

VENI, VIDI, VIDS: TRANSFORMING CULTURAL NARRATIVES THROUGH THE ART  
OF AUDIOVISUAL STORYTELLING

by

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A Dissertation  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology  
in the Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
August 2015

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

KRISTI BROWNFIELD, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in SOCIOLOGY, presented on JUNE 26<sup>th</sup> 2015, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: VENI, VIDI, VIDS: TRANSFORMING CULTURAL NARRATIVES THROUGH THE ART OF AUDIO VISUAL STORYTELLING

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Rachel Whaley

The focus of this research is “fanvids” which are the creative work of fans that combine clips or images from a visual “canon” source (usually a television series or movie) to music to create an alternative narrative. By using qualitative content analysis methods, I sampled from the television show *Supernatural* and the 2009 film *Star Trek* to understand the ways diverse characters were presented and what types of cultural narratives existed. Then I sampled from seven different vidding communities, collecting a total of 105 vids and 6509 comments on those vids as the second part of my sample. Then drawing on the sociological subfields of social psychology, gender, cultural studies, as well as the broader literatures of media and film studies, I analyzed both the data from canons and fanvids. My analysis centered on the following research questions: a) What are the cultural narratives present in the canon sources and how are those narratives rejected, accepted, replaced, or otherwise transformed within fanvids? (b) How do the narratives present within the canon source and within the vids reflect the ideologies and spirit of the culture that produces those narratives? (c) Are these vids and discussions a sign of potential change in cultural ideologies and narratives and, if so, what change is taking place? My findings within the two canons include an emphasis on a masculinity that maintains control through violence and aggression; in contrast vids reject this type of masculinity and the larger cultural narratives that support it, except when that violent masculinity is sexualized in the context of homosexual relationships. Further, vids predominantly reject the heteronormativity

found in both *Supernatural* and *Star Trek* in favor of presenting queer relationships. Within this dissertation, I have used the transformation from canon to fandom as a narrative proxy for cultural change. The differences and similarities between canon and vid point to deficiencies both in narrative and in representation in the media we are producing in the U.S. as well as narratives that are stable and enduring, so much so that fans add them even when they are not present in canon. These are the stories our culture, right now, is built on; essentially, these are the narratives that are part of the cultural ideologies that reflect hopes, dreams, beliefs, and ideologies of the people within our society.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I need to thank Dr. Rachel Whaley for her phenomenal mentorship and willingness to pick up as my dissertation chair in the middle of this project. I am constantly amazed by how hard she works on behalf of the grad students within the Sociology department and this research never would have been completed without her support, guidance, and hard work. I also owe a debt to Dr. Jennifer Dunn, who guided me through my Master's thesis, encouraged me to try this research project in the first place, and then was willing to hold me back when I was about to jump into the original over-ambitious version of this research. My dissertation committee, Dr. Jyostna Kapur, Dr. J.P. Reed, Dr. Aaron Veenstra, Dr. Chris Wienke, and their willingness to read such a lengthy dissertation in a time frame that works for me also deserve a hearty round of applause. I also thank the SIUC's Sociology Department for their support and willingness to take a chance on me all those years ago. Several people were willing to listen to me outline, explain, edit, or even gripe about this research that deserve a thousand thanks including (in no particular order): Kate Niman, Cathy Gould, Justin Martin, Priya M., Andrea H., Amanda, Meagan, Renee, Aja, Tracy O., May, Steph, Sam, Otter, Felicity, Wolfbad, Karen, Keri, and Imakegoodlifechoices (who also gave me great insight to what working in the film and television industry is like for crew). Lastly, this dissertation (and graduate school more generally) would never have been something I would have conceived of doing without the examples and support of my amazing grandparents, Dr. Edith Terwilliger and Dr. John Terwilliger. I am who I am because of their influence, advice, and teaching.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
CHAPTERS	
CHAPTER 1 – Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 2 – Fans, Fandoms, and Fanworks .....	11
CHAPTER 3 – Methods .....	40
CHAPTER 4 – Supernatural Canon .....	52
CHAPTER 5 – Supernatural Vids .....	92
CHAPTER 6 – Star Trek Canon.....	140
CHAPTER 7 – Star Trek Vids.....	172
CHAPTER 8 – Conclusion.....	221
REFERENCES .....	270
APPENDICES	
Appendix A – Supernatural Canon Summary .....	300
Appendix B – Star Trek Canon Summary .....	308
VITA .....	314

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Table 5.1 .....	94
Table 5.2.....	94
Table 7.1 .....	174
Table 7.2.....	174

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

I like to say “I’m all about the story.” I love seeing the way the scene is set, how the characters develop, and how the plot unfolds. This research, then, is also all about “the story” of fan videos (“fanvids” or “vids”). Fan videos are a well-established form of fan creation and have been since the 1970s when Kandy Fong created the first Star Trek video by putting a slide show to music (Jenkins 2006a). Thirty years later, the technology and techniques of fanvids have improved and evolved though the basic premise of what a fan video is has not changed: images from a medium such as a movie or television show (a “canon”) set to some sort of music. Fanvids are created for a variety of reasons, from celebrating a character or a relationship the creator enjoys to making a commentary on the issues within the canon. The presentations shown within the fanvids are always skewed toward the “reading” of a canon made by the video creator (“vidder”) and because of the skew many vidders reflect or intentionally reject cultural values and images of race, class and gender. All of these “fanworks” are examples of participatory culture and represent an important shift in the way consumers – and the “fanworkers” among them -- navigate cultural objects, and the ways in which a mediated existence online is changing the ways we come to understand and negotiate meanings.

Within this research I explored meaning-making and story-telling within fanvids and in online fan communities. I want to explore narrative and representation, or the portrayal of someone or something in a way to suggest those persons or things are of a certain nature. Representation is what gives us as consumers the opportunity to see ourselves within the media we consume. I want to explore the ways in which both narrative and representation change through the process of creating a vid, first from the interaction between consumer (e.g., “fan”)



and cultural object (e.g., movie or television show), second through the interaction of consumer (e.g., vidder), cultural object, and consumer creation (e.g., vid), and then finally, through the interaction between consumers surrounding a vid. This is a project that explores where stories come from, how stories are told, and how stories are changed in the telling. In this chapter, I will begin by explaining my research questions.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

I explore the dialectic that happens between fans and the stories they tell about themselves and their works; I want to learn more about the stories that fans feel connected to and the cultural narratives (e.g., Swidler 1986) and formula stories (e.g., Loseke 2001; Loseke 2007) they draw on to produce their own work. Within these stories are embedded cultural narratives that simultaneously educate us about cultural norms and provide the bedrock of connection with fans. McAdams argues that “storytelling may be *the* way through which human beings make sense of their own lives and the lives of others” (1995:207, emphasis in original). For example, the formula story of love is usually: boy meets girl (because these stories are almost exclusively heterosexual), boy and girl run into problems (relationship, economic, political, or physical), boy and girl overcome obstacles and live happily ever after. That story reinforces all the other cultural narratives about “love” we are exposed to and reaffirms our own place and identity (Dimaggio 1997; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Loseke 2007) within the culture as “insiders” who have successfully navigated this process or “outsiders” who have not. Still, these stories and cultural narratives are not the end of the “story,” so to speak. Audiences are not just passive receptors for mass mediated messages that control cultural ideologies. In contrast, many audiences are not *just* audiences. A large number of people are becoming *producers* as well. One particular form of production is the fanvid.

This has forced a paradigm shift on both sides of the creative divide; for content consumers and content producers, the production model is no longer one-to-many (e.g., one producer broadcasting to many passive consumers) but has transformed media entertainment to a many-to-many production model as exemplified by YouTube. Content production is now a dialogue between content producers and content consumers *and* a dialogue within different groups of content consumers. The internet allows for a true cultural shift within and between groups; sites such as YouTube are not just about broadcasting messages – they are about broadcasting *selves* (Burgess and Green 2009). As McLuhan (1994) would say, the medium has become the message and the message, in the case of the internet, is one created through an interaction with the media that surrounds us. The internet and computer technology is not only changing the way we interact with each other and the media we consume. Within this continuous process of consumption and production that vidders are involved in is a changing process of understanding and interpretation. How we come to understand the narratives and stories being told changes throughout the process of creation. The “narrative practices” taking place within this context includes “simultaneously the activities of storytelling, the resources used to tell stories, and the auspices under which stories are told” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998:164). Vidders take a cultural object with one meaning and reshape the images and text to create a completely new meaning. Those vids are then shared with larger fan communities who again transform the meanings as vid consumers negotiate the narrative that is being given within the vid and the narrative as they understand it from the canon. Essentially the “narrative practices” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998) within fan communities included the visual and aural experiences of storytelling (i.e., vids), the online platforms used to deliver content, and the context and expectation that the vids will remain with other *fans*.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To further investigate the way narrative changes and the process that changes it, I ask the following research questions: a) What are the cultural narratives present in the canon sources and how are those narratives rejected, accepted, replaced, or otherwise transformed within fanvids? (b) How do the narratives present within the canon source and within the vids reflect the ideologies and spirit of the culture that produces those narratives? Essentially, this question is asking how media canons and vids reflect the cultures that produce them. (c) Are these vids and discussions a sign of potential change in cultural ideologies and narratives and, if so, what change is taking place?

There are several levels of stories, all of which are interlinked. There are national stories, also called cultural narratives or metanarratives (e.g., Loseke 2007; Spillman 2002). These stories provide the frame and the background for the stories produced within media (Becker 1982; Crane 1992). Then, there are the rearticulated stories that are told about those media by consumers. For vidders, this “talk” becomes an entirely new narrative product in the form of a vid. Then, at the fourth level, is the talk about the talk about the story; that is, commentary and discussion and stories told about vids, called “meta” within fan communities. However, for vidders, the narrative begins with the canon. This is something of an arbitrary starting point because canons are influenced by metanarratives (Loseke 2007; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011), by content producers influenced by both those metanarratives and other media (Griswold 1987b; Griswold 1992) prior to even reaching the consumer who will eventually become a fan. What I am looking at is multilevel storytelling interactions that form a perpetual and interconnected process of creation. Griswold (1994) suggests that cultural production can be seen as a diamond. Creators and receivers are on opposite points of the diamond as are the social

world/culture and cultural object. I argue that Griswold's cultural diamond (1994) is actually an insufficient model because the diamond does not allow for true fluidity of roles, even as it does allow for interactions between producers/creators and consumers/receivers. What is happening within fan communities is almost an overlapping and connected second diamond as consumers/receivers, in turn, become producers/creators. It is the overlap between the two diamonds that helps to create the levels of narrative practice (Gubrium and Holstein 1998) around a canon I am interested in understanding. I am interested in the negotiated storytelling process that begins at the metanarrative level, is diffused into the cultural product of a canon, is rearticulated by a receiver/consumer into the form of a vid, and then is finally diffused and discussed within all three contextual levels of other consumers/receivers.

When I describe the canon as the "entry point" for a fan, I do so for two reasons; first, it is the canon that invites retelling into the vid (Barthes [1970] 1975) and secondly because this is the point within the narrative diffusion that the transformation between receiver and producer happens. This is the point where the receivers seize control over the story the canon tells. I use the term "canon" deliberately; it is borrowed from literary theory and used regularly within fandom. Within literary theory the "canon" is the books, music, and artwork that have been most influential in shaping (usually Western) culture. This holds true for fandom, an amalgam of the words "fan" and "kingdom" and used to denote spaces where fans of a particular source gather, as well. Canons within literary theory are contested terrain, particularly in terms of who is included (e.g., women or people of color) and who decides what is considered part of a canon (e.g., Gates Jr. 1988). This same debate exists within fandoms surrounding what is considered

part of a canon. For example, within a subset of the Harry Potter<sup>1</sup> fandom, “canon” may consist of the seven original books. Within another subset, “canon” may actually consist of the eight movies and not the books (there are vast differences between the two narratives). Another subset of fans may consider the “canon” the books, the movies, and information posted on Rowling’s official website. This is one of the first interpretations that are made within the process of meaning-making; fans must *distinguish which pieces of stories they are willing to accept*. This first step of interpretation is both an individual and a communal one. A fan may choose what pieces of a canon she prefers, but those choices may also be influenced by the others she is in contact with. If she has friends who despise the movies, that fan may prefer to ignore the stories that the Harry Potter movies tell and look only to the books.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Once what constitutes the “canon” is decided by (or perhaps for) the fan, then she makes meaning out of the narrative within the canon she has chosen. Hall (2001) characterizes media consumers as three different types: passive, negotiated, and rejecting. Passive consumers are those who do not analyze the narratives, rhetoric or themes shown in the media they consume. They accept the dominant values presented therein, agree with those values, and often reproduce those values within their “normal” lives. Negotiated consumers are those who find the values shown within a media source do not apply completely to their own lives, so they pick and choose what they will believe and follow within a canon. The final type is those fans that reject the values of a canon and prefer to insert their own; for example, the rejecting fan is where queer

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Potter is the main character of a series of novels originally written by J.K. Rowling and eventually spawned a multimedia franchise including the books, several movies, toys, games, and even academic conferences.

readings of texts often come from. This transformation from “canon” to “fanvid” is where we can begin to understand changing cultural narratives, ideologies, and values.

The fan then communicates with others. Perhaps the communication takes place between friends, families, coworkers, or even online. This interaction has the potential to change the interpretations that the fan makes of the canon. A fan worker, however, will take this interaction one step further. A fan worker is someone who creates a cultural object based on a canon; this cultural object can be fiction (“fanfiction” or “fic”), art (“fanart”), music (“filks”), video, and many other varieties of creative works. Each of these creative works is an attempt to reconstruct the story of the canon in a new, more personal way; in essence, fanworkers are negotiating the meanings associated with the work they love. This negotiation takes place in many different ways. Fans re-imagine characters, such as giving the misanthropic doctor a heart of gold. They recast relationships, positing that the ladies’ man might settle down if he gave up ladies and looked at his male best friend as a romantic partner instead. Fans even completely create alternate worlds for the characters to exist in, such as turning the members of a popular band into high school students. Each of these transformations creates an entirely new narrative within the canon. This new narrative is a reflection of the values, ideologies, and beliefs of the cultures and subcultures the fan is engrossed in. Then, a fan worker within a fan community connects to other fans by sharing their work. At its basic level, this interaction is about sharing an individually held meaning (e.g., the new, reworked narrative) with a larger group who share the same love and are assumed to hold similar (or the same) interpretations of the canon as the fanworker does. Of course, this assumption could be either relatively “true to canon” – particularly if the fanwork is being shared in a particularly focused community (e.g., a community devoted to a particular romantic pairing) – or relatively “false.”

Regardless of the closeness of the interpretation, the interactions between fans surrounding that fanwork will always be a negotiation of meaning and interpretation – a negotiation of how the story is read. I am interested in learning about both the process of interpretation and negotiation that takes place within those fan communities and the resulting narratives, particularly in terms of how images of women and people of color are presented. For example, there are two famous vids: *Women's Work (Violet)* by Luminosity and Sisabet<sup>2</sup> and *Origin Stories* by Gianjudakiss<sup>3</sup>. In an unpublished content analysis, I examined these two vids (Brownfield 2011). *Women's Work (Violet)* is from the *Supernatural* (SPN) fandom and *Origin Stories* is from the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (BtVS)/*Angel: the Series* (AtS) fandoms. BtVS, for example, is seen as a “feminist” show due to its use of a (white) female protagonist, Buffy, who fights demons, vampires, and other monsters. However, despite the feminist aspect of presenting strong (white) female characters, the few women of color that were shown as characters were only given small parts and were often killed. It was not until the last season of BtVS that a (male) character of color was given a main role. Gianjudakiss picked up on this underlying narrative about race and capitalized on it in her vid critique of the canon and fans’ response to the canon. *Women's Work (Violet)* is a critique of a canon that is extremely masculine; *Supernatural* is an urban fantasy television show that tells the story of Sam and Dean Winchester, two brothers who travel around the United States hunting ghosts, monsters, and other paranormal figures. Due to the nature of the show (e.g., men as heroes, which require opposite sex/heterosexual pairings), most of the weekly “victims” who are targeted by the paranormal creatures the Winchesters fight are women. This feminization of victimhood is part of what *Women's Work (Violet)* critiques

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<sup>2</sup> *Women's Work (Violet)* is available to view online at: <http://sockkpuppett.livejournal.com/442093.html>

<sup>3</sup> *Origin Stories* is available to view online at: <http://giandujakiss.livejournal.com/360051.html>

within the canon source. Both vids, however, pick up on larger cultural critiques about femininity and the place of women of color within society.

Both vids are critiques of the narratives about women within those two shows. Women's Work (Violet) reemphasizes the narratives surrounding women as only being victims or villains within SPN. Origin Stories details the acts of violence against *women of color* within the BtVS and AtS canon, often by the male leads. Women's Work (Violet) gained widespread popularity, including Luminosity being featured in a New York Magazine article where she talks about the vid (Hill 2007). Origin Stories, on the other hand, created and published in 2008, premiered to controversy and sparked a fandom-wide debate about the marginalization of characters of color within canons *and* the marginalization of the narratives of people/characters of color within fandom. Where Women's Work (Violet) received almost universal praise for its critique of misogyny within SPN, Origin Stories' critique of canon and fan appropriation of the narratives of characters of color received as much criticism as it did praise. This difference raises the question why was one narrative (Women's Work) more palatable for fans than the other (Origin Stories), despite the remarkable similarity? What happened in the process of interpretation and meaning making within fan communities that prompted two wildly different reactions to similar counter-narratives?

## DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION

To better understand this process and how it happens, the first step is to have a better understanding of fans and fan communities. In chapter two, I will introduce fan communities, including the participant composition, terminology, and generally accepted practices. I will follow this with a review of past literature on fans, fan communities, meaning-making, and interpretative processes. In chapter three, I explain my sample, my methods, and how those



methods will yield information about the way we contextualize and understand stories and make meanings within a mediated environment. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of why I believe this research is important and how it will contribute to the field of sociology more generally and the subfields of social psychology, cultural studies, and gender more specifically. Chapter four will move onto the analysis of my first canon, *Supernatural* (SPN), and in chapter five I examine SPN vids. Chapters six and seven will follow the same format, with chapter six looking at *Star Trek* (ST) canon and chapter seven looking at ST vids. Then, in chapter eight, I will offer conclusions by highlighting the results from previous chapters, attempting to put those results into a larger context of cultural beliefs and ideologies, and ending with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this research and how those both could provide ground for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FANS, FANDOMS, AND FANWORKS

The word "fan," coming from the root word "fanatic," actually originated due to sports fans. The term "fan" emerged in America in 1889 and was used in newspaper reporting about baseball games (Dickson 2009). Some of the earliest news reports using the term "fan" were disparaging ones, describing bad behavior: "The Sporting News (Nov. 2, 1889) noted that 'the fan' has a mouth and a tongue' and that every town is 'afflicted' with such fans" (Dickson 2009:309). At the time, sports -- baseball in particular -- were the exclusive domain of men (Kimmel 1990). So while the scholarship on fans certainly did not exist at the time, the very conception of what "fan" meant was already gendered.

While sports is perhaps the most well-established fandom, they are hardly the only subject about which people can be "fannish," or the feeling of and acting like being a fan. Books and literature, movies, music, games (i.e., card, table-top role-playing, video, computer), and people (i.e., celebrities) are all examples of the "modern" ways to be fannish. Even academics are prone to fannish behavior, as McKee (2007) points out in his tongue-in-cheek send-up of academic theory fans.

Where fan studies, in its most liberal definition, began with sports and the study of sports fans, fan studies as a true research field really began in the 1980s and it focused on women. Female fans, unlike the deviant hooligans men were portrayed as, were sexualized as part of the screaming masses overcome by a celebrity. The classical image of a female fan is the screaming girls and women greeting the Beatles as they exit an airplane. Becoming a fan, for women, had nothing to do with being "obsessed" with a media object or activity, women were constructed as being obsessed with *people*, particularly men. Within this construction, we can see an obvious

heteronormative framing of women, women's bodies, and women's desire. Early writings on female fans described the phenomenon as a pathological one (Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1992; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007b; Jensen 2001; Meyer and Tucker 2007). These typifications set the stage for the academic studies of fans.

Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2007b) categorize the different trends in academic conceptions of fans with three waves. The first wave was an attempt to shift the construction of fans as valuable rather than simply deviants (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007b:3). This wave involves the beginnings of the realization that women are fans and women, as fans, also create; this became a ground-breaking realization and much of the first wave research was actually on women. The second wave of fan studies highlights the consumptive aspect of fan activities and how the choices of cultural objects by fans are merely reflections of their "social, cultural, and economic capital" (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007b:6). Recent research into fans has started to look explicitly at the popular discourse happening within the fan communities and of fans themselves. Instead of seeing portrayals of fans as part of an othering process, more recent research (and media portrayals) shows fandom as part of everyday life. This trend in research is the third wave of fan studies (Gray et al. 2007b). The constructions of male and female fans I have briefly described were the settings for the beginning of the first wave of fan studies research. In response to the largely negative portrayals of fans, academic researchers often went the entirely opposite direction. Gray et al. call the first wave of fan studies the "Fandom Is Beautiful" wave (2007b:3).

#### FIRST WAVE: FANDOM IS BEAUTIFUL

Three key scholars make up the beginning of the first wave of fan studies, starting with Camille Bacon-Smith and Henry Jenkins. Bacon-Smith and Jenkins not only provided the

foundational work of the field that eventually became fan studies, but also began a debate that runs through the field even today. While both used ethnography and participant observation (and other qualitative methods) in their research, the positioning of the two scholars in their presentations were vastly different. Bacon-Smith (1992) positions herself as an outsider looking in at fandom, following the more traditional positivistic model of research. Jenkins (1992), on the other hand, situates himself as a *fan* writing, a positioning he later termed as “an Aca/Fan -- that is, a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic” (Jenkins 2006b). This dualistic framing of the position of an academic mirrors the positioning of fans within a evaluative dualism of “‘good fandom’ versus ‘bad’ consumption” (Hills 2002:30) where even within the academic texts on fans and fandoms, there was a strong drive to position fans as “different” or “better” from “common consumers.” This heavily and negatively implied that the conception of being a “consumer” was synonymous with the idea of a “cultural dupe,” or someone passively accepting of the capitalistically produced culture industry that encourages the “dupe” to simply consume and buy more (Horkheimer and Adorno [1987] 2002). The topics each scholar chooses to address changes due to the methodological positioning the scholar assigns themselves. Jenkins (1992), self-defining as a fan, wrote expansively about several different topics and forums within fan communities, from the “Get a life!” response from the “mainstream” to mass media fans, fanfiction, slash fanfiction (fanfiction featuring a relationship between homosexual characters), fanvids, and filks. He makes claims about fans and fandom from his ethnographic research *as well as* his own experience as a fan in an attempt to challenge the dismissal of fans “as atypical of the media audience because of their activity and resistance” (Jenkins 1992:287).

Bacon-Smith (1992) has a much narrower focus. Rather than doing a survey of the fan community at large, she explored female fanfiction communities centered on mostly Star Trek

but also other television-based fandoms. As Jenkins (1992) makes the deliberate choice to place himself as a fan that happens to do research, Bacon-Smith's (1992) more traditional positioning has the unintended side effect of marking fans as the other. Her very first statements about fandom talk about how, as an ethnographer, she wanted "jump up and down and scream 'Look what I found! A conceptual space where women can come together and create...in which each may take freedom of expression into her own hands, wherever she is, whatever else she is doing!'" (Bacon-Smith 1992:3). She contrasts this feeling with the "colder mind" that notes her participants are "subversive" and committing acts "under the very noses of husbands and bosses who *would not approve*, and children *who should not be exposed* to such blatant acts of civil disobedience" (Bacon-Smith 1992:3, emphasis in the original). Her juxtaposition of women, even at the beginning of her text, is to place them as not *just* deviant actors, but deviant actors rebelling against the standards set by the patriarchal system in which husbands and male bosses have more power.

The first wave of fan studies also saw the rise of scholarship on the subgenre of fanfiction called slash. Slash refers to narratives that portray homosexual relationships, usually between two men, though the terminology is also applied within fandom to lesbian and bisexual relationships. Both Jenkins (1992; Jenkins, Jenkins, and Green 1998) and Bacon-Smith (1992) deal with slash in their early works, though it was Constance Penley's (1991; 1992; 1997) work that popularized slash as a form of study until now the genre is arguably the most researched aspect of fan studies today. Penley (1991; 1992; 1997), building on the work of Joanna Russ, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith (1985b), is best known for her "equality" model of slash fanfiction. She presents slash as a subversive space where women use male characters to enact a heterosexual fantasy without the attendant power dynamics that create inequality between

men and women in a patriarchal society. Since the characters are both *men*, Penley (1991; 1992; 1997) believes women are writing narratives without power imbalances between characters. Fans have criticized the “equality theory,” calling it flawed (Tosenberger 2007). Rather than writing relationships without heterosexual patriarchal power dynamics, fans claim that slash stories actually reproduce patriarchy and show little understanding of masculinity, of gay male sex, or of the male body. I believe slash becomes a form of the “female gaze,” a parallel to the “male gaze,” (Mulvey 1975) in which writers use the stories to reproduce sexual inequalities by fetishizing another minority group and calling the stories progressive rather than heteronormative.

