KARA THRACE AND HER SPECIAL DESTINY: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTER KARA “STARBUCK” THRACE IN THE TELEVISION SERIES BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
San Diego State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Sociology

by
Amy Renee Guidry
Summer 2012
The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the Thesis of Amy Renee Guidry:

Kara Thrace and Her Special Destiny: A Qualitative Content Analysis of the Character Kara “Starbuck” Thrace in the Television Series Battlestar Galactica

Paul Sargent
Chair
Department of Sociology

Michael Roberts
Department of Sociology

Valerie Renegar
School of Communication

May 8, 2012
Approval Date
DEDICATION

Together we are Irrevocably.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Kara Thrace and Her Special Destiny: A Qualitative Content Analysis of the Character Kara “Starbuck” Thrace in the Television Series *Battlestar Galactica*

by

Amy Renee Guidry
Master of Arts in Sociology
San Diego State University, 2012

In this thesis, I examine the characteristics of Kara “Starbuck” Thrace in the television series *Battlestar Galactica*. I reviewed literature on feminist television criticism and media studies to frame my research question: “What are Starbuck’s feminist qualities within the series *Battlestar Galactica*?” In order to answer this question, I reviewed a total of five full episodes and a six-episode story arc where I focused primarily on Starbuck’s scenes. The themes are: (1) How is equality represented and third-wave feminism in relation to motherhood and (2) Issues with Starbuck’s body such as sex, sexualization, violence, parental abuse and emotional expression. By evaluating Starbuck’s characteristics, I was able to identify her as a woman character that has feminist qualities by our societies standards.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Progression as Seen on Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 METHODOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Television Criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Roles of Women on Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body and Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Wave Feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 OVERVIEW AND PLOT SUMMARY OF BATTLESTAR GALACTICA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Battlestar Galactica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 FINDINGS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality and Feminist Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-Wave Feminism and Motherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexualization and Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting and Physical Abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Toughness .................................................................................................................. 48
Emotions ...................................................................................................................... 49

6 CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................... 54

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 57
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.</td>
<td>Promotional picture season four: Starbuck</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.</td>
<td>Promotional picture season three: Starbuck</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.</td>
<td>Promotional picture season four: Roslin</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.</td>
<td>Promotional picture season three: Sharon</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.</td>
<td>Promotional picture season four: Sharon</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.</td>
<td>Promotional picture season four: Six</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.</td>
<td>Episode still: Downloaded</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Paul Sargent for working with me. Your knowledge and help was invaluable to my entire process. I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Roberts and Dr. Valerie Renegar for being on my committee and helping through this process. For Dr. Roberts who has been working with me since my first semester, and Dr. Renegar who would let me wander into her office, ask questions and then leave with candy. I want to thank all four of my parents for giving me the support to live in California, go to school and get my masters degree. I want to thank Renee for helping me through my masters program and being a great resource. I appreciate all that you have done. I want to Kevin, my brother, who is my best friend and who helps me if every single thing I do. I want to thank Alexa and Stephanie for going through this entire process with me, allowing me to freak out, fly off the handle and rant about ALL the things. #GradStudentsAreTheWorst. I want to also thank Lauren Tracey and everyone else in my cohort. To all the first years who think they are working on their thesis in their first year, I want to thank you for your ambition, but mostly for just making me laugh and occasionally being a distraction. Call me at the no-risk deadline next year if you need to be talked down from the ceiling. I would like to thank Coke Zero for getting me through every single day of my masters program. I want to thank all the people that worked on the show Battlestar Galactica, for giving me such good material to write my thesis. And finally, I want to thank Shitzer the Cat, for reducing my blood pressure like cats do.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In an effort to bring the literature pertaining to “strong” women characters on television into the most recent decade, I have done a qualitative content analysis of the character Kara “Starbuck” Thrace from the television series *Battlestar Galactica* (BSG; Moore 2004-2009), which aired during the 2000 to 2010 decade. The objective is to analyze the character Starbuck with a feminist television criticism point of view. I am in agreement with the television scholars Fiske and Hartley (1978) that television is a reflection of society, thus by analyzing a strong woman character within a television series, I was able to draw a parallel to current cultural attitudes towards the role of women in society.

Television is a medium that entertains, but is also a commodity and a carrier of commodities. Although the majority of households contain televisions, a common view is that television is a negative force that inserts itself into our lives, almost as if we are unwillingly participating in its power. However, television would not exist without an audience. Therefore the popularity of television is a direct result of societal demands. A popular program, more often than not, is a representation of the dominant ideology; however, in order for it to maintain its popularity, it must be able to be interpreted in many different ways, by individuals who do not necessarily embody that dominate ideology (Fisk 2011).

The importance of studying television from a Sociological perspective is because Sociology is a discipline that asks: what social forces influence human behavior? What this means, is that social institutions such as family, religion, and media all have major influences on the majority of people within our society. Therefore, studying television and viewing how it might display women, men and gender and the consequences of that, could bring valuable insight into basic human behavior.
**WOMEN’S PROGRESSION AS SEEN ON TELEVISION**

With women garnering the right to vote in the 1920s, working in wartime factories in the 1940s, and experiencing an increase in rights in the following two decades, we could conclude there is a positive progression of the feminist movement. The subsequent progression of women is evident within popular television series starting as early as the 1960s. For example, women wearing pants was fashionable as early as the 1930s but this was not reflected on television until the 1960s with both *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (Reiner 1961-1966) and *I Love Lucy* (Ball and Arnaz 1951-1957). The housewives in these series were allowed to wear pants during a limited number of scenes within each episode. The role of “housewife” was previously portrayed in television, as a woman in a dress who wore pearls. Wearing pants was a nod, however small, to the cultural acceptance of women’s roles in society slowly changing. Mary Tyler Moore then moved onto *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, “acknowledged as the first popular and long running television series clearly to feature the influence of feminism” because she was fulfilled in her career and was pursuing her career in and of itself and not as a prelude to marriage (Dow 1996:24).

The progression of women’s roles changing slightly was mirrored in later series such as *Charlie’s Angels* (Goff and Roberts 1976-1981) and *The Bionic Woman* (Johnson 1976-1978), in which women were portrayed as competent and strong, yet they were also widely viewed as sex objects. In the 1980s we were given *Murphy Brown* (English 1988-1998) and *Designing Women* (Bloodworth-Thomason 1986-1993), which were some of the first shows “written by women, about women and for women” (Dow 1996:136). These series were successful within a dominant patriarchal structure, whereby the ideas of feminism were emerging in popular television and also, arguably, becoming more acceptable within society.

While past series were considered progressive and featured “strong” women characters, they also had their limitations. For instance, Mary Tyler Moore was pre-occupied with finding a husband, even though she was supposedly fulfilled in her career. Those series still worked within the dominant patriarchal structure of the time. In order to add to this analysis into women characters, I analyzed a character from the most recent decade. I looked at a woman character in *BSG* which, as a TV series “shapes how women construct themselves as gendered subjects” (Inness 1999:4). In this most recent decade (2000-2010) examples of these types of series which provide the most contemporary insight into how
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to gain a meaningful understanding of the characteristics that Starbuck embodies, and then analyze the characteristics using feminist television criticism. The series *BSG* has six main cast members, three men and three women, who are credited with being in nearly every episode of the series. By just looking at the status of the main characters, *BSG* seems to have progressive roles for their women characters. There was a woman president, played by Mary McDonnel, and while the other characters had an issue with her presidency, it was not because she was a woman, but because she was Secretary of Education, and thus 35th in line to become president. Katee Sackhoff played Starbuck, who was established as the most competent military personnel on the ship. Both women characters would have provided good material for the study, but I chose Starbuck, the skilled military pilot, in order to have a more focused study. The reason for choosing Starbuck over Roslin is because Starbuck spends a great deal of time in the series becoming established in her work and personal life. Roslin, as an older and more mature woman, is established in both her work and personal life at the beginning of the series. Essentially, we get to see Starbuck develop in the series in a way that Roslin has already developed.

I chose five episodes that featured Starbuck in over 70% of the scenes, thus defining these episodes as Starbuck character episodes. Additionally, I analyzed Starbuck in six consecutive episodes of the third season, which I label the New Caprica Arc. In total, I analyzed approximately 220 minutes of footage pertaining exclusively to Starbuck and her interactions with other characters on this show.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

I analyzed the representation of Starbuck in *BSG*, because according to Lotz’s (2001) research one of the ways to engage in feminist television criticism is to study the representational strategies used in depicting women. Both Lotz (2001) and Kellner (2011)
agree that representation is one of three ways to engage in critical cultural studies, the second being production and political economy and the third being audience reception. In studying a woman character in *BSG*, which was not meant exclusively for women, but for a wider audience of both men and women, I am helping to bridge the gap between feminist television criticism and the larger subject of mass communication theory. Carol Eaton (2011) articulates this gap by saying there is a growing academic schism between feminist pedagogy and mass communication theory.

Next I had to analyze and evaluate Starbuck’s representation. John Fiske and John Hartley’s (1978) book *Reading Television* explain how to read the content of a television series. What Fiske and Hartley state is that television is a human construct and people are often unaware of its influence. More importantly, television “uses codes which are closely related to those by which we perceive reality itself. It appears to be the natural way of seeing the world” (Fiske and Hartley 1978:4). Essentially, humans are constantly decoding what they see in a television program and determining whether or not they are for or against the presentation. I was able to decode Starbuck’s actions in an attempt to learn what she was doing and what is significant about her actions. Essentially, if a woman character has characteristics that are not typical of most women on television, she may be presented in such a way that her actions are normalized, because that is what television does, it normalizes behavior by saturating the viewer with certain ideas (Fiske and Hartley 1978). In the case of Starbuck, for example, she does not receive punishment for her non-stereotypical behavior, thus normalizing her actions and portraying them in a positive manner for the viewer. Additionally both Inness (1999) and Deming (1991) write about the idea that fictional television is interpreted as reality. Deming (1991) states that television is supposed to articulate the “established cultural consensus about the nature of reality” (p. 42) while Inness suggests that television is mistaken for reality. Therefore, how women characters are perceived as both a part of their fictional world as well as ours, would be a valuable contribution to the field of feminist television criticism.

Finally, I had to engage with my own documentation and analysis of the program. In order to accomplish this analysis, I used Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) notion of grounded theory. This theoretical basis allows me to read into my own content analysis and “develop theories grounded in empirical data of cultural description” (Spradley 1979:12). Grounded
theory was useful in analyzing my descriptions of the content of the television program. Additionally, because I viewed the television series, I was a passive non-participant (Spradley 1980). I did not participate in the action, I just watched and observed the action in question.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

I watched each episode of *BSG* a total of three times. During the first two viewings I took notes that pertained to the settings, characters dialogue, directional choices, and mise-en-scene (set design, lighting, costume, etc.). During the third viewing I watched each scene as a whole, and reflected on the underlying context of the dialogue and the characters interaction. After watching an episode three times, I read through my notes and added more analysis to the notes. I then took the content of my notes and I coded it in HyperResearch in an effort to find common themes among the episodes and seasons.
CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A number of other women characters have preceded Starbuck on television. In reviewing the women characters that came before Starbuck, analysis of her actions are put into a historical perspective. For example, Buffy the Vampire Slayer (Whedon 1997-2003) and Xena: Warrior Princess (Schulian and Tapert 1995-2001) preceded Starbuck, who were preceded by Charlie’s Angels (Goff and Roberts 1976-1981) and The Bionic Woman (Johnson 1976-1978), and even before that was The Mary Tyler Moore Show (Brooks and Burns 1970-1977) and I Love Lucy (Ball and Arnaz 1951-1957). Essentially, each woman was allowed to push boundaries just past the woman that preceded her, and as a result we have seen a progression of women characters becoming more developed and less stereotypical over the decades.

Feminist Television Criticism.

According to Bonnie Dow (1996) “to deny that they (women on television) influence our thinking about women, women’s roles, and the impact of social change is dangerously naïve” (p. 5). Social change for women is commonly linked through feminism and feminist studies. This feminist critique is done in several ways: analysis of characters feminist qualities, avenues of liberation, and how television series have previously responded to patriarchy.

