

ABSTRACT

The Women of *Supernatural*: More than Stereotypes

Miranda B. Leddy, M.A.

Mentor: Mia Moody-Ramirez, Ph.D.

This critical discourse analysis of the American horror television show, *Supernatural*, uses a gender perspective to assess the stereotypes and female characters in the popular series. As part of this study 34 episodes of *Supernatural* and 19 female characters were analyzed. Findings indicate that while the target audience for *Supernatural* is women, the show tends to portray them in traditional, feminine, and horror genre stereotypes. The purpose of this thesis is twofold: 1) to provide a description of the types of female characters prevalent in the early seasons of *Supernatural* including mother-figures, victims, and monsters, and 2) to describe the changes that take place in the later seasons when the female characters no longer fit into feminine or horror stereotypes. Findings indicate that female characters of *Supernatural* have evolved throughout the seasons of the show and are more than just background characters in need of rescue. These findings are important because they illustrate that representations of women in television are not always based on stereotypes, and that the horror genre is evolving and beginning to depict strong female characters that are brave, intellectual leaders instead of victims being rescued by men. The female audience will be exposed to a more accurate portrayal of women to which they can relate and be inspired.

The Women of Supernatural: More than Stereotypes

by

Miranda B. Leddy, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of American Studies

Mia Moody-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts**

Approved by the Thesis Committee

Mia Moody-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

Marlene S. Neill, Ph.D.

Andrea L. Turpin, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School

August 2014

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2014 by Miranda B. Leddy

All rights reserved

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tables	v
Figures	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review	4
Chapter Three: Methods	11
Research Questions	11
Chapter Four: <i>Supernatural</i> Synopsis	13
Season 1	13
Season 2	13
Season 3	14
Season 4	14
Season 5	14
Season 6	15
Season 7	15
Season 8	15
Season 9	16
Chapter Five: Representations of Female Characters in the Early Seasons of <i>Supernatural</i>	18
Women as Monsters	18
Single Mother, Damsel in Distress	20
Women as Betrayers	23
Women Granted Mercy	24
Verbal Power	26
Chapter Six: Changes in Female Characters since the Kripke Era	29
Becky Rosen	29
Demon Meg	31
Jody Mills	35
Charlie Bradbury	37
Krissy Chambers	38
Chapter Seven: Conclusion	39
Limitations and Future Research	39
Bibliography	44

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Basic List of Feminine and Masculine Traits	10
Table 2: <i>Supernatural</i> Synopsis.....	17
Table 3: Sample of Stereotypes Present in the Early Seasons	24
Table 4: Sample of Episodes with Examples of Verbal Power	26

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Woman in White seducing unsuspecting male driver	19
Figure 2: Single mother Andrea, dressed very feminine, and son Lucas	21
Figure 3: Stereotypical blond, beautiful Ruby	23
Figure 4: Kitsune mother explaining her situation to Sam	25
Figure 5: Jo Harvelle, with a shotgun, holding her own.....	27
Figure 6: Becky being a typical fan girl and touching Sam.....	30
Figure 7: Meg begins as a stereotypical blond with a cute pixie cut	32
Figure 8: Sheriff Jody Mills is not amused by Bobby Singer's request for help.....	36

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Mia Moody-Ramirez, for her support and motivation throughout my writing process. I would also like to thank Dr. Marlene Neill for serving on my committee and giving me excellent advice on how to improve my thesis paper. Finally, I would like to thank the final member of my committee, Dr. Andrea Turpin, for providing a much-needed fresh perspective on my thesis topic.

To my grandparents,
Mary, Phil, Evelyn, and Jim

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Supernatural, a television show that airs on the CW network, defies the norm of the horror genre by targeting an audience of 18- to 34-year-old women (Beeler, 2011). Audiences of the horror genre have long been ignored, but young men usually make up the largest part of the audience (Clover, 1992). *Supernatural* premiered in the fall of 2005 and was recently renewed for its 10th season. It is labeled as a horror show because it follows a monster-of-the-week pattern (Abbott, 2011). *Supernatural* also challenges the horror genre grain by having two male leads, brothers Sam and Dean Winchester, instead of a female victim-hero who survives as the Final Girl.

Beeler (2011) asserts that due to its female audience, the writers of *Supernatural* value character development over cheap horror thrills of violence and gore. Because of this characteristic, *Supernatural* is able to have well-developed female characters in a male-dominated show that challenges well-known horror gender stereotypes. Scholars have described *Supernatural* as a female-friendly experience with Dean fulfilling the bad boy role and Sam serving as the romantic partner all women desire (Beeler, 2011). The show is also female friendly because it has many female characters with which women can identify and who find their own strength without always being a “Final Girl.”

Women who had a powerful influence in their lives inspire the brothers to hunt. For instance, Sam and Dean entered into the hunting life because of the death of their mother. The desire for revenge for the death of his wife caused their father John Winchester to join the hunting lifestyle. Similarly, the death of his mother motivates

Dean to follow his father into the hunting profession. Sam becomes a hunter after the death of his girlfriend who was killed by the same demon who murdered his mother.

Previous articles on the portrayal of women in the horror film genre have focused on four areas: 1) the victim-antagonist dichotomy 2) female monster character traits 3) the interruption of domestic harmony and 4) the damsel in distress. For instance, Clover (1996) described the idea of the Final Girl who is the victim who destroys the antagonist, but does not die; and lives to tell the tale of the horrors she experienced (p. 103). A second famous idea, pertaining to women in the horror genre, includes the female look or the act of recognizing the similarities between the monster and the female character (Williams, 1996).

A third idea, discussed in the horror genre, is the interruption of the harmony of domestic life, often seen as the female domain, which can potentially disrupt social order (Sobchack, 1996). The concern is that women in the horror genre are always the Final Girl and never the leading girl. The fear is that they are always the young, sexualized love interest. Lastly, the worry is that male counterparts overshadow female characters in the horror genre and female characters are cast only in stereotypes as damsels in distress who need the care and rescue of men.

This study analyzes a different type of horror genre show whose audience is female instead of the typical audience of young males. It will add to the limited research conducted on the female characters in horror TV shows with male leads. This will aid in understanding the role women play outside of being the main protagonists, popular in horror movies like the classic *Halloween* or more modern *The Descent*, and horror TV shows such as *Charmed* or more recent *American Horror Story*.

This study is unique because it focuses on many female characters who have not been extensive subjects of previous *Supernatural* studies. This analysis focuses on *the Supernatural* female characters that break horror stereotypes instead of upholding them. In addition, this analysis covers all of nine seasons of *Supernatural* whereas previous studies have only focused on partial seasons of the show.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Horror movies and television shows began their rise to popularity in the 1960s because members of this generation were the first to grow up with television access. Carroll (1990) hypothesizes that their “affection for horror, to a large extent, was nurtured and deepened by the endless reruns of the earlier horror and sci-fi cycles that provided the repertoire of the afternoon and late-night television of their youth” (p. 3). The Baby Boomers, in turn, raised their children with an appreciation of horror and the larger American culture played its part.

As horror became popular, food packaging started to provide horror advertisements, and companies modeled toys after horror characters. Horror literature, including *The Stepford Wives* and *Carrie*, cemented the horror film as viable entertainment (Carroll, 1990). In the 1970s, horror novels became immensely popular. As a result, popular horror novels were made into popular movies, and due to greater exposure and a greater number of people talking about horror the consumer audience grew (Carroll, 1990). Carroll (1990) asserts that it was the success of *The Exorcist* in 1973 that convinced the film industry that horror was a moneymaker, and it spawned many imitators that nearly abolished the genre. Other scholars might argue that the premiere of *Jaws* in 1975 convinced the industry that horror was still viable. Eventually, horror opened itself up to outer space movies in *Alien*, and in the 1980s, young Americans consumed more and more horror (Carroll, 1990). Slasher horror films also became popular in the 1980s. Young audiences spent their summers devouring sequels.

Horror expanded to the stage in the 1980s, and the 1988 success of the play *The Phantom of the Opera* only added to horror's popularity. Music joined the horror scene as well through Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, and the music video's popularity on MTV fueled the horror genre even more (p. 1). Horror remained popular through the 1990s. In the early 2000s, spectacle horror films such as *Hannibal* and *Signs* became a way to attract new viewers to the genre. To achieve the desired wider audience appeal, these spectacles relied on star actors and directors, technological advances, and cliffhanger endings (Simpson, 2004).