Much of this research was based on fan communities in flux while communities moved from in-person and through-mail practices to an internet-centered community, particularly in terms of fanfiction distribution. The traditional outlet for fanfic, prior to the internet boom, was through face-to-face interaction: “fan clubs formed, and fans wrote newsletters, zines, and APAs (“amateur press association” add-on circuit newsletters) and got together at conventions” (Busse and Hellekson 2006:13). Fanfic was transmitted from person to person and was only available to people who were connected to the gatekeepers (e.g., newsletter producers). You had to be “in the know” to get fanfiction or fanart. This creates a very hierarchical structure in which the owners of modes of production are afforded the most social capital within the fan community. Fanzines, the generic fandom term for fan-produced newsletters, were printed by one or two women who had total editorial control of what went into those fanzines as well as the distribution type (i.e., convention only, mailing list, etc.). Jenkins points out that “some fanzine stories and novels, such as the writing of Jean Lorrah, Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Leslie Fish, and Alexis Fagin Black, have remained in print since the late 1960s while others continue to circulate in mangled second-hand

editions or faded photocopies” (1992:49). The relative value of physical fanzines made them hot commodities and a fan’s access to them depended on their access to producers. Fanvids were a special category due to the cost of presentation (e.g., the use of projectors for slide shows) and were almost shown exclusively at conventions, furthering their rarity.

In the 1990s, with the internet boom, these dynamics began changing. Bulletin board systems (BBS), Usenet groups, Listserv, and other online communities meant that fanfiction (and other fanworks) were available more freely. The power no longer rested with fanzine producers and rather with internet moderators (“mods”), particularly in exclusive communities. Mods had control of the community profiles and ease in which a fan could join and the levels of involvement a fan might have. For example, a highly exclusive community might have an invitation-only membership (similar to the level of control a fanzine producer has). A “moderated” community may allow anyone to join, but only certain users to post. The same diversification and widening availability happened with fanvids that happened with fanfiction. Now a generic search on YouTube for the keyword “fanvid” garners over 50,000 results.

Compared to fanfiction, however, fanvids are still relatively rare, albeit a growing part of fan communities. Where one site, fanfiction.net, houses over one million pieces of fanfiction, there is still no centralized fanvid archive. The scarcity of vids compared to other fanworks, the lack of central access to vids, and the technical skills required to create a vid often situates vidders as people who have obtained high-ranking positions within a deviant subculture.. Communities are often hosted on journaling sites such as Livejournal<sup>4</sup> (LJ) and its clones<sup>5</sup>, or

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<sup>4</sup> Livejournal.com is a social journaling site orientated around communities. It functions much in the same way as other social journaling sites such as MySpace or Facebook, only the emphasis is much more on the text of the entries.

<sup>5</sup> The code used to create Livejournal is open source. Others have taken the code and used it to create “clones” of Livejournal that function in the same ways.

through older BBS and mailing lists, though from the late 2000s YouTube seems to be more the archive of choice for vidders. The ease of use of communities and the open access nature has increased not only the amount of fan participation but also its visibility; “more importantly, however, LJ has splintered fandom into nearly innumerable factions” allowing for a great diversity in community types and functions (Busse and Hellekson 2006:15). If one were to spend enough time looking, a fan could potentially find a community that caters to every type of character or narrative they prefer – especially if the narrative is a romantic one.

Of course, to be successful in their search, a fan would have to know where and how to search, particularly when looking for vids (as a more rare commodity compared to other types of fanworks). Understanding the subcultural lingo of fans helps to understand the organization of communities. Essentially, there are two types of fan communities; the first type I will call “generic” and the second “specific.” Generic communities are communities that are devoted to a fandom or canon at large. The mailing list that emerged in 2000, Harry Potter for Grown-Ups (HPFGU)<sup>6</sup>, is an example of a “generic” community. The focus of the list is “a friendly, thought-provoking place for adult discussions of the HP books” (HPFGU 2000). The focus of the group is discussing the Harry Potter world as a whole. “Specific” communities are ones that are devoted to a subset of a canon, usually a character or a (romantic) relationship. Communities such as “kirkspock”<sup>7</sup> are devoted to a very specific piece of the canon and are for fans not only of the Star Trek (ST) canon but of the relationship between Kirk and Spock more specifically.

For fanworks, there is also argot used, rising out of fanfiction communities but is often applied to other types of fanworks as well (e.g., fanart, fanvids, etc.). In literary terms, a “genre” often involves an explanation of narrative type, such as “adventure” or “romance” or “science

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<sup>6</sup> HPFGU’s mailing list page can be found: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HPforGrownups/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://community.livejournal.com/kirkspock/>



fiction.” In fandom, genre has two meanings. The first meaning is the more familiar one, involving narrative types. The second meaning for “genre” involves the level of romantic relationships, often called a “pairing” or “ship,” portrayed in the writing, as well as what type. “Gen,” short for “general,” fanworks are ones in which there is no primary romantic relationship shown between two characters. “Het,” short for “heterosexual,” are works in which the primary relationship is a heterosexual one. “Slash” is used to describe works that include a homosexual pairing (usually only in Western media fandoms; Eastern media fandoms, such as anime and manga fandoms, often use their own terminology). The term originates from the Star Trek fandom when writers would abbreviate “Kirk/Spock” (read as “Kirk-slash-Spock”) to just slash (Jenkins 1992; Jenkins, Jenkins, and Green 1998; Penley 1991; Penley 1992; Woledge 2005). Slash as a genre encompasses stories that include both gay and lesbian relationships, though is primarily used to describe male homosexual pairings. Fem(me)slash is often used to describe stories with female lesbian pairings. While not always true, stories that are labeled slash, het, or fem(me)slash are ones in which the primary focus of the work centers on the romantic relationship. Works also focus on specific characters, often called “character studies,” though the portrayal of a relationship is likely the primary focus used to categorize and organize fanworks.

This organization around relationships also helps to organize how fans are defined and define themselves. Harris (1998b) makes the argument that the term “fan” itself is meaningless as it is applied to anyone who likes something. Anyone, in essence, can be a “fan.” Instead, I find it more helpful to imagine the idea of a “fan” along a spectrum of intensity and involvement. The level of “fannishness” varies, from someone who considers themselves to just “be a fan” to someone who literally makes their life about their fandom (e.g., professional collectors, fans who turn their ‘obsession’ into jobs, etc.). Brooker describes two types of fans along this spectrum as

“gushers” and fans who are accused of uncritically accepting the canon as text and “bashers,” who are thought to be overly harsh (2002). Gray (2003) notes, however, that disgruntled fans must be distinguished from true “anti-fans.” Gray (2003) uses the term “anti-fan” to describe people who approach canons in negative ways (e.g., irritated, uninterested, etc.), sometimes even before seeing the canon. A disgruntled fan is someone who hates an episode, an era, or a producer because they perceive those periods as violations against the canon text. This type of fan is still a fan – they often continue to follow the show, despite discomfort or irritation with the source – and they find ways to compartmentalize those negative emotions so they do not interfere with the larger enjoyment of the canon source (Gray 2003).

However, this is a hierarchical organization; not all fans are created equal, both in the eyes of the “mainstream” and within the fan subcultures themselves. Brunching Shuttlecocks, a humor website that ran from 1997 to 2003, even created a chart detailing the Geek Hierarchy<sup>8</sup> that tracks many different types of fans (which spawned several imitators within other fields). Where a hierarchy exists within fan culture, a hierarchy also exists within communities devoted to fanworks, often organized around the relative “value” of the works produced. People who produce “high value” works (e.g., popular fanfic, fanvids, fanart, etc.) fall into a special category of “Big Name Fan,” or BNF for short (Busse and Hellekson 2006). BNFs are the “celebrities” of fandom, complete with the fan equivalent of gossip magazines<sup>9</sup>. Vidders, as they produce a relatively rare and hard to accomplish product, have an easier time achieving the status of “BNF” than a “regular” fan. This is not to say that being a vidder automatically means that someone will

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<sup>8</sup> <http://brunching.com/geekhierarchy.html>

<sup>9</sup> Fandom Wank began as a small community on LJ devoted to mocking “silly people” – usually BNFs – within fandoms. The community was simultaneously incredibly popular and incredibly contentious until LJ finally deleted it for violating the terms of service. The community moved to a different journaling service and continues to thrive. Fandom Wank can be found at: [http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom\\_wank/](http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/)

be a BNF as the quality of the vid produced also has a large effect on status and hierarchy, but that being a vidder means the pathway to popularity is likely quicker than someone who is just a “lurker,” or simply reads posts and consumes fanworks but produces nothing of their own (though arguably a lurker may not be interested in popularity in the same way a fanworker who seeks to share their work would).

It was this changing environment within fan communities – and the academic realization of their importance – that gave rise to the second wave of fan studies. The second wave of fan studies moved away from interrogating fan-created narratives to a paradigm centered on consumption. Unlike the first wave of fan studies where the primary research participants were women, the second wave of fan studies generally *had* no research participants. The consumption models were almost all theoretical with very little testing or even discussion with fans about their habits. Even Hills’s Fan Cultures (2002), a fairly comprehensive collection of academic discourses on fans, renders the fan invisible; there is not a single quotation from a fan in the book until the conclusion. The theories give the general impression of fan studies as academics talking to *each other* with the input of fans limited to being examples of behaviors that can only be explained in the academic realm (see Dell 1998; Harris 1998a; Jancovich 2002).

## SECOND WAVE: LOST IN TEXTLATION

The shift from exploring fan communities and fans themselves to exploring how fans consume indicates a growing concern for and with the metanarratives embedded in the media fans are absorbing. This is, essentially, a reflection of the debate surrounding the conceptions of consumers as active versus passive consumers in how they react to cultural narratives. Williams (1995) points out that the word “cultural” is troublesome due to its several meanings. He distinguishes between two “kinds” of definitions of culture: an “informing spirit” of a society

and an “emphasis on a whole social order” within a culture (Williams 1995:11-12). The “informing spirit” of a society can be ideological, religious, or national and is essentially the collective beliefs of that culture, as shown through “cultural” activities such as language, art, or intellectual work. The second definition is closer to the idea of a “lived culture” in which culture is developed as a side effect of other social processes and orders (e.g., economic or political). But there is a third position that Williams says began developing out of modern sociology of culture: the idea of culture as a “signifying system” that citizens use to communicate and reproduce social processes and order (1995:13).

For example, an American ideology might be the “ethic of fairness.” That is, everyone gets what they deserve; if you are good, you will be rewarded, and if you are bad, you are punished. This ethic is supposed to exist in all institutions as part of the “informing spirit” of American culture, but especially within the institution of work. Those that work hard and are good at their jobs are rewarded by material gains (e.g., raises, promotions, bonus, etc.). Those that do not work hard or are bad at their jobs are punished and lose them. But this dynamic can also be seen in reverse. The reality of work and occupations is not nearly so “fair.” Other factors such as race, gender, sexuality, age, and so forth *also* play a significant part in who gains and keeps jobs, especially high level and well-paying ones. So what keeps workers motivated and the economic engine of the country flowing if the system of “fairness” is broken? People continue to work because they have been taught to believe that the system of “fairness” is intact and that their hard work will pay off (e.g., Weber 2003). In that sense, the ideology of “fairness” is *also* a side-effect of the economic social order within America.

This becomes even more complicated when adding in the “internet effect.” Previously, when we talked about “culture” or “cultures,” the term would refer to a *specific* geographic area,

region, or group. The power of the internet allows us the ability to *connect those disparate groups* and create a more “global” culture. This is especially apparent in fan groups. A community may have a large number of fans from America, but also fans from Japan, countries in South America, Africa, Britain and Ireland, Australia, the Philippines, and other places throughout the world. They all communicate together, both in synchronous communications (e.g., “real time” chat) and asynchronous communications (e.g., message boards). All the different ideologies, cultural beliefs, and social norms mix together to create community ideologies, beliefs, and norms centered around both the behavior and hierarchy of the community members but *also* around the importance of the cultural object they are fans of. Essentially, fan communities are breeding grounds for “transculturation,” where the dynamics of these different individuals and cultural attributes affect each other to create a heterogeneous ensemble that includes a mix of all the cultures, albeit from differential power levels (Yúdice 1992).

This process of transculturation, both within fan communities and more generally, makes these communities ideal sites to study and investigate the mixing of narratives and symbols. For fanfic writers, the most successful (i.e., popular) key into one of two things: reproducing the canon or reproducing a certain narrative that resonates with the audience. In terms of reproducing the canon, this may mean someone who can write stories that contain the “spirit” of the characters or have plots similar to those of the original source. Another tactic successful writers use is to create a narrative that resonates, for example, the “romance narrative” where two characters that readers already feel connected with are paired in a romantic or sexual narrative. To be able to do these acts successfully, a fanfic writer must then be able to negotiate the differing symbols and meanings that her audience has and make that audience connect with her own meanings in the fanfic. This new hybrid product – a collection of pieces from the “old”

(i.e., canon) and the “new” -- is important not only because of the new meanings and messages attached but also because of the process of creation that continues. While a “finished product” is presumably produced, the interpretative process – both of the canon and the fan-produced product – is constant. Each new viewer of a fanvid allows for a change in perception and meaning. Each new viewer is creating yet another hybrid product through the interaction and interpretation taking place; not every fan approaches a canon in the same way and this holds true for fanworks as well.

### *The Problem With Fans and Culture*

These are powerful narratives, both on individual and cultural levels. Narratives affect all of society and give us guides to how we communicate with each other. Individuals develop “identities” that are, at the basest forms, stories we tell to ourselves about ourselves (Gergen and Gergen 1988). We also, however, have interactional narratives, or stories that we use or tell each other, scripts that are followed when dealing with groups. These narratives exist on cultural levels, which are the imaginary identities and narratives that embody a group of people or a region. Narratives are also institutional, used to simultaneously justify and inform organizational practices (Dimaggio 1997; Williams 1995). One of the easiest places to see these narratives is through cultural products, such as mass media (e.g., books, music, art, etc.). These cultural narratives, found in media objects, then often influence individual narratives and those cultural narratives are, in turn, often influenced by the institutions and organizations that control their production.

This is the main critique that many cultural scholars have about mass culture: cultural products are only produced to further create a demand for more products (Horkheimer and Adorno [1987] 2002). Eventually, these products become so filtered through cultural

expectations – relying on those foundational cultural narratives – that they have become little more than clichés. Even the new technology produced is aimed at turning individuals from *actors* within society to passive members (Horkheimer and Adorno [1987] 2002). This is a particularly interesting critique given the medium of the internet and the decentralization of both corporate control of content but also of identity; the masses are responsible for creating content on the internet. A second major critique of the corporatization of culture and cultural narrative stems from industry’s power to reduce the creativity and imagination of consumers. Consumers expect the narrative clichés they have become accustomed to through mass media and begin to expect those same narrative conventions to exist *even outside the medium*, breaking down the “line” between “fiction” and “reality.” Once consumers discover “reality” does not match the mass mediated “fiction,” we are disappointed and retreat back into the world of amusement to “escape” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1987] 2002:116). Critics of the culture industry argue that the cycle the culture industry creates is one that encourages even more consumerism. The very objects that foster the sense of powerlessness within reality are the same objects that are used to forget reality, creating a never-ending spiral of cultural consumption – all due to the narratives that are at play. Within this spiral, we lose the ability to retreat or refuse to engage, particularly because our peers help enforce the culture industry’s wishes (at least within American society) by ridiculing or ostracizing those that do refuse to participate. Further, sheer ubiquity of mass media makes even the refusal to participate difficult. After all, where does one go to avoid books, movies, television, the internet, radio, iPods and music players, cell phones, children’s toys, billboard advertising, and even clothing?

Critics of the cultural industry, like Adorno and Horkheimer ([1987] 2002), see refusal to engage as the highest form of active citizenship, as engagement always leads to the creation of

“consumers” out of “citizens,” often thought of as “cultural dupes.” However, as I have noted, even the option to refuse to engage is becoming increasingly hard in our technological society. Retreat from “modern” society may, at this point in time, be the only way to completely refuse to engage with the cultural industry and its products. Instead, I believe a third option – aside from “constant consumerism” and “retreat” – is shown through the actions of fanworkers such as fanfic writers or vidders. In one sense, these people are “hyperconsumers,” the epitome of the cultural dupe archetype; fans are the first to see a new episode of a television show, or go to a midnight opening of a movie, or pre-order a book release. They are constantly supporting the cultural industry.

However, fans simultaneously *undermine* the consumerism encouraged by the culture industry. Capitalism implies ownership, not only of the product, but also of the ability to produce and reproduce the product. The digital age allows for *consumer* reproduction, which in turn leads to stricter enforcement of copyright codes (Poster 2001). However, fanworkers are on *both* sides of the equation. They are, in one sense, reproducing a cultural object by using themes, characters, settings, music, images, film clips, and narratives in their work. Fanworkers also create original content out of those existing cultural objects – making them *producers*. Poster (2001:47) notes that prior to the internet, “producers” and “reproducers” were fairly distinct entities. Now, the widespread use of the internet has not only shortened the gap between “producer” and “reproducer,” but also between “producer” and “consumer.” Instead of these identities being three separate entities, fans can now embody all three tasks – *at the same time*. This change, with the introduction of the digital age, is a revolutionary shift that is beginning to include consumers within the creative process of cultural production (Poster 2001:97). This leaves questions that remain unanswered within this cultural shift: are the meanings of these new cultural works –



coming from a culture of production/consumption and from people who are simultaneously producers-consumers-reproducers – revolutionary? The processes for creating art are changing – but are the ideologies and narratives embedded within those pieces of art changing as well? Audre Lorde ([1987] 2007) wrote that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” when referring to second wave feminists’ racism, but the idea is relevant here. Is meaningful cultural change – at least in terms of the narratives and stories we tell within our culture – really possible while using the “tools” of the existing culture? And even if this cultural change *is* possible at the grassroots level, as seen through fanworks, is this cultural change something that might spread outside fan communities and into the larger culture??

### *Second-Wave Scholarship and the Question of Value*

These questions become an implicit – and important – part of the second wave of fan studies. Where in the first wave ethnographers like Jenkins (1992) set out to prove, essentially, “fans and fan communities exist and are plentiful,” the second wave of fan studies turned itself toward the question of *value*. I mean this in two senses; first, in asking what is the value that media and cultural objects hold for fans and, in a meta-narrative, what is the value that fans hold for – and *as* -- academics (see Hills 2002). The second question is, perhaps, more theoretically interesting than the first. Hills points out, aptly, that the problem when a “culturally devalued ‘in-group’ of media fandom is compelled to account for its passions” (2002:68) is forgetting that those very accounts given are culturally specific and negotiated ones that are constructed to explain “deviant” acts (Mills 1940; Scott and Lyman 1968; Stokes and Hewitt 1976). The discourse *between* fans about their passion is different than the discourse between fan and outsider/academic. Simultaneously, however, is the acknowledgement that *everyone is a fan* – including academics. The divide between the identities of “academic” and “fan” is, as Jenkins

(1992; 2006b) points out very thin (or nonexistent). While the fan studies scholar may not be a fan of, for example, Star Trek as her research participants are, the scholar may be a fan of a particular basketball team, read blogs and news articles about that team, participant in online/offline discussions about that team, watch every game that team plays, and buy team merchandising; all of these are similar practices to what happens within media fan communities and are practiced by media fans. So Jenkins's (1992, 2006b) point is that, while the fan studies scholar may not be specifically connected to their topic of research, they *also* uncritically engage in many of the same practices, just in different venues. Yet, as academics, particularly as ethnographers, we are supposed to create a very real wall so that our observations and conclusions are not "tainted." The second wave of fan studies is full of struggles dealing with this dichotomy; where "good fandom" and "bad consumption" (Hills 2002:30) are placed as mirrored opposites, so too are "good academic" and "bad fan."

I believe it may actually *be* this struggle that leads to the third evaluative aspect of the second wave of fan studies. Academics are concerned with three main questions: how fans relate to the material they consume, how academics relate to fans and the materials they consume, and how the consumption – and for fanworkers – *production* changes the communities in which fans are embedded. This third question is a question of hierarchies. Much of the academic theory dealing with this question draws on Pierre Bourdieu's metaphor of culture as an economy to try and explain the power of fans (1984; 1986; 1989). Bourdieu describes culture, particularly "high culture," as something in which we invest and accumulate social capital.

For Bourdieu (1984; 1986; 1989), there are four types of human capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. If "capital is accumulated labor," then economic capital is the access and control an individual has over economic resources such as cash, property, and

investments (Bourdieu 1986:46). Within the context of fandom, economic capital is rarely used beyond the access an individual has to internet resources such as web pages or computer equipment. In the high-end fan video communities, economic resources become very important as “fanvidders” try to get the best equipment to create better, more quality fan videos.

Bourdieu’s second form of capital is cultural capital, which “is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications” (Bourdieu 1986:47). He describes cultural capital as being “embodied” in the state of mind of an individual, “objectified,” in the form of cultural artifacts such as books, pictures, and machines, and “institutionalized” (Bourdieu 1986:47). For fandom, I believe all three processes are at work in terms of the actions of BNFs and the power dynamics. Where Bourdieu is talking about “real life” culture, we can transpose these categories to a “fannish” culture. The state of mind of a fanfic writer upon entering a community is set based on their interactions prior to joining the community. They are also influenced by their own personal history and preferences, in terms of what they like. Writers do not often write about characters they do not feel a personal connection to, for example. The cultural artifacts in fandom are the fan works produced and the institutionalization happens in communities with strict rules regarding what and how content should be posted. Bourdieu’s third form of capital, social capital, accounts for the “membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital” (1986:51). Membership in exclusive communities can give fans a certain “cachet.” A recommendation or mention by a BNF can effectively elevate another fan to BNF status within a fandom.

Bourdieu uses these forms of capital to essentially model our society as a two-dimensional map. The vertical records the *amount* of capital an individual had, both cultural and

economic, while the horizontal records the *type* of capital an individual has (e.g., cultural *or* economic). Individuals that fall to the left are higher in cultural capital than economic capital (e.g., academics, artists, etc.), while those on the right have more economic capital than cultural (e.g., business people, etc.). The top center of the map are those who accumulate both, professionals such as architects, doctors, lawyers, and so forth. At the bottom of the diagram are Bourdieu's "proletariat" who are deprived of both cultural and economic capital. I find this a useful model, despite the limitations. Bourdieu's analysis of cultural and social capital is limited to his emphasis on class being the single determinant of "taste." He ignores both race and gender as axes of domination, both in terms of the production of culture *and* the consumption of culture, particular for *popular culture*.

Bourdieu, in his concern for "high culture" of the bourgeois, also fails to give a substantial analysis to the culture of the subordinate by ignoring popular culture entirely. As Fiske pointed out, this "leads him seriously to underestimate the creativity of popular culture and its role in distinguishing between different social formations within the subordinated" (1992:32). Fiske reformulates Bourdieu's model, modifying it "to take account of gender and age as axes of subordination, and extended to include forms of 'popular cultural capital' produced by subordinate social formations, which can serve, in the subordinate, similar functions to those of official cultural capital in the dominant context" (1992:33).

Fiske looks at the hierarchical ways in which fans are productive; he characterizes fan production as "semiotic productivity," where cultural participants make meanings of a social identity or experience using the cultural icons and commodities available to them (1992:37). Next is "enunciative productivity," where the meanings created for an individual fan in semiotic productivity are shared with others (Fiske 1992:37-38). Finally, there is "textual productivity," in

which fans “produce and circulate among themselves texts which are often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture” (Fiske 1992:39). Fiske’s analysis is confined mostly to comparisons between accumulation of official cultural capital and popular cultural capital, without much depth in looking at each type of production. Fiske is not alone in this. The theorists in the second wave were concerned with *what* fans were engaging in (i.e., specific media sources) and how they engaged with each other (i.e., community structure and hierarchy). They paid little attention to the *content* produced by fans, at least in terms of what the products represented.

The third wave of fan studies built on the first two waves but also broke away sharply, mirroring the cultural shift in the view of fans. Where cultural constructions of a “fan” were deviant until the 1990s and 2000s, today we begin to see that “fan” is becoming the *default* state of media consumption even outside of normative locations within fan communities (e.g., Brooker 2002; Jenkins 2006a). Essentially third wave theorists argue that “as a fan” is how everyone practices media consumption now, regardless of whether the individual would describe themselves with that label. I might even argue that we are moving to a state in which just the “fan” identity is not the default; rather, we are moving to a mediated society where a *fanworker* (or at least a “fan-distributer”) identity is becoming increasingly the default (Burgess and Green 2009). In conjunction with this new conceptual paradigm, I have noticed a domain expansion (Best 1990) in the types of media being studied. Traditional fan studies were confined mostly to television and movie media fandoms. The third wave is not nearly so limited: studies have broadened to include video game fans and fandoms (Royse, Joon, Undrahbuyan, Hopson, and Consalvo 2007) or book and literary fandoms such as Harry Potter or Jane Austen (Pugh 2005).

THIRD WAVE: LIFE GOES ON

If the question every scholar within fan studies has to answer is “so what?” the third wave of fan studies strives to capture insights into modern life precisely *because* fan consumption has become taken-for-granted within our mass mediated society. The third wave of fan studies seeks to explore the new ways we interact with each other in our daily lives – whether those interactions happen at work, in chat rooms, or in fanfiction communities – and the ways in which we interact with our wider cultural narratives presented in our media. The third wave also opened up intersectional analyses by questioning the oft unacknowledged “fact” that the majority of creative media fans are white middle-class women. For women scholars and fans more generally, the third wave has been much kinder than the second wave. More fans are included in theory creation as participants (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007a; Jenkins 2006a; Woledge 2005) or even scholars (Jenkins, Jenkins, and Green 1998), ethnographic studies are on the rise (Bury 2005), and unlike the first two waves, studies are expanding to look at intersectionality within fan cultures and online (Nakamura 2002; Nakamura 2008).

