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“Destiel is Forever”: Negotiating Authenticity in The CW’s Supernatural Family and Beyond

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“Destiel is Forever”: Negotiating Authenticity in The CW’s *Supernatural* Family and Beyond

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the LGBTQIA+ members of the Destiel shipping communities and those outside of it who the show's narrative has affected. My care and concern for you drove this project.

To LGBTQIA+ writers and showrunners, both present and future, who wish to tell positive queer narratives: do not give up. If you ever come across this dissertation, I hope it illustrates to you the importance of our lived stories and the ones we will create.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the communicative constitution of authenticity and queerness. Because queerness has been policed and censored, notions of authenticity, in particular authentic queer representations, are fraught and sustaining to many LGBTQ+ and allied media consumers. The project focuses on the television series *Supernatural*—specifically, the unfolding of interactions in fan conventions, Twitter/X, and Tumblr involving celebrities and viewers of the series following a social breach, or rupture in the narrative. The last three episodes of *Supernatural* brought issues of queerness and authenticity to the fore for many viewers, making discussions about these themes compelling sites for multimodal data in the Communication discipline. By building a bridge between discourse studies, fan studies, and queerness, this dissertation illuminates the ways people articulate themselves in relation to others as creators, fans, consumers, and members of a community. The data consist of three collections that address authenticity. The first is composed of videos featuring actors and their discourse on a queer love confession scene from the series. The second set is user tweets posted in response to one of these videos. These posts showed support for the queer story and/or consternation and even grief over what some viewers deemed a harmful ending. The final data set consists of memes about the series posted to Tumblr that primarily critique *Supernatural*'s network, The CW, and its narrative choices. Through discursive approaches and digital ethnographic practices, this project presents analysis to conclude that both actors and viewers employ moral accounts to justify their assertions about queerness in *Supernatural*.

Chapter One: The Roadmap

> You know, ever since we met, ever since I pulled you out of hell—knowing you has changed me. Because you cared, I cared. I cared about you, I cared about Sam, I cared about Jack. I cared about the whole world because of you. You changed me, Dean. […] I love you.
>
> -Castiel, The CW's *Supernatural*, "Despair" (Berens & Speight, 2020) (37:31-38-21)

Figure 1. "Castiel and Dean," shared by a user on Imgflip. Fair use.

Image caption: Two images from the television series *Supernatural*. The top image features the angel Castiel with the caption "I love you" in white font. The second image features the character Dean, looking Castiel in the eye without speaking.

On the night of November 5th, 2020, in the third to last episode of The CW Network's horror/fantasy series *Supernatural*, Castiel, an angel introduced on the show over ten years before, uttered the words in the quote above to declare his feelings to Dean Winchester, the show's monster-hunting lead. A conversation between fans of the show exploded on social media. The interaction was fraught with shock and disbelief. Over a decade after a large constituency of fans had held on to the hope of seeing Castiel and Dean end up together, many fans were horrified not just because that did not happen, but because they watched the angel get sent to the afterlife immediately after coming out of the closet. Two episodes later, in the series finale, Dean himself would die and not meet up on-screen with Castiel in heaven, a narrative choice that ended any hope from fans for a romantic outcome. In videos from the actors and social media posts from viewers that followed, the *Supernatural* "family" took the final three episodes to task, interrogating the epistemics and ontology of queerness: what does it mean to be queer? Who gets to have a say about queerness, and what should count as a queer text? I see these questions as matters of authenticity, or, how the authentic is materialized in communication. This dissertation engages in an analysis of the viewing community's negotiation of queerness in *Supernatural*, which I take to be a privileged site for the examination of authenticity.

Although I struggle to claim the title of "true" *Supernatural* "fan," I've certainly engaged in fannish activity: dressing up like Dean's brother Sam Winchester, buying *Supernatural*-themed shirts, subscribing to a quarterly "mystery box" of merchandise, and even writing unpublished fanfiction and making fan comics. Yet even in these behaviors, I find myself leaning toward the critical, the deconstructive. The fanfiction I write imagines other ways the show could have progressed, and my comics engage directly with the show's queer themes. I wear shirts to

identify with my research and keep it close to my body in my day-to-day life. Most of the stuff in those mystery boxes is still in the boxes instead of on my shelves. I'm torn. I enjoyed the first five seasons along with seasons 11 and 12, but I have a complicated relationship with the other seasons.

If I don't *love* the show straight through, I do love the viewers. I care about them, and I especially care about the queer viewers whom the last three episodes affected. As I became a regular viewer of the series, I mourned Castiel and Dean even before I got to their deaths in my watch-through. As Vist et al. (2021) argue, fan studies scholars like me may be able to express excitement or love for a fandom, but we struggle to articulate "grief, mourning, rage, or disappointment" (p. 28). As Jenkins (2018) argues, "fan culture is often motivated by a complex balance between fascination and frustration, affirmation and transformation" (p. 16). My project aims to understand both the love and grief of *Supernatural* viewers, but I also recognize much of my impulse to do this work emerges from my desire to understand those things in myself.

Supernatural is a difficult but meaningful text for me as a queer person. I call *Supernatural* a text following the idea of phenomenal textuality (Silverstein & Urban, 1996), much as Geertz (1972) considered the cockfight a text for thick description. Thus, speech and other semiotic material are entextualized and this allows me to analyze the intertextual linkages (Bartesaghi, 2015) between elements of the show and recontextualization of certain ideas across fan sites. For example, memes in my data set critique *Supernatural*'s network The CW, but recontextualize it through image usage and digital presentation on the popular website Tumblr. I appreciate the creators' decision to make Castiel gay even as I acknowledge my own frustration with his sudden erasure and his lack of a reappearance in the finale. My membership in the LGBTQIA+ community is important to me as a scholar, particularly in the context of this

project, because I understand firsthand the stakes involved when it comes to representation in media and for the ways fans/viewers/users negotiate identity. I also understand the desire to be seen as authentic, or to claim one's own views as authentic.

The problem of authenticity has existed for as long as the notion of representation has been studied in the discipline of Communication. Instead of being seen as a "'real' thing or something that can be objectively determined" (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009, p. 256), authenticity can be understood as a "social construction that has been put into place to achieve a particular aim" and these goals vary across disciplines and time periods (MacNeil & Mak, 2007, p. 28). Authenticity can be divided into two main meanings: type and moral (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). Something can be deemed to have type authenticity if it "meets the criteria" for a certain classification (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009, p. 261). On the other hand, someone can possess moral authenticity if they are sincere and do not act in pre-determined or socially-imposed ways (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009, p. 261). Again, although we can speak of something possessing authenticity, that authenticity is a communicative dynamic–something "granted" or attributed to a thing or person in communication, but not something they possess intrinsically. Instead of communication representing reality, it constitutes it, and if communication is constitutive, then the ways we communicate and negotiate authenticity rely on constitutive effects as well. The constitutive model sees communication "as a constitutive process that produces and reproduces shared meaning" (Craig, 1999, p. 125). In my understanding of my data, there is no "true" authentic fan or text–these things are rendered so through communication and then produced and consumed across contexts.

Concepts of recontextualization, intertextuality, and resemiotization also assist my thinking. Recontextualization involves "the dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something

from one discourse/text-in-context[...] to another" (Linell, 1998, p. 144-145). In recontextualization, a part of a text is taken from one context and fitted into another one through translation and appropriation (Bartesaghi, 2015, p. 1; Linell, 1998, p. 145). The concept of intertextuality explicates the connections between texts and "reveals the ways in which texts depend on other texts by recycling and linking to former utterances" (Bartesaghi, 2015, p. 1). Resemiotization is transforming the modality of a text, allowing a community to "transpose[][...] its knowledges, techniques and technologies, as well as its interpersonal, social and cultural practices and positionings" (Iedema, 2001, p. 36). These concepts help me access the way authenticity is negotiated through shifting transformations between and across contexts and modalities in my data sites.

The organizing concept of authenticity is timely for current Communication research. In 2023, the International Communication Association's annual conference centered their theme around "Reclaiming Authenticity in Communication," showing the increasing relevance of research on the subject (International Communication Association, n.d.). In their call for papers, they assert we are living through a "global authenticity crisis" because of a recent trend of "false and/or misleading communication" in the wake of things such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Authenticity is, they announce, "the new currency." One question they ask is "[h]ow do the changes in the communication systems (e.g., emerging media platforms) as well as actors (e.g., AI agents) affect the ways in which authenticity is expressed and materialized in communication?" Eschewing binary notions of the (in)authentic, my concern is also one of expression and materialization. By looking at recorded videos, social media discussions, and memes I study how members of a fan community negotiate authenticity.

This project reformulates preoccupations of authenticity in fan studies by way of a

discourse approach to communication. My aim is to examine how authenticity is negotiated and mediated in the intertextual connections between a television show, its actors' public appearances, and the show's viewers' comments and memes. Studying authenticity in this way contributes to the Communication discipline by examining the ways video, social media posts, and memes are part of the social discourse of queer identity.

In the next section, I will introduce relevant plot information about *Supernatural* in order to clarify its main story. I will then define the term "Destiel," as it is central to my project. Finally, I offer a timeline for important real-world events surrounding the series that help make sense of my data selection.

Context

Supernatural

The series centers on the adventures of two white, working class, heterosexual brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, whose father trained them to become paranormal hunters. The first five seasons chart a long arc in which Dean is cosmically-destined to be the human vessel for the archangel Michael, while Sam is doomed to be the vessel for Lucifer. The upper-level angels send to Earth an angelic being named Castiel, who possesses the body of a white heterosexual man, to ensure Dean will follow through with his destiny. Castiel, however, closely bonds with Dean and rebels, working to protect both Dean and Sam and avoid the apocalypse. Eventually, the three of them adopt Jack, the son of Lucifer, and raise him as their own. In the third-to-last episode of the series, Castiel comes out as queer when he confesses his love to Dean, gets sent to a special afterlife for angels and demons, but eventually goes to heaven thanks to Jack's intervention.

"Destiel"

My project focuses on "Destiel," a portmanteau of Dean's and Castiel's names that represents them as a romantic relationship, also known as a "ship" in internet slang. One can also use the term "ship" as a verb to denote the action of wanting to see a ship confirmed or continued in the show's canon. Early in the show's run, some *Supernatural* fans chose to "ship" the brothers as an incestuous pairing (McDermott, 2018, p. 134-135). In fact, the first fanfiction based on the series appeared within 24-hours of the premiere's airing, and belonged to this pairing (Zubernis & Larsen, 2012, p. 20). Fans titled this ship "Wincest," and it remained the primary ship of the series until the introduction of the angel Castiel in season 4, when a committed following arose to embrace Destiel (McDermott, 2018, p. 134-135). Destiel is immensely popular in fandom and was the first ship of any text ever to reach 100,000 fan fiction publications on Archive of Our Own, a leading fanfiction website (Martinez, 2021). This popularity warrants continued research on fans' communication about Destiel from a queer perspective, especially now that the show has ended. Because what constitutes an "authentic" fan, queer character, or plotline is hotly contested in the *Supernatural* fandom, authenticity is an ideal framework for examining my data.

The Supernatural Timeline

Supernatural itself is a narrative work, but the events surrounding its release tell their own kind of story. I here introduce a timeline of some of the important moments in the show's history that are most relevant to my project. These events span the beginning of the series, to Castiel's introduction and departure, and ending with the videos and interviews that address the final three episodes.

September 13, 2005: *Supernatural* premieres on the WB network (rebranded as The CW the

following season).

September 18, 2009: The show's fourth season premiere episode, "Lazarus Rising," introduces Castiel, the angel who rescues Dean from hell after he sells his soul to resurrect Sam from the dead.

December 6, 2018: In the 8th episode of season 14, "Byzantium" (Glynn & Sánchez, 2018) in order to resurrect Jack, Castiel agrees to die and go to "The Empty" (the afterlife for angels and demons) the next time he experiences true happiness.

November 5, 2020: Castiel confesses his love to Dean in season 15, episode 18, "Despair" (Speight, 2020), thus experiencing true happiness, and is taken to The Empty.

November 8, 2020 (roughly): Video is posted to Twitter[1] and YouTube of a panel at the French DarkLight convention, in which Misha Collins (the actor who plays Castiel) refers to the confession as a "homosexual declaration of love" and laments Castiel's death as an example of the "kill the gays" trope (Stephanie Earp, 2020).

November 19, 2020: *Supernatural*'s finale airs (Dabb & Singer, 2020).

November 24/25, 2020 **(**roughly**)**: The Latin American Spanish dub of "Despair" releases in which, unlike the original version, Dean reciprocates queer love to Castiel.

November 25, 2020: Misha Collins posts "rogue translator" video to Twitter, asserting that Castiel's death was not playing into an "insidious" trope (Fig. 2). Collins thus seemed to retract his comment from the French convention.

October 21, 2021: Video posted of the Denver *Supernatural* convention panel between Jensen Ackles (Dean Winchester) and Jared Padalecki (Sam Winchester) in which the two of them deny

[1] Despite the fact that Elon Musk has changed the name of his social networking site to "X," I have opted to use the old name Twitter, not only because it was the website's name when users posted the data, but also because it is the name most people still use to refer to the site.

sexual intention behind the confession scene (Gayled_It, 2021).

The series entertains through fantastical elements that explore themes such as family, childhood trauma, and religion. These real-life occurrences surrounding the *Supernatural* family that I list above, however, tell a narrative for the external fandom. These events resulted in claims of authenticity around queerness, what it means to be a fan, and the meaning of the series itself.

Below, I list my research questions that help guide this dissertation project.

Research Questions

In this dissertation, I use *Supernatural* as a site to investigate these questions:

(1) How is authenticity negotiated in media fandom?

(2) How can we understand the unfolding events of the show as sites for the creation and negotiation of authenticity?

   a. What are the aspects of authenticity? (Accounts, strategies, resources, claims)

   b. How is authenticity relevant to queerness?

Data and Method

In this dissertation, I analyze three separate data sets. My data are multimodal: they include spoken discourse, written discourse, and images. My three data sets are as follows:

1. Videos: I examine three videos produced by cast members of the show *Supernatural*. The first video comes from a convention panel held virtually in France in early November of 2020 and features the actors Misha Collins, Rob Benedict, Richard Speight Jr., Matt Cohen, Mark Sheppard, Mark Pellegrino, and Ruth Connell. The second video is from a Denver, Colorado *Supernatural* convention where actors Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles also discuss the

confession scene. The final video, which is posted on Twitter by Collins, involves he himself addressing fans; here, Collins accounts for his interpretation of the Castiel confession scene.

2. Twitter posts: My next set of data involves eight tweets from Misha Collins and 25 tweets by other users interacting with Collins. Here, I attend to the ways in which Collins continues to craft accounts to interpret the confession scene as a positive, authentic scene for LGBTQIA+ people. I also consider the ways fans claim the scene plays into the "bury your gays" (BYG) trope and discredit Collins as a credible voice to speak to issues of queerness.

3. Memes: My third data set is composed of 11 memes on the social networking site Tumblr. Users posted these memes in response to the Latin American dub of the confession scene where Dean reciprocates Castiel's romantic confession in Spanish. This is important because it demonstrates the ways viewers use humor to interrogate inconsistencies between the versions and call into question the authenticity of both.

For the videos, I employ a synthetic approach to discourse that allows me to analyze spoken discourse. I transcribe at an intermediate level of detail (modifying the transcription system of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), including pauses, disfluencies and volume of speech). When it comes to Misha Collins' discussion of the confession scene, I employ Erving Goffman's (1963) and Harold Garfinkel's (1967) notion of breach to understand both how fans reacted to his message and the repair strategies employed by Collins. I look to authenticity and a sense of "belonging" to understand how Collins situates himself as an ally to LGBTQIA+ viewers. I include considerations of authenticity language, especially how authenticity is accomplished in discourse, and to understand it as an account, a set of claims and a resource in negotiations.

I employ a constitutive and pragmatic approach to discourse as social action, thus

attending to what actors and viewers accomplish through their communicative acts. The constitutive view of communication "asks how communication defines, or constructs, the social world, including our selves and our personal relationships" (Baxter, 2004, p. 3), and thus I ask what the acts and interactions in my data construct. Similarly, a pragmatic approach considers what language performs in the world. I recognize the dual meaning of the word "discourse," as both the analysis of communicative interaction and that interaction itself. My discursive approach entails that sites of communication are interactional, and each exchange is intertextually connected to others. Just like utterances occur in response and expectation to other utterances (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974), each situated moment of accounting cannot be separated from other moments, for they are all occasions for the accomplishment and negotiation of authenticity. I examine how videos are produced in expectation of viewers' consumption of the show and its characters. I ask: how do speakers employ the show to advance accounts and claims of authenticity? And how is authenticity a resource to enact identity roles, the show's values and different interpretations?

Corpus Studies

A corpus is "*an electronic collection of texts*" that represents "a language or a specific use of the language" (Viana & O'Boyle, 2021, p. 23, italics original). Rather than simply random collections of digital texts, researchers select corpora for specific analysis (Viana & O'Boyle, 2021, p. 24). Because I draw from discourse studies, I focus on "language as it is actually used in naturally-occurring speech and writing" (Viana et al., 2011, p. 2). I will use a corpus approach to collect digital data, in my case tweets, Twitter comments, and Tumblr memes to analyze how users are negotiating authenticity. I use Collins' own tweets that contextualize his video and I considered all viewer tweets in response to his video that include the words "bury your gays." I

also collect memes found through searching tags such as "Supernatural LATAM dub" and "Supernatural Spanish dub" that address the LATAM dubbed scene.

I have had to adjust my methodology when it comes to the tweets I collect due to recent changes in the Twitter platform. In February of 2023, Twitter chose to take away their full academic access to their archive of tweets, meaning that in order to retrieve all of the relevant tweets I needed, I would have to use a third-party scraping software that goes against Twitter's terms of service. Instead, I limit my search query to tweets users sent to Misha Collins with the words "bury your gays" in them in order to understand how fans responded to Collins' use of this term. This more focused search means I do not have to scrape and can instead access tweets one-by-one.

My Ethical Stance

Discourse research is action-implicative: it acts within the social and material world of members of the community we study. Although tweets and Tumblr posts are often publicly available, I believe that researchers must proceed with ethical caution to protect social media authors. Fiesler & Proferes (2018) note that 61.2% of Twitter users they surveyed were not aware that academics could freely use their tweets for research purposes (p. 5-6). The majority of those the researchers polled also voiced a belief that scholars should not use tweets without permission from tweet authors (p. 2).

Some scholars of social media discourse have chosen to forego asking consent, or at least do not outline this process in their methods section. Applied linguist Camilla Vásquez (2019) pulls several texts posts from Tumblr, some of which can be traced easily back to the original authors, but does not state she asked permission to reprint these posts. Vásquez (2019) anonymized the data, but admits that "it is of course possible for readers to locate most of the

texts online and – if they are so inclined – to do the additional detective work to obtain more information about their authors" (p. 169). Hautsch (2018), in her analysis of the *Supernatural* Tumblr fandom's use of GIFs, does not include an ethics section and does not state whether or not she sought permission to include posts. She also uses the usernames of post authors and commenters. Likewise, Pow (2021) in her analysis of Tumblr posts surrounding the television series *Scandal* does not anonymize names of Tumblr users.

With this said, I consider different issues as relevant to my work. Although Tumblr and Twitter posts are public, as are the usernames of their authors, the themes I consider are sensitive. Because my work centers on queerness, I believe failing to seek permission could potentially "out" users as at least dedicated to LGBTQIA+ causes, if not directly LGBTQIA+-identifying themselves. Fiesler & Proferes (2018) assert that "sensitive topics" such as medical information or drug use "could be less appropriate for quoting tweets" than for lower-risk topics such as television-viewing habits (p. 11). Because of the sensitive nature of my subject matter, recognizing the complex relations of these publics is essential to me, both as a scholar and as a queer person, and therefore I sought consent from those whose searchable words I cite. I messaged them through the Twitter direct messaging feature respectively with a note stating the purposes of my data usage and asking for consent to use their posts.

Chapter Descriptions

In addition to this introductory chapter that outlines the major themes of my work, the following chapter that presents the existing literature, and my concluding chapter that reviews the project, I include three analytical chapters. I summarize them below:

Chapter 3: *"Getting to 'The Point': Authenticity and the Authority of Creators"*

I analyze two videos from actors involved in the series. One video is from a fan

convention panel and includes Misha Collins (the actor who plays Castiel) and several others all discussing Destiel (Stephanie Earp, 2020). In this video, the actors articulate support for the confession scene as what Collins calls a "homosexual declaration of love." In my second video, set at a fan convention panel, Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles discuss Destiel and the confession scene (Gayled_It, 2021). Ackles says that because Castiel is an angel, he does not experience sexual attraction the way humans do. Padalecki equates Castiel's "I love you" to how Padalecki himself might say the same words to his own child. Together, these videos help me access the ways objects of fandom—in this case actors—must navigate conversations around queerness in *Supernatural* and show themselves as authentic authorities on the confession scene. After all, "no scene in a film" (or, due to similarity, television) "can guarantee that it will be read in the way it intends or prefers" (Dyer, 1991, p. 87), so creators—even actors uninvolved in the narrative creative decision-making—must work to construct interpretations when audiences confront them on their opinions.

As mentioned, I take a pragmatic, discursive approach to these videos, seeking to understand what these actors are doing and enacting through these interviews and monologues. What aspects of queerness and authenticity do these actors speak to? How does the discussion of these aspects construct a moral world of authenticity for these actors? I transcribe these interviews and use discourse analysis approaches as outlined by Jones (2016) to understand things such as lexical choice or pauses to theorize about these inclusions. By using a discursive approach, I can look at a micro level, seeing how each word and phrase is enacting certain aspects of authenticity.

Chapter 4: *"Erasing the Angel: Tracing Authenticity Between Creators and Viewers in the* Supernatural *Fandom on Twitter"*

In another chapter, I analyze articulations of authenticity within a video and Twitter thread from Misha Collins as well as tweet comments in response to his thread. In the video, Collins discusses Destiel and the fan backlash to the confession scene (Collins, 2020). He argues that Castiel's death is not homophobic and does not play into a "bury your gays" stereotype (Waggoner, 2017), but instead offers a moment of empowerment for Castiel as a queer character. I found thousands of responses to his tweet thread, many of which use language to question what constitutes a real fan, accurate readings of Castiel and Dean's relationship, true "bury your gays" storylines, etc. I used the Twitter search function to find the tweets that use the words "bury your gays" so that I could analyze the language, particularly the ways fans articulate Collins as an authentic or inauthentic voice on the issue. Like Bridges (2019) demonstrates and Vásquez (2022) discusses, I took screenshots of these tweets and saved them to a OneNote file.

Chapter 5: "*Rogue Translations: Object-Labeled Memes and Image Macros in the Tumblr* Supernatural *Community*"

In my last analytical chapter, I examine memes for articulations of authenticity made in response to the Latin American (LATAM) Spanish dub of Castiel's confession scene. In this version of the scene, Dean Winchester reciprocates Castiel's "Te amo" ("I love you") with "Y yo a ti, Cas" ("And I you, Cas"), unlike in the original English where Dean simply says "Don't do this, Cas" before Castiel sacrifices himself. Whereas the English version of the episode released on November 5, 2020, and the finale of the series on November 19, 2020, the LATAM dub released on November 24, 2020, giving a shock to viewers still processing a finale many found to be disappointing. The LATAM dub caused an outpouring of memes on the website Tumblr, and I collect and analyze 11 of them. I analyze them for language that articulates authority and canonicity. Is the LATAM dub of the scene more "authentic" or "accurate" because it is line

with a queer reading of Dean many fans have? Does it cancel out the original English version? Can both exist simultaneously? These are some questions I ask as I work through these humorous visual texts.

I wish to build on the work of discourse scholars such as Vásquez (2019), Jiang & Vásquez (2020), and scholars working on meme research such as Shifman (2013). By taking a pragmatic approach to these images, I ask how text and image work together in their embedded contexts and how they work to speak to the viewer community, The CW network, and the text of *Supernatural* itself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced *Supernatural*, provided context for my investigation, and presented my research questions. In the next chapter, I begin to chart important existing research that will assist my analysis for the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter Two: "According to the Lore": Tracing the Relevant Literature

In this chapter, I overview and synthesize various traditions of communication research that provide useful context for the questions I outlined in Chapter One. First, I will cover the compelling body of work already conducted on *Supernatural* itself in order to provide a historical context to which my work will add. I move on to look at core concepts in discourse studies to ground my discursive approach. In particular, I consider intertextuality, as this concept allows me to understand the ways different texts (*Supernatural*, actor videos, a Twitter comment by a viewer) make meaning between one another. I also explain the affordances of Twitter and Tumblr as social networking sites (SNS). I then unpack the rich tradition of fan studies, including concepts of fandom on social media, how the concept of "breach" works in fandom, and queer fandom. Lastly, I reach the organizing frame of my dissertation: authenticity. I examine authenticity of fans, creators, and texts. I also consider discussions of queerness and authenticity and the concepts of *superdiversity* and *enoughness.*

The Literature

Supernatural

Supernatural matters to me, but also to the actors, crew, and fans who form its community—or "Supernatural family" as they call it. As a long-running series and one with a loyal fanbase, it is and has been a rich series for fandom study. The show ran 15 seasons for a total of 327 episodes, and, as Abbott & Brown (2020) argue in their introduction to *Monstrum*'s special issue on *Supernatural,* the series is worthy of study because of its status as the longest-running fantasy series on U.S. television (p. 6). As Abbott & Brown (2020) admit, *Supernatural*

never had spectacular viewing numbers, maintaining a steady rating of 2 million viewers through its first ten seasons (Luksza, 2016, p. 180). Despite TV critics mostly ignoring the series, it fostered "one of the most passionate and devoted fandoms that has ever emerged" (Luksza, 2016, p. 177). Even scholars writing about the series express a personal connection to it, showing how much *Supernatural* has come to matter to its modest but faithful fandom (Abbott & Brown, 2020; Dodson & Bailey, 2020; Jowett, 2020).

Although there has been research on *Supernatural* in the past, more in-depth work on the show and its intersections with queerness is needed. During the last decade and a half, scholars have written extensively on *Supernatural,* including several edited collections (Lavery & Abbott, 2011; Edmundson, 2016; Engstrom, 2016; Taylor & Nylander, 2019; Wright, 2016). Only one book-length work has engaged with the series' complicated and tenuous relationship to fandom (Zubernis & Larsen, 2012), and it was released eight years before the show's finale. Academic articles on the series have focused on fandom practices, however, such as Hautsch, 2018; Xanthoudakis, 2020; Tosenberger, 2008; and many more, including an entire special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures* in 2010. Although some fandom practice articles do consider queerness, aside from a roundtable at the Fan Studies Network North America conference on the fan reactions to the last three episodes of the series in fall of 2021, there is not yet a wealth of research on those reactions; I argue there should be because of the contributions this kind of research could make. By taking a discursive approach, I show the importance of studying queer-focused conversations around *Supernatural* as occasions for the communicative constitution of authenticity, queerness and fandom itself.