Today, horror television series have become the new thrill. TV executives increasingly target horror TV shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* at young female viewers (Simpson, 2004). Bloggers and self-proclaimed fans of horror have noticed the growth of the genre and that these TV shows "are better than most horror movies" (VersaVulture89, 2013). The new horror TV shows are unpredictable, leaving behind the clichés of the innocent girl and humorous guy found in the movies (VersaVulture89, 2013). The TV format of an episode a week allows the viewer to connect with the characters because there is more time for development and better storytelling. This connection to characters allows for bigger scares when favorites are in danger (Ward, 2013).

Horror literature influenced horror movies and music, which are now influencing horror television shows. The horror genre's ability to evolve is what keeps it alive. The VersaVulture89 blog describes the genre in this manner (2013):

Horror was once a respectable genre and with time, it became a genre that just became stupider and stupider. There were no more original ideas, just remakes and original movies with similar concepts to other movies. With all of the horror TV shows that are emerging, the viewers are being introduced to characters that

we're meant to really connect with. These characters are more human, they have heart, we travel with them on their journey and more. Horror shows have stories that aren't completely absurd and every season, I just wonder where they will go next. I feel that horror series are the next wave to bring horror back to the glory it once had.

Scholars have used a wide range of methods to study gender stereotypes. The most common one, however, is critical discourse analysis (Carter & Steiner 2004, Collins 2011, Gauntlett 2008, Rudy et al 2010). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach that focuses on the representation in spoken communication between people or characters. Scholars use CDA in a wide array of studies ranging from the analysis of grammar to social conditions (Fairclough, 1992 & Wodak, 1996). According to Scheuer (2003), close text analysis and social practice analysis coincide in CDA “offering much toward explaining what is going on” (Scheuer, 2003, p. 144). CDA allows analysts to seek the general constitution of a performer if individual choices, life-story, and events are also taken into consideration (Scheuer, 2003). These considerations allow viewers to perceive a character within his or her cultural context (Scheuer, 2003). To overcome weaknesses in a CDA the analyst must focus on more than one character and his or her interactions (Scheuer, 2003). This type of application of CDA will provide more balanced and accurate results (Scheuer, 2003).

Historically, women “have accounted for one-third of primetime characters,” (Luzen & Dozier, 1999, p. 393) but this number is on the rise. Part of the reason women are underrepresented on screen is because they are underrepresented behind the scenes (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999). Young women are overrepresented on television shows, and older women are underrepresented (Lauren & Dozier, 1999). The majority of women represented on TV are white and identified by marital status (Lauzen & Dozier, 1999).

Representation of people and objects is an important aspect of the horror genre. Hall (1997) discusses the meaning of representation, stating that it is through words that people are able to give things meaning. Mass media use words to describe or symbolize something, and they become representation. Hall (1997) describes two types of representation, mental, where objects are correlated with concepts, and linguistic, where shared language allows for shared meaning (p.18). The lines spoken by actors in television shows are an important aspect of a show's representation.

Activist Betty Friedan argued that the "Feminine Mystique" was a "lie that domesticity provides the sole recipe for female happiness, pigeonholed women into wifely and maternal roles" (Busch, 2010). As victims of this lie, women did not have the education or independence necessary to reach their full potential. Busch (2010) argues that women in modern television, though often single, educated, and independent, display 1950s housewife feelings of loneliness, misery, and distress (p. 87). These TV women are emotional and ashamed of being single despite being physically attractive.

Since the 1990s, female characters on television are more likely to be portrayed having jobs once only occupied by male characters, such as professors or firemen. It is apparent, however, that the female characters "intellectual, technical, or physical skills pale in comparison to the way they wear their costumes" (Helford, 2001, p. xvi). Helford, (2001) stated, "offering role models to America's white, middle-class, female youth has become a profitable marketing opportunity" (p. xv). These female role models, on television, are often portrayed as pretty and young. They are usually heterosexual, although this is changing, and they live a life of comfort without economic hardship (Helford, 2001).

Lauzen, Dozier, and Horan (2008) add that women on prime time television are judged against the ideal that is man, and because of this unfair ideal, their value lies in their relationships to men. As multiple shows use this model, the female portrayals seem normal and all female characters start to look the same. Female characters are often married, involved in childcare, doing chores, and taking care of the family and home (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). When present in the workplace, female characters “continue to play domestic and interpersonal roles” (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008, p. 3) and have less variety in occupations than male characters.

Conversely, male characters in television shows, outside of comedy, are often portrayed as authoritative and dominating. They are often the designated breadwinner and “successful and mature fathers” (Walsh, Fürsich, & Jefferson, 2010, p. 124). Patriarchy is especially big in television shows but it is so common that it becomes normal and goes unnoticed by audiences. Male characters are constantly making sexist jokes that reinforce male dominance (Walsh, Fürsich, & Jefferson, 2010). Though mass media messages increasingly portray women as “smarter and more respectable, their apparent superiority is eclipsed” by the patriarchy of the male character (Walsh, Fürsich, & Jefferson, 2010, p. 130). Table 1 provides a list of feminine and masculine traits commonly portrayed by characters in television shows (England et al. 2011, p. 561 table 2 & 3).

Various scholars have analyzed the roles of the female characters in *Supernatural* with most choosing to focus on the stereotypes of the women apparent within the show (Booth, 2014; Calvert, 2011; Brace, 2013). For instance, Booth (2014) used *Supernatural* as the basis of his class syllabus. He wrote lessons on the representation of its female characters, asking questions about stereotypes and gender roles. His lessons often focused

on the parallels of Mary Winchester, the boy's mother, and Jessica Moore, Sam's girlfriend, describing their connections of motherhood and femininity (Booth, 2014).

Calvert (2011) wrote "Angels, Demons, and Damsels in Distress: The Representation of Women in *Supernatural*," which described how she believes women are portrayed in the show. She insisted the female characters play an important role in aiding the drive of the plot, but believes they are most sympathetic when motivating the development of Sam and Dean (Calvert, 2011). She claimed the categories under which the female characters fall include Victorian wife and mother types who are involved in the domestic, household duties, damsels in distress, who are stereotypically young and blonde, and demonic women, who are deceitful because they don't look monstrous on the outside (Calvert, 2011). She said the show's label within the horror genre holds it back, because fantasy shows such as *Alias* and *Firefly* have room for more positive, powerful female characters (Calvert, 2011). She suggested *Supernatural* is only ever about Sam and Dean and not the female characters that are frequently killed-off in the show (Calvert, 2011). Seasons 4 and 5 had many deaths of major female characters. Borsellino (2009) agreed that episodes exclude heroines from *Supernatural*, "never the ones to solve the mystery, kill the monster, or help the helpless" (p. 108).

Brace (2013) used similar categories to place the women into monsters, lovers, and mothers. Although she uses similar categories as Calvert, Brace focused more on the positive side of the women's roles in the show as moral guides for leading men, Sam and Dean. She said it is the women who "represent hearth and home... things they're [Sam and Dean] used to giving up for the greater good" (Brace, 2013, p. 87). She is still inclined to agree with Calvert, however, that these women are stereotypically domestic

wives and mothers who play a supporting role to Sam and Dean's lead. Critical discourse analysis will help determine whether these stereotypes hold true.

Table 1

Basic List of Feminine and Masculine Traits

Feminine	Masculine
Physically weak	Physically strong
Submissive	Assertive
Emotional	Unemotional
Dependent	Independent
Nurturing, Helpful	Selfish/Self-serving
Afraid, Fearful	Hero, Brave, Inspires Fear
Follower	Leader
Victim	Perpetrator
Described as physically attractive	Described as having higher economic/career status and being intellectual
Asks for/accepts advice	Gives advice
Ashamed	Proud
Troublesome	Problem Solver

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of gender representation in *Supernatural*, this paper examines the types of stereotypes represented in the series, how gender representations are presented, and how representations changed throughout the series. I chose to focus my study on only a portion of the female characters present in the nine seasons of *Supernatural* because of the time and length constraints required of this project. Most of the female characters in this analysis are recurring. I acquired notes on 34 episodes and 19 female characters. These notes consisted of observations about the female characters' speech and conversations, their setting, their appearance, and their actions. I also noted the female and male characteristics displayed by the women in each episode based on the table of feminine and masculine traits used by England et al. (2011) in their study of the Disney princess movies (see Table 1).