However, despite the omnipresence of status identities within fan studies, little attention overall has been paid to the importance of those identities. This leaves a large gap in our knowledge about fans in several ways. For example, the changing meanings associated with “masculinity” and “femininity” within both the canon sources fans draw on and the subsequent use and commentaries on those meanings within fanworks are vastly understudied. Bury’s (2005) ethnography is a beginning point; in one chapter she discusses how “middle-class, heterosexual” feminine identities are displayed through the use of media texts. However, Bury’s (2005) work ends *at the text* and the oral culture (Fiske 1989) surrounding those texts. She does not interrogate the fanworks produced by her research participants. I believe there is much more to doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) online than just the presentation of self (Goffman

1959) of fans; the works fans produce also provide insight into how they contextualize what “male” and “female” means. Fanworks offer a chance to examine gender ideologies and conceptualizations that inform gender presentations *in action*. Fanvids especially offer a unique look at the ways gender is enacted. The mixing of visual and audio elements is designed to tell a story that is different, albeit connected to, the original canon. A large piece of that story – and sometimes the difference – lies in the way gender is portrayed.

A second, under-studied, area of fans and fan communities is the idea of “collaborative meanings.” Where the first wave of fan studies was concerned with establishing the idea of fans as worthy of study and interesting and the second wave was concerned with consumption patterns (individual and communal), the third wave *is* concerned with the idea of meanings and interpretations within fanworks. Scholars are looking at the ways in which fans are reworking canons to create their own, new, narratives (e.g., Bury 2005; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007a; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Meyer and Tucker 2007; Pugh 2005). However, there is very little work that pays attention to the communal nature of this process of narrative creation.

Reception theory, rising out of literary theory, is a beginning point. Allen (1989) summarizes three major questions within the reception theory approach: a) how is a fictional narrative interpreted by the reader? b) What are the characteristics of a narrative that make it less easy for readers to have multiple readings or interpretations? c) How is the reader’s interpretation influenced by his or her social location? The third major question, regarding social location, is a key reference point within audience response literature. Griswold’s (1987a) comparison of critics’ responses to the novels of a writer from Barbados shows that each critic holds and values different parts of the novel as salient because of assumptions and the cultural toolkits (Swidler 1986) linked to their differing social locations. Even Radway’s (1984) work with lower class

female romance novel enthusiasts showed common links within their social location; women accepted some elements of the novels as “reality,” in the sense that they used the romance novels as a way of, first, contributing to their knowledge of the world and, second, as contributing to their sense of self as women and what being a “woman” meant. Radway (1984), however, is one of the few scholars that does at least attempt to address the ancillary question to the link of social location to interpretation: if social location is a guiding factor in how a reader interprets a text, then how much of the authors' significations do readers accept (e.g., Ang 1985; Vidmar and Rokeach 1979)? This is a central question (and gap) I believe my dissertation can address. Fanvids, and other fanworks, are audience interpretation made manifest.

This becomes important in terms of process and the distribution of meaning. First, what is the process of narrative rearticulation taking place with the canon images, meanings, and presentations? What changes in the process of movie or television show to vid? How is the narrative given in the original canon highlighted, cut, edited, and re-shaped into this new reading? What does this new narrative say about the presentations of race, class, gender, sexuality, and identity within the canon (and thus the culture that produces it)? While I would argue that any vid is a “counter-narrative” as each vid offers a new interpretation of a polysemic text, many vids are also “counter-narratives” in the sense that they directly contradicts the text of the canon narrative in favor of explicating “subtext.” This is particularly seen in slash vids that reject (Hall 2001) predominantly heteronormative canons in favor of homoerotic/homosexual content. Not every vid takes this route; many uphold the canon narratives by highlighting, reinforcing, or even celebrating the same presentations of race, class, gender, sexuality, and identity shown in canon. These vids are just as important as the counter-narratives shown in vids like *Origin Stories* or *Women’s Work (Violet)* (Brownfield 2011) as the less “subversive” vids



are gauges for cultural diffusion. What cultural narratives and formula stories (e.g., “romance narrative”) are resonant with fans are played out viscerally within vids. Vids make existing ideologies – either to reinforce or refute them – visible.

These may be two poles at the end of a storytelling spectrum. On one end, vidders may be providing “textual narratives,” or stories that uphold the canon narratives in some way. This could be highlighting a canon pairing or romance, reproducing or celebrating a narrative arc, or retelling the story of a particular character’s journey through the canon. In the middle are vids closer to canon but still narratively different, as if the vidder took a step sideways from canon. These vids are “subtextual narratives” and provide alternative interpretations of the canon without outright rejecting the canon text. Nothing in Talitha78’s narrative of “the subtext of Kirk and Spock” denies the textual narrative and relationships; rather the vid simply highlights what could be interpreted as a narrative beneath the surface of the text. At the final pole are vids like *Women’s Work* (Violet) and *Origin Stories* that completely “subvert” the canonical text. In *Origin Stories*, Gianjudakiss deconstructs the textual narrative, using the images and presentations given in *BtVS* and *AtS* around women of color to subvert them and criticize the text by presenting a disturbing reading. This subversive narrative is then released to the wider fan audiences where *they judge if the new interpretation of the text is resonant*.

My dissertation is exploring this collaborative nature to the process of meaning making on the consumer level. First, the fanvid is a visual and audio re-working of the canon source, often to emphasize or highlight their own particular readings. This reading (vid) is created within the context of a fan community (as opposed to the context of production a mass produced object has) and within the norms, practices, and ideologies of that particular fandom or community. The vid may actually be at the request or direction of someone other than the vidder. This means that

the vidder is drawing on two different – though linked – cultural toolkits (Swidler 1986) in the process of creation. Then the vid is released back to the fandom and discussed there, *once again allowing for the negotiation of meaning*.

My dissertation straddles the border between second and third wave fan studies. My questions dealing with culture, cultural narratives, cultural presentations of race/class/gender, and cultural change are all firmly in line with the questions and theories of the second wave. I am asking explicitly about the value of fanworks by using the canons and the fanworks as a gauge for the shifting cultural representations and ideologies of (primarily) Western culture. I am looking at how fans engage with canons and how they engage with each other in the contexts of those canons, but I am also moving beyond that into the third wave by actually investigating the process of meaning making taking place both individually and collaboratively, which fills a large gap within the literature.

Further, this dissertation is an attempt to add a more sociological perspective to the interdisciplinary field of fan studies. Fan studies has largely been a field that draws upon media and literary studies, anthropology/cultural anthropology, and cultural studies, but “Fan Studies” as conceived of the study of people in primarily media fandoms has not seen much ground within the field of sociology. Instead, the largest concentration of academic research found in sociology around fans is likely contained within the subfield of sociology of sport. Likewise, despite the concern for narrative within fan studies, there has not been much incorporation of sociology’s “narrative turn” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Mishler 1995) into fan studies.

## SOCIOLOGY AND NARRATIVE

Sociological interest in narrative has been an ongoing practice, particularly in the subfields of deviance (e.g., Mills 1940; Scott and Lyman 1968; Stokes and Hewitt 1976) and

symbolic interaction (e.g., Becker 1953; Becker and McCall 1990; Goffman 1983; Goffman 1959; Goffman 1963; Goffman 1979), but exploded beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. Polletta et al. note that “[b]etween 1970 and 1990 587 articles were published on narrative and storytelling in the journals indexed by *Sociological Abstracts*. In the next 20 years, 10 times that many were posted” (2011:110). Further, that research has become more “methodologically self-conscious” (Gubrium and Holstein 1998:193) and researchers understand that stories are not necessarily accurate, authentic retellings of experience or that the stories people told were somehow universally understood (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1995; Scott 1995; Shotter and Gergen 1989). Essentially, what Gubrium and Holstein (1998) call “methodologically self-conscious” refers to the realization of the socio-cultural and historical construction that grounds stories. Despite the grounded roots of stories and storytelling, stories also have meaning beyond those roots and we “hear stories in line, not with contemporary ideological beliefs, but with the expectations that are intrinsic to the genre” (Polletta, Trigoso, Adams, and Ebner 2013:292). Literary critic Booker (2005) points out that there are infinite variations on similarly-themed and plotted stories; for example, both Cinderella and Horatio Alger are examples of the same “rags-to-riches” story just as the myth Beowulf is as much an “overcoming the monster” story as the movie Star Wars. Sociologists agree that the amount of narrative forms, tropes, and plots used by individuals, organizations, and societies are limited (Bruner 1986; White 1980; White 1987). There are also limits on whom is allowed to tell what stories and in what venues those stories are acceptable (Gubrium and Holstein 1999; Loseke 2000; Loseke 2001; Plummer 1995; Plummer 1996; Somers 1994).

The place of stories in the social context has also been acknowledged within sociology’s “narrative turn.” Stories are trusted sources and powerful agents of socialization and normative

values; simultaneously stories are also things to be mistrusted as vehicles of indoctrination at worth and entertaining but trivial at best (Cazden and Hymes 1978; Polletta and Lee 2006).

Sociological research on stories and narratives has three themes: “stories as central to self,” or how stories were not just things people told but rather things that people lived and experienced, “stories as the basis for disciplinary authority,” or the recognition that even things understood as “empirical facts” or “truths” within the discipline are also stories, and “stories as a critical and even liberatory discursive form,” or the telling of obscured or repressed stories to subvert authority (Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011:113). Typically, stories in sociology are treated as distinct from the context of storytelling; sociologists look more at the content of the message than the context in which the story is used or told or how that story is being evaluated by its audience (Gubrium and Holstein 1998; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011).

Gubrium and Holstein describe the combination of storytelling, the resources of storytelling, and the venue in which stories are told as “narrative practices” and argue for more conscious attention on both the “spontaneous and the conditional sides of storytelling” (1998:164-165).

The past sociological research into stories makes it adequately clear that stories are important in all levels of social life. Given the centrality of stories, understanding the elements that are present within the narrative is similarly important. Narratives are made up of three basic building blocks: plot, or the structure given to the events in a story to connect them to a cohesive and meaningful whole (Somers 1994), characters, or the people involved in the events of a plot that are treated as “the combination of traits that are required to enact the actions that make up the narrative” (Polletta, Trigos, Adams, and Ebner 2013:293), and the setting, or the location(s) in which the events take place. While setting does have a large impact on both the plot and the characters, there has not been much sociological research on its presence within storytelling.

However, I believe there is likely a stronger association between receiver/consumer and “place” or “setting” than many would suspect. For example, the common use of landmarks, such as the Empire State Building, in media mean that those that actual live in that locale may feel a sense of ownership over the story and those that do not live in that locale may feel like they have been invited to be a resident. Or, perhaps, the repetitive use of certain locales in American media (e.g., Los Angeles, New York City, Washington D.C., etc.) could also potentially be something that excludes consumers as the visions of big-city coastal life and values are far divorced from any sense of a consumer’s own experiences. Characters, also, have been largely ignored in sociological research; Chatman argues that “[c]characters do not have ‘lives’; we endow them with ‘personality’ only to the extent that personality is a structure familiar to us in life and art” (1978:137). Polletta et al. (2013), drawing on expectation states theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, and Zelditch Jr. 1977), argue that while sociology has largely treated characters as subordinate to plot, plot and characters are equally important but are judged by consumers/receivers by different logics. Using fictional rape narratives, they found that how participants viewed the female protagonist, her decisions leading up the sexual assault, her decision whether or not to report the rape, and the efficacy of the story as part of sexual assault outreach efforts differed depending on the construction of the story. They concluded that “people read along the lines of genre when the characters fit with dominant status expectations. They do not when the characters defy such expectations” (Polletta, Trigos, Adams, and Ebner 2013:314). Essentially, when the statuses and identities of the characters match dominant ideologies of the plot, for example casting a white male lead in a heroic action film, participants evaluated the stories along the plot lines. In contrast, if dominant ideologies about identities are defied, such as casting a Latina woman as the lead in a heroic action film, participants evaluated the stories based on the character.

This dissertation explores and addresses the collaborative nature of meaning making and narrative interpretation at two levels. I have designed my methods to look at both the vid itself, as a cultural artifact, but also to watch how interpretation is shaped and reformed – essentially, what meanings are accepted and what are rejected within the context of the narrative reformation of the original vid – and then look at the collaborative re-interpretation that takes place around the interpretation given in the vid. This is a project about stories and storytellers. The stories they tell are stories that are being retold, both in the sense of the stories vidders tell about their art and production but also the stories that fans tell each other about the stories vidders tell. This is a project about the stories that are told culturally and how those stories are being reworked by the people who are “reading” those stories. I will be looking at the canons that inspire vids, vids, the stories about and around vids, and the stories of the vidders. I will be using multiple qualitative methods to try and assess situations, meanings, motivations, interpretations, and most importantly, *stories* within the vidding and larger fandom communities. In the next chapter, I will be discussing the different types of qualitative methods I have chosen, the research sites I will be exploring, and my sampling methods. I will follow with a brief discussion of some of the limitations of those methods as well as potential ethical concerns as a researcher. Finally, I will conclude by restating the potential importance of this research and why I believe these stories are important, not just to fans, but to understanding the processes of the societies that produce them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

Studying online populations can be problematic, particularly for sociologists. Much of the basic demographic information that we use as a baseline in our research, such as gender, race, age and so forth, is overtly missing online. However, as Markham (2005) notes, the text and presentation we give online is part of our presentation of self. Online research does not have the shortcut of visual clues toward gender or race (though I would argue that even now visual clues rarely tell us the story from the participant's perception and is often limiting) "real life" research does; this means that a more creative approach must be taken to gather data. To triangulate my data collection, I will use the techniques of content analysis and observation fieldwork.

Content analysis, simply put, is a method for "systematically analyzing and making inferences from text" (Chambliss and Schutt 2010:85). It is also one of the most popular ways of analyzing online data (e.g., Rheingold 1993; Stewart and Williams 2005). My ethnographic content analysis (Altheide 1987) will cover two sources: the original canons and the fanvids produced based on those canons. I will be tracking vids in my chosen fandoms through fandom "newsletters." These newsletters are fan-produced filters (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, and Wright 2004) and are good repositories of not only fanvids but commentaries and reactions to the fanvids. In the section I will be discussing my sample and sampling frame.

### SAMPLE AND CODING STRATEGY

I chose two specific fandoms to follow: *Supernatural* (SPN) and *Star Trek 2009* (ST). SPN is an urban fantasy television show that began airing in 2005 and tells the story of Sam and Dean Winchester, two brothers who travel around the United States hunting ghosts, monsters,

and other paranormal figures. ST is the movie “reboot” of the original Star Trek television series (ST: TOS) from the 1960s. The movie opened in May 2009 and tells the origin story of how the original crew came to be on the Enterprise. I reviewed all canon materials available for both SPN and ST, including “extracanon material,” or materials that are produced and approved by media creators but exist outside the “main” body of canon such as novel tie-ins, comics, and video games prior to beginning my content analysis of my sample. For ST specifically, I also reviewed ST: TOS and the ST: TOS movies that ST was “rebooting.” I have chosen these fandoms due to their relative popularity. I measure “popularity” by two indicators. The first is aftermarket sales in the United States and internationally as an economic indicator of success. I also measure the number of easily accessible fanfics for each of these fandoms as a social indicator of popularity.

SPN is one of the most popular fandoms for a currently airing show with a devoted and wide fan-following both in the United States and internationally. ST is relatively new and fresh; the movie reboot gained new fans and revitalized the large fandom devoted to the older series (fanvids were being posted from promotional footage before the movie was even released). I do believe there is conventional overlap, both in what these canons show and how the fans interpret these representations due to the genre similarities; SPN is urban fantasy and ST involves classic formula science fiction narratives. Both science fiction and fantasy have traditionally drawn in the same types of fans. They have also been commercially and conceptually grouped together for the purposes of marketing and distribution (e.g., science fiction/fantasy combined shelves at a bookstore). While a more diverse sample, genre-wise, may yield more comprehensive data in terms of the types of narratives surrounding representation of people and cultural norms (e.g.,



romance and relationship norms), the genre similarities of this sample will likely allow me to make deeper and richer comparisons between fandoms.

I also chose these two canons due to their narratives and presentations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Each canon has narratives that can be seen as problematic and often has been pointed out as so by fans. These canons have all been criticized for their portrayals of people of color, SPN has been termed misogynistic for its ongoing depiction of violence against women and ST only presents four women with speaking roles. Choosing these controversial canons allows me to also see how fans try to textually analyze these problems, if to point them out or even to normalize and account for them (Mills 1997; Scott and Lyman 1968). I also believe choosing canons that fans are divided on will provide good case studies for theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Using these two canons, I conducted content analyses of the original canons, the vids produced based on the canons, and the discussion and comments produced because of the vids.

When coding both canon and vids, I attempted to be sensitive to the four major areas of analysis: intention, reception, comprehension, and explanation (Griswold 1987b). Intention indicates a creator's purpose within the social constraints placed on him or her during the creation of a cultural object. Reception is how a social agent, a fan (i.e., both vidder and vid consumer) in the case of this dissertation, consumes, incorporates, or rejects cultural objects. Comprehension occurs when the analyst considered the structures, patterns, and symbols within a cultural object. Finally, explanation accounts for how an analyst connects comprehended cultural objects to the social world and how those connections are always mediated by both intention and reception. With these ideas in mind, I set up my coding at two different levels for both the canon and vids I was analyzing; I considered the "comprehension" level as the "internal

logic” of the canon or the vid. For example, in SPN the two main characters are rarely depicted wearing fancy clothes. The internal, or “in-universe” logic of this decision, is that the Winchester brothers are living a largely itinerant lifestyle and do not have money to spend on luxury purchases such as nice clothes. I also considered the “explanation” level when coding which I consider the “meta” level; for example, the portrayal of the Winchesters as working class in SPN is only possible because of their statuses as white men through clothing, music, and other shorthand cues culturally associated with white working class masculinity (all of which I will discuss in the subsequent SPN chapter). Essentially, the “meta” or “explanation” level is looking at these patterns and symbols embedded within the canon and attempting to apply “real world” circumstances and logic to them to see where there were discrepancies or commonalities. So in my example of the presentation of white working class masculinity in SPN, a “meta” “explanation” for the specific choices of clothing and music is that by using those shorthand cues, the writers and creators of SPN do not have to otherwise interrogate, investigate, or even show class within the television series. This is essentially a way of making class invisible within the canon. I use this type of analysis on both canons and fanvids through two different coding schemes to discover how the narrative and representations changed between each iteration (i.e., canon vs. fanvid).

### *Canon Coding Strategy*

Within the canon sources, I coded for three key items within the narrative: identity presentation, narrative arcs, and cultural narratives. I use the term *identity presentation* to refer to the different ways and conceptualizations of identity intersections (Collins [1993] 2004) are portrayed within the shows/movies. How are characters presented through actions, clothing, dialogue, and with what characters do they chose to socialize? How identities and statuses

portrayed in canons and what are the potential positive or negative consequences of those portrayals? This question is attempting to address both “comprehension” and “explanation.” For example, if a character is shown to be a racist, what is the general reaction to this character’s racism? Is the racism condoned narratively and, if so, does this lack of condemnation reflect what might happen should someone to repeat those acts in real life? “Comprehension” asks what the narrative circumstances are for the racist behaviors and actions and “explanation” attempts to bring those actions into real life and what the circumstances and reactions might be in that instance. *Identity presentation* is attempting to get at the ideas and narratives of representation within both canons.

When I use the term *narrative arcs*, I am referring to the structural framework of the narrative, particularly in terms of the “set-up,” where all the characters are introduced, “conflict,” where the problem is introduced, and the “resolution,” where the problem is confronted and the narrative ends. What happens during the narrative arc within the canons? How connected to the genre (science fiction or fantasy) are these narrative arcs? What other narrative conventions might be present within the arc? How does the narrative arc effect the identity presentations of the characters? This focus is largely concerned with “comprehension” as I want to understand the internal consistency present within the canons.

Finally, I use *cultural narratives* to describe the underlying ideologies that are present and inform those identity presentations and narrative arcs. For example, a character is showed as an urban black man in a certain way (i.e., through his speech patterns, clothing, actions, etc.) what are the cultural narratives and meanings that are associated with those signs? Essentially, what are the signs that the canon is drawing on to create the “shorthand” to let the viewer know that this character is an urban black man and, further, how is the identity of “urban black man”

treated within the canon? Is this character a sympathetic and believable character? Is he portrayed more as a comedic character or something else entirely? This is where I begin to look at the “explanation” level of canon narratives. I am interested not only in the internal logic of canon but also how those creative decisions specifically reflect the social environment and culture of the creators. So, in my example of the racist character, is the lack of condemnation *also* reflected in other creative choices? Is this lack of condemnation also accompanied by violence against people of color in the overall narrative, rather than just from this character? The coding on the canon source helps to establish the signs, symbols and meanings that vidders are manipulating within their vids.

### *Canon Sampling Strategy*

My sampling frame is different for each canon. As two of my main concerns deal with narrative change and images of identity over time, for SPN I sampled the first two episodes, two episodes in the middle, and the final two episodes of each season of each show (six episodes per season). As SPN is still currently airing in its tenth season and slated to begin its eleventh season in the fall of 2015, I decided to only sample the first five seasons, airing from 2005-2010, as this was when the show’s creator Eric Kripke had intended for the show’s narrative to finish. I coded 30 episodes from those 5 seasons, each episode approximately 40 minutes long. For seasons 1, 2, 4, and 5, I coded episodes number 1-2, 10-11, and 21-22. Season 3, which aired during the Writer’s Guild Strike of 2007-2008, was cut short from a regular 22-episode season to a 16-episode season so I coded episodes number 1-2, 8-9, and 15-16 of season 3. ST, as a movie rather than a television show, allowed me to code the entire 127-minute film. My emphasis in coding canons was to look primarily at characters and relationships, as these are two of the most popular ways of categorizing fanworks in fan communities. For characters, I gave my most

attention to identity presentation and cultural narrative. Relationships were coded under both narrative arc and cultural narratives.

I watched each unit of the sample four times. The first coding pass I used to note the actions happening in the canon narrative by essentially taking a summary. My second coding pass was to mark characters that were used in each vid and how they were presented through actions, clothing, dialogue, and with what characters they interacted with (e.g., “does Dean Winchester interact with Sam Winchester or Castiel in this episode?”). The third coding pass I used to look at narrative within the canon. By this pass of canon, several basic themes within the canon narratives had begun to emerge. I then took a fourth coding pass of each canon to further categorize each under a theme and look for overlap (e.g., episodes or seasons that fall into multiple themes) or anomalies (i.e., episodes or incidents that fall into no category or could only be placed under a particular thematic umbrella tangentially). Once the canons were coded, I moved onto sampling and coding vids.

### *Vid Sampling Strategy*

I gathered vids from several LJ communities: a) Vidding<sup>10</sup>, a multi-fandom vidding community created in 2002 with over 2,000 members; b) Fandom-Inspired-Videos<sup>11</sup>, a multi-fandom vidding community created in 2004 with over 1,300 members; c) Veni, Vidi, Vids!<sup>12</sup>, a multi-fandom vidding newsletter created in 2006; d) Supernatural Vids<sup>13</sup>, a SPN-only vidding community created in 2005 with over 1,600 members; e) Supernatural Vid Recs<sup>14</sup>, a SPN-only vidding community devoted to recommending and promoting vids created in 2007 with over 280

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<sup>10</sup> <http://community.livejournal.com/vidding>

<sup>11</sup> [http://community.livejournal.com/fan\\_vids](http://community.livejournal.com/fan_vids)

<sup>12</sup> [http://community.livejournal.com/veni\\_vidi\\_vids/](http://community.livejournal.com/veni_vidi_vids/)

<sup>13</sup> <http://community.livejournal.com/supernaturalvid>

<sup>14</sup> <http://community.livejournal.com/spnvidrecs>

members; and f) Star Trek Fandom Newsletter<sup>15</sup>, a multi-canon Star Trek (i.e., original series, movies, “reboot”) newsletter created in 2006 with over 1,800 members. There were no communities within the ST fandom devoted specifically to vids that I was able to locate but the Star Trek Fandom Newsletter does link to vids as they are posted and ST, as a popular fandom, regularly sees vids posted in the multi-fandom communities.

For SPN vids, I sampled the three months surrounding the end of each season of the series, through season five. From my six sample communities, I found a total of 64 different vids and 3640 comments posted between the months of April through June in the years 2005-2010.

For ST, I used a similar sampling frame by collecting vids posted from the time frame of April 2009 through December 2012; I deliberately stopped prior to 2013 as the second movie *Star Trek: Into Darkness* was released in theaters on May 16, 2013 and I wanted to avoid any vids that might use promotional footage from the sequel as it was outside my canon sample. This search left me with 41 vids and 2869 comments in my ST vid sample and a total of 105 vids and 6509 comments in my combined sample.

### *Vid Coding Strategy*

To code the vids, I used the three coding elements from the first coding site (e.g., identity presentation, narrative arc, and cultural narrative) and add a fourth code for *narrative manipulation*. I use this code to see the ways vidders shape the original narratives from the canon. What changes have vidders made to identity presentations, narrative arcs, and cultural narratives that are present within the canons? How have the images been manipulated to create new meaning out of the existing canon? Using a slash vid as an example, there are two major linked sites of change within both character and relational contexts. First is the recasting of the

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<sup>15</sup> [http://community.livejournal.com/trek\\_news](http://community.livejournal.com/trek_news)

sexuality of the two male leads which are presumably shown only as heterosexual over the course of the canon. Secondly, a slash vid recasts the relationship portrayed between the two characters into a sexual one by the creative mixing of sexualized lyrics, images, and even the vidder commentary. I watched each of the vids four times. The first coding pass I used to note the actions happening in the vid by essentially taking a summary. My second coding pass was to mark characters that were used in each vid and how they were presented through actions, clothing, dialogue, and with what characters they interacted with (e.g., “does Kirk interact with Spock or with McCoy in this vid?”). The third coding pass I used to look at narrative within the vid. By this pass of each vid, several basic themes within the vidding narratives had begun to emerge. I then took a fourth coding pass of each vid to further categorize each vid under a theme and look for overlap (e.g., vids that fall into multiple themes) or anomalies (i.e., vids that fall into no category or could only be placed under a particular thematic umbrella tangentially).

