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Female Roles and Fan Fiction in *Charmed*, *Supernatural*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

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The objective of this paper is to investigate the portrayal of female characters in *Charmed*, *Supernatural*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the relation it has to which sexes were represented in romantic relationships within fan fiction for the three shows. This investigation was conducted through content analysis of the scripts and fan fiction to determine number of female roles and their depth in the scripts, and the number of romantic relationships and the sexes involved in the relationships in the fan fiction texts.

My personal interest in this topic stems from my own participation in online fan communities and fan fiction hubs. I have read a great number of fan fiction works through the years, and I have also been involved in the creation of fan fiction, as an author and as an editor for others. One of the questions my friends not involved in the community always ask is why women read and write fan fiction centered on romantic relationships between two men. My response has been to point out that frequently it exists in fan communities from source texts without a great number of female characters, or whose female roles are underdeveloped. This research is an effort to see if my previous supposition has had any basis in reality.

Fan fiction has been the subject of investigation into the fans' practices and motives given its non-profit nature and basis in other texts (McCardle, 2003; Tushnet, 1997; Jenkins, 1992). In particular, many texts focus on slash fan fiction in an effort to understand the motives of the authors who write it (Jenkins, 1992; Kustritz, 2007; Russ, 1985; Woledge, 2005). This study aims to illuminate tendencies of the sexes of characters portrayed in romantic relationships in fan fiction to vary alongside the number and depth of female characters portrayed in the source medium. Through comparing *Charmed*, *Supernatural*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* this investigation will offer a project that fills a gap in prior research. Though some studies assert that authors write slash fan fiction because of a lack of strong female characters in the source material

(Lamb & Veith, 1986), they do not dig deeper to see if this claim is in any way borne out by differences in different fan domains.

Review of Literature

The concept of fan fiction and fan fiction studies began well before its current Internet incarnation. According to McCardle (2003), the first conception of modern fan fiction began with *Star Trek* "fanzines," or "fan-based magazines that included original works of fiction based around the characters on the show" (p. 440). This was in 1967, with the fanzine "Spockanalia." McCardle (2003) maintains that while the first *modern* fan fiction began in 1967, throughout human history the concept of stories expounding on the stories that came before has never been in question, and cites the Elizabethan era as a time when it was very common. A simple but encompassing definition of the concept of fan fiction provided by Tushnet (1997) holds that fan fiction is "any kind of written creativity that is based on an identifiable segment of popular culture, such as a television show, and is not produced as 'professional' writing" (p. 655).

Until the advent of wide-spread Internet usage, fan fiction spread primarily through fanzines. Therefore, much of the early research focuses on fanzines (McCardle, 2003). Specifically, most focus on *Star Trek* fanzines (Jenkins, 1992). In the era of fanzines, media fans – the authors of fan fiction – did not write with the goal of making a profit (Bacon-Smith, 1991). In fact, according to Jenkins (1992), this practice would be viewed as distasteful, as it interfered with the reciprocal and community-building nature of the fan community. At the time, fan fiction "visibility was limited to those willing to search out the individual publications" (McCardle, 2003, p .441). With the advent of the Internet, the popularity of fan fiction has skyrocketed and started to enter the mainstream (McCardle, 2003), while at the same time the operation style of the Internet itself serves to reinforce the non-profit nature of the works.

Fan Fiction Strategies

Jenkins (1992) conceptualized fan fiction as a reworking or rewriting of the source text, providing a list of ten dominant strategies of this change (p. 162). The first five of these strategies include (a) recontextualization, wherein fan authors provide new contexts for previously perplexing or unsatisfying portions of the source text; (b) expanding the series timeline, which either inserts stories before or after the events of the source text; (c) refocalization, which shifts the focus of the story from main characters to secondary characters; (d) moral realignment, which might tell a story from the villain's point of view; (d) and genre shifting, which might shift the focus from action to character interactions, or still more powerfully, from action to romance (Jenkins, 1992). Additional approaches include (f) cross overs, wherein the lines between one text and another are blurred to the point where characters from *Star Trek* might interact with those from *Doctor Who*; (g) character dislocation (known in fandom as Alternate Universes or AU), which might take characters from their source text and place them in historical or mythic settings instead; (h) personalization, which may include representations of the authors, or may involve bringing characters from the source text into contact with fans of said text; (i) emotional intensification, which brings more focus to the emotions felt by the characters than the surrounding plot, or may place characters in more profoundly emotional moments than are seen in the source text; (j) and finally, eroticization, which may transform relatively chaste source texts into fully described sexual relationships between characters that may or may not have had any sort of sexual relations in the source text (Jenkins, 1992).

Bacon-Smith (1991) acknowledges several of these concepts, such as cross overs, alternate universes, and extension of the series timeline (p. 58), but instead focuses on the

function of the creation within the community's social relationship. She posits that the literary

creations function on three levels: (a) how the group relates to outsiders, guided by the formal

categories into which the works fall; (b) how each member relates to the community as a part of

the group, guided by the organization of stories into their own universes or series and more

thematic categories; (c) and finally how the individual relates to the other individuals of the

group, guided by the fan text itself.

Gender in Fan Fiction

The study of how gender affects fan fiction creation and consumption tends to focus on

"slash" fan fiction, studies which shall be expounded upon later. In the most basic terms, gender

is linked to fan fiction in that it is perceived to be mostly women who write from a media text

without attempting to turn that writing professional (Bacon-Smith, 1991). Bacon-Smith (1991)

applies the metaphor of quilt-making Elaine Showalter (1986) used for women authors writing

commercially to fanzines. This metaphor holds that the authors in a fanzine, like the creators of a

quilt, do not consider it an art. The production is shared among members, and while knowledge

of who is responsible for what part is retained within the community it tends to disappear when

the work enters the consumer public (p. 57). Jenkins (1992) adds that within the community

"women who have low prestige jobs or who are homemakers can gain national and even

international recognition as fan writers and artists; fan publishing constitutes an alternative

source of status" (p. 159).