Discourse

Discourse is material; it is consequential action that makes a difference. The materiality

of discourse connects to a constitutive concept of communication, where communication does not simply convey a reality, but actually creates the world (Ashcraft, 2021, p. 572). Robert T. Craig theorized that communication shapes other social phenomena, including psychological and cultural ones (Oxford Reference, n.d.). Similarly, a simple but useful definition of discourse is "the way in which people create their social worlds through the way they use language" (Jones, 2016, p. 20). It is also "the ways spoken language is used to perform concrete actions in the world" (Jones, 2016, p. 21). Through analysis of these "moments of action," scholars "can observe how the structures of conversations help to form the structures of our societies and how the structures of our societies help to create the structures of our conversations" (p. Jones, 2016, p. 21). When discourse analysts examine texts, whether transcripts, written discourse or images, they "think in terms of unique, irreproducible actions taking place at particular points in time/space at which particular people, particular technologies, and particular social orders meet in such a way that particular actions become possible" (Jones, 2016, p. 48).

Jones (2016) borrows from Scollon to define these points as "sites of engagement" (p. 48). At sites of engagement, "social actors orient particular technologies of talk, particular social relationships, particular social identities, and particular communities in order to perform particular social actions" (Jones, 2016, p. 48-49). When Misha Collins communicates with his fans via video, the video is not just a text, but a site of engagement where Collins employs technologies, relationships, identities, and communities in order to perform the social action of authenticity. Jones (2016) argues that participants, in creating sites of engagement, are not simply "doing things with words" but also "constructing the *social situations* in which those actions become possible" (p. 49, emphasis original). Collins is not only negotiating an authentic identity and doing impression management (Goffman, 1956), but he is also creating the socio-

material situation that allows fans a site to interact with him.

I refer to discourse as communication that is situated in four major ways: in the material world, within relationships, in history, and in relation to other discursive possibilities (Jones, 2018, p. 3). The discourse of *Supernatural* includes the material (the computers in which Twitter users type the tweets, the recording technology Collins uses to make his video, the microphones Ackles and Padalecki use at the Denver convention); within relationships (between users, between fans and creators, between creators themselves, etc.); in history (the show's history, the history of the "bury your gays" trope or queer television representation broadly, the history of fandom in-jokes, etc.); and in relation to other discursive possibilities (seen in the intertextual heteroglossia users and creators evoke in conversation with one another).

Mediation

In my analysis, I draw ideas from mediated discourse analysis (MDA). MDA works to "preserve the complexity of the social situation" by approaching discourse as one among many tools people use to perform social action (Jones & Norris, 2005, p. 4), For example, these social actions could be those of being a fan, such as creating a username that references a television series character or signing up for a Tumblr account to post daily fandom memes. *Supernatural* engages relations of authenticity between various members of its community and the artifacts which signify belonging. Jones & Norris (2005) argue that meaning resides less in discourse than in the actions people use discourse to take (p. 4). This discursive approach takes its unit of analysis as the mediated action, "which is the real time moment when mediational means, social actors and the sociocultural environment intersect" (Jones & Norris, 2005, p. 5).

Computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) emerged as a means of understanding computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Herring, 2019). Computer-mediated discourse (at

the heart of CMDA's study) is any message transmitted through digital communication devices (Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015, p. 127). All analyses of online communication "that is grounded in empirical, textual observations" can be considered CMDA (Herring, 2004, p. 339). MDA and CMDA in particular will help provide a more specific discourse framework for my analysis of online communication in the *Supernatural* family. Two out of three of my videos, the tweets and their comments I examine, and the Tumblr memes all fall into the category of CMD, and therefore the ideas of MDA and CMDA are useful for unpacking them. Additionally, my third video is a recorded in-person event, and MDA still assists me in understanding the mediated moment it captures.

Social Media and Discourse

Social media describes "digital applications and services which promote social interaction between participants through the exchange and sharing of user-produced content" (Georgalou, 2017, p. 15). They are "collaborative, dialogic, emergent," meaning they are constantly evolving and becoming (p. 8). In speaking of Mark Zuckerberg's platform, Georgalou (2017) says that users "deploy language to locate themselves, to assert facts, to argue, to evaluate and to define themselves—both explicitly and implicitly—in relation to their Facebook networks" (p. 3). This description is also true of micro-blogging platforms such as Tumblr and Twitter. *Supernatural* viewers locate themselves as fans or anti-fans, assert "facts" about their particular readings of the show, argue over interpretations, evaluate and define themselves and each other within the online fandom spaces.

Digital Ethnography

To do the work of this dissertation, I employ a discourse approach to digital ethnography. This type of ethnography "studies the cultural and social domains of human interaction through

the Internet technologies they use" (Elon University, n.d.). Unlike traditional ethnography, during the digital version, scholars "are often in mediated contact with participants rather than in direct presence" (Pink et al, 2015, p. 3). This description is true of my own work, where video, social media posts, and crafted memes allow me access to the discourse of the *Supernatural* "family" and those who lie in its orbit. Discourse work is often field based, and my ethnographic investigation, which helps me identify different and important contextual material, is the spring board for my discursive approach to the data.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality involves the relationships between texts where "meaning becomes something which exists between a text and the other texts to which it refers and relates" (Allen, 2021, p. 1). Although theories of intertextuality historically emerge from literary theory of scholars such as Saussure, Bahktin, and Kristeva (Allen, 2021; Martin, 2011), the concept of intertext is useful for a variety of disciplines, including communication (see Bartesaghi, 2015). For my own work, intertextual linkages exist between *Supernatural* itself and the videos of actors, online comments from fans, and Tumblr memes. As I will analyze later in this dissertation, Misha Collins refers to the "bury your gays" trope in his own video and Twitter comments, referencing a long-running discussion from queer fans around the disproportionate number of gay character deaths in media. Intertextuality is a crucial analytical concept in my study because of the ways conversations around media reference the core text as well as other texts in the discussion.

Tumblr

Tumblr (stylized as "tumblr") is a micro-blogging platform that privileges multimedia posts, allowing for image-rich blogs. Launched by David Karp in February 2007, Tumblr has

grown to become one of the most popular social media sites, particularly for media fandoms (Chayka, 2022). Unlike Facebook which typically requires mutual friending, Tumblr allows for non-mutual following, where a user can choose to become a follower of a particular account without seeking permission, which creates "a non-reciprocal social network" (Chang et. al., 2014, p. 1). This style gives users more control over the blogs they follow and the content they see. Tumblr supports the use of tags, which allows users to search specific fandom-related terms, such as television series titles, character names, or the names of ships. This organization empowers users to find posts to reblog and other accounts to follow with similar interests. Posts from accounts a user follows will appear on that user's "dashboard," which is a "a continually updating stream of content representing each Tumblr user's tastes" (Attu & Terras, 2017, p. 529). Hillman, Procyk, & Neustaedter (2014) found that their participants voiced a love for Tumblr because it is a place where they could "strongly unite over something" (p. 287). For many *Supernatural* viewers, Tumblr has allowed a space for them to discuss the show, make fan art, post or link to fanfiction, create memes, and more.

Although not all people who ship same-gender characters on Tumblr identify themselves as gay, Tumblr has still been a safer place for many LGBTQIA+ people to congregate; indeed, Cho (2015) has asserted that "there is a huge queer ecosystem on Tumblr" (p. 43). I have witnessed pockets of the *Supernatural* fandom that have become a home for LGBTQIA+-identifying individuals who seek positive representation through the show and voice resistance and a desire for textual transformation when they have failed to find representation in the show itself.

Twitter

Twitter is a highly-popular social networking and microblogging site and, although created in 2006, it found its footing in 2008 and 2009 (Deller, 2011). I myself joined in 2009—the same year Misha Collins joined (Xanthoudakis, 2020). Originally, the platform limited tweets to 140 characters to mirror the size of an SMS text message, but in 2017, Twitter expanded to 280 characters per tweet (Spangler, 2022). Tweets cover all kinds of subject matter, as the platform can be used "as a broadcast medium, marketing channel, diary, social platform, and news source" (Marwick & boyd, 2010, p. 122). In addition to posting tweets, users can retweet other users' tweets, comment on others' tweets, like tweets that are stored in a public archive, "bookmark" tweets that are stored in a private archive, privately direct message individuals and groups, create and join communities, and form lists of users under particular topics.

Many celebrities have accounts on Twitter and some choose to interact with their fans. Misha Collins is one of these celebrities, and he has been known to use his platform to advocate for causes and raise money for charity through fan activism, the term for "the organizing of fans for civic and social engagement and to achieve both content- and non-content–related goals" (Xanthoudakis, 2020, 1.3). Collins has affectionately referred to his fans as "minions" and has used his Twitter platform to lampoon power and status (Stein, 2015). His engagement with fans shows the ways celebrities can and do employ technology to strategically connect with fans and seek to appear authentic to others. Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki also have Twitter accounts, though Collins is arguably more involved with fan interaction, not only tweeting to users but commenting on their replies as well.

Fan Studies

In this project, I use the term "viewer" or "user" for the authors of the social media posts I discuss. As Duffett (2013) defines it, "[m]edia fandom is the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture" (p. 2). Because not all viewers and users have a "positive" "emotional connection" with *Supernatural,* but might still take to the web to discuss it at length, I avoid using the term "fan" universally. With that said, I still borrow from fan studies, as I feel the "relatively deep, emotional connection" Duffett (2013, p. 2) uses in his definition can still apply to people with more negative relationships to the show. Jenkins (2018) offers a broader definition of a fan as anyone who "forms an intense affective bond with a particular property, whether or not they share those feelings with anyone else" (p. 16). Despite this more accommodating category, I use viewer/user as I do not want to project an identity onto the people I write about if they would not use it for themselves. These categories are fluid and mediated, sculpted by fans'/viewers' contexts, including online spaces.

My work continues a long tradition of fan studies, the body of work that considers the ways fans interact with "texts" and each other. Jenkins' (2013) germinal study of fandom examined resistant practices, especially textual readings. He asserted that "an individual's socialization into fandom often requires learning 'the right way' to read as a fan, learning how to employ and comprehend the community's particular interpretive conventions" (Jenkins, 2013, p. 142). For *Supernatural* fans, some will assert Destiel as the proper way to "ship," while others may take up Wincest or a strictly familial/platonic view of the three lead characters. Jenkins (2013) noted that for *Star Trek* fans, "the meta-text against which a film or episode is evaluated, was constructed by the fan community through its progressively more detailed analysis of the

previously aired episodes" (p. 151). Similarly, *Supernatural* fans analyze and construct "correct" readings of the text based on prior episodes. Like *Star Trek* fans, fan segments of the *Supernatural* family—as fans have long-called themselves and the cast and crew (Xanthoudakis, 2020)—may view episodes of the series in a negative light "if they develop the program in directions frustrating fans' own sense of its 'potentials'" (Jenkins, 2013, p. 156). In the case of the 1980s show *Beauty and the Beast*, Jenkins (2013) noted that fan backlash to the third season was in some cases so severe that it led fans to "deny the 'authenticity' of the third season episodes, rejecting them from the series' canon" (p. 146). Similarly, some *Supernatural* fans reject the finale and use "fix-it fics" (fanfiction that envisions other ways the show could have progressed) to "fix" the conclusion of the story. Although I do not analyze fan fiction, I look instead at how viewers managed a range of reactions to the final three episodes by negotiating relations of authenticity.

Convergence Culture

Understanding the ways distribution media networks, creators, and fans interact with one another across media platforms can help make sense of actors' and viewers' reactions to the Castiel confession scene. One way of theorizing about this meeting is through the concept of convergence culture, one "where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). Scholars can understand convergence as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). Although Jenkins was writing before platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr came to prominence in fan communities, his theorization helps make sense of their rise. This relevance is especially

true since "there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their heads," and social media allows users to store fandom knowledge electronically and communally (Jenkins, 2006, p. 4). Even more relevant for fan studies and my own work is his term "participatory culture," where consumers are not passive viewers but engage with media producers through interaction, despite producers still holding the most power (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). He asserts that

> a participatory culture is characterized by low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement; strong support for creating and sharing creations with others; some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices; members who believe that their contributions matter; and members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (Jenkins, 2018, p. 18).

Social Media and Fandom

When Jenkins wrote *Textual Poachers* in 1992, fans had yet to make complex networks on the internet, but now, their "migration" online has allowed for many new spaces of fandom discussion (Sandvoss et al., 2017, p. 6). This move has allowed negotiations of authenticity to move from fan convention and other physical spaces alone and onto more hyperconnected networks of discourse. When fans congregate in online spaces, they are not simply expressing their love for a text, but "they also concentrate their collective knowledge, becoming thus a community of knowledge and practice" (Misailidou, 2017, p. 1). The internet "allows media consumers to more substantially influence the meanings of media texts" and employ the images of celebrity "to more 'visibly' participate in public discourse" (Soukup, 2006, p. 319).

Fan-Celebrity Encounters

Although once primarily considered "to constitute a problem or a psychological lack,"

the desire for and experience of fan-celebrity encounters is now often seen as "part of normative media culture" (Hills, 2016, p. 463). There are two primary types of celebrity encounters: prestaged and unstaged (Ferris, 2001). In the former, celebrities appear and engage in professional opportunities for fans to meet them, such as meet-and-greets. In the latter, the celebrities may be going about their "daily rounds," even attempting to avoid fans as they conduct personal matters (Ferris, 2001, p. 33), but when fan and celebrity thus meet, it becomes a "juncture of the strange and the intimate, the ordinary and the extraordinary" (Ferris, 2004, p. 238). Both these categories are, however, in-person encounters. What happens when fans meet on a digital landscape? The use of social media has led to a "reconfiguring [of] levels of connection and depths of engagement between both celebrity and their associated fan communities" (Bennett, 2014, p. 109). When a celebrity tweets, a fan responds, and the celebrity in turn responds to them, this would certainly suggest a professional encounter rather than, say, approaching an actor at a coffee shop. With that said, the engagement is different than posing a question at a fan convention. Research into the new fan-celebrity encounters online is not new, but more work on the subject can further help us understand an array of still-expanding social phenomena.

Twitter can allow new kinds of access to celebrities; as Zubernis & Larsen (2012) argue in their book about the *Supernatural* family, "[t]he immediacy of Twitter has created the perception that celebrities are more accessible, and with it the expectation of more communication" (p. 206). Indeed, new technologies such as Twitter "have created an atmosphere in which an illusion of intimacy between celebrity and fan has become not only common, but also seen as a necessary marketing tool key to the celebrity's success" (James, 2010, p. 280). With this interaction comes certain perceived social benefits for users. Just like with a

convention photo, a fan can show a Twitter comment or retweet from a celebrity to friends to prove an interaction happened, which can contribute to that fan's "social cache" (Pennington et al., 2016, p. 60). Unless attempting to interact with "the biggest international figures," fans of celebrities can expect the possibility of a favorite celebrity "reply[ing] to a tweet, particularly one which flatters or challenges the recipient" (Giles, 2017, p. 445-446).

As I have previously mentioned, Twitter allows for non-mutual following. This feature enables fans to follow and interact with celebrities without those celebrities needing to follow them back or "form[] any kind of formal connection" (Stever & Lawson, 2013, p. 340). When celebrities interact with fans on Twitter, those fans receive a sense of connection, but the celebrities do not have to give up the kind of privacy they would have to if "friending" fans on their private Facebook accounts.

Thomas (2014) argues that celebrity, "as managed via Twitter, is not merely interactive, new and stable, but also multiple, diverse, dependent on negotiations between the agency of star, industry and audience, and coherent with prevailing paradigms and histories of star discourse" (p. 253). Stars may appear "'more intimate', 'more personal', 'more authentic'" through their tweets and the way they interact directly with fans on the platform (Thomas, 2014, p. 247).

Twitter gives the *Supernatural* fanbase and creators further ability to connect and form the "Supernatural family." Twitter allows fans "access to a celebrity's personal life, directly interact with celebrities, and believe themselves to be a part of the network" (Tanupabrungsun & Hemsley, 2018, p. 3). Being a part of Misha Collins' network, for example, can be very important for fans considering the *Supernatural* fandom is considered a "family" that includes the cast and crew. Twitter affords one more way for fans to congregate as a family. They can communicate with the senior members of the family, including the cast, through social media,

but also connect with one another. Contact with *Supernatural* celebrities allows fans to find one another through actors' threads, further strengthening the so-called familial bonds. Because some fans use "their devotion to [a] celebrity as a resource for identity construction" (Jones et. al., 2022, p. 720), and fandom itself can be "transformative" (Zubernis & Larsen, 2012, p. 12), being able to connect to those celebrities online can be a powerful affordance. Queer members of the *Supernatural* fandom can connect with Misha Collins, a known LGBTQIA+ ally, and this can be a positive (or neutral or negative) experience for them. Despite some scholars viewing Twitter as democratizing, fans still often reinforce hierarchy through the ways in which they address celebrities (Kehrberg, 2015). The *Supernatural* family may be an often-supportive, positive social experience, but hierarchies persist.

Social Dramas and the "Breach"

When a society maintains harmony, the arrangements of the social dynamic are "synchronized," but social dramas occur when there is a break in this harmony (Madison, 2005, p. 156). For Victor Turner (1982), social dramas have four main phases: breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration or recognition of the triggering schism (p. 69). Turner (1982) explains that social dramas occur in communities that have shared values and history (p. 69). Although the *Supernatural* family is diverse and holds differing opinions, there are segments of it with their own values and histories, allowing for social dramas to play out inside of them. A social drama first begins as a "breach of a norm" pertaining to "morality, law, custom, or etiquette" (Turner, 1982, p. 70). In order to control the breach, members of the group will take "adjustive and redressive measures" (Turner, 1982, p. 70). This often involves identifying a scapegoat who can be blamed for the breach (p. 71). Finally, the social drama will either end with reintegration of the group or with recognition that the central breach is simply irreparable and reintegration is not

possible (p. 71). In the *Supernatural* fandom, when it comes to Misha Collins' video about Castiel's death *not* being an instance of homophobic writing, Collins' breach is his act of breaking an important norm in queer communities: elevating gay voices over straight ones when it comes to conversations regarding queer sexual orientation. By asserting himself as the expert and "correcting" upset queer viewers, Collins positions himself at the top of a hierarchy of knowledge. This breach caused a need for redressive action, with Collins himself taking the blame, apologizing, and trying to reintegrate himself and the Twitter users he distanced through his rhetoric.

Sociologists Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel both contributed to the concept of breach. Goffman (1963) explored social norms and breaches of "civility" (p. 115). In ethnomethodology, Garfinkel (1967) also engaged with the concept of breach by setting up experiments that subverted social norms. In one, he interviewed medical students, playing for them a fake recording of an applicant who was a "boor" who used unprofessional language and bragged about himself (p. 58). The medical students gave him a negative assessment, but the interviewer insisted that the fictitious applicant had an excellent record and recommendations. The interviewees then tried to rationalize these discrepancies, showing how a breach of social expectations requires remedial action and accounts (Buttny, 1983). Although social accountability is used to define "civic engagement" that leads citizens to hold their governance accountable (Wildermuth, 2014, p. 372), we can also use the term to understand how individuals hold other forms of authority accountable, such as fans and creators of fan objects. Scholars have studied attempts to negotiate social accountability on Twitter as well (Neu & Saxton, 2023), and my work aims to understand how fans have used Twitter to hold actors, especially Misha Collins, accountable for their words.

Queerness, Queer Media, and Queer Community

A straightforward definition of queer is "of, relating to, or being a person whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and/or whose gender identity is not cisgender" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This is tricky because not all LGBT+ people identify themselves as queer, since the term is historically a slur. Although many people have reclaimed it, in order to respect those who have not, I will avoid the blanket term "queer people," and opt instead for LGBTQIA+ when speaking of individuals. Most specifically, this dissertation involves the canonical bisexual character of Castiel and opinions regarding his queerness, so my focus is on queer sexual identity in particular.

Although the Hays Code restricted Hollywood images of LGBTQIA+ people until its abolishment in the late 60s, representations of queer-coded characters abounded in early Hollywood (Russo, 1987; Benshoff, 1997). In the decades since, representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals on television has expanded thanks to TV shows like *Queer as Folk*, *The L Word*, and, more recently, *Our Flag Means Death* and *Batwoman*. According to a 2021-2022 report by GLAAD, 92 series-regular TV characters, or 11.9%, are LGBT ("Record number of LGBT characters"). Although this is an all-time high, stereotypes, tokenism, and negative tropes continue to punctuate many characterizations. For example, fan favorite bisexual character Villanelle from *Killing Eve* died in the finale (Neal & Corradi, 2022), an example of the history of gay characters dying in disproportionate numbers on screen.

The term "queer community" often refers to all people who identify with LGBTQIA+ identities, but I here wish to discuss (online) queer communities–specific and individual communities built by LGBTQIA+ people. Because of LGBTQIA+ people's status as a minority, we are at "greater risk for harm from external actors" seeking to target us (Kelly et al., 2020).

One way we have worked to find increased safety and security is through the building of queer communities. Not only can queer communities provide support, but they can also lead to political action (Barber & Hidalgo, 2017). This political aspect is certainly true of online queer communities who often work to fundraise for queer causes, such as The Castiel Project that raises money for The Trevor Project, a mental health hotline for LGBTQIA+ youth ("The Castiel Project"). To date, The Castiel Project has raised over $73,000. *Supernatural* viewers passed information to their online networks about the fundraiser through numerous tweets. Queer communities are not limited to Western society alone, but one can find them "across the globe, often spanning generations" (Dentato, 2020). Social media has allowed for LGBTQIA+ individuals to engage internationally, including in the *Supernatural* fandom.

Queerness and Fandom

In a study with queer and disabled students, one participant asserted a sense that her voice is "strongest" in online queer and disabled communities (Miller, 2017, p. 518). Queer communities online can help queer young people find a sense of belonging and access to important resources (Hanckel & Morris, 2014). In particular, Tumblr has been considered the "queer standard-bearer" when it comes to social media sites (Cavalcante, 2019, p. 1720). Although the *Supernatural* fan family is not entirely queer–indeed, in many fandoms, most male-male gay fanfiction is written by straight women (Russo, 2014, p. 457)–many LGBTQIA+ people inhabit its spaces and use the characters to understand their own queerness through discussing the show, making fan objects, and responding to wider discourse about the show's production. My study examines all three of these aspects. Queer readings of texts can be key for the "outcast and dispossessed" (Hanmer, 2010, p. 155), and the Destiel fandom was and is still a space for LGBTQIA+ people to understand themselves.

Authenticity of Texts

Fans are "not just passive followers but are active agents and framers" (Cabbuag, 2021, p. 3), and part of this framing involves asserting a sense of personal authenticity as fans and authenticating fan objects. For example, McRae (2017) defines existential authenticity in terms of "being true to oneself and one's personal commitments" (p. 14). Part of assessing authenticity involves fans "debat[ing] changes and adaptations to their favorite properties" when creators "shift[] the setting to a new time period" or establish "the subtraction (or addition) of new characters" (Bryan & Clark, 2019, p. 147). Fans may even assert "which stories best embody the essence of the characters" (Bryan and Clark, 2019, p. 147). Fans also may speculate on what narratives are authentic before the editing process, such as on reality television, using additional texts like interviews to create "alternative narratives" of the show (Canvan, 2021, p. 261).

Authenticity of Fans

In addition to arguing for what texts or which aspects of them are authentic, fans also argue over what makes an authentic fan; they do so through metapragmatics, to manage and instruct each other on how to communicate about objects (Cabbuag, 2021; Yodovich, 2021). Metapragmatics refers to "language about the *meaning* of an utterance" (Bridges, 2019, p. 37) and occurs when "speech describes a discussion about what language is doing in a certain context" (p. 36). Indexicality also factors in; indexicals are context-specific utterances that can assist with indexing things, such as the pronouns "I" and "you" (Hanks, 1999, p. 124). One can define these debates over what constitutes authentic fandom as "striving for authenticity" (Cabbuag, 2021, p. 13). Among members of the *Supernatural* communities on social media, some viewers appeal to what they will call "true fans," separating themselves and others who agree with them from false fans who hold opinions differing from their own.

Even creators can get involved with demarcating real fans from fake ones when engaging with accounts of "shipping." Louis Tomlinson, a member of the world-famous boy band One Direction, has often been "shipped" with his band-mate Harry Styles in real-person fanfic (RPF), a kind of shipping that, as the name suggests, involves fans pairing real individuals (Dare-Edwards, 2014). The ship, called "Larry Stylinson," or simply "Larry" was so popular on Twitter that the tag would often trend worldwide (Dare-Edwards, 2014). In response to these tweets, Tomlinson himself made a Twitter thread against the Larry ship. He later tweeted that he wanted to express gratitude to "the 'REAL' fans," before doubling-down in the same tweet to say he was sorry if he upset "any REAL fan of" the band's (qtd. in Dare-Edwards, 2014, p. 521). On the other side of the coin, some celebrities choose to celebrate ships they find themselves indirectly involved in. This positivity is true of Misha Collins. According to fandom lore (that has become so embedded it is difficult to find a source for it), one executive at CW referred to Destiel shippers as "crazy." Collins (2013) took to twitter to affirm fans: "You're not crazy." Collins then retweeted this shortly after the confession scene episode ended, implying that fans were, all along, right about Castiel's feelings for Dean. Although these instances are not perfectly comparable (one person is defending themselves against accusations they are romantically involved with a real-person band mate, the other is supporting queer fans), they both show the different ways celebrities interact with, reject, or affirm fandom practices.

Authenticity of Creators

Authenticity can act as an account, a claim, and a resource. Accounts can offer explanations for unacceptable behavior, a claim can assert authenticity for oneself or others, and a resource is how one can use the notion of authenticity to accomplish something. The image of a celebrity, and in fact the celebrity themselves, "is a discursive construction" (Duits & Van

Romondt, 2009, p. 42). Because of this, celebrities can "offer audiences a perfect opportunity to engage in questions of authenticity and an ideal of individual autonomy" (Duits & Van Romondt Vis, 2009, p. 43). Celebrities can account for actions as authentic, claim it for themselves, or employ it as a resource to accomplish particular things (e.g. manage their relationships with fans). The ways people articulate themselves in spoken communication—in the moment—can contribute to whether others perceive them as authentic. Characteristics used to claim authenticity for oneself or to attribute it to others include being "sincere, immediate, spontaneous, real, direct, genuine and so on" (Dyer, 1991, p. 82). It is accounted for as an intrinsic thing that is "instinctive, uncontrolled or spontaneous" (Dubrofsky, 2016, p. 185). As mentioned above, authenticity is not an intrinsic state, or innate, but part of a social negotiation of attributes that one can claim for oneself and attribute to others. A claim to authenticity often emerges from consistency, where "proof of authenticity relies on the ability to appear consistent across disparate social spaces and at different times" (Dubrofsky, 2011, p. 117). People who seek to claim authenticity may work to "behave[e] in ways that are not pre-meditated" but instead appear "uncontrived and natural-seeming, expressing themselves in spontaneous showings of feeling" (Dubrofsky & Wood, 2014, p. 282). These definitions of authenticity help us understand the videos featuring actors who try to maintain coherence in their discussions of the final three episodes of *Supernatural*.