#### *Comments and Commentary Analysis*

After completing the analysis of the vids, I moved onto the community response and commentary on these vids. What does the vidder say as an introduction to their work? What accounts are given alongside their presentations? What is the community response to the vid? Does the vidder’s stance or account change based on the comments she has received? Is the reception of the vid changed by the status of the vidder? Does the status of the vidder within the community change because of the act of posting a new vid? All of these questions can be addressed by looking at the communities in which vids are posted and the comments posted on the vids as a third site of content analysis. On each vid, I examined and coded all comments, looking largely for the analytical category of *reception*, not only of the stories told within vids, but also the stories told within and about canons. I use the term *reception* here to specifically

describe the level of positive or negative reaction the vid received and what types of responses in which the vidder and other fans engaged. When discussing both vidders and commenters in this dissertation, I use gender-neutral pronouns such as “sie” for “s/he” and “hir” for “her/his.” While the make-up of these communities are largely assumed to be women in large part due to early academic research on fandoms (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Penley 1992), there has been no real subsequent attempts to study fandom population demographics online. Due to the anonymity of an online identity, I find it easier to use gender-neutral terms rather than to either simply assume everyone involved in vidding communities is a woman or attempt to investigate each vidder and commenter individually to discover their demographic data because when I did do cursory inspections of profile pages on LJ, much of the information given was patently false (e.g., answering “Hogwarts” for high school education). Also, when quoting from vid posts or comments, I leave the text exactly as it appears, including any spelling or grammar errors, acronyms or “netspeak” (explained in footnotes), or emoticons as this presentation may be a deliberate choice on the part of the writer or a part of fandom convention. While capitalization may importantly distinguish individuals – “Sally” and “sally” may be two different commentators – I have chosen to treat all pseudonyms as capitalized proper nouns within my text, regardless of the pseudonym presentation within quotes (i.e., the post may say “sally” but I will chose to use “Sally” when discussing the comment).

## LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

I designed my methods to be comprehensive and help me gain understanding of vidding as an activity, as a community membership, as a way of relating to and remaking professional media, as a particular type of narrative practice (Gubrium and Holstein 1998). I used methods that I believe follow Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for qualitative rigor: credibility,



dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility, or conducting the research in a believable manner and being able to demonstrate the credibility of the findings, was accomplished through prolonged engagement with both canons, fanvids, and commentary. I attempted to cast as wide a net as possible and gather a sufficient amount of data to analyze. Dependability, or the stability of the data being investigated, was achieved through archiving every fanvid and post included in my sample. I also attempted to maintain a sense of reflexivity within my research and my analysis to help maintain confirmability, while still keeping a sense of the variability of interpretation. Finally, I believe these methods would be easily transferable to another project on any type of fan works (e.g., fanvid, fanfic, fanart, etc.). Further, I believe many of the trends and themes I found, particularly in the transformation of narrative from canon to fanvid, are also transferable to other canons and fandoms.

For some, my approach could be critiqued as having several limitations. I can only make conclusions about my artifacts and, on a larger scale, the two fandoms I am targeting and not about vidding or fandom as a whole. I am also only reaching a small portion of vidders by choosing a LJ-oriented approach and may be missing many vidders who participate in forums I am unaware of (either due to my unfamiliarity with the vidding portion of fandom or with an individual fandom overall). I chose a LJ-oriented approach because my own activities as a fan have often been based on LJ and I know there are large fan followings and communities based on LJ. My knowledge of fan communities in other places, however, is limited. I also believe that, despite these potential criticisms, the methods I have laid out gave me insight to a portion of fandom that is not widely researched. Following this research, we now have better insight to how these vidders make sense of the messages provided by professional media and how they react to the narratives portrayed.

This research is valuable as it helps us understand ourselves within our new media and technology dominated societies. Understanding fandom helps to understand the ways in which technology and media are changing the ways we live our lives. Vidding, with its origins in the 1970s, was at the forefront of what eventually became YouTube and other video sharing sites: user-generated video content for mass audiences. I believe learning about vidding and vidders gives us, both as sociologists and as humans attempting to negotiate a rapidly changing and technology-based society, insight into how we come to understand media (e.g., canons) and how we come to transform that media (e.g., through vidding). This research also helps us understand the way people use technology as a leisure activity (rather than using technology to *facilitate* a leisure activity). This research also allows me to begin investigating how fans respond to problematic narratives of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Our media make ideologies visible in a visceral way and investigating the popular culture allows me to see what images, typifications and stereotypes exist within the global mediated culture. Vids, in turn, allow me to see the cultural diffusion of those ideologies, images, typifications, and stereotypes and how fans negotiate them, both in their own mediated retellings but also in their interactions with each other.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SUPERNATURAL CANON

Understanding the stories told within society gives us a greater understanding of the ideologies that society holds regarding the people, places, objects, processes, and larger cultural values (Crane 1992; Loseke 2007; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011; Spillman 2002). By studying the cultural object of a “canon,” or a media-produced text such as a television show, movie, or book, I can glimpse the cultural values and ideologies of the creators (Griswold 1987a; Griswold 1992; Griswold 1994), all of which have been influenced by the greater culture. In this chapter, I will be looking at the first canon I have chosen to analyze. *Supernatural* (SPN) premiered on September 13, 2005 on the television station WB and is airing its tenth season as of 2015.. SPN was created and developed by Erik Kripke and centers on the exploits of two brothers, Dean and Sam Winchester, as they make their way across America fighting evil monsters, ghosts, and demons, with a focus on American-based urban legends (e.g., Bloody Mary and Hookman both feature in the first season). The show, as of season nine, aired 193 episodes; episodes regularly have one to two million U.S. viewers, with the series peaking in seasons one and five with averages of four to five million viewers. Kripke had planned for the series to come to a natural end with season five (Ausiello 2009) and left the show following the end of season five. While SPN continued following Kripke’s departure, the height of the show’s popularity, combined with the initial planned end of the series, means that my analyses only continues through the end of season five.

The series is a drama, though the writers do a good job of interjecting humor into situations, episodes, and characters. A large part of this humor comes from the relationship between the two main characters Dean and Sam. This relationship is the cornerstone of the show

and carries most of the narrative and emotional weight of the storytelling. SPN is not simply a show about urban legends; it is a show about family and how far people will go for family.

In this chapter, I will briefly describe the primary events that occur within the first five seasons of SPN. Then I will transition into my analysis of representation found within the television show. Primarily, this will be through looking at the characters of Dean and Sam as both main characters and binary oppositions (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) that provide the narrative structure and main plot elements of the television show. Dean and Sam are the main characters of the show and carry the brunt of the narrative. I will be focusing specifically on the representation of masculinity portrayed by both characters, as the paralleled and dueling masculinities help guide the *identity presentation* and *narrative arcs* of the characters and the overarching narrative. Next, I will also give brief looks at other characters such as Bobby Singer, Castiel, Ellen Harvelle, Jo Harvelle, and John Winchester. I will then turn my discussion to overall representation within in SPN; within this section of the chapter I will be focusing predominantly on masculinity as there are very few female characters that receive any significant screen time in SPN. Despite the devoted and large female fan base (Strauss 2014) for the show – or perhaps because of – SPN is most definitely a narrative about being part of the “boy’s club.” I will then move to a brief discussion of the *cultural narratives* found within SPN: (a) *doing the right thing no matter what* and (b) *evil is all I see* and how these narratives are specifically embodied within the characters of Dean and Sam.

## SERIES SUMMARY

The series begins in 1983 in Lawrence, Kansas at the Winchester house, where we meet father John, mother Mary, four-year old Dean, and infant Sam. Within the first few minutes of the pilot episode, Mary is killed through mysterious circumstances and this sets John Winchester

off on a search to find the thing that killed his wife. Fast forwarding twenty-two years ahead, the series shifts focus on Dean and Sam, the sons of the Winchester family. Dean has followed in his father's footsteps and hunts monster, demons, and generally anything that goes "bump in the night." Sam has rejected this lifestyle and is attempting to create a new, better life for himself by attending Stanford and settling down with his girlfriend, Jess. Dean barges into Sam's life to ask for his help to look for their missing father and this begins the quest that becomes the premise for the first two seasons of the show. The brothers eventually find their father, as well as Azazel, the demon that killed their mother (and later Jess), and are able to kill Azazel.

However, in the midst of this, the brothers learn that Sam is not a "normal" human and, instead, is developing psychic powers that had been implanted in him by Azazel when he was a baby. Further, immediately prior to his death, Azazel had kidnapped Sam to force him to kill other children with implanted psychic powers; this actually leads to Sam's death. To help his brother, Dean sells his soul to a demon and is given a year to live before being sentenced to hell. During the third season of the show, the brothers and their allies Bobby Singer, Ellen Harvelle, and Jo(anna) Harvelle, attempt to find a way to break Dean's deal that will not also cost Sam's life, and eventually fail. During the fourth season, we are introduced to a new "player" in the game in the form of Angels, many of whom are eager for the Apocalypse to begin. The ultimate plan, and the reason why Sam was targeted by Azazel, is for Sam to let Lucifer out of hell, which Sam does, and for the Archangel Michael to possess Dean during a showdown with Lucifer that will eventually end all life on Earth. Seasons four and five are focused on discovering this plan and eventually defeating and returning Lucifer to hell, at the cost of Sam's life (see appendix A for a more comprehensive summary of the five seasons of the series I analyzed).

SPN is the story of a family, small and broken, as they search for truth, vengeance, and purpose. The story revolves around the Winchester brothers and their relationship, putting them at the core of the narrative far more than any of the guest characters. From here, I will describe move to the larger discussion of representation within SPN, beginning with the positions within the narrative and overall arcs that each of the two Winchesters plays. I will also discuss the interpretations of their characters and what those characters say about white, working-class masculinity.

## REPRESENTATION IN SUPERNATURAL

As the two main characters, Dean and Sam receive the most screen time and characterization, carrying both the bulk of the narrative “weight” and taking up the bulk of the narrative “space” across the five seasons of SPN. The two characters are part of a binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) with each other and with their antagonists throughout the show. Levi-Strauss ([1958] 1963) argues that a binary opposition is a primary element of a myth and that understanding a myth can only be found through the pairing of contrasting materials within the myth. For SPN, a primary binary opposition would be the contrasting of elements of “good,” represented by the Winchesters and their allies, and “evil,” which is represented by demons and other monsters within the series. Within SPN, Dean and Sam are the focal points of two different binary oppositions. The first is good/evil, as I have just described, and the second is through the dueling representations of masculinity found between Dean and Sam. In this section, I will be detailing the specific representations of dual and dueling masculinities shown through Dean and Sam, the other representations provided as support, then discuss the effects these *identity presentations* have on specific narrative arcs. Following this section, I will then be

looking at the embedded *cultural narratives* and the connections between all three elements of analysis within SPN's narrative.

### *Dean Winchester*

Dean is the elder of the two Winchester brothers. He is cocky, uneducated, handsome, sly, humorous, dedicated, and loyal. He values physical skills over “book learning” and tends to be the leader between the two brothers. This is in large part to how he and Sam were raised. John, driven to find and destroy the thing that killed his wife, takes Sam and Dean with him on the road as he searches and dives into the hunting lifestyle. John would frequently leave Dean and Sam behind with other hunters (e.g., Bobby Singer) when they were young and as Dean grew older (i.e., around nine or ten) John would leave them alone together in short-term apartments or motels. John, a former Marine, uses the same training methods on his sons to prepare them; he teaches them to fight, forces them to work out, teaches them to shoot, and the three of them learn the “lore,” or information about the supernatural world, together. As they grow older, John begins to include Dean and Sam both in his hunts though he is always sparse with information about his hunt for the thing that killed Mary. Dean actively enjoys this life and takes pride in the work he does as a hunter. To him, hunting *is* real life. We see he is uninterested in school or academics, often eager to leave<sup>16</sup>. He enjoys traveling and takes visible pleasure from the food in diners and restaurants. He enjoys meeting new people but is wary of getting close to them because he knows that he will be leaving soon. He thinks hunting is heroic and sees himself, his father, and Sam as heroes for protecting people. Even the way he talks about it, “saving people... hunting things,” shows how his first instinct when thinking of hunting is to protect others – rather than to kill the things they hunt.

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<sup>16</sup> Season four, episode thirteen: “After School Special”

Dean is the representation of a very specific type of masculinity: a working class, rugged, womanizing, protector. Dean's characterization is also governed by a *cultural narrative* about self-sacrifice and agency. These traits are important parts of a specific type of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The idea of hegemonic masculinity is that one type of masculinity is culturally dominant and all others are subordinate to that type of manhood. However, these presentations of ideal masculinity are always socio-historically specific; that is, these ideal masculinities are predicated on a specific time and place. Dean's hegemonic masculinity is one that is idealized in the show as a rugged, working class masculinity. This is at odds with the place of this type of masculinity within the cultural context of 2015, where working-class men feel as if they are culturally subordinate to their middle/upper-class counterparts (Kimmel 2013). Despite the feelings of loss of primacy in real life, I believe and will demonstrate the ways in which Dean's masculinity is still hegemonic and specifically dominant within the context of the canon. However, this *identity presentation* of Dean as the rugged working class hegemonic masculinity is actually in contrast with his place in the *narrative arc*.

As I mentioned, Dean's *narrative arc* is one that upholds the larger *cultural narrative* of *agency* but his position within the narrative is one in which Dean is consistently shown making choices to sacrifice himself for his family. This includes becoming the primary parent for Sam while their father was absent as well as literally selling his soul to save Sam from death. This theme of "self-sacrifice," particularly on behalf of another, is actually a very feminine narrative, as traditionally it is women that are asked to sacrifice for their families far more than men, for example through giving up work in favor of child-rearing (Hartmann 1981; Hochschild and Machung [1989] 2003) or taking on more of the emotional labor in romantic relationships



(Abowitz, Knox, and Zusman 2010) or at work (Gihyung and Seunghee 2014; Hochschild 1983; Scott and Barnes 2011). This *narrative arc* of sacrifice is one that is much more common for female characters, reflecting the reality of femininity and cultural expectations of femininity. However, much of Dean's *narrative arc* is both upheld and negated by the *identity presentation* and construction of masculinity given to the character. Essentially, while the *narrative arc* of self-sacrifice may traditionally be a feminine one, SPN reconstitutes Dean's self-sacrifice as the more "masculine" trait of loyalty. While it is his loyalty that defines Dean for his good qualities, his loyalty also serves as a fatal flaw. His extreme loyalty to Sam means that Dean always puts himself second, up to and including selling his soul because he cannot live without his brother. For all his attempts to achieve hegemonic masculinity (e.g., hunting, womanizing), Dean falls short in two ways. The first is a canonical way. Dean's loyalty, and the things he does because of it, are consistently coded as a bad thing and are often actually used against the brothers. For example, when the archangel Zachariah pulls Adam, the Winchester's half-brother, from heaven, they have this exchange:

Zachariah: Can't quite zero in on you, either. So, let me take a wild guess. You're with Sam and Dean?

Adam: Yeah.

Zachariah: Didn't we tell you about them? [*Adam nods*] So you know you can't trust them, right? You know Sam and Dean Winchester are psychotically, irrationally, erotically codependent on each other, right?

Adam: I don't know. They said a few things about you.

Zachariah: Really? Trust me, kid, when the heat gets hot, they're not gonna give a flying crap about you. Hell, they'd rather save each other's sweet bacon than save the planet.

They're not your family. Understand? Now...you want to see your mom again or not?<sup>17</sup>

Zachariah is using Adam's knowledge of the lengths Sam and Dean will go for each other to convince Adam that he is not on their agenda. This works because even the viewer must admit Zachariah's point is true; Sam and especially Dean had consistently acted against the interests of

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<sup>17</sup> Season five, episode eighteen: "Point of No Return"

the wider world to maintain their lives and bonds with each other. This point is especially true in regards to Adam as the character essentially disappears from the narrative following his being sent to Hell; after “Swan Song”<sup>18</sup> Adam is only mentioned twice in the following five seasons and neither Winchester make an effort to try and rescue their half-brother.

Along with his loyalty, Dean’s other defining trait as the series goes on is his insistence on free will. Beginning with demonic possession (which does not require the consent of the host) and a continuing theme with angelic vessels (which do require consent), Dean has a long association with the supernatural and the loss of control over his own body. While Dean himself has never been possessed or used as a vessel, he has encountered other supernatural beings that can take away free will. Dean refers to being possessed by a demon as being a “meat suit” several times and being an angelic vessel as being an “angel condom”<sup>19</sup>. His insistence on free will is almost ironic when considered alongside his loyalty. Often his loyalty and devotion to his family lead Dean to make decisions that put himself last. Essentially, his loyalty will often force Dean to subsume his own desires and wishes for the benefit of others; he gives up his independence to remain connected to his family. Occasionally, this tendency is even “lampshaded,” or the pointing out of a blatant breaking of the audience’s suspension of disbelief or a trope use and simply moving on (e.g., the conversation with Zachariah), in canon. This indicates that while the writers (and the audience) continue to use and buy into these situations they are aware of the irrational extent of Dean’s actions.

These character traits and actions of Dean’s are all contextually within a specific representation of masculinity. As Connell ([1995] 2005) points out, masculinity is only defined in opposition; traditionally masculinity is defined by being “not feminine” or “not that type of

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<sup>18</sup> Season five, episode twenty-two

<sup>19</sup> Season five, episode one: “Sympathy for the Devil”

type” (i.e., subordinate masculinities such as men of color, LGBTQIA+ men, working-class and poor men, etc.) and while that is certainly the case with SPN’s portrayal of Dean, he is more aptly and starkly contrasted with Sam instead of the sparse number of significant female figures on the show. Dean’s brand of masculinity and the performance he makes of it relies heavily on all four of the cultural norms Brannon (1976) identifies, though the inclusion of “The Big Wheel” is only shown through non-normative values. “No Sissy Stuff,” Brannon’s (1976) primary part of the “guy code” (Kimmel 2008) is centered on asserting masculinity through repudiating femininity. While Dean is generally shown as supportive of women particularly through his emotional support of female victims and easy acceptance of the place of female hunters in the life, he rejects the traits of femininity he displays as part of his identity. He realigns himself (Stokes and Hewitt 1976) and his actions through verbal denials (e.g., “no chick flick moments”) or justifications (e.g., “it’s just to get her to talk”). Further, as part of a running “joke” on the show, Sam and Dean are often mistaken as lovers instead of family by the people they meet and, particularly early on, Dean is the one to make the most vehement denials about his sexuality. These denials have less to do with being associated with incest and more to do with being seen as gay, something that firmly places Dean’s masculinity in “No Sissy Stuff.” Finally, Dean is the brother that is shown as firmly “anti-intellectual,” who disdains anything academic as weak or unnecessary.

Brannon’s (1976) second cultural expectation of masculinity, “Be a Big Wheel,” is about the necessity of being powerful and successful to accomplish masculinity. This is present in SPN, though not in the same sense Brannon (1976) asserts in terms of wealth, power, or status. This idea of “Be a Big Wheel” is also, ironically, one of the few places in which the working class background of Sam and Dean becomes apparent, rather than simply part of the set or

costume pieces. Dean values physical power and authority in crisis, but does not value economic success; he values lives saved. In a way this is actually obscuring his working class roots -- by not worrying about money -- but he also shows his working class roots by rejecting the cultural expectation of financial success and shifting what he values to something more obtainable within his situation (e.g., lives saved). This is what I mean by a “non-normative” representation of “Be a Big Wheel,” as Dean still values the traits of power and success as part of his conceptualization of masculinity, he measures them differently than the broader culture does.

“Be a Sturdy Oak” (Brannon 1976) is the idea that men should be strong and reliable in a crisis, being able to handle anything that comes their way. A man is the support necessary to weather any particular crisis. Dean prides himself in being able to "save people...hunt things" and often takes the lead both in dealing directly with fighting monsters but also in finding answers (despite his frequently declared distaste for book research and libraries). Dean’s entire sense of self revolves around this conceptualization of masculinity. Ironically, however, the way SPN’s narrative is crafted around the idea of “agency” and Dean’s specific insistence on “free will” as a type of agency, means that SPN is showing Dean – a hegemonically masculine (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) character – with a narrative that is usually associated with femininity and female characters. Specifically, that narrative is one of “body autonomy.” Men rarely have to worry about the loss of control over their own bodies, at least to another person or entity, as is the loss of control shown on SPN rather than to something like illness. Women, on the other hand, have a long history of their bodies being controlled by the men around them (Rubin 1975). To put Dean at the center of this narrative about agency is an interesting (or possibly unintentional) choice on the part of the writers. The choice, however, is consistent with the overall presentation of Dean; that is, Dean is the representation of a specific type of

masculinity but is given a role that is traditionally seen as feminine (self-sacrifice for family) within the narrative. While men, as the cultural “breadwinner” also make sacrifices in the form of long hours at work and time away from their families and homes, this is a sacrifice that is often specifically disconnective. That is, this sacrifice is about being disconnected and outside the home and family. In contrast, Dean’s role and sacrifices (especially as a child), are ones that are often specifically centered *within* the home as he takes on duties of cooking, cleaning, and childrearing while John is absent. His later sacrifices of health, safety, pride, and even his soul are similarly centered on sustaining a connection with Sam or his other friends and family rather than the sacrifice of separation or disconnection a “breadwinner” would traditionally make. Finally, the other piece of “Sturdy Oak” masculinity is, as Kimmel (2008) points out, not just being the support but also being as emotionless as a block of oak. Dean frequently attempts to hide his emotions, such as giving to rage in season two while alone, or distance himself from displays of emotions by others. The emotions that Dean is likely to show and advocate for publicly are only “acceptable” ones, such as anger or lust.

Finally, Brannon (1976) identifies the idea of “Give ‘em Hell” as the final piece of the Western cultural conception of masculinity. “Give ‘em Hell” is about being daring and aggressive, taking risks regardless of what others say in the pursuit of a man’s goals. Like “Be a Sturdy Oak,” this is probably one of the most important pieces of Dean’s identity as a man. Dean prides himself on his ability to handle himself physically, even against creatures stronger and more dangerous. But “Give ‘em Hell” is not just about physical aggression – which Dean displays frequently – but can also be about *sexual* aggression. A central characteristic of Dean’s masculinity is his success with multiple women; he is an active womanizer and is frequently shown as appreciating women’s bodies in bars, or referencing one-night stands he has had in the

past. One of his reoccurring storylines, involving Lisa Braeden, is built specifically on the premise that Dean had a one-night stand with Lisa memorable enough that she is willing to begin a relationship with him even after several years apart.

Dean is a very specific representation of masculinity; he is John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Bruce Willis, and Sylvester Stallone. With Dean, SPN is relying on a larger cultural narrative about masculinity to present a particular kind of hero that is – perhaps ironic given their main audience of women – targeted to appeal to men. Even within the narrative, Dean is often shown looking to Sam for approval or recognition of his assertions of masculinity; though this occasionally backfires on Dean as Sam’s values and conceptualization of masculinity is built on the utter rejection of everything John Winchester is and Dean aspires to be. That is the key point about Dean’s masculinity, of course, is that it is at its heart an attempt to show the kind of masculinity that his father – a man of the Baby Boomer generation – teaches him to be. SPN’s writers are drawing on all of this, both textually through the presentation of John Winchester and his very different relationships with his sons, and also in the subtextual sense through Dean’s presentation. Everything about the way Dean looks and dresses and what he owns is part of the cultural context (Swidler 1986) SPN’s writers are drawing on. For example, Dean is costumed in two general types of outfits. He has “casual” wear, which is what he wears when he is on his “own” time (e.g., not meeting victims) or when expecting to confront something dangerous. This “casual” wear generally consists of blue jeans, work boots, t-shirts, Henleys, or plaid shirts (occasionally in combination), and leather or twill jackets. His other outfits, which I call his “work clothes” and designate both working and middle class occupations, actually vary widely from episode to episode, though the most typical configuration is a simple black suit and tie. Dean and Sam always wear “work clothes” as costumes to better uphold their covers. Wearing

suits fits any number of occupations but especially police or law enforcement when paired with fake badges and identification. So while Dean and Sam can both acquire and wear the trappings of middle-class respectability (e.g., the suits), these situations are always done within the context of disguise. They literally disguise their working class status through these costumes to gain information, help, or resources from others around them. Dean and Sam also have other uniforms available, such as uniforms for plumbers, sewage treatment workers, and other working class occupations. In one episode, the brothers even masquerade as priests. Dean relies on the clothing to make the people he is dealing with believe his cover and grant him the appropriate authority the profession; this is likely possible not only because of the very specific costuming but also his status as an attractive white man, which I will address later in this chapter. Metatextually, of course, this type of clothing which Dean prefers is one of the few visible markers of class within the show.