One of the favorite topics for researchers is not just what the gender implications of slash

fiction are, but women's motives for writing such fiction. Lamb and Veith suggest that "given

the historical and current limitations imposed on women, it stretches even the level of credibility

required of science fiction to imagine believable female characters who, like Spock and Kirk,

"Can save the universe once a week"" (Lamb & Veith, 1986, p. 252). They suggest that this lack

of relatable and powerful equal female characters and the ability of women to identify with

fictional male heroes make the relationship between two male characters like Kirk and Spock

closer to the perceived ideal than a relationship involving women could be (Lamb & Veith,

1986). Jenkins (1992) refuses this notion, and points to popular narratives like *The Avengers*

which demonstrate "strong female characterizations and represent men and women working side

by side for a common cause" (p. 196).

Studying gender is important to the study of fan fiction not merely because of the

demographic, but in some of the functions that fan fiction serves. Jenkins (1992) maintains that

through the concept of refocalization in particular, fans are offered the chance to "reclaim female

experiences from the margins of male-centered texts, offering readers the kinds of heroic women

still rarely available elsewhere in popular culture" (p. 167). On the other hand, Busse (2009)

denies the assumption that because fan fiction offers the opportunity to flip the subject-object

relationship involved in the representations of and by men that automatically creates an

interrogation of these roles. She postulates that even though the typical roles of male-subject,

female-object have been switched through the interplay of female writers editing male characters

to fit their own desires, the construct itself remains unquestioned (Busse, 2009). This subject-

object reversal in regards to gender would seem particularly pointed in the subcategory of fan-

fiction known as "slash."

Slash Fan Fiction

One of the areas in fan fiction that receives a high amount of scrutiny is that of "slash"

fiction. Jenkins (1992) explains the origin of the term that arose from a practice that began in the

early 1970s within the *Star Trek* fandom: "the convention of employing a stroke or "slash" to

signify a same-sex relationship between two characters (Kirk/Spock or K/S)" (p. 186).

Alternatively, Woledge (2005) defines slash fiction as "fiction written by women, that focuses on

male protagonists, representation of whose gender is facilitated by the theme of same sex

intimacy" (p. 51).

In her study, Kustritz (2007) determined that "almost only (white, urban or suburban,

unmarried) women read and write slash, (pp. 32-33)" but refused the notion that this was enough

to explain slash, as people of other backgrounds were also found to participate. Kustritz (2007)

also compiled a survey of slash fans' sexuality, finding that when permitted to describe

themselves in their own words, only 39.33% described themselves as unequivocally straight. She

further found that 32.59% describe themselves with something other than strictly heterosexual,

homosexual, or bisexual, using terms with qualifiers [e.g., "straight, but curvy," or "heterosexual,

but curious" (p. 52)], and suggests that more entrenched and basic research questions have gotten

misleading answers in the past by not accommodating these complexities (Kustritz, 2007).

Focusing instead on genres instead of authors, Woledge (2005) suggests that the genre of sci-fi in

particular lends itself to slash fiction by removing itself from everyday identities, norms, and

social values.

The fan communities also develop lesbian stories surrounding beloved characters, though

they are less common than slash or heterosexual stories (Jenkins, 1992). According to Jenkins'

(1992) review of fannish discourse, "the scarcity of lesbian slash and the seeming compulsion of

some slash fans not only to assert publicly their own heterosexuality but to deny the existence of

lesbians within slash fandom" (p. 220) worries some fans about possible misogynist tendencies

within the community.

Slash has been viewed through different lenses over the years, and Jenkins (1992) recaps the most prevalent in an effort to demonstrate the complexity of the subject without effort to cleave to one view. Slash has been seen as pornography for women that offers, as critic Joanna Russ (1985) postulates, insights into the motivations behind aspects of female sexual fantasy. Yet Russ (1985) argues that slash readers are not expressing any desire to become male, but rather taking the opportunity to negotiate a love "entirely free of the culture's whole discourse of gender and sex roles" (p. 89). Slash has also been seen as a chance to create a romance story that does not center on masculinity and femininity, but rather on androgyny and the mixing of gender stereotypes (Jenkins, 1992; Woledge 2005). Jenkins (1992) also gives weight to the notion that slash serves as a point of fantasy identification whereby women can identify with either man in the story, and simultaneously have through this fantasy both of the men portrayed.

Woledge (2005) disagrees with Russ' notion of slash as pornography; from her perspective, gender-blending in slash has a focus on intimacy, and not sex. Conventional gender stereotypes are not seen as being overturned and ignored completely in slash, but rather as something relied upon to make the works of fiction function, without the stereotypes the gender-play that occurs wouldn't have any kind of meaning (Woledge, 2005).

Modern Fantasy: *Charmed*, *Supernatural*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

Within the genres of science-fiction and fantasy, more specifically modern fantasy, the three source texts that are the focus of this study are *Charmed*, *Supernatural*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. All ran for seven to eight seasons, and all have inspired fan fiction. Yet one of the key differences in the shows is the number of female characters represented.

The scholarly works (Beeler, 2008; Feasey, 2005, 2006) surrounding the television show *Charmed* make almost no mention whatsoever of fan fiction. Beeler (2008) focuses the chapter

about *Charmed* in her book on the abilities of the character of Pheobe and the feminist

implications of her role as a seer. In this analysis, Pheobe's abilities are linked back to the long

history in Western literature of women as oracles and visionaries, which is often viewed as a

more passive power. The chapter relates the more complex dynamics of feminism at work in the

way the show does not equate her passive power as bad and her sisters' more dynamic, warrior-

like abilities with good (Beeler, 2008).