This type of analysis allowed me to reach my conclusions based on detail-oriented data. A critical discourse analysis was an appropriate method of analysis as I was concerned with the stereotypes and roles of female characters in *Supernatural* and not with the frequency of occurrences.

Research Questions

Building on a review of the literature and the summary of the critical discourse approach explained by Scheuer (2003), this study explores the following four questions:

RQ₁: What stereotypes are represented in the series?

RQ₂ How are gender representations presented?

RQ₃ What role do female characters play in the show's plot?

RQ₄ How do representations change throughout the series?

CHAPTER FOUR

Synopsis of *Supernatural*

Analysis of the series, *Supernatural*, requires some knowledge about the characters in the show. This section introduces the series and the overarching concept of the program (see Table 2).

Season 1

In season 1, Sam and Dean are looking for their missing father John Winchester, who disappeared while tracing a lead on the demon Azazel who killed his wife and the boy's mother 22 years prior. Along the way, they encounter Azazel's demon daughter Meg, the recurring antagonist of the season, who is attempting to stop John Winchester before he is able to find the Colt, a gun that can kill demons, and exact his revenge on her father (Knight, 2007).

Season 2

Season 2 centers on the death of John Winchester. The boys must find Azazel and murder him. Sam experiences premonitions as a side effect of being fed Azazel's demon blood as a child. At the end of the season, Sam is killed in a competition set up by Azazel to test all of the "special" children he infected with his blood as children. Dean, unable to handle Sam's death, sells his soul to a demon who resurrects him. Finally, with some help, the brothers are able to kill Azazel (Knight, 2008).

Season 3

In season 3, Dean has only one year to live as part of the deal he made for Sam's life, and hundreds of demons have been set loose on the world because of the fight with Azazel. Sam and Dean make it their mission to track down and kill the demons. Once they learn the mother of all demons, Lilith, is one of the demons now walking the earth, she becomes their main target. Sam and Dean partner with a demon named Ruby, who wants to help them get rid of Lilith, who will kill all demons. The season ends with Hellhounds dragging Dean to Hell, and Sam deciding to embrace his demon side to help him defeat Lilith (Knight, 2009).

Season 4

In the climax of season 4, an angel named Castiel (Cas) raises Dean from Hell. Castiel explains to the boys that Lilith is attempting to break the 66 seals to free Lucifer from his cage in Hell, and they need to stop her. At season's end, Ruby betrays the boys, and Lilith's death allows Lucifer to be freed, and he rises out of Hell (Knight, 2010a).

Season 5

Sam and Dean make it their mission to put Lucifer back in his cage in season 5, but to do this they must first acquire the rings of the four horsemen. While hunting Lucifer, the boys must navigate angel politics; Michael wishes to use Dean as his vessel to fight Lucifer who needs Sam as his vessel. During the season's finale, Lucifer is defeated at the cost of Sam, who is trapped in the cage with him in Hell. Dean retires from hunting, as a promise to Sam, and enters the domestic life with his former girlfriend

Lisa Braeden. This concludes the five-season story-arc under Executive Producer Eric Kripke (Knight, *Official Guide: Season 5*, 2010b).

Season 6

Under new Executive Producer Sera Gamble, season 6 begins with the discovery that someone has pulled Sam out of Lucifer's cage, but he or she left his soul behind. Dean makes it his mission to get Sam's soul back, and the boys fight a new evil in the form of Eve, the mother of all supernatural creatures. By season's end, Sam's soul has been returned, but at the cost of his sanity as he begins to hallucinate about Lucifer and Hell (Knight, 2011).

Season 7

In season 7, Sam and Dean face a new foe, the leviathans and their leader Dick Roman, who want to make a meal out of the earth's entire population. Sam and Dean team up with the prophet Kevin Tran in an effort to translate the Word of God and determine how to get rid of the leviathans. At season's end, Roman and the leviathans are killed, but as a result, Dean ends up in purgatory (Knight, 2012a).

Season 8

Supernatural acquired a new Executive Producer, Jeremy Carver, during season 8. It begins a year after the leviathans defeat, and Dean has returned from Purgatory to find Sam has retired from hunting. Dean convinces him to hunt again, however, with the aim of closing the gates of Hell forever. Sam volunteers to undertake the three trials required to achieve this goal, which causes him to become sicker as time passes. The series later reveals that Sam must sacrifice his life to close the gates, and Dean is not

willing to let him do this, so he makes him stop the trials. A betrayal by the angel Metatron results in the exile of all angels from Heaven and the closing of its gates (Knight, 2012b).

Season 9

Season 9 opens with Sam in the hospital dying from the trials and Dean agreeing to let an angel named Gadreel enter Sam to heal him. An angel named Gadreel possesses Sam and Crowley, the brothers hold the King of Hell prisoner. A Knight of Hell, Abaddon, seeks control over Hell. Sam and Dean also work on a way to get the angels back into Heaven. The only weapons that will kill Abaddon are the First Blade and the Mark of Cain, which Dean acquires from Cain himself. Abaddon is defeated, and the brothers turn their sights to Metatron, who is now ruling Heaven. Dean attempts to kill Metatron with the First Blade, but Metatron kills him instead. A distraught Sam attempts to summon Crowley to save Dean, who unbeknownst to him is already by Dean's side explaining the consequences of the Mark of Cain; its bearer cannot truly die, and Dean awakens bearing the black eyes of a demon. Table 1 provides a succinct overview of the *Supernatural* seasons ("Supernatural Season 9", n.d.).

Table 2
Supernatural *Synopsis*

Seasons	Executive Producer	Plot	Major Female Characters
Season 1	Eric Kripke	Searching for John Winchester and the Colt	Meg (demon)
Season 2	Eric Kripke	Searching for Azazel; Sam experiences premonitions; Dean sells his soul	Meg (demon)
Season 3	Eric Kripke	The boys are trying to rid the earth of Lilith and her demons; Dean is dragged to Hell	Ruby (demon) Lilith (demon)
Season 4	Eric Kripke	Enter angel Castiel; Boys must stop breaking of 66 seals; Lucifer is freed	Ruby (demon) Lilith (demon)
Season 5	Eric Kripke	Boys must hunt Four Horsemen; avoid being vessels to angels Michael and Lucifer; Sam goes to Hell and Dean retires	Meg (demon) Jo Harvelle (hunter) Ellen Harvelle (hunter)
Season 6	Sera Gamble	Sam emerges from Hell without a soul; boys take on Eve; Sam begins hallucinating	Eve (mother of all supernatural creatures) Meg (demon)
Season 7	Sera Gamble	The boys team up with Prophet Kevin Tran to defeat the leviathans; Dean goes to purgatory	Becky Rosen Jody Mills (sheriff) Meg (demon) Charlie Bradbury
Season 8	Jeremy Carver	Dean returns and finds Sam retired; Sam must complete three trials to close the gates of Hell; angels fall from Heaven	Meg (demon) Charlie Bradbury
Season 9	Jeremy Carver	Sam possessed by angel; Dean acquires blade and Mark of Cain to kill Metatron; Dean becomes a demon	Jody Mills (sheriff) Charlie Bradbury Abaddon (Knight of Hell)

CHAPTER FIVE

Representation of Female Characters in the Early Seasons of *Supernatural*

The early episodes of *Supernatural* are full of stereotypical female tropes often found in the horror genre. This is especially apparent in seasons 1 through 5, the early seasons, because during this time, the executive producer was Eric Kripke, and in his mind, the show would end after five seasons. Women were the monstrous antagonists or the victims that were very sexualized and one-dimensional with barely any development. In Season 1, there are only two recurring female characters, and of the 22 episodes, five had female antagonists and 10 had female victims who needed rescuing (Knight, 2007).

Women as Monsters

Some of the female supernatural creatures that protagonists Sam and Dean hunt in the first season seem full of guilt. This guilt seems to stem from their commitment of a crime against what one might see as the feminine domain or ideal. Society typically view the house as the feminine domain because it is women who spend the most time there, are in charge of its upkeep, and it is where they are charged with raising and keeping the children safe. Women are meant to be levelheaded, calm, and nurturing (Calvert, 2011).

The first episode of *Supernatural* tackles the urban legend of the Woman in White (see Figure 1). The woman is first seen dressed in white, often associated with innocence, and convincing men to pick her up because she is beautiful and alone. Once inside the male victims' car, she proceeds to flirt with him, getting him to drive her home. The Woman in White kills the unsuspecting male victim on the drive by clawing at him with

her fingernails, a very stereotypically female method of attack as TV shows often portray women as having long fingernails.