In addition to the clothing, there is a third invisible and voiceless “main character” within the show: the black 1967 Chevy Impala. The car symbolizes “home” specifically for Dean and much of this association is not only because both of the brothers spent significant amount of time riding in the car while they were children but also because the car is originally a possession of John Winchester who leaves it in trust to Dean. Dean is fiercely possessive of the car, calling it his “baby” and even ripping out an iPod Sam installs in the car while Dean is in Hell. The pilot includes the following conversation that becomes a key characterization moment for Dean:

Sam: ...I swear man; you gotta update your cassette tape collection.

Dean: Why?

Sam: Well for one they are cassette tapes, and two— [Pulls out a few cassette tapes] Black Sabbath? Motorhead? Metallica? It’s the greatest hits of mullet rock.

Dean: [Grabs a cassette from Sam and pops it in the player] House rules, Sammy. Driver picks the music, shotgun shuts his cake hole.

Within this one sequence, we can see the importance of the Impala as a symbol of power to Dean, particularly in combination with music. Dean and the type of music played within the show – predominantly classic rock, metal, and occasionally traditional blues – are synonymous. Further, as Harrison (2010) traces for heavy metal and O’Connell (2013) for blues, all three musical genres are ones that have strong roots within working-class culture and this is the music that is featured within the series. The car and his music make a powerful statement about how Dean considers his own masculinity and his father’s.

Masculinity is a homosocial activity (Kimmel 2008; Kimmel 2010) and like all attempts at “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995) requires the performance to be judged by others before “masculinity” is successfully achieved. For women, this judgment is made by both men and other women. For men, however, the judges they care the most about are *other men* (Kimmel 2008; Kimmel 2010). In Dean’s case, that means the judgment of his father. This older style of rugged and rough hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) as portrayed through both John and Dean is given a sharp contrast in the masculinity presented by Sam Winchester. Sam, in contrast to Dean, is shown as a softer masculinity. While the two brothers do have much in common, Sam is written as Dean’s foil. We can see this both in Sam’s personality and actions. However, while he is written as a foil to Dean, he is often presented as a *mirror* to his father, John, and can be seen perpetuating the same sort of manipulations on Dean that John uses in flashbacks.

#### *Sam Winchester*

Sam is smart and prefers thinking and planning to action; he values book-learning and education in a way neither Dean nor John do. He represents the researcher of the family. He is also rebellious in a way Dean never is. Where Dean accepts and enjoys the hunting lifestyle, Sam



rejects John and hunting early on. He wants to be normal in a family that lives abnormally. He even attempts to become normal by walking away from Dean and John to attend Stanford when he was eighteen. Sam is openly resentful of his father and often disparages Dean for his attitude toward hunting and preferences. Some of this is played on the show as simple sibling rivalry, usually through pranks between the brothers, but much of the tension between the two brothers has to do with their differing value systems.

Sam is shown as the “soft” one of the two and the type of masculinity he displays is more empathetic than Dean’s. As Dean’s binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963), Sam consistently rejects the masculine values Dean portrays and rejects the *identity presentation* that incorporates Brannon’s (1976) typology of primary masculine characteristics. For example, where Dean eschews emotional displays, Sam is frequently shown trying to get Dean to talk about his feelings. Where Dean displays “Give ‘em Hell” (Brannon 1976) through sexual aggression, Sam is initially shown in a long-term romantic relationship and wants to settle down. Sam, as Dean’s opposite, rejects the brand of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) Dean portrays. Sam is also contrasted as a character that not only rejects the earlier hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) but also more modern (and ultimately problematic) expressions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This rejection includes what Kimmel terms as “guyland” (2008). “Guyland,” which owes a debt to the cultural expectations of the previous generation that Brannon (1976) identifies, is a state of “topsy-turvy, Peter-Pan mindset, young men shirk the responsibilities of adulthood and remain fixated on the trappings of boyhood, while the boys they still are struggle heroically to prove that they are real men despite all evidence to the contrary” (Kimmel 2008:4). Essentially, the masculinity of men from ages 16 to 26 (Sam begins the series

at 22), is one of a delayed adolescence, as men try to essentially figure out what “being a man” means in the modern world. Kimmel characterizes “guyland” as a predominantly white-middle class masculinity, that involves men attempting to hold on to the things they enjoy (e.g., sports, games, drinking, sex, etc.) or, for working-class men, “guyland” is “their local sports bar, on the factory shop floor, and in the bowling league or military unit. Yet the same sense of entitlement, the same outraged response to the waning of privilege, is clear” (2008:12). Sam attempts to reject both the masculinity of the previous generation (John, Dean) and the masculinity predominantly held by his peer groups. Dean is the character a viewer is supposed to root for as the hero but the first five seasons of SPN are ultimately *Sam’s* heroic journey, both in terms of the narrative and Sam’s own inner journey. The narrative hinges on Sam’s choices and actions in a way they do not for Dean. Sam’s narrative is one of self-discovery as an unwilling hero and is ultimately a recovery narrative.

Sam’s *narrative arc* is also, in many ways, the opposite of Dean’s narrative of self-reliance and independence. Dean’s narrative stresses agency while Sam’s is built on the theme of “dependence.” Where Dean wavers between accepting his fate (i.e., his father’s plans) and rejecting fate (i.e., the plans of the angels) depending on where his loyalty is, Sam’s narrative regarding fate and self-will begins when he is six months old and the Yellow-Eyed Demon changes him in his crib. Sam’s fate was deliberately altered in a way Dean’s never was; what Dean often fails to see about his situation, particularly as someone who believes he is being pushed in multiple directions, is that while outside forces are trying to manipulate him to their own ends, it is always his own choices that put him in that situation. Sam, in contrast, either has his choices taken away from him by his father, by Dean, or by circumstances, and eventually just gives up and stops fighting for his own dreams of normality and a middle-class lifestyle. His

dream of a normal life is the only thing he fights for continually and even that dream Sam gives up on by the end of season five, instead transferring his wish for a “normal” life to his brother. Sam is marked by the choices and manipulations of others as well as his own instinct and wish to rebel. Essentially Sam’s journey depends on other people. Four key points happen throughout his development along his heroic journey: his changing in the cradle and the subsequent loss of his mother and stability, his rebellion against his father and attempt to create a normal life for himself at Stanford, how he handles Dean’s death and descent into Hell, and finally how Sam handles the revelation that he is destined to be the vessel for Lucifer.

The first time the audience is introduced to Sam is also the first time Sam’s choices are taken from him by others. When Azazel makes baby Sam swallow his blood, Sam is marked for evil. Azazel’s plan involves the corruption of Sam as he grows into an adult. The corruption is partially to make him more suggestible to demonic influence and more likely to say yes and allow Lucifer to use him as a vessel but also Sam is picked partially because of his family background. John’s reaction to Mary’s death and learning about the supernatural drags both Sam and Dean into a life of hunting. What John does not realize at the time is that Mary – and her family, the Campbells – were always hunters. She hides that part of herself from John and, after they are born, Dean and Sam. Dean discovers this backstory when Castiel sends him back in time and he meets John, Mary, and his grandparents Samuel and Deanna Campbell in the past. His interference brings the attention of Azazel to the Campbells and eventually causes the death of John Winchester. Mary makes a deal with Azazel to bring John back to life and in exchange is asked not to interfere when Azazel comes back for Sam in ten years. We can see that it is *Mary’s* choice, despite Dean trying to interfere and stop this from happening that draws Azazel’s attention to Sam and alters his life. Then, after Mary’s death, John’s choice to hunt Azazel and

other supernatural monsters robs Sam of his desperate wish to have a “normal life.” Mary betrays her family in two ways: she gives permission for Azazel to infect Sam but she also makes the deal to save John and not her parents. Mary makes the deal to preserve her “normal” future.

Sam takes after Mary in that sense; many of his worst actions are in pursuit of ending trouble and returning to a “normal” life. He leaves when he is eighteen with a full-ride scholarship to Stanford. This action blindsides both his father and brother and leads to a fight in which John tells Sam that if he leaves he cannot come back. This mirrors Mary’s choice; Sam chooses to walk away from the family he knows and the life he has been raised in and “save” his chance at a happier and “normal” future. Even after rejoining Dean on the hunt in season one, Sam is consistently obstinate about returning to his normal life after Azazel is dealt with and often mocks Dean for his continued devotion to their father. In the season two episode “In My Time of Dying<sup>20</sup>,” Sam starts a fight with John over Dean’s death-bed, accusing him of caring more about catching and killing Azazel than the son lying in the hospital. John is the one who stops Sam during their fight and the viewer discovers that, rather than planning to summon Azazel to kill him, John plans to make a trade and sell his soul to save Dean. After John’s death, Sam begins to respect his father more; an action Dean often calls him out on, even pointing out their fight after Dean wakes up in the hospital.

John’s actions in “In My Time of Dying” have two consequences. First, by selling his soul he is binding Sam further into the hunt for Azazel. Once again, the actions of another being have forced Sam off his chosen path of a “normal” life. Sam stays partially to obtain the vengeance for the three people close to him Azazel has killed (Mary, Jessica, and John) and partially to help Dean through his grief and make sure Dean does not die. This is the beginning

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<sup>20</sup> Season two, episode one

of where the viewer can truly see the codependency between the two brothers; Dean provides the drive to keep them going when Sam might quit while Sam provides the emotional grounding necessary for both of them to process the very literal horrors they see on a daily basis.

This codependency becomes key when, first, Dean repeats his father's actions and sells his soul for Sam at the end of season two, and second when the viewer sees how Sam has been living without Dean when Dean comes back to life in season four. Sam, without Dean, has continued hunting for something to do. What he does not tell Dean is that he picks up a "partner" during the time when Dean was gone: Ruby the demon. Ruby had been helping Sam learn about his psychic powers and feeding him her blood to increase those powers. With enough blood, Sam can exorcise and even torture demons while they are in their hosts. The blood, however, is addictive and leaves Sam reliant on Ruby for company and the blood.

When Dean returns to life, Sam hides his abilities from a Dean who is suspicious and uncertain of them as well as his connection to Ruby. Despite everything, Sam is unwilling to trust Dean with a large part of himself. Some of their most devastating fights are centered on Sam's lying to Dean. Like with his father John, Sam's reaction to Dean's attempt to stop and control him is to pull back and fight harder. Sam firmly believes in himself and his ability to control both Ruby and his own actions. This belief is one of the best examples of Sam's fatal flaw: pride. Many of the characters comment on how Dean and Sam are both fit vessels, such as the Archangel Gabriel's comment: "Think about it, Michael, the big brother, loyal to an absent father. And Lucifer, the little brother, rebellious of daddy's plan. You were born to this, boys<sup>21</sup>." Rarely, however, does anyone comment on the flaw of Sam's pride and insistence of self-reliance.

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<sup>21</sup> Season five, episode eight: "Changing Channels"

This is where Sam's rejection of both the older cultural expectations of masculinity (Brannon 1976) and more modern expectations of masculinity (Kimmel 2008) begins to break down. Sam's rejections are consistently verbal while his *actions* often run counter to this and are steeped in many of the cultural assumptions that come along with the older style of masculinity he was taught by John and Dean. Kimmel describes the rules of the "guy code" as a list of ten aphorisms, including things like "boys don't cry," "it's better to be mad than sad," and "don't get mad – get even" (2008:45). These particular rules are the modern version of "Give 'em Hell" (Brannon 1976) and are the attitudes Sam verbally advocates against but is frequently shown acting upon. For example, Sam is only brought back into the hunting life permanently following the loss of his girlfriend and his desire for revenge. The flaws Sam frequently shows of pride and self-reliance are also packed into both sets of masculine expectations. For example, Kimmel's aphorism of "I don't stop to ask for directions" (2008:45) is a tenet of masculinity that encourages young men not to ask for help and only depend on themselves. Sam is consistently shown telling Dean he should seek physical, mental, or emotional help but rarely ever does this himself. When he does seek out help, Sam tends to go to sources that are corruptive influences (e.g., Ruby) because he believes in the ideologies of "just do it" and "it's all good" (Kimmel 2008:45). Essentially, Sam's pride means that he believes that he will be able to handle any situation that comes his way, even when working with someone who is nominally the "enemy."

While both pride and self-reliance are shown to be good qualities textually, the subtext of the show always undermines Sam's traits. His pride is what allows him to fall into several traps throughout the five seasons (e.g., Meg, Lucifer). His insistence of self-reliance is subtextually painted as "bad" within the narrative first in Sam's rejection of both hunting and his family, especially later on in the series when even Dean is beginning to doubt the rightness of hunting,

because this is also a rejection of helping people. Secondly, his insistence on self-reliance is translated into keeping secrets during season three and four, such as his relationship with Ruby and blood-addiction. Sam and Dean are both characters that are presented as saying one thing and doing another. However, the narrative consistently upholds Dean's actions as "right" and Sam's as "wrong," or at least actions with far more consequences (e.g., the release of Lucifer).

All of this combines in a character that is written in ways that can seem very uneven when looking at his place in the narrative, particularly with regards to Sam's place as both foil and mirror. Sam, as Dean's foil (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963), is shown as the opposite sort of masculinity compared to Dean. However, this kind of masculinity is still in many ways hegemonic (Connell 1987; Connell [1995] 2005); instead of the rugged working class masculinity that values physical labor and action, Sam embodies the more refined upper-class type of masculinity. Sam's masculinity is about privilege and the value clash between Sam and John is ultimately a clash between class values. The things Sam values – educational attainment, financial success – are all part of the "Be a Big Wheel" (Brannon 1976) conception of masculinity and are hallmarks of what is considered "success" in middle- and upper-class values. Dean values other things as educational attainment and financial success are fundamentally incompatible with his current lifestyle, essentially retreating (Merton 1938) from the more "mainstream" values for a definition of masculinity that highlights his strengths within his lifestyle. Sam, in contrast, has internalized societal values of "success" and attempts to reject both Dean and John's brand of masculinity and values for the "mainstream." His attempts to conform are marked as "deviant" within the context of the SPN narrative as consistently Sam's actions are shown to be foolish or leading to negative consequences, largely because the "mainstream" and "normal" life Sam so desperately wants to have is only possible because

hunters safeguard those who are unaware of the supernatural. Dean and Sam both realize that the “policing” work they do is necessary but come up with different conclusions about it; Dean enjoys the work and values it but Sam does not understand why he is the one to have to make the sacrifice for others, particularly because he never chose the life of a hunter or felt any real connection to his mother Mary. Dean’s story follows the narrative a willing hero who is continually disillusioned and hurt by the obstacles he must face; Sam, in contrast, is the unwilling hero whom must be forced into accepting his role. The differences in these two archetypes are also reflected in their portrayal of masculinity, with Dean shown as the more active, dominant masculinity and Sam as a more passive, restrained masculinity.

What makes Sam’s story interesting – and also extremely problematic – as an unwilling or reluctant hero is, as Campbell ([1948] 2008) points out, that requires a supernatural “push” to eventually begin and accept his journey. Sam’s “push” comes in the form of women. Jess provides the first step in Sam’s motivation to begin the journey, mirroring the journey his father took after Mary’s death. Sam provides two functions within the narrative; his purpose is, primarily, to be a foil to Dean but also to serve as a mirror to John and John’s journey from happy family man to veteran hunter. Jess and Mary provide mirror motivations, specifically within the “fridging” (Simone 1999) trope, when a woman is killed to provide backstory or motivation for a man’s narrative. The whole purpose of Jess within SPN’s narrative is simply to push Sam onto his journey; as a character, she has no inner life, no motivations, or no real existence beyond her connection to Sam. Sam’s second push, switching him from unwilling to willing hero, also comes at the hand of a woman: Ruby. While Ruby has a slightly more complex characterization than Jess, her essential role within the narrative is to guide Sam further onto his journey. Dean’s death at the end of S3 provides the catalyst to switch Sam from an unwilling



hero to a willing hero, Ruby's purpose within the narrative is to push Sam to fully accept and embrace his demonic "gifts" and powers, setting him on the path that will eventually free Lucifer. Sam's apotheosis (Campbell [1948] 2008) is directly the result of Ruby's presence and actions.

This means that Sam, like Dean, plays a somewhat contradictory role between his place in the *narrative arc* and his *identity presentation* of masculinity. Where Dean carries narratives regarding agency and body autonomy, Sam's narrative is about the lived experience of the lack of body autonomy and lack of agency. He is, also like Dean, placed narratively in a role due to his connection with the theme of dependence that is usually reserved for a female character. However textually Sam is often the character with the most power as his choices and actions (limited and bounded by others as they may be) and central positioning as someone on a heroic journey slot him into a more masculine narrative role.

Sam also provides a mirror to John in his role of "gender cop" early on in the series. Dean is attempting to live up to his father's conception of masculinity and lifestyle and from their few interactions largely seems himself as disappointing that role model. Sam also acts in the role of critic of Dean's behavior and masculinity, and constantly judges him for the very hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) Dean aspires to achieve. However, by making those judgments, Sam is taking over the role John plays in Dean's life as a figure of considerable disapproval.

### *Supporting Cast*

While Dean and Sam are the focus of the narrative, their story would not be possible without the inclusion of a supporting cast. Other characters broaden the narrative, provide possible entry points for new types of stories, and create tension or drama through character

conflict. Ultimately, however, the role of a member of the supporting cast is not to carry the narrative but facilitate the function of Dean and Sam as heroes. Within the first five seasons, the most influential members of the supporting cast are John Winchester and Bobby Singer, followed by Jo and Ellen Harvelle and the angel Castiel. I place John and Bobby as the most influential figures less because of their number of appearances but because of their places within the overall narrative. As their father, John's presence is constantly with both Dean and Sam as they travel, initially to find their father, then to help John fulfill their mission of killing Azazel, and finally to take revenge for his death. Even after John's death in season two, structurally speaking his "presence" is required as a motivation. Unlike Jess, who provides early motivation for Sam to continue his heroic journey with Dean and then largely disappears from the narrative, John is a constant presence through subtle portrayals of grief (particularly in season two and early season three), mentions of him, or flashbacks to the Winchester childhood. John's presence within the series is not only ubiquitous but also fairly damaging. John is presented in two lights – "hunter" and "father" – much in the same way Dean is presented as "brother" and "hunter." However, unlike Dean who continually puts his role as "brother" first, we see John as a man who is a good hunter and a good hunting mentor to Dean and Sam but a fairly terrible father.

Bobby Singer provides a contrast to John in terms of parenting skills. Bobby is introduced as "Uncle Bobby" in the season three flashback episode, taking place in 1991, "A Very Supernatural Christmas"<sup>22</sup> by Sam, highlighting that his association with the Winchesters – and particularly Dean and Sam – go back at least a decade. Bobby lives in South Dakota and runs a junkyard – Singer Salvage. His "day job" is as a mechanic but he spends most of his screen time acting as a hunter; Bobby is shown to be a focal point and connection for a vast

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<sup>22</sup> Episode eight

network of hunters, many of whom use him as a reference. For example, he poses as a supervisor over the phone, verifying various hunters' credentials<sup>23</sup>. His library of esoteric books on lore and religion is large and he built a demon and ghost-proof panic room in his basement. Despite his centrality into the hunter network, perhaps the most telling markers of Bobby's place in Dean and Sam's lives is, first, the moniker "Uncle Bobby," given by Sam and, second, Dean, when he is put into an alternate reality with no memories of his past by the archangel Zachariah, says that his father's name is "Bob," rather than John. John Winchester is presented as a mentor but Bobby is given the place in the narrative of "father figure," without the same sort of contention or pain that accompanies the relationships between the three Winchester men. Bobby, like John, is a representation of an older style of working class masculinity.

The third important supporting figure is Castiel, the angel whom raises Dean from Hell in season four. His presence is minimal in season four and increases as the series goes on due to fan reaction and demand. Within the context of the two seasons I analyzed that Castiel appears in (seasons four and five), his overall impact is relatively small but his presence within the canon in season six and beyond – as well as his great popularity within the fandom – means this character becomes a central focus within the narrative. Castiel is our first real introduction to the angelic side of Christian theology within the SPN world and provides the narrative vehicle into the major conflicts of seasons four and five. Castiel's character himself is presented as both "straight man" and "fish out of water." His focus and intensity add to the role of "straight man," in that he constantly pressures Dean and Sam to fulfill their mission and attempt to avert the apocalypse. However, as he *is* a fish out of water, Castiel also provides humor in many situations as he interacts poorly with humans, leaving Dean and Sam to correct his mistakes until he learns.

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<sup>23</sup> Season six, episode six: "Weekend at Bobby's"

Castiel's character evolves, particularly in season five, however, and he begins to adopt more "human" traits, joining Dean and Sam as a full member of "Team Free Will." Castiel essentially becomes "human" by imitating Dean and his lack of success in achieving the same type of masculinity due to his incomprehension is often used to add humor to scenes and situations within the plot.

The last two reoccurring characters of importance are Ellen and Jo Harvelle. While both characters only appear in a handful of episodes (Ellen appears in eight episodes over seasons two through five and Jo appears in six episodes), they provide the same sort of narrative support John and Bobby do to the Winchesters. First and foremost, the pair is shown as a family facing some of the same problems and experiences that Dean, Sam, and John have; the Harvelles are created very deliberately as an inverse mirror of the Winchesters. The first inverse is obviously gender; the Harvelle's are the primary example we have of *female* hunters within the SPN universe. Secondly, while both families have experienced loss – Mary from the Winchester family and Ellen's husband/Jo's father from the Harvelle's – each family is shown dealing with that loss very differently. Ellen is shown running a bar that becomes a pit stop and information source for hunters and trying to get Jo to give up the idea of becoming a hunter and go to college. When Jo rebels and becomes a hunter, despite her mother's wishes, Ellen does what she can to support her – a direct contrast to John's approach of essentially cutting off Sam from the family when he rebels out of the hunting life. These five characters provide support, both in terms of assisting the Winchesters, but also narrative emphasis to the overarching themes within the show of agency and dependence.

*Overall Representation*

SPN is a complex story that draws on several types of cultural narratives and very distinctly American myths and legends. The layering of “reality” and “superreality,” which we see within the A and B plots of each episode (i.e., monster hunting narratives and family dynamics narratives) provides depth to a series that might otherwise be very vapid. The story of the Winchesters is compelling but often distracts from troubling narratives underneath the surface. SPN tells the story of lower/working class white masculinity; this means the stories of women and people of color are often absent or problematic. Women are consistently shown as victims of monsters in scenes of extreme sexualized violence and used to provide motivation for the characters to continue their hunts. Women are much more likely to be shown unclothed, if a victim, or her death scene is likely to be shown in full, compared to the way the show frequently cuts to black/commercial prior to the death scene of a male character. If a woman is not a victim, then she is immediately assigned the role of villain instead. Three of the main demon antagonists within the first five seasons (Meg, Ruby, Lilith) are played by blonde white women<sup>24</sup>. This is an interesting juxtaposition when considering that both of the dead women that propel the Winchester storyline (Mary, Jess) are white and blonde. Women of color are afforded even less narrative space than white women. In five seasons, the SPN only gives us *four* named black women: Taylor<sup>25</sup> (dies during her episode), Missouri Moseley<sup>26</sup> (a psychic who told John about the demon that killed Mary when he first started hunting and thus falls under the “magical negro” stereotype), Cassie<sup>27</sup> (the only woman Dean professes to love within five seasons and only

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<sup>24</sup> Ruby’s character is initially played by actress Katie Cassidy (blonde) in S3. In seasons four and five, Ruby’s actress was switched to Genevieve Cortese (a brunette).

<sup>25</sup> Season one, episode seven: “Hook Man”

<sup>26</sup> Season one, episode nine: “Home”

<sup>27</sup> Season one, episode thirteen: “Route 666”

appears in one episode), and Tamara<sup>28</sup> (part of a husband-and-wife hunting team Bobby, Dean, and Sam encounter when they face the seven deadly sins). None of these characters last longer than an episode. No women of other ethnicities are shown in SPN. Essentially, white women are given a place within the Winchester's narrative but ones that are restricted to three roles: victim of the supernatural, supernatural villain, or sex object. The narratives of women of color are excluded almost completely from the picture of both "reality" and "superreality" that is portrayed within SPN; women of color are not even present in the background of crowd scenes, let alone as named characters. Women are positioned as objects within the canon and even the reoccurring characters with, arguably, the most agency are Meg, Ruby, and Lilith, all of whom are taking orders from higher-ranked men. Even Ellen and Jo Harvelle, who appear as supporting characters for Dean and Sam, are given very little character development and exist solely to assist the Winchesters before eventually sacrificing themselves to allow Dean and Sam to run away from hellhounds<sup>29</sup>.

Men of color fare slightly better within the SPN world as black men (and only black men, no other ethnicities are shown) are given reoccurring roles or significant parts within the plot.. The most notable black characters are Jake Talley, Victor Hendrickson, Gordon Walker, and Uriel. Jake Talley is introduced at the end of season two as another psychic Azazel created. He initially helps Sam after Sam is kidnapped but is tempted by the power Azazel offers and eventually stabs Sam in the back before being killed by Sam. Victor Hendrickson is an FBI agent that is tasked with finding and stopping Dean and Sam. He believes they are serial killers and goes to great lengths to track them. In the season three episode, "Jus in Bello"<sup>30</sup>, Hendrickson

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<sup>28</sup> Season three, episode one: "The Magnificent Seven"

<sup>29</sup> Season five, episode ten: "Abandon All Hope..."

<sup>30</sup> Episode twelve

catches up with Sam and Dean in Colorado. They are all trapped in a police station that has been surrounded by demons. Victor, faced with proof of the supernatural, lets the Winchester brothers go and agrees to clear them of charges. They part on good terms. After Sam and Dean leave, the scene switches back to the police station where Lilith arrives and blows the entire building up – along with everyone in it.