While there are many fan-created investigations into the fan fiction of *Supernatural*,

specifically the slash pairing of Sam and Dean, the two main brothers in the show, most of these

works fall outside the realm of scholarly research. They tend to be written as blog entries or

course papers for high school or college students. One scholarly work by Darlene Rose Hampton

(2010) includes a chapter that focuses on how the act itself of producing fan works within the

Supernatural community is gendered. She suggests that the network-sponsored trailer-creation

competition is an example of the ways in which fan works that display the masculine traits of

competition and promotion are validated shown as valuable to the network. Meanwhile, she

adds, the more feminine community of LiveJournal and its values of community and intimacy

conveyed through fan fiction are devalued, not just by the lack of acknowledgement from the

network, but by the nature of the community's anchor in digital technology.

The discourse surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has a depth and breadth of study that

is not seen in either *Charmed* or *Supernatural*. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is an older show, and

one Barbara Lippert says is one of the "line of female action heroes beginning with Sigourney

Weaver in *Aliens*" (Lippert, 1997, p. 24). According to Jowett (2005), Buffy Summers appears as

a strong female character in part through her blending of roles as an action hero and keeper of a

very feminine appearance. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* uses postfeminist identities in efforts to

break down gender boundaries and "produce new versions of power and heroism" (p. 43) while not losing sight of the conflicts that can arise when such identities are blended (Jowett, 2005).

Surveys of demographics of the online fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* indicated that the average online fans were generally "young, white, heterosexual, middle-class, college-educated American women" (Rebaza, 2009, p. 151) and that the average online fan fiction writer for the program was "younger and more female than the overall survey group" (p. 154). Surveys also indicated that the average fan fiction writer for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was "much more likely to prefer a book to television (65 to 35 percent) than are other respondents" (p. 159). For *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Busse (2002) considers how the vampires in the Buffyverse play into the generally postulated reasons for slash fan fiction, suggesting that as the vampires in *Buffy* "are not only considered hypersexual but also often regarded as bisexual" (p. 211), they are considered particularly inviting source text for the slash relationships to be developed.

This study attempts to bring all of these topics together on some level. It focuses on whether or not there is a difference in the proportion of slash fiction written for television shows when the number and prominence of female characters also varies. In order to do so, certain procedures and investigative routes were followed.

Methodology

For this study, my aim was to explore the connections between the number and prominence of female characters and the proportions of the sexes involved in the romantic relationships portrayed in the subsequent fan-created fiction. The data for the research consists of transcripts of episodes of *Supernatural*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Charmed*, and fan fiction from Fanfiction.net.

To conduct the research, I obtained scripts or transcripts of the first and last episodes of seasons one through seven of *Charmed*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and *Supernatural*. I also obtained copies of the first fourteen English fan fiction stories by different authors posted on Fanfiction.net in the categories of the three shows. The transcripts were obtained via fan-sites and locations on the Internet where they are already published. The fan fiction was obtained via Fanfiction.net from the respective categories of each show.[1]

Measures

The measurement tool used to determine number and prominence of female characters was a content analysis. Content analysis systematically sorts units of a text to better draw inferences from said text, and is an instrument in the communication researcher's arsenal. Some past studies utilizing content analysis include an investigation into how the media portrays European politics (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), a comparison between Japanese and U.S. magazine advertising (Hong, Muderrisoglu, & Zinkhan, 1987) and an investigation into music videos (Baxter, De Riemer, Landini, Leslie, & Singletary, 1985). This current content analysis consisted of counting the number of words spoken by each character in all of the scripts from a given television show, and comparing the total number of male, female, and sexless characters. The higher number of words spoken is taken to indicate a greater role prominence. The nature of these shows as fantasy-based does provide some difficulty in what should be used to determine a character's sex, be it actor sex or gender pronouns used. To take this into account, I relied primarily on actor sex, as not all characters had sufficient screen time to have their sex stated outright. However, if there was a specification of a given character as sexless or of a different sex than that of said character's actor, I changed said character's classification to the indicated sex and marked it with an asterisk to indicate the variation from actor sex.

Content analysis was also applied to the fan fiction texts to establish the number and types of relationships portrayed in the fan fiction for each show. Categories included relationships between two males, relationships between a male and a female, relationships between two females, relationships between a sexless character and a female, relationships between a sexless character and a male, relationships between sexless characters, and an "other" category for relationships between more than two people, or in which the sex of one or more participant is unknown. A lack of relationships in a given work was indicated through scoring all previous categories a zero. Characters that were one sex in the show, but whose sex was changed within the fan fiction, were counted in a relationship as a member of their new sex. Every relationship in the texts was counted and added to the totals for the show for which it was written.[2] If there was a doubt about whether or not the characters were involved in a romantic or sexual relationship of some kind, I marked it as not a relationship. Additionally, I trained a second coder to ensure that my determination of what makes a clearly demonstrated relationship is reliable.

In total, there were three main measures provided here, (1) the number of female characters, (2) the prominence of female characters, and (3) the number and types of relationships. The first two indicators came via extrapolation of the data provided in the content analysis of the scripts and transcripts.

Interpretation Procedures

In order to make these data points comparable between the different shows, I turned the numbers of each set into proportions. The total number of female characters, male characters, and sexless characters was each divided by the total number of characters presented by each program in all of the transcripts. I read through each transcript once before beginning the count

to establish a level of familiarity with the transcriber's style, so that words and characters were not missed or mistaken when I began to analyze the content. The second read-through was a count of characters only, with each character marked as male, female, or sexless, and tallied. This gave me a stronger basis for the third read-through, during which I counted the number of words each character speaks. The number of words spoken by the top three female, male, and sexless characters in each show was contrasted against the other sexes in the show from which they come. The total number of relationships of any given category was divided by the total number of relationships presented in the fan fiction for that show. These percentages were then considered with the proportions and prominence of sexless, male, and female characters of the same show. Once all parts are comparable in measure, comparisons may occur between shows.

To ensure validity and reliability, I applied the same criteria to every categorization of the same type that I made, across show boundaries. I needed to ensure that every character whose sex I categorized was subject to the same rules and methods of interpretation, and the same for every relationship within a given work. All categorization criteria must be compatible with the outside world and grounded in reality. To maximize the reliability of the study, I established intercoder reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002) by enlisting another coder that I trained to code the fan fiction into the listed categories. Intercoder reliability can be established between two or more coders, and in this case I established it between two, my partner and myself (Lombard, et al., 2002). I then labeled the 42 fan works with numbers, and used a simple random number generator to select five for my partner to code. Once my partner has done so, I compared our coding to ensure that we coded to 70% reliability, the criterion often used for exploratory research, or higher (Lombard, et al., 2002).

Results

The focus of this research is on the number and depth of female characters in *Supernatural*, *Charmed*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the sexes of the characters involved in romantic relationships within the fan fiction of the three shows. The results and tables to follow examine the proportions of female characters and the words spoken by female characters in the television transcripts, and the proportions of romantic relationships involving the different sexes within the fan fiction. This provides a basis from which to make comparisons among the shows.

Episode Analysis

Table A totals the number of characters of each sex introduced into the scripts for *Supernatural* within my sample episodes. Characters are not re-counted; several characters recur throughout the series, but for the purposes of this study they are only counted once, upon their first introduction. The proportions at the bottom indicate the ratio of male, female, and sexless characters as compared to the overall number of characters introduced within the examined 14 episodes.

Table A:

Supernatural Character Totals				
	Male	Female	Sexless	Total
Episode 1.1	10	5	0	
Episode 1.22	2	1	0	
Episode 2.1	2	2	0	
Episode 2.22	1	2	0	
Episode 3.1	6	5	0	
Episode 3.16	4	2	0	
Episode 4.1	1	2	0	
Episode 4.22	4	3	0	
Episode 5.1	2	2	0	
Episode 5.22	1	1	0	
Episode 6.1	5	2	0	

Episode 6.22	4	2	0	
Episode 7.1	3	1	1	
Episode 7.23	2	1	0	
Total	47	31	1	79
Proportion	0.59494	0.3924	0.01266	

Table B tallies the number of characters of each sex introduced into the scripts for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* within the 14 examined episodes. Characters are only counted once, upon their first introduction. The proportions at the bottom indicate the ratio of male, female, and sexless characters in comparison with the overall number of characters introduced within these 14 episodes.

Table B:

Buffy the Vampire Slayer Character Totals				
	Male	Female	Sexless	Total
Episode 1.1	9	7	0	
Episode 1.12	2	1	0	
Episode 2.1	3	0	0	
Episode 2.22	6	2	0	
Episode 3.1	6	2	0	
Episode 3.22	8	2	0	
Episode 4.1	8	8	0	
Episode 4.22	3	3	0	
Episode 5.1	3	1	0	
Episode 5.22	4	2	0	
Episode 6.1	5	3	0	
Episode 6.22	2	0	0	
Episode 7.1	7	3	1	
Episode 7.22	1	4	0	
Total	67	38	1	106
Proportion	0.63208	0.35849	0.00943	

Table C totals the number of distinct characters of each sex written into the scripts for *Charmed* within my sample episodes. Recurring characters are not re-counted; for the purposes of this study characters that appear in more than one episode are only counted once, upon their first introduction. The proportions at the bottom indicate the ratio of male, female, and sexless characters as compared to the overall number of characters introduced within the 14 episodes.

Table C:

Charmed Character Totals				
	Male	Female	Sexless	Total
Episode 1.1	6	5	0	
Episode 1.22	2	2	0	
Episode 2.1	7	4	0	
Episode 2.22	7	0	0	
Episode 3.1	5	0	0	
Episode 3.22	8	5	0	
Episode 4.1	4	4	0	
Episode 4.22	2	3	0	
Episode 5.1	4	3	0	
Episode 5.23	7	4	0	
Episode 6.1	3	6	0	
Episode 6.23	7	4	0	
Episode 7.1	6	2	0	
Episode 7.22	5	5	0	
Total	73	47	0	120
Proportion	0.60833	0.39167	0	

Tables A-C demonstrate that within the 14 selected episodes per series, *Supernatural* and *Charmed* have the greatest percentages of distinct female characters at 39.2%, while *Buffy the*

Vampire Slayer follows with 35.8%. This higher proportion of female characters is in contrast

with the number of words actually spoken by the characters of each sex in the various shows.

Table D tracks the total number of words spoken by all characters of each sex within each

selected episode of the series *Supernatural*. It includes word totals for each episode, as well as

for all 14 episodes combined, and a proportion of words spoken by characters of each sex. It also

includes the total percentage of words each sex speaks.

Table D:

Words Spoken by Sex: *Supernatural*				
	Male	Female	Sexless	Totals
Episode 1.1	3204	369	0	3573
Episode 1.22	2620	305	0	2925
Episode 2.1	2450	403	0	2853
Episode 2.22	2606	417	0	3023
Episode 3.1	2515	235	0	2750
Episode 3.16	2304	836	0	3140
Episode 4.1	2448	475	0	2923
Episode 4.22	2468	700	0	3168
Episode 5.1	2647	398	0	3045
Episode 5.22	2999	20	0	3019
Episode 6.1	2789	257	0	3046
Episode 6.22	2259	640	0	2899
Episode 7.1	3101	26	24	3151
Episode 7.23	3003	161	0	3164
Totals	37413	5242	24	42679
% of Total Words	*87.661*	*12.282*	*0.056*	

Table E totals the number of words spoken by all characters of each sex within a given

episode of the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. It includes word totals for each episode and totals

by sex for all 14 episodes combined. It also measures the total percentage of words each sex

speaks.