Feminist television criticism is analysis of characters (mostly women, but sometimes men), how the audience feels about them and the influence of our political economy on the character and series in question. Lotz and Ross (2004) outline the value and history of feminist television criticism stating that feminist criticism and television were “born together” from feminist film theory. This manifests into prime-time feminism, which is when certain elements of feminism, such as equality and inclusion, become a mainstream idea because of television’s influence (Projansky and Vande Berg 2000). In Bonnie Dow’s (1996) book Prime-Time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement Since
In 1970 she asserts that “[The] *Mary Tyler Moore [Show]* is generally acknowledged as the first popular and long-running television series clearly to feature feminism” (p. 24). *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (Brooks and Burns 1970-1977), for example, showed feminist ideas from the 1970s as one of the primary themes of the series. What this means is that Mary was able to have career fulfillment and live independently of a man, as opposed to the previously mentioned character of Lucy (from *I Love Lucy* [Ball and Arnaz 1951-1957]) simply subverting her feminine duties as a housewife. While both examples could be seen as a feminist act, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (Brooks and Burns 1970-1977) had a very clear feminist agenda while *I Love Lucy* did not.

Inness (1999) suggest that while later series like *Charlie’s Angels* (Goff and Roberts 1976-1981) and *The Bionic Woman* (Johnson 1976-1978) did offer women “potentially powerful role models” both series still “helped reaffirm that women, while more capable than generally given credit for, were still less competent than men” (p. 32). The reason for this is because while *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (Brooks and Burns 1970-1977) was about a woman making a career for herself and exploring independence, *Charlie’s Angels* and *The Bionic Woman* were about women taking over roles that were previously played by men. For example, *Charlie’s Angels* and *The Bionic Woman* were the first time we saw women as represented on television as lead detectives. Havalovich and Rabinovitz (1999) discuss the first efforts of feminist television criticism saying that it was “directed at deconstructing and countering the patriarchal implications of television shows featuring women” (p. 3).

When looking at content, we must also consider the creators of the series in question. The creator of a television series may have a different agenda than the actors. The difference between the creators and the actors shows the cultural attitudes behind the people that are responsible for creating and bringing a television series to life. For example, the popular show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon 1997-2003) came about because Gail Berman, President of FOX Entertainment Group, learned that creator Joss Whedon had a pilot series based from the original movie, which centered around the idea of having an attractive blonde woman being the heroine of a series instead of her usual status as victim (YouTube 2011a). She noticed there were no young empowered women on television at that time, and she wanted that to be the selling point of a new series (YouTube 2011b).
The creators of the series are responsible for the shows “language,” and D’Enbeau (2009) discusses the implications when a woman is responsible for creating a new television series as opposed to a man. D’Enbeau defines empowerment-through-representation as being a part of women’s ontological liberation. What D’Enbeau means by ontological liberation is that the language used is important, and in this case the television show itself is the liberating language. Women can see their voice, an alternative to the patriarchal voice, represented in the television (D’Enbeau 2009). This is done with series like Designing Women (Bloodworth-Thomason 1986-1993) or Gilmore Girls (Sherman 2000-2007), which are shows created by women for a female audience. Essentially, men were mostly responsible for creating women characters, meaning women viewers only saw themselves through the eyes of men. When a woman creates a series, women viewers are able to view themselves outside of the patriarchal lens. This, is done through the series writing, and thus women creating television for women can be liberating.

**Gender Roles of Women on Television**

When analyzing the gender roles of women in television, several themes are discussed in the literature. First there is the implication of what it means to be gendered “woman” on a television series. With these gender roles comes certain expectations, that of femininity, sexualization and her place in society. Essentially, we must ask: what will happen if a woman on television is not sexualized or chooses to find a career outside of the home?

Goffman (1979) articulates that “gender is defined as the culturally established correlates of sex” (p. 1). What this means is that people are gendered based on their sex, because our culture insists on linking gender and sex in most cases. This is also reflected in television; and just like within society, gender norms can be broken on television as well. Going against typical gender norms can be done with the simple act of a character rebelling against societal expectations. This rebellion was seen as early as I Love Lucy (Ball and Arnaz 1951-1957) where the main character is in a cross-cultural marriage and spent a great deal of her time trying to be involved with her husband’s night club. Lucy’s duties as a housewife and her maintenance of the household came at the expense of her trying to be involved with activities outside of the home. When she did these things, such as having a temporary job, she would most often fail at her work attempts outside of the home (Helford 2000). This idea
of pushing the boundary was later seen with *Charlie’s Angels* (Goff and Roberts 1976-1981), and *The Bionic Woman* (Johnson 1976-1978) which were television series where women had non-stereotypical roles, such as a detective or superhero (Devas 2002; Heinecken 2003; Jowett 2005; Ross and Stein 2008).

Part of our television culture is that we have certain expectations of women and men characters, however, certain series go against our culture’s gender expectations. *Cagney and Lacey* (1981-1988), for example, “specifically address women and women’s issues and it potentially challenges the boundaries of patriarchal discourse” (Clark 1991:118). Challenging the cultural stereotypes can be done when shows are “written by women, about women and for women” (Clark 1991:136). Some of the first series to do this were *Murphy Brown* (English 1988-1998) and *Designing Women* (Dow 1996). The success of these series illustrated that television series could be written from a woman’s point of view, which is something that Heinecken (2003) says is difficult for our culture to accept due to institutionalized and embedded sexism.

How femininity and sexualization is portrayed is also a vital element to character analysis. For example, in *Charlie’s Angels* (Goff and Roberts 1976-1981) the series mixed the women’s femininity with ideas of Liberal Feminism, which is a type of feminism that strives for equality through political and social reform (Levine 2007). Then, later, with the series *Cagney and Lacy* (Avedon and Corday 1981-1988) and *Murphy Brown* (English 1988-1998) the women were not objectified, but shown solely as working professionals (Levine 2007). Douglas (2010) points out that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon 1997-2003) and *Xena: Warrior Princess* (Schulian and Tapert 1995-2001) do not use hyper- femininity, somewhat copying earlier series such as *Cagney and Lacey, Murphy Brown*, and *Moonlighting* (Glenn Gordon 1985-1989). In comparing *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with *Charlie’s Angels*, we see that in both series the women were feminine, but Buffy could be seen as more of a realistic woman because she was not portrayed as hyper feminine, even though Sarah Michelle Gellar is as conventionally beautiful as the women who played the Angel’s. In the case of the Angel’s their hyper-femininity was one way to undermine their progressive qualities, because it made them more like caricatures and less like real women. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, characterized Buffy as a young woman who had to deal with society’s expectations of how women should dress and act. What this meant for the viewer,
was that while Buffy was conventionally attractive and feminine (in terms of dress, hair and makeup) she was also dealing with self-presentation and societal expectations, which made her an easier character for most women to identify with than the Angel’s.

In terms of societal expectations, Heinecken (2003) addresses that if a woman steps outside of her typical role, she might be seen as an “unruly” or a “bitch.” Does the woman in question get “wrangled in” or is she allowed to continue her path? Lucy, in I Love Lucy (Ball and Arnaz 1951-1957), was an example of a woman that would, in the end, get “wrangled in.” Roseanne Barr, star of Roseanne (Williams 1988-1997), was ridiculed in media because of her “unruly” nature (Heinecken 2003). Both illustrated different types of women who dared to step outside of their typical roles. The women characters would either experience consequences in their fictional world or the actresses playing them would experience consequences in their personal lives. Heinecken is making the point that there are several ways to punish and regulate women who dared to be unruly.

Overall, character’s gender identity and their roles within the series will dictate their action, however, as illustrated above, forms of rebellion were unique to each decade. In the 1950s a woman was only allowed to rebel in her tightly confined role of “housewife.” Later, in the 1970s women could play non-stereotypical roles, but had to still be feminine. Still later, women were not required to be feminine but were shown as competent working professionals. We see here that there is an obvious progression of some women’s roles into a more positive and less stereotypical space.

**Body and Relationships**

Two elements that define a character’s gender identity is her physicality and how she interacts with other characters. A woman breaking stereotypical gender norms by being physically tough is just as meaningful as the hero, man or woman, being emotionally vulnerable in their personal relationships. Even though emotions are typically associated with women, we are comparing a physically tough woman with a physically tough man, and finding that women are allowed their emotions while their male counterparts are not. A woman’s emotional range being juxtaposed against her physical toughness does not make her weak, but it makes her a well-rounded character that is allowed to explore all facets of her personality. Typically, when men are emotional they are compared to women, which is an
insult and a way to regulate masculinity; in this scenario femininity is “negative,” therefore masculinity is “positive.” Women, alternatively, are expected to express themselves emotionally, so by doing so they are simply fulfilling societal expectations. The way this scenario manifest itself in women characters is by having them portray the positive trait of being tough (masculine), while they are also given the latitude to express themselves emotionally (feminine). Women characters are fortunate not to have their feminine qualities be a distraction, while men are not allowed to have this same balance.

Both Vares (2002) and Douglas (2010) pinpoint the 1990s as a time when women emerged as being specifically “tough” on television. Joss Whedon, for example, stated in an interview that his idea behind Buffy the Vampire Slayer was having the blonde woman, who was usually the victim, be the hero and kill the monster. Xena: Warrior Princess (Schulian and Tapert 1995-2001), which premiered on television in the mid 1990s “is a far tougher image of womanhood than we would have seen on television ten years ago” (Inness 1999:180). This idea is reiterated when Inness discusses that the much earlier series Charlie’s Angel’s (Goff and Roberts 1976-1981) has the Angel’s protecting weaker women. This display showed the Angel’s toughness, but it ultimately emphasizes the weakness of women. Inness explains that it was later series that truly emphasized women’s toughness and competence. An alternative to emphasizing weakness is looking at the physical power of women characters and the consequences of this power. Heinecken (2003) points out that with all heroes, men or women, there will be a focus on their physicality.

Next, there are the relationships of the women characters. The first element of character-to-character interaction is looking at the relationships of the main characters. Miller (2003) points out that Buffy, for example, is not as isolated as a man hero typically would be. Miller (2003) surmises “Buffy’s fought mightily over the past seven years, not just against the vampires, demons and forces of darkness, but also against detachment, self-pity and arrogance.” What Miller is articulating was also what creator Joss Whedon wanted, which was that these characters main quality was their relationships; those relationships are vital to their existence. Women hero’s are allowed to have relationships and explore their emotions because they are women. Once again, the idea that women are allowed to be more developed emerges.
**THIRD WAVE FEMINISM**

In addition to understanding the women that preceded Starbuck’s character, it is also important to evaluate the current feminist rhetoric and how third-wave feminism manifested. According to Lotz (2003), third-wave feminism was preceded by second-wave feminism, which was generally acknowledged as starting post WWII and lasting until the 1980s. During the time of the second-wave, there were two sides to the feminist debate: the liberal feminists who wanted women in the public sphere and the radical feminists who pinpointed women’s gender as the reason for their oppression (Lotz 2003). Lotz highlights the forming of the National Organization of Women (NOW) as a time when the second-wave came to have one clear voice, however this “one voice” is the primary critique of the second-wave by the third-wave.


> [Third wave feminism] engages differences and multiplicities within and between women that were ignored by predecessor feminist movements; works to build a new kind of solidarity that recognizes and brings together blurred, overlapping and sometimes contradictory facets of women’s identities that were often compartmentalized by feminist in other eras; and incorporates feminism into everyday life more than previous feminist movements. (P. 237)

Fixmer and Wood (2005) are saying that third-wave feminism has an intersectionality that was missing with pervious movements and the individual woman’s needs is more important than the greater good of all women. Overall, second-wave feminism was too narrow, and third-wave feminism opened up to minority groups, transgender groups, and women of color, who had been previously excluded (Fixmer and Wood 2005; Lotz 2003).