Objects of fandom (such as actors and showrunners) must work to be perceived as authentic themselves (King-O'Riain, 2021). When series do not live up to fans' expectations, some viewers will relocate "their anger onto the producers" when they fail "to deliver what the series appeared to be promising" (Jenkins, 2013, p. 146). The ways creators interact with fans also requires negotiation, as fandom "implicitly involves an unwritten set of expectations

between performers and their followers" which "can extend beyond the primary performance itself to include how the audience is treated" (Duffett, 2013, p. 98). Ultimately, in order to maintain their identity as celebrity, an "authenticated individual is acting as the guarantor of the truth of the discourse of [their] stardom" (Dyer, 1991, p. 88). Misha Collins has been known to use authenticity as a resource, providing intimate moments of his personal life to "establish[s] his persona's authenticity" (Xanthoudakis, 2020, 3.1). In my own work, I analyze the strategies in Collins' and other actors' accounts to understand how they enact and articulate themselves as authentic. In doing so, they reflexively designate themselves as authorities on the matter.

Queerness and Authenticity

I have established that authenticity is not intrinsic, but performative work that people negotiate and assign, claim, grant, and disclaim. Questions of authenticity have plagued LGBTQIA+ people, especially certain identities in particular, such as bisexuals and asexuals, who have faced discrimination even within queer communities for not having the "correct" kind of queer identity. What makes a story queer or a character queer? Discussions concerning the authenticity of queer characters sometimes involve complaints about "queerbaiting," a term used to describe "the concept of showrunners and writers adding homoerotic subtext between two characters, usually leads, in order to attract LGBTQ audiences to the show without ever intending to elevate the subtext to an actual relationship" (Shakeri, 2017). *Supernatural* has been accused of queerbaiting after taking seasons to confirm Castiel as bisexual and never confirming queer-coded Dean Winchester as such in the English version. In season 5 episode 8, "Changing Channels" (Carver & Beeson, 2019), one of the series' most experimental episodes, Sam and Dean are sent by the archangel Gabriel into an alternate universe of television shows, including a *Grey's Anatomy* parody featuring a Dr. "McDreamy" knock-off named Dr. Sexy. Early in the

episode, Dean is shown as a fan of the show and Dr. Sexy, but when he is sent into the world of the show and meets the character, he appears flustered and overwhelmed, suggesting attraction. Narratively, nothing came of this and other queer-coded details, leading to many accusing the show of queerbaiting LGBTQIA+ fans by arranging Destiel but never following through in a mutual way. This situation has caused some people to call into question the *Supernatural* writers' commitment to queerness, showing a negotiation of what makes an authentic queer text and demonstrating the relevance of what I will now discuss in terms of enoughness.

Enoughness

These different aspects of authenticity and fandom can also be viewed as issues of "enoughness," where someone or something must have sufficient "emblematic features" of an identity before they can be "ratified" as authentically of that identity (Blommaert & Varis, 2011, p. 146). I would argue that for fans, this might mean things like having seen enough episodes or holding the right "beliefs" about the characters and storylines. For creators, a sense of enoughness might require them to remember plotlines of their own shows or support the correct interpretations of the show that fans hold. For the texts themselves, in order to fit the category of, for example, queerness, they might need to have canon-confirmed queer characters and avoid having those characters meet a tragic end.

Memes

In their earliest definition, cultural memes are considered "contagious patterns of 'cultural information' that get passed from mind to mind and directly generate and shape the mindsets and significant forms of behavior and actions of a group" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 199). First coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976, memes "describe small units of culture that spread from person to person by copying or imitation" (Shifman, 2013, p. 2). When discussing

specifically internet memes, the term can help describe "the rapid uptake of and spread of a particular idea presented as a written text, image, language 'move,' or some other unit of cultural 'stuff'" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 202). A key characteristic of internet memes "is their sparking of user-created derivatives articulated as parodies, remixes, or mash-ups" (Shifman, 2013, p. 2). The use of the term "meme" on the internet typically refers to a specific type of meme—the image macro. An image macro is simply a "visual image with superimposed textual elements" (Vásquez & Aslan, 2020, p. 102). Although this definition sounds quite broad, the "protypical image macro" tended to have a line of text along the top and along the bottom (Zenner & Geeraerts, 2008, p. 175). The memes I study in my project often break from this more rigid, traditional set-up to include more than one image (a "thread" of images, as I call them), to superimpose images on top of one another in a kind of intertextual collage, and to put text in different places on the image macro.

Intertextuality is key to the success of memes, as they "often relate to each other in complex, creative, and surprising ways" (Shifman, 2013, p. 3). The meme format "only make[s] sense when the recipient has sufficient experience with Internet memes" and understands the specific language of them (Zenner & Geeraerts, 2018, p. 172).

A meme's success in circulation often hinges on "irony, humor, and play" (Vásquez & Aslan, 2020, p. 102), where humor often "elicit[s] amusement through the […] belittlement of a given target" (Ferguson & Ford, 2008, p. 283). This humorous belittlement is true of the memes I consider, which work to critique narrative choices the writers and network made in the final few episodes of *Supernatural.* Pow (2021) argues that "the visual meme has become ubiquitous in fan production, particularly in a humorous way" (p. 129). The satirical nature of these memes "is frequently used in fan production to lovingly criticize the shortcomings in the object of one's

fandom" (Pow, 2012, p. 129). As for the memes I study in response to the Latin American (LATAM) dub of season 15 episode 18, not all users produced them "lovingly," and it is clear from a careful analysis of these images that the humor they employ masks a deep-seated discomfort—if not pain—with a perceived suppression of queer reciprocation in the English version.

Conclusion

In *Supernatural* itself, Sam Winchester is the "lore keeper" of the two hunter-brothers, often researching the known literature on different mythologies and folklore and presenting it to Dean and their companions to help assist on cases. In this chapter, I aimed to do the same for the purposes of my dissertation, introducing key theories and approaches that work as the foundation for my project's investigations. I first covered the literature already existent on *Supernatural* as a site; moved on to cover concepts such as discourse, mediation, and intertextuality; introduced social media sites Tumblr and Twitter; engaged important theories from fandom studies; and finally discussed concepts of breach and authenticity. I return to these concepts and approaches throughout my dissertation to investigate my research questions of authenticity and queerness in my chosen site of *Supernatural* family discourse.

My next chapter begins the analytical portion of this project. In it I analyze two fan convention panels between actors which both engage with the meaning and "point" of Castiel's confession scene in the episode "Despair." I analyze the discursive moves the actors make such as their lexical choices, disfluencies, and overlapping speech. Through this, I aim to show the ways spoken discourse negotiates authenticity and constitutes interpretations of queerness.

Chapter Three: Getting to "The Point": Authenticity and the Authority of Creators

In this chapter, I consider the ways the actors I analyze in the following sections use moral accounts to offer justifications and explanations for Castiel's confession scene. Hudson (2016) defines a moral account as "a speech act that neutralizes a problem that stigmatizes presentation of self and also constructs one's social identity as morally good" (p. 320). For Shotter (1985), when we account for ourselves, "we must always meet the demands placed upon us by our status as responsible members of our society" (p. 168). The ways we communicate our accounts must be "intelligible and legitimate to others, in ways that make sense to them and relate to interests in which they can share" (Shotter, 1985, p. 168). For the actors I transcribe below, their discourses suggest a need to engage the conversations of fans and communicate in ways that are relevant and logical to the communities in which they speak. I provide excerpts of the actors' dialogue and use discursive approaches to analyze the ways they work to mend the breaches the presence of Castiel's coming out and disappearance caused for the fandom.

I believe this work is important because celebrities matter. They are nigh ubiquitous, and it is impossible to even check out at the grocery store without seeing the shelves lined with their images. We may "disdain the public focus on celebrity" but we also "continue to watch, discuss and participate and thereby ensure the maintenance of a celebrity industry" (Marshall, 2010, p. 36). Regardless of how an individual may feel about stars like Taylor Swift, Zendaya, or Timothée Chalamet, almost all of us encounter representations of their fame online through digital news articles and through non-electronic, more traditionally-material contexts like magazines or cinema/concert-going. But what happens when these material experiences revolve

around flesh-and-blood encounters with celebrity? Publicity appearances, including fan conventions, help celebrities promote old, current, and future works, but these public forums also give space for actors, as co-creators of meaning on screen, to meet with fans and create new sites of engagement (Jones, 2016). Furthermore, these in-person opportunities also allow on-screen celebrities to articulate analysis of media narrative of which they are a part. Although it is impossible to know whether they may be "fed" this analysis by distributors or networks, this question of authenticity does not undercut the ways actors' voiced opinions on their work can start, continue, or even try to end conversations around stories. This importance is particularly salient when it involves emotionally "hot" scenes in films and television or controversies in fandom, such as Castiel's confession scene and the conversation around it.

Supernatural has had a long tradition of fan conventions with appearances from the biggest stars on the show to some of the more obscure guest actors. Thousands of fans have descended on these conventions, paying high prices to attend panels with their favorite *Supernatural* actors and hear behind-the-scenes information about the show and the people who make it. Despite the series having been off the air for over three years at the time of this writing, *Supernatural* "cons" continue in popularity, with several hosted in 2023 by the Creation Entertainment company. Tickets and celebrity meet-and-greet opportunities for these events are not cheap, either. The "gold standard" weekend pass at Creation New Jersey in 2024, for example, is $1099, while front-row seat passes are $1899 ("Admission"). Photo opportunities with Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki cost $199 each ("The Road So Far..."). These prices show the lengths fans will go to gain proximity to their favorite *Supernatural* stars, but it also helps illustrate the ways fan conventions themselves represent key places where emotionally-loaded interactions between fans and actors can occur due to fans' desire and commitment to be

physically present and engaged. Because of this, conventions offer a unique environment for understanding fandom (and, in the case of *Supernatural*, "family") discourse.

Analyzing fan convention appearances from the actors helps us make sense of the ways they position themselves and offer accounts of the series. They do this partially by metadiscursively commenting on fan conversations around it. They also employ intertextuality through discussions that connect to the series and broader narratives about queerness. By engaging with fans and their questions, actors are able to present themselves as authentic, or authorities on and ambassadors of the series for fans. In this chapter, I use a discursive approach to analyze two convention panel talks by actors, including the actor-director who directed the episode in which the confession scene itself features (Richard Speight Jr.). Specifically, I examine the ways these co-creators articulate the authenticity of the confession scene and their own "readings" (analysis) of it. I also consider the metadiscursive moves they make when they comment on viewer conversations around Castiel and the scene, paying particular attention to how the actors discuss the queerness (or lack thereof) at the heart of the scene.

Although the discourse of *Supernatural* viewers takes up a considerable portion of this dissertation, I recognize that looking to the spoken discourse of the actors themselves would help contextualize exactly what viewers were responding to on social media. In this chapter, I analyze two *Supernatural* convention panels to understand how several actors from the series articulate and thematize the confession scene and Destiel as a relationship. These two convention panels take, I argue, contrasting and incompatible stances on their subject matter, but both reveal the ways actors on the show come to terms with reactions *to* reactions. These are metapragmatic attempts to respond to viewers' opinions and assert the actors' own positions on the scene as either co-creators of it or observers uninvolved in the scene directly but who still have a stake in

the ways viewers embrace or reject Destiel's representations.

Conventions are pre-staged encounters, which are "one[s] in which producers or other groups organize circumscribed opportunities for fans and celebrities to come into contact with one another (e.g., conventions, luncheons, personal appearances, book signings, and golf tournaments)" (Ferris, 2001, p. 33). Here, fans can seek out interactions with their chosen celebrities that bring into sight the tensions between the "real" actor and the "fictional" character. Indeed, one of these experiences can be "a bridge between the mediated and the real" (Ferris, 2001, p. 44) allowing "character and actor" to "occupy one body" (p. 26). For fans of *Supernatural*, conventions can allow viewers to ask members of the cast questions about characters' motivations, requesting that the actors—who are usually not the writers of the episodes—to step into a creative role and speculate on what the characters "really" feel or think. These are a kind of paratext that present character traits that may not be proven by the originary text of the series. For example, when the fan at the Denver convention asks Ackles when he knew about Castiel loving Dean romantically, Ackles says that Dean did not know because Ackles himself did not know, allowing "fantasy and reality [to] merge" (Ferris, 2001, p. 26) as Ackles' knowledge (or lack thereof) becomes connected to Dean's ignorance.

Fan-celebrity interaction can be highly personally meaningful for fans. While writing about meet-and-greets with famous singer, Marco Borsato, Reijnders et al. (2013) ask "[d]o [fans] really want to have contact with Marco Borsato the person, or is Borsato actually only a medium and the fans are in fact in search of contact with the thing which Borsato and his music constitute a sounding board for their own inner world?" (p. 10). I would argue that, for some fans, reaching out to Misha Collins (or Jensen Ackles, Jared Padalecki, and the other stars) to inquire about or seek affirmation of the show's queerness may really be a way of accessing the

fans' own queer inner worlds, or affirm the queer inner worlds of others with which these fans are allied. Castiel is a fictional character, yes, but he provides *imaginative representation* for non-fictional viewers that can enrichen those viewers' own understanding of their queer identities. The meet-and-greet or fan question-and-answer opportunities are no insignificant, laughing matter; they are not only collaborative, but also creative events where important world-building (and world-destroying) may happen during these encounters. I will avoid projecting onto the mother who poses their question to Ackles and Padalecki below, but I know that my interest in co-creators' opinions on the matter does emerge from my own inner world. That observation returns back to my impulse to work on this dissertation: it matters to me personally.

In the sections that follow, I analyze the moves the actors and episode director make to establish authenticity as authorities to speak to the subject. I also touch on how one fan at the Denver convention asks Ackles and Padalecki a question that triggers their responses. I consider lexical choice, patterns of speech, disfluencies, metapragmatic commentary and other devices and strategies to do this work. In the next section, I will introduce and analyze transcripts from a French online fan convention.

The Online DarkLight Convention

In November of 2020, shortly after season 15, episode 18 aired, a large group of the *Supernatural* cast joined a virtual panel for a French fan convention called the Online DarkLight Convention. Although no fans were materially "present" with the cast as they would be at an in-person panel, the convention offered them an opportunity to watch some of their favorite stars interact through video conferencing technology. The featured actors were Collins, Rob Benedict (who plays Chuck, AKA God Himself), Richard Speight Jr. (the archangel Gabriel and also the real-life director of "Despair"), Matt Cohen (the young John Winchester and the temporary

vessel for the archangel Michael), Mark Sheppard (the king of hell, Crowley), Mark Pellegrino (Lucifer), and Ruth Connell (a witch named Rowena, who is Crowley's mother and the eventual queen of hell). They were also joined by an English-to-French translator. Because the actors were communicating via video conferencing technology, it is difficult to analyze their spatial relationships. In the roughly 8-minute excerpt of what seems to be a longer conversation, the actors use humor, positive face strategies (Goffman, 1955) and politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to highlight the importance of Destiel in the narrative and the personal importance it had for the *Supernatural* family. As a note, the video posted to Twitter[2] that I have used for transcription appears to be only an excerpt of a lengthier conversation, and the beginning of the dialogue seems to be edited out (Stephanie Earp, 2020). Because of this, I lack the context to know what precedes Collins interruption ("I have something to say" in line 1). I have also chosen to edit out some of the conversation that is not relevant for my analysis. Additionally, I discuss part of the conversation in the conclusion chapter of this dissertation. For now, I provide excerpts of the exchange below (See Appendix A for transcription symbols):

Extract 1: Video #1

1	Collins:	I have something to say. I have a feeling that probably half of the
2		people on this screen don't know what happened in that last
3		episode.
4	Translator:	Oops.
5	Cohen:	Exactly.
6	Collins:	Yeah. Um. Castiel...

[2] Despite this video being Twitter content, I opted to not ask for consent from the user since it was broadcasted, and therefore was meant to be spread.

7	Benedict:	I think we all know.
8	Collins:	Um. Castiel tells Dean he loves him. And, like, basically makes
9		Destiel canon. Um, which is a=
10	Pellegrino:	=Whoa.
11	Collins:	Fans—yeah—fans are kind of freaking out over that. And then,
12		um, to complicate matters he dies right after that. So, um.
13	Sheppard:	Who, Dean or Castiel?
14	Collins:	Uh, Castiel. So, Castiel like makes this hom-homosexual de-
15		declaration of love and then—uh—and then di—which is amazing
16		that that happens—and then, he um, ((clears throat)) and then he
17		dies right after-after, which plays into like a-a timeless Hollywood
18		trope of 'kill the gays.' Um, which—
19	Benedict:	((laughs))
20	Collins:	Well, also, then, like, pisses off, like it's—like it's—like we give
21		and then we take away, uh, so, um, yeah. That's=
22	Sheppard:	=You—you do know, Misha, that we all knew.
23	Collins:	Oh, no, I didn't know. Uh—there were—Matt—Matt—didn't
24		know. Did you know, Matt?
25	Sheppard:	No, no, we all knew that that that uh Castiel was in love with
26		Dean.

As mentioned, Collins seems to interrupt an earlier conversation to shift to a discussion of Castiel's confession scene in this excerpt and signal it as important. He uses the words "I have something to say" (line 1) to draw attention to his next moment of discourse and mark it as

worthy of his castmates' attention, as well as that of the audience. Interestingly, Collins' sentence supposes an ignorance on the part of the other actors about the events of the episode, and therefore suggests that his following statements will be pedagogical for them. As teacher, Collins is able to begin his narrative as an authentic authority, well-informed to speak on the scene for his audience of peers and fans.

We see Collins first acknowledge the excitement of fans before transitioning to an admittance of pain for the fandom. Collins' phrase "freaking out" (line 11) is quite colloquial, and could be seen as somewhat dismissive. Collins does not use a more formal term such as "excited about" or "happy about," but evokes a much more visceral and uncontrolled response. Indeed, Dictionary.com defines "freak out" as "to lose or cause to lose emotional control from extreme excitement, shock, fear, joy, despair, etc." There is of course also the drug-related definition, "to enter into or cause a period of irrational behavior or emotional instability, especially under the influence of a drug" ("freakout"). The terms "lose emotional control," "irrational behavior," and "emotional instability" all work to suggest a lack of logical response or intellectual engagement with the events of the episode. According to Collins' lexical choices in this dialogue, fans' reactions were overwhelmed by their own emotions to the scene and had a strong and potentially illogical action. I would argue, though, that the term "freaking out" could also take on another tone to it that is more positive in order to reflect jubilance and ecstatic commitment to something loved and important to the individual. Later, Collins also uses the crude term "pisses off" (line 20) to further signal a guttural reaction from fans to Castiel's death. These lexical choices work to show that the scene mattered to fans. These expressions tie back to Collins' assertion that he has "something to say." These discussions are important because fans find the scene an urgent matter.

Collins also employs strategies of intertextuality to engage in a critique of the scene. Jones (2016) borrows from Bahktin when he speaks of "heteroglossia," or the concept that "all utterances necessarily contain the 'voices' of other people" (p. 50). When Collins speaks of "kill the gays" (line 18) he is recontextualizing the narrative trope "bury your gays." This involves a reformulation of the original phrasing, where reformulation "is a discourse function whereby the second unit is a restatement or elaboration of the first in different words, to present it from a different point of view and to reinforce the message" (Hyland, 2007, p. 269). This reformulated phrase allows Collins to reference (and therefore claim knowledge of) an ongoing conversation about the ways in which gay characters die at a disproportionate rate to their straight counterparts. Even though Collins changes the wording of the trope name, he is able to reconstruct a dialogue that has existed long before his own utterance, thus recontextualizing this conversation, now a resource for doing authenticity. I argue that by doing so, Collins' language positions him with a sense of belonging as someone conversant with the queer community.

The "bury your gays" trope is a phrase by which users critique the narrative device where media texts depict the deaths of gay characters at a higher rate than straight characters, often in situations that add depth to the straight characters' plots at the expense of gay people. Scholars argue that it is used to "discredit and delegitimi[z]e" media representations of LGBTQIA+ characters (Seymour, 2020, p. 90). It has emerged in different ways dating back to literary works from the end of the 19th century (Hulan, 2017), but has been used in television since 1976 (Waggoner, 2018, p. 1877). Hulan (2017) defines it as a narrative trope in which one member of a same-gender romantic pair must die by the end of the story, sometimes mere moments following the confirmation of their relationship (p. 17). Some have expanded the definition to include any same-gender-attracted characters who die in "violent ways" (Birchmore & Kettrey,

2021, p. 1). Bury your gays can also be a trope "wherein queer death serves as a plot device" (Cameron, 2018, p. 1). One of the most notorious and academically-noted contemporary instances of bury your gays emerged in the young adult science fiction series *The 100*, another popular show aired by *Supernatural*'s network The CW. In *The 100*, the lesbian character of Lexa dies less than one and a half screen minutes after she consummates her relationship with the main character Clarke (Waggoner, 2018, p. 1883). Although this trope typically plagues women-loving-women characters at a higher rate than men-loving-men characters (Birchmore & Kettrey, 2021, p. 1), Seymour (2020) includes the Oscar-nominated *Brokeback Mountain* as an exemplar of this trope as well (p. 91).

The bury your gays trope also often works to further the plot line of another character (Cameron, 2018, p. 1-2), usually a heterosexual one (Tzikas, 2018). Although this can be frustrating as it uses gay people as a means-to-an-end, one may argue that at least the person who mourns them honors the life of the deceased gay character. In the case of *Supernatural*, Dean Winchester (and Sam) do not mourn Castiel for a significant period of time, and only briefly mention missing him in passing during episode 19 of the final season. When Dean goes to heaven, his and Sam's father-figure Bobby mentions that Castiel helped Jack rebuild heaven, and although Dean smiles to hear this, the two men drop the subject and speak at no more length about Castiel. Instead of the angel's death even serving a personal purpose for Dean, it leaves no meaningful impact on him beyond shock—another key ingredient to the bury your gays tradition (Waggoner, 2018, p. 1877). In speaking of the deaths of queer women on television, President and CEO of GLAAD said: "producers must do better to question the reason for a character's demise and what they are really communicating to the audience" (Townsend, 2017). Fans believe in the ramifications of these depictions, speaking of the death of Lexa in *The 100* as

something that could "trigger thoughts of suicide and self-harm" (Misailidou, 2017, p. 3). By evoking the term bury your gays, Collins is borrowing a resource for claiming authenticity from this long, enduring conversation about the representation of queer characters. By doing so, he positions himself as someone who belongs as a queer ally–someone gay *Supernatural* viewers can trust to support them.

Despite Collins' implication that he is conversant with the phrase "kill the gays," it is worth noting the disfluencies in his delivery at this juncture. Disfluencies include times when speakers "pause, repeat themselves, or restart their utterance" (Arnold et al., 2003, p. 25). Collins repeats sounds and uses the word "uh" when trying to initially say "dies," and interrupts himself by stating that Castiel's confession was "amazing" (lines 14-16). He then clears his throat before finally delivering the news that Castiel died right after the confession (line 17). It is then that he brings in the reference to "kill the gays" (line 18). Before delivering the "bad" news of Castiel's death, he first couches the negative by asserting the positive of Castiel's confession. These disfluencies—repetition and interruptions—suggest the speaker's uncertainty, and certainly care, in navigating the formulation of an account.

Collins' use of the construction "we give and we take away" (lines 19-20) borrows from and reformulates the Biblical affirmation that "the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away" from Job 1:21, situating the creators of the show as God-like powers who can bless and curse LGBTQIA+ audiences at will (New Revised Standard Version, 2010). This usage is also an example of intertextual heteroglossia, legitimizing his rhetoric by referencing the major literary work of the Book of Job, one closely linked to religious articulations of loss, grief, and a God who allows His people to suffer. His use of the phrase is, however, ironic; although the network

and creators have power, they are not actual deities. This irony allows him some distance from the subject.

Collins, interestingly enough, implicates himself by the use of "we" (lines 20-21) rather than saying something such as "the show gives and the show takes away" which would allow him to disburse accountability onto others. Collins pronominal work signals an admittance, an act of authenticity in which he refuses to avoid shirking responsibility (Pantelides & Bartesaghi, 2012). Although this could position him as outside LGBTQIA+ allyship, his confession and willingness to listen and acknowledge the show's perceived shortcomings helps to once again bring him back into alignment with queer fans. Only by acknowledging harm done (the breach that Castiel's death caused) can he return to a state of belonging in the community.

Later in the panel, after some light joking between the actors about the performance, Collins wraps back around to a serious consideration of the scene, in particular Speight's choices in his directing of the episode. Collins offers an account of filming "Despair" that includes him and Speight as characters cast in a "moral tale" (Roulston, 2002):

27 Collins: I will—I will add one more thing about it um the, that last episode
28 I-I-I have to say I really do appreciate that um Richard took the
29 time and attention to like give that scene its due like rehearsal time.
30 We talked about it quite a bit in advance of shooting it which is not
31 something we often do on *Supernatural*, we don't spend a lot of
32 time dissecting things or rehearsing or analyzing in advance of
33 shooting because it's too run-and-done most of the time um but I-I
34 appreciate the thought and care and attention that you put into that
35 uh scene and even like putting it—that was, y'know, that was the

36 end of—the very last scene we shot, the very end of the uh
37 episode, um, which was uh not a scheduling necessity um but it
38 was done to like y'know give that—give that scene its
39 attention. So, I appreciate that.

Collins creates a dichotomous account for the episode. He praises Speight's choice to take "the time and attention" (line 29) to respect the process of planning the confession scene. Filming long series such as *Supernatural* does not allow for much rehearsal of scenes (lines 32-33), but Collins notes that Speight made efforts to rehearse the scene to give it the care it deserved (lines 28-29). According to Collins, Speight even put the scene last in filming to emphasize its importance (lines 36-39). Explaining these specific details of the directing process lends a sense of credibility and authenticity to the scene. For Collins, the scene not only meaningfully confirms Castiel as a queer character, but the production choices behind it show a care and respect for the scene as a culmination of a queer story that presumably began seasons before. Despite the issue of "kill the gays" (line 18) Collins mentions earlier, he performs repair work here, creating an account in which the episode and its creators are on the right side of the moral divide when it comes to caring about queer narratives. As a character in the account, Collins has firsthand experience, and is thus able to verify the account as authentic.

After this excerpt, Speight himself takes over to respond and to add further context for his decision. His response is lengthy, so I have excerpted relevant portions:

40 Speight: I think it's such a gift to the fans that you guys gave this character
41 this journey, that allows fans to live that process, that difficult
42 process through a character they've become so connected to. And
43 that doesn't happen in TV much, it certainly doesn't happen in

network TV where risks are never taken. And the risk—which is not really a risk—'cos it's always been in the nature of you to be empathetic as a person, but, to the actual business of Hollywood it is a risk and I think you did such a wonderful job leaning into that and—and—I-I, you know. […] But things came up that day—things that mattered to that scene immensely—came up that day. Conversations were ongoing for three weeks and up to the moment of shooting it we were making changes that were dynamically effective in telling that story. And you don't get that chance in TV to work with your buddies, to work in advance of the scene, and to have a scene that actually matters and will resonate beyond the life of the show. So kudos to you my friend, and to Bobo, and to [showrunner Andrew] Dabb for letting it happen."

