

THE CW HAS A NEW HERO



SUPERGIRL: Feminist or Faux?

By Elaine Wang - April 2, 2022

Network: The CW

Number of Seasons: 6 (126 total episodes)

Dates Aired: October 26, 2015 - November 9, 2021

Genres: Superhero, Action, Adventure, Drama, Science Fiction, Political Fiction

Plot: Twelve-year-old Kara Zor-El escapes doom on her home planet Krypton to find protection on Earth with the Danvers family. She learns to hide the extraordinary powers she shares with her cousin, Superman. Now an adult living in National City and working for a popular media business, Kara finds her days of keeping her abilities a secret are over when she's enlisted to help protect the city's citizens from threats. Finally coming into her own, Kara must juggle her new responsibilities with her very human relationships. (Warner Bros. TV)

My Review: Look up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's... a girl? Not just any girl, but SUPERgirl. Now, why would a show promoting female empowerment *not* name their titular hero SuperWOMAN instead? Though this issue was comically addressed early in the show, this naming problem dates back to the original comics. Supergirl's introduction in the 1950s wasn't meant to replace Superman, but rather support *his* story; the only way to do this was of course, minimize Kara's character into the naive, innocent title of "girl". Now, instead of getting fixated on the sexist naming of superheroes in the olden days, let's focus on the CW's adaptation of Supergirl.

Warning: this next bit contains spoilers!

In S1, we see Kara grapple with her dual identity and double life. Accompanied by her super-friend co-workers, Winn and James, she becomes National City's new hero. Oh, and it wouldn't be complete with a Winn-James-Kara love triangle that has nothing to do with the plot! Kara eventually defeats her evil-calculated-uncle and once-evil-turned-good-aunt (who perishes in a moment of vulnerability), only to receive a new threat *literally* fall out of the sky—a hot, muscular, did I say *hot*, man. Jumping into S2, this mystery man, named Mon-El, is the stereotypical bad boy: sexist, rude, and arrogant. But don't worry, he's attractive so we're bound to have an enemies-to-lovers trope! Kara falls for Mon-El despite his extremely toxic behavior toward her, but eventually has to send him off to space to save the world. Out of context, this scene looks like your typical "heroic man saves the world for his emotionally-distressed female love interest". It doesn't even end there, S3 begins and with some time travel, Mon-El is back and Kara's story is still 100% tied to this man. However, she *finally* stands up for herself—while under a psychic attack that enhances emotions... can a woman not show any act of independence without an external influence? By the end of the season, Kara saves the world again! But, once again, it was Mon-El's technology that allowed her to do it. The man saves the day again. In S4, we finally are devoid of a man in Kara's way of growing herself as a character (phew); in fact, it's with the help of her best friend, Lena Luthor, that develops her storyline the greatest. The levels to which these women push each other to finally depicts a healthy relationship in which viewers feel what female empowerment should be. Kara and Lena's teamup helps Kara defeat Lex Luthor (Superman's big bad) AND allows Kara to thrive as a journalist, even winning a Pulitzer Prize. S5 deals with the consequences of what happens when you don't tell your best friend that you're a superhero while manipulating her as both of your identities... yeah Kara you done messed up. The great thing about Lena Luthor's character is that her drive to power and success isn't held back by anyone, she embodies what it means to be an independent woman. Leave it to Supergirl writers to somehow mess all that up! Apparently, independent woman means villainous, vengeful, I-want-to-cut-off-all-relationships woman! Despite the trainwreck that was S5, S6 got slightly better. We saw relationships rekindled, Supergirl got her team back together, Kara quit her job to focus on superheroing. Wait what. Kara *quit* her job?? Wasn't the whole point of the show to show the balance between her human and hero sides? I guess not... because by the end of the whole entire series, it was shown that it was impossible for Kara to be both Kara AND Supergirl. She could only choose one identity. So, she reveals her identity to the world. The End.

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As a final farewell, The CW announced a spinoff of Supergirl... Superman & Lois. A show about how Kara's cousin, Clark, can successfully balance a family with two sons gaining powers *while* being Superman. Do you see the double standard that I'm seeing? All in all, Supergirl is a show I don't regret watching at all; I connected deeply to the characters and the plotlines brought up throughout the series. It just hurt to see Kara's character fall into the common trope of "women lacking power to handle their work lives". Nevertheless, Supergirl broke its own barriers in defining what a female superhero represents, and I am hopeful for what future television can do.

My 5-Star Rating:

