

FEMALE STEREOTYPING IN VAMPIRE FICTION

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ABSTRACT: This essay focuses on how negative stereotypes in the media can affect people's behaviors towards the groups targeted in these films or books. More specifically, how vampire fiction portrays females as psychotic and by showing that they have nothing else to offer besides their bodies. The media can be highly influential and may even shape our understanding of the world and what we believe everyone's role in the world is. Therefore, analyzing vampire fiction and their portrayal of their female characters is crucial in understanding why we may treat women in a less dignified manner compared to men. My paper provides evidence to prove that even subconsciously, men may treat women as if they aren't as qualified for a job as their male colleagues. Looking at the source of where we obtain this information of what typical female behavior should be and figuring out how we can alter it in the books we read and the films we watch, will be essential in moving our society closer to reaching gender equality.

The fight for gender equality is a major issue that has always been present. More specifically, women have never received the same level of respect as men in the US and looking at the representation of the two genders in the media, it is not hard to see why. "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes" (1949) by Fritz Leiber highlights this issue when looking at the portrayal of females. This vampire tale centers on a vampire disguised as a model who uses her sexuality to get what she wants: the blood of her dates. Her behavior throughout the story certainly is not something that could be described as ground-breaking for female characters. From Dusk till Dawn (1996) directed by Robert Rodriguez similarly objectifies women but adds an element of fear to them. This action horror film is about two robbers who find themselves trapped in a strip club filled with vampires eager to feed on them. Dissecting these pieces, I believe is crucial in determining why men may behave a certain way towards women. The media helps shape our perceptions of

the world and people around us, so we must be aware of films and books that portray women in a negative light. I wish to argue that female vampires are seductive and dangerous, as shown in "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes" and From Dusk till Dawn, perpetuating the stereotypes that females are crazy and obsessive in relationships and lack much depth besides showing you what is under their shirts. The way women are portrayed in these narratives affect how we behave towards them, and moving away from the misogynistic ways of vampire fiction could help inspire social change in the future.

I'll begin my discussion on the issues of female stereotyping with the short story "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes", specifically, the issue that female vampires flaunt their sexuality to fulfill their selfish desires. The story is narrated by a photographer named Dave who finds himself working with a model, and soon finds out that she is not as gorgeous and innocent as she may seem. He realizes that any man who is around her ends

up dead the next day and he could be next if he does not stay away. Due to her increasing fame as a model, she finds it easy to seduce men, as evident by one man she meets whose reaction Dave described as, “A crazy dream had come to life for him” (Leiber 346). The “crazy dream” for the man shows how desirable she was; he was infatuated with her and ended up being another victim of her desires. The stereotypes of female vampires in “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” sends a message that women are selfish and even scary when in a relationship with men. While at a dark park with the vampire, Dave observes that, “wherever she came from, whatever shaped her, she’s the quintessence of the horror behind the bright billboard. She’s the smile that tricks you into throwing away your money and your life” (Leiber 347). Normally, one would not describe a smile as a trick, unless someone is deceiving another person, which seems likely based on the vampires’ intentions of wanting to drink his blood. This shows us that she is manipulative by using her smile, which could be a way of saying she is highly seductive to get what she wants from men, whether that be power or their very lives. Dave’s comments on how manipulative she can be only worsens the stereotype passed around between men that women are crazy or can become mentally unstable around their boyfriends. She is a serious threat to his life, and this central character’s shift from charming and sweet to blood thirsty killer does not help to prove the stereotype of women being psychotic in relationships wrong.

The film *From Dusk till Dawn* is a perfect example of women in vampire fiction being treated as sex objects. This black comedy/horror film revolves around bank robbers

Seth and Richie. The two men force a family to take them to a strip club known as the Titty Twister where they will meet their contact. However, when the sun goes down the employees at the strip club turn into vampires, and now the family and bank robbers must try to escape. A significant scene in the film shows Richie watching one of the strippers dance when she becomes fixated on his hand which is covered in blood after getting shot earlier during the robbery. Suddenly, she reveals herself to be a vampire and bites Richie. Before we learn that she is a vampire, we see various sexualized shots of her dancing on stage. We first see a close-up shot of her dancing with a snake wrapped around her body while a band plays music that talks about “knocking on the devil’s door” (From Dusk till Dawn). This shot with the snake is mostly used to show her at her sexiest as the snake slowly moves around her body and legs, while the music is foreshadowing the impending doom for the guests. Following this, is a medium shot of the stripper and Richie as she pours wine down her leg and lets the drink flow into Richie’s mouth. At this point she has seduced him enough for Richie to lower his guard and while he was distracted, she bites him and turns him into a vampire. This connects to the idea of females being mischievous as she gains power over him by using her body. The message this sends to viewers, particularly men, could potentially be alarming. Seeing how Richie is enjoying this interaction with the stripper could be telling men to treat women like eye candy. Even when the woman ends up attacking him, it is shown to be more horrific than empowering for women, as she is clearly the villain who wants to feed on human blood. Down to the setting of the

scene being in a strip club, director Robert Rodriguez is showing men that women are only good for their body and that if they are not careful the women can also be very vicious and dangerous. This film does not try to be subtle in its sexualization of female vampires when looking at the woman at the strip club and could present a problem to female viewers as well.

How does stereotyping women in vampire fiction affect the way women are treated in the real world? Understanding stereotypes of women and why they can be damaging to them is necessary for analyzing females in vampire fiction. In “How Does Gender Bias Really Affect Women in the Workplace?” by Christine Rho, describes a study conducted by Yale University where it was found that women who talked a lot were seen by colleagues and especially by people in power as domineering and overly assertive compared to men who spoke a similar amount. Another study was done that looked at job reviews for both men and women. Not only was it found that women received more criticism in these reviews than men, but this criticism usually included feedback such as needing to tone it down and be less aggressive. Rho’s article in summary, shows how even when men and women behave the same way, people are more likely to be intimidated by the women and view their behavior as unacceptable. The negative response to women being assertive at work could possibly be caused by the way those same people have been taught to view women because of reading/watching vampire fiction’s portrayal of women. Tying this into “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” and *From Dusk till Dawn*, we see both female vampires that I have analyzed act in ways similar to how women in Rho’s article are

perceived to act at work. When you see *The Girl* try to manipulate her way into getting what she wants as a model or the stripper that goes from seductive to a rampaging killer in Rodriguez’s film, it is easy to see why men are intimidated by women being in a position of power or showing confidence at work. Whether it is in vampire fiction or from real-world examples, the way we talk and depict different groups of people may subtly affect how they behave. Female vampires are victims of stereotyping that has type casted them as sexual predators who are only appealing when they are pleasing men by showing off their bodies. “The Girl with the Hungry Eyes” shows a vampire who uses her position as a model to seduce and feed on unassuming men. *From Dusk till Dawn* does not stray far from these stereotypes, featuring a villainous vampire who takes up a job as a stripper by day, and a bloody thirsty killer by night. Over time, not much has changed when it comes to the representation of women in vampire fiction. In the future, we should be mindful about how portrayals of women can influence viewers and respond accordingly. Stereotypes are prevalent in all types of media and vampire fiction is no different. As mentioned in Rho’s article, stereotypes can alter how people treat women, so we must fight to prevent negative stereotypes from being reinforced in today’s media.

References

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