The responses the actors give help work together to form a co-justification. Collins acknowledges the "kill the gays" (line 18) trope at work in the episode, but Collins and Speight together in the excerpts I have provided show that despite this, they approached the scene with care and consideration. Because of this, the scene is a "gift to the fans" (line 40) that will "resonate beyond the life of the show" (lines 54-55). This framing allows them to authenticate themselves as co-creators and the scene as a co-created text, made with care.

Speight's very complimentary remarks to Collins do a variety of interesting discursive moves, but in particular, they help authenticate Castiel's actor as an "empathetic" ally (line 46) to the LGBTQIA+ community. Speight implicates Collins as a co-creator of the scene along with Bobo Berens, the episode's writer, showing that Collins did not simply recite words given to

him, but had an active hand in shaping Castiel's storyline. Speight also makes reference to "conversations" that happened around the scene among the co-creators (line 50). Although these are phantom conversations we lack direct access to, Speight's engagement of this unquoted-yet-reported speech (Buttny, 2004) around the scene lends credibility to it. These referenced conversations show that evoking an authentic queer coming out for Castiel was desirable for the co-creators. Speight also emphasizes the "risk" Collins and Berens took in telling Castiel's story (lines 44-45), authenticating it as an important narrative that resists typical Hollywood mainstream pressure to avoid telling queer stories. Although not necessarily intertextual with other media, as he does not mention other texts that "queerbait" their fans, his comments still indirectly reference a conversation amongst fans about the lack of meaningful queer stories in Hollywood productions. These remarks, as a moral account, help justify *Supernatural* and the "Despair" episode despite their critics.

In the next section, I will analyze an in-person panel at a Denver Supernatural convention. In it, Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki answer a fan's question about the confession scene and use discursive moves to construct their answers as authentic and themselves as authorities on the matter.

The Denver Convention

What does it mean to get to the "point" of something, especially when it comes to art? We usually mean this as a way of getting at a kernel of meaning at the heart of a text, but that kernel is, of course, subjective for each person engaging with said text. Intertextuality as a theory can help us understand the ways co-creators (in this case, actors) of a text make sense of it, as well as how they metadiscursively respond to other people's analyses of it. In this section of Chapter Three, I ask how Padalecki and Ackles use metadiscursive commentary and intertextual

linkages to authorize their own readings of Castiel's confession as authentic.

Although on the surface, this conversation looks primarily like an intertextual discourse about the confession scene, showing how the two lead actors articulate their positions on Castiel's sexuality and the nature of his love for Dean, the video is also intensely metadiscursive. Ackles and Padalecki comment on the viewer conversation *around* Dean and Castiel's in-series conversation. As I will elucidate below, the two actors respond to the ways viewers have identified Castiel's love as romantic or sexual. Ackles and Padalecki reject this reading of Castiel's love and declaration, and instead offer two of their own, which ground the situation as lacking in lust and instead about a more universal—or even divine—kind of love.

A year after the airing of the finale, in November of 2021 in Denver, Colorado, Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles were featured at an in-person convention panel that ran for nearly 35 minutes (Gayled_It, 2021). Padalecki and Ackles stood on a stage with a huge backdrop behind them featuring Baby (Dean's beloved car in the series). The two men stood a few feet apart from each other and spoke into microphones on stands. The panel covered a lot of ground, including discussions of other projects the actors were a part of, but it is the final audience-posed question that I find most pertinent for this project.

A person (I have opted to use they/them pronouns for them even though they identify as a mother) began to ask a question before the actors interrupted them. When the discussion wrapped back to the questioner, they began this way:

57 Questioner: So, um, actually, so I'm a mom, a couple of my kids are—

58 identify as queer.

59 Padalecki: ()

60 Questioner: And I always appreciated how like organically you just introduced

61		like gay characters and things and um sorry I'm shaking I'm so
62		nervous.
63	Padalecki:	It's all right.
64	Questioner:	Um and so my question is with Castiel. When did you know that
65		the way he loved Dean was in a romantic like deep love? Like
66		when in the series did you know because we always kind of debate
67		over "see this is when they're kind of dropping hints."

The questioner does a few things here I find interesting. The speaker uses four introductory words and disfluencies ("so," "um," "actually," "so" again) before beginning the primary part of their sentence with an identifier (line 57). They are a mom, and a couple of their kids "identify as queer" (line 58). These disfluencies suggest that what they are about to share is very important to them. By starting this way and mentioning their children, the questioner provides an identity that positions them in close proximity to queerness, even if they choose to use the term "identify as queer" rather than "are queer," the latter of which would formulate their children's identities in a stronger way. Although the mother does not disclose a queer identity, their close familial bonds with two queer individuals help establish authenticity for them to speak to this subject. Expressing these bonds also helps demonstrate that the topic is of importance to them personally, so that their concern is authentic.

The questioner then pivots to praising the show, particularly how "organically" it introduces queer characters (line 60). The word organically goes hand-in-hand with authenticity, since organically can be seen as a kind of type authenticity. The questioner then admits to "shaking" because they are "so nervous" (line 61-62). This confession helps show the importance of the interaction to them, and even helps establish them as a true, emotive fan who

has a strong embodied experience to meeting and communicating with these actors.

The questioner not only establishes their reading of Castiel's love for Dean as romantic (and therefore queer), but also uses the word "deep" to describe it (line 65). This wording suggests that rather than presenting the love as a surface-level construction, the show successfully represents the love as something that matters "deep"ly to Castiel as a queer character. This is not a "mancrush" or a "bromance;" it is romantic and it has come to matter.

The questioner also offers a metapragmatic commentary to establish themself as a member of the *Supernatural* family. They evoke the long-term conversation around Destiel by saying fans "always" debate (line 66) when and where the show implies romance between Dean and Castiel (or, in the case of English language canon, a one-way attraction). The questioner also goes so far as to paraphrase the discourse by using the term "see" to evoke a conversational shift in their sentence toward a quotation and away from their own language alone (line 67). These discursive moves help show the ways in which the questioner is not only familiar with the discourse community of Destiel fans, but has personally and actively engaged in these conversations. Thus, the questioner establishes authenticity for themself as a Destiel shipper, committed fan, and active participant. These identities bring weight to their question and, building onto their relationships with their queer children, help illustrate why this question is important to them and why they desire to hear Ackles' and Padalecki's thoughts on Destiel.

The speaker also positions themself as something of a detective, wanting to know exactly when the actors came to the realization (the knowledge) of Castiel's canon feelings. Because the actors stand as authorities on the subject matter, their beliefs and readings surrounding Castiel have major impact on how fans process canon. This detective work is also temporal—it is not just a question of if, but when. When were "hints" dropped (line 67) and when did the actors do

the detective work themselves of reading between the lines?

Below, I transcribe Ackles' and Padalecki's responses:

68 Padalecki: Yeah, yeah. Uh. Do you want to take this? Or do you want me to
69 take this?
70 Ackles: Sure! Uh.
71 Padalecki: I—so=
72 Ackles: =I—I,, well, I don't think Dean really ever knew until the very end
73 there. Uh, uh, in fact I-I-I know he didn't because I never played
74 that. I would say when when Jensen found out or when it was sort
75 of discussed internally that it—it's—it's interesting because the the
76 I think romantic=

Instead of answering first through his own knowledge of Castiel's love (which is what the questioner requests), Ackles begins by discussing *Dean's* knowledge of it (lines 72-74). Ackles denies playing Dean as understanding these "dropped hints" and refers to himself in the third person. In his narrative, Ackles not only includes Dean as a character experiencing the revelation of Castiel's feelings, but he also casts himself as "Jensen" to be a part of the story (line 74). This helps him insert his own identity into the world of *Supernatural*, authorizing himself as an organic member of the show's universe. Ackles then shifts gears, and instead of staying on the questioner's topic about when the romanticism was confirmed, he starts to switch to discussing whether the love itself is romantic/sexual. This conversational switch is then further extended by Padalecki's interruption, transcribed below:

77 Padalecki: =I think the point is=
78 Ackles: I think that I think the term romantic is being used because there

79 isn't a term that necessarily=

80 Padalecki: =He's junkless, y'know? I—It's it's I think I think the point—

Padalecki uses the first instance of seven of the term "the point" to start to establish his interpretation of the scene (line 77). Ackles interrupts to begin to put forward his own theory about the meaning of the scene, but Padalecki takes another turn. In the series, Dean uses the term "junkless" to describe angels. It is a complex one, but I have read it as meaning that angels, in their natural form when not possessing humans, do not have forms with genitalia, even though the people they possess do have genitals. When Padalecki evokes this term (line 80), it is another instance of heteroglossia/intertextuality, where he uses the text itself as proof for his argument. This move supplies authenticity to his and Ackles' emerging argument that Castiel is not a sexual being.

81 Ackles: I don't think it was—I don't think lust is—is involved with the

82 romanticism.

Ackles first acknowledges that the confession *is loving* but furthers Padalecki's claim that Castiel's love is not sexual. It is worth noting that the questioner did not imply this—they solely refer to the love as a "deep" romantic love (line 65). Both actors, however, offer accounts on the desexualization of Castiel's love. Padalecki's lengthy response, which is worth quoting in its entirety, shows the ways both of their responses revolve around an anxiety in queer sexuality.

83 Padalecki: I don't think it's the point that they both have human male bodies

84 seemingly and want to sleep with each other. I think the point is

85 that like you can love anything like it's a superpower. You can

86 love—someone can punch you in the face and you can say I love

87 you, I forgive you. Someone can give you a million bucks and you

88 go “I love you.” It doesn’t mean like—like—I say that with my
89 friends, I say it with Ackles, like, “hey, I love you, man.” It doesn’t
90 mean like “I want to take you to a hotel room.” It means that I love
91 you.

Twice again, Padalecki uses the phrase “the point” to introduce a definition (line 83), first to deny a reading of the scene and then to affirm one. He rejects the idea that their same-sex bodies suggest that they want to have sex. Instead, he switches to defining it in a desexualized way. The first one evokes the Christian “turn the other cheek” definition of extending love and forgiveness to someone who physically assaults you (lines 85-87), despite there being no physical assault in the confession scene. He flips this to instead focus on someone doing something as incredibly generous as giving a large sum of money (lines 87-88). These examples create a dichotomy, in which expressing love can be valid either when meeting violence or kindness. Although the latter is much closer to the confession scene (Castiel sacrifices himself as a savior figure), it does not explain the turn-the-other-cheek explanation. Padalecki brings in an unexpected defense of loving someone who harms you, defining love as forgiveness of your enemies, but rejects the possibility of a sexual gay love as not “the point” of the scene. He therefore denies the authenticity of the primary scene-reading from the Destiel community and Misha Collins’ own as well.

Padalecki also shifts to a discursive move he will use at length for the rest of this passage: making the declaration of love relate to his own personal relationships. He begins by noting that he uses the phrase “I love you” with friends, including Ackles, but he attaches the word “man,” which men often use to denote a platonic love for one another (line 89). This addition, however, changes the context of Castiel’s “I love you,” which does not include the “man” conclusion.

Padalecki once again doubles-down on his rejection of a sexual aspect of the scene, arguing that the "I love you" does not mean Castiel is expressing a desire to "take [Dean] to a hotel room" (line 90). This phrasing is particularly damning, since hotel rooms are seen as places where trysts occur instead of inviting someone over to a domestic space. Hotels are often sites for extramarital affairs, or sexual encounters that exist outside cultural norms, where the involved parties do not want their sexual interactions to be tied to their social identities. By using this phrase, Padalecki Others the queer experience as purely sexual, without the "loving" aspect Castiel confesses. (I don't wish in this analysis to say that loving sexual encounters cannot occur in hotel rooms, or that the concept of "love" is necessary for queer people to experience meaningful sexual encounters. On the contrary, much work has examined the importance of "cruising," which typically leads to one-night stands. However, in the context of Castiel's confession, a queer reading, including the questioner's own definition, denotes a "deep" "romantic" (line 65) love that offers a different—though not necessarily more "valid"—kind of queer emotional resonance).

92 Padalecki: And—uh—and so that was- the the the the the point of the
93 relationship story-wise is that they could love each other—we—
94 y'know—Sam and Dean loved each other. It wasn't a show about
95 incest. You know. Uh. So, Cas and Dean can love each other. It's
96 not a show about uh it's not a show about heterosexuality OR non-
97 binary. It's a show about like hey you can choose to live your life
98 with love. Um not hey this this means they wanna make out. It's
99 not about that. It's about I-I can tell my son "I love you" and it's
100 not that I want to do something to or with my son. I just love my

101 son. My daughter can say the same thing."

In this next portion, Padalecki continues to dismantle a sexual reading of the scene. He includes a sentence that features 5 disfluencies in a row—five "the"'s—before yet another use of the word "point" to denote that he is once again defining the purpose of the scene (line 92). He also continues to reject a sexual "point" to the scene by bringing in familial love. Sam and Dean's story was not one of "incest" even though the series serves as an illustration of their love for one another (lines 94-95). He tries to connect this to Castiel's love, despite the angel and Dean not being blood relatives. Padalecki then declares that it is not a show about "heterosexuality OR non-binary" (lines 95-97). This argument is curious, as "non-binary" denotes a gender identity of people who do not identify as solely a man or woman—it does not denote sexual orientation. He changes direction again to assert that the show is about "choos[ing] to live your life with love" (lines 97-98) despite this not excluding a sexual or romantic reading of the confession scene. Again, Padalecki rejects a romantic/sexual desire by saying the scene does not mean Castiel wants to make out with Dean (line 109). Padalecki brings in another instance of familial love and rejection of incest, this time saying he does not want to engage in sexual contact with his son or daughter even though they can say "I love you" to each other (lines 99-101). Most of Padalecki's rhetoric here is, in fact, metapragmatic. He is dismantling the fan conversations around the confession scene and bringing in his own personal life and familial communication style to lend authenticity to his points.

102 Padalecki: So, that that I'm sorry that wasn't the point of that scene. The
103 point was you are free to love whoever you want, you can be
104 heterosexual and love whoever you want, you can be queer and
105 love whoever you want, you can be any part of the LGBTQIA love

106 whoever the fuck you want. Doesn't mean—sorry for my
107 cursing—it doesn't mean you want to do something with them or
108 to them. So hopefully *Supernatural* uh in its 327 episodes helped
109 to have people love those around them.

Padalecki's second-to-last use of "the point" is a very direct denial of the woman's question, saying "I'm sorry" in a way that acknowledges he might be hurting her, but not one that comes from a place of admittance or apology (line 102). The "point" of the scene, as he says in his final use of this phrase out of seven overall uses, is that you can love whoever you want (although it is not clear how this is mutually exclusive from a romantic or sexual reading of the scene). He iterates this by affirming a potential queer reading of the scene—that Castiel could in fact be part of the "LGBTQIA" community—but that it still does not mean he wants to "do something" with or to Dean (lines 106-108).

Although Padalecki, unlike Collins at the DarkLight Convention, does not directly address the "kill the gays" trope or other troubling phenomenon that could hurt queer fans, his use of the lexical choice "I'm sorry" does admit that his discursive framing of the scene will cause harm. I argue that these simple two words frame his entire explanation for the scene as a moral account. His reading of the confession as platonic or familial will upset some listeners, and so he must provide a thorough, detailed account to justify his own interpretation which he acknowledges could cause breach. Unlike most moral accounts which *follow* a breach, he acknowledges the moral account itself could cause one, so he frames it as sturdily as possible.

110 Ackles: I think that's really what was uh—I'll just piggy back on what he
111 said—((audience clapping and cheering)) in that—yeah—that the
112 the the love uh that that Cas had is is heavenly. It it was you know

he's an angel. So he's able to he's able to I think love on a on a level and on a plane that that human emotion doesn't necessarily comprehend.

Ackles here suggests there is a kind of third love outside of romantic and sexual that angels, as heavenly beings, are able to experience.

What is worth remembering about the scene is that Castiel contextualizes his confession in "Despair" by saying "the one thing [he] want[s]… It's something [he] know[s] [he] can't have" suggesting he in some way *wants* Dean. Although one could perhaps argue an undefined heavenly love could involve wanting someone in some way impossible for us to conceive of as humans, this phrasing more strongly suggests that Castiel, despite being an angel, has become more humanlike in his time on Earth, and can experience romantic and/or sexual attraction the same as—or similar to—humans. This reading is more in line with Collins' own assertion that the scene culminates as a "homosexual declaration of love" and that Castiel is bisexual (or else the "kill the gays" stereotype would not be relevant mentioning).

Ackles: Um, and I think that we might default to making it a uh uh a romantic or a sexual love when it I think it the way that I kind of interpreted it and this is the great thing ((clears throat)) about the show and I think the relationships and some of these characters is that they're open for interpretation. If if you find identity in in a character because of because of whatever reason—fantastic. Great! If that encourages you to be a better person, or to to love someone a little harder, or to to forgive someone for something then fantastic! That's that's I think that's one of the beautiful things

125 about doing what we do is we get to encourage people on a variety
126 of levels.

Ackles leaves it up for fan interpretation after sharing his own reading of the scene. Like Padalecki, he evokes a culturally Christian idea of forgiveness, despite the scene itself having no clear connection to this theme, and he does not offer up a rationale for this.

127 Ackles: And and I think that Cas' love was a love that isn't isn't identified
128 by humans necessarily. It was a love that that that superseded that.
129 And so we tried to find words to describe that and I just don't think
130 there are words.

Ackles once again reiterates that Castiel's love is not one humans can identify. It "superseded" that (line 128).

131 Padalecki: Yeah. But thank you and glad that y'all connected with it on
132 whatever level.

Padalecki concludes the answer, and the panel's core content, by acknowledging an appreciation that fans connected with the scene. The theme of viewers' connecting personally with *Supernatural* is not a new concept for Padalecki. In Zubernis & Larsen's (2012) transcripts of convention interviews from the earlier days of the show, Padalecki shares his belief that "the big thing that has drawn fans to the world of *Supernatural* is that each has turned it into their world. It's no longer about guys on the road or hunting demons, it's connected to some part of them that they might not even know exists" (p. 225). Despite this positive assertion, his use of term "the point" to deny fans' interpretations seems to authenticate his own world of *Supernatural*, leaving out the queer inner worlds of some fans.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented transcripts from panels at fan conventions with actors who converse about Castiel's confession. I argued that the actors offer accounts that claim morality for their inclusion in production and their interpretations of the scene. Collins' queer sexual reading, Padalecki's full rejection of a sexual reading, and Ackles embrace of an open-to-interpretation reading shows the multiplicity of meanings the actors claim. It is worth remembering, however, that the director of the episode, Speight, confirms that it was an important episode for him to shoot, and that they spent time discussing and developing it. That statement does not inherently make Castiel's confession a queer one, but it certainly implies within context that a queer reading should be valid. By offering these different interpretations, all three actors transform the meaning of the scene through their lexical choices.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to the affordances of the social networking platform Twitter and the ways Misha Collins and *Supernatural* viewers utilized them in late November of 2020. In particular, I focus on a video and series of tweets from Collins and comments from users in response to him. I argue that Collins once again offers a moral account of the confession scene, this time rejecting the presence of the "bury your gays" trope and justifying the scene as a positive one. In opposition, many users rejected Collins' justification and offered their own accounts, complete with definitions of the bury your gays trope that fit the series finale. These conflicting accounts negotiate authenticity for Collins, the users, and *Supernatural* as a narrative.

Chapter Four: Erasing the Angel: Tracing Authenticity Between Creators and Viewers in the *Supernatural* Fandom on Twitter

In this chapter, I continue to analyze the ways Misha Collins articulates the confession scene's impact while communicating for fan consumption. I consider a video and series of tweets he made in the aftermath of the Latin American dub of season 15, episode 18 and further discuss the ways Collins attempts to repair breach and offer moral accounts. I use the term "breach repair" to denote the action of attempting to reintegrate into the group (Turner, 1982, p. 71) through an account. I take the analysis a step further by introducing discussion of how fans responded back to Collins on Twitter with their own tweets that reject and deconstruct his failed accounting. I argue that this video and these tweets work to create a sense of authenticity for the show, the creators, and the fans who take issue with the narrative choice of Castiel's death.

Within the *Supernatural* family, Misha Collins is a powerhouse of creator-fan connection. Beloved by a large constituency of the series' fans, Collins took a supporting role in a show about monsters and mysteries and helped turn Castiel into one of the most iconic queer characters in online fandom culture. Bolstered by his sharp skill at using social media to reach out to fans, Collins has amassed over 2.7 million followers on Twitter as of March 2024 across the nearly fifteen years he has used the platform. Collins has also not shied away from being an outspoken ally for LGBTQIA+ communities and he advocated for Castiel's queer identity to be made canon on the show. Because of this support, his remarks on queerness carry weight for the fandom, and one thread he posted in November of 2020, after the release of the Latin American dub of "Despair," caused quite a stir among users. There were thousands of tweets made in

response to his thread, and this chapter analyzes both Collins' video, his tweets, and a selection of fan responses to the video and tweets.

As I have argued in the last chapter, actor conversations provide an intricate landscape for understanding how intertextuality operates when those involved with the creation process comment back on the text itself and on fan discourse surrounding it. In my analysis, I examined how Richard Speight Jr. framed the decision-making around the confession scene as a powerful, empathetic one, and Collins' language helped confirm this. The importance of understanding the articulations of the co-creators can be key, but exploring reactions from viewers to actor discourse helps shed light on additional layers of intertext and metadiscourse. In the last decade and a half, social media have allowed for an explosion of communication from fans to celebrities. Social networking sites have furthermore facilitated talk in the opposite direction, where actors are able to comment on fans' posts and tweets, and will sometimes even repost/retweet fans, such as when it comes to fan art. In this chapter, I perform two main acts of analysis. First, I analyze a video and Twitter thread in which Misha Collins addresses rumors that there was a "conspiracy" around the Latin American dub of the confession scene. I then unpack Twitter comments in response to this, paying particular attention to how viewers articulated the trope of "bury your gays."

As Gordon (2023) asserts, intertextuality and metadiscourse are "companion[s]" (p. 6). Her work analyzes a discussion forum focusing on clean eating, and the forum replies help show the way incorporating the texts of others (intertextuality) in a discussion reply can help a user comment on the language use of the original post or other posts in the thread (metadiscourse). Gordon (2023) defines metadiscourse as "discourse about discourse" and as a term, it "captures the notion that one function of language is to communicate about itself" (p. 2). She further argues

that intertextuality is not one theory but two, since if we are to understand intertextuality on the contemporary internet, we need to also elevate metadiscourse. This hand-in-hand study is especially important for scholars examining the "functioning of groups of people who gather online and engage in a shared endeavor" (Gordon, 2023, p. 6), such as the users in this chapter who gather to discuss *Supernatural* and queerness. In this chapter, I use a large collection of social media exchanges responding to an original video and thread. My purpose is to show the ways users intersect strategies of intertextuality and metadiscursive commentary.

To do this work, I analyze a video from actor Misha Collins and his Twitter thread that accompanies the video, considering in particular how he articulates and contextualizes what he voices as a non-presence of the "bury your gays" trope in Castiel's arc. I also analyze fan/viewer/user tweets that respond to his video and thread to understand the rhetorical moves they make to establish authenticity. I consider these tweets individually but also collectively, i.e. as interaction. Bridges (2021) argues digital discursive interactions "make for easily accessible data of authentic language use and linguistic practices" (p. 7). Furthermore, as Hughes (2023) argues, "[a]ll material things exist in relation to others" and "[r]elationships are evident in and emerge out of interactions" (p. 92). In order to understand the dynamics of the *Supernatural* family and those who exist closely beyond it, we must turn to their interactions.

I used the Twitter search to find tweets that were in response to @mishacollins between the day he posted his thread (November 25th) and the end of the month (November 30th) and included the phrase "bury your gays." I limited my selection to comments in response to the thread in question. Because there was a very large amount of comments, I decided to aim for those that had engagement—at least ten "likes." Once I located these comments, I identified and selected those that were part of a user's longer comment thread. I collected these particular

tweets (even if they did not include the phrase “bury your gays”) in order to reconstruct the full context of their communication to Collins. Of the data gathered, I have only included in this chapter tweets from users who gave consent in writing to their posts being used.

As I mentioned before, I decided to gain consent from those users I quote because of the sensitivity of the topic of queerness. To acquire consent, I used a few methods. If a user’s direct messages (“DMs”) were “open” (accessible to those they do not follow), I messaged them. Here is an example of the language I used:

> Hello, my name is Bishop and I'm a Ph.D student studying fan reactions to Supernatural's final season. I wanted to request permission to use some tweets of yours in my research. If you’re interested in being included, let me know! I can also provide additional details about the project if you'd like.

In almost all cases, I then left a comment on one of their tweets to let them know since direct messages from users a recipient does not follow will end up in a separate folder. Users do not receive a clear notification for this style of message and must manually go into the separate folder and accept the message. Here is an example of language I used to alert them to this issue in Twitter comment form:

> Hi, my name is Bishop and I’m a Ph.D student doing research on Supernatural. I’ve sent you a DM about possibly using some tweets of yours in my research, but since you don’t follow me, the message probably went to the requests tab. Just wanted to let you know!

If a user’s DMs were not open, I commented on one of their tweets informing them of my interest in using one or more of their tweets in my research. For example:

> Hello,

> My name is Bishop and I'm a Ph.D student and SPN[3] viewer studying actor/fan reactions to SPN. I wanted to request permission to use tweets of yours in my research, but I can't message you since your DMs are closed. If you're interested in being included, let me know by DM.

Ultimately, I received written consent from each user I quote below. As I mentioned in my introduction, collecting consent was not necessary as these tweets were all posted publicly, but because they deal with a sensitive topic, and several users assert their own queerness, it was important to me to avoid using their often-vulnerable messages as a means to an end for my own work. Since many people might mistake a huge Twitter thread such as this one as a semi-private space, where tweets become "buried" under one another, it was important to me that if I brought these to light, by examining them in terms of discourse strategies, the users would be comfortable with their words quoted. Interestingly enough, although many users did not respond to my requests, not a single person who replied told me no. Everyone who took the time to respond said yes to being included.

Because each tweet was posted under Collins' original video/thread, they are inherently intertextual, requiring Collins' original messages to make full sense of them. Even if some of the viewers' arguments make some sense individually, understanding the fuller context helps my analysis be more precise. I use the concept of metapragmatics to assist me in understanding these contexts. Metapragmatics is "speech about what language is doing in a particular context" (Bridges, 2021, p. 6). It "refers to how language use itself becomes an object of discourse and, in turn, serves to organize features of language into interpretable events" (Bridges, 2021, p. 6). Most of the tweets collected work on a metapragmatic/metadiscursive level, as they talk *about*

[3] "SPN" is the fan-used acronym for *Supernatural*

the way Collins is talking *about* Destiel and the confession scene. Collins' video and tweets themselves are also metapragmatic, as they engage with and critique the reactions the *Supernatural* family had to the confession scene and, briefly, the Latin American dub.

Aside from just responding to Collins' assertions and engaging with the show as a text, the users' responses also appeal to a long-running history of defining the term "bury your gays." They define and redefine what bury your gays means to them, oftentimes moving away from the stricter definitions I provided in the last chapter and toward a more expansive view of the phrase. Not only does the actual death of a character matter for these users, but also the fact that the show erases Castiel from the narrative by only mentioning him a few times in the two episodes following his death. The fact that Castiel was "scrubbed" as one user argues (Fig. 28) leads to another kind of burying—the series "buries" Castiel into a lack of importance in the narrative in a way that does not make sense considering how key he was to the story across the twelve seasons in which he features.

In the following section, I reproduce some of the tweets in my data set to closely analyze them using discursive analytical approaches. I chart key moves I see users making multiple times across several of my gathered tweets, and use the tweets below as specific examples of these patterns. The ones I see are (1) appeals to emotions (using words like "I love you"), (2) asserting one's own queerness to bring authority to their message, (3) (re)defining bury your gays, (4) asserting erasure as a major issue in the scene, and (5) using the bury your gays/confession scene as a means to open up the conversation to other issues in the show (such as Dean's and Sam's endings). Although the tweets show a diverse range of patterns, these are the ones I have chosen to focus on as they bring to light appeals to authenticity in the users' discourse. They also help to

shed light on the links between intertextuality and metadiscourse in ways I feel are enlightening and worthwhile.

I consider key interactions between Collins and users that the Twitter platform affords. To do this, I first discuss Collins' opening tweet, then I provide a transcript of his video and analyze it. I next move on to considering his following Twitter thread and the ways in which it adds further context for the video. Finally, I present some key tweets that respond to Collins' communication.

The Opening Tweet (and Video Thumbnail)

Figure 2. "#SPNFamily Meeting," shared by @mishacollins on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "I'm seeing a lot of commentary on the ending of #SPN & the recent Spanish dub & am disheartened to see there are a lot of misconceptions that are making many in our family feel unheard & unsupported, so I'm calling a #SPNFamily meeting to sort a few things out for the record:" There is also a thumbnail of a video attached to the tweet. The thumbnail is of Misha Collins in a close-up with a background of books. He wears a gray t-shirt. There is a blue play-button in the middle of the screen and a time stamp that says "2:02," signifying the video's length.

Collins opens his tweet in Fig. 2 by indexing the conversation surrounding what he calls "the Spanish dub" (referred to by many fans as the "Latin American" or "LATAM" dub, since it

is Latin American Spanish and not Spaniard Spanish). Although the concept of indexing usually relates to using things such as pronouns to stand in for something else (Hanks, 1999, p. 124), Collins' use of "Spanish dub" allows him to reference an entire discourse without citing specific aspects of it at length (Fig. 2). His introduction, therefore, is another instance of heteroglossia, where Collins' own utterances contain the discourse of others. He uses the words "unheard" and "unsupported," which both work to validate the pain he hears *Supernatural* fans express. Similarly to what he did at the French DarkLight convention, Collins uses the language of moral discourse to do breach-repair work. This validation helps to claim the position of an empathetic listener who cares about the fans and wants to respectfully engage in a conversation with them about the ending.

Collins uses the word "family" twice and recontextualizes it for his own account, which allows him to borrow the category of kinship used by fans to refer to themselves, each other, the cast, and the crew (Fig. 2). This co-membership helps to position him as intimately linked to fans: not as a content producer separate from them, but as a person within their relationship network who cares about them. He uses this word once when addressing how it is the family who feels "unheard & unsupported," and soon after in the hashtag #SPNFamily when he wants to convene an "#SPNFamily meeting." Family meetings often occur in domestic situations where all available members of a family meet to discuss a particular issue they are facing. In speaking of Lady Gaga's use of Twitter, Valentinsson (2018) argues that by using words such as "roomies" to describe her relationship to her fans, Gaga invites them into an imaginative physical space representing her "elite, celebrity sphere" which "metaphorically eras[es] the invisible boundary separating fans from stars" (p. 723). Similarly, Collins' invites the family for a talk in what we might imagine as the kitchen table or living room sofa set. Collins' use of the

term "family meeting" also establishes a sense that the unheard members of the family will have an opportunity to speak to the issues they perceive and the ways family members are hurting. This form of mediation also connects to the concept of breach–now that a fissure has formed between members of the family (fans and creators), he promises support and affirmation.

Not everyone offended by the last three episodes of *Supernatural* necessarily belongs to the "#SPNFamily," however. Anti-fans, neutral viewers, or fans who gave up watching *Supernatural* in the past also have the technological affordances to engage in the conversation and comment on Collins' tweet. With that said, Collins' choice of words does not invite them to do so—this is a family meeting, not a neighborhood meeting. This targeted address helps to further a sense of intimacy and position loving fans as the most important addressees at the Twitter table. Only fans can work to negotiate the breach. With that said, families are also asymmetrical, with certain members holding more power. As one of the creatives on the show, Collins is already further up on the familial hierarchy than fans. Indeed, it is Collins' job to "sort a few things out for the record," positioning himself as the arbiter of the truth that can dispel the fans' own "misconceptions" around the confession scene.

The Video and Transcript

Before unpacking Collins' lexical choices and delivery, I want to note the physical aspects of this video's thumbnail. He is in front of a bookcase on the left and a chair on the right next to another shelf. This location suggests intellectuality as well as casualness—the chair suggests a spot for sitting down to pass the time reading a book. This room does not look like a professional space as much as it does a domestic one—one where a family could meet. Collins has bright lighting on his face to highlight him, and he is in close-up which can create a sense of intimacy. He wears what appears to be a dark T-shirt that further suggests a casual state.

Furthermore, because this video appears to be shot on a phone camera due to its quality and not on a professional location, there is a sense of immediacy which lends itself to a definition of authenticity that revolves around being spontaneous (Dubrofsky, 2016).

Below, I transcribe Collins' video that accompanied the initial tweet analyzed above:

Collins: Hi. I just wanted to take a moment to explain there is no conspiracy, there never was an alternate ending of episode 15.18, when Cas said "I love you." Um, there—it—apparently was a rogue translator. Um, I also, um, I feel proud of the ending of *Supernatural.* I feel like it was intentionally inclusive and a celebration of someone uh expressing their truth and having good things come of it. Castiel is not, is not, a character that plays into any insidious trope of exclusion in Hollywood. Castiel on the other hand in my opinion and—in the—IN MY OPINION Castiel's declaration of love was done of his own volition, uh, with full knowledge of the consequences of those actions. He went on to rebuild heaven and his action literally saved the world. So by expressing who he really was by saying, by saying this—by making this declaration of love he literally ends up saving the world. And if that's not something to celebrate, I don't know what is. I'm a little irked. That's my irked face. I love you all and I love your passion and I wish we could just take a moment to celebrate the good of this show. Like, I'm sad it's gone. It was 15 years of the forces of good triumphing over the forces of evil, evil. Was it

152 perfect? No. But I think the world is better off because of it. And

153 I'm sticking to my guns.

Analysis of Video

The beginning of Collins' video quickly claims authenticity for the English original in order to reject the Latin American dub. Collins begins with an informal "hi" which creates a conversational tone before switching to a strong assertion that there was no alternate ending to the episode (line 133). This declaration works to shut down fan speculation that The CW chose a scene without reciprocation over the alternate version that had Dean saying some form of "and I you, Cas" (mirroring the LATAM dub's "Y yo a ti, Cas"). Collins defines whomever was responsible for the LATAM dub "a rogue translator," invalidating the canonicity of their choices and implying this was never the intent of the original creators or network (line 135-136). By doing so, Collins lends authenticity to the original English version without reciprocation and rejects the authenticity of the LATAM dub. Furthermore, the use of "rogue" suggests a deceitfulness in the translator, situating them outside the correct side of the moral universe Collins wishes to organize the *Supernatural* family into safely. A rogue also operates outside the bounds of acceptability, and Collins' lexical choices suggest he wishes to distance himself from this transgressiveness. While fans may have said The CW was at fault for killing Castiel, in Collins' moral account, it is actually the rogue translator who bears fault for instigating fandom theorizing about the episode. This theorizing led to fans feeling "unheard," thus triggering a need for Collins' breach management.

Collins then pivots to discussing the positives of Castiel's ending, authenticating it in an implied way as a queer-affirming narrative, although he does not use "queer," "gay," or other terms that denote LGBTQIA+ identity or subject matter. Because he is intertextually referring to

the conversation around the confession scene, and because he talks about the "insidious trope" of "exclusion" (line 140), and finally, because he directly references "bury your gays" in a subsequent tweet (Fig. 4), I feel comfortable assuming his video is meant to discuss Castiel's confession as an inherently romantic one. After rejecting the LATAM dub as finding its source in the "rogue translator," he begins with an "Um" that signals a change in both tone and thought (line 136). He declares that he "feels proud of the ending of *Supernatural*" (line 136-137), steering away from a rejection of the LATAM dub to an affirmation of the "authentic" (I here use scare quotes) English one. It was, for him, "intentionally inclusive," a phrase which validates the creators of the scene as cognizant of the choices they made (line 137). It is also "a celebration" of Castiel "expressing his truth" with positives emerging from this choice (lines 137-138). Collins does not address in his video the issue of Castiel's death beyond mentioning the "consequences" of the character's actions, but, rather, focuses on the fact that the angel "literally ends up saving the world" (lines 143-144). Based on the reactions from users in the tweets I present below, Collins' assertion and reclamation of the narrative unfortunately opened up a new breach by invalidating the positions viewers had initially taken toward the scene.

Collins' reclamation of the scene involves making a strong statement that Castiel's declaration of love is one to "celebrate" rather than condemn (line 147). This justification denies a reading of the scene as primarily problematic; it instead puts forth an interpretation where the events surrounding Castiel's coming out are queer-affirming. In particular, since the angel's confession saves the world, Collins says that "if that's not something to celebrate, [he doesn't] know what is" (lines 147-148). This statement is a very strong affirmation for the narrative, as it suggests this scene is *the* pinnacle of queer representation since nothing else deserves praise as much. This assertion only adds to the justification for the scene as being snugly within the realm

of moral acceptability. From this, he transitions to saying he is "irked" and that, after making a face on camera, that that expression is his "irked face" (line 148). Transitioning from affirming the scene to showing displeasure and disappointment through his "irked face" conveys a sense that the fan portion of the family is in the wrong for their reaction. As further discussed in the next paragraph, Collins positions himself as an older member of the family, perhaps a parent, "irked" by the fans, perhaps the children in this family relationship, who are acting out of line in their failure to support and celebrate the good things that come out of Castiel's confession and instead focusing on the bad. His justification therefore paints the fans' perception of the breach as illogical and unearned.

Collins' use of the phrase "I love you all" both in the video (line 148) and the tweet thread (Fig. 7) shows the ways he builds community in the *Supernatural* "family." This discursive move helps to establish him as an authority member in the family, perhaps a parent or other older, senior member of the unit. Fans will also use the words "I love you," as discussed below, and it helps soften the blow of some of the stronger and more assertive statements. The *Supernatural* family community is a complicated one, especially when you factor in the ways people who do not identify as fans often join the conversation. Despite the many layers to the fandom, this thread and its comments show the ways that expressions of love, particularly between Collins and commenters, serve as rhetorical moves that create a sense of care and authenticate both the discourse community as one of emotional wholeness and the individual members as respectful and sensitive to the subject matter. For Collins, however, an alternate reading of his use of "I love you all" could be that it comes off as infantilizing and condescending to listeners/readers, treating them as children he loves but who "irk" him. I would argue that the term works both to authenticate him as sensitive, but also to further establish him

as the most "senior" and valid voice in the discussion.

While Collins' appearance at the DarkLight convention shows him using the language of the queer fandom to create a sense of belonging, his tweets and video appear to do the opposite—he shuts down conversations and rejects the language queer viewers had been using to critique the confession scene(s). All three extracts show Collins using intertextuality and recontextualization to transport discourse across contexts, from the *Supernatural* scene itself, to the "bury your gays" history, to fan conversations, etc. It results, in his Twitter video, with a new theory of the "rogue translator," his own personal narrative that attempts to make sense and create an account of the breach the confession scene caused at multiple levels. As will be evidenced by my data of Twitter comments from viewers, Collins' video was met with mixed success from fans, some of whom felt alienated and silenced by his dismissive rogue translator explanation and his overall defense of the original English-language confession scene.

Collins' Tweets

Below I include screenshots and transcripts of the tweets Collins posted in a thread after the video:

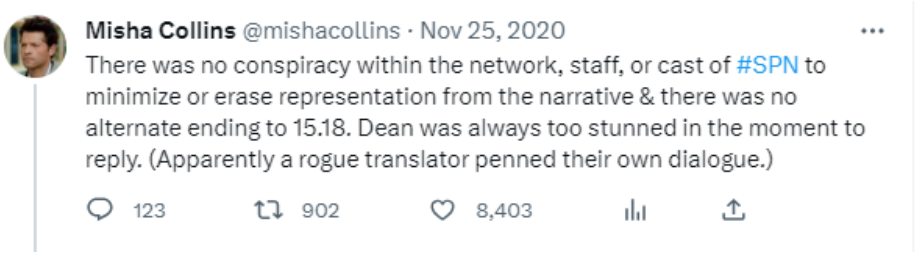

Figure 3. "No Conspiracy," shared by @mishacollins on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says: "There was no conspiracy within the network, staff, or cast of #SPN to minimize or erase representation from the narrative & there was no alternate ending to 15.18. Dean was always too stunned in the moment to reply. (Apparently a rogue translator penned their own dialogue.)"

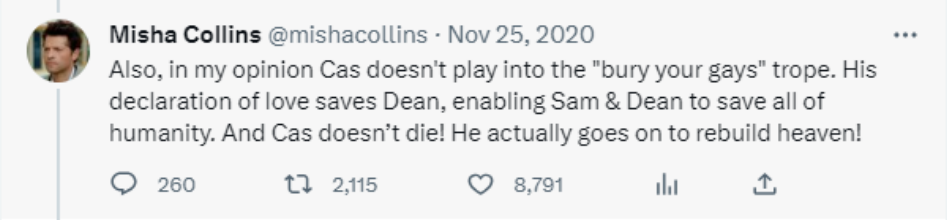

Figure 4. "Declaration," shared by @mishacollins on X. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "Also, in my opinion Cas doesn't play into the 'bury your gays' trope. His declaration of love saves Dean, enabling Sam & Dean to save all of humanity. And Cas doesn't die! He actually goes on to rebuild heaven!"

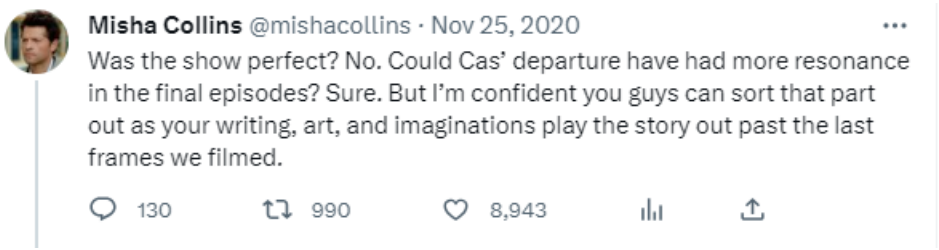

Figure 5. "Perfect?," shared by @mishacollins on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "Was the show perfect? No. Could Cas' departure have had more resonance in the final episodes? Sure. But I'm confident you guys can sort that part out as your writing, art, and imaginations play the story out past the last frames we filmed."

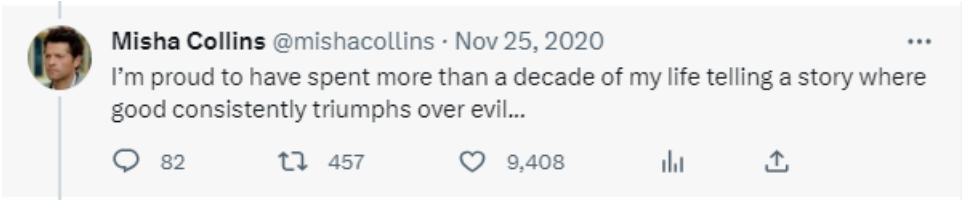

Figure 6. "I'm Proud," shared by @mishacollins on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "I'm proud to have spent more than a decade of my life telling a story where good consistently triumphs over evil…"

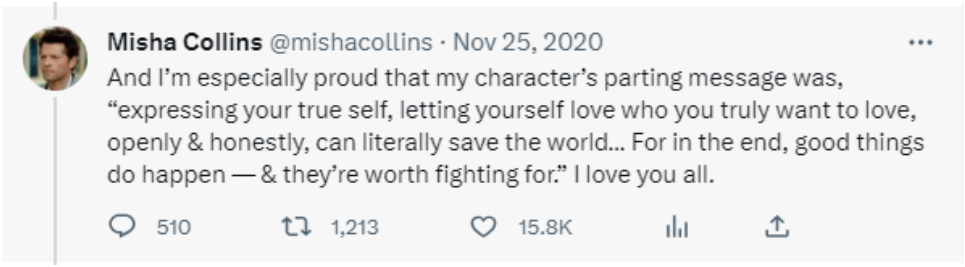

Figure 7. "Especially Proud," shared by @mishacollins on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "And I'm especially proud that my character's parting message was, 'expressing your true self, letting yourself love who you truly want to love, openly & honestly, can literally save the world… For in the end, good things do happen – & they're worth fighting for.' I love you all."

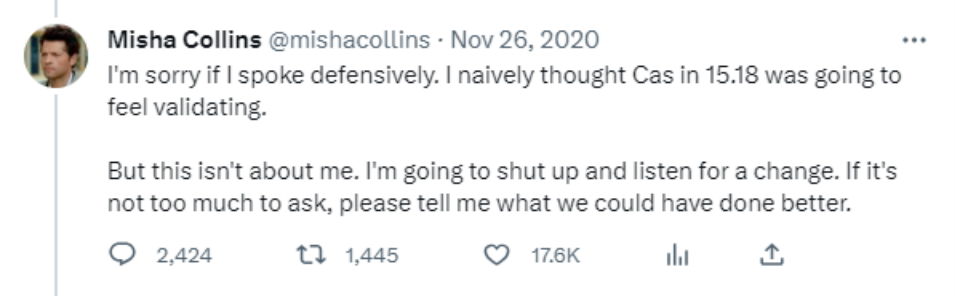

Figure 8. "I'm Sorry," shared by @mishacollins on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "I'm sorry if I spoke defensively. I naively thought Cas in 15.18 was going to feel validating.

But this isn't about me. I'm going to shut up and listen for a change. If it's not too much to ask, please tell me what we could have done better."

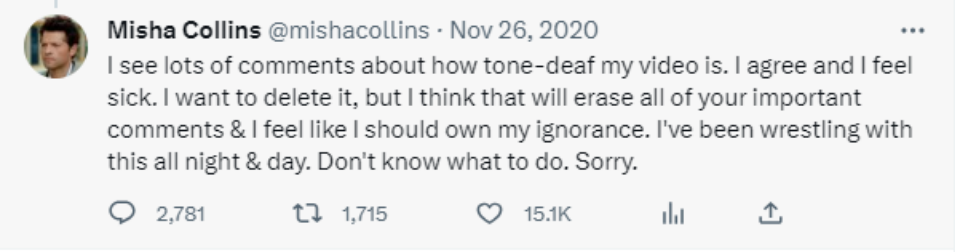

Figure 9. "I Feel Sick," shared by @mishacollins on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "I see lots of comments about how tone-deaf my video is. I agree and I feel sick. I want to delete it, but I think that will erase all of your important comments & I feel like I should own my ignorance. I've been wrestling with this all night & day. Don't know what to do. Sorry."

In his tweets, Collins doubles-down on denying an alternate ending of the third-to-last episode, and once again asserts a "rogue translator" was involved (Fig. 3). By repeating his assertions in both the video and text, Collins is able to further emphasize core ideas he wants to convey. This forceful idea-doubling allows for a further sense of authenticity as it becomes clear Collins wishes to more strongly argue these points.

The next day, on the 26th of November, Collins tweeted an addendum to his video and original tweet thread after he received comments from users in response (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9). In these two tweets, he expresses remorse over his phrasing and a hope that the thread of users' comments will be useful. He offers an apology, although it is worth noting he uses the word "if," not saying definitively that he did in fact speak defensively, but leaving it up to the interpretation

of the fan-family (Fig. 8).

Collins' commitment to "shut up" and "listen for a change" aligns him with the queer cultural value of allies listening to LGBTQIA+ people to understand our experiences (Fig. 8). Passing the mic is a common term in multiple marginalized communities and describes the ways allies can position marginalized folks to speak to our own lives. Pledging to self-silencing and listening helps assert Collins as an authentic ally who will take a back seat and let queer commenters educate him on his shortcomings. He also asks directly to be educated, opening up an avenue and extending an invitation for others to speak back to him, avoiding a one-way conversation. Unlike a parent who distributes rules and definitions, as he did in the original video and tweets, Collins reverses this relationship, allowing others to become the senior members in the family meeting.

In his second of his amendment tweets (Fig. 9), Collins uses emotional language to convey an affective reaction and stance to the condemnatory tweets he received. His additional tweets allow him to present a new moral account in the face of a fresh breach his video and initial tweets produced. He shares that he "feels sick" and has been "wrestling with this all night & day." He also admits ignorance through not "know[ing] what to do." These emotional words and phrases help illustrate his "authentic" affective positions on commenters' discourse. Not only is he remorseful, but his guilt over his words have made him physically ill and intellectually he has wrestled with what to do. This phrasing shows a care and concern for harm done and works hand in hand with his initial amendment tweet to show how he wishes to turn the conversation over to users in hopes of shifting the conversation away from his own rhetoric and onto theirs. It is also metapragmatic, as it comments back on his original tweet and the regrettable approach he took. This tweet rejects his original decree for fans to "celebrate" the

scene and how his "irked face" is justified because of their illogical critiques. Collins acknowledges users' rejection of his account and attempts to realign himself as on the right side of the moral issue all the same.

(It's worth noting that Collins, according to Fig. 9, wanted to leave the thread up to be educational, and if he had in fact deleted the video and tweets, this chapter would not exist. It is highly possible this entire dissertation would not exist, since his video, thread, and the tweets in response were the catalyst for me wishing to research this topic. If anything, this dissertation is a testament to the importance of archiving discourses, even if what they contain is painful to many. Celebrities can and should "own up" to their mistakes and not delete commentors' responses. Undoubtedly to me, this thread is a very important conversation around not only Castiel's arc, but the "bury your gays" trope in general.)

User Tweets

Now that I have analyzed Collins' video and text thread, I will analyze comments made in response. To do this, I have included screenshots of tweets from users that demonstrate the core aspects I have chosen to examine. In my analysis, I either use the pronouns users include on their public account profiles or, in the cases that this information is unavailable, I have opted to use gender neutral they/them pronouns.

The first set of user tweet data I will present is this tweet thread from user @jotunnblood. In it, they use emotional language, an identification of their own queer identity, and concern for Castiel's erasure from the plot. They also use the conversation around bury your gays as a springboard to discuss Dean's behavior.

Figure 10. "ep 18 was incredibly validating," shared by @jotunnblood on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @jotunnblood that says "ep 18 was incredibly validating, it was perfect and I loved it. It's ep 19 and 20 that's the problem. It has nothing to do with you. We're not mad about Cas's end here, we're mad about Dean's, because he was silenced. Whether or not the translation is what it was supposed to"

Figure 11. "Dean was never even allowed," shared by @jotunnblood on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @jounnblood that says "be, Dean was never even allowed to *mention* Cas again, before or after Dean was killed. That is why we're angry.
But aside from that, Cas's sacrifice did absolutely play into bury your gays trope. Yes it was beautiful and I'm actually happy about the scene because"

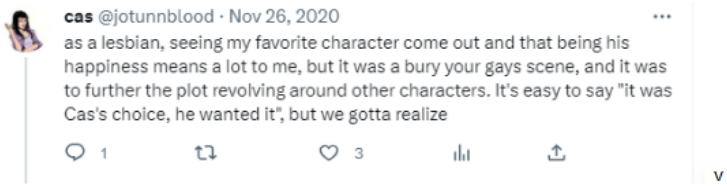

Figure 12. "as a lesbian," shared by @jotunnblood on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @jotunnblood that says "as a lesbian, seeing my favorite character come out and that being his happiness means a lot to me, but it was a bury your gays scene, and it was to further the plot revolving around other characters. It's easy to say 'it was Cas's choice, he wanted it,' but we gotta realize"

Figure 13. "the writers and the network do," shared by @jotunnblood on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @jounnblood that says "that Cas isn't real, he doesn't make his own choices – the writers and the network do. Cas not being mentioned again, other than in a throwaway line, doesn't change that. I'm glad he's alive, but it doesn't change that in the story, he just disappeared after coming out.
But"

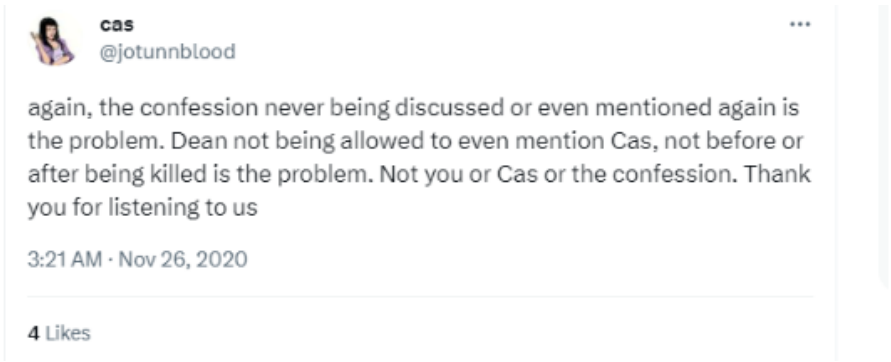

Figure 14. "the confession never being discussed," shared by @jotunnblood on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @jotunnblood that says "again, the confession never being discussed or even mentioned again is the problem. Dean not being allowed to even mention Cas, not before or after being killed is the problem. Not you or Cas or the confession. Thank you for listening to us"

@jotunnblood uses appeals to emotional engagement with both the show and Collins' tweets to frame an authentic connection. They begin their twitter thread with the assertion that episode 18 "was incredibly validating" and that they "loved it" (Fig. 10). This language shows that they are not coming from a place of animosity toward the entirety of the episode. The use of "validating" here is complex: the act of saying the episode was validating also *validates the episode* as something that is not solely queerphobic. Unlike other users who take strong issue with the scene itself for killing Castiel, @jotunnblood expresses a more mixed outlook on the episode. They also validate Misha Collins by telling him that their anger has "nothing to do with [him]" but instead it is directed toward episodes 19 and 20 (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11). Finally, at the end of the tweet thread, @jotunnblood's use of "Thank you for listening to us" offers an emotional appeal of appreciation (Fig. 14). As previously noted, listening to queer communities when it comes to our experiences is widely considered to be an important part of allyship. @jotunnblood's expression of this thankfulness is heteroglossaic. It comments on Collins' willingness to listen, but it also echoes previous discourse around what allies should do.

