An Other Nonetheless: Gender, Sexuality and Monstrosity in *Supernatural*

by

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Abstract

Supernatural (SPN) is a long-running horror-fantasy television show that first aired in 2005 on the WB network, moved to the CW network in 2006 and recently released its final episode on November 19, 2020. With intertextual links to both horror cinema and the American Western, the show features few prominent women or queer characters, focusing instead on the protagonists, the Winchester brothers, and other male characters. When women and queer characters are featured, they are othered either as monsters or as humans who do not fit within a masculine, heteronormative status quo. This thesis analyses *SPN*'s treatment of gender and sexuality in the first five seasons, and the ways in which it interacts with representations of otherness and monstrosity. For this analysis, I draw on theoretical contributions in the areas of gender studies, genre studies and popular culture scholarship, specifically the study of the horror genre. The thesis consists of three chapters, which explore gender ambivalence, monstrous femininity and monstrous sexuality respectively. I conduct analyses of specific episodes, using close reading as a method to examine representative scenes and characters. Within *SPN* one can trace concerns and anxieties surrounding otherness, especially regarding women and queer people, and a desire for individualist masculine power. The project contends that while the creators of the show attempt to explore nuanced and non-normative representations of gender, the series nonetheless is entrenched in a conservative worldview that is undergirded by a patriarchal status quo.

Keywords: *Supernatural*, gender, sexuality, monstrosity, other(ness), pop culture, women, queer(ness)

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INTRODUCTION

Supernatural (SPN) is a long-running horror-fantasy television show that first aired in 2005 on the WB network, moved to the CW network in 2006 and recently released its final episode on November 19, 2020, clocking in with a final episode count of 327. Show creator Eric Kripke spent over a decade conceiving of the series, which he originally envisioned as a movie. He has a fascination with urban legends and American folklore, which serve as inspiration for the show. These stories, according to Kripke, are "all part of this great mythology of America that speaks to the unique fears we have in America. They're every bit as relevant today as when they were originally told" (qtd. in Fernandez). Although the original reception of the show was mixed, reviews have generally grown more positive as the series has progressed. Regardless of critical reception, to ignore such a monolith of popular culture would be to create a gaping blind spot in contemporary media scholarship. This thesis is an attempt to begin to fill that blind spot. Most of the existing scholarship on the show analyses its relationship to fandom, rather than the content of the show itself. This includes such volumes as *Fan Phenomena: Supernatural* (2014) and *Fangasm: Supernatural Fangirls* (2013). Otherwise, the edited volume *TV Goes to Hell* (2011) presents an academic analysis of *SPN,* but better serves as a survey of a variety of topics, such as music, comedy, storytelling, and folklore, rather than a rigorous examination of any one element of the show. *Supernatural, Humanity and the Soul* (2014) is a similar volume that surveys topics in the show connected to philosophy. Not much else exists in terms of academic discourse surrounding the show beyond a handful of disparate essays. *In the Hunt: Unauthorized Essays on Supernatural* (2009) is another edited volume that contains a variety of essays which vary from academic to informal, again covering a variety of topics, such as family,

good and evil, and social class. Its essays were written after season 3 had ended and before season 4 began. Many of its essays are "not just out of date, but borderline incorrect" due to the story changes that season 4 brought forth (Supernatural.tv v). In addition, extensive informal fan scholarship exists online, much of which focuses on gender representation and queerness in the series. This thesis will bridge the gap between these topics and their apparent lack in existing academic discourse. In the interest of keeping the scope appropriate for a master's thesis, I will be focusing my study on seasons 1 through 5, which encompass what was famously supposed to be the entire series before an unexpected renewal by the CW Network in 2010.

SPN combines the history of American horror cinema with the road movie, following the brothers Sam and Dean Winchester (Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles, respectively) as they travel across the United States in their 1967 Chevy Impala during the early 2000s. Their quest of "saving people, hunting things" quickly grows into a much larger storyline, first from searching for their missing father, to avenging their mother's death all the way to preventing the incarnation of Lucifer and the End of Times. Along the way, the brothers meet a variety of allies and enemies, some of whom do not last a single episode. Others, such as their stand-in father figure Bobby Singer (Jim Beaver), consistently show up to support Sam and Dean in their quest to save the world. Seasons 1 and 2 take themselves gravely seriously, whereas the later seasons get more satirical and self-reflexive. Overall, it is a tale of family loyalty, demons and angels and questioning what it truly means to be human.

SPN first aired in 2005, only two years after *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ended (the last episode aired May 20, 2003). "Whether it wants to or not," states Mary Borsellino, "*Supernatural* exists in a world and genre which is unarguably post-*Buffy*. You can't be a

popular, fashionable show beginning life on the WB Network and featuring young attractive people killing monsters without summoning the ghost of Slayers past" (107). *Buffy* is a noted example of a fantasy-horror series that explicitly and deliberately subverts established gender roles and tropes associated with horror movies. By following in its footsteps, *SPN* must also grapple with these themes to a certain extent. One may even go so far as to categorize *SPN* as a "male response" to the female-fronted *Buffy.* However, the themes of gender and sexuality in *SPN* have their own complex relationships within the narrative of the show, influenced by more than just one other popular television program. This thesis will be an exploration and analysis of those themes and the way they interact with Otherness and monstrosity within the text of *SPN.*

Jason Mittell claims that "to understand television texts...we need to first understand how television genre categories work to form a set of assumptions which individual programs draw upon and respond to" (19). With this in mind, I will first look to the genre conventions surrounding the series and the generic traditions which *SPN* becomes a part of. Arguably, *SPN* belongs in the category of gothic television. In literature, gothic fiction came out of the Romantic movement in the late 19th-century. The texts tend to focus simultaneously on emotion and invoking terror or wonder in the reader. The subject matter is dark, mysterious and usually involves some element of the supernatural. It follows that these generic conventions can also be seen in television shows of a similar nature. Julia M. Wright discusses the tension between televisual realism and gothic fantasy, considering that "[c]ritiquing, parodying, and otherwise interrogating realism and its precursor, verisimilitude, is a well-established feature of the gothic from its very beginnings" (3). The arguments in scholarship surrounding this tension are either that gothic television is a failure because gothic fantasy cannot coexist with televisual realism, or that gothic

television succeeds because gothic fantasy works with televisual realism precisely because of this tension (2). Wright concludes that "[r]ealism is thus an aesthetic mode rather than the vehicle of a credible representation" (3). Gothic television, therefore, can coexist with televisual realism and leads to an interplay between gothic television and the real world. The result is that gothic television "makes visible what many other televisual modes leave invisible: it foregrounds textual debts, for instance, through the repetition of well-known lines; its characters are widely conversant with popular culture, creating in-jokes for the viewing audience; and it often 'goes meta,' commenting on its own form" (4). Anyone who has seen *SPN* knows that the show makes constant use of pop culture references through dialogue, music and *mise-en-scene*. There is enough intertextuality present throughout the series that an entirely separate thesis could be written analysing the use of references, self-reflexivity and 'meta' jokes, though these themes are beyond the scope of what I am writing here. Furthermore, "[t]he mixing of modes and genres in the gothic is part of its attention to its own constructed-ness – it is not natural or authentic (as realism purports to be), but is built out of and on top of prior texts, established conventions, and stock devices" (13). This blending of influences is supported by J. Halberstam's analysis of gothic, stating that "in its generic form, Gothic is the disruption of realism and of all generic purity" (11). *SPN* is indebted to a tradition of many prior texts, especially horror texts. However, it also draws upon other genre traditions, such as the Western. These genres commonly deal with otherness, whether that be through monsters or the wilderness.

Sam and Dean were raised by their father, and their mother is brutally murdered in the pilot, so their world is a masculine one. They drive across gritty, rural locations dressed in flannel and leather with a trunk full of guns and knives, ready for anything. Here the genre traditions of the Western film can be seen. The American Western is a genre steeped

in gender politics, as it explores rugged men who claim power in a desolate landscape, using violence (specifically guns, which are symbolic phalluses) to get their way. In contrast, there are women who must either be protected for their virtue or conquered in bed. The land itself becomes feminine as cowboys conquer it with their colonialist worldview and tame the wilderness. *SPN* copies this mentality. The Winchesters, whose name alludes to the gun, rarely visit big cities, opting instead to travel about the rural USA like a pair of Shanes, always ready to leave by the next sunset. Although given a modern update, the brothers have their trusty steed (the Impala) and enough guns to make any cowboy blush. That they get their hands on a magic Colt revolver built in the late 19th-century is no arbitrary coincidence. Furthermore, neither Sam and Dean nor their allies are people of status. *SPN,* like the Western, is a saga of working-class heroes who must carve their own path without the protections of society. Beyond plot details, the general aesthetic and *mise-en-scene* of the show contribute to this blend of genre. The first three seasons have a general brown palette, evoking the dusty, unforgiving terrain of the old Wild West. The locations range from dive bar (or saloon) to motels (or inns) and dilapidated shacks in the middle of nowhere. Additionally, general costuming sees a variety of denim jeans and leather jackets, all items that would not be out of place on a bona fide Western film.

In addition to the category of horror-fantasy, there is now reasonable evidence to claim that *SPN* is also a Western. This thesis is an examination of the ways in which gender interacts with otherness and monstrosity in *SPN*, and horror and Westerns treat their others in strikingly similar, monstrous ways. With some cross-over exceptions, the villains in Westerns are all human beings, at least conventionally speaking. Yet whether they be

malicious cattle rustlers or a tribe of attacking Indians[1], these films make it clear that their behaviour is monstrous. For example, in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), as the Apache tribe attacks the titular carriage, the gambler Hatfield contemplates shooting new mother Mrs. Mallory, for death is certainly preferable to what would happen to her, were she captured. This is all too reminiscent of a tragic hero in a zombie movie, begging to be shot before he turns into the very monster that he once fought against. Indeed, horror movies are more explicit in the monstrosity of their villains. If the villains are at all human, then they are too far taken with their own dark instincts to be redeemed. Whether we think of Leatherface from *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) or the unassuming Norman Bates from *Psycho* (1960), these "human" villains behave in such abominable ways to the point of being monsters. Their psychology is deviant, which could even be an adaptation of the old definition of monsters as medically abnormal. In addition to content, dehumanization of villains can also come from cinematography. This can be achieved by using wide shots that avoid showing the villains' faces and emotions, as well as not letting the camera linger when one of a crowd of many is killed. Otherwise, if the villains are indeed monsters, they are marked by a physical Otherness, whether that be excessive body hair (werewolves), sharpened teeth and pale skin (vampires) or any other manner of physical attribute that cannot typically be found in human beings. According to Halberstam, "[w]ithin the traits that make a body monstrous - that is, frightening or ugly, abnormal or disgusting - we may read the difference between an other and a self, a pervert and a normal person, a foreigner and a native" (8). These divisions between self and Other are paramount to narratives involving monsters and understanding the claims that are being made about humanity.

[1] I use this term because it is specific to the genre. Westerns do not usually portray actual Indigenous peoples.

Barry Keith Grant contends that “monster movies, like most genre movies, are about the time and place in which they were made more than when and where their plots are set and that they reflect the values and ideology of the culture that produced them” (28). By examining the way in which monsters are portrayed and contrasted to human characters, one can discover the values and ideologies represented in the text, specifically regarding themes surrounding what is considered taboo.

Theoretical Framework

For this analysis, I will be drawing on the theoretical contributions in the areas of gender studies, genre studies and pop culture scholarship, specifically the study of the horror genre. My point of departure in the area of gender studies comes from Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity as outlined in her 1990 publication, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* Butler contends that “it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (4-5). This contention contributes to the idea that gender is not an essential or inherent trait, rather something that is constructed. Butler goes on to state that “[w]hen the relevant ‘culture’ that ‘constructs’ gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny” (11). This is not to say that gender is completely divorced from the body, but that “‘the body’ is itself a construction, as are the myriad ‘bodies’ that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender; the question then emerges: To what extent does the body come into being in and through the mark(s) of gender?” (12). These questions revolve around identity and the

construction of gender, which are key features that I will explore in relation to *SPN*. Butler is particularly interested in what differentiates "man" from "woman" and the inequality that is produced by this differentiation. Femininity, according to Butler, is more embodied than masculinity, to the point that "the female sex becomes restricted to its body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes, paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom" (16). The relationship to the body is therefore more restrictive for females than for males. The significance of bodies is a prominent theme throughout *SPN,* specifically regarding monstrous bodies. This bodily restriction that Butler describes can be seen in the series with female monsters, which I explore in chapter 2. The terms "man" and "woman" are also defined oppositionally in relation to each other, which reinforces heterosexuality as the hegemonic norm and constructs a rigid binary system of gender. Butler critiques this system, claiming "[t]his conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire" (30). Where this system breaks down, Butler says, is with the removal of the terms "man" and "woman". Once these categories are removed, "then it is no longer possible to subordinate dissonant gendered features as so many secondary and accidental characteristics of a gender ontology that is fundamentally intact" (32). The designation of "man" or "woman", therefore, has a marked impact on the performance of gender in an individual. These systems of gender are culturally imposed just as an individual performs to fit or not fit within those systems. I draw on the idea of gender performativity throughout my analysis, especially in chapter 1, where I analyse the ambivalence of gender that can be found within certain characters in *SPN.*

In *Gender Trouble,* Butler puts certain theorists in conversation with each other, including Simone de Beauvoir. In her book *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir discusses the

imbalanced relationship of power between men and women, placing women in a negative category. By her reasoning, “man represents both the positive and the neutral...woman represents only the negative” (xv). Men are defined as having the universal experience, whereas women are only defined in how they are related to men (xvi). Women are defined as being what men are not, and therefore they are negative. Furthermore, according to de Beauvoir, woman “is simply what man decrees; thus she is called ‘the sex,’ by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex - absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other” (xvi). These two ideas of woman’s sexual definition and Othering are key. De Beauvoir’s ideas inform the analysis in my chapter on femininity and monstrosity in *SPN*. The show’s female monsters are indeed defined by their sexuality in a way that male monsters are not, and they are doubly Othered by their roles as monsters and as women.

To bridge my interest between gender studies and the study of horror, I turn to *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* by J. Halberstam (1995). Halberstam traces the relationship of Gothic fiction, first in the 18th and then the 19th centuries, all the way to contemporary horror cinema. Through the examples of Frankenstein’s monster, Mr. Hyde, the vampire and Dorian Gray, Halberstam examines what monsters symbolized for the Victorian reading audiences and the way those symbols have changed in modern cinema, using *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) as a prime example. The figure of the monster combines and “condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body” (3). Halberstam identifies a marked difference between 19th-century monsters and modern day ones, namely that what once was perceived as a racial or

foreign threat has now been transformed into a sexual threat. This threat is clearly shown in the figure of the parasite, which can manifest in various forms, and "becomes paramount within Gothic precisely because it is an internal not an external danger that Gothic identifies and attempts to dispel" (15). Contemporary horror films move away from an external threat, such as Stoker's foreign Dracula, and move towards internal threats, such as the American Buffalo Bill. According to Halberstam, "[p]arasitism, especially with regards to the vampire, represents a bad or pathological sexuality, non-reproductive sexuality, a sexuality that exhausts and wastes and exists prior to and outside of the marriage contract" (16-17). Halberstam goes on to talk about monsters in Gothic as being "the perfect figure for negative identity", which hearkens back to de Beauvoir's theories (22). In the same way that women are defined negatively against men, "[m]onsters have to be everything the human is not and, in producing the negative of human, these [works] make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual" (22). *SPN*'s treatment of monsters is in keeping with this construct, which I will explore in chapters 2 and 3.

The discussion of Gothic begs a broader discussion surrounding genre and how it relates to *SPN.* For that, I turn my attention to Jason Mittell and his 2004 book *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture.* Mittell looks at genre not as mere categorization, but as a discursive practice. According to Mittell, "analyzing genres must consider the processes and practices of categorization itself, not just the elements which fall under a categorical rubric" (xviii). The reason genres exist in television is because of the patterns that they perpetuate and the relationship that different genre works have with each other. Genres are a component of the text, though "if genres are dependent on *intertextuality*, they cannot be an inherently *textual* component" (8). Earlier in the introduction I have explored why *SPN* blends genres and depends on intertextuality to

create its meaning, so this idea is relevant to my study. Furthermore, "television genres play a crucial role in forming and maintaining cultural hierarchies and categories of social identity, such as gender, age, and racial difference" (xvi). The genres of horror and Western have very specific gender traditions and hierarchies, as I have explored in the first half of the introduction. These two genres must be read as discursive practices in order to identify the cultural hierarchies that they are forming and perpetuating within the context of *SPN*. Genres are influenced by real world relationships rather than "abstract textual ideals", which is why genre is an important part of pop culture analysis (23).