Starbuck, as a character, aligns with more of third-wave feminism than second-wave. Evaluating Starbuck against the idea of the individual woman dealing with her individual issues and the contemporary feminist movement makes the most sense for her character and the contemporary nature of the series.
In summary, we see that across several decades, women characters have developed and progressed. Women characters doing small acts of rebellion until they were allowed outside of the home and into the careers typically associated with men brought about this progression. After this, women were allowed to be in more progressive roles, such as the heroine of the story and in being the woman hero, they were allowed to explore the emotions that their male counterparts were not. It is with this progression in mind, that we now look to Starbuck’s characteristics and actions in *BSG.*
CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW AND PLOT SUMMARY OF
BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

Overview of Battlestar Galactica

BSG is a remake of an older series that premiered in 1978. The original BSG ran for one season in 1978 and then one season of a series called Galactica 1980 (Larson 1980). Then, in 2003 Ronald D. Moore conceptualized a remake of the BSG franchise. He filmed the three-hour mini series, which was considered the backdoor pilot and the SyFy network picked it up (Maull and Lavery 2010).

The remake of BSG was able to find its niche in a post 9/11 world, because it dealt with themes of war, humanity and “the other.” While the remake followed the overall idea of the original series--the humans were running from the deadly cylons and trying to find Earth--the remake had a very dark tone, which was significantly different than the original series. Moore wanted to do “naturalist science fiction” which he felt would separate his series from the original (Maull and Lavery 2010:46). What this meant for the viewer, was that the aesthetic of the show was not in a typical science fiction fashion. The only part of the series that looked like typical science fiction was when they showed the fleet of ships floating in outer space. When the camera went inside Colonial One or the Battlestar: Galactica, the two primary ships in the series, it looked like the insides of an airplane or the command center of a navy ship. There was also a conscious effort by the set designers and creators of the show to have items that would be considered “retro” in today’s world, such as corded telephones and older looking electronics. According to a 2011 interview done by The Los Angeles Times, Moore stated that he wanted to “get rid of all sci-fi trappings” and wanted to write good human drama that just so happens to take place in the science fiction universe (YouTube 2008b). Most of all, he wanted the audience to identify with the people on the show.
Moore had previously worked on the series Star Trek: The Next Generation (Roddenberry 1987-1994) that was, according to Helford (2000), the first series of the Star Trek franchise that had women in important roles such as chief medical officer and head of security. While Moore created a show whose primary cast had an even number of men and women in equally important roles, it was not the same for the individuals that produced, wrote and directed BSG. According to the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) there were 18 producers listed, only one of which was a woman. Overall, women writers on the series are responsible for writing 8 of the 73 episodes, while the men writers have written the other 65. In terms of the directors, only men have directed episodes of BSG.

**Plot Summary**

The pilot began with exposition that the cylon war had been over for nearly 40 years. What we learn is that the cylons were machines with artificial intelligence that eventually rebelled against the humans, effectively starting a human versus cylon war. The cylons then left abruptly during the war, and the humans had not encountered the cylons since that time. At the beginning of the pilot episode, the cylons returned and we discovered that they evolved. Instead of only having the cylon centurion, who was the original mechanical robot, they now had cylon raiders who flew and human-cylons who were cylons that are indistinguishable from humans in every way. The human-cylons had human feelings and were in no way mechanical, the only way they could be distinguished was through advanced testing of their blood. The human-cylons controlled the centurions and raiders, by modifying their cognitive functioning, essentially making them slave-like robots to the human-cylons.

The cylon fleet returned after nearly 40 years, and made first contact with the humans by dropping nuclear bombs on the 12 colonies, which were the planets the humans inhabited. During that attack, we learned that the cylon’s consciousness downloaded to a new body when they die. The logic behind the cylons consciousness downloading instead of “dying” in a traditional sense, is explained by a human-cylon in the episode “Scar” (Nankin 2006:Season 2, Episode 15):

> Makes sense, doesn’t it? It takes months for you to train a nugget into an effective viper pilot… and then they get killed, and you lose their experience, their knowledge, their skill sets… it’s gone forever. So, if you could bring them back


and put them in a brand new body, wouldn’t you do it? ‘Cause death then becomes a learning experience.

What this meant for the humans, was that cylons could not die in the traditional way.

The following episodes revolved around the fleet of ships that were in the air during the time of the attack. The primary action of the series took place in the BSG—which was similar to an aircraft carrier—and Colonial One which was equivalent to Air Force One. William Adama, the Commander of the Galactica, along with President Laura Roslin decided to take all the ships that survived the attack and run away from the cylons. At the end of the pilot, Adama gave a speech, where we learn about the mythical 13th colony: Earth. They began their search for Earth, while running from the deadly cylons.

There were six main characters. First there was Commander William Adama, whose role it was to make all military decisions for the fleet, and President Laura Roslin, whose role it was to make all major decisions that involved civilians. This division of power between Roslin and Adama is their main connection and placed them as the patriarch and matriarch over the other characters (Maull and Lavery 2010). The other characters included Adama’s son Lee “Apollo” Adama, Kara “Starbuck” Thrace, Dr. Giaus Baltar, and the human-cylon named Six. While there were more supporting characters, these six main cast members starred in at least 71 of the 73 episodes in the series.

In the pilot, we learned that Kara “Starbuck” Thrace’s back-story was that she was dating Zak Adama, the Commander’s son. In addition to dating him, she was also his teacher in viper pilot flight school. Starbuck allowed him to pass, even though he failed his practical examination, and as a result, he ended up dying in a standard practice exercise. Starbuck confessed this to Apollo, Zak’s brother.

Later, several viper pilots on the Galactica died due to an accident in the flight deck. There was an immediate need for more pilots, so Commander Adama asked Starbuck to teach the new set of volunteer pilots. This brought up painful memories of Zak’s death for Starbuck, and she ended up being harder on the new recruits, and eventually failed them in their flight training, saying they were a danger to themselves and others. Apollo realized the problem and when talking to Adama about it, he nearly revealed Starbuck’s secret about Zak to his father. Adama realized Starbuck was keeping something from him, and she eventually confessed her part in Zak’s death to Adama. He was livid, but told Starbuck to reinstate the
pilots and train them to become effective viper pilots, which she did. During a training mission with the pilots, she ran into a cylon raider and crashed on a nearby planet. In spite of her broken leg, she managed to climb into the dead cylon raider and fly it back to the Galactica.

With Starbuck’s broken leg, she was not able to fly vipers, so she was given other jobs in the interim. One task was to interrogate the human-cylon prisoner Leoben Conroy. He was discovered hiding in the storage area of another ship, and Adama chose Starbuck to be Leoben’s interrogator. Leoben claimed to have hidden a nuclear bomb on a ship in the fleet. He was also able to guess that her call sign was Starbuck without prior knowledge. Leoben knowing this information visibly bothered Starbuck, but when she called Adama, he said that with Leoben being a stowaway, he could have heard her name over the fleet’s wireless radio system. Leoben continued to guess things about Starbuck, which were later confirmed to be true: such as her abusive childhood. During the interrogation, Leoben ripped off his handcuff and strangled Starbuck when they were left alone by the marine guards. Here, he proved to be a physical threat to Starbuck. She retaliated by trying to coax information out of him using water torture.

Eventually, President Laura Roslin came to the interrogation room to check on the status of the prisoner, and reprimanded Starbuck for her torture techniques. Leoben revealed to Roslin that he was lying about the bomb, so she executed him. Starbuck, having felt compassion for Leoben, prayed for his soul when she had a private moment in her bunkroom.

Starbuck later found out that Adama did not know the exact location of Earth, and that he was only using the idea of Earth to keep the people in the fleet hopeful. When she asked him about this, he lied and she became angry and disappointed with him. Roslin, however, believed in the mythology of their religious books, and convinced Starbuck to return to Caprica, one of their 12 colonies, to search for the Arrow of Apollo, which was an ancient artifact that would help the fleet find Earth.

Starbuck agreed, went back to Caprica and acquired the artifact. She ended up meeting up with Helo, an old Galactica shipmate she thought had died. During this time, Helo and Starbuck met up with Samuel Anders and a group of resistance fighters that survived the nuclear attack. Anders and Starbuck quickly forged a romantic relationship, and she agreed that when she made it back to the Galactica she would come back to rescue him.
and the resistance fighters. While Starbuck and the resistance fighters were planning their mission, they were ambushed by cylons and Starbuck was shot.

She woke up in a hospital that claimed to be part of the resistance, but we later learned it was a cylon hospital. Upon trying to escape, Starbuck discovered a room full of woman that were attached to machines with tubes going in and out of their vaginas. At the request of one of the women, Starbuck destroyed the machines, which also effectively cut off the women’s life support. Anders, Helo and the resistance fighters were in the process of storming the cylon hospital when Starbuck had finally fought her way out, the three along with some of the resistance fighters managed to escape back to their base camp with their lives. At this point, we learned that the cylons were using human women to make hybrid babies. Hybrids, as defined by the series, were when a human had a baby with a human-cylon model. The cylons, in this case, were taking women with healthy uteruses as prisoners and attempting to make hybrids, with the cylon hospital receiving the nickname “farms.”

Starbuck’s time at the hospital brought up her personal issues with motherhood, which were linked with her abusive mother. When they returned to the resistance camp, Anders and Starbuck had a sad goodbye, and she promised once more to return for him. Starbuck, upon returning to the Galactica, tried to keep her promise to mount a larger rescue mission back to Caprica, but she met resistance from both Adama and Roslin.

Starbuck sunk into a self-destructive depression at the idea that Anders might be dead, but eventually was able to convince Adama to let her return to Caprica to rescue Anders and the resistance fighters. Her rescue mission was a success, and when she returned with Anders, he and Starbuck got married.

During the rescue mission back to Caprica, two pilots accidentally discovered a habitable planet, which was aptly named New Caprica. The fleet decided to settle on this planet, this included Starbuck leaving the Galactica with Anders and settling on the planet. After a year of living on New Caprica, the cylons returned. The Galactica fled along with the rest of the fleet that remained in orbit around New Caprica. During the cylon occupation of New Caprica, the cylons kidnapped Starbuck and locked her in a prison cell that looked more like a house and apartment than a typical prison cell. Here, she is forced to live with Leoben.

Their “routine” was that she killed him each time an opportunity arose, and he downloaded and returned. Part of his psychological torture was to coax her into loving him.
and one of his techniques was by convincing her they had a daughter together named Kacey. He used her time in the cylon hospital, saying they acquired healthy eggs from her uterus during the surgery where they stitched her gunshot wound. Starbuck did not believe Leoben at first, but eventually came to accept Kacey as her own. Unbeknownst to Starbuck, the Galactica was planning a mission to rescue the humans from New Caprica. While this rescue mission was happening, Starbuck was freed from her prison, but went back to find Kacey. When she returned to the prison cell, she found Leoben with the girl. Here, she was forced to tell him that she loved him and kiss him. During this kiss, she stabbed him in his side and he died. Once everyone was back on the Galactica, Starbuck learned that Kacey was not her child, but belonged to another woman, and as a result Starbuck became self-destructive. Adama, realizing there was a problem, talked to Starbuck and she eventually came to terms with what happened on New Caprica.

Later, the fleet discovered a planet with a food source, and during their time harvesting, they discovered an ancient symbol. This symbol, which they called the Mandala, was the same symbol Starbuck painted on her walls in her apartment on Caprica, before the attacks. The Mandala was found in an ancient temple that had significant clues on the path to earth. Starbuck became so disturbed by this link that she began having nightmares about Leoben. Eventually she killed herself by crashing her viper into an electrical storm. However, moments before her death, she had a vision where she saw Leoben and resolved the issues she had with her mother and abusive past.

While the other characters were distraught about Starbuck’s death, they continued on their search for Earth. Starbuck returned in the same viper she crashed into the electrical storm, and claimed to know the way to Earth. It becomes unclear at this point what happened to Starbuck after she “died” and the question arises whether or not she is a cylon. There was a lot of mistrust, with all the characters making the assumption she was a cylon. The human-cylon models, 12 in all, were eventually revealed, and Starbuck was not one of them. Starbuck leads them to “Earth” and they discovered it was a nuclear wasteland. They abandoned this planet, and during a final battle with the cylons, Starbuck entered a random set of coordinates and they did a faster-than-light jump to safety. Here, they discovered another planet, and decided to call this planet Earth. They settled there and abandoned all of their technology, setting their abandoned ships to fly into the sun. Starbuck and Lee were
having a conversation in an open field when she vanished, implying that the Starbuck that returned was neither human nor cylon, but possibly something else. The show advanced to present day, and we learned that the hybrid child of Helo (a human) and Sharon (a human-cylon) was the mitochondrial Eve to all the people currently on Earth.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

EQUALITY AND FEMINIST REPRESENTATION

The first major theme that occurred in this analysis is how the character Starbuck fits into the personal and public sphere. This analysis will be done by analyzing the nature of BSG’s society in terms of equality between the sexes in the public sector, such as her occupation, as well as analyzing Starbuck’s feelings on motherhood, which is an analysis of her private life.

