she sees Starlight as her younger self before she got used to this patriarchal system. This leads them to empower each other.

2.3 The Oppressed Villains: “The Boys”

The goal of “the Boys” is to fight against the supes in the capitalist system. A sense of solidarity does not only happen between Starlight and Queen Maeve, but it also happens with “the Boys”, and that is the reason why they are united. “The Boys” is a group of people in superhero society who get exploited by the supes. They represent common and powerless people who can be exploited by the supes at any time since the supes have a higher status in this society. The corrupted superheroes bred by the evil corporate capitalist can be seen more as villains as the leader of “the Boys” Billy Butcher describes “A multi-billion-dollar global industry supported by corporate lobbyists and politicians on both sides” (Kripke, 2019a). The influence of the company leads to the idea that these superheroes are good and we are lucky to have them. It causes a false consciousness for the normal people as Butcher says, “people love that cozy feeling that Supes give them. Some golden c-nt to swoop out of the sky and save the day so you don't get to do it yourself” (Kripke, 2019a). He adds that the public does not want to know about the dark side of the superhero society because they think that this world is fine as it is. We are safe, thanks to the supes. They cannot see that they can be exploited by this system just like “the Boys” at any time. This makes people who feel that the supes are bad get ejected from the society becoming bad guys because they criticise this utopia while in the reality they, the common people, live in dystopia. “The Boys” are marked as criminals by Vought while they cannot voice their own defense since the company is the one that has power in the society. Although they might be considered criminals since they commit crimes and rebel against the ones the society perceive as being heroes. In fact, all of their actions are for justice and for the oppressed. The line between good and evil becomes blurred as every character is

acting in a gray area. From the outside, “the Boys” are fugitives while The Seven are superheroes in the eyes of the public. Somehow, the role might not be like that. The supes become the oppressors and “the Boys” are the oppressed who want justice for themselves. Since “the Boys” is the title of the series, the real heroes of this story may well be them.

Hughie Campbell, the protagonist of the story, is a representation of the working-class man who gets exploited by the system. The catalyst of the story happens when Hughie’s girlfriend, Robin, is run over by A-Train, a speedster from The Seven. Superheroes and collateral damage or accidents can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Vought International helps their supes get away from crimes that they commit without taking any responsibility. As a member of The Seven, it is important to keep the clean image of the superhero. Vought tries to bribe Hughie and convince him to not place charges. They also blame the victim, claiming that Robin was in the middle of the street, while the truth is, she was only one step from the sidewalk. A-Train himself does not show any regret or empathy with regard to the accident, traits which would be associated with the conventional hero (Staats et al., 2009). Later, Hughie also finds out that A-Train was addicted and high on Compound V, making him unable to control himself. Vought help him to get away from this crime. This is the exploitation of the corporate company on normal guys like Hughie. After the accident, Hughie suffers PTSD, seeing Robin everywhere. Not only Robin, though. He also sees A-train everywhere, but not as a hallucination. Everywhere he goes he sees A-Train. There is a scene that he goes to buy some beer; he sees A-Train on the bottles. When he turns back, he sees him on boxes of cereal. He sees him on TV. He is surrounded by the man who killed his girlfriend and ruined his life. In this scene, the aisles are very narrow and tight, like he cannot escape from A-Train. Everything shows that he lives in a world in which his girlfriend’s killer lives well and free, as a celebrity in the capitalist world.

Billy Butcher represents the fury of people who get exploited. His wife, Becca, is raped by Homelander and goes missing, and he believes she might be dead. Worse than A-train, Homelander intentionally harms others, by raping Becca which is a crime,

and also gets away with it through help from Vought. Butcher was invited by Colonel Grace Mallory to join her exposing supes' and Vought's dark secrets. Mallory later leaves the mission after her grandchildren were burnt by Lamplighter, leaving Butcher on his path of vengeance. He becomes a vigilante. He will do whatever it takes to get the job done even if it is not morally right. He later recruits Hughie to the team who heard about Hughie's girlfriend's death. He has only one goal, to take down Homelander. He also hates every supe, even Starlight, who is apparently in a good relationship with Hughie. This season is yet to reveal the motivation to join "the Boys" of Mother's Milk and Frenchie. However, it can be assumed that both of them also get exploited by the superhero society.

Kimiko, the only female and super-abled member of "the Boys" is a person who gets dehumanized by both capitalism and patriarchy. She is the subject of the test to change an adult into a supe. In the eyes of the public, she is an outsider and a terrorist, which is the narrative that Vought wants people to believe. However, the truth is she is kidnapped by the terrorist group, and then she gets taken to the United States for her supe transformation. In the prison, she is called "the female" by the guard. This can be considered a way to disempower her by not acknowledging her name.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Be it literature, films or television series, they are all art forms that reflect human life and society in every aspect. At the current time, the superhero genre might be considered the most popular genre in the entertainment industry. Superhero films and television series are produced every year by various studios. Whereas most of them portray their subject-matter in an idealistic way, so the superheroes can be role models in society, some of them portray superheroes in a more realistic way, in which superheroes can be perceived as flawed.