From genre studies I narrow my focus to specific pop culture scholarship on horror and Gothic works. I find the works of Carol Clover particularly illuminating, especially her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992). I find particularly productive her ideas surrounding gender politics in slasher films and occult films. Clover analyses the different roles usually assumed by male and female characters in slasher movies, positing that "[t]he functions of monster and hero are far more frequently represented by males and the function of victim far more garishly by females. The fact that female monsters and female heroes, when they do appear, are masculine in dress and behaviour (and often even name), and that male victims are shown in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity, would seem to suggest that gender inheres in the function itself" (12). Clover continues to deconstruct these functions, observing "gender confusion" in male killers, while the rare female killers are spurred on not psychosexually, but by their negative relationship with men (29). These ideas relate to my analysis of female monstrosity in chapter 2 and the tension of gender performance that is created when a woman is also a monster. Clover also identifies the concept of the "Final Girl" in slasher movies. The Final Girl is a teenage girl who is the last victim alive by the end of the murderer's killing spree, most often being the

one to dispatch the killer herself. Clover articulates that the Final Girl is “boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine - not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends” (40). The Final Girl exists in a space of liminal gender, vacillating between femininity and masculinity. She is “feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved for adult males, the terrors and masochistic pleasures of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality” (51). Ultimately, according to Clover, the Final Girl is masculine because she is able to save herself, an independence afforded to males. Clover conducts her analysis from an essentialist view of gender, yet still looks at the way gender is performed by the characters that she analyses. In my first chapter, I apply the concept of the Final Girl and her associated liminality to a side character in *SPN.* In addition to slashers, Clover looks at how gender is depicted in what she calls occult movies. Occult movies tell stories of “human responses to ghostly or satanic doings”, often involving demonic possession (65). Using examples such *The Exorcist* (1973) and *Witchboard* (1986), Clover examines the role of gender in terms of characters being possessed, and those that must try to end the possession. On the one hand, according to Clover, “[s]atanic possession is gendered feminine, it seems, even when the portal is a male” (72). This is due, in part, to the fact that these female bodies are possessed by male spirits which alter their behaviour and appearance to something more masculine by contrast. On the other hand, these films focus on the inner stories of the men that observe these possessions, putting “the female body on the line only in order to put the male psyche on the line” (86). The stories revolve around having to open up and let something in, whether that be literally in the female case or figuratively in the male case. “Only when rational men have accepted the reality of the irrational - that which is unobservable, unquantifiable, and inexplicable by normal logic - can the supernatural

menace be reined in and the community returned to a new state of calm" (98). *SPN* uses possession as a plot device multiple times during the first five seasons, both in keeping with the tradition that Clover outlines and in subverting that tradition. I will use Clover's observations and apply them to the possession stories that are told within *SPN* in order to examine how gender relates to the supernatural.

Pivoting from gender representations to representations of sexuality, I turn to Harry M. Benshoff and his work *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film* (1997). Benshoff examines the connections between monsters and queer individuals as portrayed in horror films. Benshoff writes, "[t]he concepts 'monster' and 'homosexual' share many of the same semantic charges and arouse many of the same fears about sex and death" (3). He goes on to deconstruct these semantic charges and fears as they relate to the depiction of monsters on screen and their relationship to queerness, especially for queer viewers. "Queer viewers are...more likely than straight ones to experience the monster's plight in more personal, individualized terms", which can lend to queer readings of horror films (13). Furthermore, in certain horror films, "gay or lesbian characters fall victim to the monster just as straight characters do, although somewhat disturbingly their fates are frequently deemed 'deserved' by the films they inhabit, often solely on the basis of their characters' homosexuality" (14). This contributes to the problematic construction of homosexuality or queerness as non-normative in horror films. I examine *SPN*'s treatment of queerness and monstrosity in chapter 3 and will be using Benshoff's work as a point of departure.

Thesis Structure

After the introduction, this thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter 1, "Ambivalent Genders", analyses spaces of gender ambivalence and non-normative gender as they are

performed by characters in *SPN.* Beginning with Sam, the younger Winchester brother, the chapter looks at the complex relationship that he has with his gender. In combination of external infantilization and feminization, as well as performing roles in horror narratives typically filled by women, I argue that Sam comes to represent femaleness and fluidity, despite being a male character. Next, attention is turned to the older brother, Dean. On the surface, Dean appears to be a stereotypically masculine character, to the point of excessive machismo. The episode "Skin" (S1E6) is used to explore the impact of Dean's masculinity and the relationship it has to toxicity. However, Dean's performance of masculinity begins to unravel when attention is paid to his relationship to Sam and his relationship to domesticity. Dean fulfils the role of caregiver, and the responsibility falls to him to keep their home (the Impala) in good condition. These are roles traditionally filled by women, and Dean's participation points to the ambivalence of his seemingly traditional masculinity. Lastly is the analysis of the female monster hunter Jo Harvelle (Alona Tal). Like Clover's Final Girl, Jo performs both femininity and masculinity. The choice of a conventionally attractive actress, her costuming and her treatment by the camera all point toward a traditional display of femininity. By contrast, Jo also comfortably wields guns and knives, behaves aggressively and fights monsters just as the Winchesters do. Her role straddles that of love interest, little sister and fighter. She needs to be rescued, but also performs the role of rescuer. Ultimately, Jo occupies a space of gender liminality. In light of this, her diminished role and permanent removal from the series point to a discomfort on the part of the creators with this kind of complexity as explored through a female character.

Chapter 2, "Femininity and Monstrosity", presents an analysis on the ways in which the series does engage with femininity. Due to the general lack of female protagonists, this is done largely through the depiction of female monsters. The analysis is broken up into four

categories: woman as werewolf, woman as witch, woman as demon and woman as "victim-monster". Each section looks at specific episodes within *SPN* and how these categories of monsters are portrayed. These episodes are used as case studies to interpret the representation of female monsters and draw conclusions about female power, agency and sexuality as depicted within the series. The analysis of woman as werewolf focuses on the episode "Heart" (S2E17), in which a woman does not know she is a werewolf and must not only be convinced of the fact, but eventually "saved" from her own monstrosity by being killed. Werewolf stories are typically rooted in explorations of masculinity, so choosing to portray a female werewolf is a subversion of that trope. This section examines the relationship that she has to the typical werewolf narratives and draws the conclusion that she is deemed too powerful and dangerous to be allowed to live. The analysis of woman as witch explores the portrayal of witches across numerous episodes, with specific focus given to the episode "Malleus Maleficarum" (S3E9), in which witches are introduced to the series. The witches have a distinct relationship to the body, just as Butler states that women are more embodied than men. The witches are also deliberately feminine in their portrayal as bored housewives, using subverted "female arts" such as cooking and sewing as catalysts for their spells. Their depiction carries on the tradition of portraying witches as representations of evil femininity, a tradition rooted in fairy tales and historical Christian witch hunts. The analysis of woman as demon studies three specific female demons from the series and the ways in which each one represents threats to male authority and power. This includes sexual power, manipulation and the perversion of innocence and maternal roles. Each demon is vilified for her sexuality above all else, and each one is spectacularly destroyed over the course of the show. Lastly, the analysis of woman as "victim-monster" explores a category of female monster defined by her victimhood. This follows four case

studies of female monsters that are sympathetically portrayed and must be saved from their own monstrosity. In each case, saving the woman also means destroying her, and contributing to the status quo of the storyworld in which monsters must die and humans must live. Overall, the depiction of female monsters contributes to a patriarchal status quo in which powerful women must be destroyed, weak women saved, and male authority maintained.

Chapter 3, "Monstrous Sexuality," explores the ways in which the show relates monstrosity with sexuality, especially regarding queer characters. The first section examines monstrous queerness, analysing how queer human characters are treated, then analysing how queer monster characters are treated. Initially in the series, there are no queer characters and the show engages with queerness through jokes at the expense of heterosexual characters, specifically Sam and Dean. This also connects queerness to incest, which creates a taboo around homosexuality. Not until season 2 does a queer human character get introduced to the series. The depiction of queer human characters grows in complexity as the series progresses, but these characters still find themselves subjected to a disproportionate amount of violence and lack of agency within the narrative. Those queer characters that do survive are treated as sources of humour, and their status as queer people is used as a joke to take the heterosexual characters off guard and make them uncomfortable. The queer monsters, on the other hand, range from being depicted as ruthless predators to having a nuanced, positive relationship with the protagonists. The queer monsters disrupt the established narrative status quo and introduce new ideas, effectively queering the narrative away from established expectations. The next section explores vampires as depicted in *SPN* and their explicit relationship with sexuality, most often portrayed as deviant. I examine the historical literary and folkloric depiction of

vampires as sexually driven characters and compare that to the way they are depicted in the show. The episode “Dead Man’s Blood” (S1E20), which introduces vampires into the *SPN* mythos, is used as a case study to see how vampires are represented as sexual deviants. This brings another connection back to queerness and violence, as one of the vampires is not only bisexual, but forcefully kisses and turns a human of the same sex. The depiction of the vampires vilifies sexual behaviour that does not conform to a hegemonic heterosexual status quo. The series’ engagement with sexuality privileges a conservative point of view, Othering those that engage in non-normative sexuality.

CHAPTER 1: AMBIVALENT GENDERS

Much of the scholarship surrounding *SPN* supports the idea that the show represents gender in a normative way. In the collection *TV Goes to Hell*, Lorrie Palmer writes about the "purely undomesticated, masculine, rural space — of dark forests and plains, isolated homesteads, and rustic back roads" that the Winchesters must navigate without the tempering presence of women in their lives (82). Palmer draws a connection between untamed rural space and the untamed masculinity represented by the Winchesters. Because there are few female characters (most of them are killed), Palmer argues that the brothers live in an un-feminine world, lacking domesticity and stability. Indeed, the show follows the story of brotherhood, masculinity and heroism in the face of the horrifying and the unknown. However, treating Sam and Dean as only the "Men Who Know Demons" limits them to the same reductive category of traditional masculinity without acknowledging the complex relationship each brother has to his gender (89). Judith Butler talks about "the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term women denotes a common identity" (*Gender Trouble* 4). In the same way that all those who may use the term "woman" do not share a common identity with each other, one can infer that the same applies to those who use the term "man". Both Winchester brothers are cis-gendered men as defined in the plot of the series, and *SPN* explores their relationship to that male identity. Nevertheless, there is a distinct difference in gender expression between Sam and Dean, both of which subvert the expectations of normative masculinity. Sam is made to represent fluidity and femaleness while Dean's seeming representation of steadfast maleness is deconstructed in the show as parallels can be drawn between him and traditional female gender roles. Both brothers express their gender in ways that blur the hard-set normative boundaries between masculine and feminine. These same boundaries

are blurred in the character of Jo Harvelle with an approach to traditional femininity. Jo is a friend of the Winchesters, and one of the few female Hunters. The first five seasons of *SPN* tend towards the representation of women as occupying traditional female roles, either as damsels or seductresses, which contributes to the idea that women exist solely in a virgin-whore dichotomy. Jo vacillates between these two roles throughout her time on the show, which allows her more freedom of feminine expression than the dichotomy dictates. Jo also occupies traditionally masculine spaces at times, which contributes to a non-normative portrayal of femininity. Bronwen Calvert argues that "in *this* narrative [*SPN*] a strong female character is often perceived as taking up *too much* space" (91, original emphasis). Taking up narrative space is associated with normative masculinity, so Jo taking up that space is inherently subversive. Through the examples of Sam, Dean and Jo, it is my contention that, despite the tendency towards the representation of gender stereotypes, the series offers an exploration of non-normative gender.

The Ambiguous Gender of Sam Winchester

One of the ways in which Sam's relationship to his gender is demonstrated is through his relationship to the supernatural world, which also serves to differentiate him from Dean. Early in the series, Sam develops psychic powers, which internalizes his connection to the supernatural as opposed to Dean, who remains an outside observer of supernatural events. In her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws,* Carol Clover explores gender as it relates to characters in typical horror movies from the 1960s to the 1980s. In the chapter "Opening Up" Clover conducts an analysis of the occult film, which she defines as dealing with the satanic, possession and haunting spirits (65-66). By this definition, *SPN* would fall into the occult category more so than other types of horror film that Clover

describes (although, due to the length and seriality of the show, one cannot confine it wholly to just one kind of genre). For Clover, occult horror films follow the dichotomy between White Science and Black Magic, two forces that attempt to solve the supernatural problems presented to them.

> White Science refers to Western rational tradition. Its representatives are nearly always white males, typically doctors, and its tools are surgery, drugs, psychotherapy, and other forms of hegemonic science. Black Magic, on the other hand, refers to satanism, voodoo, spiritualism, and folk variants of Roman Catholicism. A world of crosses, holy water, seances, candles, prayer, exorcism, strings of garlic, beheaded chickens, and the like, its inhabitants are blacks, Native Americans, mixed-race peoples (especially Cajun and Creole) and third-world people in general, children, old people, priests, Transylvanians - but first and foremost women. (66)

Where White Science attempts to diagnose and categorize satanic possession into the natural world, Black Magic embraces spiritual power and ultimately finds success (or offers a moral lesson to those who cannot or will not believe in it). At first glance, one might be tempted to put both Winchester brothers into the Black Magic category without a second thought. Sam and Dean not only believe in the supernatural, they regularly use folk magic and other spells to combat it. They burn the bones of vengeful ghosts, they keep demons at bay with salt rings and symbols, and they use herbs and potions to create protective talismans. One may even go so far as to say that there is no representative of White Science on the show, that *SPN* is an exploration of what can be done within the realm of Black Magic. Here is where the complication can be found: Supernatural *is an exploration of what can be done within the realm of Black Magic.* This means that a further division can be found

between Western rational thought and magic-based spiritualism among the various monster hunters in the show. Some are more faith-based in their Hunting practice, while others follow rational rules that dictate the ways in which they operate. This divide naturally lands right between the brothers. Dean trusts what he can see, what he has experienced and approaches Hunting as its own kind of White Science. Sam, on the other hand, has a deeper, more visceral relationship with the occult. He believes in angels before the brothers actually meet one (Dean does not), develops his own psychic powers and much of his character development in season 3 revolves around the regular consumption of demon blood. I will call the new categories created by this division Logomagic and Pathomagic, bringing with them all the gendered implications that come with traditional divisions between logic and emotion (where Logomagic aligns with what is traditionally perceived as masculine and Pathomagic, feminine).

Sam's relationship to traditionally feminine roles can be parsed by analysing his relationship to Pathomagic. Right from the beginning of his life, Sam is exposed to Pathomagic. Exactly six months after Sam's birth, the demon Azazel (Fredric Lehne) breaks into the Winchester home and feeds Sam the blood of demons. The passing of spiritual fluids is a hallmark of occult film, according to Clover, and "possession via oral penetration is a cliché of recent horror film" (79). By force-feeding Sam through oral penetration, Azazel is subjugating Sam's body to invasion and opening him to further invasions of the supernatural later in his life. Sam's body is forever "opened" as he is transformed into a portal for the demonic. Clover argues that "women in general are figured as more open to the supernatural", so Sam is already coded feminine from the early stages of his life (74). Furthermore, Sam is Othered by this action, transformed from a healthy human boy into a psychic with telekinetic powers. The name "freak" follows him throughout the series, as he

is constantly reminded that the circumstances of his childhood place him in a category Other than human beings. According to Rosi Braidotti, “monsters are human beings who are born with congenital malformation of their bodily organism” (61). Sam may not have been born with his powers, but they came to him, bloodborne, during infancy. By the most basic of definitions, Sam has become a monster. Monstrosity is traditionally associated with femininity “as far back as Aristotle who, in *The Generation of Animals,* posits the human norm in terms of bodily organization based on a male model. Thus, in reproduction, when everything goes according to the norm a boy is produced; the female only happens when something goes wrong or fails to occur in the reproductive process” (63). By this logic if Sam is a monster, then Sam must also be endowed with feminine attributes.

Sam continues to be associated with traditionally female roles as he grows up. The name “Sam” is ambiguous in and of itself, being a possible nickname for either Samuel or Samantha. Dean takes this one step further by constantly using the diminutive “Sammy”, despite his brother’s initial protests. By using this name, Dean contributes to Sam’s infantilization, which is also something that women are constantly subjected to. (Multiple characters refer to female characters almost exclusively as “girls”, regardless of their age.) Additionally, in an act of affectionate brotherly antagonism, Dean refers to Sam as “bitch” throughout the series, calling his gender directly into question. Of the brothers, Sam has more emotional intelligence than Dean (a traditionally female trait) and he is constantly being made fun of for caring too much about the feelings of others. Sam is also a frequent recipient of unwanted sexual attention, usually at the hands of women. This is a reversal of usual roles, but the power imbalance in these situations puts him in the (usually female) role of victim, while his female aggressors behave in a typically more masculine way. For example, in season 1, episode 16, “Shadow”, Sam and Dean are bound to support beams by

the female demon Meg (Nicki Aycox). Meg uses the opportunity to gloat and assaults Sam, kissing and caressing him repeatedly. She says, “Come on, Sammy, you and I can still have a little dirty fun”. This accomplishes two things. Firstly, she uses the diminutive “Sammy”, which demonstrates her power over him. Not only that, but “Sammy” rings similar to a female nickname. Secondly, Meg implies that Sam will have fun during their sexual encounter, and that it will be a taboo yet desirable experience. This kind of implication falls directly in line with Western rape culture, “a process of linking sexuality to violent aggression”, and puts Sam in a feminine role (Phillips 5).