Finding Starbuck’s place in the current feminist movement can be challenging because--as a heroine in a science fiction television show--she lives in an alternative universe we can only proscribe definitions to her actions with our world’s feminist movement, because in her world there was no clearly defined movement. Equality, in the BSG universe is demonstrated in several ways throughout the series, from the number of men and women considered main characters, to the characters’ interactions, and finally their jobs. While analysis of equality in the BSG universe covers Starbuck’s public life, third-wave feminism is used when evaluating her private life. Third-wave feminism is the idea that individual women must deal with a multitude of issues that are based not only on their gender but their race, family, sexuality, class and occupation (Dekel 2011; Fixmer and Wood 2005; Hammers 2005; Lotz 2003.) One of these individual issues, for example, may be that women ought to have a choice in whatever they do, meaning that they would chose to become a mother because they want to be a parent, not because of societal pressure. In the case of Starbuck, I explore her choice, or lack there of, about motherhood. Both equality and third-wave feminism are analyzed in relation to Starbuck’s character to better understand both her public and private life.

Equality

Fiske and Hartley (1978) stated that television normalizes behavior, which means that if sexism and inequality are portrayed positively in a series, it condones that behavior.
Alternatively, a series like *BSG* normalizes equality between the sexes. In the case of *BSG* it evokes the idea of prime-time feminism, which is “television has made particular aspects of feminism ubiquitous” (Projansky and Vande Berg 2000:15). Inness (1999) points out that earlier series had women taking over the role of men, however with *BSG* we see that both men and women are present in power position as well as lower level positions. We do not see a woman in a high power position controlling and dominating men, nor do we see men in a high power positions controlling or dominating women. This illustrates a level of equality within *BSG* that was not seen in previous decades.

The first way this equality is shown on *BSG*, is that there is a woman equivalent for each man character, and vice versa. Adama, a man, is in charge of the military personnel, while Roslin, a woman, is the President and in charge of the civilians. Not only is there equality in the powerful positions, but also with less prestigious jobs. For example, the hanger deck on the Galactica has military personnel that are maintenance workers. The viper pilots have nicknamed them “knuckle draggers” because they do a lot of manual labor. Even though this job emphasized physicality and mechanical ability, there are a number of men and women at this position. This equality spans from the low ranking position of maintenance worker, to higher positions held by Adama and Roslin. What creator Ronald Moore did, was enact a level of equality, which does not exist in our world and applied it to his fictional series.

In terms of women and men having equal positions of power, we see several scenarios in which the men are taking orders from women or asking women for help. First, there is a scene between Roslin and Adama on how to handle Leoben, their cylon prisoner (Turner 2005:Season 1, Episode 8):

*Adama*: I’ll send a team over to destroy it immediately.

*Roslin*: I want this man interrogated first.

*Adama*: First of all, It’s not a “him” it’s an “it.” Second, anything it says cannot be trusted, best thing to do is to destroy it immediately.

*Roslin*: I’d like to hear what this thing has to say, it might be important.

*Adama*: Madam President, I’ve dealt with this model before, he’ll fill your head with double talk and half-baked philosophy and confuse you.
Roslin: Then send someone who won’t be easily confused. That’s an order, Commander. I want him interrogated.

Adama: Order understood.

In this scenario, tensions are elevated because cylons are a very dangerous enemy and little is known about the human-cylon models. Adama feels he has more experience than Roslin because he interacted with Leoben prior to this scene. Roslin and Adama’s interaction is a “who knows best” power struggle, but ultimately Roslin orders Adama to interrogate Leoben. The reason Adama complies, is not because Roslin is his superior, but it because they have an agreement on a division of power and this decision, apparently, was hers to make. When she hangs up, he is expressionless showing no anger or annoyance that a woman has given him an order. In the next scene he is sending Starbuck to interrogate Leoben, showing that in addition to verbally agreeing, he did not undermine her authority by not doing the task.

In “The Farm” we also see that Starbuck is in a position of power over two men, when they are discussing their plans to escape from Caprica (Hardy 2005:Season 2, Episode 5):

Anders: Ok. Cylons have a re-fueling airstrip just on the other side of that ridge. There’s a heavy raider that makes a regular re-fueling stop every afternoon, like clockwork.

Helo: Machine’s like routine.

Anders: It’s usually guarded by less than three of the mechanical varieties.

Helo: So? What’s the plan?

Starbuck: Go here, approach the airstrip from the south side, sprinkle our men through the tree line, wait for the cylons to land the raider to hook up the re-fueling hoses, once they hook up the tillium hoses, we take out the guards and blow the re-fueling station.

Anders: I thought you wanted the raider in tact?

Starbuck: They build ‘em tough, believe me… blowing the fuel will barely put a scratch in the hull… might give us enough time to board the raider. Once I’m inside, I’ll blow the brain and start working on trying to get it—

At this point, they are interrupted by a cylon ambush and gunfire. This scene is important because when Helo asks, “so what’s the plan?” he is looking at Starbuck and Anders, and the expectation is that Anders will continue speaking, but he does not: Starbuck does (Hardy 2005:Season 2, Episode 5). Anders does not balk at Starbuck taking over explaining the plan, because it was her plan; he was simply relaying information from a reconnaissance mission.
Starbuck, in this scenario, is the senior most military personnel, therefore she is in charge of Anders, Helo and all the resistance fighters and they seem prepared to follow her lead.

Equality is also shown in other scenarios. For example, in “Act of Contrition” Adama’s first choice to get someone to train a new squadron of viper pilots is Starbuck (Turner 2005). At first she resists, but he asks her if she knows anyone who is better qualified and she says “no” (Turner 2005:Season 1, Episode 4). Adama going to Starbuck, in both the training of new pilots and the interrogation of Leoben, shows that he thinks she is competent at her job and has the respect of the Commander.

The final element that solidifies Starbuck’s equality is comparing her to Lee “Apollo” Adama, her male counterpart. Apollo and Starbuck are a logical man/woman pair, where the pairing occurs naturally because of their jobs. They are both lower ranking military officers than Adama, but Apollo has a higher rank than Starbuck. He is Captain of the Air Group (CAG) while Starbuck is a Lieutenant and a viper pilot, effectively making Apollo her superior officer. Even though Apollo is higher ranking than Starbuck, Adama has shown preference to Starbuck when he needed something important accomplished. While Adama usually selects Starbuck for special tasks, Roslin usually selects Apollo for her special tasks. What we see here, is equivalency between men and women on the show. Adama and Starbuck’s relationships, in which the man is in the power position, mirrors Roslin and Apollo’s, in which the woman is in the power position, thus showing another element of equality.

In all, we see that equality between the sexes manifests itself in several dynamic ways throughout BSG. The important element of this multi-tiered equality is that it normalizes that behavior. While women in our society do not have that level of egalitarianism as the women in the series, BSG is a part of prime-time feminism because it serves to normalize equality between the sexes.

Third-Wave Feminism and Motherhood

Third-wave feminism is the idea that individual women must deal with a multitude of issues. These issues are shaped by not only the woman’s gender, but also by her race, family, sexuality, class and occupation (Dekel 2011; Fixmer and Wood 2005; Hammers 2005; Lotz 2003). Essentially, women should be allowed to make choices that are both typical and
atypical of their gender and they should never be forced into the traditional constructs of what it means to be a woman. With respect to women raising children or the notion of motherhood Conly (2008) discusses the idea that Starbuck’s rejection of motherhood is either a neurotic one based on fear or that her entire identity is to be a viper pilot. Starbuck was afraid that she was going to repeat the mistakes of her verbally and physically abusive mother as well as embracing her identity as a viper pilot, so she initially rejected being a parent. In this, Conly points out that with Starbuck’s character, she is committed to living a certain type of life, and a child does not have a place in this life. Conly notes that Starbuck had a choice, but in some other instances, women do not have a choice, such as the other women in “The Farm” who were forcibly hooked up the machines by the cylons and forced to have children (Hardy 2005). According to Projansky and Vande Berg (2000) it is a traditional role for women to care for others. Childcare, in this case, is the woman’s responsibility. Nightingale (1991) points out that because society socializes women to be caretakers, we think of motherhood as a choice (which is not always the case). This socialization of women to feel pressured into becoming mothers happens in many ways: receiving baby dolls as a child, exposure to heteronormative media, and finally social pressure form their church or community, just to name a few. So, when television is produced and it reflects the idea of women as mothers and caretakers and that men are not, it is cementing this division of labor between the sexes. It is important that television reflects third-wave feminism, and does not impress an agenda upon women that make them feel obligated to be a mother or become a caretaker.

Motherhood on BSG comes up in three different ways. The first is in “The Farm” with the series addressing Starbuck’s choice to not have children, and how that choice might be interpreted in a post-apocalyptic world (Hardy 2005). Starbuck had chosen, up to this point, to not have children. This was plainly illustrated when stated explicitly that she did not want children in “The Farm” to Simon, a human-cylon masquerading as a doctor that worked with the resistance (Hardy 2005:Season 2, Episode 5):

**Simon:** Gotta keep that reproductive system in great shape, it’s your most valuable asset these days.

**Starbuck:** Right.
Simon: I’m serious. Finding healthy child bearing women your age is the top priority of the resistance, and you’ll be happy to know that you are a very precious commodity to us.

Starbuck: [laughs] I am not a commodity, I’m a viper pilot.

Simon: Do you see any vipers around here? I mean you do realize that you’re one of the handful of women left on this planet who is actually capable of having children, right? I mean that is your most valuable skill right now.

Starbuck: Well I don’t want a child, so just drop it. Ok?

Simon: Well, no one’s forcing you.

What we see here, with the idea of a woman’s body being a commodity and her most valuable asset her uterus, is that our world is being impressed upon theirs. What this means is that Simon represents our society, one in which women who chose to not have children are sometimes questioned and scrutinized for their choice. The cylons do not respect the humans’ egalitarian society. They prescribe to the idea that women must have children for the greater good, and are separating men and women by their biology. What the series illustrates is the cylons, the enemy, presenting the alternative to women being equal with men, to women being reduced to being an asset. We often have to be reminded of inequality if we are to appreciate the possibility of equality.

The idea of Simon addressing her choice to be a mother is more poignant when compared to another scenario on BSG. Later in “The Farm” Starbuck came to the realization that Simon was a cylon and decided to escape (Hardy 2005). After killing Simon and another human looking cylon, she came across a large room with women in hospital beds. There were large machines that ran down the middle of the room with women’s beds being on either side. Upon further inspection Starbuck saw that women were drugged, their legs were in stirrups with tubes going into their vaginas. Starbuck came across Sue-Shaun - a woman character from earlier in the episode, someone who was also trapped by the ambush that got Starbuck in the hospital in the first place. While Starbuck was in a hospital bed discussing her choice to not be a parent, Sue-Shaun was attached to the machine being forced into becoming a parent. Starbuck destroys the machines at the request of Sue-Shaun, with the understanding that eliminating the machines would also cut off the women’s life support and they would die.
We learned later that the women hooked up to the machines were part of cylons larger plan to make hybrid babies. Hybrids, according to this series, are when a human-cylon and a human have a child together. Anders, Starbuck, Helo and Sharon discuss the farms (Hardy 2005:Season 2, Episode 5):

Anders: Supposedly they can’t reproduce biologically, so they’ve been trying every which way to produce offspring.

Starbuck: Why?

Sharon: Pro-creation, it’s one of God’s commandments: be fruitful….. we can’t fulfill it, we’ve tried, so we decided—

Starbuck: To rape human women?

Sharon: You know, if you agreed to bear children it’d be voluntary, maybe they even set you up with someone you like.

Starbuck: Like you two kids? They didn’t ask Sue-Shaun if she wanted to fall in love, alright?! They put a tube in her and they hooked her up to a machine!

Starbuck was appalled by the cylons’ actions, because this level of oppression was not something Starbuck or any of the humans in this world had to deal with prior to the cylon attacks. The idea of a baby making “farm” reduced the women to what was supposedly their most valuable asset: a healthy uterus. “The Farm” showed the difference between obligation and choice by presenting both scenarios: the women attached to the machines and Starbuck (Hardy 2005).

These scenarios can be linked to how women in our society deal with the choice to become a mother. If a woman believes she has a biological obligation to have children, then she is void of her choice. In the case of BSG, the human population was reduced to roughly 45,000 people, which made women having children a vital part of the continued existence of the human race. This idea of sustaining the human population then becomes a moral dilemma for women who were accustomed to having a choice about whether or not they wanted a child. We see that the cylons so believed that women should have children that they began to implement mechanized rape on women that had healthy child bearing uteruses. They also attempted to socially pressure Starbuck into having a child. The idea of social pressure is more applicable to our society, in the sense that women are still continuously pressured to have children. This pressure comes from major institutions of socialization such as religion and mass media, where women are either told by the church to have children or seeing the
normalization of women being mothers on televisions and in movies. This pressure is relentless and constant for most American women, regardless of how being a mother fits into their identity as a person. The extreme nature of how the cylons accomplish their task, the mechanized rape, is to make the point that a woman’s decision to become a mother can be removed in several ways.

The final scenario that deals with motherhood was when the cylons attempted to emotionally blackmail Starbuck into being a parent. While Leoben was holding Starbuck captive on New Caprica, he claimed that they had a child named Kacey. Leoben explained that they removed Starbuck’s uterus in the cylon hospital, fertilized it with Leoben’s sperm and a surrogate carried the child to term, making Kacey, Starbuck and Leoben’s child. In the second episode of the New Caprica episodes, Leoben decided to leave Kacey and Starbuck alone for the afternoon. Starbuck ignored the little girl and eventually went to the bathroom to take a moment and collect herself. A loud thump came from outside and Starbuck discovered that Kacey had fallen down the stairs, been knocked out and was bleeding. This was the point that Starbuck realizes that she can and should be the caretaker for the child, thus fulfilling a motherly role.

There was a scene between Kacey and Starbuck later, when they were back in the house, in which Starbuck explained her actions to the little girl (Mimica-Gezzan 2008:Season 3, Episode 2):

Starbuck: Hey, there’s something that I want to say to you….. I’m sorry that I left you alone….. I didn’t mean for you to get hurt. I was upset with myself, not you. Ok? Uh… grownups do stupid things sometimes, we get caught up in our own little world until it’s almost too late…… [Starbuck looks at Kacey, who is smiling back at her] You have no idea what I’m saying to you do you? [Kacey, still smiling, shakes her head and Starbuck laughs] Ok, it’s time to take a nap.

Starbuck’s speech to Kacey had dual implications: the first was that she neglected Kacey out of her own neuroticism. The second implication was that perhaps Starbuck’s mother had similar issues with parenthood, implying that Starbuck may have been coming to terms with her own abusive past.

We eventually learn that Kacey is not Starbuck and Leoben’s child, however the important aspect of Kacey and Starbuck’s interaction is that she allows herself to be a parent to Kacey. She could have chosen complete neglect, but when she realized that on a very basic
level, this child needed a caretaker, she was able to step into the role that she previously denied herself. Starbuck as a woman, reacted to taking care of her child, or supposed child, in a similar way that some of the men characters reacted. For example, Chief Tyrol became a widower and fulfilled the role of primary caregiver for his son. After his wife’s death, his child became ill and he discovered from the doctor that the child was not his. He found the father, Lieutenant Kastanza and dragged him to the hospital. When Kastanza asked “what do I do?” Tyrol said, “you sit there until he wakes up,” and then Tyrol left the room (Moore 2009:Season 4, Episode 12). In the case of Tyrol, there was deception about whether the kid was his, just as with Starbuck. Both Tyrol and Starbuck cared for the child that they believed to be theirs up to the point that they learned the truth. In both scenarios, there was very little follow up as to whether or not they continued to be in the children’s lives, and only some vague indication that they would continue to interact on any level, just not as primary caregiver.

With these three examples, we see that motherhood can be addressed in several ways. Motherhood for the women in the farm was biological, but with Starbuck it was emotional. The cylons, who believed that procreation was a commandment from their god, were responsible for both the gross violation of the women’s bodies as well as the social coaxing and blackmailing of Starbuck into motherhood. These scenarios also show the varying degrees of choice. In all Starbuck is used as a symbol of what it looks like when women reject becoming a caregiver, and some possible consequences. Also, the women at the farm are symbols for when women are not given a choice about motherhood.

While there is equality between the sexes, we see the cylons grossly violate women’s bodies and rights. What this does, is create a tension between the cylons and humans. This tension could be symbolic of a society where women have no rights, to a more progressive one where women are equals. Starbuck also represents qualities of third-wave feminism because we see her individual struggle on an important matter, such as motherhood. Starbuck has an individual and unique struggle, like most women, and that is one of the basic components of third wave feminism. As Fixmer and Wood (2005) stated, third-wave feminism is more about the individual woman than the greater good. The cylons encouraged Starbuck to have a child for the greater good of society, and Starbuck rejected that. She had to deal with her individual feelings on motherhood and when she did that, she was able to
accept a child into her life. By evaluating Starbuck’s unique and individual struggle, we see that all women have their own unique and individual experiences with matters such as motherhood, family and career, which are the basic components of third-wave feminism.

**BODY**

When analyzing Starbuck, representation of her body is one of the most prominent themes - ranging from her sexuality to basic physicality and “toughness.” The first theme is the sexualization of her character and her sexual relationships with the men on the show. Next, there are issues of violence between her and the cylon Leoben. Following that, is the physical abuse she endured with her mother and how this shapes the relationship between Starbuck and Adama, her surrogate father for all intents. Finally, there is the idea of toughness and vulnerability, which addresses both Starbuck’s physicality as well as expression of emotions.

**Sexualization and Sex**

The first idea when discussing sex, is a woman’s sex appeal: how is her body being presented, and what is the result of this portrayal. The body and its appearance are important to portraying any number of specific ideas about the character in question. One way the creator of *BSG* used appearance to portray an idea about Starbuck was in her hair length. Moore wanted to use Starbuck’s short hair as a way to show she was a tough character. In the pilot, for example, Starbuck’s character was only a very superficial “tough” character: she had a temper, fought with superior officers, smoked cigars and had extremely short hair. As the series progressed, her hair grew longer, and her character developed. During the New Caprica episodes, Starbuck’s hair was past her shoulders. Moore, the creator, wanted this to represent the non-military, married and arguably more “domesticated” Starbuck. When she returned to the Galactica and back to her job as a viper pilot, Moore wanted her hair to be short again, to be a visual representation that she was “back,” transitioning her from a wife back to a fighter pilot. Starbuck’s hair length told the audience where she was as a character: short hair and tough versus longer hair and domesticated. However, having long or short hair did not mean the same thing for the other characters. For example, Roslin had long hair the entire series, while the majority of the men characters had short hair. The other women who
were military personnel had mostly long hair that was most often in a ponytail while they were on duty. Starbuck was one of the only characters that had drastic hair changes during the series, which could have been because her hair length was a part of her characterization. Making a woman more masculine with hair length or sexualizing her with wardrobe choices reaches a similar goal: it tells the audience what to think about the character on the screen.

In Dawn Heinecken’s book *The Warrior Women of Television: a Feminist Cultural Analysis of the Female Body in Popular Media* (2003) she points out that the majority of the women that are sexualized are white, thin and conventionally attractive. Katee Sackhoff, for example, is white, thin and conventionally attractive. In the episodes used for this study, Starbuck’s character has sex with men, but was never overly sexualized or put on display for the male gaze. The ‘male gaze’ is defined as when the woman is the subject, and the person that is looking is in the power (Green 2010; Schaare 2000). Both the viewer and the man character sees the woman through the patriarchal lens, meaning she is often sexualized (Milsted 2003; Schaare 2000). There are instances when she is in as little as a sports bra and shorts, but even when a man is in the room, her body is not presented as a sexualized object meant for the male gaze. For example, Starbuck and Helo were in the work out room of the Galactica and she was in a sports bra and shorts and he in a tank top and shorts. When he is talking to her, he is not distracted by her lack of clothing, and is looking her in the eye the entire time. When she turns and walks away to another set of weights, he does not discretely “check her out.” Helo was involved with another woman and Starbuck and he are platonic friends, which could explain him not viewing Starbuck as a sexual object. However, Anders, who was involved with Starbuck romantically, had a similar reaction to her when she was only in a bra and underwear. They were in a room together, he was asleep while she tiptoed to her pile of clothes. After she put on her pants, he woke up and they proceeded to have a conversation. During this conversation she was pacing back and fourth, clutching her shirt. Anders does not stare or indicate that her lack of clothing is a sexual distraction. In both instances, with men that are both friends and romantic partners, Starbuck is not presented as a sexual object for the male gaze.

Another form of sexualization is when a character is put in risqué clothing. Heinecken (2003) points out “the sexual nature of her presentation suggests that, like other sexualized images of ‘powerful’ women, [a series is] paying lip service to feminism while conveying
deeply masculinist attitudes in drag” (p. 64). Heinecken uses the specific example of a very sexualized promotional picture of Buffy from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon 1997-2003). She explains a very sexual picture of Buffy crawling over a table with a wooden spike in her hand. With this, it is important to look at the sexualization of both Starbuck and the other women in *BSG*. When Katee Sackhoff did promotional photo shoots as the character Starbuck, she was not highly sexualized. For example see Figure 1.

She is staring at the camera, without touching her body and her clothes are not revealing. As seen in Figure 2, however, is one of the most sexualized promotional pictures of Starbuck.

In Figure 2 photo, her positioning is slightly more provocative: her chest is subtly protruding, and her hands are resting lightly on her pants. However, she is fully clothed and even though her shoulders are revealed her shirt does not expose cleavage. In addition, her
lips are not pursed in a suggestive manner and her hair and makeup are presented as naturalistic. Overall, while there are two very subtle elements of sexualization with this picture, there are more elements about it that are neutral and not sexualized.

With Roslin, for example, she is often shown in a suit as seen in Figure 3. In Figure 3, her stance is slightly feminine and her blazer is low cut, but not exposing cleavage. But similar to Starbuck’s pictures, she is mostly covered and has naturalistic makeup and hair.

Sharon, who was both military personnel and a cylon was often portrayed as shown in Figure 4. When not in her military uniform, she dressed as shown in Figure 5. The majority of her outfits outside of a military uniforms consisted of long pants, tank tops and jackets. She was rarely, if ever, in provocative clothing. Sharon’s clothing, like Starbuck and Roslin’s is most often not sexually provocative.

The final woman character is Six. There are two versions of her character: the first is a figment of Dr. Giaus Baltar’s imagination who is “Head Six,” while the second Caprica Six
the human-cylon model that Head Six is based from. When Head Six appears she is primarily in a tight and form fitting red dress. The color varies only occasionally, with slight variations of this cut and length as shown in Figure 6. However, when Caprica Six appears, she is usually dressed as shown in Figure 7. Caprica Six dresses similar to Sharon, wearing long pants, tank tops and jackets. The military attire and personal attire are not sexualizing the women on the series. However, Head Six, essentially created by a man’s psyche, is presented as highly sexualized. While the women are able to break from their stereotypically sexualized appearance, the a man, in this case Dr. Baltar, does not break from the stereotypical idea that a man will sexualize a woman. The women, with the exception of Head Six, are not sexualized in either the promotional pictures or in the series. Essentially, the women on the series are allowed to break the stereotype of being sexualized, but the men are not allowed out of the stereotype of sexualizing the women.
Ronald Moore, the creator of *BSG*, said that a television series can sexualize women characters in any number of ways, but that it is the act of them having sex that puts them on equal footing with men. In the words of Moore (YouTube 2008a):

> You can dress them up in leather, S&M outfits, and you can fetishized them as objects, but if you just have sex with them, if it’s just like they’re people and you allow their sexualization to be co-equal with men, it flips the fans out.

Essentially Moore is saying that if women have sex in the same way that men have sex, then they are seen as equals. However, our gender expectations may result in the viewer feeling conflicted about women being equal to men through the act of sex, because women are generally portrayed as being more reserved than men when it comes to sexual relations.

According to Owen and Fincham (2010) “men, generally, are socialized to view sex as a physical encounter with limited relational intimacy or attachment whereas women are
more likely to prioritize emotional investment and hope for relational commitment” (p. 322). So, if a woman does not link sex with intimacy, but perhaps only link sex with pleasure she could be rebelling against societal expectations. Starbuck lives in an egalitarian society between men and women, therefore she is not rebelling against her societal expectations. Meaning, in only the episodes analyzed, Starbuck had or was going to have sexual relations with three men, only one of which she was in a committed relationship with. It is important to look at how the show deals with sex and what that means for Starbuck’s character. For example, the act of sex between Starbuck and Zak, her now dead fiancé, is meant to be a visual representation of their entire intimate relationship, while sex between Starbuck and Apollo is meant to be a way for Starbuck to ease emotional pain about another man. It is more about what the sex represents then the act itself. In the following scenarios, it represents intimacy and comfort.
With Zak sex is used as a means to symbolize their personal and intimate relationship. There was a juxtaposition of the couple having sex interspersed with discussions about their professional relationship. By showing Starbuck and Zak’s conversation during an intimate moment we see that their professional and personal relationships were intertwined. Sex is used as a symbol for Starbuck and Zak’s entire personal relationship, while the conversation about Zak being a pilot is a symbol for their professional one.

The next man Starbuck has a physical relationship with is Samuel Anders. While Starbuck and Anders are not shown having sex, the idea of them starting a sexual relationship is heavily implied. For example, the couple is seen waking up in the same room, there is a noticeable level of comfort between the two of them and a joking rapport that is common with dating couples. At the beginning of “The Farm”, it seems possible that Starbuck is not interested in pursuing an intense emotional relationship, but by the end she has created a
strong emotional bond with him (Hardy 2005). For example, at the beginning of the episode, their conversation goes as such (Hardy 2005: Season 2, Episode 5):

   **Anders:** We could use some professional advice.

   **Starbuck:** You want some advice, you’re in the losing end of this fight, give it up before you all die. Head further up in the mountains, above the ambient radiation and just hold up.

   **Anders:** And what? Wait to die?

   **Starbuck:** As soon as I get back to Galactica, I’ll send a rescue party

   **Anders:** Yeah right…

   **Starbuck:** If I say I’m going to do something, I’ll do it.

During this conversation, they are both very curt. They do end up joking around by the end of the scene, but their emotional distance is apparent. By the end of the episode, after Starbuck escaped from the cylon hospital, she has very different feelings about her
relationship with Anders. She tells him she wants to stay and help the resistance liberate the cylon farms, and he reminds her of her original mission. They step off to have a private conversation. Anders hands Starbuck the Arrow of Apollo and says (Hardy 2005:Season 2, Episode 5):

*Anders*: Go find Earth.

*Starbuck*: What about you? You said you needed professional advice.

*Anders*: We’ll muddle through. We’ve managed so far

*Starbuck*: They’ll kill you. You’ll die here, you know that.

*Anders*: A lot of people died here………. I’ll tell you this, if I’m going to die here, I’m going to take out every last one of those fraking farms before I do.

*Starbuck*: I’m not going to leave you here.

*Anders*: You said you were going to come back, remember? I’m going to hold you to it.

*Starbuck*: [pulls off her dog tags and gives one to Anders and then grabs his face with both of her hands] I’m coming back. I said it. I meant it.

While their second conversation mimics their first in content, it does not have the same emotional content as the first. In their second conversation, they are both holding back tears and there are long pauses between the dialogues to allow for the actors to express the necessary emotions. They were brought together by sex, but it was her experience in the cylon hospital that made her realize his importance. Anders also realized Starbuck’s importance, and while we did not see his development throughout the episode, we see that they ended the episode much closer and emotionally connected than when the episode started.

The third way the show dealt with sex was in the episode “Scar” (Nankin 2006). Starbuck was dealing with the grim possibility that Anders may be dead (this was before she went back and rescued him). One thing Starbuck does in her increasingly “destructive” behavior is try to have sex with Apollo, her best friend. Starbuck and Apollo are drinking and talking about all the pilots that have died since the nuclear attacks, until Starbuck makes an internal decision about “seizing the day” and kisses him. The situation is implied to escalate quickly, the camera cutting away to a frenzied scene where the pair are taking off one another’s clothes and kissing in their bunkroom. It appears to be rough and quick, but somber music plays over the scene with flashes of her and Anders flirting and kissing from “The
Farm” (Hardy 2005). Apollo begins to protest as he realizes that something is wrong (Nankin 2006:Season 2, Episode 15):

*Apollo:* Woah! Kara, this isn’t a race!


*Apollo:* HEY! What about us?!

*Starbuck:* There is no us! Alright? I just wanted a good lay. There is nothing here! Do you get that? Nothing!

*Apollo:* Sure…

*Starbuck:* My Gods!

*Apollo:* Well, that’s just great. Frak or fight, huh? Ok, maybe I am just a quick lay, but I am also your friend—

*Starbuck:* I am hung up on a dead guy! Ok? And it is pissing me off, and I don’t know what I’m doing.

*Apollo:* Anders right? On Caprica? The resistance fighter

*Starbuck:* Samuel’s dead, so it doesn’t matter

*Apollo:* Oh Kara—

*Starbuck:* I don’t need your pity!

*Apollo:* You haven’t got my pity! Listen, listen. You are fine with the dead guys, it’s the living ones you can’t deal with

Starbuck then slaps Apollo, kisses him and storms out of the room without saying anything else.

While there is some sexual chemistry between Apollo and Starbuck, the show never gratified that relationship with sex up to that point in the series. Here, Starbuck is using sex as a way to give herself emotional comfort. Apollo, on the other hand, does not want to be used as a sexual object and stops her actions. Sex as emotional comfort is more typically associated with men, and women are often portrayed as wanting sex to be an act of intimacy and commitment. If that is what is typically portrayed, then Starbuck and Apollo switch gender roles. She takes on the more typically masculine traits and he the feminine.

The final way the show deals with sex is when Starbuck has a sex dream about Leoben. The sex is rough and seems on the verge of rape, without crossing that particular moral line. The roughness of the dreamed sex, the implied sexual violence, and Starbuck later referring to it as a nightmare, is arguably more indicative of her feelings toward Leoben.
than of her feelings toward sex. She is constantly victimized by Leoben’s character throughout the course of the show, although never sexually. The implied victimization and the roughness of the act of sex between the two of them illustrate how she feels about their relationship. Starbuck internalizes their relationship dynamic as being violent, and this manifest itself as sexual violence when she dreams about Leoben.

In conclusion, what we see with the various men in Starbuck’s life is that sex can either be used as a symbol to mean something else, can be part of a relationship, can be used for comfort and can manifest itself in perverse ways when other issues are internalized. While Starbuck and Anders had the same understanding about their physical and emotional relationship, Apollo and Starbuck did not. With Starbuck and Apollo, there was the man who wanted an emotional connection and intimacy. In the episodes chosen, the only men shown having sex are the men that are being intimate with Starbuck. Additionally, the series used sex as a symbol to represent the complexity of Starbuck and Leoben’s relationship without resorting to overt sexual violence, which would have been a tragically simple way to make Leoben the enemy. Their relationship, instead, is far more complicated, filled with ambivalence and depth, without a clear picture on their exact feelings for one another. The act of sex, in all ways that it is used, helps to illustrate the complex ways that individuals deal with one another.

**Violence**

Both Douglas (2010) and Vares (2002) discuss women being violent on television, pointing out the 1990s as the general time this began to occur, implying that before this, women were most often the victims and not the perpetrator. Woman will no longer be passive and the receiver of violence, but they are now allowed to take up a certain amount of physical space, and in some scenarios, that is being violent (Heinecken 2003). Heinecken points out that the male figure is one that crosses boundaries, in the case of BSG, this would be Leoben, and him imprisoning her on New Caprica and pretending they were a couple. While Leoben and Starbuck have a volatile relationship, and she is extremely violent with him, she is not always doing this because her life is threatened.

Because Leoben is a cylon, he can download and return, even when Starbuck kills him. This allows for them to have several interactions in spite of the number of times she
kills him. Starbuck interacts with Leoben in person during “Flesh and Bone” and then during the New Caprica episodes (Turner 2005). While Starbuck is one of the most competent viper pilots and has impressive physical strength, Leoben is stronger than her. Starbuck managed to kill a woman cylon model in a physical fight, we learn during “Flesh and Bone” that she is unable to do this with Leoben (Turner 2005).

The first time Starbuck meets Leoben he is handcuffed and chained, effectively limiting his movement and making him a non-threat to her. There are two instances in their initial interaction - one where he tries to shake her hand and another where he tries to grab food - when the handcuffs stop his movement abruptly. Later, Starbuck is left alone when the marine guards go retrieve an item she needs. Right as the door is shut, Leoben says (Turner 2005:Season 1, Episode 8):

Do you realize I could kill you before they came back in the room? I could get to my feet, rip your skull from your spinal column, crash through that door and kill the guard in less time than it took for me to describe it to you.

She asks him why he does not, and he replies, “it’s not time” (Turner 2005:Season 1, Episode 8). Starbuck smirks and looks to the side; she ignores his threat because she is not afraid of him at this point. Starbuck does not realize the truth behind his threat. Leoben then rips his handcuffs free, flips the table that lies between them, grabs Starbuck by her neck and pushes her up against the opposing wall. The guards re-enter the room using the door on the opposite end of the room and it takes two men to pull Leoben off of Starbuck. She proceeds to torture Leoben for the remainder of the episode. Leoben was putting forth the facade of being restricted by the handcuffs, when he was, in retrospect, a physical threat to Starbuck. Her reaction to this sudden power reversal is to return violence with violence, which sets the tone for their entire relationship.

Their next interaction is during the New Caprica episodes. The first scene is Starbuck and Leoben having dinner together where they seem almost like a “normal” couple. They sit down, pray, and then she asks him to cut her steak, implying that Starbuck is not allowed sharp or potentially deadly object. Leoben walks over to her, and put his face close to hers. They smile at one another then Starbuck pulls a pair of chopsticks that she was hiding beneath her chair and plunges them through Leoben’s neck. She kicks him to the ground,
straddles his body and stabs him repeatedly. Her position on top of him and the way she lean over to talk to him moments before he expires brings sexual undertones to her killing him.

The next scenario in which Leoben is physically violent with Starbuck is when the human insurgency attacks the cylon occupation, the Galactica returns, and the humans evacuate the planet. Leoben is leaving to help the cylons defend against the human attack, when Starbuck chases him up the staircase and says he cannot leave her in the apartment. Starbuck proceeds to jump on his back, and he wrestles her off then knocks her unconscious. This is the first time we see him being violent toward her since “Flesh and Bone” (Turner 2005). Overall, Starbuck killed Leoben a total of six times, two were on screen and four were off. Prior to killing him, she witnessed his death in “Flesh and Bone.” In all, Leoben is physically violent with Starbuck during “Flesh and Bone” and the New Caprica episodes. His physical violence with her during the New Caprica episodes is not as prominent, because the psychological damage of locking her up and making them live together is more significant. Essentially, Starbuck has nightmares, abuses alcohol and spreads malcontent among the viper pilots, all shortly after her experience on New Caprica.