Identity and enoughness (Blommaert & Varis, 2011) are also at work in this thread. @jotunnblood identifies themselves as a lesbian in Fig. 11 and Fig. 12. They also profess that

Castiel is their favorite character, and that seeing him come out was affirming for them as a lesbian. This positive reaction seemingly stands in contrast to their assertion that the scene embodies the "bury your gays" trope, but the move of authenticity is key. As a lesbian, @jotunnblood can speak with authority to this issue according to the discursive "rules" of the LGBTQIA+ community because they have sufficient qualities (enoughness) of queerness to be an authentic authority on the issue. The user's affirmation shows that they are a part of the *Supernatural* family of fans with positive reactions to parts of the show, and this helps provide their critique a kind of credibility. Similarly to fans that told Collins they "love" him or love what he has done for queer fans, articulating a love for the show or a scene from it (particularly the confession scene) can help "ease the blow" of the accusation of bury your gays.

Although @jotunnblood does not use the words "erasure," "erase," or "erased," they still make an appeal to Castiel's lack of presence in the show. Furthermore, they also use this issue as a springboard to discuss Dean's behavior. @jotunnblood argues in Fig. 11 that Dean is not allowed to mention Castiel after the angel's death, illustrating the ways Dean's behavior factors into bury your gays; despite the fact that he and Castiel were best friends, Dean works to erase the angel by not mourning him in a significant way. The user emphasizes in Fig.13 that the issue is not with Collins himself or the confession itself, but with Castiel's erasure and Dean's avoidance of mentioning him beyond a "throwaway line" (Fig. 13), which could refer to either the brief reference to his death in episode 19 or Bobby's mentioning that Castiel helped Jack, now the new God, rebuild heaven in episode 20.

The next group of tweets comes from account @peterpantomime, who self IDs as a fan, queer person, and media studies scholar (Fig. 15). (I have excerpted their tweet thread to include those which I directly analyze or need for context).

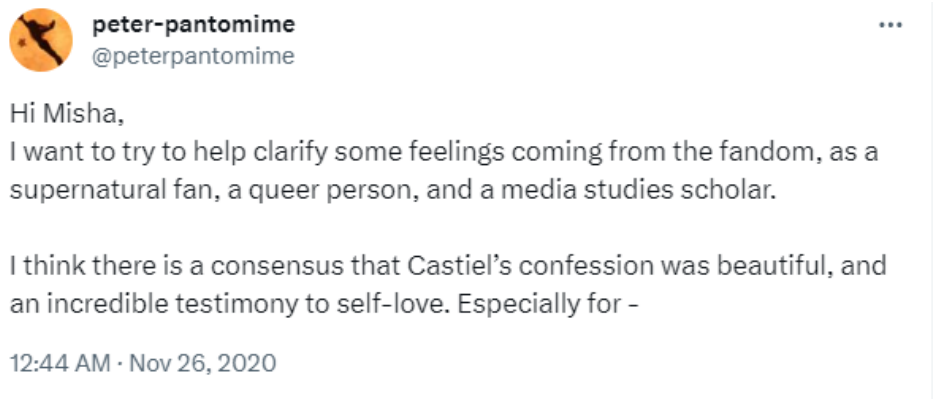

Figure 15. "I want to try to help clarify," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "Hi Misha,
I want to try and help clarify some feelings coming from the fandom, as a supernatural fan, a queer person, and a media studies scholar.
I think there is a consensus that Castiel's confession was beautiful, and an incredible testimony to self-love. Especially for –"

Figure 16. "seeing someone be truly happy," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "queer people, seeing someone be truly happy accepting who they are and who they love in a moment absolutely independent of the reactions of those around them was deeply moving. I think before the finale people feared that this scene would be tarnished by Castiel's death being –"

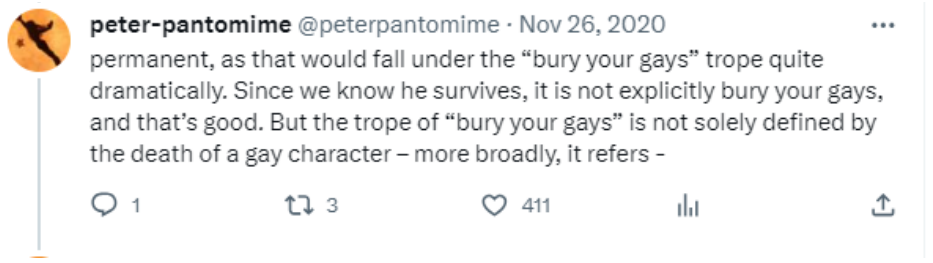

Figure 17. "It is not explicitly bury your gays," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "permanent, as that would fall under the 'bury your gays' trope quite dramatically. Since we know he survives, it is not explicitly bury your gays, and that's good. But the trope of 'bury your gays' is not solely defined by the death of a gay character – more broadly, it refers –"

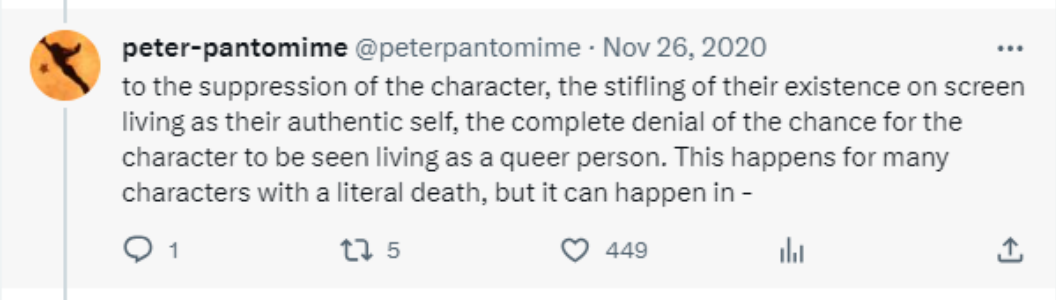

Figure 18. "to the suppression of the character," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "to the suppression of the character, the stifling of their existence on screen living as their authentic self, the complete denial of the chance for the character to be seen living as a queer person. This happens for many characters with a literal death, but it can happen in -"

Figure 19. "if a character is alive," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "other ways as well – for example, if a character is alive, but we don't get to see them live. Because really what 'Bury your gays' is about is the exclusion from the narrative of gay characters living their –"

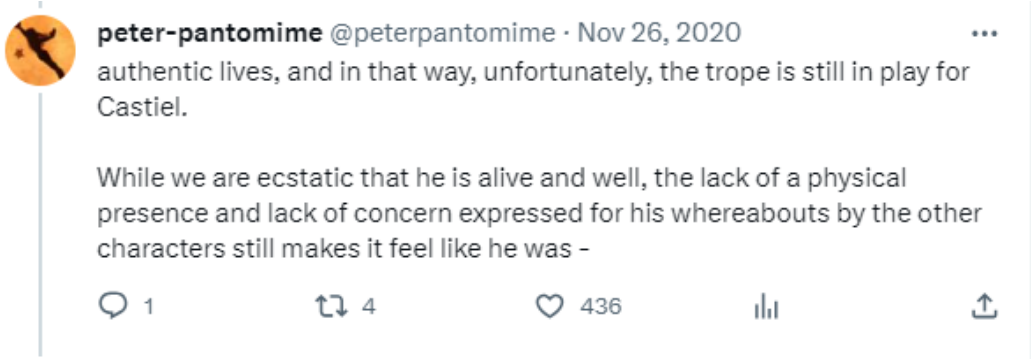

Figure 20. "authentic lives," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.
Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "authentic lives, and in that way, unfortunately, the trope is still in play for Castiel.

While we are ecstatic that he is alive and well, the lack of a physical presence and lack of concern expressed for his whereabouts by the other characters still makes it feel like he was -"

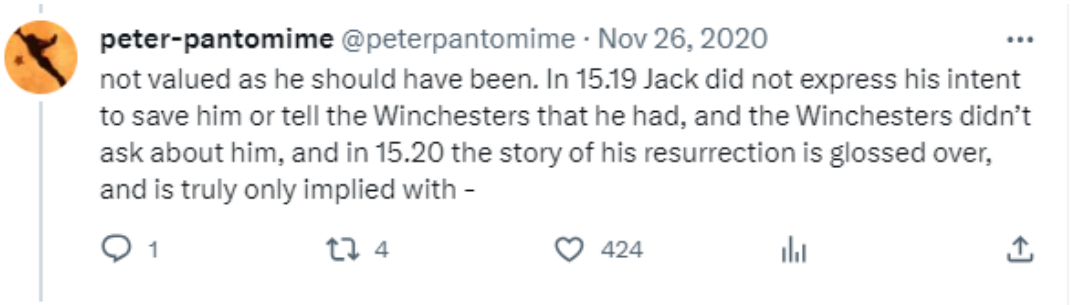

Figure 21. "not valued as he should have been," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "not valued as he should have been. In 15.19 Jack did not express his intent to save him or tell the Winchesters that he had, and the Winchesters didn't ask about him, and in 15.20 the story of his resurrection is glossed over, and is truly only implied with –"

Figure 22. "Bobby's line," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "Bobby's line that 'Cas helped.'
As it stands, his last moment in the show – the one that stands out, the one that people will remember, especially if they missed the quiet reference to his survival – is him expressing queer love and immediately dying. His ejection from the –"

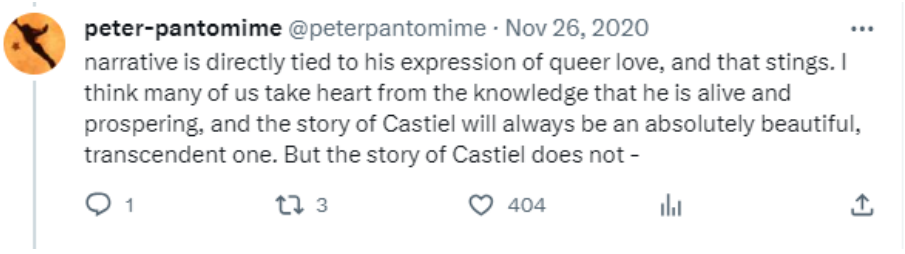

Figure 23. "I think many of us take heart," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "narrative is directly tied to his expression of queer love, and that stings. I think many of us take heart from the knowledge that he is alive and prospering, and the story of Castiel will always be an absolutely beautiful, transcendent one. But the story of Castiel does not –"

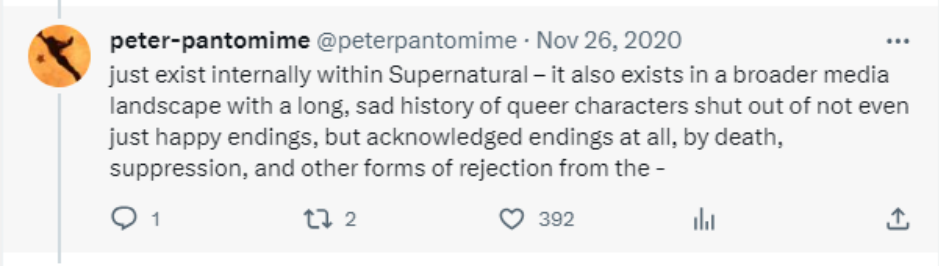

Figure 24. "It also exists in a broader media," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "just exist internally within Supernatural – it also exists in a broader media landscape with a long, sad history of queer characters shut out of not even just happy endings, but acknowledged endings at all, but death, suppression, and other forms of rejection from the –"

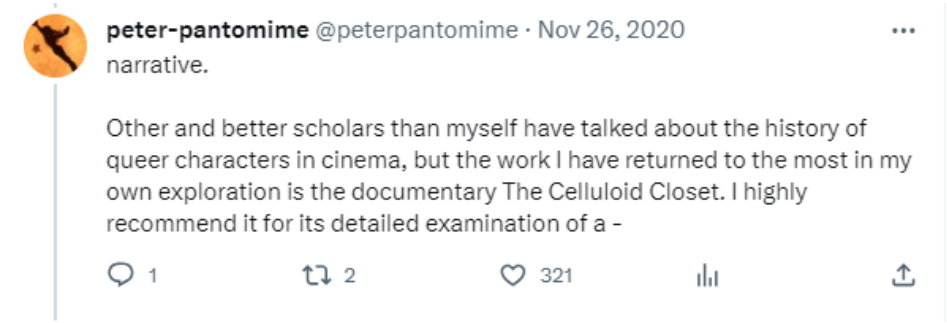

Figure 25. "Other and better scholars," shared by @peterpantomime on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.
Image caption: A tweet by @peterpantomime that says "narrative.

Other and better scholars than myself have talked about the history of queer characters in cinema, but the work I have returned to the most in my own exploration is the documentary The Celluloid Closet. I highly recommend it for its detailed examination of a -"

@peterpantomime opens their lengthy Twitter thread with a tweet that authenticates them with three relevant identities: *Supernatural* fan, queer person, and media studies scholar (Fig. 15). By stating this, the user is able to show that they are a member of the #SPNFamily, a queer person able to speak to the experiences of queer communities, and a scholar whose work focuses specifically on media. All of these labels help to confirm their authority on the subject, and the intersection especially helps bring them a command of the conversation. Late in the tweet thread, @peterpantomime even cites the documentary *The Celluloid Closet* (Fig. 25), which is based on an academic work about queer cinema by Vito Russo (and one germinal enough it needed citing

in my literature review). By mentioning this text, @peterpantomime is able to further demonstrate their authenticity as an academic in-the-know about queer theory, especially as it pertains to cultural artifacts such as *Supernatural*.

@peterpantomime uses this integrity to affirm the "deeply moving" "incredible testimony to self-love" that they voice Castiel's confession embodying (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16). The user's use of emotionally-charged language helps position themself as a fan who appreciates the confession scene, similarly to @jotunnblood's rhetoric in the tweets cited above. @peterpantomime then asserts that since Castiel does not stay dead, thanks to Jack resurrecting him, it is not "dramatically" or "explicitly" bury your gays (Fig. 17), which helps ease into their immediate condemnation of what *does* happen to Castiel.

@peterpantomime's tweets focus primarily on (re)defining the "bury your gays" trope. Despite admitting that Castiel's end is not the traditional trope, @peterpantomime reformulates the definition of bury your gays to one that is similar to those other users also assert. They offer a substantial alternate definition of bury your gays: "it refers […] to the suppression of the character, the stifling of their existence on screen living as their authentic self, the complete denial of the chance for the character to be seen living as a queer person" (Fig.17 and Fig. 18). Additionally: "Because really what 'bury your gays' is about is the exclusion from the narrative of gay characters living their […] authentic lives" (Fig. 19 and Fig. 20). @peterpantomine's reconstitution of the definition of bury your gays rejects Collins' moral account that the final three episodes do not embody a harmful trope. They signal that Collins has not mended the core breach Castiel's death caused.

@peterpantomime uses the term "authentic" twice, once to describe a queer character's "self" and another to describe gay characters' "lives" (Fig. 18 and Fig. 20). The use of

"authentic" here does not necessarily connect to the definitions of authenticity as spontaneity that I have employed in this dissertation. Instead, I would argue that @peterpantomime's use of the term has more to do with enoughness (Blommaert & Varis, 2011). Does the narrative allow the character to have sufficient characteristics we associate with their LGBTQIA+ identity? Can we easily index them as identifiably queer based on cultural and historical understandings of our communities? Obviously, dead or off-screen characters cannot exhibit enoughness because the audience is unable to actively witness these needed characteristics. Although @peterpantomime does not use the term "erasure," it is clear through words like "suppression" (Fig. 18), "ejection" (Fig. 22) and "rejection" (Fig. 24) that issues of erasure come into their argument. Indeed, in this case, it is as if erasure of queer characters stands in opposition to the visible authenticity of queer characters. For a moment, after confessing his love, Castiel can be authentic in his identity through uses of emotionally-charged expressions such as "you changed me, Dean" and "I love you," but then the episode immediately erases him. The series fails to develop Castiel's out-of-the-closet queer enoughness in-depth after this sole scene.

My next tweet from @problydave features the use of emotional language and the discursive move of using the bury your gays conversation to comment on queerbaiting, another trope members of the LGBTQIA+ community often critique in the media.

Figure 26. "this literally breaks my heart," shared by @problydave on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @problydave that says "Misha :(this literally breaks my heart. SPN has been the #1 definition of queerbaiting & bury your gays for years. Im happy that youre happy with Cas' ending but the fact remains that it wasnt right. From an audience perspective. Esp to loyal queer fans. Im sry but..youre wrong."

User @problydave first makes a clear appeal to emotion by asserting that Collins' message "breaks [their] heart" (Fig. 26). They use Collins' first name and a frowning emoji to open their message, making it personal and direct. They then move onto something that helps explain their heartbreak: the fact that *Supernatural* "has been the #1 definition of queerbaiting & bury your gays for years" (Fig. 26).

@problydave uses the conversation around bury your gays to bring in a further critique of the show's queerbaiting. Queerbaiting is a fandom term that denotes a film or show's use of queer elements without confirming queer identity or relationships as canon. Brennan (2018) defines the term as one "employed by media fans to critici[z]e homoerotic suggestiveness in contemporary television when this suggestiveness is not actuali[z]ed in the program narrative (p. 189). Fathallah (2015) deepens the definition by asserting the act of queerbaiting as a "strategy by which writers and networks attempt to gain the attention of queer viewers via hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism suggesting a queer relationship between two characters, and then emphatically denying and laughing off the possibility" (p. 491). This definition includes the specific use of humor as a component, which is an element of queerness often found in *Supernatural*. As mentioned before in this dissertation, in a metatextual episode of the series called "Changing Channels" where Sam and Dean are transported into television shows of various genres, one of them is a hospital drama (Carver & Beeson, 2019). Earlier in the episode, Sam found Dean watching the hospital series starring a character dubbed "Dr. Sexy." Once transported into the show, the two brothers meet Dr. Sexy, and Dean appears flustered and bashful about meeting him, suggesting a crush. Although this scene is played for laughs, it still implies Dean is some form of bisexual.

Ng (2017) uses the term queerbaiting to identify "situations where those officially

associated with a media text court viewers interested in LGBT narratives—or become aware of such viewers—and encourage their interest in the media text without the text ever definitively confirming the nonheterosexuality of the relevant characters." McDermott (2021) offers a similar explanation: "'Queerbaiting' refers to the perceived intentional practice of 'baiting' audiences with the promise of queer representation, through marketing, or subtextual hints and gestures, but ultimately failing to meet expectations." (p. 844). These definitions strongly implicate the creators of shows for actively encouraging and heightening audience commitment to a narrative in hopes of eventually gaining queer representation. The hints of Dean's queerness throughout *Supernatural* suggest a tug-of-war between expectation and the delivered product. Although fans claim Destiel "went canon" in the confession scene, it was only one-way.

User @problydave voices that they are happy that Collins himself is pleased with presumably the confession scene/Castiel's ending, but the user emphasizes that "it wasnt right" (Fig. 26). The user is able to express an affection and connection for Collins and a fannish happiness for him as actor and co-creator of the scene, but @problydave also uses this turn of phrase to pivot to a condemnation of the overall execution. This rhetorical move allows for authenticity as a fan—and one with an emotional connection to Collins—which helps soften the blow of the critique. Despite this, the assertion that it "wasnt right" is still a strong, defining one (Fig. 26). "From an audience perspective" works to separate the audience from Collins as an actor, showing a disconnect between his views and theirs (Fig. 26). @problydave next doubles-down, bringing queer identity into the picture, and emphasizing that for a queer audience, it especially wasn't "right." The phrase "Im sry" (I'm sorry) helps once again show an emotional bond to Collins, and one that ought to be handled with politeness (even if there is some passive-aggression perhaps at play), but it is followed by a twin-phrasing of "wasnt right": "youre

wrong" (Fig. 26). This assertion is one of the strongest ones in any of the tweets I quote here. It is definitive. No matter how strong an emotional tie user @problydave expresses, no matter how much happiness or politeness we see in their tweet comment, it does not counter the fact that they believe Collins is solidly wrong in his take on the scene.

In the following section, I excerpt user @JuKO1911's tweet thread. It employs four of the five patterns I analyze in this chapter: emotional language, defining bury your gays, an assertion of erasure, and the use of the bury your gays (BYG) conversation to discuss other problematic aspects of the final episodes.

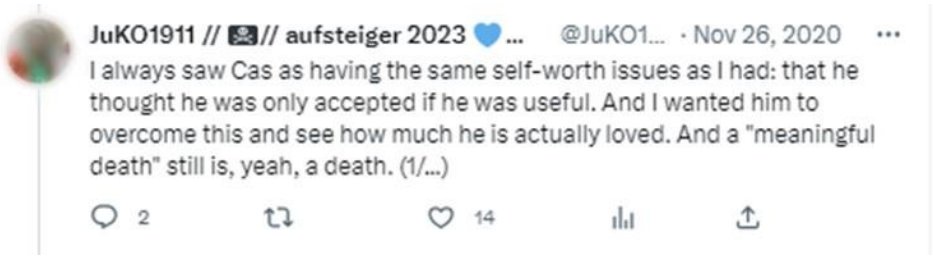

Figure 27. "I always saw Cas," shared by @JuKO1911 on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @JuKO1911 that says "I always saw Cas as having the same self-worth issues as I had: that he thought he was only accepted if he was useful. And I wanted him to overcome this and see how much he is actually loved. And a 'meaningful death' still is, yeah, a death. (1/…)"

Figure 28. "So the confession scene gave me hope," shared by @JuKO1911 on X. November 26. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @JuKO1911 that says "So the confession scene gave me hope that it would be addressed in some way. But it never was after that, it felt like his existence was scrubbed from the show because he was reduced to an afterthought who was less important than pie, even. (2/…)"

Figure 29. "And sacrificing yourself in the process," shared by @JuKO1911 on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @JuKO1911 that says "So what I'm taking away from this is that if youre only happy and feel accepted because you think you're useful to others – you probably are. And sacrificing yourself in the process is honorable, too.
And that's NOT what I wanted this conclusion to be. It really hurts. (3/…)"

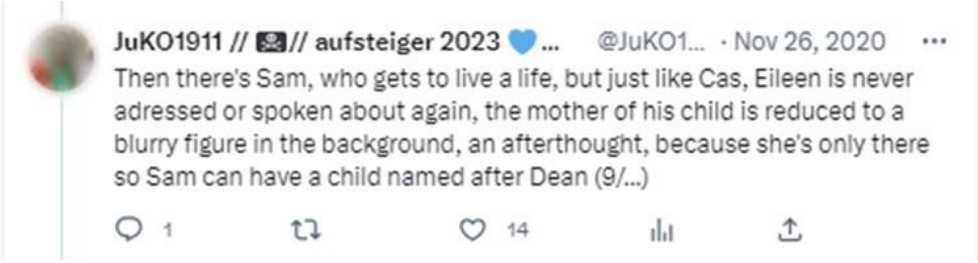

Figure 30. "Then there's Sam," shared by @JuKO1911 on X. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @JuKO1911 that says "Then there's Sam, who gets to live a life, but just like Cas, Eileen is never addressed or spoken about again, the mother of his child is reduced to a blurry figure in the background, an afterthought, because she's only there so Sam can have a child named after Dean (9/…)"

Although @JuKO1911 does not self-identify as queer, she does voice a sense of relatability with Castiel using emotional language. She sees herself in his self-consciousness, and vulnerably admits she can connect with his sense of only being worthwhile if he is "useful" (Fig. 27). She laments that Castiel's ending shows he is only worthy when useful to the Winchesters, in this case, saving Dean. This conclusion to Castiel's arc is "NOT" what @JuKO1911 wanted, using capitalized letters to emphasize this (Fig. 29). The user declares that Castiel's ending "really hurts" (Fig. 29). This employment of strong emotional language helps lend authenticity to the user's critiques. Rather than simply being an intellectual rejection, the complaint stems from harm done. It is implied that this harm comes about through the user's deep connection with

Castiel and the way she relates to the character.

(Re)defining and asserting the presence of BYG in Castiel's arc and critiquing his erasure are patterns that repeat across my Twitter data, and @JuKO1911's thread is no different. She argues that "'meaningful death' still is, yeah, a death" (Fig. 27) and "his existence was scrubbed from the show because he was reduced to an afterthought who was less important than pie" (Fig. 28). Collins argues that Castiel's death was meaningful because he saved the world, but here user @JuKO1911 affirms that it does not matter—it is still BYG by virtue of Castiel dying. Her use of "yeah" (Fig. 28) adds a casual element to the sentence but does not undercut the power of the declaration. The user then moves on to a critique of the aftermath of Castiel's death—not only is he killed, but he is erased. Although the word erased is not used here, "scrubbed" acts as a synonym (Fig. 28). Castiel, for @JuKO1911, is presented as less important than "pie," a reference to Dean's adoration for the dessert and the fact that the final episodes (arguably) spend more time focusing on this fact than Dean's grief over Castiel.

@JuKO1911 also uses the conversation around BYG to put forth feminist critiques of how the show handles women in the finale. The ongoing BYG conversation and its breach therefore creates a platform for unpacking a different breach, this time gender-based. Despite the erasure of Eileen, Sam's Deaf girlfriend, taking up a lot of space in the post-finale conversation, this is the only tweet in my data set that directly evokes her and the lack of closure to her plot or relationship with Sam (Fig. 30). Considering Eileen is the only major Deaf character on the show, her erasure was particularly concerning for many viewers. @JuKO1911 additionally implies a feminist critique by referencing what fans refer to as "the blurry wife"—the blurred figure of a woman who looks on in the finale as Sam plays outside with his son Dean Jr. (Fig. 30). @JuKO1911 borrows authenticity from the extensive BYG conversation to launch a

feminist critique of how women were erased (either by lack of a simple mention or through editing effects) in the finale.

I next present tweets from @castielverse, who uses the authenticity of the conversation as a resource to claim other issues with the final episodes.