Sam’s femaleness is complicated by his relationship to the demon Ruby (Katie Cassidy, Genevieve Cortese). Ruby approaches the brothers initially in season 3 with the promise of saving Dean from Hell, but eventually develops an alliance with Sam in his quest to destroy Dean’s murderer, Lilith. In season 4, this alliance grows into a sexual relationship that also becomes a metaphor for addiction. Ruby helps Sam grow his psychic powers by allowing him to regularly consume her blood. He becomes able to obliterate demonic presences using only his mind, departing from the Logomagic that he and Dean usually use (i.e. ritual circles and chanting in Latin). While not a traditional possession story, Sam’s trust in and dependence on Ruby grows concurrently with his Pathomagical powers. He is opening up to a demonic influence, both sexually in his relationship with Ruby and orally in his ingestion of her blood. His behaviour changes during this time, especially while Dean’s soul is trapped in Hell. Without his brother around, Sam becomes far more masculine. He gets physically more muscular, more aggressive and more sexually active. This indeed complicates Sam’s femininity, but not to the extent that one might initially think. According to Clover, a portal possessed by a demonic influence often becomes increasingly masculine during this time, often to the point of toxic masculinity. She cites such examples as Regan of

The Exorcist (1973)*,* Linda of *Witchboard* (1987) and even Arnie Cunningham of *Christine* (1983), all three of which become "increasingly foulmouthed, hostile, aggressive - indeed, macho" (72). These toxic masculine behaviours are a sign of demonic possession, of the change that has taken place within the feminine portal due to the infernal invasion. *SPN*'s use of this convention from occult films not only cues to the audience that Ruby is not to be trusted, but that Sam's true (i.e. unpossessed) nature is feminine.

After Azazel's initial bloodborne invasion of Sam's body, Sam interacts intimately and exclusively with female demons and monsters. While his relationship with Ruby is analogous to possession, Sam finds himself actually possessed by Meg in season 2, episode 14, "Born Under a Bad Sign". Meg forces Sam to commit several crimes, including a particularly brutal murder of a fellow Hunter. Meg reveals that her motivation for possessing Sam is exactly because of his open, more emotionally vulnerable nature - "One look at Sam's dewy, sensitive eyes and they'll let me right in their door". These descriptors could very easily be describing a Samantha as they do a Samuel. Meg wants to murder the other Hunters, and to use Sam's more feminine exterior as cover for doing so. She also has a personal vendetta against the brothers, but her reasoning for choosing Sam over Dean is because of Sam's apparent femaleness. That Meg is initially identified as female does not change the fact that her influence causes Sam to behave with violent machismo. While possessed, he smokes, drinks, steals and gets into fights. Most telling is his behaviour towards the Winchester's ally, Jo. Sam gets Jo alone to emotionally manipulate her. When she rejects his advances, Sam sexually assaults Jo. He touches her without her consent, knocks her out and ties her up. This behaviour is to be expected from a male predator, especially taking into consideration the entitlement to women's bodies that toxic masculinity encompasses. Sam behaves at his most masculine when he is possessed by what is later revealed to by a female

demon. The demon's gender does not matter, because all of Sam's demonic actions are perceived to be masculine by the other characters. Dean uses the epithet "demonic son-of-a-bitch" when he first discovers that Sam is possessed and uses masculine pronouns for the demon until it is revealed to be Meg. Even once Dean calls the demon Meg, she responds with "Not anymore. Now I'm Sam". This implies gender fluidity of demons and contributes to the gender fluidity and femaleness that Sam represents.

Dean Winchester and Masculinity

One cannot discuss Sam without also discussing Dean. The brothers have a strong narrative bond, being the protagonists of the series, but also exist in a dualistic relationship to each other. While Sam is soft and sensitive, Dean is hard and emotionally distant. Sam has a nuanced and problematic relationship with demons, while Dean has his own complicated relationship with angels. Sam's femininity is sharply contrasted to Dean's masculinity, which coincides with Butler's description of the gender binary, in that "one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (*Gender Trouble* 30). One need only look at the realization of each brother's destiny: Sam is intended to be a vessel for the returning Lucifer, while Dean is literally the sword of the archangel Michael. Here Sam must open and be possessed, while Dean's body is compared to a phallus and must be used only for violence. Susan Cosby Ronnenberg describes Dean's character as "a parody of conventional masculinity, a walking stereotype - the shallow, cocky, handsome, dumb, and self-centred jock" in the early seasons (135). She also notes that this can be a facade that Dean hides behind, either from others or from his own insecurities. This section will conduct

an analysis of Dean's relationship to masculinity, in its anxieties, its relationship to toxicity and the way in which Dean's own masculinity breaks down.

Masculinity, especially regarding the Winchesters, is often portrayed as a phallic, heroic ideal by *SPN*. Both brothers pursue this ideal, but Dean is a character grounded far more in stereotypical masculinity than Sam. He womanizes, he gets into fights, he holds back his emotions except for anger, and he is well versed in dealing out violence and aggression. Dean could be considered proponent of hyper-acquisitive xenophobic militarism, a masculinist ideology that Kirk Combe and Brenda Boyle see plastered all over modern cinema screens (1). Combe and Boyle describe the *Terminator* saga as a prime example of this: the War Machine has come to life (7). Throughout those films, both sides of the conflict (humanity vs. machines) represent a desire to acquire excessive wealth, resources and power, destroy the Othered enemy and use aggressive, military tactics to achieve those goals. This is the same kind of attitude that can be seen in early seasons' Dean. Dean's relationship to hyper-'acquisitivity', however, is not entirely clear cut. Although he and Sam consistently run credit card scams to fund their Hunting, this is out of necessity more than desire for the cumulation of wealth. The only material assets the brothers have are Hunting weapons and Dean's 1967 Chevy Impala. The Winchesters are fixedly working-class, and never express the desire to change that aspect of their lives. However, Dean adopts the hyper-acquisitive attitude not to wealth or material possessions, but to women. Dean constantly flirts with women, from bartenders to morgue technicians to sweet small-town girls. Although he has deeper relationships with a select few, his attitude towards women is largely acquisitive - he wants to have them all. For Dean, women exist to be slept with. The other aspects of hyper-acquisitive xenophobic militarism fit neatly with Dean's character. Dean is referred to throughout the series both by himself

and by others as a “soldier”, despite never actually participating in organized military activity. He grew up with an equally militaristic father, a Vietnam veteran, who trained him to fight and follow orders, and he sees himself as participating in a war. This war consists of “saving people, hunting things” and requires Dean to put himself in physical danger and engage daily in acts of violence, all without complaint. The xenophobia comes from the way in which Dean responds to monsters. According to Dean, monsters must be eliminated. For example, in season 2, episode 3, “Bloodlust”, Dean must grapple with the possibility that vampires could coexist non-violently with humans. He spends the whole episode not believing in the possibility, saying to his brother, “They’re all the same, Sam. They’re not human, okay? We have to exterminate every last one of them”. This kind of rhetoric can be applied to any kind of Other, and although Dean realizes the error of his ways by the end of the episode, this does not stop him from continuing to use violence as a first mode of engagement with monsters in later episodes.

According to Tim Edwards, “[i]t is, in sum, the more traditional and ‘unreconstructed’ models of masculinity that tend to correlate most strongly with patterns and practices of violence and, moreover, these are precisely the models of masculinity that are also often most repressive to men themselves as full and complete personalities rather than just well trained thumping machines” (54). Indeed, Dean is constantly faced with the consequences of his “thumping” lifestyle and finds himself stuck in his hyper-acquisitive xenophobic militaristic role. This feeling of repression is explored in season 1, episode 6, “Skin” not by Dean, but by his own dark double. “Skin” is an exploration into the monstrous extremes of toxic masculinity and how it relates to Dean. The plot follows a shapeshifter (or “skinwalker”) who can take the form of any human being that he has seen. He uses this power to observe heterosexual couples, learn when the male partner will be away,

transform into that partner and then make advances towards the woman. In all cases, he dominates and tortures the woman (sometimes killing her) before fleeing and letting the actual partner take legal and criminal responsibility for his actions. The plot is further complicated once the shapeshifter kidnaps the Winchester brothers and takes on Dean's form, using it to make advances on their friend Rebecca, who called them to this town in the first place. Eventually the brothers kill the shapeshifter, but Dean becomes a nationally wanted criminal as a result of this.

The shapeshifter is a unique monster in the *SPN* universe because he does not have a "monstrous" form. Other than brief, reptilian colour changes in his eyes, he looks exactly like any other human being in the show. This choice serves to visually tell the audience that the shapeshifter's monstrosity goes beyond appearances, to the core of his character. In order to transform, the shapeshifter must literally shed his skin and don a new one (demonstrated in a spectacularly visceral scene in the middle of the episode). According to Halberstam, "[s]kin…becomes a kind of metonym for the human; and its color, its pallor, its shape mean everything within a semiotic of monstrosity.... Skin houses the body and it is figured in Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside" (6-7). By shedding his skin, the shapeshifter transgresses this "ultimate boundary" and blurs the inside with the outside, showing the audience Dean's inside feelings brought to the surface. Although his means of blending in are supernatural, all the shapeshifter's monstrous behaviour is thoroughly rooted in our own reality and unmistakably human. The shapeshifter mentions that "All he wants is to be loved" to Rebecca, speaking as Dean at the time. He then almost immediately makes an advance towards her and she rebuffs him. It is after this rejection that the shapeshifter becomes violent towards Rebecca, as it so often is with many human predators. The sense of male entitlement towards women's bodies is a

major crux of rape culture, stemming from the assumption that “men are expected to be sexually aggressive and women passive” (Phillips 11). The episode also exclusively features attacks on women already in relationships (or friendship, in Rebecca’s case), which reinforces the idea that “victims of rape usually know their assailants, and they can even be victimized by the person they are dating” (31). The elements of monstrosity come from toxic masculinity, and so the shapeshifter can be considered an example of monstrous masculine, which does not get explored in the series often.

At the subtextual level, by taking Dean’s form, the shapeshifter uses Dean as a virtuous juxtaposition to his own monstrosity. Dean’s role in the series is to be the white-hatted cowboy, with a stoic disposition, itchy trigger finger and a penchant for the vices of drink and sex. He is an example of classic Western (genre) masculinity, which also has its own connections to toxicity. By seeing how the shapeshifter behaves while inhabiting Dean’s life, the audience can see how terribly Dean could behave if he chose to do so. This does not show Dean as entirely innocent, however, and highlights the monstrous qualities that already exist within his humanity. The shapeshifter tells Sam that “Dean would bang [Rebecca] if he had the chance”, for example. The shapeshifter has access to Dean’s memories and feelings, and expresses what Dean himself cannot, bringing his “inside” to the outside, as Halberstam would say. Dean is so shut out of his true emotions that for the audience to learn how he’s feeling, it must be expressed by a literal dark double of himself. For example, the shapeshifter speaks as Dean about his relationship to Sam: “Deep down, I’m just jealous. You could have friends, you could have a life. Me? I know I’m a freak. And sooner or later, everybody’s gonna leave me”. In order for the human side of Dean to be revealed, it needs to be heard from the mouth of a monster. His jealousy and insecurities

are but a few of the many chinks in his masculine “tough guy” armour, indicating a more nuanced character beneath.

When looking closely at Dean’s role within his family, the “walking stereotype” begins to break down. Upon first glance, Dean is the tough older brother and the obedient son. He chastises Sam and dutifully takes orders from their father John (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). John treats Dean as a soldier, as previously mentioned, and uses his paternal authority to constantly criticize Dean in the name of keeping him alive. John is so hard on Dean that Dean is able to tell his father is possessed when he does not reprimand him for using a bullet from the magic Colt pistol - “He’d be furious that I wasted a bullet. He wouldn’t be proud of me, he’d tear me a new one” (S1E22 “Devil’s Trap”). This negativity in his upbringing sets the stage for Dean to treat Sam the same way. However, Dean ultimately acts as Sam’s caregiver. When they are children, John consistently leaves the boys on their own for weeks at a time. Dean has to quickly become both the provider and the caregiver for Sam. Susan A. George points out that “[n]ot only does Dean serve as...Sam’s caregiver when he is just a child himself, but he also proves to be a good, if not perfect, parent and protector of children in the series—roles traditionally given to women in horror and science fiction film and TV” (147). Dean’s role as nurturer is one traditionally associated with femininity. This is where his masculine persona begins to unravel. Furthermore, Dean has a connection to domesticity through the space of the Impala. The Winchesters lack a fixed home during the first five seasons of the series. They spend their time in various motel rooms as they travel across the country. The only space that remains constant for them is the Impala itself. More than just a mode of transportation, the Impala serves as the site of domesticity where the most important emotional conversations happen for Sam and Dean. Therefore, by being responsible for the care and wellbeing of the Impala, Dean

> is more than a regressive 1970s blue-collar car guy; he is also a masculine equivalent of a good housewife. He manages, even in the most extreme of conditions, to keep the Impala, the family home running and looking great. Like the good civically minded 1950s mom, who was to keep the home nice for her husband and children as well as be ready for any eventuality the Cold War could throw her way, including keeping the family bomb shelter well stocked, Dean keeps the Impala purring and the trunk stocked for any monster emergency. Although it is a pointedly male version of hearth and home, Dean's role as caregiver crosses the boundaries of stereotypical gender roles thus providing a more complete definition of masculinity. (151)

While Dean grows in complexity as the series goes forward, one can already see the beginnings of gender role subversion in his relationship to his home and his family in these first five seasons.

Jo Harvelle and Liminal Space

Women are few and far between in *SPN*'s masculine world of monster hunting. Sam and Dean run into several other Hunters throughout the series, most of which are men. A helpful woman may be a medium, psychic or federal agent, but rarely is she a Hunter. One exception to this rule is Jo Harvelle, the daughter of a late Hunter who wishes to follow in her father's footsteps. Jo lives with her mother, Ellen (Samantha Ferris), who runs a saloon for Hunters called the Roadhouse. Although they have a close relationship, Ellen disapproves of Jo's desire to Hunt and strives to keep her daughter safe at home. This leads to Jo rebelling and leaving her mother behind on more than one occasion. In order to pursue monster hunting, Jo must navigate the masculine space of the job. At the same time,

the series situates Jo in a traditionally feminine space through aspects such as her costuming and her relationship with male characters. From the moment of her initial introduction, Jo occupies both a masculine and a feminine space. Jo first appears in season 2, episode 2 “Everybody Loves a Clown”. The first thing she does is shove a rifle in Dean’s back. Dean says, “Oh god, please let that be a rifle”. Jo responds with a sarcastic, “No, I’m just real happy to see you”. She takes the phallic imagery associated with guns and amplifies it, allowing her to wield its masculine power. When Dean successfully disarms her, Jo responds by punching him square in the face. Dean reels at the hit, which shows that Jo matches him in physical prowess, if she does not surpass him. In any case, she embodies physical aggression in a way that is traditionally associated with masculinity. One must note that this display of masculinity is in direct competition with Dean and the audience is thus invited to compare Jo to him. Furthermore, this construction of masculinity is contrasted by both Jo herself and how the camera treats her. She is constructed as heterosexually appealing, dressed in a tank top and tight, low cut jeans, which reveal her midriff. Although her dress is practical, it still shows off her body in a way that can be traditionally associated with women as objects of desire, and thus a normative femininity. Furthermore, later in “Everybody Loves a Clown”, the camera follows Dean’s gaze to focus on Jo’s butt (see fig. 1.1). This places her in a filmic position of femininity, as she is Object to the male gaze. This liminal space straddling masculinity and femininity is familiar to horror fans, as it is occupied by many characters who fall into Clover’s category of the ‘Final Girl’. The Final Girl is so named because she is the last survivor of the killer in a slasher movie, and she is indeed a teenage girl. Clover describes the Final Girl as “the spunky inquirer into the Terrible Place: the one who first grasps, however dimly, the past and present danger, the one who looks death in the face, and the one who survives the murderer’s last stab” (39). The Terrible

Place is where the action of the film takes place, where the killer stalks his victims. Clover identifies the Place most often as a house or tunnel which "may at first seem a safe haven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become...the walls that hold the victim in" (31). By this definition, despite not being part of a slasher

Fig. 1.1 - A lingering shot of Jo's behind

movie, Jo arguably aligns with the characterization of a Final Girl as she is constructed in *SPN,* especially in season 2, episode 6 "No Exit". The first clue is in Jo's name. "Jo" follows in a long line of androgynous or masculine names given to Final Girls, such as "Stevie, Marti, Terry, Laurie, Stretch, Will, Joey, Max" (40). Just as Sam's name gives him a connection to the feminine, so does Jo's give her a connection to the masculine. Jo's costume changes in "No Exit" to something that contributes to this androgynous construction. Like the Winchesters, she too wears flannel and denim, dressed in practical clothing that does not impede movement (see fig. 1.2). While she is Hunting, Jo wears the dress of a masculine

Hunter. She carries her own knife, which used to belong to her father. She is attempting to carry on his masculine legacy. The episode “No Exit” has Jo instigating her own Hunt with the help of the Winchester brothers. They pursue the ghost of first American serial killer H. H. Holmes, who is kidnapping, torturing and killing young blonde women from a specific

Fig 2 - Dean and Jo have similar dress

apartment complex. Jo gets an apartment in the building, with the full intention of being bait to draw the ghost out. She does her research and formulates a plan with the brothers to systematically sweep the building for signs of the ghost. This behaviour aligns with Clover’s description of the Final Girl as “intelligent and resourceful in a pinch” (39). The plan changes when Jo herself is kidnapped and stashed away in Holmes’ Terrible Place - a defunct sewer system beneath the building. Here Jo’s role reverts to feminine as she now must play the role of victim. When the ghost accosts her and rips out a chunk of her hair, she is clearly frightened and lets out a bloodcurdling scream. According to Clover, “[a]bject terror...is gendered feminine, and the more concerned a given film is with that condition - and it is the essence of modern horror - the more likely the femaleness of the victim” (51).