After these instances of violence between Starbuck and Leoben, we see that she has internalized their violent interaction. In the final episode, “Maelstrom,” she had a vision where Leoben visited her and coaxed her into killing herself (Nankin 2008). Starbuck dies at the end of the episode by crashing her viper into an electrical storm. The primary story in the episode “Maelstrom” is about Starbuck coming to terms with her abusive mother, who died of cancer, which is tied into Starbuck overall fear of death (Nankin 2008). She has two visions; one is where she re-lives the moment where she learns that her mother has cancer; the second is her visiting her mother’s deathbed, which never happened, because of Starbuck’s fear of death. Leoben says (Nankin 2008:Season 3, Episode 17):

_Leoben_: See, there’s nothing so terrible about that? When you finally face it, it’s beautiful. You’re free now to become who you really are.

_Starbuck_: You’re not Leoben.

_Leoben_: I never said I was. I’m here to prepare you to pass through the next door, to discover what hovers in the space between life and death.

She awakens in her viper, and proceeds to crash her viper into the electrical storm and dies.
Overall, Leoben and Starbuck have one of the most violent relationships in the series. They continuously switch roles in terms of who is violent toward whom, and Leoben is presented as one of the only characters on the show that is a physical threat to Starbuck. With her visualizing Leoben before her suicide, and he being the representation of her suicide, we see that she has internalized their violent relationship to the point that he is the symbol of her suicide, which is arguably the ultimate act of violence.

Essentially, Starbuck mimics Leoben in the amount of violence they enact toward one another. The series does not highlight Starbuck’s violence toward Leoben as a negative trait because it is often a response to him being a physical threat or violent toward her. What this means, is that her being violent toward him is “self-defense” while him being violent toward her serves to further villianize his character. Regardless of Starbuck and Leoben’s sex, we see one version of a relationship between a hero and their nemesis, and the violence that occurs out of this dynamic. Starbuck fought with and killed a Six model, as well as Adama fighting with and killing a Leoben model. In both scenarios where the sex was the same, the cylon still had the physical advantage. In these scenarios the violent interaction is not exclusively men being violent toward women.

**Parenting and Physical Abuse**

When a television series deals with the roles of mothers and fathers, there is usually a stereotypical way in which both sexes are displayed (Larson 1996). Women are seen as the caring mother while fathers are meant to maintain an emotional distance and provide monetary support for his children and family (Tsai and Shumow 2011). Starbuck is presented as having her biological mother, who raised Starbuck on her own as a single mother, and Adama, who is presented as her surrogate father because of their personal and professional ties. Starbuck’s mother was abusive both physically and emotionally, which Larson (1996) states are one of several negative consequences that may emerge from a single parent household. Adama, as the patriarch and surrogate father to Starbuck, follows Coltrane and Adams (1997) characteristics of “knowledgeable, independent, powerful, successful and prone to swift decisive action” which is how men are generally portrayed (p. 330). Starbuck’s childhood aligns with Larson’s article on the potential negative consequences of a single parent household, because her mother was both physically and verbally abusive.
We learn that when Starbuck was seven, she had extreme consequences for not doing her chores, such as being beaten with a broom handle by her mother. Starbuck told Anders the story of when she retaliated exploiting her mother's bug phobia by hiding fake bugs in her closet. When she finishes the story Anders says, “I bet you caught hell for that” to which Starbuck replies, “she grabbed my hand, held it in the door jam and slammed it shut” (Nankin 2008:Season 3, Episode 17). When Anders winces, Starbuck follows with a, “it was worth it, watching her scream her fraking head off” (Nankin 2008:Season 3, Episode 17).

Adama, alternatively, is a parental figure to Starbuck, because he guides her and loves her in a relationship that is similar to that of parent and child. They work together for several years on the Galactica, and develop a familial relationship over the course of that time. In “Act of Contrition” Starbuck tells Adama that she passed his son, Zak Adama, in flight school despite the fact that he failed the practical exam (Turner 2005). The idea that Zak was ill prepared to be a viper pilot is, in everyone’s mind, the reason he died. During the scene when Starbuck confesses this to Adama, they are standing very close and his expression is extremely angry and intense. When she tries to gauge his reaction he remains silent so she continues to apologize. Adama says, “leave, while you can still walk” (Turner 2005:Season 1, Episode 4). She is hurt by his threat, already in tears, and flees the room.

The next instance is when Starbuck gets back from New Caprica. She is abusing alcohol and causing morale problems between the viper pilots on the Galactica. She and Colonel Tigh, who is also having issues adjusting to the Galactica after New Caprica, are implying that the pilots that remained on the Galactica had it easier and do not understand what the individuals that were on New Caprica went through. Adama deals with this by finding Starbuck and Tigh, who are in the pilots’ recreation room, and talking to them about their behavior. He starts to lecture them and Starbuck says she is not going to apologize, so he pushes her, causing her to fall to the ground. He looks at her and says (Segonzac 2008:Season 3, Episode 6):

*Adama:* You were like a daughter to me once, no more. You’re malcontent and a cancer and I won’t have you on my ship. So you have a choice, you figure out how to become a human being again and an officer or you can find another place to live, off of this ship. You’re dismissed.

She does not respond, but only kicks the chair, stands and leaves. While she does not respond in that moment, she ultimately comes to her senses and does what Adama told her.
In both cases, Adama either threatens bodily harm to Starbuck or actually does get slightly physical with her to make his point. In the first instance, during “Act of Contrition” it was the most effective way to make her exit the room (Turner 2005). In the second case, he uses violence with Starbuck to make her pay attention to what he is saying, Adama is a generally positive father figure for Starbuck and he is the one that helps her come to terms with her experience on New Caprica. While he mostly does not have to resort to violence or the threat of violence, we see that for Starbuck, it was effective. It takes Adama pushing her chair to get her attention, but it is what he said that really changes her mind. We learn in a later episode that what Adama said mimicked Starbuck’s mother, which, according to a psychic oracle was (Nankin 2008:Season 3, Episode 17):

Oracle: You were born to a woman that thought suffering was good for the soul, so you suffered. Your life was a testament to pain. You want to believe it because it means that you’re bad luck, you’re like a cancer that needs to be removed, because you hear her voice every day and you want her to be right.

What we see here is that there is a common thread between Starbuck’s mother and Adama in how they try and get through to Starbuck.

Starbuck’s mother was violent and abusive. However, Starbuck came to the realization with Kacey, that parents may hurt their children because of the parent’s own neurotic fears. In the case with Adama, Starbuck provoked him, so his actions could be explained. Regardless of the reason, we see that there are two parenting strategies, one is extremely violent and the other is much less so. The extremely violent parent is a single mother while the less violent one is the surrogate father. While it is not illustrated in the selected episodes, Apollo, Adama’s biological son had a strained relationship with his father, with a back-story that Adama having a military career meant he was an absentee father to his sons. He was a much more attentive parent to Starbuck, one of his employees, than he was to his biological son. Women are typically portrayed as caretakers while men are typically portrayed as keeping an emotional distance from the children (Tsai and Shumow 2011). Starbuck’s relationship with her mother and Adama, respectively, switches what we typically see in parent child relationships on television.
**Toughness**

When violence is enacted on a character's body, we think of the toughness of that character or what it means to be considered “tough.” Author Sherrie Inness (1999) discusses toughness and what this means for women characters in her book *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture*. First, she mentions that society’s working definition of “tough” is traditionally associated with men that have a strong physical build. Alternatively, a tough woman can “endure tremendous physical and emotional suffering and still emerge the victor” (Inness 1999:12).

The first thing that must be evaluated when looking at a character's toughness is the intentions of the producers and actor playing the part. The actress that played Starbuck, Katee Sackhoff, stated in an interview that she usually got the roles of a stereotypical weak blonde, but after Starbuck, she is now the go-to tough girl for casting directors (YouTube 2009a). For example, she played a tough character in the movie *The Last Sentinel* (Johnson 2007) as well as playing strong women in *The Bionic Woman* (Johnson 1976-1978) and *Longmire* (Chulack 2012). However, in another interview, when asked about the importance of playing a strong character, she claimed she did not care if she played a strong or weak character, as long as the story was up to her moral standard (YouTube 2009b). For example, Sackhoff did not mind that Starbuck drank alcohol and had sex, but she did not want Starbuck to smoke.

Sackhoff claimed that sex and drinking could be explained to the younger audience by their parents, but that smoking could not, and she did not want Starbuck to be a bad influence (YouTube 2009a). Sackhoff’s moral standard, in this case was: drinking and sex are justifiable actions, but smoking is not. Sackhoff claims she has more of an obligation to her audience as a public figure than she does in the roles she chose to play. The reverse may also happen when a woman character wants to portray more competence or strength than the producers are allowing. For example, Sackhoff pointed out that when she was a guest star on the series *24* (Surnow and Cochran 2001-2010) that the man she was with shot the gun that her character stole (YouTube 2009b). She was surprised, after playing a character like Starbuck, that she was not the one shooting the gun (YouTube 2009b). While the creators and producers sometimes have an agenda to create non-stereotypical roles that the women playing the roles do not necessarily feel the same obligation. Alternatively, we see that sometimes producers do not feel an obligation to create strong women characters and the
actor takes note. In both instances, the producers, who are often also the writers, seem to have the most control over their series.

In *BSG*, Starbuck has a great deal of physical strength and ability. In “The Farm”, we see that in spite of a gunshot wound and a surgical incision, still she is able to kill two cylons, and escape from the cylon hospital (Hardy 2005). The other indication of her toughness is not what she does, but how other characters treat her. An example of this was when the cylons occupied New Caprica, and imprisoned Starbuck. Technically, all the colonials were prisoners in the sense that they could not leave New Caprica, but the cylons allowed the colonials to still work and function as a normal society, albeit an occupied state. Within the New Caprica police state, they had additional prisons they used to lock up certain people or colonial insurgents. Starbuck was contained and the fact that the cylons held her captive showed how strong they thought she was, ultimately validating her toughness. The cylons’ actions, along with Starbuck’s, shows that she is physically one of the toughest characters, man or woman, on the series.

**Emotions**

Douglas (2010) points out that when a woman does take over a typically male role, such as Starbuck being the most competent pilot on her military ship, there is an opportunity for more feminine exploration, namely that of exploring emotions. For example Adama and Apollo would have less freedom to express their emotions than Starbuck and Roslin. The woman in the unconventional role is allowed to be both strong and emotional (Conly 2008; Jowett 2005; Kungl and Hicks 2008; Levine 2007). Starbuck, for example, shows toughness as stated, but she also expresses sadness, compassion, anger and joy.

Starbuck shows emotional sensitivity and even cries on occasion, and unlike her male counterparts, can do it publicly. Alternatively, a good place to look at how *BSG* deals with male emotions, is to consider Adama and Apollo’s reaction to Starbuck’s death. In both instances, Adama and Apollo cry in private or not at all. Adama’s reaction to Starbuck’s death in “Maelstrom” is first disbelief in the public command center, and then anger that leads to sadness in the privacy of his room (Nankin 2008). The scene shows Adama working on a model ship and then, when he has trouble attaching a piece, throwing the entire thing against a wall and crying. He expresses his emotions in the privacy of his own room. His son,
Apollo, has a similar reaction to Starbuck’s death a few episodes later. He is going to pin her picture up on the Wall of Remembrance and is getting emotional, when a person calls for him to go down to the hanger deck and he quickly composes himself and hides the picture. Even more so in this scenario, Apollo is hiding his feelings. He is more exposed than Adama, but he is still not expressing his sadness.

When looking at the episodes in chronological order, we see that Starbuck felt comfortable expressing her sadness both in public and private scenarios. In “Act of Contrition” she only cries in front of Adama (Turner 2005). In the next episode, “Flesh and Bone” she does not cry, but she shows compassion to Leoben (Turner 2005). He spends the episode trying to break down her “tough” facade. Each scene they share, her face expresses slightly more and more emotion until by the end she is visibly saddened. At the end of the episode, after they execute Leoben, she prays for his soul. While the praying was a private moment, she also displayed her connection by putting her hand up to the window of the room where he was executed. She was doing this in front of guards and Roslin, showing that she felt both compassion and pity.

During the next season we see Starbuck in “The Farm” where she is physically injured and spends the majority of the episode in a hospital bed, she cries, but does not do so in front of Simon (Hardy 2005). She cries when Simon informs her that Anders is dead and again when he mentions her abusive past, however in both instances she waits for Simon to vacate the room. Starbuck and Anders also have a moment at the end of “The Farm” where they both get emotional, although neither of them openly cries (Hardy 2005). In “Scar” Starbuck cries twice, both times when she is alone and had been drinking (Nankin 2006).

In the third season, Starbuck is experiencing intense emotional stress by being held captive with Leoben and being forced to “play house.” In this instance, she only shows sadness and some tears when she is alone. Starbuck also cries when Kacey is taken away and when she goes back to visit the child at the end of the episode “Torn” (Segonzac 2008). In both of these scenarios with Kacey, Starbuck is crying in public.

The final time we see Starbuck crying is in the episode “Maelstrom” (Nankin 2008). Starbuck has a dream where she re-lives the moment when her younger self learned of her mother’s cancer and imminent death. The younger Starbuck, responded with anger and annoyance, but did not cry in front of her mother. She was even ridiculed by her mother for
expressing sadness with a, “what are you going to do? Cry about it?” (Nankin 2008:Season 3, Episode 17. The younger Starbuck was expressing emotions, but because of her mothers reaction we see that she hid the sadness and as a result responded emotionally with anger. The older Starbuck is finally able to respond to re-living this painful moment by crying openly and allowing herself to feel grief. Starbuck’s expression of sadness is important because it shows her vulnerability and how she developed over the series. However, she expresses a number of other emotions such as: anger, annoyance, compassion, fear, guilt, and joy.

Starbuck expresses annoyance at both herself and others. She displays minor levels of annoyance when other characters do not comply with her demands. For example, she becomes annoyed when she interrogates Leoben does not answer her questions. She also becomes annoyed at the trainee pilots when they do not stand at attention upon her walking into the room. She deals with these scenarios by smirking and saying something rude, essentially putting fourth her facade and indicating she is “in charge.” We see intense annoyance when she is dealing with her ambivalent emotions over Anders and New Caprica. First, she becomes annoyed that Apollo will not have sex with her, but through their argument, it becomes apparent that her annoyance is not with Apollo, but with her feelings toward Anders. The second instance is the post-New Caprica episode “Torn” where she interacts with several characters, and becomes annoyed or angry with almost all of them (Segonzac 2008). She becomes annoyed at Kacey’s real mother for bringing the girl to visit her, she becomes annoyed with Apollo and Adama for giving her direct orders, and lastly she becomes annoyed with the other viper pilots on the Galactica. It is apparent that her outward anger with other people is really just her frustration that she will have to deal with her feelings about what happened to her on New Caprica and the psychological damage it caused.

Next, Starbuck shows compassion during the episode “Flesh and Bone” during this scene with Roslin and Leoben (Turner 2005:Season 1, Episode 8):

Roslin: I’ve come to tell you that this conflict between our people does not have to continue. We have to trust each other. Trust me. I think you know you can. Tell me what I need to know, and you will live.
Leoben: The warhead doesn’t exist, I made it up. Lieutenant was right, I was too far out and I didn’t want to die, so when I got caught, I made up a story to buy some time.

Roslin: I see. Thank you for the truth.

Leoben: Thank you. Madam President, don’t be too hard on Kara, she was just doing her job. The military, they teach you to dehumanize people.

Roslin: I’ll take that into consideration.

Starbuck: Are you alright?

Roslin: I’m fine. Put him out the airlock

Starbuck: What?! You can’t do that! Not after he told you the truth!

Roslin: Yes I can. And I will. Lieutenant, look at me. You’ve lost perspective. During the time I’ve allowed him to remain alive and captive on this ship he has caused our entire fleet to spread out defenseless… He puts insidious ideas in our minds, more lethal than any warhead. He creates fear. But you’re right, he’s a machine and you don’t keep a deadly machine around when it kills your people and threatens your future, you get rid of it.

Starbuck: He’s not afraid to die. He’s just afraid that his soul won’t make it to God.

Starbuck sympathizes with his religious beliefs and his fear that he might not “download successfully” if they are too far from a cylon resurrection ship. Essentially, this Leoben is at risk of having a true death, and because Starbuck fears death, she prays for his soul after his execution showing the compassion that Roslin pretended to have at the beginning of this scene. Starbuck also has compassion for the women that were attached to the machines in “The Farm” (Hardy 2005). She destroys their life support, even though she technically killed the women, she was doing the most humane thing she could do in that scenario.

Next, is the display of fear. Starbuck shows fear in both the cylon hospital and during her time imprisoned on New Caprica. First, she leaves her hospital room and discovers the hospital is run by cylons and not the resistance, she goes back to her room, shuts the door, looks scared and starts mumbling frantically, “what do I do, oh god, what do I do?” (Hardy 2005:Season 2, Episode 5). Second, when she is with Leoben on New Caprica, her emotions are difficult to interpret when he is present. However, when he finally leaves her alone, she falls to her knees and looks terrified. She notices their front door is open and when she rushes out she is still barricaded by bars in the hallway. She screams hysterically, “I don’t belong here! Let me out! I don’t belong here! Let me out!” (Mimica-Gezzan 2008:Season 3,
Episode 1). We see her display fear, showing that even though she is a tough and competent woman, there are scenarios that she feels she cannot control and make her fearful.

The next emotion is guilt. During the episode “Act of Contrition” she acts extremely guilty over her involvement in Zak’s death (Turner 2005). Her feelings over his death are unresolved because she has not revealed the truth to Adama. The guilt manifest itself by her failing the trainee pilots in flight school as well as her engaging in several arguments with Apollo. Eventually, she does tell Adama the truth, but feels she must do one additional gesture: she attempts to fight several cylon raiders and crashes her viper. Her guilt caused her to not only tell Adama, but also seek his forgiveness by doing something dangerous to prove her loyalty.

One of the final emotions is joy and happiness. Starbuck and Apollo, at the beginning of “Act of Contrition” are joking around in their bunkroom (Turner 2005). Adama joins them and then we see Starbuck playfully telling Apollo a story about Adama. The three are being jovial and smiling. Starbuck and Anders also have a happy moment at the beginning of “The Farm” where they flirt and joke with one another (Hardy 2005). Outside of the episodes selected, the characters expressing happiness and joy is not frequent, which is due to the serious nature of the show.

Showing that Starbuck can express a variety of emotion is the series allowing for the audience to explore multiple sides of her personality. She is not a tough hero character completely void of emotion and she is also not an emotional wreck incapable of doing things for herself. Starbuck is allowed to express herself openly where men cannot. In this series, women are again allowed to explore an emotional space that their male counterparts are not.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As illustrated in the findings Starbuck is a very dynamic character in the sense that she is physically tough, competent at her job, and compassionate. In addition to those traits, she has multifaceted relationships with the other characters on the show that lend themselves to great analysis of her character. Starbuck, along with the other women on the series are equal to the men, meaning they live in an egalitarian society in which men and women should be allowed both feminine and masculine exploration. The women are not becoming the men; they are simply on equal ground with the men. Also, Starbuck exhibits attitudes about sex and her body that is sometimes seen in both men and women characters on television. She is both a hero and “tough” as well as emotional and vulnerable. She is a well-rounded woman in a way that was not seen on television in previous decades and I would argue, based on my analysis, that she is a feminist character and a representation of what a modern feminist character on television should be.

Starbuck not only represents a feminist character on television but also the series BSG should be added to the list of television series that help progress the feminist movement. The reason for this is simple: in BSG’s reality we see what an egalitarian society should be and it is not drastically different from our own society. There is a long history of women fighting for equality and there have always been forces that resist this change. Whether it is men’s anxiety of women gaining power, or women not being comfortable with their potential power, there has always been opposition. BSG shows in a very normalized way what would happen if we lived in an egalitarian society, and it would be as simple as having both men and women in positions of power. BSG shows that sometimes women get emotional, and other times men get emotional; there is nothing wrong with either expression. Sometimes a man rescues a woman, and sometimes a woman rescues a man. The women in power positions do not emasculate the men; they are simply their subordinates as women would be with a man in power. It must also be noted that I used the term “egalitarian” to describe the idea that women are equal to men, however a fully egalitarian society would be true gender
equality. Meaning, while this series forwards the idea that men’s emotions are not inherently negative, some of the men express their emotions privately. While the majority of the men on the series do not openly sexualize women, there was one man character that continued to be highly sexualized and viewed women in that manner. However, I would argue that having the women be equal with the men as well as having the majority of the men being equal with the women, is a far more progressive representation of an egalitarian society than has previous been seen on television. The next step would be to have a television series where men and women would be entirely equal with one another in every capacity.

*BSG*, essentially, presents the viewer with a reality that the women are equal to the men, and in order to enjoy this series, the viewer must accept that reality. So, if a person watches *BSG* and becomes involved with a character like Starbuck, then they are accepting an egalitarian society and how this woman navigates that. By individuals watching this series, they are accepting that women can be equal to men, which may help people not resist when that idea is eventually enacted. Women being “equal” to men is not to be confused with women become or replacing men. Just as watching *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (Brooks and Burns 1970-1977) made people more accepting of women in the work place, and watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon 1997-2003) made people more accepting of women being strong and independent, watching *BSG* will make people more accepting of an egalitarian society between men and women. It is for this exact reason that *BSG* could be added to the long list of television series that help to advance the feminist movement, and Starbuck could be viewed as a feminist character.

I personally chose Starbuck for this study because of how I reacted to her character upon my initial viewing of the series. I enjoyed watching Starbuck interact with other characters, have competence at her job, and alternate between personal successes and failures. I could relate to her imperfections, gain strength from her competence, and enjoy her successes. Simply put, I was able to compare my strengths and weaknesses against Starbuck’s, and as a result made me a more self-aware and competent woman. I wanted to learn about her and understand her behavior and more importantly, I wanted to understand how she could be a positive influence for not only myself but also for other women.

While I did not do an analysis of how women react to the characters, I believe that attempting to understand strong woman characters is both empowering and meaningful. I
brought in relevant issues such as: reproductive rights and violence against women. In addition to that, this research touches on the most basic ideas of how women respond to the world around them, and I do this through an analysis of Starbuck. Both women and men will be able to compare Starbuck’s characteristics and relationship dynamics to their own lives. Is Starbuck living in a more progressive world? Why? Should men act like the men on the show, and if so, would women start acting like the women on the show?

My study is limited because I only did one component of television criticism. Doing television criticism involves content analysis, evaluation of political economy in which the show exist and finally audience reaction. I, however, only did content analysis. In addition, I only analyzed one character from a show that had six main characters. As a white woman, I was only able to analyze Starbuck from my limited worldview. I believe a man or a woman of color could have a different analysis of the series, and may come up with very meaningful insight that I did not. I believe, however, in spite of these limitations that this research is meaningful understanding others helps us understand ourselves.

A good place to continue this research would be to do a comparative analysis of Starbuck to the other women on the show, or to compare all the women on the show to all the men. Another place to continue research is to look at the content of the show in relations to the media events surrounding the series original airing. The series first came to my attention via a National Public Radio (NPR) show, about how the human insurgency against the cylon’s on New Caprica could be compared to the insurgents in Iraq. NPR discussed how putting a human face, literally, to insurgents might help us understand the Iraq insurgency, and more importantly their motives. Essentially, looking at BSG in direct relation to when it was on air and the current events of that time period would be invaluable. The final way the research could be continued is having individuals watch the series and gauge their reactions and feelings on the subject matter. Do they feel empowered or do they feel the show itself in unrealistic? In all, more expanded content analysis, evaluating the show against current events and audience’s reception would all be great ways to further analysis of BSG.
REFERENCES


Hardy, Ron [Director]. 2005. *Battlestar Galactica: The Farm* (Season 2). DVD.


Moore, Ron. [Director]. 2009. Battlestar Galactica: A Disquiet Follows My Soul (Season 4). DVD.


Nankin, Michael [Director]. 2006. Battlestar Galactica: Scar (Season 2.5). DVD.

Nankin, Michael [Director]. 2008. Battlestar Galactica: Maelstrom (Season 3). DVD.


Segonzac, Jean [Director]. 2008. *Battlestar Galactica: Torn* (Season 3). DVD.


Turner, Brad [Director]. 2005. *Battlestar Galactica: Flesh and Bone* (Season 1). DVD.