Figure 31. "it felt like the entire message," shared by @castielverse on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @castielverse that says "it felt like the entire message of the show was ruined in the finale. besides the issue with the bury your gays trope, they erased all of sam and dean's development we waited 15 seasons to see come together. a how shouldn't have the same ending-"

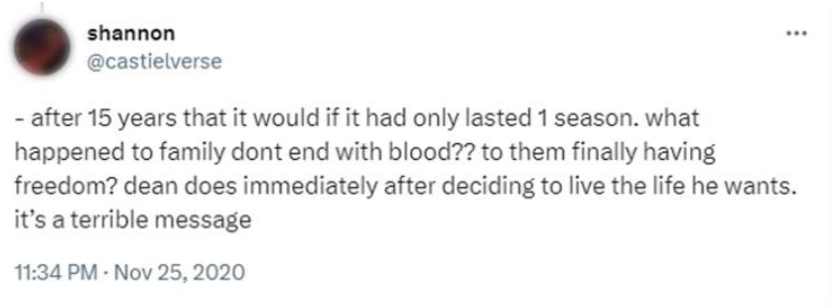

Figure 32. "after 15 years," shared by @castielverse on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @castielverse that says "- after 15 years that it would if it had only lasted 1 season. what happened to family dont end with blood?? to them finally having freedom? dean does immediately after deciding to live the life he wants. it's a terrible message"

Similarly to @JuKO1911, user @castielverse uses "the issue with the bury your gays trope" (Fig. 31) as an avenue to detour into discussing the endings of other characters. The BYG conversation serves as a jumping-off point for broader discussions of the erasure of other issues. Although the user does not evoke an issue of queerness in her complaints about Sam and Dean's

endings, placing them in the broader conversation borrows credibility for her arguments. The user mentions the show's famous "Family don't end with blood" (Fig. 32) line to critique the direction the show took Sam and Dean. Although the sentence says "does," we can assume this is a typo for "dies" in the second tweet.

Yorancy_'s tweet below defines bury your gays through emotional language.

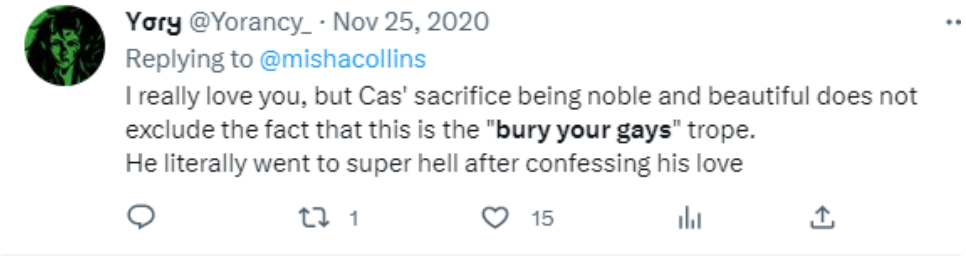

Figure 33. "I really love you," shared by @Yorancy_ on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @Yorancy_ that says "I really love you, but Cas' sacrifice being noble and beautiful does not exclude the fact that this is the 'bury your gays' trope.
He literally went to super hell after confessing his love"

User @Yorancy_ uses language similar to @JuKO1911's assertion that the death was "meaningful" (Fig. 27) but still obviously a death. She argues that the sacrifice being "noble and beautiful" does not deny it as the BYG trope (Fig. 33). This tweet is an exemplar of the re(defining) BYG pattern, since @Yorancy_ provides evidence for the bury your gays claim: Castiel goes to "super hell" after his confession (Fig. 33). Super hell (and sometimes "turbo hell") was a quasi-humorous term that viewers of the show coined and employed to describe The Empty. The Empty is not technically hell, and although it is difficult to articulate exactly why fans created the nickname, the term "super hell" helps emphasize that not only was he sent to a gloomy afterlife, but it is an extreme one.

I want to pair @Yorancy_'s tweet with another one, as I see both of these making an interesting move.

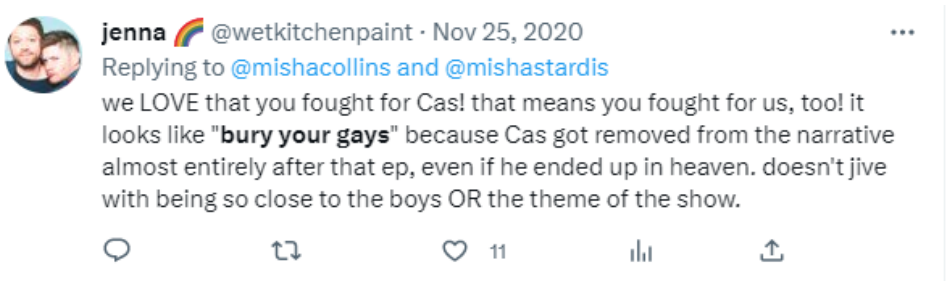

Figure 34. "we LOVE that you fought for Cas!," shared by @wetkitchenpaint on X. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @wetkitchenpaint that "says we LOVE that you fought for Cas! that means you fought for us, too! It looks like 'bury your gays' because Cas got removed from the narrative almost entirely after that ep, even if he ended up in heaven. doesn't jive with being so close to the boys OR the theme of the show."

Both @Yorancy_ and @wetkitchenpaint use the term "love," which helps bring authenticity to themselves as fans of Collins (Fig. 33 and Fig. 34). @Yorancy_ says that she loves Collins, confirming them as a fan of the actor, and @wetkitchenpaint uses her declaration to show her appreciation for how Collins fought to confirm Castiel as gay. These are examples of emotional language helping to give credibility and authority to the users. They are fans, and therefore qualified to speak at Collins' family meeting.

@wetkitchenpaint is able to ground her critique of Castiel's erasure in this declaration of appreciation for Collins' advocacy. She then layers on another criticism—the erasure doesn't "jive" with the theme of the show (Fig. 34). By appealing to the theme—perhaps we can assume this is the "family don't end with blood" theme—@wetkitchenpaint is able to further authenticate her frustrations with the BYG element.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the video and tweet thread of Misha Collins and followed with an analysis of tweets in response to him. I have shown that Collins' attempts at moral accounting continue on social media, and fans use the platform as well to deny his accounts and articulate the reasoning for their rejection. I included considerations of how the

concept of enoughness and identity factors into the conversations as well. Ultimately, these sites are sites of engagement, where "social actors orient particular technologies of talk, particular social relationships, particular social identities, and particular communities in order to perform particular social actions" (Jones, 2016, p. 48-49). Like the two convention panels I discussed in the last chapter, these are places for authenticity work to unfold.

Twitter has come to be an important place for many individuals to connect with others over shared interests, political movements, breaking news stories, and much more. The departure of users to other platforms such as Bluesky and Threads after Elon Musk's Twitter takeover has changed the landscape, but some users, including some in the *Supernatural* family, have chosen to stay and make the best of the website. Researching their social media usage can be useful for understanding the place of queer communication online. As Pennington et al. (2016) argue, "[c]omprehensively assessing the influences of engaging celebrities is an important step in understanding fan culture and social networking sites" (p. 57). Although fan-celebrity interactions obviously predate the internet, the current "visibility of audience–fan interaction makes it possible, for the first time in history, to observe the moment-by-moment unfolding of celebrity–audience relationships" (Giles, 2017, p. 445).

Collins' behaviors on Twitter reveal complicated ways celebrity users employ the service to communicate to fans and articulate themselves. Marshall (2010) identifies three versions of the self on display by celebrities: public, public private, and transgressive intimate. The public self is made up of "release dates of recordings and films, premieres and appearances, performance videoclips, the path to get tickets for specific appearances and events and biographical profiles of the most fawning nature" (p. 44). The public private allows celebrities to "construct their versions of what parts of their lives they are willing to convey to an on-line

public" (Marshall, 2010, p. 45); this work can be done through social networking involvement, especially Twitter. The third of Marshall's (2010) selves, and the one most relevant for Collins' tweets, is "the one motivated by temporary emotion" (p. 45). The kinds of transgressive emotions that may be "appropriate for one's closest friends is [...] shared with hundreds of thousands who pass it on virally to millions" (p. 45). Collins' tweets are difficult to cleanly slot into these categories. On the one hand, he is doing public relations work for the show, trying to defend it and the "good" of it, but on the other hand, his positive, personal emotions (which created a breach) seem more like the public private self. Lastly, his apology tweets that convey strong emotion could be seen as transgressive in nature due to their vulnerability. Regardless of how we organize the components of Collins' activities on Twitter, it is clear that the discursive moves he made were complex.

In the next chapter, I turn my attention to Tumblr memes made in response to the Latin American dub of the "Despair" episode. I consider the ways the meme creators call attention to the breach, mock Collins' attempts at breach-repair, and work to articulate the LATAM dub team as being on the correct side of the *Supernatural* family's moral divide. I do so using an analysis of image and lexical choices.

Chapter Five: Rogue Translations: Object-Labeled Memes and Image Macros in the Tumblr *Supernatural* Community

In this chapter, I present 11 memes/image macros posted to the social networking site Tumblr that critique the Latin American (LATAM) dub of the "Despair" episode. These memes use humor to unpack the meme creators' complaints with the confession scene's original English version and praise the Latin American dub team for reformulating the scene to confirm a queer reciprocation from Dean to Castiel. These memes illustrate that for users on Tumblr, the original version of the scene had caused a breach, but the dub allowed for a more satisfactory alternative for many fans. *Supernatural*'s network, The CW, however, does not get credit for breach repair because, as Collins stated in his video and tweet thread, the LATAM dub owes its creation to a "rogue translator." The CW cannot claim a breach repair because they did not seemingly commission this version of the LATAM dub. These memes therefore show a compelling relationship to the concept of breach and the issue of where the network is situated in the *Supernatural* family's moral universe.

For active users of the internet, memes can offer lighthearted breaks from internet text walls. A meme, "a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" (Davison, 2012, p. 122), can help spread humor across discourses while also critiquing power through irony. Memes are inherently intertextual, often borrowing from popular culture or even other memes to intersect meanings for humorous purposes. Memes are not simply created to make a viewer let out a giggle, however; memes have strong argumentative power as well. Indeed, a meme is often "more a visual argument than simply a joke that is

replicated" (Wiggins, 2019, p. 9). Memes' humor "often manifests itself as a powerful means for voicing critique vis-à-vis contemporary social and/ or political issues" (Piata, p. 39). Even when a meme seems to be for pure entertainment, "the political and social underlining may be pinpointed" (Denisova, 2019, p. 29).

Memes allow their creators to voice opposition to and even hostility toward certain events and situations they may feel otherwise unable to change. Although Costello & Moore (2007) argue that "[i]nternet technologies have empowered" television fans to be "resistors and shapers" of TV storylines (p. 124), there is not much fans can do once a show ends. Because the last three episodes of *Supernatural* were definitive and canonical, there was no way for audiences to effect change regarding them other than to push for a sequel TV series, movie, podcast, or book that changed the trajectory of the story. It is hard to identify what other kinds of direct social change their critiques could create toward the show itself once it ended. These memes, I would argue, still serve a political purpose for the people who create them and those that consume them. The memes cultivate a sense of community, a shared anger and hurt toward The CW and means to vent those emotions through art. They address "at least two groups, one which is positioned to 'get the joke' and one which may be the target of the joke" (Wiggins, 2019, xv-xvi). For most of the memes in my data set, the former addressees are queer and queer-allied *Supernatural* viewers (or ex-viewers), and the latter addressee is The CW itself. For my memes that bypass the network and critique the English dub itself, there appears to be no direct critiqued entity, but we can assume The CW and other authorities who made the decisions about the final episodes are the ones assigned the blame.

Resemiotization is transforming the modality of a text, allowing a community to "transpose[][...] its knowledges, techniques and technologies, as well as its interpersonal, social

and cultural practices and positionings" (Iedema, 2001, p. 36). By taking the political tensions of the LATAM dub and translating it into humorous memes, users were able to resemiotize their experiences through visual communication to create new, powerful, and persuasive texts. This resemiotization also recontextualizes the arguments for the LATAM dub or against the English original: placing these in the Tumblr community with other kinds of persuasive texts, such as text posts that put forth their own rhetoric as well.

Humorous memes also serve an emotionally-fulfilling purpose. For many *Supernatural* fans, the final three episodes proved frustrating and even overwhelmingly upsetting for some. Humor in memes can be a way to "embrace levity perhaps for the purpose of defusing a tense situation" (Wiggins, 2019, p. 58), and I would argue this was part of the *Supernatural* memes' power. They facilitated the community-building of *Supernatural* viewers (and ex-viewers) to critique the writers' and network's narrative decisions, but the meme-creators did so through a form that can bring a sense of catharsis and relief. For some meme creators, "the process of appropriating internet memes for the purpose of identity co-construction may ameliorate feelings of low self-esteem and anxiety, perhaps only temporarily, but functionally" (Wiggins, 2019, p, 121).

On the other hand, memes can also be used to further tensions. Users "may choose to deploy political memes not to respond to conflict but rather to engage in and to extend conflict through discursive practice" (Wiggins, 2019, p. 64-65). For the memes in my data set that use harsh humor to interrogate The CW and the English dub, there may not be any attempts at (re)constructing new futures for *Supernatural*, as much as an attempt to destroy the network's credibility through a scorched-earth approach to meme-creation.

One might argue that memes, and "internet activism" in general, do not affect real-world

change, but *Supernatural* memes illustrate the importance of speaking back to power regardless of whether it creates immediate or discernible change. Although digital advocacy has its critics, scholars such as Jackson, Bailey, & Welles in their book *Hashtag Activism*: *Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (2020) have shown that internet platforms can offer useful affordances to organize activists. For marginalized people who may not have access to traditional activism, online forms can enable them to participate in meaningful ways (Egner, 2023). In terms of memes, Wiggins (2022) argues that "the production of memes regarding certain issues may be the only discursive tool available for the purpose of expressing a socio-culturally or politically critical perspective" (p. 71). For many of the young people, including students, who create *Supernatural* memes, they may not be in the situation to give money or volunteer for pro-LGBTQIA+ causes, and they also may not themselves ever become successful or powerful television executives who can determine future positive LGBTQIA+ narratives. Yet, through meme-creation, they are able to enact a meaningful connection to other fans and help alleviate pain through community.

In addition to the activist qualities of meme-making in a post-"Despair" fandom, I argue the *Supernatural* fandom used LATAM dub memes to cultivate resilience. Although resilience is usually theorized in the face of devastating events such as natural disasters or the loss of a loved one, more micro-seeming negative experiences, such as watching a queer character beloved for over a decade die on screen, can call for a need for resilience. The act of meme creation allows members of the *Supernatural* family and those closely outside of it to develop resilience. As Buzzanell (2010) argues, resilience requires processes. One of these involves "the creation and maintenance of communication networks" (p. 6), and social media serve as avenues for communication networks. By connecting through memes, users are able to share their critiques

and create networks of humor and shared outrage. Another process Buzzanell (2010) highlights is the "development of alternative logics" and the "reframing [of] the entire situation" (p. 6). By focusing on their love for the LATAM dub, shifting blame onto The CW, and asserting a requited Destiel, meme-makers were able to reframe the confession scene as a more queer-affirming sequence.

The LATAM Dub

In late November 2020, Netflix released the Latin American Spanish dub version of Season 15, Episode 18. Instead of saying "Don't do this, Cas" as he does in the English dub, Dean, after Castiel confesses his love, replies with "Y yo a ti, Cas," which translates to "And I you, Cas," confirming a reciprocated love. Since it is only a dub, the scene visually plays out the same, with The Empty consuming Castiel and Dean being left distraught, sitting on the floor.

Data

The memes that feature critiques of the English dub assume a specific audience (or discourse community) of *Supernatural* viewers who already have knowledge about the Latin American dub of episode 18. Without this knowledge, the memes are incoherent. Because of this, they are intertextual with other texts that inform users of the Latin American dub (such as other text-based Tumblr posts or news articles that ran about the dub) and the Latin American dubbed scene itself. Wiggins (2019) argues that "[f]or memes to be memes," engaging users must play a part in "responding" to the images (p. 53). Memes help users demonstrate shared "insider knowledge" (Diedrichsen, 2022, 116).

For my data set, I used the search function to look for memes with tags such as "supernatural spanish dub" or "spanish dub." From these tags, I pulled 45 *Supernatural*-focused memes and then divided them into categories based on the discursive moves I saw them making.

For this chapter, I narrowed them down to four interrelated core categories: memes in response to Collins' tweets, memes that depict The CW network as a "silencing" force, memes that praise the LATAM dub team as subversive agents, and memes that construct the dub itself as a powerful entity. Most of these memes use a sharp, biting sense of humor to eviscerate their targets in favor of the LATAM dub and its creators.

Below, I present 11 memes that work intertextually and often metadiscursively to critique the network's power and show a playful delight in embracing the LATAM dub instead. Furthermore, I have strived to group memes together that are taking similar micro-approaches, such as my first two memes that directly engage with Misha Collins' Twitter thread I analyzed in the previous chapter.

Despite the majority of the memes using the misnomer term "the Spanish dub," I have opted to be sensitive to the cultural specificities of the issue and refer to the dub as the "LATAM" version throughout this chapter.

Almost all of my memes are examples of what is known as "object-labeling" according to the popular meme archival site, KnowYourMeme.com. Object-labeled memes are ones where "subjects of a specific image are labeled to create a humorous interpretation of the picture" ("Object Labeling"). These memes "are a subcategory of image macros in which a user adds labels to the characters or objects featured in a stock image" (Scott, 2021, p. 280).

Table 1. Table of Memes

In Response to Collins	**The CW as Silencer**	**Subversive LATAM Dub Team**	**The All-Powerful LATAM Dub**
Spencer and Gibby (Fig 35)	COMPANY IS COMING (Fig. 37)	Distracted Boyfriend (Fig. 41)	The Undertaker (Fig. 44)
Gru and Balthazar (Fig. 36)	Dean and Castiel (Fig. 38)	Free Real Estate (Fig. 42)	Thor: Ragnarok (Fig. 45)
	Sephiroth and Mario (Fig. 39)	SPN's Grave (Fig. 43)	
	I don't get words wrong (Fig. 40)		

Table Note. A table that breaks down the memes into their categories.

In Response to Collins

As mentioned, I will now present two memes that metadiscursively engage with Collins' twitter thread. The first features a screencapture from the popular children's television series *iCarly*.

Figure 35. "there is no conspiracy," shared by user on Tumblr. November 26, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A object-labeled meme of Spencer and Gibby from the television series iCarly. Gibby, labeled "the CW, using misha as a puppet," is about to hit Spencer, labeled "spn fans talking abt the spanish dub" with a stop sign. The sign is labeled "there is no conspiracy."

I begin here with Fig. 35, one of the most complex memes in the data set, as I believe this meme best illustrates a strong critique of both The CW and, more gently so, Collins' (suggested) forced complicity in the issue. This one meme takes aim at both The CW and Misha Collins' video. The base image comes from a scene in the television series *iCarly*, in which the character Gibby hits the character Spencer with a stop sign (Schneider, 2007-2012). Here, Spencer represents "spn fans talking ab[ou]t the spanish dub," which I analyze as fans discussing the various theories about why the dialogue was different from the English version. Gibby now represents "the CW, using misha as a puppet" and weaponizing "there is no conspiracy" against

the fans. The conspiracy quote is, of course, a line from Collins' Twitter video where he denies that there was an alternate ending to the episode where Dean reciprocates (line 133-134). Like others in my set, this meme locates The CW as the adversary to fans in the Destiel sub-fandom. This meme and the *Despicable Me 3* meme analyzed below are the only two in the data set that directly implicate Collins' video as a tool The CW theoretically used to suppress fan theories, but both show a keen condemnation of The CW for their perceived manipulation of Collins and the fandom.

This meme has interesting implications for breach management and the moral accounts of Collins' Twitter video and thread. For one thing, the meme calls into question Collins' attempts at evoking authenticity, from the bookshelf background, to the close-up shot, to the familial way in which he speaks (Fig. 2). Now, it claims Collins' video was part of a bigger plan by The CW to use him to put forth falsehoods that would squash theorizing. For this meme, Collins' breach repair strategies failed because they were not authentic to him. His moral account is immoral because the network is using him as a puppet, controlled and unable to speak spontaneously and from the heart. The interference the meme accuses The CW of is a whole new breach which requires repair, and the image and text work together to make a claim about the network's transgression.

The image choice is also crucial here, because it implies The CW attempted to strongly suppress conversations around the dub. Gibby's actions are violent and his weapon he uses against Spencer is a stop sign. Not only does the meme present The CW as a physically aggressive network, but also one that chooses to *silence* the fans that are "talking abt the spanish dub." Considering the reformulated definitions of "bury your gays" I examined in the last chapter which revolved around erasure, silencing LGBTQIA+ people's conversations around

issues that matter to us can be seen as burying our perspectives and rejecting us from fandom narrative. Although proving there was evidence for a conspiracy is a hotly-contested topic in the fandom, it is understandable why this meme creator would be upset about feeling silenced. The meme uses obvious hyperbole to make its point humorously, but the image conveys a feeling of being "hit over the head" by a heavy-handed message.

The next meme I present uses a comical scene from a children's movie to show an exaggerated timeline for the events surrounding the LATAM dub.

Figure 36. "Water Gun," shared by user on Tumblr. November 27, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A thread of images taken from the film *Despicable Me 3*. In the first image, Balthazar Bratt, labeled "shippers," holds a huge jewel labeled "destiel." He holds in his other hand a gun labeled "15x18." Opposite of him is the character Gru, labeled "CW," looking taken aback. In the next image, Gru pulls a larger gun labeled "15x20" while Bratt continues to be labeled "shippers" and holding a "destiel" jewel. In the next image, Bratt holds a much larger gun labeled "Spanish dub" at the CW-labeled Gru. In the following image, Gru pulls a tiny green water gun labeled "rogue translator." In the final image, he looks down at the gun in disappointment and bewilderment.

This meme uses absurdity and sight gags to track the progression of Destiel across the meme's thread of multiple images (Fig. 36). The base screenshots the creator added text to come from the animated film *Despicable Me 3*, where the character in the scarf on the left is named Felonious Gru and the character holding the gem is named Balthazar Bratt (Coffin & Balda, 2017, 5:53-6:06). The meme labels Gru as The "CW" and Bratt is Destiel "shippers." At first, the shippers, holding the "Destiel" gem in one hand, point a gun labeled "15x18" at the CW network, suggesting Castiel's confession as a way to defend the ship's canonicity. The CW then points a larger gun labeled "15x20," which I would argue represents the network ending any hope for reciprocation through Castiel's lack of an appearance. To counter this larger gun, the shippers pull out an even larger gun labeled "Spanish dub." In retaliation, the CW pulls one last gun: a much smaller water gun labeled "rogue translator." This is, of course, a reference to Collins' video in which he claims the dub is not officially-sanctioned. Like the *iCarly* stop sign meme, this meme implies that The CW is the actual source of the "rogue translator" claim, using Collins as a mouthpiece to deny fans' claims. The inclusion of the water gun, and Gru's facial expression of confusion and disappointment as he realizes the uselessness of the gun, shows the ways the meme suggests the "rogue translator" argument is not as effective as this theoretical CW network would like it to be.

Once again, like many of the tweets in the last chapter's data set, this meme (Fig. 36) rejects Collins' "rogue translator" message as an insufficient moral account. Similarly to the *iCarly* meme which accuses the network of using Misha as a puppet, this meme implies Collins' lexical choices are a weapon the network used to target shippers. The meme dismisses this moral account as ineffectual, because instead of a dangerous weapon, "rogue translator" is a harmless water gun. In contrast, the "Spanish Dub" labels a huge gun that looks menacing, showing the

ways the meme's creator positions the LATAM dub as Destiel's best instrument to push back against The CW's rejection of Destiel.

The CW As Silencer

My next set of memes implicates the network as a silencing agent that tried to squash canon Destiel or the LATAM dub in particular. The first meme (Fig. 37) uses a humorous YouTube video to position The CW as a strict hierarchical figure demanding an end to the LATAM dub's existence.

Figure 37. "We can't let people know," shared by user on Tumblr. November 27, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: Two images from the Chris Fleming sketch "COMPANY IS COMING." In the first image, a character, labeled with The CW's logo, says "Get rid of the foreign language dubs!" In the next image, The CW-labeled character shouts "WE CAN'T LET PEOPLE KNOW THEY'RE *GAY!*"

This image macro/object label meme (Fig. 37) derives from a video sketch by the popular YouTube comedian Chris Fleming in which he humorously mimics a mother doing chores when expecting company over (Fleming, 2015, 0:10-0:15). The original dialogue is "Get rid of the couches; we can't let people know we SIT!" Instead of the new image representing a person, the meme creator now lets Fleming's character represent The CW. Instead of getting rid of the couches, the network wants to purge "the foreign language dubs" so that people will not "know [Castiel and Dean are] GAY!" This meme is another example of an edited image that critiques The CW as an arbiter of canon, and one attempting to suppress the queer narrative in favor of the original heterosexual meaning.

Like Collins' hierarchical call for a "family meeting" (Fig. 2), this meme (Fig. 37) positions The CW as a controlling parental figure. Its rhetoric may not be 100% logical (since the mother in this case would be talking to her children to help them clean up), it still mocks the idea of The CW as at the top of the *Supernatural* family, able to attempt to silence the children (viewers) advocating for Destiel. In similar ways to how Twitter users felt Collins' comment brushed aside viewers' complaints about Castiel's burying, this meme communicates a frustration around The CW's desire to reject the LATAM dub. The meme signals a clear breach in the network's handling of Destiel for the meme creator and others who support their message. Although The CW may be the parent, creating the family through their power of production, this meme mocks their sense of control. It unauthorizes the network's authenticity due to their creation of and lack of accounting for the breach. I was unable to locate a producer or network executive's comment on the LATAM dub, so it could be argued the network did not try to actively cover up the dubs (in fact, Netflix still hosts the LATAM dub as of February 2024), but it is obvious from this meme that its creator wishes to condemn them as a source of silencing.

The next meme I present uses a still from *Supernatural* itself to show The CW as a physically-forceful silencing agent.

Figure 38. "cw america / canon destiel," shared by user on Tumblr. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: An image-labeled meme where Castiel, labeled as "cw america," covers the mouth of Dean, labeled "canon destiel."

Like the Chris Fleming image macro (Fig. 37), this one (Fig. 38) directly above posits The CW network's attempt at silencing the canon Destiel of the LATAM dub. This is one of two memes in my data set that takes a shot from *Supernatural* itself as its main base. This screenshot is a scene from the episode "Lucifer Rising" (season 4, episode 22) in which Castiel, the subject out-of-focus on the left, covers the mouth of Dean Winchester to silence him (Kripke, 2009, 32:41-32:45). Here, Castiel now represents "cw america" working to silence "canon destiel." This simple meme asserts The CW as a silencing force, trying to stop Dean from reciprocating the way he does in Spanish. Although it does not use humor to critique The CW like most of the memes in my data set, it still works intertextually, speaking directly to the *Supernatural* fan base who would have knowledge of this episode, scene, and specific encounter between the characters.

My next meme features two images from a video game and employs violence and surprise to condemn The CW's "killing" of canon Destiel.

Figure 39. "Sephiroth and Mario," shared by user on Tumblr. December 12, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: An object-labeled meme thread of two images from the trailer for the video game *Final Fantasy VII*. In the first image, the character Sephiroth, labeled as "CW," seems to impale Mario, labeled "Destiel." The second image reveals that Mario was saved when the sword slipped into his overall strap, labeled "Spanish Dub."