Figure 1. Woman in White seducing unsuspecting male driver (em_em, Woman in White).

Her inspiration of fear, however, is a masculine trait. The white color she wears is now revealed in its true form, as a ruse to lure unsuspecting men. At the end of the episode, the viewer realizes that this woman committed a crime against the female domain by murdering her children in her house. She is a monster because she went against the feminine ideal and murdered her children instead of doing her job as a good mother and nurturing them and raising them. She fears entering her house because the guilt over her children's death haunts her. In the end, she receives her just rewards for committing this sin as the ghost of her children drags her to Hell (Kripke & Nutter, 2005).

In episode 5, Sam and Dean take on another well-known urban legend, Bloody Mary, with a unique feminine slant. Bloody Mary appears in mirrors wearing white, again the color of innocence, and her main victims are young women, in itself a stereotype of the horror genre, who are seemingly guilty of causing someone's death. The

first female victim owned a car, which matched the description of a car involved in a hit and run, which killed a man; the second indirectly caused the death of her ex-boyfriend who informed her he would kill himself if they broke up and proceeded to do just that after she ended their relationship. Sam and Dean are able to defeat Mary because she sees what she has become in a mirror and realizes she is a monster. She no longer ascribes to the feminine ideal because she has murdered innocent children. Women are not meant to hurt the innocent, nor should they be so irrational as to seek revenge, these are traits best left to men. Distracted by her guilt, Sam and Dean are able to smash the mirror she inhabits, causing her destruction (Hughes, Milbauer & Ellis, 2005).

Single Mother, Damsel in Distress

A second stereotype apparent in the early seasons of *Supernatural* is that of women as damsels in distress, needing rescue, many of whom are portrayed as nurturing mothers, a domestic ideal Sam and Dean never experienced. These mothers are usually single and seemingly do not have jobs as they are always seen at home caring for their children. One such single mother Andrea, in episode 3 of season 1, is the victim of a vengeful water spirit, attacking her due to the guilt of her father who accidentally killed another boy when he was a child (see Figure 2). Sam and Dean rescue her from drowning in her bathtub as the spirit holds her underwater. Throughout the episode, she wears flowing skirts, emphasizing her femininity, and tops, which often rise up to show her stomach. As a mother, she is always seen caring for her son. She takes him to the park, encourages his drawing, prepares his meals, and supervises him at play when they are home.

She is the stereotypical, vigilant mother caring for her child in the female domain. She also cares for her single father, drops off his dinner and looks after his well-being, a duty she must perform as his only daughter and female companion (Tucker, Gamble & Manners, 2005).



Figure 2. Single mother Andrea, dressed very feminine, and son Lucas (Aimee Louise Harvey, 2013).

The third season of *Supernatural* also has two recurring female cast members listed and of the 16 episodes, there are seven female antagonists and five damsels in distress. Season 3 also contains single mother and damsel in distress stereotypes. Two of these emerge in the second episode of season 3. The first is introduced in the female domain of the kitchen where she greets her daughter upon her return from her father's house and proceeds to make her a snack. The second mother, an ex-girlfriend of Dean's named Lisa Braeden, is introduced in the backyard of her home where she is throwing a birthday party for her son. On a case, Dean stops by and flirts with her as he does with many of the damsels, including Andrea from episode 3 of season 1 (Gamble & Sgriccia, 2007). Both of these mothers live in the idealized American location of suburbia, recalling images of the home-life and feminine influence, which Sam and Dean missed

because of the death of their mother. Though the early seasons of *Supernatural* contain the greatest amount of stereotyped female characters, there are a few mothers in season 2 who break female stereotypes.

Season 2 has three recurring female characters, five female antagonists, and seven damsels in distress. Sam and Dean in season 2 episode 11 rescue a single mother from an angry spirit who wants to harm her family. This mother not only has a job but is a business owner of an inn. She runs the front desk when Sam and Dean check in. She is immune to Dean's immediate flirting as she mistakenly thinks he and Sam are a gay couple. She is also seen as capable in handling heavy loads, often the man's job, as she packs boxes in anticipation of her family's move. Nor does she need a man's protection as an elderly bellboy, who would not be much help in the case of an attack, is the only man in residence at the inn. She does not, however, neglect her feminine duties. She cares for her daughter, tucking her into bed, and she cares for her ill mother (Witten & Beeson, 2007). This working mom is portrayed as very capable in all aspects of her life; she is nurturing and attractive but also displays masculine traits of independence and physical strength without sacrificing her own identity.

Another single mother, the owner of a hotel, appears in season 1 episode 18. This mother is rescued from a shtriga that sucks the life from people. She checks in the guests, cleans the rooms, and performs maintenance all while looking after her two young sons, including one who is ill in the hospital (Knauf & Ransick, 2007). Sam and Dean rescue both of these mothers who fulfill the maternal role of caretaker while simultaneously doing the man's job of making the money.

Women as Betrayers

Women also often play the role of betrayer, the wily female, not to be trusted, who often takes Sam and Dean by surprise. One example is the demon, Ruby (see Figure 3). She appears in the third season claiming she wants to aid Sam in learning to use his demon blood to help exorcise demons, and she also wishes to help the brothers defeat Lilith. Season 4, however, reveals that Ruby is self-serving. All along, she wished to kill Lilith only because it would allow Lucifer to be freed from his cage. Sam is shocked by the betrayal and as a result cannot find the energy to use his demon powers to stop Lucifer from rising (Kripke & Kripke, 2009).

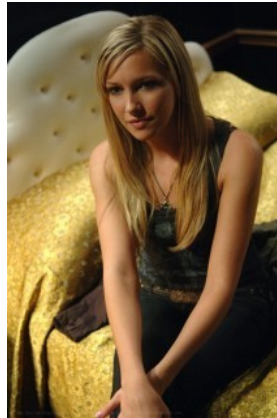


Figure 3. Stereotypical blond, beautiful Ruby (67impala, Ruby).

Many of these female antagonists seem horrific because in some way they go against the feminine stereotype, as is a trait of traditional horror films; one such character is the aunt and seemingly loving guardian to her niece whose parents are dead. Upon harvest time, she willingly hands over her niece for a pagan scarecrow god to sacrifice, showing barely any remorse and ignoring the cries of her niece as she binds her to a tree to await the god's arrival (Shiban & Manners, 2007). Although one could argue the needs

of the many outweigh the needs of the few in this situation, where the sacrifice will provide a good harvest for the townspeople, there is something even more sinister about a woman who would go against stereotype to harm a child, and in a way commit a crime against the domestic as she breaks up her family instead of keeping them safe and together within the home. Another antagonist who betrays the feminine stereotype is a nurse, a job usually gendered female, named Karla who is meant to be caring for patients at the psych ward she works at, but is instead killing and feeding off of them (Dabb, Loflin & Conway, 2010). Table 3 provides a succinct look at a sample of the stereotypes present in the episodes from the early seasons.

Table 3

Sample of Stereotypes Present in the Early Seasons

Stereotype	Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Season 4	Season 5
Guilt/Crime against domesticity	1.1, 1.5, 1.11				5. 11
Single Mother	1.1, 1.4, 1.18	2.11	3.2		
Young/Pretty female	1.1, 1.5, 1.3, 1.18	2.11	3.2	4.22	5.11
Damsel in distress	1.5, 1.3	2.11	3.2		

Women Granted Mercy

Finally, there are female monsters in the early seasons granted mercy by Sam and Dean. They are spared death because they are not trying to harm the humans they live amongst. One such character is the vampire Lenore, who is part of a clan of vampires who do not drink from humans. Lenore is the leader of the clan. It is uncommon for females to be portrayed in a leadership position, especially over male counterparts in any

show, even *Supernatural*. Lenore also functions as a sort of mother figure for her small clan. She is at first listened to and pardoned by Sam, who then implores and convinces Dean to leave her clan alone as they are not harming any people (Gamble & Singer, 2006). If they had run into the male vamps first would the result have been the same, or was it because she was female that Sam and Dean were willing to go easy on her?

A second example of this kind of mercy involves a kitsune mother who was Sam's childhood friend and promised him she would never kill a human (see Figure 4). As an adult, she is now a mother, and her son is sick, the only cure being human flesh. Due to her stereotypical motherly concerns, she is forced to kill a few humans and is subsequently tracked down by Sam and Dean. Again, it is Sam who convinces Dean to let her go as she promises that she will no longer kill humans as her son is better, so they allow her to get out of town (Dabb, Loflin, & Ackles, 2011). Is the stronger motivating factor here because they are more inclined to allow mercy to females, is it because she is a mother, or is it because she was Sam's childhood friend? These are questions for further research projects.