Gordon Walker is a hunter who specializes in vampires. He is focused, brutal, and kills every supernatural being he comes across (not just the ones that are killing or harming humans). He enjoys torture and, when he first meets the Winchesters, he believes he may have found someone who understands and agrees with his methods in Dean<sup>31</sup>. Dean eventually comes to his senses and begins to move past his grief at the loss of his father and the Winchesters have a falling out with Gordon. Gordon believes that Sam, due to his psychic powers, is not human and tries repeatedly to kill Sam<sup>32</sup>. In his final appearance, his attempts to kill Dean and Sam lead Gordon to be captured and turned by a vampire. He decides to kill Sam as his last good act before killing himself; Sam gets the better of him and garrotes Gordon with razor wire until he is beheaded (one of the few ways to kill a vampire). Uriel is an angel introduced as a “specialist” in season four. He routinely calls humanity “mud monkeys<sup>33</sup>,” a particularly ironic insult given the racist associations with the term. He advocates killing humans whenever possible and is revealed to have been trying to break the Seals to release Lucifer rather than trying to protect them the entire time he worked with the Winchesters<sup>34</sup> until he is killed by his fellow angel Anna. All four black male characters die and only *one* of those characters stays “good” – at least in the sense of

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<sup>31</sup> Season two, episode three: “Bloodlust”

<sup>32</sup> Season two, episode ten: “Hunted” / season three, episode three: “Bad Day at Black Rock”

<sup>33</sup> Season four, episode seven: “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester”

<sup>34</sup> Season four, episode sixteen: “On the Head of a Pin”

not trying to kill either of the Winchester brothers, though Hendrickson is still an antagonistic character.

The combination of positioning of all female characters and male characters of color provides a very distinct counterpoint to the white masculinity shown through the Winchesters and other “good” protagonist characters (e.g., Bobby Singer, Castiel). Men of color are used as props to highlight and position the Winchester brothers as dominant men (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Perry 2009). This is similar to, for example, the way Perry (2009) identifies gay bashing as a form of doing masculinity. In Perry’s (2009) findings, men who are unable to achieve hegemonic masculinity in other ways turn to the domination of subordinate or “lesser” masculinities as a way to regulate “acceptable” and “unacceptable” forms of masculinity. Within the canon, men of color become this “unacceptable” masculinity in a form of symbolic violence, or the imposition of perceptions upon social agents (i.e., consumers), whom then take those perceptions to be “right” (Bourdieu 1989; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

The violence against women shown repeatedly within the canon is easily coded away, first, as a driving motivation for the Winchesters to hunt (i.e., to stop the violence/protect women and to avenge violence already done) and, second, as a way to put women in their place (i.e., “women” have been recoded as “monster” or “less than human”). Women are created within the narrative to provide a comparison to the Winchesters, reflecting our cultural ideologies of sex/gender as a binary that is then made legitimate through the continued construction of “gender” as “biological” (Lorber 1993; Lorber 1994; Preves 2011), and often come out unfavorably. They, like men of color, are used as props within the larger narrative to elevate the Winchesters as “heroic men.” Women are portrayed as simultaneously weaker and needing to be saved *and* as out of control and needing to be “put down.” The three examples we have of



women whom are both “strong” and “controlled” (Ellen and Jo Harvelle, Mary Campbell, Tamara) are eliminated or erased within the narrative. Ellen and Jo only appear in a limited number of episodes and when they are shown as “hunting” they are both put in positions where they need the Winchesters to save them; Jo is even nearly raped by a possessed Sam until Dean shows up to stop him<sup>35</sup>. Ellen and Jo eventually sacrifice themselves to further Sam and Dean’s mission, putting them back in both categories of “needing to be saved” and “being avenged by Sam and Dean.” Mary Winchester, at least in her guise as a Campbell “hunter,” is devalued twice over. She first refuses and dislikes being a hunter or coming from a hunting family. There is a strong implication that her relationship with John Winchester begins because she is seeking “normality” and a life away from hunting; John seems to be a good means to that end. John is “saving” her from a life of hunting. Secondly, she is the one whom initiates the deal that brings Azazel back to her home to infect Sam<sup>36</sup>. Her “selfishness” in making a deal to save John’s life created the circumstances that drive the entire plot of the first five seasons forward and eventually lead to her own death. Tamara’s single appearance is accompanied by her husband Isaac, a fellow hunter, and when Isaac is killed Tamara loses control, almost getting herself killed trying to pursue and kill the demon who had killed Isaac – until the Winchesters show up to help. All four of these examples are women who are saved or controlled by white men.

The place of black men is even more troublesome within the narrative. Where women are at least given a somewhat “positive” portrayal as hunters or helpers, black men are consistently shown as antagonists to Sam and Dean. The interactions between the Winchesters and the black men they encounter are always that of foils. Jake, a soldier in the U.S. Army serving in Afghanistan when he was taken by Azazel to Cold Oaks, is a darker foil to Sam who was raised

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<sup>35</sup> Season two, episode fourteen: “Born Under a Bad Sign”

<sup>36</sup> Season four, episode three: “In the Beginning”

to be a soldier (John had been a Marine). They both receive the same training but Sam rejects the acts of violence required by that training – and ultimately rejects the destiny Azazel assigns him. Jake, on the other hand, confesses he *likes* being a soldier (a contrast to Sam’s rejection) and gives into Azazel’s temptations both to kill Sam and open the door to hell. Everything Sam rejects, Jake embraces. Gordon is a foil for Dean as a hunter. Dean considers himself a vicious and deadly hunter but he comes off tame in the viewer’s eyes compared to Gordon. Gordon hunts to excess, even attempting to kill beings that are sympathetic and are not harming anyone. Worse, in terms of the narrative, is his focus on pre-emptively killing Sam because he believes Sam will become evil. Gordon is depicted as a zealot, in comparison to Sam and Dean, who are moderates protecting people. Victor Hendrickson is a foil to both Sam and Dean as investigators; where Sam and Dean investigate histories and people to discover exactly whom/what is killing people, Hendrickson does the same. In contrast, Sam and Dean discover and eliminate their true culprits while Hendrickson is consistently shown as wrong and made a fool of as he pursues the “innocent” Winchesters. Finally, Uriel is an ideological foil to both Winchesters, though specifically to Dean. Dean’s insistence on the power of humanity and protecting people is a total opposite from Uriel’s disdain for humanity and willingness to kill innocents to root out a problem. Dean and Sam are cast as protectors compared to Uriel’s destroyer.

Both the positioning of women and men of color within the narrative serve to cast Sam and Dean (and their other white male counterparts) as heroic protectors, to diminish their mistakes, and to provide motivation for their endless heroic journey. They are used to highlight a particular type of masculinity: physical, strong, protective, heteronormative. Despite this, the show’s creators are playing with two different narratives and presentations of masculinity by showing Dean, hegemonically hypermasculine (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt

2005), and heavily contrast him with Sam, a more sensitive and “feminized” modern masculinity (e.g., educated, prefers settling down, better social skills, outwardly more caring). Dean and Sam both rigidly protect their gender borders (McGuffey and Rich 2011; Thorne [1993] 2008) between each other. These insurances of gender regulation are reflective of ones that happen in our culture. For example, McGuffey and Rich (2011) studied the way children aged five through twelve organize and rank themselves. Boys had a value system which placed a premium on athletic ability and high status boys would “patrol” interactions and quickly identify and exclude boys whom transgressed. Kane (2011) similarly found that girls were allowed much more freedom to participate in activities that would give them higher value and “masculine”-coded traits such as leadership or aggression, while boys were actively stopped from acquiring or exploring “feminine”-coded traits, activities, or toys. Thorne’s ([1993] 2008) exploration of schoolyards showed the same sort of ideologies; girls were allowed to explore and play with their gender performance but boys are policed much more heavily. Some of this, Thorne ([1993] 2008) argues, is that within schools there is an institutional value difference placed in boys and girls: boys *before* girls. These types of gender policing are reflected in SPN as Dean denigrates Sam’s sensitivity and reluctance to hunt with phrases like, “No chick flick moments” when Sam tries to apologize to him for complaining about their parents<sup>37</sup>. He asserts his masculinity through numerous female sexual conquests and Sam often puts Dean down in a manner similar to “slut shaming,” or the culturally-endorsed shaming of women engaged in sexual activity (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, and Seeley 2014; Papp, Hagerman, Gnoleba, Erchull, Liss, Miles-McLean, and Robertson 2015; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, and Livingstone 2013; Ringrose and Renold 2012). How they patrol their mutual borders is different: Dean asserts his

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<sup>37</sup> Season one, episode one: “Pilot”

masculinity by making jokes about Sam being a “girl” or “gay” (Kimmel 2010) where Sam tends to assert his form of masculinity defensively, by pointing out how much better his methods work than Dean’s.

Due to this back-and-forth play between “traditional” and “modern” white masculinities, women and men of color are used to further set off the “rightness” of how Dean and Sam are able to act. The core narrative of a heroic journey (albeit different types of heroic journeys) is only possible within this narrative structure because Sam and Dean are *white men*. They have the privilege of being on the road, of people looking at them and not questioning their ability to potentially save others, or their authority when they impersonate federal or local officials and law enforcement (e.g., FBI agents). Instead, any subversion of gender expectations, roles, or hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) within the narrative takes place in the relationship and contrast between the two brothers. For example, for all of Dean’s womanizing, the times when he is shown having sex (e.g., Cassie, Lisa) are scenes that are established as romantic in nature through the lighting, the music, and even the positioning and actions of the participants (i.e., slow, gentle, woman on top). In contrast, Sam’s sex scenes are much more passionate and often rough or kinky despite his insistence on softer masculinities. The relationship between the two brothers is also often characterized by “feminine” interactions, such as discussing feelings. This initially subverts the masculine narrative woven around the two brothers by taking them out of the world of hunting. However, the masculine narrative is often quickly reinserted either by a statement of Dean’s (i.e., “no chick flick moments”) or an interruption which puts the brothers out of an emotional realm and into a physical one.

Essentially, the narrative of Sam and Dean is one of a fairly rigid masculinity, despite the two differing models offered, that upholds a traditional masculinity emphasizing two core

values: (a) the role of the protector and (b) family first. Dean becomes the embodiment of both principles, through his avocation of hunting and through his insistence on putting both his father and his brother over himself. Sam spends a large part of the narrative rejecting both principles but eventually begins to believe and even pushes Dean to believe as he begins to lose faith. Sam making Dean promise to settle down and leave hunting is actually a reflection of his own acceptance of those values. Sam is telling Dean to find a *new* family and protect them once Sam is gone and Dean does as he is asked.

SPN's narrative does nothing but reaffirm masculine narratives, often at the expense of women and men of color. Despite the upholding of cultural narratives, the reliance on two attractive male leads, which show the two ideal types of masculinity in their characters, could be a large factor in SPN's continued success with its primary demographic: women aged eighteen to thirty-four. By reifying the "alpha male" and "sensitive man" stereotypes within Dean and Sam, SPN is simultaneously embracing the cultural expectations of masculinity and teaching the viewers the very real flaws of that masculinity: it only comes in comparison and through the domination of others.

## CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN SUPERNATURAL

I am using the term *cultural narratives* specifically to identify underlying ideologies that are present and inform the *identity presentation* and *narrative arcs* within SPN. This section of the chapter is also where I look more deeply at the "explanation" (Griswold 1987b) level of the television show and discuss how creative decisions reflect the social environment and culture of the show's creators. The two *cultural narrative* themes I identified in SPN are (a) *doing the right thing no matter what* and (b) *evil is all I see*. The first theme is heavily linked to the conceptions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) shown within the

television show and to Dean's specific *narrative arc* regarding self-sacrifice. The ideology behind this theme is that individuals should attempt to do "the right thing" no matter the cost. The second theme, *evil is all I see*, is similarly connected to presentations of masculinity but is more heavily influenced by what Altheide (2006; 2009) calls the "politics of fear." Essentially, this theme is influenced by the idea of the realization of decreasing safety in our modern world post 9/11.

### *Doing the Right Thing No Matter What*

The theme of *doing the right thing no matter what* is predominantly shown through the *identity presentation* and *narrative arc* of Dean Winchester. For example, Dean gives up his soul to bring Sam back to life. Dean is consistently challenged by this act, even by Sam, throughout the narrative and while he is shown dealing with severe consequences of this decision, the narrative ultimately upholds the act as necessary for the eventual conquering of Lucifer. Similarly, the conflict between Dean and the angels – particularly Uriel – highlights this theme. Dean, as an advocate of doing the right thing, is shown as the ultimate judge of what "right" is, particularly when judged by the standards of the more utilitarian ethics – the greatest good for the greatest number – of the angels. Uriel, when confronted with the potential rise of a powerful demon from hell, advocates simply destroying the entire town where this might happen to stop the event. This is a strictly utilitarian act; essentially, Uriel is arguing that the lives of the few thousand in the town are outweighed by the lives that might be saved across the world by preventing the rise of Samhain. Dean, in contrast, chooses to try and stop the rising without killing everyone, even at the cost of his own health and safety.

What is not explicit within the text of the show is the contradiction about what is considered "right." The narrative consistently upholds Dean as the arbiter of "right" and his

judgements are ones that do often privilege his family over anything and anyone else. Further, the choices that Dean makes – while narratively shown as sound – often cause harm to others. For example, Dean’s choice to sell his soul is one that is narratively upheld throughout the long-term *narrative arc* as “good” but is shown in the short-term as “bad” because Dean eventually and unknowingly begins the apocalypse while he is in Hell. This is the contradiction of the theme of *doing the right thing no matter what*: first, are the narratively presented alternate options (e.g., Uriel’s utilitarian plan) and, second, the idea of “no matter what” and the only consequences that matter within the narrative are ones that happen to Dean or Sam. While the ideology espoused within the show is attempting to show that Dean’s actions are for the benefit of the greater good and the preservation of human agency, the underlying and likely unintentional subtext is that, narratively, the only people that truly matter are Dean and Sam. The consequences, even lives taken directly because of their actions, are ultimately “written away” within the narrative. For example, Adam, who is an innocent boy is sent to Hell while being possessed by Michael and neither Sam nor Dean attempt to free him. His life does not matter, even though he is nominally “family” to the brothers.

I believe SPN is reflecting a conservative belief in individualism through this *cultural narrative*. Essentially, SPN’s narrative shows that the only ones you can rely on is yourself or your close family. Ireland (2013) argues that the attachment shown within SPN’s narrative by Kripke and other writers reflects a larger dialogue about the place of family within the U.S. following 9/11 by drawing on McGuire and Buchbinder and their argument that, following 9/11, the family was “both a metaphor for and a metonym of the nation and the disarray and continuing disruption caused by the threat of international terrorism (2010:300). Ireland (2013) argues that SPN is creating a narrative where the only place of safety is with family; connecting

this to the larger *cultural narrative* I identified shows that the narrative of *doing the right thing no matter what* hinges specifically on “the right thing” for *the family* and “no matter what” is about personal cost rather than the cost to bystanders or others.

### *All I See Is Evil*

Like the *cultural narrative* of *doing the right thing no matter what*, the theme of *all I see is evil* is heavily influenced by the conservative, post-9/11 ideologies. The “politics of fear” (Altheide 2006; Altheide 2009; Glassner [1999] 2009), or the use of fear as a motivating force in the political landscape to convince citizens to do something (e.g., vote a certain way, buy a certain product), is one that is intertwined with our culture and is very apparent within the narrative of SPN. *All I see is evil* is the ideology that everyone, even the person that seems innocent or harmless, is an enemy. This theme is also linked to the idea of the “Give ‘em Hell” masculine typology (Brannon 1976). Consistently throughout the show, preemptive attacks and attempting to provoke the enemy are shown as not only part of “being a man” but as the best method to destroy the enemy. This is particularly embodied through the mirroring of the characters of Dean and Sam and Dean and Gordon. Dean and Gordon are both shown as very aware of the potential for evil around them and advocate strongly for the hunting lifestyle. Sam in contrast wants to achieve the illusion of “normalcy” that is consistently broken because of the evil that exists in the world. The mirroring happening with Dean/Gordon and Sam is one of (a) the realization of an enemy’s existence and (b) the realization of the responsibility to do something about that enemy. Sam prefers to ignore the existence of the enemy and to reject his responsibility to stop the enemy; he is narratively punished for this choice throughout the five seasons of SPN.



The mirroring between Dean and Gordon is one of degrees. Both Dean and Gordon agree that the enemy exists and they have a responsibility to get rid of the enemy. What makes Gordon Dean's "dark mirror" is the lengths Gordon will go to dispose of evil. Gordon is SPN's narrative example of the inherent conflict between the two ideologies present within the text. Essentially, *all I see is evil* is a theme that reflects the larger cultural landscape and ideology that we (i.e., Americans) are surrounded by enemies that wish to do us harm. However, our choices in how we *deal* with those enemies fall under the ideology of *doing the right thing no matter what*. Gordon is an example of what happens when an individual takes the ideology of *all I see is evil* without considering *doing the right thing no matter what*. Gordon, in essence, loses the sense of value of "right" and "wrong" in his pursuit of the enemy and becomes the monster in a mirror to the *identity presentation* of Dean who is consistently shown as someone who grapples with moral questions and eventually makes the right choice.

## CONCLUSION

SPN is an engaging television show with a surprisingly deep narrative, despite its problems. As a viewer, I found it enjoyable to watch, at least until I began my analysis of the episodes in my sample. This surface enjoyment is why I believe the show's general themes and representation pass by viewers so easily. The other reason is that those themes are simply emphasized versions of American cultural beliefs. The *identity presentations* within SPN are predominantly supportive of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) that treats violence and aggression as the best way to "be a man," resolve conflict, and remove enemies (Brannon 1976; Kimmel 2008). Subordinate masculinities, such as men of color, LGBTQ+ men, or Sam's textual rejection of the ideals of manhood ascribed to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) are largely devalued (i.e., men of

color, Sam) or invisible (i.e., queer men) within SPN's universe. Men of color are especially treated as objects within the plot to further prop up the presentation of white hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) as "good" by consistently portraying black men as "evil." Femininity is similarly devalued within SPN by the writers treating women as sex objects, victims, or villains. The extreme and excessive scenes of violence against women are a reoccurring motif over the five seasons I sampled. While men are also the victims of violence, rarely do their scenes involve sexualization or more intense focus of the act of harm the way violence against women is shown; for men, the actual portrayal of harm is usually cut and they are rarely shown as dead bodies. Finally, the overall *narrative arcs* of "agency" and "dependence" are there to primarily support the presentations of masculinity within Dean and undermine Sam's rejection of the hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) that Dean and John assume. The *cultural narratives* of SPN, *doing the right thing no matter what* and *all I see is evil*, are both deeply embedded in the American cultural landscape and part of the depiction of masculinity within SPN.

In the next chapter, I will be moving my analytical focus away from SPN canon to SPN vids. I will be describing the main themes I found in SPN vids as well as *identity presentation*, *narrative arcs*, and *cultural narratives* I found within the vids I coded. I will also be discussing the ultimate *narrative manipulation*, or the ways in which the stories and themes from SPN canon are changed and transformed by vidders and how that reflects *cultural narratives* and ideologies held by vidders. This will be followed by a discussion of the community response to those vids.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUPERNATURAL VIDS

*Supernatural*'s (SPN) narrative arc throughout the five seasons I analyzed relies strongly on the relationship between Dean and Sam Winchester. In the previous chapter, I discussed my analysis of SPN focusing specifically on the Winchesters. The two brothers are the core of the show and are overwhelmingly the characters the audience respond to when watching. They are featured heavily in nearly every episode and it is the constant push-and-pull between Dean and Sam that creates a sense of narrative tension both between the two different types of masculinity portrayed and within the larger *narrative arcs* of agency and dependence. During my content analysis, I identified several elements of representation, such as Dean's *identity presentation* of white, working class hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and Sam's rejection verbal rejection of that same type of masculinity. I also identified two underlying *cultural narratives* that I termed *doing the right thing no matter what* and *all I see is evil*, both of which support narratively support Dean's *identity presentation* and *narrative arc*. However, this is only a small piece of the larger research question I have about narrative and narrative change. Vidders take images, representations, and stories from the canon and reshape them into something for themselves. The original creation of the canon is influenced by larger cultural values and metanarratives (Loseke 2007; Spillman 2002) but it is actually up to the audience whether to accept, reject, or transform (Hall 2001) not only the metanarratives/*cultural narratives* embedded within a canon but also whether to accept, reject, or transform (Hall 2001) the *narrative arcs*, and *identity presentation* within that canon. In this chapter, I will move away from canon to fandom and look at audience interpretation through the lens of the fanvid.

As I detailed in my methods chapter, I took vids from five different vidding communities<sup>38</sup> during my sampling frame of the months of April through June of the years 2005 through 2010. This provided a total of 173 posts within those communities. Within the SPN community it became common practice to post basic information about the vid within the communities and then link to a vidders own LJ page for the actual vid and comments. Of those 173 posts, 35 included “dead” links to vids that were no longer available online that I could find. 24 posts of the 173 were vids that were available online but had no comments and 114 posts had both vids and comments available. Many of those posts were duplicates as vidders had begun “cross-posting,” or linking to the same vid within several different communities. After filtering through the 173 posts, I finished with 64 different vids available to be analyzed and a total of 3640 comments:

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<sup>38</sup> <http://community.livejournal.com/vidding> ; [http://community.livejournal.com/fan\\_vids](http://community.livejournal.com/fan_vids) ; [http://community.livejournal.com/veni\\_vids](http://community.livejournal.com/veni_vids) ; <http://community.livejournal.com/supernaturalvid> ; <http://community.livejournal.com/spnvidrecs>

Table 5.1. SPN Vid Comment Totals.

Number of Comments on Vid	Number of Vids
Under 10	24
11-20	5
21-30	4
31-40	4
41-50	4
51-70	5
71-99	7
100+	10
Total Number of Vids	64

Table 5.2 SPN Vid Themes

Theme	Frequency
Shared Suffering	16
The Beautiful Nature of Men's Pain	23
Queering the Narrative	41
Alternate universe/AU	19

*Note:* Themes are not mutually exclusive.

Many of the SPN vids included advanced techniques to provide or highlight narratives. For example, Loki's "My Sweet Prince" (2009e) rendered almost the entire video in black-and-white, except for one instance where blood was shown as red. Mirrored images, fade techniques, jump cuts and other cinematographic approaches lend an overall air of sophistication to the SPN vids. Many vids also used images from other movies and television shows. Obsessive24's "Fall of Man" (2009) even referenced famous artwork and ends with an image of the God disappearing from Michelangelo's fresco, *The Creation of Adam*, which is painted on the Sistine Chapel. These more advanced techniques show a shift both in the technology available to vidders to create effects but also the skill level of the vidders themselves. SPN vids also tended to use recent rock or alternative songs but also included a large component of classic rock. Songs like Kansas's "Carry On My Wayward Son" were more likely to be used. I believe the use of classic rock over modern or current music has to do with the musical theme of the SPN canon. As I discussed in the previous chapter, a large part of Dean's character is his love of classic rock and early heavy metal music and the show has featured several popular rock musicians and songs (including "Carry On My Wayward Son"). The choice to use classic rock is a "callback" to the show and, in particular, the character of Dean.

In this chapter, I will discuss the four main narrative themes I found in SPN vids: *shared suffering*, *beautiful nature of men's pain*, *queering the narrative*, and *AU/alternate universe*. This discussion of major themes will then be followed by a discussion of how the vids interact with the canon narratives of SPN of "agency" and "dependence." Then I will move onto the responses to vids from viewers. While most of the responses tend to fall along the lines of "kudos," responses to SPN vids also tended to include in-depth commentary.

## VIDDING THEMES AND NARRATIVES

As the main characters, Dean and Sam are not surprisingly the stars of the majority of the vids made and their relationship with each other becomes the focus piece. Their sense of connection, specifically to each other, but also to their father and other members of their “found family” (e.g., Bobby Singer, Jo Harvelle, Ellen Harvelle, Castiel/Cas) drive the predominant narratives within the vids. For the most part, this connection is not shown in any sort of positive manner. Rather, the familial bond is often portrayed as destructive and the cause of suffering for one or both brothers. I call this theme *shared suffering* (n=16).

### *Shared Suffering*

Charmax’s vid, “Your Ghost” exemplifies this idea (2010). The vid, set to the song of the same name by Greg Laswell, creates a narrative in which John and Mary Winchester are literally the ghosts that haunt Sam and Dean. Charmax shows several flashback scenes (from the pilot) and all of them in some way contain images of fire; this includes the wall of flames that engulf Mary on the ceiling to superimposing faint images of flames over a shot of Mary kissing Sam within his crib. Images of the Impala superimposed with Sam and Dean growing up is paired with lyrics of “You were driving circles around.” The loss of family creates a void in which Sam and Dean are shown to continually make mistakes. Charmax even includes scenes from Sam and Dean’s trip to the past within season five, showing how Sam was targeted by Azazel. What makes the vid interesting is that the narrative is positioned around Sam and his search for a connection with his family and the past. Sam is shown in canon as someone who never knew his mother (or *a* mother, beyond the qualities of a mothering role Dean takes with him as they go up) and is estranged and often angry at his father. This changes the metaphor of the repeated use of flames. The fire does not only mean the literal separation caused by Azazel but also the

figurative separation from both John and Dean. When Sam leaves to go to Stanford, he is burning his bridges behind him.