Table E:

Words Spoken by Sex: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*				
	Male	Female	Sexless	Total
Episode 1.1	1505	2476	0	3981
Episode 1.12	1769	1886	0	3655
Episode 2.1	1657	1774	0	3431
Episode 2.22	1631	1608	0	3239
Episode 3.1	1123	1950	0	3073
Episode 3.22	920	906	0	1826
Episode 4.1	1519	2765	0	4284
Episode 4.22	1522	1697	0	3219
Episode 5.1	2167	1757	0	3924
Episode 5.22	1251	2077	0	3328
Episode 6.1	1880	2826	0	4706
Episode 6.22	1048	1858	0	2906
Episode 7.1	1191	2207	254	3652
Episode 7.22	1531	1669	206	3406
Totals	20714	27456	460	48630
% of Total Words	*42.595*	*56.459*	*.946*	

Table F shows the total number of words spoken by all characters of each sex within each

selected episode of the series *Charmed*. It includes word totals by episode, as well as for all 14

episodes combined. It also includes the percentage of total words spoken in the selected episodes

that each sex speaks.

Table F:

Words Spoken by Sex: *Charmed*				
	Male	Female	Sexless	Total
Episode 1.1	1116	2936	0	4052
Episode 1.22	1475	2867	0	4342

Episode 2.1	570	4432	0	5002
Episode 2.22	2152	2661	0	4813
Episode 3.1	1862	2984	0	4846
Episode 3.22	1399	2761	0	4160
Episode 4.1	1464	2898	0	4362
Episode 4.22	1445	2828	0	4273
Episode 5.1	1532	3697	0	5229
Episode 5.23	2085	2863	0	4948
Episode 6.1	1422	3102	0	4524
Episode 6.23	3118	1705	0	4823
Episode 7.1	1952	3529	0	5481
Episode 7.22	1902	2472	0	4374
Total	23494	41735	0	65229
% of Total Words	*36.0177*	*63.982*	*0*	

In *Supernatural*, male characters do the lion's share of the talking. 87.66% of all words spoken in the 14 analyzed episodes are spoken by male characters, leaving female characters to speak only 12.28% of the time, while sexless characters have .06% of all speaking time (Table D). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is the most balanced of the shows with regard to words spoken by the different sexes, with 42.6% of lines spoken by male characters, 56.46% by female, and .946% by sexless entities (Table E). The show with the greatest percentage of lines given to female characters is one of the two shows with the greatest percentage of female characters, *Charmed*. In *Charmed*, female characters say 63.98% of all spoken words in the examined episodes, and male characters say 36.02% (Table F). There are no sexless characters in the 14 examined *Charmed* episodes.

The variance in the amount of words given to characters of each sex is not merely demonstrated in the overall totals of words spoken by sex, but additionally in the specifics of total words spoken by the top three most prominent characters in each series.

Table G1 contains the number of words spoken by the three male characters with the most lines in the series *Supernatural*. The total words spoken by each character was divided by the total words spoken in the series by male characters to develop the Percentage of Sex's Total Words row, and by the total words spoken in the series by all characters to develop the Percentage of Series Total Words row.

Table G1:

Top 3 Male Characters Word Count: *Supernatural*			
Male			
	Dean	Sam	Bobby
Words	12706	8667	2932
% of Sex's Total Words	*33.961*	*23.166*	*7.837*
% of Series Total Words	*29.771*	*20.307*	*6.87*

Table G2 includes the number of words spoken by the three female characters with the most spoken words in the series *Supernatural*. The total number of words spoken by each character was divided by the total words spoken in the series by female characters to develop the Percentage of Sex's Total Words measure. The total number of words spoken by each character was divided by the total number of words spoken in the series by all characters to develop the Percentage of Series Total Words measure.

Table G2:

Top 3 Female Characters Word Count: *Supernatural*			
Female			
	Ruby	Meg	Robin
Words	1186	611	559

% of Sex's Total Words	22.625	11.656	10.664
% of Series Total Words	2.779	1.432	1.31

In *Supernatural*, the most prominent three male characters are also the most prominent three characters of the series, as even the male character with the third-highest word count, Bobby, speaks more than the most talkative female character of the series, Ruby (Table G1; Table G2). In fact, Bobby speaks nearly 2.5 times the number of words that Ruby does, despite the fact that he is only the third most prominent male character (Table G1; Table G2). Dean, the male character with the most lines, speaks 10.71 words to any single word spoken by Ruby, the highest-ranked female counterpart. Dean alone speaks more words in the examined episodes than the total word count for the entire female sex category, as does Sam (Table D; Table G1). The ratio of Dean to Ruby is still far better than the sole sexless character, as even the top female character with the fewest words speaks 23.29 times as many as the sexless mass-entity Leviathan does.

Table H1 lists the number of words spoken by the three male characters with the greatest number of spoken words in the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The total number of words spoken by each character was divided by the total number of words spoken in the series by male characters to develop the Percentage of Sex's Total Words row, and by the total number of words spoken in the series by all characters to develop the Percentage of Series Total Words row.

Table H1:

Top 3 Male Characters Word Count: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*		
Male		
Xander	Giles	Spike

Words	5821	5270	1836
% of Sex's Total Words	*28.102*	*25.442*	*8.864*
% of Series Total Words	*11.97*	*10.837*	*3.775*

Table H2 contains the number of words spoken by the most prominent three female characters in the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The Percentage of Sex's Total Words row was developed by dividing the total words spoken by each character by the total number of words spoken by female characters in the 14 examined episodes. The Percentage of Series Total Words row was developed by dividing the total words spoken by each character by the total number of words spoken in the 14 examined episodes by all characters.