Figure 4. Kitsune mother explaining her situation to Sam(nepetaleijonmeow, Kitsune Amy Pond).

Verbal Power

Jo Harvelle, a hunter, is one of the female characters of the early seasons that is not stereotypical, is often seen on the road away from domesticity, she works in a bar, and she claims the upper hand over Dean in their encounters. Reiss (2004) argues, within the horror genre, that verbal humor is used to signify the character that holds power (see Table 4). Abbott (2011) tackled the subject of physical versus verbal comedy at play in *Supernatural* (p. 7). She argued that the hunters in *Supernatural* use sarcasm to assert machismo, a strong or exaggerated sense of manliness. This is true as Dean especially uses sarcasm often to taunt his opponents, but what is it called when the female hunters use sarcasm against a foe? Can they be accused of trying to assert machismo or is sarcasm just a technique all hunters use to help them find courage? Defining the use of sarcasm in *Supernatural* as machismo narrows the term too much and leaves out the important female hunters, who play a role in the supposedly male-dominated universe.

Table 4

Sample of Episodes with Examples of Verbal Power

Verbal Power	Episodes
Sarcasm	2.2, 2.5 both by Jo Harvelle, 9.8 by Jody Mills
Humor	3.10, 3.12 both by Bela Talbot
Machismo	3.3, 3.6 both by Bela Talbot, 8.18 by Krissy Chambers, 6.4 by Jody Mills

Harvelle is an example of the female hunter who uses sarcasm in her dealings with supernatural creatures and in this way, the audience knows she holds the power (see Figure 5). Harvelle even uses sarcasm to hold the power over main character Dean Winchester. Upon her first meeting with Dean she tells him “Most hunters come through

that door think they can get in my pants with some... pizza, a six pack, and side one of Zeppelin IV” (Shiban & Sgriccia, 2006).

This visibly throws off Dean but he attempts to regain the power in the situation by responding “normally I’d be hitting on you so fast it’d make your head spin” (Shiban & Sgriccia, 2006). Then he casually adds that it’s “the wrong time, wrong place” (Shiban & Sgriccia, 2006), claiming this because his father is dead, and he is attempting to keep secrets.



Figure 5. Jo Harvelle, with a shotgun, holding her own (Laura Crook, 2012).

His excuses only highlight even more that Harvelle holds all the power in this humorous verbal transaction and that Dean has become the victim unable to adequately defend himself (Abbott, 2011, p. 16).

Bela Talbot is another female character who uses verbal power against Dean. In episode 6 of season 3, she and the brothers are working to obtain the Hand of Glory to stop a ghost ship. To accomplish this, they have to go to a fancy, upscale party and Dean is forced to ditch his plaids and wear a tux for the first time in his life. Dean takes a long time getting ready causing Bela to comment “What are you, a woman? Come down already,” (Andries & Bole, 2007) and as Dean descends, she whistles suggestively as he

mumbles in embarrassment. When referring to Sam she calls him “Cute. But a bit of a drama queen” (Edlund & Singer, 2007). Not only does she use verbal power, but she gives Sam and Dean feminine traits, destroying their masculinity.

CHAPTER SIX

Changes in Female Characters since the Kripke Era

Although the first five seasons of *Supernatural* saw most of the female characters somewhat stereotyped and relegated to background characters, the show found stronger female characters in the second half of the series. Perhaps women have more of a presence because there was a change in show runners. Eric Kripke was Executive Producer for the first five seasons of *Supernatural*, but once the story he wanted to tell ended, he left and Sera Gamble then took over as the head of the show, running seasons 6 and 7 before stepping down and allowing Jeremy Carver to take over for seasons 8 and 9. There has been a rise in the number of powerful female characters as well as further development of female characters from Kripke's era including Becky Rosen, demon Meg, and Jody Mills.

Becky Rosen

Becky Rosen was first introduced, near the end of Kripke's era, in season 5 episode 1 (see Figure 6). She is portrayed as the ultimate fan girl. She writes *Supernatural* fan fiction, squeals in excitement when she receives a call from the *Supernatural* series author Carver Edlund (Chuck), and is exhilarated at meeting Sam and Dean in real life (Kripke & Singer, 2009). Although it may seem as if she is a stereotypical female fan girl because she is infatuated with Sam and continually touches him, it is apparent that she is well grounded. At first, she is skeptical of Chuck's needing her help in delivering a message to Sam and Dean, who she believes are fictional

characters. She responds to Chuck's request assertively saying "I know the difference between fiction and reality" (Kripke & Singer, 2009). She is also apparently smart, composing her own original stories, and reliable, faithfully delivering Chuck's message to Sam and Dean after learning they actually exist.



Figure 6. Becky Rosen being a stereotypical fan girl and touching Sam (questionableliterarymerit, 2011).

In season 5 episode 9, Becky tricks Sam and Dean into attending a *Supernatural* convention. It is here that we see her character develop. She abandons her fan girl crush on Sam and turns her attentions to Chuck because she sees the quality characteristics, such as bravery, that he possesses. Although the brothers are at first angry with Becky, they value her knowledge of the chronicles of their lives, heeding her information on where they can find the Colt (Kripke & Conway, 2009). Allowing Becky to deliver messages and provide the brothers with vital information that they need, Becky is clearly being portrayed as a female character only used to further the story of main protagonists Sam and Dean.

Her status changes, however, in her next appearance in the Gamble era episode 8 of season 7. The episode opens and remains focused on Becky's story. She has broken up

with Chuck and as a result tries to reclaim her love for Sam by marrying him. Becky acquires a potion from a demon that causes Sam to fall in love with her. She then accompanies him on hunts, taking charge interviewing witnesses and brainstorming. She literally holds all the power in her relationship with Sam, which is not typical of female characters. She also is seemingly his equal in domestic duties as Sam helps around the apartment by doing dishes. She is not a stereotypical female taking care of the needs of her husband. Once Dean discovers what has happened, however, Becky is forced to relinquish Sam, although she does not wallow in self-pity for her loss, moving on to her next love interest quickly (Dabb, Loflin, & Andrew, 2011). Also, this story does not appear to advance the Winchester brother's story in any way. The episode is instead an homage to a beloved female character, and the female fans of *Supernatural*.

Demon Meg

Demon Meg is the longest lasting female character in *Supernatural* appearing in six seasons and 12 episodes (see Figure 7). She begins as one of the main antagonists of Sam and Dean Winchester. She is the daughter of the demon Azazel, who killed the boy's mother causing their foray into the hunting lifestyle. Meg first appears in the season 1 episode 11 titled "Scarecrow" wearing jeans and a leather jacket, with a blonde pixie cut, as a fellow traveler who bonds with Sam Winchester over her family problems in a bus station. Sam and Meg eventually part ways and it is not until the end of the episode that it is revealed to the audience that Meg is self-serving (Shiban & Manners, 2006). She appears again in the 16th episode of season 1 titled "Shadow" where Sam, suspicious of meeting her again, concludes that she is in league with the demon that killed his mother. Meg unleashes two lesser demons, daevas, upon the boys and ends up

capturing them. She reveals to the boys that they are merely a means to the end of luring their father John Winchester to town. Sam eventually gets free of his bonds and overpowers Meg who is thrown from a window and seemingly killed by the daeva demons that were freed from her control (Kripke & Manners, 2006).

Although Meg is stereotypical in looks, she is not the traditional victim or damsel in distress.



Figure 7. Meg begins as a stereotypical blond with a cute pixie cut, but transforms through the seasons into a tough brunette (suilynn, 2012).