Sacrilicious's "A Pain I'm Used To" (2007) is a Dean-centric vid that touches on both the loneliness of the life of a hunter and the search for family to stop the loneliness. Where Charmax presents the Winchester family as the passive cause of loss, Sacrilicious presents Sam and John Winchester as abusers to Dean's victim. The use of repetitive images of Dean alone and in pain is mirrored by images of Sam beating Dean and John's actions to hurt Dean while he was possessed by Azazel. Dean is even shown being shot and killed by Max, a fellow child targeted by Azazel with telekinesis who kills his abusive family. During the episode *Nightmare*<sup>39</sup>, Sam receives a vision of the future of Max shooting Dean in the head and develops his own bout of telekinesis to stop him. The parallel between Max, who is explicitly shown as abused by his relatives within canon and Dean who, on the surface, is part of a loving family is clear despite Max's act against Dean. The centerpiece of Sacrilicious's narrative is the combination of the image of Dean hugging Sam when they reunite in season one<sup>40</sup> with the lyrics "there's a hole in your soul like an animal." The implication of this combination is that *John* is the one who puts the "hole" in Dean's "soul," both by his deliberate actions against Dean (e.g., when being possessed by Azazel) and also his absence in season one. The vid's title, "A Pain I'm Used To" references how Dean has acclimated to being the victim of physical and emotional abuse within his family and continues to stay.

The interesting thread that links vids with the "shared suffering" theme together is through the portrayal of broken masculinity. Dean is presented throughout canon as both hypermasculine but also as the emotional core of the show. Dean is the character that continually

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<sup>39</sup> Season one, episode fourteen

<sup>40</sup> Season one, episode eleven: *Scarecrow*



carries the emotional weight of season arcs, even as Sam is the character in which most of the early arcs are centered on. Dean often tells Sam “no chick flick moments” and openly speaks out against verbally expressing emotions, even pain. In contrast to his words, Dean is more often the man shown displaying less “accepted” masculine emotions beyond stoicism or anger such as pain, loss, regret, fear, and love. Sam, on the other hand, is the character whom often mocks Dean for his “backward” masculinity and coaxes Dean to share and show his emotions and feelings about what is going on to and around them. Sam, like Dean, says one thing and does another; for all Sam’s talk about openness and being a new, better man through emotional sharing, rarely ever shows or talks about feelings – even acceptably masculine ones. It takes a ghostly possession in “Asylum”<sup>41</sup> before he shares his rage and anger at Dean and his family. This contradiction between words and actions presents an interesting picture of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) in canon that upholds Dean’s stated presentation of masculinity at the expense of Sam’s stated presentation of masculinity.

The reason this contradiction is so important is what the vidders do with it when making using of the “shared suffering” theme. SPN fanvids key into the paradox of masculinity presented within the show and highlight the differences in Dean and Sam’s self-concepts (e.g., “man’s man” and “sensitive man”) compared to their actual masculine presentations of self (Goffman 1959). Vids such as “A Pain I’m Used To” (Sacrificious 2007) are highlighting the exact moments when the “front” (Goffman 1959:22) breaks without showing any of the subsequent aligning actions (Stokes and Hewitt 1976) taken by the characters to reestablish their masculine presentation of selves. One of the more popular vids, Mkitty3’s “Breathe” (2006) received 253 comments on the LJ post and another 37 on YouTube. Mkitty3 combines Melissa

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<sup>41</sup> Season one, episode ten

Etheridge's "Breathe" with a narrative similar to "Your Ghost" – the story of Dean finding his way without Sam or, as Mkitty3 explains it: "Dean longs for home again. A home only Sam can give him" (2006). Even before Mkitty3's summary, Mkitty3 is careful to disclaim (Scott and Lyman 1968): "The song is Breathe by Melissa Etheridge. I love the tone of her voice. It's gritty and rough which fits perfectly with the look and feel of SPN. I also love the lyrics. This is Dean to me, Dean and his feelings for Sam. *Have no fear, this is only Wincest if you want to see Wincest*. No warnings are necessary" (2006, emphasis mine). The centerpiece of the vid is a shot of Dean slowly looking at a stoic Sam – who is looking away – paired with the lyrics "Home is a feeling I buried in you." The chorus of the song includes the lyrics "I'm all right, I'm all right / it only hurts when I breathe." This song, coupled with the consistent and subtle breaking of Dean's "front" (Goffman 1959:22) (e.g., showing resignation and fatigue versus crying) in season one displays the paradox of masculine presentation in SPN easily. Further, given the number of comments for this vid, it is clear this is a narrative to which SPN audiences respond well.

The sixteen vids within the *shared suffering* theme focus heavily on the idea that personal suffering is caused by connection to others. This theme is demonstrated particularly through family connections as the cause of pain and is intensely connected to the second major theme within SPN fanvids, *the beautiful nature of men's pain*, as the suffering within *shared suffering* is often the cause of beauty within the next theme I will discuss.

### *The Beautiful Nature of Men's Pain*

The theme of *beautiful nature of men's pain* (f=23) uses the physical attractiveness of the two male leads and spotlights that attractiveness specifically when either Dean or Sam is physically or emotionally hurt suggesting that the characters become *more* beautiful while in pain. This theme is exclusively masculine; neither of the two vids that featured female characters

as protagonists or central characters showed this theme; in contrast, vids that featured women tended to emphasize *strength* over weakness. This provides a dichotomy within the vids that is not present within the canon: men are shown as strong and women are consistently weak. Even the reoccurring female characters in the first five seasons that are shown as “strong,” such as Meg, Ruby, Ellen Harvelle, Jo Harvelle, or Anna are all put in submissive positions (e.g., when Sam is possessed by Meg he attempts to rape Jo) or killed. In one sense, I believe both *shared suffering* and *beautiful nature of men’s pain* are similar themes. Ultimately what both these themes share is the deconstruction of the basic building blocks of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

“John the Revelator” by Sacrificious exemplifies the pairing of the *shared suffering* and *beautiful nature of men’s pain* themes (2006b). The vid, using Depeche Mode’s “John the Revelator” features John Winchester, Sam and Dean’s father, as the central character within the vid. Sacrificious manages to balance the heroism and cleverness of John’s individual actions (e.g., blessing a building’s water supply and setting off the fire alarm and sprinklers while demons are inside) with the neglect and pain his overall actions cause. Sacrificious explains in a response comment that “I have such a love/hate relationship with John. Sometimes I really like him, but then he’ll do something like leave a nine year old in charge of a five year old for several days and then FREAK out on Dean when he actually acts like a kid, and I’ll like him much less” (2006a). This character paradox of John as heroic and John as heartless becomes the key narrative of the vid. What makes “John the Revelator” a perfect example of *the beauty of men’s pain* is the way the human cost of that paradoxical characterization is shown within the vid, both to John and to his sons. At the thirty-eight second mark in the vid, Sacrificious pairs a scene of John held telekinetically against a wall by demons, writhing in pain, with the lyrics “He’s a

smooth operator / It's time we cut him down to size.” This combination effectively speaks to the ambivalence of the character but also presents John’s very real physical pain in almost a sexual manner. The staging of the scene out-of-context simply shows John gyrating, with his teeth clenched and eyes closed; this is a position that is used frequently in media sex scenes, though primarily for women. This particular scene in “John the Revelator” does “double duty,” by showing John’s pain in a manner evocative of sexual pleasure but also by “cutting down to size” John’s masculinity by casting him in a submissive and feminine role.

Where “John the Revelator” features physical pain as sensual and beautiful, Starrylizard’s “Gethsemane” features emotional pain (2007). The vid, using “I Only Want to Say (Gethsemane)” from the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, tells Sam’s emotional and character arc as he struggles with learning about himself and the demonic nature of his abilities. The combination of song and images cast Sam as a Christ figure within SPN canon. The actual song lyrics are almost indistinguishable during the vid (either from a poor quality vid upload or poor quality audio source), leaving the narrative relying heavily on a viewer’s prior knowledge of both (a) the theme of the song and (b) understanding of the context of the images to construct the Sam-as-Christ parallels. Combining images of Sam drinking demon blood with the lyrics “Take this cup away from me / for I don't want to taste its poison” changes the meaning of the image where Sam is eager for his next “hit” of blood and the strength that comes with the blood. The reference to Jesus’s refusal within the musical to initially accept his fate – “the cup of poison” – becomes a contradiction when paired with Sam eagerly drinking demon’s blood. The lyrics work, however, on a different level when taking into consideration Sam’s horror at what his actions do and cause in the release of Lucifer, even with the sense of power demon blood brings him.

In the end, the comparison between Jesus and Sam is made even more poignant by Sam's betrayal of Dean and his promises to Dean not to use his abilities. The vid continues in this vein, showing Sam's despair and desperation while the people around him die. "Gethsemane" ends with Sam crying and walking away before transitioning to a shot of Dean flinching and the sound of a gunshot, implying that Sam killed himself. Starrylizard takes great care in choosing the shots of Sam that provide both the most attractive and most anguished shots of Sam throughout this narrative. Where Sacrificial pairs sensuality and physical pain, Starrylizard links the visible effects of Sam's emotional pain with physical beauty. While the two vid examples I described used John and Sam, it is actually *Dean Winchester* that receives the most treatment within the *beauty of men's pain* theme, with fifteen of the twenty-three vids within this theme focusing on Dean as the point-of-view or central character. This is an interesting juxtaposition both because of Dean's stated masculine presentation (Goffman 1959) and his placement within the canon's narrative in terms of "telling" us he is hegemonically masculine (Connell 1987; Connell [1995] 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) rather than "showing" his masculinity through his actions or the narrative. In part, some of the reason Dean may be the focus of these vids is due to the high availability of scenes in canon in which Dean is shown in pain. This is a theme that exists in canon; while vids sexualize the violence and pain associated with Dean being broken down, canon uses these as examples of the opposite to show how tough Dean is that he can move on past those experiences. In comparison Sam's front (Goffman 1959) breaks in a completely different way. Dean's front breaks as his presentation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell [1995] 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) breaks; Sam's front breaks when he takes on the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity in spite of his disdain of those traits when Dean displays them. Due to this contrast, there simply is not the same amount of images of Sam

in pain in canon compared to the amount of images available of Dean. Sam's front (Goffman 1959) is more likely to break in a theme I will discuss shortly: alternate universe.

Secondly, Dean's central placement in this category reveals a few interesting things about female erotic desire. Much of the past research on internet pornography has shown it to be fairly exploitative of women (e.g., Attwood 2005; Harmon and Boeringer 2004; Paul 2009). Research on women's consumption of internet pornography has also revealed interesting results. Byers (2006) found that ease of access to sexually explicit materials on the internet was the same for men and women however their usage patterns were different by gender. Schauer (2005) conducted a content analysis of several pornographic sites advertised as "for women" and found mixed results in terms of how models were portrayed. While sites would textually insist models were "straight" and chosen by women for women, they in fact included models out of gay male porn or straight male porn. Specifically, the photos with a single model were:

Visually coded according to conventions associated with gay male pornography. Couples photos, in contradistinction, seemed visually suggestive of "straight" male porn. Thus, while porn-for women does seek to interpellate a female consumer of pornography, the sites speak in a hodge-podge way—particularly in terms of the visual coding of images (Schauer 2005:62).

Additionally, Jae Woong, Mahnwoo, and Hong-In ([1970] 1975) found that sexual objectification actually occurred more frequently in pornographic websites aimed at women compared to sites aimed at men. This greater frequency of objectification was due to the way sites for women were more likely to objectify both women *and* men, compared to the sole objectification of women on pornographic websites for men. Schauer's (2005) similar study looked at model poses and body language in sites for women compared to mainstream online pornographic sites and found that the conventions and tropes used on for women sites were mixed; solo-model shots of men tended to follow conventions of gay male pornography whereas

couples or group photos tended to follow the conventions of straight male pornography. Regardless of the solo or couples/groups shots, Schauer (2005) found that the men were posed with objects that could represent a symbolic masculinity such as firefighter's coats, police hats, and other such examples of traditionally masculine occupations. Further, Schauer (2005) found that, at least in pornographic sites aimed at straight women, there were sections of lesbian pornography but no examples of man-on-man contact.

What the vidders do within SPN, particularly with Dean in the *beauty of men's pain* theme, is something similar. The poses – either solo or in couple/group configurations – are evocative of pornography. For example, in “John the Revelator,” there is a shot at the 2:59 mark of Dean with his back to the wall and John standing close, leaning over him. This image seems plucked straight out of advertisements which conflate “eroticism” with “menace” (Jhally and Killbourne 2010). Essentially, the vids combine the eroticism of pornography with a specifically homoerotic subtext (given the popularity of slash vids compared to heterosexual vids). What this means, however, is a slightly more complex question and one that is not directly answerable based on the data in my dissertation. The question becomes almost tautological: are women creating these vids for other women's pleasure and is that act, inherently, something that becomes “insurrectionary speech,” (Butler 1997) as women use the heterosexist-based (hooks 1993) images of erotica and transform them into something that disrupts the very culture that uses those to demean women? Is the “style” (Hebdige 1979) within the fandom subculture one that twisting the narrative such that the “normative” is being interrupted by reframing the heterosexist images into a homosexual context specifically for the pleasure of other women? Or is this an example of another instance in which women become “female chauvinist pigs” (Levy

1997), participate in their own oppression and reproduce the patriarchal roles for men and women on another group?

The 23 vids within *beauty of men's pain* all not only highlight male characters but are predominantly ones that are coded with homosexual content (n=17). The ones that are not specifically coded as homoerotic, either in the visual coding such as seen in “John the Revelator” or in the “set-up” the vidder uses to introduce the vid, are ones that heavily overlap with the *shared suffering* theme and the link between family and pain. The heavy use of homoeroticism within this theme is one that continues in the third theme I will discuss next.

### *Queering the Narrative*

Loki's “705” (2009a) combines both the *shared suffering* and *the beauty of men's pain* in a different way than “John the Revelator.” Sacrificious's vid is unique not only in that the two themes heavily overlap but also because it features John, rather than Sam and Dean. Loki, a prolific vidder, uses “705” to combine the themes in a more typical way: through *queering the narrative* (n=41). SPN is a profoundly heteronormative show; in the first five seasons there is only one queer character, Alan J. Corbett<sup>42</sup>, who explicitly is established as queer by professing his love for another heterosexual male character as he's dying. Despite this, within the SPN fandom the two most popular “ships,” or romantic/sexual relationships, are queer.

Loki's “705” introduces the first popular ship: “Wincest,” or the portrayal of Dean and Sam in a romantic or sexual relationship. The term “Wincest” is a play on the brothers' last name, “Winchester,” and the word “incest,” explicitly denoting the non-platonic nature of the relationship. In “705,” Loki gives an early season one and season two look at Wincest, centered

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<sup>42</sup> Season three, episode thirteen: “Ghostfacers”



on “In My Time of Dying<sup>43</sup>” while Dean is dying in the hospital. Loki provides background by using shots of Sam and Dean as children; the unique element of the backing to the vid is that Sam and Dean are often in the same shot but rarely ever together. Loki sometimes even merges two shots from different points in time (e.g., a shot of Dean from one episode and a shot of Sam from an entirely different episode) to achieve this effect. Due to this separation of characters, the narrative of the vid relies heavily on the juxtaposition of image and lyrics as well as the “set up” Loki provides in the summary for the vid: “After an awful accident Dean and Sam fell in coma. In the dream-world they are all alone in a whole world, walking in the empty house, trying to find each other and themselves. Sam thinks that he died after the accident, and he asks Dean to let him go. But is Dean actually alive to let go his brother?” (2009a). While the vid works perfectly fine from a location in canon (as the narrative of disconnection and longing are obvious even without Loki’s set up), the summary changes the narrative and the vid so that it is also classified “AU,” or “alternate universe.” Loki sets up a scenario of mutual longing between the two characters, even using shots of Dean and Sam as they are looking at significant others within the first season so that the “other” within the vid is their brother. Rearranging the romantic narrative of the show to be about Dean and Sam together is subversive both because of the normalization of incest between the two brothers but also because, as with *the beauty of pain*, these scenarios often are about tearing apart and removing the markers of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Queering the narrative both queers the show and the characters. This fandom narrative element is produced for many reasons, such as: (a) providing representation for queer audiences, (b) audiences using what characters are available and consistent (as most television shows and

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<sup>43</sup> Season two, episode one

SPN in particular are skewed heavily to having more male characters than female ones), or even (c) pairing two attractive men together. Regardless of the individual (or collective) reasons for the popularity of “slash,” or male/male pairings, vidders creating slash vids must find ways of reconstructing the narrative in queer ways. With Dean, this reconstruction becomes fairly easy as one of his two defining traits – loyalty to his family – means that he is *textually* caring for his brother physically and emotionally. Even further, the breaking of his masculine front (Goffman 1959) in terms of showing emotions such as longing, fear, or sorrow mostly happen because of Sam’s actions within the canon. Vidders, by season five, do not *have* to reconstruct heartfelt looks given by Dean to the two women within his life (i.e., Cassie and Lisa) as Loki does in “705” with season one footage because he *also* gives those looks to Sam.

In another vid, Loki keys into this and Dean’s loyalty. The vid, “We Carry No Arms,” uses the Mumford and Sons song “I Gave You All” and is about Dean’s “sacrifices for his brother, and how he, no matter what, stayed with Sam. He gave him all and even more, and though they kind of stopped the Apocalypse, they still didn't win. More to say, I think they lost their biggest battle, they lost each other, even if for something good and important” (Loki 2010). With this summary, Loki is creating a narrative that is both queered *and* canonical. Loki primarily uses larger, dramatic moments, such as pairing the lyrics “how can you say our truth is better than ours” with a scene of Dean shouting desperately for Sam. Another potent combination is the chorus “but I gave you all” with numerous scenes of beatings Dean has taken for or because of Sam, especially the scenes in which *Sam* is the one providing the beating to make the point. The melancholic refrain of the lyrics “But you rip it from my hands / And you swear it's all gone / And you rip out all I have / Just to say that you've won” while Loki presents scenes of Dean’s reaction to Sam’s possession by Lucifer and confrontation with Lucifer and

Michael in “Swan Song” speaks both of Dean’s outward struggle against enemies (e.g., Azazel, Lucifer, Zacharias and the other angels seeking a war.) but also his inward struggle for his feelings for Sam. Even without the queered Wincest reading of the vid, Loki manages to capture the essential strength and weakness of Dean’s character. The queered reading of Dean’s canon backstory and how he was raised to take care of Sam transforms that reading to a co-dependent backstory of Dean’s actions and need for Sam.

Even beyond the breaking of Dean’s masculinity by breaking Dean’s heteronormativity, “We Carry No Arms” adds an interesting twist by casting Dean within a feminized role. While the entire vid is about Dean’s actions to keep Sam safe, the subtle message is actually about Dean’s *passivity*, a stereotypically feminine trait. Over and over within the vid, Dean is shown as either standing still while he looks at Sam or having things done *to* him (e.g., being beaten). This is a more subtle presentation of passivity in that it characterizes Dean as someone who is unwilling or unable to follow through on his feelings for Sam (romantic/sexual or otherwise). Dean, for all his loyalty to Sam, refuses to actually talk to and interact with Sam within the vid. He becomes passive in his own relationship with his brother. This compliments the presentation of Dean being a victim of Sam’s as a more blatantly passive and feminine role, even within the show. Violence is predominantly done to females within the show and showing the violence done to Dean outside the context of regular fighting, especially violence done by people Dean trusts (e.g., Sam, Sam as Lucifer, Castiel), furthers the metaphor.

“We Carry No Arms” also presents Dean within a feminine role through the narrative of sacrifice. The entire message of the vid about Dean’s “sacrifices for his brother, and how he, no matter what, stayed with Sam” is a typical feminine action (Loki 2010). Women are often expected to give up and sacrifice for the people in their lives in ways that men are not. Our entire

society becomes structured in ways built around those assumptions about feminine and masculine roles, such as the gender pay gap (e.g., Acker 1992; Acker 2006; Chafetz 2004). Even in the home, women often sacrifice for men in terms of taking more responsibilities for chores and children, at the expense of the free time women lose (e.g., Hill 2011; Hochschild and Machung [1989] 2003; Tichenor 2011). While this is often overlooked within canon, Dean's role in the Winchester family is more of a parental role, often combined with the mothering duties, than a simpler big brother role. He is responsible for caring for Sam often and usually on his own while his father is away on hunting trips. Loki is highlighting that aspect of Dean's personality by celebrating everything Dean gives up in favor of Sam. This has the consequence of also highlighting Dean's passivity within his *own life*. While he is eager and happy to be hunting at the beginning of the first season, by season five it is obvious that the real joy for him in "hunting things, saving people" is doing that work with his family. Dean consistently puts Sam first in a way that is expected and honored among women and while Loki does not make this explicit within "We Carry No Arms," the undertones of association between Dean's familial sacrifice and femininity are carried within the vid.

Turquiosetumult's vid, "Losing My Religion," using a cover by Joshua James of the REM song, provides a queered example of the Dean and Castiel relationship (2010).

Turquiosetumult describes the vid as "losing faith, finding friendships, and discovering the heartbreaking truth of reality. A look at Castiel's progression in seasons 4 and 5, from obedient warrior of the Lord to loyal servant of humanity (the boys)" (2010). Even without watching the vid, the summary easily sets up Dean and Sam ("the boys") as the reason why Castiel "falls" from heaven and moves away from the heavenly agenda. While the summary talks of "the boys," the one most present in the vid is Dean; Sam only appears infrequently and only shown

interacting with Castiel twice. Within “Losing My Religion,” Dean is presented as both a warm and welcoming presence to Castiel, something he is shown as unfamiliar with during his time in Heaven, but also a tempting one. The very qualities that Castiel prizes in Dean – warmth, genuineness, loyalty, the willingness to make Castiel both friend and family – are the very things that Heaven warns him away from and Lucifer occasionally talks of wanting prior to his fall from Heaven. “Losing My Religion” emphasizes the internal struggle Castiel has between what he sees as “right,” what he wants, and the conflicting information he is being told by both Heaven and the Winchesters. Ultimately, he sides with the Winchesters in both the show and the vid. Turquiosetumult even uses dialogue from the show, such as Castiel’s line: “Sam is my friend<sup>44</sup>” to help underline the difficult decisions about which side he is on Castiel must make.

Like most of the Wincest vids in the sample, this “Destiel,” a portmanteau of Dean/Castiel, vid relies on fairly formulaic principles to address the possibility of a romantic or sexual relationship between the two characters. Pairing particular lyrics with longing looks or touches makes the subtext of canon become text within the vid. For example, pairing the soft, quiet lyrics of “the distance in your eyes” with a scene of Castiel watching Dean in the hospital as Dean looks down and away from the angel provides the text of an relationship that is suffering distance between two people. Or the use of Dean’s dialogue “People, families, that’s real<sup>45</sup>” with the lyrics “trying to keep up with you / and I don’t know if I can do it” implying Castiel’s desire to “keep up with” with Dean despite the forces of Heaven that try to keep him from “doing it.” Essentially, “Losing My Religion” and the other vids like it that queer the narrative, do so by relying on viewer knowledge or appreciation for subtext within the canon. They are expecting audiences to *already* enjoy or “see” the non-canonical pairing and that assumption, combined

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<sup>44</sup> Season five, episode thirteen: “The Song Remains the Same”

<sup>45</sup> Season four, episode twenty-two: “Lucifer Rising”

with a creative mixing of lyrics to evoke subtextual assumptions and audience desires, creates the newly queered narrative.

### *Alternate Universe*

The fourth narrative theme is one I have briefly discussed during *queering the narrative* and, in fact, queering the narrative *is* a certain type of this theme. “AU,” or alternate universes (n=19), are ones in which the entire canon narrative is disregarded and something completely new is produced in its place. When the narrative is queered, the part of the canon narrative that is heteronormative is tossed away to be replaced by a queer narrative. What distinguishes a “simpler” queered narrative from a full AU is the scope of the changes. Most queered narratives are still set within the canon narrative that involves Dean and Sam “saving people, hunting things.” A full alternate universe will completely remove that setting and place the canon narrative somewhere else.

Loki is a vidder whom excels at doing this. Five of Loki’s vids within my sample create similar alternate universes in which Sam, Dean, or both are killers rather than hunters. “Acid,” using The Legion of Doom’s “Lolita’s Medicine” creates an alternate story:

When you’re in the mental hospital, when they try to pump you with the sedatives, when you unconsciously go back to your past, always losing yourself on the edge with present, it means that you are locked. But you’re locked not in the suit of white rooms and corridors, but in your own head. So try to understand, where it all started, try to separate what really happened from what never happened. Try to distinguish what you see in the haze of memories, hallucinations and nightmares. Try to find the truth. Look in her black eyes. (Loki 2009c)

Loki’s story in “Acid” is one in which all the “saving people, hunting things” Dean does is in his head. Sam is cast as less of a brother and more of an alternate personality within Dean; he literally becomes the voice inside Dean’s head urging him to do bad things, primarily to hurt

women. Loki uses images of both the shape shifter when he is portraying Dean<sup>46</sup> hurting women. There are also frequent modified images of Dean that give him black eyes, as if he was possessed by a demon (something that never happens in canon). By adding images from other media, Loki enhances the narrative by presenting the picture of Dean, in jail or a mental asylum, being given psychiatric tests and drugs. To add depth to the technique, Loki sets all the images of Dean either hurting someone, “demonic,” or the people within the hospital in black and white, a contrast to the full color of Dean as he tells his story or struggles to understand what is going on around him.