This study has analysed and discussed Amazon Prime Video's original series *The Boys* by Eric Kripke, which reflects aspects of capitalism magnified in a dystopian setting. In the real world that we live in, as a capitalist society, money might be the most important aspect, driving the society. That society is imaginatively approximated in *The Boys* through the medium of arguably the most popular genre in the entertainment industry today. Earning a lot of money from the audience, the superhero genre can reflect our society in a way that some people might not recognize. When money and reputation become part of the society, the path of the Hero would start to bend.

Using the definition and characteristics of hero and superhero, the meaning and characteristics of corporate capitalism, and definition and processes of commodification in order to discuss how corporate capitalism may impact the idea of hero and superhero, this research can make people understand the concept of superhero and raise their awareness of how capitalism can taint and exploit the concept by answering two research questions. How is the idea of corporate capitalism portrayed in *The Boys Series*? How does the commodification of superheroes in a capitalist world corrupt the idea of hero and superhero as portrayed in *The Boys Series*?

In conclusion, *The Boys* portrays a twisted futuristic world where superheroes are real and become commodities of a corporate capitalism. The society in the series is shaped by two hegemonic powers: corporate capitalism and superhero culture. Vought

International takes the role of corporate capitalism, dominating the society by producing supes into the society. Vought creates Compound V to create superheroes. Superheroes grow up in the superhero society that Vought has created, and the environment and society lead them to decide to be superheroes. Then, a new generation of superhero makes money for Vought. In the superhero society, normal citizens are also impacted by the environment and superheroes become a part of their lives since people can see superheroes everywhere.

To sell their supes, Vought commodifies the supes using two processes. They use a “diffusion” process to introduce the new heroes that they created for the market, giving them characters or gimmicks that will interest fans and use a “defusion” process for some supes by redesigning the costumes or adjusting their public personae. Moreover, they take the sexual assault of Starlight and make it into a movie for money without her permission, leading to distortion of the facts. Moreover, they also rent the superheroes as a service which means you have to pay for supes for keep the city safe.

The capitalist system leads to corrupted heroes and the oppressed that could become villains. When money becomes a goal, heroes do not act to save others in need anymore. Corrupted heroes will act for their own self-interest. However, they still get praised by the people for their heroic acts and in this system that means money. Moreover, Vought also interferes with the government by sending their supes into the military which could be considered a ‘regulatory capture’. This enhances Vought’s power in the society.

Homelander who was raised by scientists in a Vought laboratory is the most valuable superhero of Vought with his look that attracts a mainstream market. However, this unnatural origin leads to his corrupted personality. He will do anything to maintain his status in the society including kill people and creates unnecessary threats for supes to fight with. All of this happens because Vought makes him into a corrupted super-moneymaker.

However, even a hero still can be oppressed in this system. Starlight might be the closest thing to the traditional hero in the series, but she gets oppressed by the

patriarchy in the superhero society whether it be her colleague, her company, or her fans. She gets sexually harassed by her teammate and sexually objectified in order to gain money for the company. Luckily, she can empower herself at the end.

Lastly, there will always be the oppressed in the capitalist system which is “The Boys”. They are exploited by the corrupted superhero society and want justice for themselves by getting revenge and exposing corrupted superheroes and Vought. Still, people see them as villains since they are against the heroes. Since the series portrays how the corrupted supes and their exploitative manager, Vought international, manipulate and benefit from the myth of the Hero, the series has successfully engaged its audiences in reconsidering the definitions of hero and villain.

Recommendation

For people who want to study further, The Boys could be studied in the light of Gender Studies and Feminism in the case of Queen Maeve and Starlight. Queen Maeve is a LGBTQ+ character. She can be a role model for people who want to come out and embrace their gender identity. However, Vought decides to keep her sexuality as a secret. Moreover, she was turned into a sex object for the fans. Another interesting topic may be a Psychoanalytic study on the Homelander character. He has a psychological problem due to his time in Vought lab, and it is shown in his complicated relationship with his mother figure Madelyn Stillwell.

This series has left much to be further analyzed. There are also Seasons Two and Three to be soon released that can be studied further. Moreover, superhero or other fantasy and sci-fi genres should be studied more as it has been proven that films are more than just a form of entertainment, but they can also deliver messages that may enlighten the society.

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VITA

NAME PAKAPOL CHOMSAENG

DATE OF BIRTH 23 June 1997

PLACE OF BIRTH BANGKOK

INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED 2019 Bachelor of Arts in English
From Srinakharinwirot University

HOME ADDRESS 21 Ladprao 1 Yak 4-3, Jompol, Chatuchuk, Bangkok. 10900