She is the boy's attacker, and she runs the show as is apparent in her expert manipulation of the boys, tricking them into luring their father to Chicago, and again deceiving the boys into believing she is dead when she actually survived her tumble from the window. In many ways, she is smarter than Sam and Dean and remains calm under pressure, regrouping and continuing with her pursuit of John Winchester instead of succumbing to fear or frustration as many other female characters in horror do. Meg also proves the power of the speaker when she takes charge of conversations. In season 1 episode 21 titled "Salvation" she interrupts a conversation between John, Sam, and Dean with a phone call, wresting the power away from them. She demands John hand over The Colt, a demon-killing weapon she wishes to possess and threatens the life of one of his friends,

Caleb. Not often in the horror genre do women use murder as leverage to get what they want, that is usually left to the men. By the end of the episode Meg captures John Winchester again claiming the upper hand on them as she says they will never see him again (Tucker, Gamble & Singer, 2006). In season 1 episode 22, Meg again shows her power over her male antagonists as she taunts Dean over the phone, a tactic Dean often uses when claiming the upper hand over his opponent. Meg also is not portrayed stereotypically as domestic and belonging in the home. She appears as the opposite of domesticity as she is nomadic, traveling from town to town, and she has no children. Even when she is seen with her father Azazel she does not care for him as a doting daughter. In this episode, there is even a bit of symbolism against domesticity as she invades the home of Bobby, Sam and Dean's adoptive father, a place where Sam and Dean had sought solace. She kicks in the door to the house as if attacking domesticity and its promise of safety and comfort (Kripke & Manners, 2006).

Meg is not stereotypically cooperative. She questions male authority in season 5 episode 10 disagreeing with Lucifer, her ruler, about the wisdom of his plan to wait for Sam and Dean to find him, instead of seeking them out (Edlund & Sgriccia, 2009). Meg also is a survivor at all costs, and again she gets the best of Sam and Dean capturing them in season 6 episode 11, threatening them in an attempt to gain information about a new enemy and the new King of Hell Crowley. She ends up partnering with the boys in a mutually beneficial alliance to kill Crowley, even willing to sacrifice herself as she holds off Crowley's henchmen while the boys seek out the King himself. She also initiates physical contact with Castiel, who is surprised when she kisses him, and therefore shows she does not need the man to make the first move in a relationship. Once they find

Crowley, Dean hands over the demon-killing knife to Meg so that she can kill him, but when that fails, she quickly abandons Sam and Dean saving herself.

In 7.17 “The Born-Again Identity,” Meg reappears this time as the savior of Dean who is disarmed and surrounded by three demons. Meg promptly disposes of one and the others flee. Now Meg begins to display character development. No longer is she the lackey of her father Azazel or her boss Lucifer, she has plans of her own that involve teaming up with Dean and Cas to end her feud with Crowley, and no longer is she running in fear of Crowley, but facing him head on. Meg also shows her leadership skills and the ability to take charge, even over her male cohorts as she takes control of the situation at Northern Indiana State Hospital where Sam is a patient. She orchestrates a plan to clear out the demons surrounding the hospital (Gamble & Singer, “The Born-Again Identity,” 2012).

Meg continues to help the Winchesters risking her own life and becoming a hero in her own right as she saves the brothers from demon attacks, betraying her own kind for the greater good of defeating the King of Hell, even though the Winchesters still don’t trust her. In 7.23 “Survival of the Fittest,” it is Meg again who demonstrates her worth and smarts as she concocts a plan to find Dick Roman, a leviathan, the boy’s latest enemy, and she again shows character development as she risks her life to create a diversion so the boys can infiltrate the building housing Dick Roman (Gamble & Singer, 2012). In her last appearance in 8.17, Meg helps the boys recover an angel tablet that they need to defeat Crowley and sacrifices herself so the boys can escape; she is killed by Crowley (Thompson & Wright, 2012).

Meg is not just another female background character, nor is she portrayed in a stereotypically female light. She is smart, brave, physically strong, and a leader who becomes a trusted ally of Sam and Dean Winchester. She is not a love interest, nor is she the subject of Dean's flirting. She has motivations of her own regardless of Sam and Dean's involvement. She is more of an equal to Sam and Dean, as they learn to trust her judgment and fighting skills, and she holds her own in the sarcasm and taunting department just as Dean does, often calling Cas, to his dismay, Clarence in reference to the angel from *It's a Wonderful Life*. Her appearance is stereotypical but not much else is, and she is not a static character, instead she develops and changes. It is also her strengths as not being stereotypically female that allow her to become an accepted female character in the *Supernatural* fandom as she is no threat to taking away the affections of brothers Sam and Dean.

Jody Mills

Jody Mills is another female character, continued from Kripke's era, who breaks the female and horror genre stereotypes (see Figure 8). She is first introduced in season 5 as the somewhat stereotypical suburban mother, who cares for her family by making them dinner, and plays nursemaid to her sick son. She is not stereotypical, however, in that she works out of the home as sheriff, a position not often occupied by women. When it is revealed that some of the townspeople are zombies, including her own son, she does not hesitate, just coordinates the weapons and defense plans necessary for her town's survival (Carver & Showalter, 2010). Most women in her position in horror films are portrayed as hysterical, crying and screaming, unable to handle the situation, Sheriff Mills, however, is portrayed as perfectly capable.

Sheriff Mill's next appearance, in Sera Gamble's era, avoids the *Supernatural* stereotype that the female characters are only used to drive the plot for Sam and Dean (Calvert, 2011, p. 91). She also proves the type of power she is capable of wielding, when she is able to secure the extradition of Bobby's friend Rufus, after he asked for her help (Dabb, Loflin, & Ackles, 2011).



Figure 8. Sheriff Jody Mills is not amused by Bobby Singer's request for help (dugindeep, 2011).

She succeeds in extraditing him, although she is a small town local sheriff proving she has power most female characters are rarely portrayed as having. Her appearance in this episode in no way aids the efforts of leads Sam and Dean, proving she is an important female character with independent stories. Jody Mills is not only a capable sheriff; she is also an exceptional hunter who is actually taken seriously, instead of being dismissed because she is a woman by the Winchesters and Bobby. Once in the hospital, she traces a leviathan posing as a doctor, and Bobby heeds her tip and investigates (Edlund & Bee, 2010).

Later, it is Sheriff Mills who discovers that the substance sodium borate is toxic to leviathans, providing the tools for a much needed turn in the war against the leviathans (Thompson & Showalter, 2011). She continually proves her usefulness to the boys,

providing them with tips for hunts, being asked to help with hunts, and even being trusted to provide the necessary weaponry. She earns her status as an equal to Sam and Dean, who begin to ask her advice on how to defeat monsters (Thompson & Sgriccia, 2010). She earns their respect and becomes a part of their family, not relegated to the status of background character, Final Girl, or love interest. She shed her stereotypical domesticity in season 5 and never looked back.

Charlie Bradbury

Admittedly, there are still some stereotypes about women, which are upheld even in the last four seasons of *Supernatural*, but there are some, like Charlie Bradbury, who become leading female characters with their own interesting storylines. Clover (1996) wrote of the idea of the “Final Girl” who is often portrayed as more masculine, has a boyish name, is competent and quick-thinking under pressure, is usually smaller but willing to take on larger foes, and is separated sexually from other girls, perhaps because she remains celibate (p. 86). Clover said it is because of these traits that the “Final Girl” actually finds herself allied with the boys she seemingly is scared of and dismisses. Charlie Bradbury, at first glance, seems to fit nearly every aspect of this “Final Girl” description. She has a boy’s name, wears jeans and T-shirts instead of dresses, uses her computer hacking skills to aid on cases, is small but willingly takes on monsters much bigger than her, and finds herself an honorary member of the hunting party that is Sam and Dean Winchester. She is unique, however, in that although she is separated from other girls sexually, it is because she identifies as a lesbian, not because she is nervous around boys. This does not mean she is stand-offish around girls who catch her interest. In the episode “LARP and the Real Girl,” she is seen flirting with and kissing a fairy

maiden named Gilda (Thompson & Szwarc, 2013). In a later episode “Slumber Party,” she shows interest in Dorothy of Oz and even follows her into Oz at the conclusion of her case with Sam and Dean (Thompson & Showalter, 2013). She also wants to be part of the boy’s group, instead of being automatically allied with them, seeking Sam and Dean when she needs the comfort of a friend in “Pac-Man Fever” (Thompson & Singer, 2013). She is neither afraid of nor runs away from men.

Krissy Chambers

Krissy Chambers is another example of the “Final Girl” as she has a masculine name, is a capable hunter, and she is a teenager and therefore smaller than her foes. She is however, not separated from boys because she is awkward and shy around them or uninterested as is Laurie in *Halloween*. Instead she is focused, knows what she wants, and takes control of her relationships with boys. She is seen in episode 8 of season 18 “Freaks and Geeks” rejecting a boy’s attention by telling him she has a boyfriend in Canada (Glass & Wright, 2013). Her power lies in her successful ability to fend off unwanted advances, and by rejecting the boy’s interest, he loses his power. Becky Rosen, demon Meg, Jody Mills, Charlie Bradbury, and Krissy Chambers are just a few examples of female characters in the later seasons that break stereotypes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Limitations and Future Research

Due to time constraints, this analysis research was contained to the nine seasons of *Supernatural*. This allowed for in-depth analysis of the female characters within the show but does not allow the conclusions to be generalized to all female roles and representation in television shows. This study, however, adds to the overall literature concerning the horror genre by challenging its continued treatment of female characters as victims and Final Girls.