This meme (Fig. 39) positions The CW as a murderous entity set on killing Destiel, but the Spanish dub serves as a rescuing element. According to KnowYourMeme.com, this meme template is known as the "Sephiroth Impaling Mario" meme. The two figures represented here are Sephiroth (the character wielding the sword, from the video game *Final Fantasy VII*) and Mario (the character who looks to be impaled but is not). The images come from a video game

trailer for *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* (GameSpot, 2020, 2:03-2:10), where Mario is a main character and Sephiroth was added as a downloadable content player. Here, The CW enacts violence, seeming to brutally kill Destiel with a sword. The twist is, however, that the sword simply slips into Destiel's/Mario's overall strap, and the overall strap here is object-labeled "Spanish dub." In this way, the Spanish dub itself is able to save Destiel from certain death at the hands of the CW.

The next meme is my second collected meme that uses images from *Supernatural* to praise the LATAM dub and reject The CW's dismissal of it.

Figure 40. "I don't get words wrong," shared by user on Tumblr. November 27, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A object-labeled meme thread of three images featuring Castiel and Dean. Dean is labeled "CW" and Castiel is "LATAM Dub." Dean says "English is kind of tough, maybe you got the word wrong." Castiel replies with "I don't get words wrong." The final image is Dean rolling his eyes while Castiel looks onward with a determined expression.

This meme (Fig. 40) paints The CW as an entity that wishes to discredit and deauthorize the LATAM dub. Unlike most of the memes in my data set that borrow intertextually from non-*Supernatural* contexts, this meme is in conversation with the series itself. In the original scene from "Good Intentions, the 14th episode of the 13th season (Glynn & Pesce, 2018, 15:00-15:08), Dean suggests to Castiel that the angel has gotten the Enochian words wrong (Enochian is the language of angels on the show). Castiel then tells him that he does not "get words wrong." In the new image, Dean now represents The CW, telling the Castiel-replacement, the LATAM dub, that maybe it "got words wrong" in its Destiel confession. Not so, since the LATAM dub is now a powerful text that does not "get words wrong" either. This meme is yet another example of a meme creator taking aim at The CW's perceived desire to squash the LATAM dub and its authority. The meme, though, asserts this authority, saying that the words the LATAM dub includes are not in fact "wrong." Because of this, the LATAM dub is the real, correct canon version of the scene that is in no way wrongly-worded.

All four of the images I presented above (Figs. 37-40) reject the moral authority of The CW. Although the network may have brought the series into being and thus control the canonicity of the narrative, the memes situate them on the wrong side of the moral universe. The memes imply a strategic erasing of the LATAM dub and Destiel as a whole, which revokes the network's authenticity since their exploits appear insidious rather than sincere. The original English version created a breach by refusing to allow Dean to reciprocate. The CW did not take apologetic action for their choices. The LATAM dub is the closest thing to a repair that, like in the Mario meme and its overall strap, can ease the harm of the breach by confirming a reciprocated Destiel. Because The CW is accused of trying to silence Destiel, they have,

according to many Destiel shippers, further deepened the breach by rejecting the one thing that could offer an alternative to the English version's transgression.

Subversive LATAM Dub Team

Another key subtheme I noticed in the memes I collected was the idea that the team of directors and actors behind the LATAM dub were trying to actively subvert The CW's wishes by confirming a Destiel reciprocation. I present three memes below that display this discursive move. The first uses a popular format to show the LATAM dubbers as a team that favored canon Destiel.

Figure 41. "Distracted Boyfriend," shared by user on Tumblr. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: An object-labeled meme featuring the Distracted Boyfriend format. In it, the boyfriend is labeled "Latin American dub team," the jealous girlfriend is "CW," and the woman he is looking at is labeled as an image of Dean saying "Y yo a ti, Cas."

This meme (Fig. 41) illustrates the theory that the "Latin American dub team" personally preferred a reciprocated version of the scene and rejected The "CW" in favor of their own narrative. The "Distracted Boyfriend meme" takes its base from a stock photo by Barcelonian photographer Antonio Guillem taken in 2015 (Feldman, 2017). This meme format is one of the most popular I have seen in recent years. It shows a man "checking out" another passing woman

as his own partner looks on in disgust. It is typically used to show a sense of betrayal, where the man represents someone or something "cheating" on their/its main affiliation in order to appreciate something else. The CW is the rejected party, with the team favoring the other person, in this case a screenshot of the captioned dialogue where Dean reciprocates his love to Castiel. This once again shows how the dub, and the people who made it, stand in contrast to the network's wishes for the scene to remain one-sided.

The next meme uses a clip from a different television series to show the ways in which the theoretical actions of the dub team were advantageous for the Destiel ship.

Figure 42. "Free Real Estate," shared by user on Tumblr. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: A meme featuring an image from *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!* The meme features a fictitious dialogue, where The CW says "here we have this absolutely normal, no-gay love confession." The "spanish dub team" then responds with an image from the Tim and Eric show, which has a man saying "It's Free Real Estate."

Like the Distracted Boyfriend meme (Fig. 41), this image (Fig. 42) also creates a scenario in which the "spanish dub team" had their own personal agenda to reject the authenticity of the network's canon and create their own. This meme base is rooted in a sketch from Adult Swim's series *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!* (Adult Swim, 2012, 00:34-00:36). In it, the comedians use a faux commercial format to try to convince one man only, Jim Boonie, that they have a free house for him. At the very end, Tim Heidecker says "It's free real estate," which has become a popular meme, where the text is often transformed to say other things. For example, one version captions the dialogue as "It's bad writing" to critique storylines in media. In this *Supernatural*-based meme, the text remains the same as the original sketch. It argues that the opportunity to dub the scene has created "Free Real Estate" in the series' universe for the dub team to apply their own queer meanings. Like the others in this subset, the "Free Real Estate" meme suggests that the team attempted to actively subvert the network's wishes in order to create a relationship between Dean and Castiel that better aligns with the wishes of Destiel shippers.

The meme below uses a sarcastic and dismissive meme format to show how the theorized actions of the dub team deauthorized *Supernatural*'s homophobia.

Figure 43. "SPN's Grave," shared by user on Tumblr. Fair use.

Image caption: A labeled meme featuring a behind-the-scenes image from the filming of the television show *The Flash*. Grant Gustin, the actor who plays The Flash, is here labeled "Spanish dub director." He is kneeling over a grave labeled "spn homophobic ass" while making a backward peace sign.

This meme (Fig. 43) takes its source from a behind-the-scenes photo from the television series *The Flash*, which also broadcasted on The CW. The grave belongs to Oliver Queen, AKA the Green Arrow superhero. The actor squatting near the grave with a reverse peace sign is Grant Gustin, who plays The Flash himself. It is a popular and humorous meme format that disrespects the passing of Queen, and this type is typically used to celebrate the death or end of something maligned by the labeled entity crouching. In this case, the death belongs to the "spn homophobic ass," representing the network that, for seasons, did not feature as much queer content as many

fans wanted. The celebrating Barry Allen is transformed into the "Spanish dub director," who is now seen triumphing over the dead body of the (implied) English version.

Like the other memes in my set, these three images (Figs. 41-43) I discuss above represent The CW as a villainous and breach-creating organization. In contrast, the dub team are resistant heroes who worked to confirm Destiel and create an alternate, more queer-affirming version of the show. Although it is not suggested that the LATAM dub created a traditional *moral account* to repair the breach, it offers a different kind of breach-repair. By attempting to erase the original canon and replace it with something many queer fans prefer, this theorized dub team bypasses the need for The CW to offer an account. They take subversive action on their own using the power they and the opportunities ("free real estate") it affords them.

The All-Powerful LATAM Dub

The final two memes I present here humorously convey the LATAM dub and the Spanish language as powerful entities capable of defeating The CW. Whereas the first two sets I offer focus on the ways human organizations wield power (The CW executives silencing and the LATAM dub creators resisting), the object-labeled memes below (like the Enochian meme, Fig. 40) instead anthropomorphize the LATAM dub and its language into their own dynamic forces.

The first meme I present references a mystical fictional occurrence in a World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) show.

Figure 44. “The Undertaker,” shared by user on Tumblr. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: This is an object-labeled thread of memes featuring professional wrestlers. In the first image, Randy Orton, labeled as “CW” looks down on The Undertaker, labeled “Destiel,” seemingly dead and in a coffin. In the second image, The Undertaker, back to life and now labeled “Spanish dub,” grabs Orton by the neck. In the final image, The Undertaker, still labeled “Spanish dub,” is sitting up and strangling Orton, still labeled “CW.”

This image macro thread (Fig. 44) illustrates the LATAM dub as an unforeseen yet formidable force that can confront The CW. This image takes its foundation from a part of professional wrestling mythos and a reading of the visuals benefits from their original context. This particular wrestling segment is from a September 23, 2005 episode of WWE’s weekly show

Smackdown (WWE, 2018, 2:17-2:32). In it, The Undertaker, a popular wrestling star, lies in a casket. The other man looking into the coffin is the wrestler Randy Orton. The Undertaker, famous for his supernatural abilities, comes back from the dead and grabs Orton by the throat. In the edited version, Orton now embodies The CW, and the Undertaker, coming back to life, represents the ways in which the supposed "dead" Destiel resurrects now in the "Spanish dub." Like other memes, this one also shows the violently disruptive power of the LATAM dub, especially in how it can overtake the will of the network to bring Destiel into canon and thus back to life.

This meme does not have a KnowYourMeme page, and I was only able to find one other example of it online (but a lot of GIFs of it), so I would refer to this as an image macro instead of a successful circulating meme.

The next meme references a beloved Marvel Studios film to humorously illustrate the power of the LATAM dub's Spanish language.

The source of the meme below (Fig. 45) comes from the Marvel Cinematic Universe film *Thor: Ragnarok* (Waititi, 2017, 1:55:28-1:55-34) in which the woman shown at the top, Hela, is doing battle with the man, Thor, shown in the second panel. In the original, she tells him "You cannot defeat me," to which he replies, "I know, but he can," before the being known as Surtur bursts forth (shown in panel 3 of the thread). In this revised meme, we once again see The CW network as the adversary in the relationship, saying that Destiel shippers "can't make Destiel canon" (Fig. 45). The meme acknowledges Destiel shippers' lack of power in the face of canon. They cannot defeat The CW's perceived agenda against Destiel's canonicity. They can, however, wait for the flag of Spain—representing the LATAM dub's language—to burst forth and confirm Destiel's two-way canonicity.

Figure 45. "Thor: Ragnarok," shared by user on Tumblr. November 25, 2020. Fair use.

Image caption: This object-labeled meme thread features three images from the film *Thor: Ragnarok*. In the first image, the villain Hela, labeled with The CW's logo, says "You can't make Destiel canon." Thor, labeled as "Destiel shippers," says "I know, but he can." In the final image, the flag of Spain bursts forth.

Both memes above (Figs. 44 and 45) construct Destiel and its shippers as unable to confirm a canon reciprocated relationship on their own. The LATAM dub and the Spanish language instead become empowered agents that, despite being inanimate, wield their own agency. Because the dub and the language are obviously both communication-based, they provide a compelling example of language as constitutive. Through the dub's lexical choices using Spanish as a vehicle, it is able to enact canon Destiel in the world. According to these

memes, unlike the English version shippers dismiss, Destiel shippers claim the LATAM dub's authenticity and positivity as it lacks a homophobic agenda. Lacking this surreptitious agenda, the LATAM dub is free to present Dean and Castiel as authentically queer.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented 11 memes and image macros that illustrate the ways Destiel shippers criticize The CW and its sanctioned English version of the confession scene. By using intertextuality and moral discourse, they position The CW as an antagonist while the LATAM dub and its creative team serve as heroic, subversive entities. The meme creators' often-humorous intersections between pop culture and a defense of Destiel show the ways memes work to reformulate and repurpose multiple ideas at once to construct new, powerful discourse. These reformulations negotiate authenticity through legitimizing certain actors (the LATAM dub team, Destiel shippers) and deauthorizing others (the network).

The *Supernatural* family and the show's anti-fans have had a long history on social media, utilizing it to form community and critique the narratives. The social media events of late November 2020 and beyond are part of a long tradition of memes in the fandom. As Zubernis & Larsen (2012) show throughout figures in their book, fans have edited images, often humorously, through the *Supernatural* fandom's long, storied history. I doubt that these practices will ever cease, even long after the show has ended.

In the next chapter, I summarize this dissertation's findings. I also turn my examinations back on myself to understand my place in this study and how doing the work of research changed my perspectives. I present some final data that help illustrate my summaries and the further importance I see my project's topic having.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Originally the term "fan" or "fanatic" stemmed from a religious connotation, and although we now use the word fan typically for pop culture or hobby purposes, it is difficult to reject a religious metaphor at work in many fans' practices ("Fan"). I am not, at the time of this writing, a religiously-devoted fan of anything in particular, but I have a lifelong interest in celebrities, television series, and movies (especially for things like *The Lord of the Rings* films as a young child seeing them in theaters). I have tasted fanaticism, and I know it is powerful. In this dissertation, I have aimed to demonstrate the ways in which fandom matters to LGBTQIA+ people and works to shape our experiences with media texts. When LGBTQIA+ people sense a failure in beloved media texts, many of us will utilize social media in some way to speak back to the text. Co-creators, such as actors, will often engage. Although the *Supernatural* family is only one instance of this, for me it has had a major impact on how I understand communication about queerness.

In this conclusion, I reflect on what I have discussed in this dissertation, but I also look outward, beyond my immediate data.

Reflection

When I began to watch *Supernatural* all the way through for the first time, it was the week Misha Collins posted his "rogue translator" video. The series had ended the week before, it had been a few weeks since Castiel had come out, and fans were still reeling. I was new to the world of "SPN," but I knew it was something that would be important to me. I had never seen such a sudden, vivid, and pressing reaction to a narrative media event like I did with both the

confession scene and the finale. It *mattered*, so intensely. As silly as it sounds, at the end of 2020, I made a new year's resolution that I would work harder to further queer narratives in my own work to honor Castiel and Dean. I needed the reaction to their deaths to not just be a negative thing that sunk like a stone in the stomach-pits of viewers. I needed it to be a driving force that led to the creation of better things. Although I thought this commitment would realize itself in my creative work as a poet and fiction writer, I now know this dissertation arose out of my desire to make meaning from the death of Destiel. My hope is that this project helps others see the ways actor and fan discourse at conventions and online can be a powerful way of negotiating disappointment and the alleviating (or worsening) of it.

Before I began this project, I had not heard of the term "breach" (or if I had, did not remember it). I have experienced countless breaches in my life, both interpersonally and on a wider cultural level. The term has helped me better understand social phenomena and what is happening when people experience hurt, especially in marginalized communities. "Representation matters" is a common phrase when discussing the power of inclusion on screen, but it is typically used to laud the positives. The negatives, however, also matter, and deserve discussion. If positive representations can help LGBTQIA+ folks imagine better futures for ourselves, negative ones can cause us to fall back into queerphobic traps that limit our ability to imagine and realize better worlds for one another. The ways creators of these negative representations respond to them can either repair or further damage relationships with fans. On the other side, the ways fans articulate themselves, whether in social media posts or creative texts such as memes, show how LGBTQIA+ people and their allies can reject breach justifications and attempt to reclaim their own power in the dynamic.

Authenticity continues to be a fraught concept for me. I still, like most people, want to

"be" authentic, but working on this project revealed that it is, of course, a constructed, projected concept. While researching and writing, I hoped this project would feel honest and uncontrived. I worried about certain aspects, such as whether my analysis of Twitter users would suggest they were being insincere. I felt concern that I might have been too harsh on the actors, especially Jared Padalecki (who brought to life my favorite character, Sam) for how they navigated issues of queerness. I wanted this dissertation to be a life-giving project even through its critiques. I return to user @peterpantomime's desire to see queer characters live "authentic lives" (Fig. 20). I want this dissertation to be part of my authentic queer life, as much as I realize the project's language and approaches are linguistic claims for that authenticity. Ultimately, I hope my work matters. Like a fictional character we may want to see in stories, I hope I positively represent the communities in which I exist.

Twitter

For many people, Twitter is in its twilight, losing sponsors and users regularly. If so, why then did I choose to focus a whole chapter on it? Well, there is the practical reason that I chose my dissertation topic in May 2022 before Elon Musk's takeover of the company in fall of the same year. There is, however, a relevant reason—even if "X" goes the way of MySpace and LiveJournal in relevancy—or, worse, disappears entirely—for 15 years, it proved to be arguably the most important microblogging platform in the world. It affected change across the globe and allowed individuals, including young activists, to build communities and work collectively toward new futures. If and when it ends, it will leave a gaping hole in communication. For as long as possible, we should continue to study the affordances and impacts of Twitter so that if we must attempt to build a similar infrastructure on the websites Bluesky, Threads, or elsewhere, we understand what it is that we need from a new microblogging site. For this dissertation, fans

being able to connect with influential celebrities is an important way of enacting fandom, and one microblogging affords. Interacting with fellow viewers to build new languages and landscapes for fanhood must also be possible in microblogging frontiers.

Although I have offered a deep consideration of Misha Collins' tweets and fan responses, his actions at conventions and on Twitter are still compelling sites for exploration. At a Creation Entertainment convention in East Brunswick, New Jersey in April of 2022, Collins asked the audience "By a show of force, how many of you would consider yourself introverts? How many extroverts? And how many bisexuals?" (Kirkpatrick, 2022). He followed this up with "I'm all three." Many people in the *Supernatural* family believed this to be Collins, after years of advocacy for LGBTQIA+ communities, finally coming out as bisexual to fans. Not so, though. Collins took to Twitter soon after to apologize and explain his reasoning:

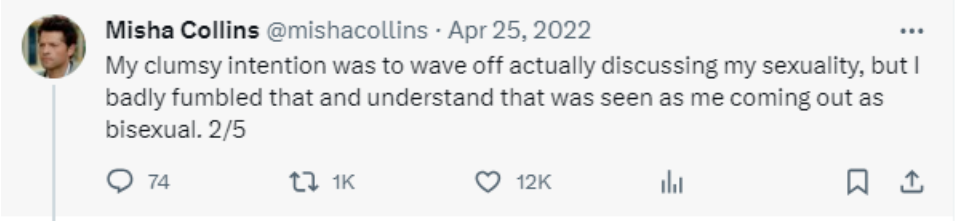

Figure 46. "My clumsy intention," shared by @mishacollins on X. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "My clumsy intention was to wave off actually discussing my sexuality, but I badly fumbled that and understand that was seen as me coming out as bisexual. 2/5"

He declared his actual heterosexuality in the following tweet:

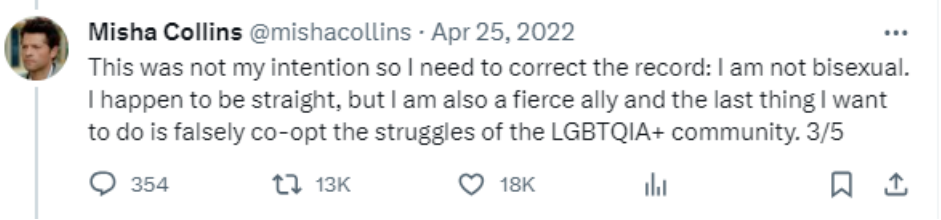

Figure 47. "This was not my intention," shared by @mishacollins on X. Fair use.

Image caption: A tweet by @mishacollins that says "This was not my intention so I need to correct the record: I am not bisexual. I happen to be straight, but I am also a fierce ally and the last thing I want to do is falsely co-opt the struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community. 3/5"

Although this was nearly a year and a half after the "rogue translator" video and thread, it shows that Collins continued to navigate what it means to do allyship with LGBTQIA+ communities during fan conventions *and* his online presence.

Memes

I am not a prolific creator of public memes, but I have made quite a few to share with my close friends, including a few *Supernatural* memes. They have allowed me to offer humorous critiques of culture, and zero in especially on issues I perceive with some of my favorite media texts. For instance, after the *Supernatural* finale was released, the showrunner Andrew Dabb shared his original plans for the finale had the COVID-19 pandemic not disrupted it. In the original finale, many of the main characters would meet at a roadhouse in heaven while the band Kansas (who wrote the show's anthem, "Carry On My Wayward Son") played on stage (Silverstein, 2021). Fans took to social media to mock this, claiming that the show would have to kill all the members of Kansas in order for this to happen.

Figure 48. "Dead Kansas," created by author.

Image caption: This meme features an image of Harvelle's Roadhouse from the show. The text "what if we kissed in front of dead kansas" appears in white. In the center is an image of the band Kansas with "RIP" drawn over it in purple. There is also an emoji of an angel and another emoji pressing its fingers together shyly.

"Dead Kansas" became a joke, and I made a meme (Fig. 48) of it to send to my best friend. I used the meme format "What if we kissed" which meme-makers typically use to draw attention to humorous and unusual locations or events. I used an image of the roadhouse featured in the first few seasons of the series and also a photograph of the band. I included an angel emoji as a nod to Castiel to denote him as the speaker asking Dean for a kiss. It also implies that he should be in heaven in this finale scenario, although Dabb himself did not mention specifically if he would be. My creation of this meme was an attempt first of all to make my best friend laugh, but also to critique what I (and others like me) found to be an absurdist "ideal" conclusion. Although I did not end up posting this on Tumblr, editing this meme helped me understand the processes by which meme-makers whose work I included in this dissertation went about their creation process.

Conventions

Although I have never attended one of Creation Entertainment's *Supernatural* conventions, I have been to the Tampa Bay Comic Convention on multiple occasions, and even met stars like Marvel Cinematic Universe's Charlie Cox, Doctor Who's Freema Agyeman, and *Star Trek: The Original Series* icon Nichelle Nichols herself. I sat in on many panels and listened to creatives discuss the filmmaking process, and back before her work with the #MeToo movement, I even walked up to the microphone to ask Rose McGowan about the state of Hollywood for women filmmakers. I may not have asked meaningful questions about queerness to any of the stars I interacted with, but I have witnessed in-person how conventions can build bridges between eager fans and the obliging objects of their fanaticism. In this dissertation, I hope I have demonstrated the ways fan conventions can become sites of engagement that create opportunities for new meanings to form.

At the end of the Online DarkLight Convention (Stephanie Earp, 2020), before the translator took over to summarize the conversation, Ruth Connell, Misha Collins, and Mark Sheppard offered up some final thoughts on the significance of Castiel's confession:

153	Connell:	I do—I do also want to say though on Thursday night I was uh
154		() watching—watching Misha and I—you moved me to tears () not only that it moved the entire fandom so that Destiel was trending
155		worldwide after Trump and Putin and like—what an amazing=
156	Collins:	=()=
157	Connell:	=()=
158	Collins:	Yeah, isn't that so crazy? It—there was—I mean—we were
159		like—like—Everybody is on tenterhooks waiting to find out the
160		results of this, you know, hotly-contested election and uh, and
161		then—and then all the sudden more people are talking about
162		Destiel than that. It was—it was—it's it's it's uh a strange commentary on our world.
163	Sheppard:	It actually goes back to the first that last question it goes back to
164		you know the idea that these themes and these ideas are so
165		inclusive and so important to so many people. They seem so
166		simple they seem so unimportant to maybe the outside—the rest of
167		the world—but to the *Supernatural* family these little things that
168		actually matter are surviving, getting through, and being
169		acknowledged—our differences, our difficulties, and everything
170		else. I mean, one way or the other, the election will take care of

171 itself. But my God, Destiel is forever.

Sheppard's mentioning of the election (line 170) references the fact that the confession scene episode aired on November 5th, when people were circulating many election memes, including ones about the possibility of Georgia going "blue" (reporting a majority of votes for the Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden and running mate Kamala Harris). Because The CW released "Despair" during the aftermath of the election, these two events have been closely linked by fans.

I of course draw the title of this dissertation from the above quote (line 171), as I believe it helps us understand the use of humor and irony to highlight the magnitude of importance the ship has for many in the *Supernatural* family and the wider circle of people surrounding/closely outside of it. To be sure, when Sheppard implies the canon confirmation of Castiel's queerness is somehow more important than the 2020 U.S. election, he is using hyperbole to make his point humorously. Yet, there is something to ponder in his words. Although certainly the results of the election have far-reaching and more high-risk impacts on not only the United States but the world as a whole (since the U.S. continues to have a large influence globally), I would argue the *discourse* around the election (news articles, memes, television coverage, etc.) has less enduring and cyclical meaning for *Supernatural* viewers than the discourse of the confession scene. Although I have not seen a meme or article about Georgia's voting results cross my social media feeds recently, I did just encounter a Castiel confession scene meme *this very morning* posted by a member of the *Supernatural* family I enjoy following on Twitter. Although very few people outside of perhaps academic researchers will pull up videos of Steve Kornacki's election analysis videos (despite his immediate virality at the time), there are old and new viewers of *Supernatural* who will (re)encounter the confession scene, most likely far into the future due to the series'

longevity, popularity, and spread, and thanks to its large community that still dominates internet fandom and fanfiction spaces. Those individuals will also reconstitute the event of Castiel's coming out. Memes and other internet discourse about Castiel's confession may continue into the future after many, many election cycles have played out, and "take[n] care of" themselves, as Sheppard jokingly states (lines 170-171). Again, I do not wish to downplay the importance of U.S. politics or the election results, but only to argue that the ephemerality around the election's internet viral discourse just might prove to be less long-lived and widely-reproduced than that of Castiel's queerness.

Indeed, as long as *Supernatural* exists, whether through physical DVDs or digital releases/streaming, Destiel (and its discourses) will exist. If access to *Supernatural* magically disappeared, as long as fanfiction sites and social media exist, Destiel will exist still. Even if somehow all those things were magically wiped away, prior *Supernatural* fans would still exist, discoursing about the "beforetimes" when they could watch the show and post about it. And, one may ask, what about after those folks, steeped in their apocalyptic, theoretical world, have died? They will have written down their fanfiction in hard-copies like the old days, pre-internet. They will have shared it, archived it, kept it safe. And they will have told their children, and their friends' children, about Castiel's "I love you"—about the queer angel that saved his family who saved the world. Call me cheesy, but Castiel's love for Dean did not just change the universe of *Supernatural*. It changed ours forever as well.

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Appendix A: Transcription Symbols

( ) – unclear dialogue

(( )) – non verbal actions

= latched utterance , or an utterance that follows right after another

– a false start, or speaker disfluency

Appendix B: Fair Use Statements

INSTRUCTIONS

Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

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Class or Project: Dissertation - "Destiel is Forever"

Title of Copyrighted Work: Tweets

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CONCLUSION

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from: https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

LeEtta Schmidt, lmschmidt@usf.edu and Drew Smith dsmith@usf.edu

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Title of Copyrighted Work: Memes

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from: https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf

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Class or Project: Dissertation - "Destiel is Forever"

Title of Copyrighted Work: "Dead Kansas" Meme

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NATURE OF THE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

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Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from: https://d396qusza40orc.cloudfront.net/cfel/Reading%20Docs/A%20Framework%20for%20Analyzing%20any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf