

## **7. To what extent is 'patriarchal oppression and the ideology of dominance' evidence in the set episode?**

The oppression and subordination of women mostly happens because of the patriarchy which exists in society. Patriarchal oppression therefore refers to the dominance and higher status of men, particularly white middle class cis men, and this can be clearly seen in the set episode of Humans, to a large extent.

Firstly, it is Joe who makes the decision to buy a synth to take on the domestic duties he has been left to handle. It is implied throughout the episode that his wife Laura is failing in the domestic domain, choosing instead to focus on her career as a lawyer. It is Joe that we first see in the home trying to cope with domestic duties, as the camera pans around the hallway showing messy shoes, cutting to a wide shot of Joe stood behind the kitchen counter where plates are piling up. Cross-cut editing shows us that Laura is away on business, and through dialogue it is clear that Joe resents her being away from the family home. Initially there is the suggestion of the empowerment of women as we view Laura as a successful woman with a high powered career, however she is bullied by Joe to feel guilty for leaving him to domestic duties, thus suggesting patriarchal oppression of a woman who possesses individualism. This is seen again later in the episode when Anita makes breakfast, and Joe says, "See, this is what breakfast is supposed to look like", a seemingly poorly veiled criticism of Laura's housekeeping. It becomes clear that Joe believes household chores are beneath him, and so decides to buy a synth, seemingly to replace Laura in the home. This strongly links to bell hooks' theory of patriarchal oppression because Laura is being punished for not conforming to gender expectation and it therefore to blame for the breakdown of familial relationships. This is confirmed later when she is rejected by her eldest daughter Mattie. It is also seen in Joe taking the decision to buy a synth without consulting Laura, despite the impact it will have on her life.

When Joe goes to buy Anita we see evidence of women being sexualised and oppressed. Firstly, is the key point that the synths were created by a man, in this scene sold by a salesman, and then bought by Joe, a man, all facts that cannot be ignored once Anita is revealed. Enigma is created through low level panning movement on Anita's feet as she is wheeled out of the stock room, and the camera scans her body as she is unzipped and thus unveiled. Here, Anita is represented as a doll, being unveiled like a gift. The youngest daughter exclaims 'What is she's not pretty?', implying that the ideology of Western beauty norms and the focus on a woman's appearance, key aspects of patriarchal oppression, have been accepted by this girl who only places value in the beauty of the synth. This is further emphasised when the salesman tells Joe the synth has a 30-day return guarantee, connoting the frivolity of men to discard a woman if she doesn't satisfy them – parallel to the way Joe is discarding and replacing Laura with a more beautiful and passive model. Joe is dominant over Anita as he is set up as her primary user. Anita's voice is soft and passive, her appearance is flawless, and her costume is a stereotypical domestic worker's uniform,

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through cut well to emphasise her slim figure. The use of intra-diegetic gaze throughout the episode establishes Anita as an object to be admired (by the daughter) and gazed upon sexually (the son and dad), but also viewed with fear (Laura) and suspicion (Mattie).

The binary opposition of Anita and Laura is also evidence of patriarchal oppression. The two women are juxtaposed through the symbolic codes including Laura's dishevelled dowdy hair and unflattering costume, make-up free face revealing tiredness and ageing skin, and typically frowning facial expression which signals her dissatisfaction with Joe. In contrast Anita's body language is poised at all times with a straight back compared with Laura's slouch, perfectly straight hair, flawless complexion, and always passive grin. When the two women meet, Laura is flustered and meets hostility from Mattie, part of her punishment for leaving. Anita stands poised in the lounge with a cleaning cloth and products in her hands, held up ready to use. Both women are being oppressed here, with Laura being punished for pursuing a life outside of the domestic domain, and Anita as a sentient synth being reconfigured to behave as the perfect domestic servant. In hooks' theory women of colour suffer more through patriarchal oppression, and this can be seen here as Anita is a woman of colour who has been bought to serve in this middle class white household. In fact, in the first episode the vast majority of ethnic minority characters are synths, built to serve. We even see one male synth working in a field picking fruit, before he is shot down and taken to be reconfigured. This echoes the history of slavery as we observe white men stopping the synths from becoming sentient and then escaping, by wiping their memories to ensure full cooperation. This reflects Stuart Hall's notion of the black 'slave' stereotype. In Humans, it is not only women who experience dominance at the hands of white men, it is also men of colour. We can also identify Judith Butler's gender performativity theory here as the synths perform stereotypical gender functions, though they do not possess a sex. They are interpreted by humans as male or female based on our own assumptions about what gender means and looks like.

The dominance of white men is also seen through the character Leo who is constructed as the saviour of the synths. Through symbolic codes Leo is shown in combat costume, and through camera framing is typically positioned ahead of the groups of synths he is saving, as if leading or protecting them. Leo's tone of voice is always stern, particularly when instructing the synths. Niska, one of the sentient synths is told by Leo to stay in the brothel until he comes back for her, condemning her to being prostituted, and through a lingering final shot we see her pain as a man has sex with her. This is in addition to a slow zoom-in shot to Niska as she dances in the window. When Niska sees Leo she is relieved and hugs him, symbolising his role as saviour as she believes he is there to rescue her. Niska is subjected to patriarchal dominance here by both Leo and male punter, and she has no way to escape and no voice with which to fight back.

However, there are examples in the episode of women who do hold more dominant positions, for example the elder daughter Mattie. Mattie challenges Van Zoonen's gender theory as she is represented as being strong, capable, and rational. This is seen when she first meets Anita and through her intradiegetic gaze we see her disdain for the synth. This is emphasised through the binary opposition between Mattie and Sophie, where Anita forms a

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nurturing relationship with Sophie but is rejected by Mattie. Mattie asks, “What’s its core processing speed”, suggesting that she views Anita only as a robot and not human, as well as showing her intelligence as her father doesn’t know. Through her dialogue and body language, Mattie challenges her father’s dominance, questioning his decision making, and rejecting Anita. Mattie demonstrates that she understands the consequences of the synths, representing her as possessing some power.