Future studies might build on these themes. For instance, scholars might analyze some of the reasons Sam and Dean grant mercy to certain characters. Is it because they are female? Is it because they are mothers? Or, is it because they were once childhood friends? Future research could also be conducted on the biblical imagery of women in *Supernatural*. It would also be useful to discover if the gender dynamic in the show reflects the gender dynamic in the United States. Finally, it would be interesting to analyze the significance of females occupying powerful positions in Heaven versus males occupying powerful positions in Hell.

Though scholars such as Calvert (2011) and Brace (2013) confirm there are feminine stereotypes in the episodes of seasons of *Supernatural*, this analysis indicates that many of the show's female characters break these historical representations. Accordingly, Calvert's notion that "any female character, whether angel, vampire,

demon, or would-be action heroine, will always have to exist on their [Sam and Dean] terms” (Calvert, 2011, p. 104) perhaps is untrue. Study findings indicate not all of the women in *Supernatural* subscribe to feminine stereotypes of domesticity, caring for their homes and families, raising the children and cooking the meals.

Many of the women in the early seasons ascribe to aspects of feminine stereotypes, but they are not defined by them. Also, many of the women display masculine as well as feminine traits. There are single mothers who are independent business owners, and refuse to be flattered by Dean’s flirting. There are women who are assertive and in leadership positions, such as Sheriff Jody Mills. There are female characters who betray the femininity stereotype by harming children instead of nurturing them, and women who have stereotypically feminine jobs, such as nurse, who abuse their power to harm innocent patients.

There are physically strong female hunters that dress in jeans and leather jackets, ditching the stereotypical feminine clothes such as dresses and skirts that damsels in distress or perfect mothers often wear. There are women who are the stars of their own episodes, including Becky Rosen and Charlie Bradbury, where they are not contributing to the larger story arc of Sam and Dean. There are also women like Jody Mills that solve the mysteries and inspire fear in the monsters. There’s demon Meg who becomes an asset to Sam and Dean, proving her intellect by offering advice, instead of fading into the background. Meg gets to play the hero, rescuing Sam and Dean over and over from demons and sacrificing her life so that they can escape with their lives.

Supernatural is a solid indication that female characters outside of the fantasy genre, can be brave and powerful, drawing women viewers because they are dynamic and

relatable like fan girl Becky and tech whiz Charlie. *Supernatural* women do not only exist on Sam and Dean's terms.

As the seasons included in my analysis indicate, the female characters have evolved, becoming more important and involved in Sam and Dean's storylines as well as their own. Perhaps the horror genre is progressing in an attempt to better reflect the real-life roles of women. In the early seasons of *Supernatural* female characters, like Jo Harvelle, were changed or killed off because of negative fan reaction (Calvert, 2011). Executive producers had to rely on old characters, like Mary Winchester, to tell stories as female fans did not want new female characters that were stereotypes of beautiful, young love interests (Calvert, 2011).

The subsequent seasons, however, had more positive fan reaction to the introduction of new female characters that broke feminine stereotypes. Becky Rosen quickly became a fan favorite, labeled funny and enjoyable. As the female characters became more relatable, and had similar "tastes, mannerisms, and pastimes" (Cherry, 2011, p. 214) as fans, they began to garner more episodes and greater appreciation. As the female characters moved away from stereotypes, they became more popular. A combination of fan reaction and new executive producers contributed to the change in the portrayal of the female characters in *Supernatural*.

This study illustrates the evolution going on in the female characters of *Supernatural*. No longer are these women stereotypically blond, wearing dresses, and remaining domestic as was feared in previous studies. They have outgrown the stereotype of single mother, damsel in distress and become allies of Sam and Dean. A horror television show with two male leads, instead of a female victim-hero, can have leading

ladies who contribute their own stories. The female target audience no longer just tunes in because of Dean the bad boy and Sam the romantic interest, but because of Becky Rosen who they see in themselves and want to connect with more. *Supernatural* is no longer a male-centric television show, but a show that also embraces its female characters.

This study implies that television horror is starting to portray strong female characters that no longer conform to strict stereotypes. These female characters are often single, but they are also brave, hold leadership positions, are intellectual, and proud. This is important because Busch (2010) states that “the amazing popularity and global appeal of these postfeminist icons indicates that such figures represent more than mere entertainment for twenty- or thirty-somethings; statistics indicate that women see themselves in these protagonists” (p. 88). Since 1960, there has been a 30% increase in the number of single women around the world, and these women are independent, economically stable, and are not emotionally dependent on a man (Busch, 2010). Also, like the women in *Supernatural*, women in the U.S. no longer have stereotypical feminine jobs, and they make up 46% of the American workforce (Busch, 2010). Statistics show “women running their own businesses increased at twice the growth rate for all businesses,” (Busch, 2010, p. 88), and *Supernatural* provides female characters that are business owners. Being single and a being a single mother are acceptable in the U.S., and *Supernatural* also reflects this lifestyle by having many single female and single mother characters. The target audience of *Supernatural* that includes young women is exposed, by watching the show, to female characters with diverse jobs and backgrounds that more accurately reflect the United States as it is today. *Supernatural*

provides female protagonists who are role models, and may teach viewers what it looks like to live a fulfilled life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Print Sources

- Abbott, S. (2011). Rabbits' Feet and Spleen juice: The Comic Strategies of TV Horror. In S. Abbott & D. Lavery (Eds.), *TV Goes to Hell: An Unofficial Road Map of Supernatural* (pp. 3-17). Toronto, CAN: ECW Press.
- Beeler, S. (2011). Two Greasers and a Muscle Car: Music and Character Development in *Supernatural*. In S. Abbott & D. Lavery (Eds.), *TV Goes to Hell: An Unofficial Road Map of Supernatural* (pp. 18-30). Toronto, CAN: ECW Press.
- Booth, P. (2014). Teaching Through *Supernatural*: Using *SPN* in the College Classroom. In L. Zubernis & K. Larsen (Eds.), *Fan Phenomena: Supernatural* (pp. 11-21). Chicago, IL: Intellect Books.
- Borsellino, M. (2009). Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Jo the Monster Killer: *Supernatural's* Excluded Heroines. In supernatural.tv (Ed.), *In the Hunt: Unauthorized Essays on Supernatural* (pp. 107-118). Dallas, TX: Benbell Books, Inc.
- Brace, P. (2013). Mothers, Lovers, and Other Monsters: The Women of *Supernatural*. In G.A. Foresman (Ed.), *Supernatural and Philosophy* (pp. 83-94). Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Busch, E.K. (2010). Ally McBeal to Desperate Housewives: A Brief History of the Postfeminist Heroine. *Perspectives on Political Science*, 38(2), 87-98. doi: 10.3200/PPSC.38.2.87-98
- Calvert, B. (2011). Angels, Demons, and Damsels in Distress: The Representation of Women in *Supernatural*. In S. Abbott & D. Lavery (Eds.), *TV Goes to Hell: An Unofficial Road Map of Supernatural* (pp. 90-104). Toronto, CAN: ECW Press.
- Carroll, N. (1990), *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York, NY: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc. Carter, Cynthia & Steiner, Linda. (2004). *Critical readings: Media and gender*. Maidenhead, ENG: Open University Press.
- Cherry, B. (2011). Sympathy for the Fangirl: Becky Rosen, Fan Identity, and Interactivity in *Supernatural*. In S. Abbott & D. Lavery (Eds.), *TV Goes to Hell: An Unofficial Road Map of Supernatural* (pp. 203-218). Toronto, CAN: ECW Press.
- Clover, C. J. (1992). *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, MA: Princeton University Press.