The latter half of the episode splits its time between Sam and Dean's mission to rescue Jo, and with Jo having to survive the Terrible Place. The camera takes on Jo's point of view, showing the audience the sewers through a tiny slit in the chamber that contains her. Her abject terror is constructed through the limited point of view, with the shaking of the camera and the sound of her laboured breathing. To that end, Jo's terror is underscored whenever Holmes attacks by a sudden sting of scraping strings that only heighten in noise and dissonance while she screams. She is terrified, and that terror places her in a feminine position. Furthermore, Jo's femininity in "No Exit" is solidified by the fact that despite spending the entire episode insisting that she is capable of Hunting alongside Sam and Dean, she still needs to be rescued. Clover says that "[t]he decisive moment, as far as the fixing of gender is concerned, lies in what happens [after the protagonist's trials]: those who save themselves are male, and those who are saved by others are female" (59). Even though she helps them trap Holmes in the end, Jo still needs the brothers to save her. No matter how masculinely she is coded or may behave, she is relegated to the feminine role of victim at the end of the episode.

Heather L. Duda defines roles for women in modern horror into two categories: the victim and the vixen. "The victim is just as one would expect: the virginal or pure girl who is to be rescued by the male hero(es). The vixen, however, is much more complex. She is the women[sic] who is obviously linked to the monster; she is monstrous because of her sexuality" (107). Jo has already fulfilled her role as victim, but in season 5, episode 10 "Abandon All Hope…", she uses her femininity to fulfil her role as vixen. The Winchesters team up with Jo, Ellen and Bobby in order to regain the magic Colt and take down Lucifer. Part of this plan involves infiltrating the home of the demon Crowley (Mark Sheppard). Clad in a revealing black dress and high heels, Jo approaches the front gate and asks to come in

and use the phone. She uses her femininity to appeal to the male security guards, trying to appear heterosexually desirable. This role is very different from the gun-toting, face-punching woman of season 2, but allows Jo to use her power in a specifically feminine way. Jo also takes control of her sexuality later in the episode. The gathered Hunters are spending one last night together before they attempt to kill Lucifer. Dean uses the opportunity to give Jo the "last night on earth speech" attempting to woo her into bed with him. Jo pulls him close enough to kiss him before she flatly refuses his advances. Duda's victim and vixen mingle together in this scene. On the one hand, Jo uses her sexual desirability to tease Dean. She is in command of herself and knows how to use her sexuality to evoke a reaction. On the other hand, she ultimately remains virginal (or at least sexually unavailable) by not taking Dean up on his sexual offer. This scene is an example that shows how Jo "can move smoothly, almost seamlessly, between the two gender stereotypes", which lends to her complex relationship with gender (116). This type of fluid relationship, according to Duda, is necessary for the female monster hunter to exist (116).

Jo's fluid relationship between the masculine and feminine space shows that the series is willing to explore nuances of gender within its characters. Sherrie A. Inness claims that this kind of female action hero is more likely to appear on television than in film. This is likely because "[i]t is less costly to experiment with one episode of a series rather than experiment with a major film" (10). There is the sense that Jo is just that: an experiment. She appears in six episodes of the first five seasons, only three of which feature her for more than fifteen minutes (S2E6 "No Exit", S5E2 "Good God, Y'all!" and S5E10 "Abandon All Hope…"). Ultimately, Jo's disruption of gender cannot be allowed to continue. "Abandon All Hope…" marks the point where Jo meets her tragic end. Jo saves Dean from a hellhound in an act that can be conceptualized as masculine heroism, emptying her shotgun into its belly.

However, this puts her in the position to get mauled by the beast herself. After the Hunters regroup and hole up in a nearby hardware store, it becomes clear that they may not be able to make it to Lucifer. The Winchesters begin to plan on how to get Jo and Ellen to safety, but Jo stops them. “I can’t move my legs,” she says, “I can’t be moved. My guts are being held in by an ACE bandage. We gotta...we gotta get our priorities straight here”. Jo is trapped inside a broken body, which historically has meant the end of Hunting (Bobby spends most of the season in a wheelchair, which effectively ends his career as a Hunter) - “I can’t fight. I can’t walk, but I can do something”. Rather than simply die from her injuries, Jo chooses to sacrifice herself instead. She has the others build a bomb, which she will set off to kill the rest of the hellhounds once Sam and Dean have fled. Despite her physical agency being stripped away, she exercises the agency of her will. In the end, however, Jo does not even get to fulfil her heroic sacrifice as she dies before being able to hit the button. Ellen stays behind with her daughter and sets off the bomb, killing both of them and the hellhounds. Jo’s story follows a familiar pattern laid out by Sara Crosby in her article “The Cruelest Season: Female Heroes Snapped Into Sacrificial Heroines”. She describes a “rubber band effect”, in which female heroes are allowed to exist up to a certain narrative “snapping point”. This snapping point occurs “[w]hen tough female heroes reach either the end of their stories or a crucial place in their character arcs, when the question of final purpose logically comes to the fore, [then] the narrative snaps them into sacrificial heroines” (155). One must keep in mind that these characters do not exist on their own, but rather as the construction of the creators of the series. A female action hero cannot come to the “end of her story” on her own; someone must make the decision to end that story for her. The decisions, therefore, are representative of the worldviews and ideologies of the creators and writers of any one series, most of which are male in the case of *SPN*. In keeping with

this pattern of sacrificial heroines, the ideologies in question construct a conservative worldview of gender roles, in which female action heroes are not allowed permanence. Furthermore, Jo does not strictly adhere to the pattern that Crosby identifies. True, her character arc follows someone desiring to be a Hunter to someone who gets to Hunt alongside her mother, but Jo's purpose in the series is to help the Winchesters more than anything else. She does not come to the end of her own character arc, but to a narrative point when the stakes of the situation must be demonstrated by having a familiar character die. Even her final moments of heroic self-sacrifice are so Sam and Dean can escape. Butler states that "it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script [of gender] by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations", and this is what happens to Jo ("Performative Acts" 415). The exploration of gender fluidity ends, and the patriarchal status quo is reinstated.

Conclusion

Through the characters of Sam, Dean and Jo, *SPN* offers an exploration of ambivalent, non-normative genders. Sam and Dean both allow for differing perspectives on non-normative masculinity, while Jo is a demonstration of non-normative femininity that can also occupy masculine space. All three of these representations belie the idea that the early seasons of *SPN* only interact with gender in a stereotypical way. The series makes an attempt to grapple with these spaces of gender ambivalence and succeeds, especially in the realm of non-normative masculinity. However, comparing the ways in which this grappling is done reveals a conservative worldview that undergirds the series. The treatment of Sam and Dean is different from the treatment of Jo. The brothers are allowed a permanence throughout the narrative, despite dying several times each. No matter what happens to

them, Sam and Dean always return to the story and their characters are allowed to grow more complex. This is not the case with Jo. She is introduced briefly in season 2 before disappearing from the series until partway through season 5. She reappears for only two episodes before she is permanently killed off. Although she occupies both feminine and masculine space, she is not allowed to do so for very long. The gender ambivalence of these characters provides nuance to the overall depiction of gender, but one cannot ignore that the series privileges explorations of masculinity over explorations of femininity. This is reinforced by the fact that there are very few main female characters, and those that do exist often die. The ways in which the series does engage with femininity is usually through a patriarchal lens, relegating the female characters to normative roles (i.e. Madonna or whore). The following chapter explores the role that femininity plays in *SPN,* specifically regarding monstrosity.

CHAPTER 2: FEMININITY AND MONSTROSITY

Supernatural privileges a male perspective, as I have explored in the conclusion of the previous chapter. It follows two men who have had the women in their lives systematically murdered as they contend with countless horrors across the rural and urban landscapes of the United States. Femininity repeatedly reveals itself during these adventures, either in the form of saveable damsels or dangerous female monsters. Either way, femininity is represented as the negative alternative to the masculine default, which is an idea brought forward by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex.* De Beauvoir states that "humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him", that is, as Other (xvi). Due to the general lack of female representation in the early seasons of the show, and the fact that the damsels rarely have any dimension to them, one must look to these monsters to see the script grapple with femininity. In his book *Monster Cinema,* Grant states that "monsters, despite their seemingly unending variety, are always marked as different and, consequently, as a threat to the natural or ideological order" (1). Therefore, female monsters are considered Other in two different ways, compounding the threats that they represent. In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws,* Clover explores the gendered history of horror movies and examines the role that gender plays in plots and symbolism of these stories. According to Clover, "[t]he functions of monster and hero are far more frequently represented by males and the function of victim far more garishly by females. The fact that female monsters and female heroes, when they do appear, are masculine in dress and behaviour (and often even name), and that male victims are shown in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity, would seem to suggest that gender inheres in the function itself" (12). Clover asserts that monsters are most typically associated with normative masculinity, and the gendered function of monsters implies that even female monsters carry male-gendered

connotations. However, this assertion exists in tension with the idea that heroes are masculine, and monsters are in opposition to those heroes (Combe and Boyle 7). That is, monsters are what the heroes are not, representing negative space and acting as character foils to those heroes. If heroes are masculine, as Combe and Boyle assert, monsters, therefore, could be considered `not-man' by definition. In keeping with societal gender norms, this would make monsters feminine. The tension exists between the ideas that monsters are either coded masculine no matter their gender, or monsters are opposed to masculine heroes and must therefore exist in a feminine space. The result of this tension is that monsters must exist in a liminal space of gender, no matter how they are coded, because they can neither be strictly masculine nor strictly feminine. According to Barbara Creed's reading of Julia Kristeva, blurring of borders and boundaries is foundational to constructing the abject, and the abject is crucial to horror (8). Monsters are frightening precisely because they exist in a liminal space. The female monster, by her very existence, violates the boundaries between male and female. This chapter will explore the female monster through the examples of woman as werewolf, woman as witch, woman as demon and a concept that I will call woman as victim-monster, and depends on Butler's idea that "gender is in no way a stable identity of locus of agency from which various acts proceede[sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" ("Performative Acts" 402, original emphasis). These categories of monsters will allow for an analysis of these repeated acts in order to examine the ways in which *SPN* represents and interacts with performed femininity.

Woman as Werewolf

Traditionally, the werewolf narrative tells male stories and engages in explorations of masculinity. The transformation from men to wolves "masculinizes them, often turning them from effete or ineffectual males into assertive males, or worse, dangerous, toxic males" (Barr 15-16). This change, one should note, occurs in their human selves. Although the curse turns the man into an animal, it is the man whose behaviour is changed as a result of the transformation. The traits associated with this form of masculinity are "sexualized, primitive, aggressive: these words that can summon forth the image of the werewolf, but most of all, fear, not only the fear that the werewolf engenders in other people, but the fear that the werewolf engenders in the very person themselves" (13). These traits appear in most werewolf characters in cinema to varying extents, according to Barr. The close relation of such traits to hegemonic masculinity means that the very act of casting a woman in the role of werewolf already subverts the expected gender roles. She occupies a masculinized space that threatens to overwhelm her, and in some cases may lead to the complete loss of the female identity (117).

"Heart" (S2E17) follows the story of a woman named Madison who turns out to be a werewolf. The brothers unknowingly encounter Madison in human form while they hunt down the werewolf. During their investigation, Sam learns that Madison has recently taken control of her own life. She was "mugged" and decided to stop "feeling sorry for [her]self". The mugging was in fact a werewolf attack and resulted in Madison's own transformation. Her seizure of power and agency over her life coincides with her transformation into a monster. Her power, therefore, must be connected with what is monstrous. It should be noted that as the werewolf, Madison only attacks men who have threatened her. This is a stark contrast to the male werewolf who turned her, who only attacks women (mostly

prostitutes). In her wolf form, she murders her sexual harasser boss, a male police officer and her stalker ex-boyfriend. Madison as a werewolf is a threat to male autonomy and male authority. This falls somewhat in line with Barr's assertion that female werewolves "are either masculinized, embracing aspects of the masculine, or they are sexual predators, out to destroy the male" (119). Madison's attacks, however, are not sexual in nature. There is no seduction that would otherwise typically precede such attacks on men by female werewolves in other cinema (Barr cites *Trick 'r Treat* [2007] as an example of this trope of seduction). Instead, Madison's wolf form tracks the men down in their homes or offices and promptly murders them. Arguably, she only preys on men that she distinctly does not want a sexual connection with. (This is reinforced by her transforming and leaving Sam alone after they sleep together).

Another important detail is that Madison's human self has no control or consciousness while she is in her werewolf state. Her power is primal, connected to basic animal instincts. However, the visual language of the makeup tells a different story. "Traumatic transformations...are designed to keep human and wolf separate", according to Barr (12). Many werewolf movies play with the transformations, making gory spectacles of the whole event. *SPN* on the other hand, does a subtle lengthening of the nails that occurs silently while the werewolf is asleep. There is no thrashing about, no screaming, no cracking of bones or sprouting of hair. In fact, the werewolf makeup in *SPN* is rather minimal (see fig. 2.1).

Fig. 2.1 - Madison transformed

Madison is given claws, grey, wolf-like eyes and sharp canine teeth. Beyond these slight changes, she looks entirely human. This aligns her wolf self visually with her human self. The text of the story says she has no control of her actions, but the visuals show the wolf's animality as just another side of the woman.

According to Barr, "the young woman who transforms often seems to lose their identity more often than male characters" (117). This is true for Madison, though not in the way that Barr describes. Barr refers to female werewolves being completely overtaken by their wolf self, losing their human identity in the process. Madison, on the other hand, loses her agency by completely submitting herself to the idea that she has become an irredeemable monster and begging for Sam to kill her. Sam tries to convince her otherwise, but Madison insists, "I'm a monster…this [dying] is all there is left. Help me, Sam". Unlike those female werewolves who gain a sense of freedom and strength from their newfound supernatural powers, Madison discounts her entire human self and instead identifies solely with the wolf. For her, it does not matter that she has just achieved agency within her own

life or that she has just met Sam, with whom she has a genuine romantic connection. All that matters to Madison is the part of her that's monstrous, and she needs that part to be put down. By pleading with Sam to kill her, Madison rejects her own personhood in favour of maintaining the status quo. That is, that monsters must die while human beings must live. This is a recurring theme throughout the series, and a worldview that the Winchesters staunchly hold onto, especially regarding female monsters.