Table H2:

Top 3 Female Characters Word Count: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*			
Female			
	Buffy	Willow	Anya
Words	11485	5473	1919
% of Sex's Total Words	*41.831*	*19.934*	*6.99*
% of Series Total Words	*23.617*	*11.254*	*3.946*

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* balance prevails again. Buffy, the female character with the highest word count, does speak nearly twice as many words as the most loquacious male character, Xander. However, the female character with the second-highest word count, Willow, speaks fewer words than Xander does, and is nearly one-to-one with Giles, speaking 1.039 words to every one word that Giles speaks. A similar phenomenon of near-parity occurs between Anya and Spike, though all characters outstrip the sole sexless character by at least 3.99 to 1.

Table I1 contains the total number of words spoken by each of the three male characters with the most lines in the series *Charmed*. The total number of words spoken by each character divided by the total words spoken in the series by male characters provides the Percentage of Sex's Total Words proportion, which is multiplied by 100 to create the percentage shown. The total number of words spoken by each of the three male characters divided by the total words spoken in the series by all characters produces the Percentage of Series Total Words proportion, which is then multiplied by 100 to create the percentages shown.

Table I1:

Top 3 Male Characters Word Count: *Charmed*			
Male			
	Leo	Cole	Chris
Words	4900	2052	2005
% of Sex's Total Words	*20.856*	*8.7341*	*8.5341*
% of Series Total Words	*7.512*	*3.146*	*3.074*

Table I2 contains the number of words spoken by the three female characters with the most lines in the series *Charmed*. The total number of words spoken by each of these characters was divided by the total number of words spoken in the series by female characters to develop the Percentage of Sex's Total Words row, and by the total number of words spoken in the series by all characters to develop the Percentage of Series Total Words row.

Table I2:

Top 3 Female Characters Word Count: *Charmed*			
Female			
	Phoebe	Piper	Paige
Words	14523	10997	6072

% of Sex's Total Words	*34.798*	*26.35*	*14.55*
% of Series Total Words	*22.278*	*16.859*	*9.309*

Charmed again demonstrates a clear female preference, and like *Supernatural*, the top three characters of one sex do surpass all three of another sex's top contenders. Phoebe, Piper, and Paige all speak more lines than even Leo, who is the male character with the most words to his name in the examined episodes. Unlike in *Supernatural*, however, the ratio between the highest female character and the highest male character is much closer, as Phoebe only speaks 2.96 words to each one spoken by Leo, and the greatest gap between Phoebe and Chris is a ratio of 7.243 to 1, though there are no sexless characters to include in the analysis.

Fan Fiction Analysis

Table J contains the results of the content analysis performed by the researcher with regards to the types of relationships portrayed in the fan fiction for the series *Supernatural*, listed by author name. The proportion was derived by dividing the total of each type of relationship by the total number of relationships portrayed within all the selected fan fiction.

Table J:

Fan Fiction Results: *Supernatural*								
	M/M	M/F	F/F	S/F	S/M	S/S	Other	**Total**
AriannaCastellis1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bed of Thorns	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Catnip2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Deanaholic	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
GregGregGregGregGreg	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Jace22	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Kit-Kat92	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
LostAngel2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mel11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Moonfairyhime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

RatherDashing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Smart Alexia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sweet as the Punch	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Twilight-Addict1430	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	1	17	0	0	0	0	0	18
Proportion	0.05556	0.94444	0	0	0	0	0	

Supernatural fan fiction that met the selected criteria only contained 18 relationships in total, spread across 10 of the selected works. Four works did not include any relationships whatsoever. The only Male/Male relationship depicted was a relationship between Sam and Dean in a work by Jace22, alongside Male/Female relationships. All other relationships within the selected works were Male/Female relationships, one prominent one being a relationship from within the show itself, that of Sam and Jessica.

Table K shows the results of the content analysis performed by the researcher on the fan fiction from the series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* with regards to the types of relationships portrayed, with results listed by author name. The proportion was derived by dividing the total of each type of relationship by the total number of relationships portrayed within all the selected fan fiction.

Table K:

Fan Fiction Results: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*								
	M/M	M/F	F/F	S/F	S/M	S/S	Other	Total
A.j.	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Ankhet	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Beth Arritt	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chaz Darkam	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Hells Minion	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Isaac	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Kab Inc	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
Net Girl	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Niklarus	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2

Nina Mercury	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Saffron stepsister of Evil	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Shadows	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Trinity Day	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
VampPhile	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	31	0	0	0	0	1	32
Proportion	0	0.96875	0	0	0	0	0.03125	

The fan fiction for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* contained 32 relationships, the most romantic relationships of all three programs' fan works. Every fan fiction examined for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* contained at least one romantic relationship. The one romantic relationship that was not Male/Female fell into the Other category, involved female Cordelia and an unknown other party and was depicted alongside two other relationships that were Male/Female. Common Male/Female relationships to portray included Willow and Oz and Buffy and Angel, two couples which also appeared in the television series itself.

Table L contains the results of the content analysis performed by the researcher for the types of romantic relationships portrayed in the fan fiction for the series *Charmed*, listed by the name of the fan fiction's author. The proportion at the bottom was derived by dividing the total of each type of relationship by the total number of relationships portrayed within all the selected fan fiction.