- Clover, C.J. (1996). *Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film*. In B.K. Grant (Ed.), *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (pp. 66-113). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- England, D. E., Descartes, L., & Collier-Meek, M.A. (2011). Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses. *Sex Roles* 64(7-8), 555-567. doi 10.1007/s11199-011-9930-7
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, ENG: Polity Press.
- Gauntlett, D. (2008). *Media, gender and Identity An introduction*. 2nd edition. London, ENG: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. (pp.13-74). London, ENG: SAGE, Open University Press.
- Helford, E. R. (2001). *Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*. Lanham, ENG: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lauzen, M.M. Dozier, D.M., & Horan, N. (2008). Constructing Gender Stereotypes Through Social Roles in Prime-Time Television. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 52 (2), 200-214. doi: 10.1080/08838150801991971
- Knight, N. (2007). *Supernatural The Official Companion: Season 1*. London, ENG: Titan Books.
- Knight, Nicholas (2008). *Supernatural The Official Companion: Season 2*. London, ENG: Titan Books.
- Knight, N. (2009). *Supernatural The Official Companion: Season 3*. London, ENG: Titan Books.
- Knight, N. (2010a). *Supernatural The Official Companion: Season 4*. London, ENG: Titan Books.
- Knight, Nicholas (2010b). *Supernatural The Official Companion: Season 5*. London, ENG: Titan Books.
- Knight, N. (2011). *Supernatural The Official Companion: Season 6*. London, ENG: Titan Books.
- Knight, N. (2012a). *Supernatural The Official Companion: Season 7*. London, ENG: Titan Books.
- Knight, N. (2012b). *The Essential Supernatural: On the Road with Sam and Dean Winchester*. San Rafael, CA: Insight Editions.

- Lauzen, M.M. & Dozier, D.M. (1999). The Role of Women on Screen and behind the Scenes in the Television and Film Industries: Review of a Program of Research. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 23(4), 355-373. Retrieved from <http://ejournals.ebsco.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/direct.asp?ArticleID=63WRX6VYURE5KL27HV1J>
- Reiss, J. (2004) *What Would Buffy Do? The Vampire Slayer as Spiritual Guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Scheuer, J. (2003) Habitus as the principle for social practice: A proposal for critical discourse analysis. *Language in Society*, 32(2), 143-175. Retrieved from <http://ejournals.ebsco.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/direct.asp?ArticleID=CR4PM095D45RQB1X13C5>
- Simpson, P. L. (2004). The Horror "Event" Movie: The *Mummy*, *Hannibal*, and *Signs*. In S. Hantke (Ed.), *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*. (pp. 85-102). Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Sobchack, V. (1996). Bringing it All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange. In B.K. Grant (Ed.), *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (pp. 143-163). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Supernatural* Season 9. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved June 13, 2014, from http://supernatural.wikia.com/wiki/Season_9
- VersaVulture89. (2013, June 19). Why Horror TV Series are better than Horror Movies [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://versavulture89.hubpages.com/hub/Why-Horror-TV-Series-Are-Better-Than-Horror-Movies>
- Walsh, K.R., Fürsich, E. & Jefferson, B.S. (2010). Beauty and the Patriarchal Beast: Gender Role Portrayals in Sitcoms Featuring Mismatched Couples. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 36(3), 123-132. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/JPFT.36.3.123-132>
- Ward, R. (2013, October 31). 5 Reasons Why Horror TV is better than Horror Cinema [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://vadamagazine.com/31/10/2013/entertainment/horror-tv>
- Williams, L. (1996). When the Woman Looks. In B.K. Grant (Ed.), *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (pp. 15-34). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Wodak, R. (1996). *Disorders of discourse*. London, ENG: Longman.

Media Sources

- Andries, L. (Writer), & Bole, C. (Director). (2007). Red Sky at Morning [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Carver, J. (Writer), & Showalter, J. (Director). (2010). Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Crook, L. (2012). Jo Harvelle [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <http://lauracrook.com/five-things-friday-five-reasons-supernatural-is-more-than-two-hot-brothers-killing-stuff/>
- Dabb, A., Loflin, D. (Writers), & Conway, J. (Director). (2010). Sam, Interrupted [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Dabb, A., Loflin, D. (Writers), & Andrew, T. (Director). (2011). Season Seven, Time for a Wedding! [Television Series Episode]. In S. Gamble (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN : Warner Brothers Television.
- Dabb, A., Loflin, D. (Writers), & Ackles, J. (Director). (2011). Hello, Cruel World [Television Series Episode]. In S. Gamble (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- dugindeep. (2011). Sheriff Jody Mills [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <http://spnroundtable.livejournal.com/302510.html>
- Edlund, B. (Writer), & Sgriccia, P. (Director). (2009). Abandon All Hope... [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Edlund, B. (Writer), & Singer, R. (Director). (2007). Bad Day at Black Rock [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Edlund, B.(Writer), & Bee, G. (Director). (2010). Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- em_em. Constance Welch (Woman in White) [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/supernatural/picks/results/49529/fave-bad-guy-week-season-1>

- Gamble, S. (Writer), & Singer, R. (Director). (2006). Bloodlust [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Gamble, S. (Writer), & Sgriccia, P. (Director). (2007). The Kids Are Alright [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Gamble, S. (Writer), & Singer, R. (Director). (2012). Survival of the Fittest [Television Series Episode]. In S. Gamble (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Gamble, S. (Writer), & Singer, R. (Director). (2012). The Born-Again Identity [Television Series Episode]. In S. Gamble (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Glass, A. (Writer), & Wright, T. (Director). (2013) Freaks and Geeks [Television Series Episode]. In J. Carver (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Harvey, A.L. (2013). Andrea Barr [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <http://www.iliketovote.com/jsp/WAppServerPage.jsp?TransID=RVOTES00&VoteID=11475>
- Hughes, B., Milbauer, R. (Writers), & Ellis, P. (Director). (2005). Bloody Mary [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Knauf, D. (Writer), & Ransick, W.. (Director). (2007). Something Wicked [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Kripke, E (Writer), & Nutter, D. (Director). (2005). The Pilot [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Kripke, E. (Writer), & Manners, K. (Director). (2006). Devil's Trap [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Kripke, E. (Writer), & Manners, K. (Director) (2006). Shadow [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN : Warner Brothers Television.

- Kripke, E. (Writer), & Conway, J. (Director). (2009). The Real Ghostbusters [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Kripke, K. (Writer), & Kripke, K. (Director). (2009). Lucifer Rising [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Kripke, E. (Writer), & Singer, R. (Director). (2009). Sympathy for the Devil [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN : Warner Brothers Television.
- nepetaleijonmeow. Kitsune Amy Pond [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <http://nepetaleijonmeow.tumblr.com/>
- questionableliterarymerit. (2011). Becky Rosen [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <http://questionableliterarymerit.tumblr.com/post/11173644798/becky-rosen-is-my-spirit-animal>
- Shiban, J. (Writer), & Manners, K (Director). (2006). Scarecrow [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN : Warner Brothers Television.
- Shiban, J. (Writer), & Sgriccia, P. (Director). (2006). Everybody Loves a Clown [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Shiban, J. (Writer), & Manners, S. (Director). (2007). Scarecrow [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- 67impala. Ruby [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/supernatural/images/7150762/title/supernatural-ruby-photo>
- suilynn. (2012). Meg Masters [Online image]. Retrieved June 2, 2014 from <https://suilynn.wordpress.com/tag/supernatural/>
- Thompson, R. (Writer), & Sgriccia, P. (Director). (2010). Time After Time [Television Series Episode]. In S. Gamble (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Thompson, T. (Writer), & Showalter, J. (Director). (2011). Slash Fiction [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.

- Thompson, R. (Writer), & Wright, T. (Director). (2012). Goodbye Stranger [Television Series Episode]. In J. Carver (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Thompson, R. (Writer), & Showalter, J. (Director). (2013). Slumber Party [Television Series Episode]. In J. Carver (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Thompson, R. (Writer), & Singer, S. (Director). (2013). Pac-Man Fever [Television Series Episode]. In J. Carver (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Thompson, R. (Writer), & Szwarc, J. (Director). (2013). LARP and the Real Girl [Television Series Episode]. In J. Carver (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Tucker, R., Gamble, S. (Writers), & Manners, K. (Director). (2005). Dead in the Water [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Tucker, R., Gamble, S. (Writers), & Singer, R. (Director). (2006). Salvation [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*. British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Witten, M. (Writer), & Manners, K. (Director). (2006). No Exit [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.
- Witten, M. (Writer), & Beeson, C. (Director). (2007). Playthings [Television Series Episode]. In E. Kripke (Executive Producer), *Supernatural*, British Columbia, CAN: Warner Brothers Television.