Woman as Witch

The figure of the witch is a contentious one, caught between historical persecution and annihilation of women and re-appropriation as a feminist symbol. This tension treads the line between what Natalie Wilson calls oppressive monsters versus subversive monsters (11). Oppressive monsters are cultivated by a ruling class to create a hegemonic status quo. Here, monstrous figures are used in art, folklore and popular culture to "bolster existing systems of power" (12). Subversive monsters, on the other hand, allow those marginalized Others to reclaim the monster as a figure of empowerment, using her monstrous powers to disrupt and dismantle the status quo. Wilson gives a plethora of examples:

> We have seen life-affirming visions of zombie children saving the planet (as in *The Girl with All the Gifts*), vampires eager to prevent humanity's demise (as in *The Passage*), and witchy women dedicated to thwarting reproductive injustice (*Red Clocks, Penny Dreadful*). Monstrous outcasts have taken down mad scientists (*Stranger Things, The OA*), military corruption (*The Shape of Water, The Passage*), and devilish patriarchs (*The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina, Get Out*). As these examples convey, some of the most successful horror narratives of our times not

> only let the monster live, they also applaud the paradigm-busting and wall-breaching capabilities of cultural outsiders. (12)

The witch can fall into both categories, depending on the context in which she is depicted. In the context of myth, European history and fairy tales, one can find the oppressive figure of the witch. Wilson asks "[w]hat was Lilith if not a witch that refused to bed down, missionary style, with Adam?", referring to the Hebrew legend of the first woman created before Eve (130-131). While folk wisdom and magical practices existed far back throughout European history, the cultivation of the witch myth as a tool of violence against women was spurred on by the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a treatise on witch-hunting, by Catholic clergymen Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in 1486. This publication turned the practice of folk medicine and animistic magic into direct collaboration and collusion with the devil. Silvia Bovenschen explains that "[w]hat made the Church so uncomfortable was not the belief in magic and miracle per se (it is still today a component of any religiosity), but rather the practice of such magical-animistic miracles by laypeople, especially by women who, according to long tradition, seemed predestined to it ever since antiquity" (97). By taking those miracles and making them evil, the Church was able to maintain control over the way in which those beliefs were exercised. This also means that what little agency women were afforded as midwives and healers was stripped away and branded as devil worship. Even after the witch hunts died down, the figure of the evil witch lived on in European popular culture. "Romantic scholarship attained its greatest influence [over the perception of women] with the publication of the *Gesammelte Volksmärchen* of the Brothers Grimm. In these tales - Wilhelm Grimm's editing saw to that - the witch is without exception old and evil; occasionally she appears integrated into the bourgeois family as the stepmother. Thus the potential for evil is lurking in every woman" (Bovenschen 114). Maria

Tatar details such evil fairy tale women in her essay “Sex and Violence”, citing such vile acts as murder and cannibalism (364). Whether plotting to cook up Hansel and Gretel or practicing magic to kill Snow White, these witches of the tales are always brutally punished for their scandalous behaviour.

Finally, *SPN* can be added to the long history of the depiction of the oppressive witch. One must note that this is a departure from the trend of using witches in a subversive or empowering way which had been gaining popularity in 20th-century American television, with shows such as *Bewitched* (1964-1972), *Charmed* (1998-2006) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). If one chooses to view *SPN* as the male response to *Buffy*, which I insinuated in the introduction, *SPN’s* oppressive witches could be considered in direct contrast to *Buffy*’s subversive ones. The first episode in which witches appear in *SPN* is aptly titled “Malleus Maleficarum”, indicating the sort of 15th-century treatment that the witches will receive (S3E9). The story follows Sam and Dean as they stumble upon a coven of suburban housewife witches, one of whom is performing fatal curses upon first her rival, then her ex-lover. Sam clarifies that they are dealing with “old world black magic”, not “some new-age wicca water-dowser”. This acknowledges that the continued contemporary practice of witchcraft is not what the brothers are hunting, yet little else is done to address nuance in the show’s portrayal of witches. “I hate witches,” Dean says, “They’re always spewing their bodily fluids everywhere...it’s creepy! Y’know, it’s downright unsanitary.” Through this glib line of dialogue, arguably intended to be humorous, the connection is drawn between witches and the body. This is not a new idea. As Wilson points out, “[a]ligned with the irrational, the grotesque, the abject, the polluting, the natural world, and the body (rather than the soul), linkages between the female and the monstrous have imbued the patriarchal imaginary throughout recorded history” (182). Butler also draws a

connection between women and the body, which "works along magical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to its body" (*Gender Trouble* 16). Indeed, each of the witch's curses is visceral and bodily - she makes a woman's teeth fall out, she curses a man to eat maggots and later a woman is made to choke up sewing pins. Not only are these curses connected to the body (and thus the grotesque, the abject and the feminine), but they all specifically affect the mouth. The mouth is the centre of speech and the portal by which sustenance is consumed. The mouth allows human beings to connect with each other and ensures survival. By attacking the mouth, the witch is removing speech and agency, as well as a means of survival. In the Freudian sense, the oral stage is the earliest stage of psychosexual development. Therefore, one could interpret the mouth as being connected to the human state in which we are most vulnerable, i.e. infancy. By having the curses affect the mouth, they are attacking people in their most vulnerable place. The mouth is also involved in the manifestation of revulsion, whether it be through gagging or vomiting. This contributes to the bodily response to these curses, both in the victim and the viewer. These curses are meant to make the viewer sick to their stomach, playing on the "unsanitary" abject nature of witches that Dean describes.

Even in power, these witches are thrust into the role of subservience. Their power does not come from themselves, from the mythical connection that women were feared to have with magic, but rather from a demon with whom they have made a pact. This detail is straight out of the *Malleus Maleficarum* - "Witches were acknowledged as evil, but even in evil, masculine supremacy had to be guaranteed: Satan was enthroned" (Bovenschen 97). According to the guidelines outlined in the treatise, women received their magic by making pacts with the devil (usually of a sexual nature). This removes the idea that women can have their own power and agency, making them beholden to yet another patriarchal rule.

Interestingly, in the episode, the demon that the witches make a pact with is masquerading as one of the women in the coven. This does not necessarily mean that the power is feminine, however, since demons can possess any human being regardless of gender. The witches and their flaws, however, are coded feminine. They are portrayed as bored housewives who are tangling with forces beyond their comprehension. The human women in the coven are depicted as foolish and selfish, using black magic to achieve material success or undertake internecine conflict with other women. Competition between women is a stereotype perpetrated by patriarchal ideals because of the idea that women must be competing for the attention of men. Even though Sam explicitly states at the beginning of the episode that witches can be literally anyone, these particular witches are steeped in feminine symbology. The coven meets secretly under the cover of a book club, for example. One woman's husband slyly comments, "I'm not fooled by your little book club, by the way. I know what you ladies get up to when I'm gone - it's all dishin' gossip". He calls attention to the relationship of women to speech, especially harmful speech. According to Justyna Sempruch, the witch's "speech perverts the language of philosophers; laughter, spells, and evil incantations flow from her grotesque and filthy mouth" (2). The focus is brought back to the mouth – a witch is dangerous because of what she *says*. This idea is underscored in the opening scene of the episode, in which a close-up of a woman's mouth chanting is intercut with the effects of the curse she is casting (see fig. 2.2).

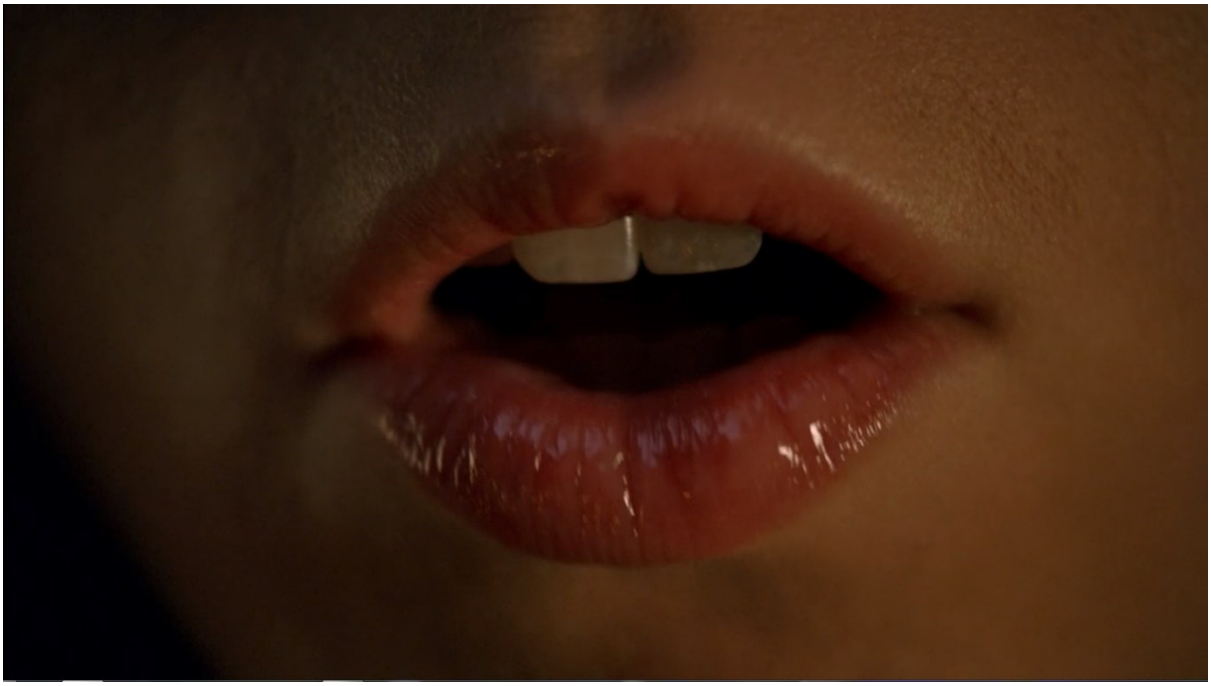

Fig. 2.2. – The mouth of a witch

A book club is not exclusive to women, but stereotypically can be considered one of the acceptable modes under which women may gather with each other and exchange ideas. Witch-hunters of old were instructed to be suspicious of any gathering of women, lest they be attending their “dark university”, of which Satan was the teacher. There is also the parodic use of women’s arts. One witch curses a meal which she cooked for her ex-lover, another causes sewing pins to fall out of the demon’s mouth. This evokes the classic image of the witch’s broom (another perversion of a woman’s tool) or the cursed objects used by the wicked Queen in Snow White (Gilbert and Gubar 294). According to Gilbert and Gubar, “[f]rom the point of view of the made, self-assertive Queen, conventional female arts *kill*. But from the point of view of the docile and selfless princess, such arts, even while they kill, confer the only measure of power available to a woman in a patriarchal culture” (295). This same dichotomy of danger and power can be seen in the way the witches subvert the use of such traditionally female arts as cooking and sewing.

The first five seasons of *SPN* do not have only female witches, but there is a distinct difference between the ways female witches and male witches are treated. Firstly, female witches are demonized because of their sexuality, liberally being called "whores" even by their own patrons (S4E7, "It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester"). In her lecture about the history of witch feminism, Kristen Sollee pulls the following quote from the *Malleus Maleficarum*: "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable". Although the housewife witches do not lead particularly sexual lives, the witch from "Great Pumpkin" dresses provocatively and behaves in a seductive manner in order to manipulate those around her. These are stereotypically "feminine" qualities, which are in turn proven monstrous by her occupation as a witch. This kind of sexualized behaviour does not occur with male witches in *SPN.* Secondly, all female witches in this part of the series die, usually murdered by their patrons. They are punished as the fairy tale witches are, doomed to brutal deaths for their transgressive behaviour. By contrast, the male witches in the series not only survive more often, but are portrayed as more than just the pawns of evil demons. In "Criss Angel is a Douchebag" (S4E12), the male witch Charlie is killed to protect the Winchesters, but is not portrayed as evil. Rather, he is depicted as a protective friend who simply strayed down the wrong path. In "The Curious Case of Dean Winchester" (S5E7), the brothers run afoul of the male witch Patrick, who lures people into playing a poker game in which the stakes are years off their lives. Those older folks who are considered worthy are gifted with new youth, while cocky young souls (including Dean) are aged prematurely. Rather than being portrayed as a force of evil, Patrick (who is notably Irish) has a morally ambiguous role similar to that of a fairy in a Celtic folk tale; he rewards and punishes people for their behaviour, has access to magic charms and ultimately teaches the protagonists a lesson. He is allowed to go on his way at the end of the episode, presumably to continue his

magic poker game. Lastly, in “Swap Meat” (S5E12) a fourteen-year-old boy named Gary uses witchcraft to swap bodies with Sam. Again, Gary is portrayed not as evil, but as misguided. He wants to be a powerful witch, but the brothers successfully convince him otherwise and he is free to go. All these examples show that although witches can be any gender in the *SPN* universe, it is only the women who are punished for it.

Woman as Demon

In *Men, Women and Chainsaws,* Clover spends her second chapter, “Opening Up”, discussing what she calls the occult film. This includes tales of “human responses to ghostly or satanic doings” (65). By Clover’s definition, *SPN* would fall into the occult category. In this chapter, Clover discusses several films that involve stories of satanic possession of demons, most notably *The Exorcist* (1973) and *Witchboard* (1987). Both films follow the stories of women who become possessed by male demons and must be exorcised of their supernatural afflictions. Due to the popularity and success of *The Exorcist*, dozens of imitators sprang up in its wake (*Witchboard* included), which created the generic tradition of male demons possessing female bodies. *SPN* strays from this path and even inverts it on occasion (see the case of Meg possessing Sam in “Born Under a Bad Sign” [S2E14]). Rather than having male demons possessing female bodies, the show has a variety of female demons that possess female bodies. This is a notable departure from horror movie tradition, especially considering the many genre tropes that *SPN* does follow. This section seeks to examine how female demons are codified based on their gender and how that gender is made monstrous.

As seems to be the pattern with many female *SPN* monsters, the female demons are defined by their sexuality and desire. According to Clover, “[t]o the extent that the monster

is constructed as feminine, the horror film thus expresses female desire only to show how monstrous it is" (47). In a similar vein, Cristina Santos says that "[i]t is this male fear of female sexuality that leads to the labelling of women with a strong sense of sexual identity as deviants and thereby depicting them as 'monstrous,' be it as a vampire, witch or werewolf - monstrous female identities stemming from a woman's deviation from the socially accepted norm of the complacent and desexualized woman" (xvi). Using the examples of Meg and Ruby, both have a strong sex/ual drive, which is demonstrated through sexual manipulation and aggression. In the episode that introduces her, Meg uses the promise of sex to put her male victim in a vulnerable position (S1E11 "Scarecrow). She has been picked up by a van and suggestively asks "How about you pull over?" to the male driver. Instead of kissing him, she slits the man's throat and uses his blood to conduct a demonic ritual. In a later episode, Meg uses her power over a tied-up Sam to aggressively kiss and caress him (S1E16 "Shadow"). Her sexuality manifests as connected to her desire for and display of power, and is framed by these events as a dangerous power that would cause men harm. Even Meg's human host later condemns her for her sexuality, saying that she "dressed me like a slut" (S4E2 "Are You There, God? It's Me, Dean Winchester"). The show's writers punish Meg brutally, having her thrown off a building, shot in the stomach and violently exorcised from her body.

Ruby's portrayal is different, but still sexual. Her connection with Sam goes from tentative to trusting to sexual over the course of seasons 3 and 4. By the time Dean is rescued from Hell at the beginning of season 4, Ruby and Sam are already consistently sleeping together. The actual sexual relationship between the two of them is portrayed as loving and consensual, however, this relationship becomes affected by Ruby introducing substance dependence into it. In order to use his psychic powers, Sam must consume

demon blood, and he is able to get that blood from Ruby (a fact which is revealed in “On the Head of a Pin” [S4E16]). In the revelatory scene, Sam approaches Ruby saying that he “needs it”, to which she replies “It’s okay, Sammy. You can have it.” Initially, it is unclear to what they are referring, but as the exchange begins with a kiss between the two of them, a viewer may be led to think that “it” is sex with Ruby. Instead, she uses a knife to cut her arm and Sam hungrily sucks her blood. The lighting is dark and the music is dissonant, framing the act as a dangerous one. Ruby gently caresses Sam’s head, but the camera lingers on a sly smile across her lips, which is the audience’s hint that Ruby may be up to something more nefarious. Their relationship is thus transformed into one of dependence and addiction, with Ruby as the manipulator of Sam. It is later revealed that Ruby’s entire relationship with Sam was for the express purpose of tricking him into killing Lilith and releasing Lucifer from Hell (S4E22 “Lucifer Rising”). Ruby is therefore not only a seductress, but a deceitful one who tempts men into sin. Jane M. Ussher describes the evil “woman...positioned as powerful, impure and corrupt, source of moral and physical contamination”, which can certainly be seen in this portrayal of Ruby (1). Furthermore, her temptation of Sam isolates him from Dean, his most important male relationship. For all these transgressions which stem from her sexual relationship with Sam, she is murdered by her own magic knife. Sam rejects her by holding her in place while Dean stabs her stomach. Thus, the poisoning feminine influence is expunged from the brothers’ relationship.