Table L:

Fan Fiction Results: *Charmed*								
	M/M	M/F	F/F	S/F	S/M	S/S	Other	Total
Bradygirl	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
CharmedRyan2000	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cool Kitty	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
CyberPagan	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Dore	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3

Hiccups	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
JoBelle	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Pipercool	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Piper Mary Cherry Milano	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Rinoasuka	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
SensitiveSoul	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Silverwolf	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TheLadySong	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Wendigo3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	14	0	0	0	0	1	15
Proportion	0	0.93333	0	0	0	0	0.06667	

The fan fiction for *Charmed* contained 15 romantic relationships, the fewest total

relationships of the three television shows. These 15 relationships spread across 11 of the 14 total

examined works. Several of the Male/Female relationships depicted involved Piper and Leo, a

relationship that also appeared within the television show itself. *Charmed* contained one

relationship in the Other category involving Piper and an unknown partner that appeared in

isolation. There were no Male/Female relationships appearing within the selected work.

Within the fan fiction for all three series Male/Female relationships were the vast

majority of those mentioned, depicted, or displayed. In the *Supernatural* fan fiction, 94.44% of

the romantic relationships were heterosexual, 96.88% of those in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* were,

and for *Charmed* the number was 93.33% (Table J; Table K; Table L).

The percentage that was not male/female pairings did differ between the shows, as 5.56%

of the total relationships depicted in the examined *Supernatural* fan fiction were Male/Male, one

of   18 total relationships uncovered in all of the *Supernatural* fan fiction study (Table J). *Buffy

the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* also both demonstrated a single pairing outside the

"Male/Female" category, though in those cases the pairing fell into the "Other" category,

accounting for 3.13% and 6.67% respectively (Table K; Table L).

Table M contains the results of the content analysis performed by the second

coder for the types of relationships portrayed in the fan fiction for the series *Charmed*, listed by

author name. These results were used alongside the researcher's to establish intercoder

reliability.

Table M:

Partner's Fan Fiction Results								
	M/M	M/F	F/F	S/F	S/M	S/S	Other	Total
Kab Inc	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
VampPhile	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Piper Mary Cherry Milano	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
SensitiveSoul	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Moonfairyhime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In the analysis of the fan fiction itself, intercoder reliability of 100% agreement was

established with a partner on 11.9% of the fan fiction read. The stories selected were chosen

through a simple random sample created by a random number generator of five terms. As

chance agreement may cause the simple percent agreement to be misleading, Scott's Pi was

employed to measure the variation between the coders' responses on the selected works (Craig,

1981). Scott's Pi can be used when a pair of coders codes the same subset of the data, and is

calculated "as the ratio of the difference between obtained and expected proportions of

intercoder agreement to the difference between perfect and expected agreement" (Craig, 1981, p.

261). The maximum possible coefficient for Scott's Pi is 1.0 (Craig, 1981). Scott's Pi as applied

to the Male/Male, Male/Female, and Other categories of the fan fiction content analysis was 1.

For Female/Female, Sexless/Female, Sexless/Male, and Sexless/Sexless categories, Scott's Pi

was undefined due to invariant values, as no instances occurred in any of the selected works in

either coder's analysis.

Discussion

The research above indicates that of the three shows, *Supernatural* may have one of the

highest proportions of female characters at 39.2%, but the female characters have the lowest

percentage of total spoken words at 12.3%. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has the lowest percentage

of female characters at 35.9%, and the most even percentages of total words spoken by males

and females, with males speaking 42.6% of the total words, and females speaking 56.5%.

Charmed proved to have one of the highest proportions of female characters at 39.2%, and of all

three shows, *Charmed* had the greatest percentage of total words spoken by female characters, at

64%. The romantic relationships in the fan fiction for all three shows were predominantly

Male/Female, though *Supernatural* contained one Male/Male relationship, and *Charmed* and

Buffy the Vampire Slayer both contained one relationship in the Other category.

Given the male-centric nature of *Supernatural*, the balance of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*,

and the female focus of *Charmed*, it would not have been unexpected to see *Supernatural* with

proportionally the most male/male romantic relationships, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with the

most balance in kinds of romantic relationships, and *Charmed* with the most female/female

romantic relationships depicted in the fan fiction. While it is true that the least female-centric

show, *Supernatural*, had more male/male relationships than either of the other shows, it does not

seem particularly robust as an example, as it was only one relationship demonstrated, and the

other series also had similar percentages that fell outside the most common option of

male/female romance.

This study differs from many of the previously existing scholarly works on fan fiction in part due to its exclusive focus on internet fan fiction. While some of the studies which emphasize fanzines may include mention of internet fan fiction (McCardle, 2003), others relate their research exclusively to the production of fan fiction prior to the internet, in the days of fanzines (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Lamb & Veith, 1986; Russ, 1985; Showalter, 1986). Though this is a distinction between the works, broader discussions of the meaning of fan fiction which underpin and underlie these works are still applicable to my more internet-focused investigation.

Jenkins (1992) and Bacon-Smith (1991) dedicate portions of their work to the storylines of the fan fiction works themselves, and the strategies employed by the authors of fan fiction in developing these storylines. Bacon-Smith (1991) focuses on how the narratives develop community relations between the authors themselves, and less on the strategies used within each work. Jenkins (1992) discusses romance most clearly in terms of three of his ten dominant strategies of rewriting the source text, specifically, Jenkins suggests that genre shifting, emotional intensification, and eroticization may involve romantic developments or connotations not present in the source text. My research, alternately, chooses to focus less on the thematic considerations of developing a romantic relationship within any given work, and rather on specific mentions of romantic relationships in each work examined, regardless of whether or not it is an overarching theme within the story's plotline.