As the main antagonist for part of season 3 and all of season 4, Lilith’s role is given more gravitas than either Meg or Ruby. She is described in the show as the first demon that Lucifer created. This is a departure from the Hebrew legend of Lilith. According to *The Alphabet of Ben Sira (ABS)*, an ancient Hebrew and Aramaic text from the 8th- to 10th-century C.E., Lilith was created by God alongside Adam from the same clay of the earth (qtd.

in Kosior 114). This is what caused her to claim that she and Adam were equals, because they were created the same way. After refusing to lie beneath Adam in intercourse, Lilith speaks the Ineffable Name of God and flies from the Garden of Eden. She comes to live in a desolate place, sometimes described as the middle of the sea, and becomes the mother of all demons. Kosior states that "the ABS seems to elevate [Lilith] to the position of the ultimate enemy of God...this association becomes even more apparent if Lilith is viewed as a perverted 'mother of all life,' responsible for birthing demonic legions, a hundred of whom are supposed to die every day" (116). Some of these ancient aspects of Lilith are carried over into *SPN*, while others, such as her origin, are left behind. By making Lilith a creation of Lucifer instead of God, the writers of the show are taking away the power afforded to Lilith by being Adam's equal. Instead, she is beholden to Lucifer, much like Eve is beholden to Adam. Although Lilith is still a credible threat to the Winchesters, the nature of her origin diminishes her power. One theme that is carried over from the *ABS* myth is that of perverted motherhood*,* approached through Lilith in two different ways. First, it is implied that Lilith eats babies. Rather than provide maternal care expected of a woman, Lilith consumes and destroys these infants. According to Santos, "the murdering of the children can be metaphorically interpreted as a deadly returning of the children to the mother's protective womb" (71). Doubly so when the "mother" is literally ingesting the babies back into her stomach. Although not a direct adaptation from the Lilith myth in the *ABS*, the myth does say that Lilith has dominion over newly born infants unless they are adorned with the proper protective amulets (Kosior 116). Most scholars believe this myth to be an attempt at explaining why new-born deaths occur. Second, Lilith chooses to almost exclusively possess children, specifically little girls. In the bodies of the innocent, she commits atrocities such as murdering a dog or flaying a woman alive. The perversion of innocence is starkly illustrated

in the season 3 finale, “No Rest for the Wicked”, which shows Lilith in the body of a young blonde girl, wearing a baby pink dress streaked with blood (see fig. 2.3). The image shows the dissonance between the perceived innocence of a prototypical little girl and the actual monstrosity perpetrated by Lilith. Her relationship with children is distinctly not motherly. In subverting both innocence and motherhood, Lilith is rejecting the only “good” traditional feminine roles that are allowed to women.

Fig 2.3. - A bloody Lilith

Lilith is not excluded from being demonized from her sexuality. This theme is complicated by her possession of children, but Lilith comes to possess the body of an adult woman once the script calls for her to sexually tempt Sam (S4E18 “The Monster at The End of This Book”). Dean calls attention to the fact that Lilith is normally a little girl (and therefore couldn’t possibly sexually tempt anyone), but this gets hand-waved away as Lilith instead possesses the body of a “comely dental hygienist from Bloomington, Indiana”. In the mythos of *SPN,* a kiss is used to seal a deal between a demon and a human. With Lilith, however, it “will take more than a kiss. A lot more”. The sex is transactional, and Sam does not go through with the act. Still, in order for the sexual temptation to occur, Lilith must be

an adult. The script is not willing to broach the taboo of involving a child with sex, even the suggestion of it. This is also due to the fact that Sam specifically would not pursue sex with a child, even transactionally, because that kind of behaviour would be considered taboo or even monstrous and he is meant to be a hero of the series. This change moves away from the perversion of innocence and walks the familiar path of women being seductresses who are then punished for seduction. All the audience gets to see this adult Lilith do is propose a deal to Sam, which must be sealed with intercourse. Afterwards, she prepares a ritual in the season finale, but is only on screen long enough for the final confrontation with Sam. When Sam finally does kill Lilith, he kills the adult version, not the child. He is killing the *woman*, the one who is defined by her sexuality.

Woman as Victim-Monster

Throughout *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, Clover uses the descriptive phrase "victim-hero", usually in reference to the character she dubs the Final Girl. The "female victim-hero" is an amalgam of both femininity and masculinity, as well as humanity and monstrosity, what with "the hero part always understood as implying some degree of monstrosity" (4). The term describes female characters that are both victimized by the monster or killer and are able to defeat him. In a similar but opposing fashion, I will use the phrase "victim-monster" to describe female characters in *SPN* that are victimized by their own monstrosity. Whereas the victim-hero overcomes her victimhood at the end of the movie to succeed as a hero, the victim-monster succumbs to her victimhood by being drawn irrevocably into her monstrosity. After this occurs, the victim-monster must be disposed of because, despite her innocence, monsters cannot be allowed to live in the *SPN* universe. This act is framed

around the tragic choice that the male characters must make, rather than focusing on its impact on the female victim-monsters.

One such victim-monster is Madison the werewolf, whose story is outlined previously in this chapter (S2E17 “Heart”). Madison is not evil by nature, nor does she have any desire to be so. Madison’s transformations are beyond her control, and her wolf self acts in accordance with base animal instincts rather than a moral compass. She is corrupted by her own monstrosity, which, in her eyes, prevents her from participating in the kind of life that she would like to lead. Specifically, Madison does not want to hurt anyone else. Although Sam is determined to try to find a cure for her lycanthropy, Madison instead begs him to kill her. Madison makes this suicidal choice, but the emphasis is placed on Sam’s reaction to it. Sam weeps at the thought of killing her, but refuses to let Dean do it for him. Once the choice is made, the camera does not show Madison again. The actual act happens off screen, the camera instead showing Dean’s face reacting to the sound of the gunshot. This is a case in which the victim-monster is an innocent that must be sacrificed to serve the greater good. A similar instance can be found in the opening scene of “Fresh Blood” (S3E7). Sam and Dean capture a young female vampire named Lucy who does not realize she has become a vampire. Rather, she believes herself to be under the influence of drugs. “I can’t come down,” she weeps, “I just wanna come down”. When Dean informs her that she has killed two people already, she frantically denies it, thinking that she hallucinated the incidents. Clearly, Lucy does not intentionally hurt people, nor does she want to. In this scenario, her victimhood is clearly illustrated by elements such as staging and details of the acting. The brothers have tied her to a chair, and she spends the whole scene frightened and crying, having been “drugged” by an unknown man. Sam even has some sympathy for her and promises to let her go. However, Dean states that “We don’t have a choice” and

promptly beheads Lucy. Again, the beheading happens off screen while the camera focuses on the reaction of a man, this time Sam. Like Madison, Lucy is an innocent who has been caught up in the trap of monstrosity. Both women are attacked by men who wilfully cause their transformations, and both women are killed by men for being transformed. In his analysis of Hammer's *Dracula* (1958), Christopher Frayling puts forth the idea that women in horror stories often exist as vessels to be possessed by either good or evil (131). This is precisely what occurs with the victim-monster. Because she is possessed by evil, or monstrosity, she cannot be possessed by the forces of good and must therefore be destroyed.

The victim-monster also manifests in a different way in *SPN.* Rather than being an innocent who unwittingly performs monstrous acts, there are victim-monsters who were once virtuous women whose monstrosity has fundamentally changed their moral compasses. One example is the zombie Angela from season 2, episode 4, "Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things". The story follows a college student who brings his crush back from the dead, only to have her systematically murder those who have wronged her. The dialogue spends a lot of time establishing how sweet, kind and virtuous Angela was in life (even her name suggests that she is somewhat holy). As a walking corpse, however, she becomes violent, manipulative and vindictive. When confronted with Sam at gunpoint, Angela pleads her case "I didn't ask to be brought back, but it's still me. I'm still a person." While this turns out to be more manipulation, she is not wrong. In the situation, Angela is still as much a victim as she is a monster. One cannot ignore that she, too, was made monstrous by a man. In this case, the man had projected sexual desires onto her that she did not reciprocate, and his bringing her back from the dead is indicative of his feelings of entitlement to her through that desire. A similar but more complex version of this kind of

story occurs in season 5, episode 16 “Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid”. In the hometown of Bobby Singer, the father figure for Sam and Dean, the dead rise from their graves *en masse* and happily reunite with their families. This includes Karen, Bobby’s late wife. In her short time on screen, Karen demonstrates the feminine role known as the “angel in the house”. She cooks, she cleans, and she takes care of Bobby. Everything she does is for him, and it is made clear that this is the kind of person she was when she was alive. Unfortunately, all the raised dead begin to turn violent and attack their loved ones, Karen included. Although she initially professed a loss of memory upon her initial resurrection, Karen later reveals that she remembers the circumstances of her death. She was possessed by a demon, and Bobby was forced to kill her. Karen’s deceit is the first indicator that she is not the same woman she was when she was alive. Just as with the others in the town, Karen becomes violent (or so it is implied) and Bobby is forced to kill her once again. The death happens off screen, the camera instead showing Dean having come looking for Bobby. What connects these two stories, besides the common plot point of bringing loved ones back from the grave, is the loss of traditional femininity. Here are two women who both fulfilled their prescribed feminine roles, one as a dutiful girlfriend, the other as the “angel in the house” wife. However, in being turned into monsters, their virtuous feminine potential is negated, and replaced with negative feminine traits, such as manipulation and deceit.

Overall, stories that revolve around victim-monsters show that a woman's role as victim can even outweigh her role as monster. Victimhood denies women agency. All four of the women I discuss are stripped of their agency by their transformation into monsters. Even Angela, who behaves at the behest of her own fiendish desires, is still a victim in her situation. Ultimately, the stories outlined above are about the men connected to those women, and the way that they react to the women’s victimhood. In the case of Sam and

Bobby, this is reflected in the tragic choice to end the life of a loved one for the sake of the greater good. In the case of Dean, both with Lucy and with Angela, this is the illustration of a man, specifically a Hunter, doing his duty in order to protect the world of humans from the world of monsters.

Conclusion

I have mentioned more than once that there are few women in the world of *SPN.* I must amend that statement to be more specific. There are few *human* women in the world of *SPN.* There are many monstrous women, who all explore the show's interpretation of femininity as it relates to monstrosity. For many of them, female monstrosity is closely related to sexuality. The violent power afforded to these women monsters is tied to their sexual expression and the way in which it puts men in danger. This sets up a double standard when compared to the way heteronormative male sexuality is portrayed. Dean is just as, if not more, sexually active and expressive than any one of the female monsters mentioned in this chapter, yet he is allowed to be heroic and complex and is never punished for that sexuality. Furthermore, it focuses the stories of female monsters ultimately on the men who interact with them. This also occurs with the victimhood that these female monsters undergo. Rather than focus on the impact on the women, the story favours emphasis on the emotional reaction of the men to these women victims. Both examples enforce the idea that the storytelling of *SPN* is filtered through a male perspective and supports a patriarchal status quo. The vilification and exploration of sexual expression is not limited to women, however. *SPN* has a complex relationship with sexuality as a theme, especially as it relates to queerness and identity. This relationship will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: MONSTROUS SEXUALITY

Supernatural has a prime time slot on broadcast television, which affects how explicitly it may depict sensitive topics such as sexuality. The series does engage with sexuality, although explicit sexual acts are kept to a censored minimum. According to Darren Elliot-Smith, "[t]he show's fairly innocuous sexual display essentially achieves only a flaccid eroticism, one that is not designed to arouse, but merely to provide 'eye candy'" (113). Indeed, the visuals of topless men or women in their underwear are certainly pretty to look at but do little to engage with sexual desire of characters outside of strategically censored montage or "fade to black" representation. Even so, the sexuality of characters plays a larger role ideologically than this "flaccid eroticism" might suggest. This remains in keeping within the Western horror tradition by which the genre is used to explore concepts surrounding sex and death. Halberstam, in describing the gothic literary tradition, contends that "[t]he production of sexuality as identity and as the inversion of identity (perversion - a turning away from identity) in Gothic novels consolidates normal sexuality by defining it in contrast to its monstrous manifestations" (17). Historically, sex outside of the strict functionality of procreation has been associated with being the cause of monstrosity. In his book *On Monsters and Marvels*, first published in French in 1573, Ambroise Paré describes the source of monsters as deviant sexuality, among a comprehensive list of other causes. He maintains that "[i]t is certain that most often these monstrous and marvelous creatures proceed from the judgment of God, who permits fathers and mothers to produce such abominations from the disorder that they make in copulation, like brutish beasts, in which their appetite guides them, without respecting the time, or other laws ordained by God and Nature" (5). Lustful sex therefore has a history of being intrinsically and culturally linked with monstrosity. One need only think of the trope in slasher movies in which teen

characters who engage in sex are destined to die violently to see that this attitude has not disappeared four hundred-fifty years after Paré. Clover, in analysing slasher films, describes that "[t]he notion of a killer propelled by psychosexual fury, more particularly a male in gender distress, has proved a durable one" (27). For *SPN,* even the notion of desire itself is often represented as monstrous. For example, in season 5, episode 14, "My Bloody Valentine," the opening scene follows a shy young couple on a first date. Through the power of what is later revealed to be the Horseman of the Apocalypse, Famine, the couple's kisses quickly turn monstrous. In amongst the kissing, the woman bites the man and draws blood, to which he says "It's okay. It's good." The couple then proceeds to kiss passionately all the while taking bites out of each other until they die. The association between sex and death could not be more pronounced. The couple's sexual desire overwhelms them to the point that they literally devour each other. This is just one of many examples in which desire, and by extension sexuality, is represented as monstrous within the series. In this chapter, I will explore the representation of sexuality in *SPN* and analyse what the representation is saying about concepts such as queerness, identity, sexual violence and deviant sexuality.

Monstrous Queerness

The representation of queer characters and queer sexuality in the first five seasons of *SPN* deals with problematic portrayals of identity and sexual violence, as well as some homophobic tendencies. As a basic example, this can be seen when Dean teases his brother by calling his gender or sexuality into question. For example, after Sam details the story beats of Cinderella, Dean gives his brother a withering look and says "Dude, could you be more gay?" (S3E5, "Bedtime Stories"). Despite being commonly shared across Western households, knowledge of fairy tales is a non-normative trait for a man to have, according to

Dean. By demonstrating that trait, Sam is then considered to be non-normative by his brother. The term “gay” in this context does not necessarily refer to actual homosexuality, but to behaviour that contributes to Sam being less of a man in Dean’s eyes. This implies that Dean may also consider homosexuals to be less than men, which is a harmful stereotype. Dean, as a hypermasculine character, engages in this kind of casual homophobia countless times throughout the series, specifically towards Sam. Whether through his affectionate nickname “bitch” or deferring to Sam with a “ladies first”, Dean constantly calls Sam’s masculinity into question by comparing him unfavourably to women and gay men. Although he is considered more sensitive than his brother, Sam is also uncomfortable with homosexuality. For example, in season 5, episode 20, “The Devil You Know”, upon learning that Bobby sold his soul to the male demon Crowley (Mark Sheppard), the first thing that Sam asks is “Did you kiss him?”. Sam is more concerned with a same-sex kiss than he is with the safety of Bobby’s soul. This moment sheds light on the discomfort that Sam has with homosexuality, even though the kiss in question is strictly transactional. Elliot-Smith points out that “it is in those moments of homoeroticized or queered masculinity that the fragility of the hypermasculine ideal is highlighted” (113). Sam may not ascribe to a hypermasculine ideal the way that Dean does, but his concern for Bobby’s masculinity is apparent. The image that Sam has of Bobby as a tough, no-nonsense monster hunter who runs a scrapyard is queered by the kiss with Crowley. This suggests that if Bobby, arguably a peak of traditional masculinity, can be drawn into a queered masculinity, then something similar could just as easily happen to Sam, who already has more non-normative masculine traits. When it comes to traditional masculinity, participating in something like a same-sex kiss or even being subject to sexual abuse by another man can cause a man to be perceived as gay, no matter the pattern of sexual behaviours in the rest of his life (McIntosh). Sam is

uncomfortable with being mistaken for a gay man. In the season 1, episode 8, “Bugs”, the brothers tour a new housing development and are winkingly misconceived by the realtors to be a gay couple. This is the first time in the series that the concept of queerness is textually addressed, and it is done so as the butt of a joke to make the straight men (Sam and Dean) uncomfortable. Both are visibly uncomfortable the first time they are mistaken as a couple, though the second time Dean plays it off by calling Sam “honey” and smacking his rear end. Sam, however, is clearly uncomfortable with the insinuation and angry with Dean for playing along. This kind of joke can also be seen in the season 1, episode 18, “Something Wicked” and season 2, episode 11, “Playthings.” In season 4, episode 18 “The Monster at the End of this Book”, the audience can get a sense of what the text of the show (and ostensibly the creators) actually think of the concept of Sam and Dean as a romantic couple. The episode introduces a series of novels based on the lives of Sam and Dean that grow wildly popular and develop a fan base analogous to that of the real-life show’s. The brothers discover that in addition to the novels themselves, there is also “slash fiction” that imagines the two of them as sexual partners. Slash fiction is a type of fan fiction, written by fans of a property, in which a non-canonical, often queer, romantic pairing is explored, usually in sexually graphic detail. Catherine Tosenberger notes that most academics posit that “slash resists the compulsory heterosexuality not only of a given source text, but also of the culture at large” ([1.3]). Sam and Dean are disturbed by the implication. “They do know we’re brothers, right?” Dean asks, to which Sam responds, “Doesn’t seem to matter.” Dean makes a face of disgust before uttering what can only be assumed to be the voice of the show’s creators: “Aw come on, that...that’s just sick.” The discomfort and the notion of “Wincest” (as it is called in the real-life fan base) is played for laughs. It is notable that Dean’s main concern is the incest rather than the homosexuality. However, since there is such a lack of proper

queer representation in this part of the series, the association is made between gay relationships and incestuous ones, which can be seen as categorizing both as deviant in the minds of the characters and, therefore, the text of the show[2].

Beyond this clumsy treatment of queerness surrounding the Winchesters, *SPN* also fails to represent queer characters as a part of regular society in the first five seasons (even when a main lesbian character is introduced in later seasons, she does not survive). As Elliot-Smith puts it, "[w]ithin the camp gothic excesses of *Supernatural's* milieu, the homosexual remains the preferred Other, but an Other nonetheless and as such gay love possesses a supernatural potency" (111). Indeed, all the textually confirmed queer characters are somehow wrapped up in the supernatural. In a series where the monstrosity of supernatural forces is constantly being debated, to have queerness *only* be associated with the supernatural runs the risk of associating queerness with monstrosity. (This idea will be explored in more detail further on in the chapter.) The first queer human character that the audience meets is a lesbian psychic named Lily, introduced in season 2, episode 21, "All Hell Breaks Loose (Part 1)". Lily, like Sam, was fed demon blood at a young age and is one of the contenders to be the leader of Hell's army. Lily is brutally killed in that same episode and is never developed beyond mentioning that she has a girlfriend. Next comes Alan Corbett, an openly gay intern for the ghost-hunting reality show "Ghostfacers" (S3E13). Corbett is relegated to a low-status position as the intern, made to make coffee runs and lug around heavy equipment at the behest of his colleagues. The fact that he has a crush on one of the hosts, Ed, is initially played for laughs to make the heterosexual Ed uncomfortable. Like Lily,

[2] Interestingly, actual fans of the show tend to consider the "incest taboo as just one more social norm that is ultimately irrelevant to the Winchesters' lives" when writing their slash fiction (Tosenberger [5.9]). The truly transgressive act, according to Tosenberger, is allowing Sam and Dean to find happiness, rather than the unjust punishments they receive in their own story world.

Corbett is also brutally murdered within the same episode. However, Corbett is given some agency through death when the heterosexual man that he loves must "go be gay for that poor dead intern." By achieving an intimate emotional connection with Ed, albeit a false one, Corbett is able to harness his supernatural abilities as a ghost and destroy the murderous spirit that the Ghostfacers and the Winchesters are hunting. The characters of both Lily and Corbett fall victim to the "Bury Your Gays" trope, a phrase used in discussion of popular media to describe the disproportionate frequency with which queer or queer-coded characters are killed within their narratives. This trope can be particularly harmful when the *only* queer character is killed from within a cast of straight characters because any positive representation of that character (and, by extension, queerness) is removed (*TV Tropes)*. Both Lily and Corbett appear as the singular queer character within their respective episodes, each complete with an ensemble of heterosexual characters with which they share the screen. Being a horror show, *SPN* runs into a unique tension surrounding the representation of death and queer characters. Anxieties about death are commonly explored through horror stories, and one way this is executed is through the literal death of characters within the narrative. Due to generic conventions, characters in a horror story are more likely to die than characters in other genres. Therefore, if the creators of *SPN* want to have queer representation on the show, those characters are subject to the tenets of horror just as other characters are. However, when only four human characters are textually members of the LGBTQ+ community over the course of one hundred four episodes of television, and two of them are killed within the same episode that they are introduced, the representation becomes caught up in negative tropes.

As previously mentioned, the queer human characters in *SPN* are denied representation of a mundane, everyday existence. By situating these characters strictly

away from what is “normal”, the association becomes that queerness is “not normal” or Other. To refer back to Elliot-Smith, the fact that queer characters are represented at all makes them “the preferred Other, but an Other nonetheless” (111). Queer characters are allowed within the narrative, but the narrative makes it abundantly clear that these characters exist only as a special exception to heterosexual normativity. The stands true for Lily and Corbett, and even for the gay couple Demian and Barnes. Although they work regular jobs and maintain an existence outside the supernatural, they are only introduced to the show by being caught up in a ghost hunt. Demian and Barnes are introduced in season 5, episode 9 “The Real Ghostbusters”, in which Sam and Dean are tricked into attending a fan convention for the novel series based on their lives. Demian and Barnes are attending the same convention in cosplay, dressed up as Dean and Sam. They participate in a LARP (Live Action Role Play) that gets them wrapped up in a real ghost hunt alongside the Winchester brothers. Demian and Barnes perform the roles of Dean and Sam to parodic perfection, which is used as a main source of humour throughout the episode. Despite being eventually essential to the success of the hunt, the two cosplayers are painted as hapless bumblers, far out of their depth. They get into trouble by putting on airs of machismo, which leads them to be rash. On the one hand, this is an unconventional portrayal of gay men, straying away from the stereotypical lisping effeminate. On the other hand, when so few characters are confirmed to be queer within the fictional world of the series, the characters that do exist run the risk of being interpreted as representing the queer community at large. Moreover, Demian and Barnes are *pretending* to be heroes. Their masculine behaviour is confirmed to be an element of the cosplay, when they reveal that they are a romantic couple and resume more effeminate affectations. However, the reveal of their relationship also forces Dean to confront his own discomfort with homosexuality.

He (and the audience) spend the entire episode not knowing that Demian and Barnes are homosexual and therefore does not treat them any differently due to their sexuality. Upon the reveal that they are partners, Dean awkwardly pauses before saying “Oh. Well...howdy, partners.” At this point in the episode Dean respects Demian and Barnes for their masculine heroics and must re-evaluate his assumptions about what it means to be a man. Here the notion of queered masculinity can be seen highlighting the fragility of traditional masculinity, just as Elliot-Smith says (113). Therefore, Demian and Barnes serve as a more complicated representation of queer characters than the underdeveloped Lily or the victim Corbett. While the series moves away from the earlier simplistic representation of homosexuality, it still falls short overall due to the very limited number of queer characters.

Beyond queer human characters, *SPN* also has a handful of queer monster characters. In fact, the only two same-sex kisses shown on screen during the first five seasons are perpetrated by monsters against unwilling human recipients. This supports the association of queer sexuality with sexual assault, which is a problematic viewpoint often portrayed in popular media. One of the same-sex onscreen kisses occurs when the demon Crowley seals a deal with a wealthy human businessman named Pendleton. The two meet beneath an intersection for the transaction, where Pendleton says that he had heretofore been discussing the deal with a “very young, attractive lady” (S5E10, “Abandon All Hope...”). Crowley reveals that, due to the importance of the deal at hand, he has come to seal it personally. Pendleton reminds Crowley that the deal will be sealed with a kiss, which Crowley glibly confirms. “Your choice,” he says. “You can cling to six decades of deep-seated homophobia...or give it up and get a complete bailout of your bank’s ridiculous incompetence”. Pendleton initially refuses, but eventually agrees to the kiss. However, a moment before their lips touch, he says “No” and the kiss goes ahead regardless. The kiss is

then drawn out as Pendleton grunts in protest (see fig. 3.1). However brief, that "no" from Pendleton means that the kiss is non-consensual. As with any sexual interaction, Pendleton should be able to revoke his consent at any time and because Crowley ignores that, the transactional kiss turns into a sexual assault[3]. In the introduction to their collection *Theorizing Violence,* editors Renee J. Heberle and Victoria Grace claim that "The problem of sexual violence in itself is not self-evident in its essence; it does not have an essence once we begin to look closely at the attendant issues through multiple lenses; there is no singular form that sexual violence can be reduced to even as we seek to make it visible as an unjust and damaging action" (2). Indeed, sexual violence can take many forms, and this is part of the reason why theorizing about the topic is so difficult. The kiss can be categorized as sexual assault through Pendleton's explicit non-consent. This scene demonstrates a different kind of sexual assault than what one may be accustomed to seeing on prime time television, particularly in a dramatic setting. Most often, sexual assault is used in plots in which the victim is female, the aggressor is male, and the assault in question is

[3] In researching this paper, most of the discourse surrounding sexual assault focussed on sexual assasult against women. Sources include *Theorizing Violence,* edited by Renee J. Heberle and Victoria Grace, *Rape on Prime Time: Television, Masculinity and Sexual Violence* by Lisa M. Cuklanz and *Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault in Popular Culture* by Laura L. Finley. Sexual violence targeting women is far more common and more discussed than sexual violence targeting men.

Fig. 3.1 - Crowley and Pendleton kiss

often more violent than an unwanted kiss. Television episodes dealing with sexual assault are usually used to highlight and contrast hegemonic masculinity through both the perpetrator and whichever male protagonist is pitted against him, marginalizing the story of the victim in the process (Cuklanz 62). However, “Abandon All Hope…” does not do this because the protagonists have no idea that a sexual assault has taken place. Instead, the scene’s only subjects of masculinity are the perpetrator, Crowley, and the victim, Pendleton. While Pendleton does not appear again in the series, Crowley is a recurring character who undergoes development and this scene is his introduction. The first thing the audience sees Crowley do is sexually assault a man in order to make a deal for his soul. One must note that this particular action does not appear to have any consequences for Crowley. This is not a plot point that gets revisited later, nor is it part of Crowley’s character that ever gets addressed. All it does is tell the audience that Crowley uses power and manipulation to get what he wants. His actions are monstrous. However, he is not painted as the “sick, perverted and even psychopathic individuals” that normally commit sexual assault on

screen (Cuklanz 69). Instead, Crowley is a shrewd businessman, with a high-class British accent and such high status that he has no qualms about insulting Pendleton to his face. Similarly, Crowley is dressed in an impeccable suit, with a clean-shaven face and no-nonsense haircut (see fig. 3.2). He emulates a specifically upper-class mode of masculinity that is not usually associated with a stereotypical sexual aggressor. He is also not a particularly large or muscular man, nor does he seem the type to jump into a fist fight (unlike the Winchesters). His danger is far more insidious, precisely because he does not evoke the stereotype. When Cuklanz describes stereotypical sexual aggressors, specifically rapists, she says they "are depicted as marginal beings far removed from the masculine ideal demonstrated by the protagonist" (69). In any other prime time show this might not be true of Crowley. However, *SPN i*s very much situated in the viewpoint of the working class; Sam and Dean run their own "family business" (monster hunting) and do so by exemplifying work ethic and dependability. The Winchesters live in a true meritocracy because to be bad at their job means to be killed. Their business is predicated on helping the community rather than making money or personal gain, which places them outside the capitalist system. The *mise-en-scène* of the series situates the action in lived-in rural settings, cheap motels and industrial parks. The brothers are dressed in work garb comprised of leathers, flannel and denim. Therefore, by portraying Crowley as an upper-class businessman, he is indeed being portrayed as a figure marginalized from the masculine ideal of the protagonists. His upper-class masculinity is not to be strived for, but to be rejected.

Fig. 3.2 - A well-dressed Crowley

This form of upper-class masculinity can also be found in the victim, Pendleton. Pendleton is not intended to be a likeable character. He is a banker during the housing market crash of 2008 (the episode first aired on November 19, 2009 but would have been written and shot during the previous year), a position which would welcome derision from the general public. (The concept of a demonic influence behind the bailouts of the time is its own form of commentary on the crisis itself.) Referring to the working-class ethos of the show, a character like Pendleton is juxtaposed against the protagonists as an ineffectual rich man, who seeks an easy fix for his own failures by making a deal with a demon. When Crowley references “your bank’s ridiculous incompetence”, he is likely serving as the voice of the creators commenting on the 2008 financial crisis and the type of people responsible for it. It follows, then, that Pendleton’s homophobia can also be considered an unappealing character trait since the audience is not supposed to like him. However, the kiss from Crowley then becomes a form of punishment for Pendleton’s misdoings. Sexual assault as punishment has a long history in popular media. Cultural theorist Jonathan McIntosh uses

the terms “reciprocal punishment or karmic justice” in his video essay about the trope of sexual assault of men and its use in comedy. These terms refer specifically to instances of villainous or unlikeable male characters being sexually abused as a form of punishment. According to McIntosh, jokes about the sexual abuse of men are “designed to demean, humiliate or emasculate a male character for being the victim or potential victim of sexual violence”. When a man is the recipient of sexual abuse at the hands of another man, the power dynamic forces the victim into a vulnerable position. That vulnerability transforms the male character into performing the role of a woman, which, McIntosh says, under the patriarchy is considered the most humiliating thing that can happen to a straight man. In the same way, this new submissive role insinuates queerness onto the victim due to the identity of the perpetrator, the vulnerable position the victim is forced into, as well as the associated femininity within that role. Being perceived as gay is another role that is meant to humiliate these characters for similar reasons that being treated as a woman is meant to. These jokes are thus informed by both misogyny and homophobia. Although the kiss between Crowley and Pendleton is not a comedic moment, the depiction of sexual assault of men by male perpetrators in media shares cultural markers regardless of genre. For instance, McIntosh claims “when media frames the sexual assault of men, even bad men, as ‘getting what they deserve’, it perpetuates a culture of rape acceptance”. Even though Crowley does not do more than kiss Pendleton, the punitive nature of a non-consensual sexual act still contributes to the narrative surrounding rape culture. Reciprocal punishment can contribute to victim-blaming, because it serves the narrative that sexual assault only happens to those that deserve it. It also contributes to the pervasive narrative that queer sexuality is associated with sexual assault rather than loving, consenting relationships. Furthermore,

this transactional, punitive kiss is being performed by a demon. Queerness thus continues its exclusive association with the supernatural, in this case with the demonic.

Crowley continues to be queer-coded throughout the series, from his concern with his looks to his taste for fine things to his fabrication of an illicit love affair with another male demon (S5E20, "The Devil You Know"). Being a demon, Crowley occupies a significant symbolic space in which he is both queer and a monster. As Benshoff puts it, "for many people in our shared English-language culture, homosexuality is a monstrous condition" (1). There is no question that Crowley is a monster. After his introduction in which he commits sexual assault, he is later in the same episode shown relaxing in his home while watching *Triumph of the Will* (S5E10, "Abandon All Hope…"). He slaughters innocents because "We're on a tight schedule" and convinces Bobby to sell him his soul in exchange for the location of the Horseman of the Apocalypse, Death (S5E20 "The Devil You Know"). Queer sexuality has long been associated with monstrosity and fear. Benshoff explains at the beginning of his book *Monsters in the closet: Homosexuality and the horror film:*

> A 1984 study of antihomosexual attitudes, the investigators broke heterosexuals' fears of gay and lesbian sexuality into three topic areas: (1) homosexuality as a threat to the individual—that someone you know (or you yourself) might be homosexual; (2) homosexuality as a threat to others—homosexuals have been frequently linked in the media to child molestation, rape, and violence; and (3) homosexuality as a threat to the community and other components of culture—homosexuals supposedly represent the destruction of the procreative nuclear family, traditional gender roles, and (to use a buzz phrase) 'family values' (1)

Looking at these three categories, Crowley resonates most closely with (2) homosexuality as a threat to others. He exercises power over others, whether through supernatural means or

simply difference in status. He has no qualms about murder and sexual assault, as previously discussed. However, Crowley proves to not be a threat to the protagonists of the series. In fact, Crowley goes out of his way to help the Winchesters and their friends in order to accomplish their shared goal. Even after Sam repeatedly tries to kill him, Crowley still chooses to talk to the brothers instead of fighting them. He restrains his monstrous nature around them, though he does not restrain his queer nature. Although he is a monster, Crowley is not a villain. This disrupts the established status quo within the plot of *SPN* thus far. Up until this point, demons have all proven themselves to be villainous with no exceptions. Even the former ally Ruby turns out to have been a traitor all along. Crowley is the first demon the Winchesters come across who behaves as a true ally. This aligns with Benshoff's theory that "queerness disrupts narrative equilibrium and sets in motion a questioning of the status quo" (5). Crowley is queer both in the sexual sense, and in the disruptive sense. He inserts himself into the narrative of the Winchesters and disrupts the image they have constructed for themselves of what a demon is. Crowley purportedly is helping the brothers only for his own survival but reveals himself to be more altruistic than that. When he convinces Bobby to sell his soul to him, he takes the liberty of not only accomplishing the goal of finding Death, but uses his power to also restore the use of Bobby's legs. For the entirety of season 5, Bobby has been bound to a wheelchair. Most of Bobby's season arc is spent coming to terms with his new mode of being and struggling greatly to accept what losing the use of his legs means for his usefulness as a Hunter. Crowley has no obligation to Bobby, but chooses to use his power to help him anyway. This is a contrast to the episode in which Bobby loses the use of his legs and the angel Zachariah uses Bobby's well-being as a bargaining chip to get Dean to agree to his plan (S5E1, "Sympathy for the Devil"). Where an angel allows Bobby to become paralyzed, a demon

chooses to heal him. This complex representation of a nuanced antihero is a far cry from the lesbian psychic who immediately gets killed back in season 2. Crowley shows that *SPN* becomes more progressive in queer representation over the course of the early seasons, with a clear pattern of increasing complexity and longevity of queer characters. While this does not erase the problematic elements from the earlier portrayals of queer characters, it shows the evolution of the show over the course of the five seasons.