This focus instead on particulars rather than on overarching notions in relation to fan fiction is most clearly similar to the works of Kustritz (2007) and Rebaza (2009), who focus not on the fan fiction works themselves, but rather on the populations which create them. Kustritz (2007) set out to determine what the demographics of slash fan fiction authors were, and Rebaza (2009) had a greater interest in the demographics of online fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Thematically, my research was designed mostly in an effort to provide support or rebuttal for Lamb and Veith's (1986) suggestion that the lack of relatable and powerful female characters in the source material is what leads to much slash fan fiction. While my study does not speak to how powerful the female characters depicted are, it does show that in some shows such as *Supernatural* there may be a lack of female characters with much screen time. The relation of this lack to the occurrence rate of slash fan fiction was inconclusive, but further research may serve to shed additional light upon the subject.

Limitations and Possible Sources of Bias

This methodology does provide limitations. One such limitation would be that by comparing only the top three characters of each sex category, additional prominent characters may be missed in the analysis. The reason that not all characters were included in this analysis was that doing so would unwittingly include the number of characters of each sex into the measure of prominence based on sex, which is a separate measure. There is no guarantee that any given show will have equal numbers of female, male, and sexless characters, and therefore attempting to go through all of them in a one-to-one comparison will eventually leave the final candidates without a partner to compare with. Even three was a high number to expect from the sexless category, but anything less does not seem to give enough depth to the study, while anything more may leave a dearth of characters of a given sex to work with. Another limitation is that this study also does not account for if a particular relationship portrayed in a story is the central focus of the work or a side plotline.

The use of Fanfition.net is a possible bias in the source of my information regarding the fan fiction texts, as the works I selected are then from merely one site and not the entire Internet. However Fanfiction.net is a large hub of aggregate fan fiction, easily found by those wishing to

post their works, and should provide a more varied sample than the specifically stratified

communities present on Livejournal.com, which are often dedicated to one specific couple or

another.

Another possible source of bias lies in the different time frames during which the shows

aired, and the prevalence or lack thereof of internet fan fiction at the time. This could have an

effect on what was posted during any given time frame, and even if a time frame were selected

that was based on when a show aired, it could still cause difficulties if at the time fan fiction had

not yet taken off in any great way. To mitigate this, I elected to take a sample of the first stories

posted to each category in Fanfiction.net.

One other possible source of bias is that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ended with only seven

full seasons, whilst *Charmed* ended with eight, and *Supernatural* is currently in its eighth season

and has been renewed for a ninth. While the shows were selected for their similar genre and

number of seasons, this minor difference needs to be addressed. In efforts to balance this, I

determined to assess only the scripts for the first seven seasons of each show. While with

Charmed and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* it might be possible to create balance by going from

show start until show end, *Supernatural* is still airing, and therefore that is no longer a viable

route.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the relative parity between the shows in terms of percentages of male/female

relationships, it would seem premature to infer anything about the relationship between the

number or prominence of female characters in the television program and the stories fans write

about them. While the research makes it fairly clear that the shows do have differences in terms

of the prominence of female versus male characters, the fan fiction investigation was less

conclusive, and is the dimension which would require the greatest additional research.

For more conclusive results, future researchers should increase the number of fan fiction

selected to be examined, and may wish to change their sampling criteria. While selecting the first

14 stories posted by different authors in each fan category avoids bias stemming from the

differing airing lengths of shows, avoids complications of how prevalent fan fiction itself was at

the times the shows aired or ended, in the cases of *Supernatural* and *Charmed* especially it

caused a few difficulties. When the fan fiction selected for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was posted,

the show had had the opportunity to run a few seasons. *Charmed* and *Supernatural*, on the other

hand, seemed to have had their stories posted during the first running season, meaning that many

of the characters that would become prevalent or popular later on had not yet been introduced.

Additionally, the choice of the first fourteen stories was meant to avoid accidentally

encompassing themes that were developed after the seasons under investigation were over, but

just as certain characters were not yet introduced when these stories were posted, similarly

certain themes were not yet in play. In May of 1999, when the most recent of the stories

examined for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was published, Willow and Tara had not yet met, let

alone developed their romantic relationship.

A potential alternative to this dilemma in future research might be to instead look into the

air dates of the last examined episode for each show, and to select a date a few weeks or months

after that point. This date would have to be prior to a new season airing and would create

problems in sorting through the published stories as there is no option to start the list at a specific

date, but it would allow for all characters and themes to have a chance to develop. From there,

researchers could work backward in time towards that last aired episode and select a set number

of stories by different authors to examine. A larger selection might be wiser, as several stories involved no romantic relationships whatsoever. While this is important to note in how the stories develop from the parent shows, it does limit the deductions about romantic relationships that can be drawn in a case of somewhat limited sampling.

While this study did not provide any truly conclusive evidence for the notion that the number and prominence of female characters relates to the sex of characters involved in the romantic relationships portrayed in the fan fiction for each community, it does provide an indication that these three shows would be an excellent place to launch future studies.

Notes

1. There were some special problems with attaining the scripts, as it appears that some episodes for *Charmed* and *Supernatural* only have fan-made transcripts available, and the quality of these may vary in small ways from the official scripts. This variation may be better or worse, as on occasion the official scripts of any television show will contain lines that never made it to air, or leave out lines that were ad-libbed on the spot. Without access to the official scripts, I had to rely on these transcripts while accepting that it may introduce some level of error into the study.

2. One difficulty might have been determining if a relationship was actually present, or if it was merely hinted at. To negotiate this, I defined a relationship as anything explicitly demonstrated through terms like "girlfriend, boyfriend," kissing, sex, sexual acts, through author statement in accompanying commentary, declarations or thoughts of love, thoughts of the length of the relationship, and other similarly clear demonstrations of romantic intent. Even if a relationship that demonstrates the above has been terminated, it still counted towards the total count, as some stories focus on the emotional turmoil of a relationship that has been ended, or a death that has occurred, and sometimes may be central to the plot of the work. To ignore them would be to remove what may well be a central plotline from consideration.

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