Deviant Sexuality and Vampirism

The monster queer can also find representation in the series through vampires. Vampires are perhaps the most human of the monsters portrayed in *SPN*. Anatomically, they are distinguished by cat-like reflective eyes and a second set of teeth that descends when they feed. Unlike demons, who delight in doing evil, vampires are portrayed as hunting out of survival rather than malicious sadism. Otherwise, they look and behave like human beings. The significance of this lies in the fact that their representation engages with sameness and difference surrounding humanity. Vampires are *almost* human, but not quite. In the introduction to her co-edited volume *Gender in the Vampire Narrative,* Amanda Hobson speaks to the metaphorical role that vampires traditionally play:

> Every manifestation of the vampire explores underlying messages about what it means to be (in)human and how one navigates the world around them. The vampire, though, is a socio-cultural lens through which we can examine issues of justice and identity and one whom we recognize quite clearly as the most familiar monster because they share our faces, yet they operate as disconcerting mirrors of humanity (1)

This mirroring and the associated sameness and difference allows vampires to be interpreted as an example of Freud's uncanny, as well as Otherness in comparison to human beings. For Freud, the uncanny or *Unheimlich* stems from a close relationship with the familiar or *Heimlich* (connected to *Heim* or the home). In order for something to be uncanny, there must be an element of familiarity to it - something that is *almost* familiar, but has been made unfamiliar through slight differences. Just as Hobson says, vampires "share our faces", so they have that element of familiarity (1). It is through their monstrous behaviour and difference from humans that vampires are transformed into uncanny creatures. Freud describes the uncanny as "everything that ought to remain hidden and secret, but has been brought to the surface" (302, my translation). Therefore, by definition, the vampires represent qualities that society would rather stay hidden. While this includes violence, it also includes the formation of relationships, the attempt to enjoy being alive in a carnal way (drinking, dancing, having sex) and the desire to propagate their species. All these qualities could easily be found in human beings, but because they are represented by the uncanny Other or the "disconcerting mirror", they are transformed into monstrous qualities. Of the *SPN* monsters, vampires are the closest to being human and arguably the most sympathetically portrayed. Season 2, episode 3, "Bloodlust" even goes so far as to feature a group of "vegetarian" vampires that only drain the blood of animals. These vampires are portrayed as innocents and ultimately Sam and Dean work towards protecting from fellow Hunter, Gordon Walker (Sterling K. Brown).

Vampires have a history of being represented as embodiments of sexuality. This can be traced back to Gothic fiction of the 19th century, with such vampire stories as "The Vampyre" by John William Polidori (1819) and of course Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula.* Both eponymous vampires in these stories rely on seduction in order to secure their victims,

rather than through magical or hypnotic means. Juxtaposed with chaste, conservative human beings, these characters come to represent carnal desire by virtue of their very existence. Halberstam identifies that "[p]arasitism, especially with regards to the vampire, represents a bad or pathological sexuality, non-reproductive sexuality, a sexuality that exhausts and wastes and exists prior to and outside of the marriage contract" (16-17). This form of sexuality includes both queer and heterosexual but deviant sexualities, as explored by vampires. This tradition continues into *SPN.* When the vampire Kate turns a young woman in season 1, episode 20, "Dead Man's Blood", she does so by slicing her own wrist, sucking up her own vampiric blood into her mouth and then kissing the other woman forcefully. Sexual assault is less about actual sexuality than it is about power, but the scene comes immediately on the heels of Kate being sexually stimulated by her mate Luther. The act of turning the woman occurs in place of sex, and both women are framed with choke shots during the scene. The camera itself is intruding on this sexually violent space (see fig. 3.3). The figure of the lesbian vampire has a long-standing tradition of representing dangerous sexuality, specifically as a threat to the patriarchy. According to Bonnie Zimmerman, "[l]esbianism—love between women—must be vampirism; elements of violence, compulsion, hypnosis, paralysis, and the supernatural must be present. One woman must be a vampire, draining the life of the other woman, yet holding her in a bond stronger than the grave" (432). Indeed, Kate's act of sexual violence towards this young woman is framed as something dangerous and wrong. The young woman is whimpering throughout the scene, and the underscoring music builds dissonance as the kiss takes place. Kate at once becomes the woman's mother (by giving her new life as a vampire) and her lover through the act. Thus, the implied queer relationship of a woman kissing a woman is immediately associated with incest by virtue of the kiss also being a transmission of

vampirism. Here queer relationships can be seen in association with two taboos: sexual violence and incest. According to Sergio Fernando Juárez, "[q]ueer sexuality is continuously linked to child molestation, rape, and violence", which can unfortunately be seen illustrated in this scene (237). The fact that this scene is the first instance of a same-sex kiss portrayed on the show contributes to the problematic construction of queerness that the early seasons of *SPN* undertakes. Specifically portraying Kate as bisexual also contributes to the narrative of sexual violence, as well as hypersexualization. Certain biphobic ideas paint bisexual people as having uncontrollable

Fig. 3.3 - Kate (right) turns a young woman into a vampire

sex drives, and thus are driven to acts of violence including rape and sexual assault. In her study surrounding stigma in the LGBTQ community, Meredith G. F. Worthen theorizes "the very fact that bisexual women can have sexual interests in both women and men may also oversexualize them as 'up for anything' or even 'sexually insatiable' because of the perception that they cannot be satisfied by a monogamous relationship with a single man or a woman" (227). Kate occupies a space of sexual insatiability, leaving her male partner mid-

stimulation to kiss and turn a female victim. Her portrayal contributes to the oversexualization of bisexual women. According to Benshoff, the recurring use of homosexual or bisexual vampires in film has "done much to cement into place the current social construction of homosexuals as unnatural, predatory, plague-carrying killers" (14). This is exactly what occurs with the portrayal of Kate, who behaves in a predatory manner and deliberately passes her vampirism on to someone else. Although queer human characters are later introduced, Kate is the first queer character to appear in the series and remains the only one until Lily makes an appearance at the end of season 2. To have this uncanny Other also be the sole queer representation for almost an entire season contributes to the construction of queerness as monstrous. The association of queer sexuality with vampirism also constructs queerness as an infection. This sort of comparison abounded in anti-LGTBQ rhetoric during the AIDS crisis in the USA, where "gay men [were] contagions - vampires - who, with a single mingling of blood, can infect a pure and innocent victim, transforming him or her into the living dead" (Benshoff 2). There is also the perception that by interacting with the queer community, a person automatically becomes one of them. Historically, homosexuality has literally been viewed as a disease. "Homosexuality" was only removed as a mental disorder from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1973 by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (Drescher 1). By constructing queer sexuality as infection, one contributes to the pathologization of queerness and further Others those in the LBGTQ community.

Conclusion

SPN engages in complex portrayals of sexuality, which increase in complexity as the series progresses. The show becomes more comfortable with queerness and non-heteronormative

sexuality as it continues, which is demonstrated by such characters as Demian, Barnes and Crowley. Looking at the corpus of the five seasons overall, however, the representation of sexuality paints a mostly heteronormative picture. Sam and Dean both have various sexual relationships with women (including angels and/or demons), and many side characters engage in heterosexual relations, even if they only appear for one episode. One need only think of the couples from “My Bloody Valentine” (S5E14) or “Malleus Maleficarum” (S3E9) to find examples of explicit heterosexuality in minor characters, and countless episodes follow suit. The audience sees many husbands and wives or boyfriends and girlfriends throughout the series, from single scene appearances to entire episodes dedicated to their stories. Compare this to the four identifiable queer human characters and two monster queers that I have outlined in this chapter, and the disparity of representation becomes quite clear. The lack of representation delegates queer characters into an Othered category, even if, as Elliot-Smith says, they are “the preferred Other” (111). Despite engaging with these issues of non-heteronormative sexuality, the series still privileges a conservative point of view because of this Othering.

CONCLUSION

I came first to *Supernatural* not as an academic, but as a fan. I was drawn to the series late in its production, coinciding with its upload to Netflix. I avidly consumed the show with phone in hand, tweeting out my impressions as I watched. As I re-read those tweets, I came to the realization that I had more to say about the series than could be summarized in 140 characters. The main themes that I reacted to were the ways in which gender and sexuality were approached by the series, and I reacted emotionally. I knew from the episode "The Real Ghostbusters" (S5E9) that, based on the fanbase portrayed in that episode, the creators of the show perceived their audience to largely comprised of young men, with a handful of young women who were attracted to the protagonists or were depicted as having "Wincest" fantasies about them. However, in my experience, everyone that I know who is a fan of the show is a woman, usually queer, and engages with the show beyond a simple attraction to the actors. Most of the scholarly work related to *SPN* focuses on the specific relationship between the *SPN* fandom and the show. The question that I sought to answer, then, was how does the show portray the people that make up its fanbase? How are women and queer people represented? Besides a handful of scattered essays and three edited volumes, there is not much academic scholarship surrounding gender, sexuality and *SPN,* and the topic of monstrosity seems to be virtually non-existent. Due to the way that women and queer characters are Othered in the series, in order to conduct an analysis of those characters and their portrayal, one must also analyse how that portrayal interacts with monstrosity.

This thesis has engaged with a variety of themes surrounding gender and sexuality as they relate to monstrosity and non-normativity in *SPN.* The series attempts to explore and depict non-normative gender in a positive way, which can be seen in the spaces of gender

ambivalence that certain characters occupy. Both Sam and Dean are examples of this ambivalence as expressed through male characters. Sam is not only more feminine when compared to his brother, he is also subjected to feminizing processes throughout the construction of his character, such as infantilization and being placed in horror movie tropes typically reserved for women. Dean is meant to be a masculine contrast to Sam, yet finds himself in a different kind of ambivalent gender role. Rather than remaining a strict representation of traditional masculinity, Dean also takes on roles related to domesticity and caregiving, which are roles stereotypically fulfilled by women. Both men are allowed to exist in this space of non-normative gender, likely as a result of being the series' protagonists and getting the benefit of the most screen time to explore their respective characters. In addition to their gender being ambivalent, the series uses humour and jokes to explore possible ambivalence surrounding Sam and Dean's sexuality, especially in relation to each other. The result of these jokes is an acknowledgement of the homosexual overtones that exist in the brothers' relationship, while at the same time using homosexuality as a discomfiting punchline that is equivocated with incest. While this problematizes the series' relationship with the representation of queerness, the depiction of queer characters grows more complex as the series progresses. Beginning with such one-dimensional characters as Kate, Lily and Corbett, by the time the show reaches season 5, the audience gets to meet the nuanced couple Demian and Barnes and the complicated Crowley.

While these explorations are indicative of an attempt at displaying progressive values, the first five seasons of the series at large are more firmly undergirded by a conservative worldview. One can find indications of this worldview especially in the depiction of women in the series. Comparing the example of Jo to Sam and Dean, the signs

of this conservatism can be seen. While Jo can also occupy a space of gender ambivalence, she is a side character whose sole purpose is to appear for a short time to help the male protagonists before dying spectacularly. Where Sam and Dean are given narrative time to explore their non-normative roles and come out the other side as heroes, Jo is ultimately punished for her transgression of gender boundaries. This is the way that *SPN* treats its female protagonists, and the treatment of female villains is even more oppressive. Whether they are werewolves, witches, demons or victim-monsters, woman monsters are represented through a patriarchal lens. These women are both objectified and vilified for their sexuality and other stereotypically "feminine" traits such as deceit and manipulation. The use of woman as werewolf takes a traditionally masculine story and turns it on its head in order to victimize a powerful woman and make her power monstrous. The representation of woman as witch draws on a history of using the myth of the witch to oppress women, depicting them as evil, satanic and unequivocally feminine. This representation is only reinforced when contrasted with the sympathetic way that male witches are portrayed. *SPN*'s employment of woman as demon serves to pervert traditional roles of womanhood such as innocence and motherhood, as well as representing sexually powerful women as desirable, yet ultimately too threatening to male authority. Lastly, the depiction of woman as victim-monster cements the role of women as victims, not at the hands of men, but at the behest of their own monstrosity. If women hold power, not only will it make them monstrous, but it will consume their very humanity until they must be destroyed.

In the story world of *SPN*, monsters must die while human beings must live. One way this value is explored in the series is through the example of vampires. *SPN* carries on the literary tradition of portraying vampires as sexual threats to the normative status quo. Vampires, in their uncanny resemblance to humans, represent a sexual Other that must be

destroyed. Although some are sympathetically portrayed in “Bloodlust” (S2E3), even these “vegetarian” vampires must conform to the rules of human behaviour in order to warrant mercy at the hands of Hunters, unable to live in the carnal way that allows their species to thrive. Otherwise, even vampires that are themselves victims are given a speedy beheading. The idea that all monsters must die makes for a stark, binary system of morals that governs the protagonists’ behaviour, and that system fits neatly into a conservative, patriarchal point of view. Although they do not wield economic power, Sam, Dean and other Hunters hold masculine, heteronormative power and are able to succeed through their grit, determination and work ethic. Ultimately the fate of the world is decided by two white, heterosexual men that hold individual power greater than any governmental or collective power, and who choose to exercise that power through violence. Any Other that threatens that power is brutally excised at the hands of the Winchesters.

This paper provides an in-depth examination of gender, sexuality and monstrosity as they interact in *SPN.* This fills in the gap created between less rigorously academic online discussions surrounding gender and the few edited volumes that contain surveys of a variety of topics. While *TV Goes to Hell* includes a section specifically on gender within the series, the other two volumes spread their topics out to other areas, including social class, philosophy, good and evil, music and storytelling. No one volume has ignored gender and sexuality altogether, but none of the existing academic scholarship explores these topics in depth and none have included the dimension of monstrosity in their analysis. Considering the vast popularity of the series and how long-running it is, to ignore *SPN* would be to ignore a massive piece of Western popular culture. As Darryl Jones et al. claims, “popular cultural documents provide unique insights into the concerns, anxieties and desire of their times”, and *SPN* is no different (3). Within *SPN* one can trace concerns and anxieties surrounding

otherness, especially regarding women and queer people, and a desire for individualist masculine power.

The next step in this project is to move beyond the first five seasons of the show. I chose to keep my corpus limited to the first five seasons in the interest of keeping the scope of my project manageable and focused. However, one could gain insight into changing cultural perceptions surrounding gender by looking at how the theme is treated in season 1 and comparing that to season 15, for example. The text spans fifteen years, which provides a unique opportunity to see and analyse how attitudes surrounding these themes have evolved over time within the worldview represented by the series, and how that worldview itself has changed. Although the people involved with creating the series change over time, there must be an effort to remain consistent with both the story and with acceptable values as the series progresses. For example, the lesbian Charlie Bradbury (Felicia Day) is introduced into the main cast in season 7, and Mary Winchester (Samantha Smith) returns from the dead in season 12 to take up Hunting once more alongside her family. These are just two examples of the series introducing more prominent women and queer characters, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of gender and sexuality. In addition to expanding the corpus to include the entire show, which was until recently impossible due to the show not being complete, there are also possibilities for comparison between *SPN* and other series contemporary to it that cover similar themes. As previously mentioned, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* provides an interesting point of comparison between how gender is explored through the fighting of metaphorical monsters, and how that metaphor is affected by having female versus male protagonists. Another possible comparison would be the television show *Wynonna Earp* (2016-2021), in which a pair of sisters must protect their small prairie hometown from demons. Much in the same way that *SPN* is indebted to *Buffy*,

Wynonna Earp is indebted to *SPN*, and deals with similar themes of family and monstrosity. Lastly, this project focused exclusively on gender and sexuality without acknowledging the intersectionality between these topics and race. Again, this decision was made to keep the scope of the project narrow, but race is an important theme to be discussed in conjunction with gender and sexuality. *SPN* has a complex relationship with race just as it has with gender and sexuality, especially regarding monstrosity and the appropriation of folklore from non-Western cultures. This relationship is demonstrated not only through casting, but through the storylines that the writers of the show choose to follow. These are just some examples of ways to progress the work started in this project and expand on the themes explored therein.

Overall, *SPN* makes a concentrated effort at complex representation of a variety of genders and sexualities, but ultimately falls back on a conservative viewpoint. The show excels at exploring nuances in representation of masculinity but struggles with the exploration of femininity and queerness. The content of the series lends itself to engagement with otherness, which interacts with gender and sexuality, and which results in the othering of women and queer characters through the use of both literal and figurative monstrosity. To paraphrase Elliot-Smith, women and queer characters are preferred Others, but Others nonetheless (111). Because these Others are constructed in opposition to the "norm", that norm is constructed as white, heterosexual and male. The result is a patriarchal status quo that shapes the content of the series and acts as a lens through which that content is filtered. As a pop culture artefact, *SPN* follows in the footsteps of other mainstream horror narratives that, although they temporarily examine otherness, ultimately punish it.

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