“Acid” is a vid that completely divorces the reality of the vid from the reality of the canon all the while *using* images from the canon. Another of Loki’s vids, “In the Mirror Distorted,” provides a similar experience. “In the Mirror Distorted” asks the question “‘How certain are you in what you brought back is 100 % pure Sam?’ This is about what can you see when you look in the mirror. So...how certain are *you*?” (Loki 2008, emphasis in the original). The first line of Loki’s summary is from a piece of dialogue Azazel tells Dean in “All Hell Breaks Loose Part 2” following Sam’s resurrection. Loki crafts the “In the Mirror Distorted” so that only three characters appear throughout the vid. Dean, the third character, only appears for the last two seconds of the vid. The other two characters are actually two aspects of Sam. The summary, and the reference to Azazel’s quote, help to set-up a world in which two sides of Sam are at war. The quote is to influence viewers to think that, perhaps, Sam did come back wrong or possessed and scenes of him with an evil expression on his face, jarring transitions between a Sam that is smiling and one with black eyes further cement the view.

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<sup>46</sup> Season one, episode six: “Skin”

“Monsters,” another vid from Loki combines the two types of AUs shown in “Acid” and “In the Mirror Distorted.” The vid, set to the “Matchbook Romance” song, gives the following summary: “*He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster.*” Friedrich Nietzsche (Loki 2009d, emphasis in the original). “Monsters” is a different type of AU than either of the other two vids by Loki I described in this section. Rather than removing the characters from the canon setting, as in “Acid,” or “swapping” the characters to a different role or type (i.e., turning a good character evil) as in “In the Mirror Distorted,” “Monsters” changes the events of canon and, due to this change, ultimately changes the characters. Within “Monsters,” Sam and Dean are shown losing their moral centers. Rather than “saving people, hunting things,” they have become the true monsters. Loki uses numerous images of violence against women, often blonde, from the show and edits the scenes to make it seem as if Sam and Dean are the ones who are perpetuating that violence. The catalyst for the change from heroes to villain is portrayed as Sam’s death and Dean selling his soul to bring Sam back to life; all the scenes regarding this “backstory” are shown strictly in black and white.

As I mentioned earlier, the AU theme is when Sam becomes the central figure in vids the same way Dean is the central figure in the *beauty of men’s pain* vids. Sam’s front (Goffman 1959) of being a “nice guy,” who prefers a more modern masculinity consistently breaks within canon when Sam is shown perpetuating hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This break is, in some ways, more of a problematic break than Dean’s as Sam’s assumption of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) is always accompanied by violence, particularly violence against Dean. This change – putting Sam’s displays of force as power – in the center of this theme does two contradictory things. First, on the surface, the narratives of the alternate universe vids that feature Sam using violence



and force are all ones that cast him as either insane or evil, two things generally considered deviant. Second, the vids take that deviance and often glorify it.

## FANVID VS. CANON

What links all four themes I found within the vids together is a desire to transform or change the surface narratives being presented within SPN. For *shared suffering*, the vids changed the canon narrative of familial love being strength and putting your family first as an ultimate goal into something often far more dark and twisted. Instead of providing strength to Sam and Dean as in canon, vids with the *shared suffering* theme consistently point out the ways in which this loyalty and familial piety actually works to destroy the Winchester family. With *the beauty of men's pain*, vidders actually deconstruct the canon narrative in two ways. First, by focusing on the artistic images of men in pain, they are ignoring the far more prevalent images of *women* in pain. The vids also highlight a contrast of the sexualization of pain between the two genders in canon; women's deaths are more likely to be shown on camera, more likely to be brutal, and more likely to be sexualized through location (e.g., bedrooms) or apparel (e.g., nightclothes, undergarments). Men's deaths are rarely shown on screen and even of the male leads and the three other reoccurring male characters (i.e., John Winchester, Bobby Singer, Castiel), the audience is rarely going to see any of them hurt or injured. So the vidding emphasis on *men's* pain, compared to the canon's emphasis or glorification of *women's* pain provides a unique contrast. It also becomes the second way in which vidding contradicts canon by highlighting the ways in which canon's heteronormative masculinity is broken. While the scenes vidders use are from canon and the argument could be made that canon itself is deviating from its presentations of masculinity, the difference between the presentation on screen and the self-concept held by the characters is never clearer than in these vids. Within the context of canon, the injuries

suffered by the men are often downplayed or treated as “war wounds.” The display of pain and hurt becomes both heroic and masculine within canon. In *the beauty of men’s pain*, the heroism is removed from the narrative to be replaced with weakness.

*Queering the narrative* and *AU* are themes in which vidders are more overt about transforming the narrative. While *shared suffering* and *the beauty of men’s pain* is almost solely about engaging with the subtextual narratives within SPN, queering the narrative and AU are explicitly dealing with text (though both often make use of subtext). Queering the narrative outright rejects the heteronormativity of canon. While I did not discuss this in more length when discussing the vids, the choice of queer pairings is something that also transforms the narrative. The two most popular pairings, Wincest and Destiel, are in some ways born of necessity given the lack of other reoccurring characters to use as part of a romantic relationship. Despite this, fans eagerly are willing to dive into “forbidden” pairings, first through incest and then through a non-human pairing. In one sense, this insistence on queering the characters to the extent of these “extremes” can be seen as both problematic and even fetishistic. Fans desire a homosexual pairing so greatly so they will step far outside the normal sexual boundaries. Further, the practice of slash has been criticized by queer fans as an act of fetishization of queer relationships comparable to the way lesbian pornography is filmed for the straight male gaze (Tosenberger 2007). On the other hand, this desire to go to extremes speaks of a strong desire for LGBTQ representation in popular media. Rather than just fetishizing the ideal of two men having sex together, the popularity of these deviant pairings speaks to a larger desire of the audience to see queerness normalized. Perhaps incest and non-human options would not be the first and most popular pairings within the SPN universe if there were viable queer alternatives available. This is, of course, true of heterosexual pairings as well. A large part of my critique of SPN in the

previous chapter is its handling of diversity. Black men are treated solely as antagonists and villains, women are largely treated as victims to be saved, and women of color and men of ethnicities other than black are practically absent within the canon. This lack of viable potential *female* partners for long-term relationships often means that fans, again, are forced to resort to the mostly male characters which are available, as women are mostly killed, proven to be antagonists, or left behind as the Winchesters move onto the next hunt and next town.

The second area in which fanvids reject canon is through the consistent use of themes dealing with loss of control or being out of control. A large part of the thematic narrative through all five seasons I analyzed (through especially seasons three through five) is body autonomy. With both angelic and demonic possession represented, many of the characters experience periods in which another entity is in control of their actions. We never see Dean out of control like this in canon but Sam experiences both demonic possession<sup>47</sup> and angelic possession (e.g., Lucifer). Most of the canon is fighting against this loss of control, such to an extent that the Winchesters and their closest allies (e.g., Castiel, Bobby Singer) have been nicknamed “Team Free Will,” a reference to a line Dean has within season five episode thirteen<sup>48</sup>:

Dean: This is it.

Sam: This is what?

Dean: Team Free Will. One ex-blood junkie, one dropout with 6 bucks to his name, and Mr. Comatose<sup>49</sup> over there. Awesome.

Despite the presentation of desiring and fighting for “free will” within canon, many of the vids I analyzed actually shared narratives in which Sam and Dean were both out of control. Most often loss of control was found either in the failure to repress or through possession. Unsurprisingly, this overarching trend was found more often in the queering the narrative and AU vids. I found

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<sup>47</sup> Season two, episode fourteen: “Born Under a Bad Sign”

<sup>48</sup> “The Song Remains the Same”

<sup>49</sup> Dean is referring to Castiel, who is passed out drunk on a hotel bed nearby during the conversation.

the loss of control through failure to repress most often within the queer vids. Slash vids, Wincest in particular, often presented narratives in which Dean or Sam (or both) are attempting to suppress their feelings for their partner and failing. The failure of suppression is purely a romantic one and the loss of control is started when one partner gives into the emotions they wish to forget. There was also a second subset of “failure to repress” vids: ones in which Sam or Dean give into the evil within themselves. Vids such as Loki’s “Acid” or Monsters” give narratives in which Sam and Dean become villains. The failure to suppress their darker urges changes the narrative so that the Winchesters become the monsters of the show.

In terms of accepting canon, perhaps the best example is the lack of vids that showcase or highlight women or men of color in any narrative sense. The emphasis on Dean and Sam within canon is continued within fandom and fanvids, often at the expense of any of the other characters. Finding vids like “John the Revelator” that highlight minor or supporting characters were rare. Only one vid, “Unrequited” by Thandie, featured a female character as the sole protagonist (2008). “Unrequited’s” narrative is about Jo Harvelle, her life at the Roadhouse with her mother, and how that life changes through her relationship with Dean Winchester. The vid uses a technique that adds an image of a filmstrip as the border of the scenes, creating the subtext that the audience is watching a retrospective of Jo’s story, as if in tribute. In this sense – the removal of women and men of color – the canonical narrative of SPN *did* play out and was not subverted or rejected the way the narratives about masculinity and control were.

## VID COMMENTS

Ultimately, the acceptance or rejection of narratives carried out in SPN vids also happens within the context of the larger fandom community. In turn, viewers of vids also have a choice to accept or reject the altered narratives. To gauge responses, I analyzed all 3640 comments

available but paid special attention to the comments on the 10 vids with more than 100 comments. Within vid response, I found that comments largely fell into congratulatory categories and many comments overlapped and fell into multiple categories. The first four categories are *kudos* (81%), *narrative kudos* (34%), *ship kudos* (56%), and *technical kudos* (13%), and are heavily related. Kudos, or a “kudo,” is usually given as praise for exceptional work. Kudos, within fandom, is often given in short one-word or sentence format without any critical or engaged commentary. For example, one fanfiction archive, Archive of Our Own, added a “kudos” button for people to click on stories to indicate they liked the story without having to write a full comment. *Kudos* is also a way to compliment a fanworker without engaging their narrative. *Narrative kudos*, while also following the same format as *kudos*, are comments and congratulations given specifically because of a component of the narrative within the vid. *Ship kudos*, similar to *narrative kudos*, are to congratulate a vidder on the presentation of a particular romantic relationship within a vid. Arguably, ship kudos could be seen as a subset of narrative kudos as the romance is often treated as the primary narrative within those vids. However, I am treating these as two separate categories and consider a comment falling into “narrative kudos” when a commenter notes something within the narrative that does not have to do with a romantic pairing. Finally, *technical kudos* are given when a commentator wants to specifically appreciate a piece of technical work done on the vid. The final category of response is *emotional response* (32%), in which a commentator notes specifically how the vid made them feel.

In this section, I will be focusing specifically on the most popular vids, all of which received over 100 comments. Overall, those vids were technically proficient, using advanced techniques such as the inclusion of outside materials (e.g., Obsessive24’s “Fall of Man”). However, plenty of the vids that did not receive nearly as many comments used similar

techniques and seemed to show the same amount of technical skill to my amateur eyes. This meant three possibilities: (a) the narratives of the popular vids were significantly different from the narratives of the vids that received a lower number of comments, (b) the ten vidders whom received more than one hundred comments for their work were “BNFs,” or “Big Name Fans,” people who are well-known and have accrued high statuses within fandoms, (c) some combination of the two. My first guess on the differences between the vids – the narrative – was ultimately incorrect. The types of narratives given in those ten vids were not all that different from the less popular vids. Only one vid is significantly different in terms of narrative: Danegen’s “Luv Song,” set to Jane Jensen’s “Luv Song” (2009). This vid is actually a video ode to Misha Collins (the actor whom plays Castiel) and Collins’s fans/fandom. The only narrative given in “Luv Song,” which combines clips from the song, pictures and images from conventions and interviews, and screen captures of Twitter comments about Collins, is that the fans love Collins and he loves them back. Danegen’s summary, “Hey fandom, there goes your boyfriend” aptly gives the entire narrative of the vid (2009). The humor of the vid combined with the “perfect encapsulation of the Thing that is Misha Collins and Supernatural fandom” help explain the vid’s popularity (sdwolfpup 2009). The comments on “Luv Song” all had to do with finding the vid funny or some comment on Collins and his actions (both within and outside of the vid).

Where Danegen’s vid is unique in narrative direction and content, the other nine vids fell into line with the themes I have mentioned earlier. Six of those ten vids were created by one vidder: Loki. Loki accounted for 20 vids with 1525 comments throughout my sample. Both Loki’s prolific nature and hir popularity as a vidder help explain the differences in number of comments despite the narrative similarities. Loki’s vids are unique even beyond the sheer number of them. Several of Loki’s vids include a small number of comments (n=53) that are

written in a Cyrillic alphabet which Loki responds to in kind. I used the Google Translate service to understand and code the comments, though given the suspect nature of the translation provided, I ultimately excluded the foreign-language comments from the sample (all comment numbers given in this chapter reflect the exclusion). The international component of Loki's audience also sets those vids apart from the rest as no other vidder received comments written in any language but English.

### *Emotional Response*

The one overarching response across all ten of the vids, even Danegen's as an outlier, was an audience response to emotion. For Danegen's vid, the emotion commenters noted was usually humor, often mentioning how the vid made them laugh. Commenters also mentioned emotional connections to the subject of "Luv Song." For example, Sol\_se posts "That was awesome and hilarious! I loved all the little details you put into it. Great job! I'm beginning to think he really is a product of mass hallucination..." (2009). For Sol\_se, the vid was funny and "awesome" not only because of the presented narrative about Misha Collins but also because of Sol\_se's previous knowledge and adoration of Collins. This comment is also an example of how simple *kudos* work; Sol\_se (2009) is essentially saying "good job" with only minimally engaging in the narrative or other aspects (i.e., ship, technical aspects). Counteragent takes a similar, if slightly different, tack with hir comment:

Great concept. Of course this is my very favorite kind of vid, the type that celebrates the crazy in fandom while never letting us off the hook or taking ourselves too seriously.

Like in Happy Alone<sup>50</sup>, you present a convincing case--Misha Collins IS really that awesomesauce (Jensen really IS in love with Jared), but it \_almost\_ reads as a by-product of your exploration of fannish squee. That's talent! (2009)

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<sup>50</sup> "Happy Alone" is another vid by Danegen, centered on the relationship between Jensen Ackles and Jared Padelecki, the actors that play Dean and Sam Winchester respectively. The vid fell outside of my sample range.

Where Sol\_se takes a more personal perspective, Counteragent sees “Luv Song” from a broader perspective. Rather than connecting directly to their own feelings about Collins, Counteragent instead connects to the general *fandom* regarding Collins and SPN. Counteragent’s connection is to other “fannish” people and the humor that can be found through that connection. Further, counteragent is appreciative of the way Danegen “celebrates” the enthusiasm of fans, rather than shames them. Both Sol\_se and Counteragent are identifying specifically with subjects of the vid, whether the subject is Misha Collins or the “Mishimigos,” the term used even within SPN canon for fans of Collins<sup>51</sup>. This intense emotional connection to the subject predisposes the viewer to like Danegen’s vid and, as Counteragent notes, the lack of “shaming” reinforces the connection that is felt. Danegen’s vid becomes easy for fans to identify with simply because it presents and celebrates the feeling of being fannish; essentially, Danegen is highlighting all the things fans enjoy about their fannish identities (Altheide 2000).

Loki’s vids approach emotion in the exact opposite way from Danegen’s approach by using angst (e.g., “705”), horror (e.g., “Acid,” “Monsters”), or pain (“We Carry No Arms”). Loki’s most popular vid within my sample with 186 comments is “The Chain,” to the Fleetwood Mac song of the same name. “The Chain” was created as a Sweet Charity vid in 2009 and Loki describes it as “I think this is what this show is about, right? Two brothers (include all the family drama), driving down the road, killing monsters and listening to the classic rock?” (2009f). The vid features a narrative exploring the relationship between Sam and Dean and the “chain” that pulls them together. Loki pairs the lyrics “damn your love / damn your lies” with shots of Dean and Sam with the women they have had relationships with in the past (e.g., Cassie, Jess, etc.) and contrasts this with the lyrics “And if you don’t love me now / you will never love me again / I

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<sup>51</sup> Season six, episode fifteen: The French Mistake



can still hear you saying you would never break the chain” and scenes of how far Dean and Sam go to save each other (e.g., Dean selling his soul). The transition between the two types of scenes with the lyrics from the chorus implies that, despite the genuine love Sam and Dean felt for those women, it was a “lie” as their ultimate loyalty would always be to each other.

### *Technical Kudos*

Most of the comments on “The Chain” were the basic *kudos* type, essentially telling Loki the vid was good. Geckoholic’s comment, “Wow, this is really, really awesome!!” typifies this type of response (2009). While all but three comments were complimentary – those three comments were requests that Loki re-upload the vid to a sharing website – a small number gave an in-depth response and comments based on the vid. These more in-depth comments tended to remark on the technical aspects of the vid, on the use of Fleetwood Mac, or some combination of both of these things. Caarianna’s comment is an example of the first type:

My God, you're brilliant at making these vids. This one is absolutely breathtaking ... and black and white really works for the mood you've created. You choose the most perfect music, too. Pulsing beat, haunting lyrics, a melody that evokes conflict, desperation ...

The way you meld the music and images is awesome.

I'm stunned. And I'm very, very grateful (2009).

Caarianna combines both her emotional reaction and appreciation for the technical ability Loki displays in “The Chain” through the use of black and white modifications. Caarianna’s emphasis on the interaction of technique and music interacts without actually mentioning the presented narrative of the vid – only what the addition of Fleetwood Mac’s “haunting lyrics” is an interesting but deliberate choice. For Caarianna, the mood of the vid is what creates an emotional connection.

In contrast, Altyronsmaker comments almost exclusively on the interaction between music and narrative:

Okay, first: The Chain is one of my absolute favorite FM songs. The power of it, the staccatto choruses then that DRIVING ending. Just a great song. And the vid?

Whoa. Terrific scene choices, the transistion between frames was seamless and fit perfectly with the music, and when that bass line kicks in (doon dododoon dodoon dodoon doon) the flashes of ruby, Sam and Dean, with each tap on a chord? WELL DONE!

Ohh, the slow pan on Dean watching Sam, when that circle of light grows over his face then disappears, you set it to the line in the song "Damn the dark, damn the light" - the timing on that was Soooo PERFECT, I gasped.

And the washed out sepia? MAsTerful. My only complaint, some of it was too dark, but that probably had more to do with the way the show's filmed than anything you did in the vid making process.

More than likely going to DL this vid, AND rec it. Because, wow. Terrific job (2009). Rather than immediately addressing the vid, Altyronsmaker actually addresses the *song* first,

explaining what Altyronsmaker enjoys about the song to make it a “favorite FM song” (2009).

The next two sections of the comment deal specifically with how the song enhances or helps create the narrative of “The Chain.” Altyronsmaker does not specifically give the emotion felt while watching the vid but does when saying “I gasped” give the physical reactions, implying shock or awe in response to the moment mentioned. Even Altyronsmaker’s complaint about how the footage, especially when rendered into sepia-tones, was too dark is excused by blaming the source of the clips rather than the rendering technique Loki used (Scott and Lyman 1968; Stokes and Hewitt 1976).

#### *Narrative Kudos*

Sanaan’s comments provided one of the most in-depth examples of feedback to “The Chain”:

For me it was Dean's POV and then Sam's POV, and it was all about their lives, their living on the road, and about your trust and love to the one person that shares this life with you.

I loved the first thump-thump sounds. It's like a warning, like preparation to smth<sup>52</sup> bigger. And then the road leads you further. And here they are, doing what they're doing and fighting through it.

>Damn your love, damn your lies, scene since 00:31

I love Dean retreating back to Cassie, to normal life, he goes away but turns back a bit to what he's leaving behind, as he goes away to the life he chose.

scene 00:42-00:43 - Sam's POV but then you show it from Dean's POV, and it makes sense. The scene is about trust. Sam thinks about how much Dean can trust him after seeing that, and hopes he does, and Dean wonders whether he could trust Sam in a first place, and for Dean it feels like a betrayal. So, they both feel hurt and they are the ones to bring the hurt.

00:47 - I love how guys turn the heads))

01:28 - Dean and the gun!

and then there were lies and misunderstanding (i love esp. 02:36-02:40) and it has been thrown into their faces, and they started to fight against each other.

And all those years they were fighting shoulder to shoulder against smth else, protecting and saving each other.

And in the end, it's them against smth else, shoulder to shoulder.

Great job, doll. All those pain and suffering were worth it!

You made it better, turned an idea into smth much bigger, stronger, and digged it to the core of the show (2009a).

Saanan's comment here goes beyond just praising Loki's vid and gives a detailed account of the ways in which Loki constructs the narrative – from Saanan's perspective as a viewer. Saanan's comments even help categorize the theme "The Chain" predominantly fits into, shared suffering, when Saanan comments "they both feel hurt and they are the ones to bring the hurt" (2009a).

The format of the comment is also interesting; most commenters if providing more detailed feedback would, first, outright praise the vid and then discuss the narrative and their reaction to

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<sup>52</sup> This is shorthand for "something."

it; in contrast, Saanan addresses the narrative in-depth and *then* gives two short sentences of praise. That praise is the most telling part of the comment and the key to Saanan's emotional interaction with the vid. Pairing the first sentence, "it was all about their lives, their living on the road, and about your trust and love to the one person that shares this life with you" with how Saanan chooses to end her comment, "You made it better, turned an idea into smth much bigger, stronger, and digged it to the core of the show" gives us an explanation of why Saanan reacted strongly enough to the vid to want to leave detailed feedback (2009a). Saanan feels that Loki manages to encapsulate the "core of the show" (2009a) into a four-minute vid. Loki, in a response to Saanan, even agrees: "yeah, it was their boths' POV, because this video was about them" (2009a). The "core of the show" (Saanan 2009a) for both Loki as the vidder and Saanan as a viewer is the relationship – the "chain" – between the two Winchester brothers.

This further exchange between Loki and Saanan also reveals their perception of the show's heteronormativity:

*I love Dean retreating back to Cassie, to normal life,*

I think those love interests from s1 were like...you know...Cassie, Taylor's character - it was more "real"? I don't know, it felt more natural than in newer seasons. Maybe because in s1 everything wasn't so fucked up and there was - really was - a chance that they, someday, will go back to a normal life.

Apparently, they won't (Loki 2009b, emphasis in original).

thumps up for the the meaning of their previous love interests.  
yeah, there was smth more about them, the guys kept them in their memories.  
and later, there was no room for "real love interest" (Sanaan 2009b).

Here, their interaction reveals that while as a more critical viewer (i.e., watching specifically to analyze rather than enjoy SPN) I found the show extremely heteronormative, both Loki and Saanan found the opposite as they watched. Both Loki and Saanan's comments do not demean the place of a "love interest" for Sam or Dean and rather, instead, look at them hopefully and see

the meaning within the characters. However, the lack of a continuous (female) love interest throughout the show is not seen as something bad, as I saw it being part of SPN's overall treatment of women, but rather a part of the Winchester character arc to be appreciated. Loki writes of the way Sam and Dean will not be able to go to a "normal life" by having a romantic relationship and Saanan agrees that as the narrative continues there is "no room for 'real love interest'." However, the underlying assumption made here by Loki is that a "normal life" is equivalent to having a romantic (heterosexual) relationship. This is an assumption that is supported by canon. Sam's life is "destroyed" by the death of Jessica in the pilot episode; the death of his relationship is also the death of his normality. Dean's romance with Cassie early on is destroyed when he tells her the truth about who he is and what he does when he hunts. When Cassie initially does not believe him, Dean accepts that *hunting* is normality for him and that his sacrifice allows others to have a "normal" life. Later in season five, Sam makes Dean promise that he will attempt to live a "normal" life by going to Lisa and her son Ben to start a real relationship with them. Again, the show's narrative emphasizes that the only normality can be found in a heterosexual relationship.

Within this exchange, we not only see an acceptance of the heteronormative message of the show (and the larger cultural assumption behind that) but also a negotiation of that message (Hall 2001). Both Loki and Saanan adhere to the cultural assumption of heterosexual relationships as "real" or normal, but they are always implicitly queering their readings of SPN by privileging the relationship between Sam and Dean as more important and more representative of the "core of the show" (Sanaan 2009a). While neither of them makes the explicit comparison or call Sam and Dean's relationship queer, the pairing of the emphasis and

preference for the Winchester relationship in the middle of a conversation about romantic relationship becomes an implicit queering.

### *Ship Kudos*

The vid within my sample that received the most comments (n=306) is Obsessive24's "Fall of Man." Obsessive24 summarizes the vid, which uses the Matthew Good song "Fall of Man," as "Castiel character, Castiel/Dean. What you don't know won't kill you" set in season four (2009). The vid is one of the more technically proficient vids I saw within my sample, mainly due to the seamless blending of multiple types of media, including other shows and even pictures and images of artwork. The vid opens with images of Dean in hell mixed with shots from other movies or television shows (the sources of these clips are not identified except in comments). All the outside clips feature fire or people tortured, to give a larger impression of hell. Castiel makes brief appearances during this opening, such as an image of Castiel with wings made of fire; the implication of the images is that Obsessive24 is describing Dean's time in hell and Castiel's journey to pull him out.

The vid then changes with a shot of Dean's hands pushing out from under the ground as he digs his way out of his grave. The lyrics of the song do not begin until approximately fifty seconds into the song. The lyrics "You pray for the sheep / I get closer to hell / I stand on the hill" are paired with shots of three significant events for both Castiel and Dean in season four: Dean torturing Alistair, Castiel unlocking the door while Sam is detoxing from demon blood so that Sam can attempt to go kill Lilith, and the death of a blonde female angel in white with the ash of blackened wings spread out on pavement. These three events become the centerpieces of the vid and the entire narrative revolves around the consequences of those actions, particularly for Castiel as we see him begin to question the orders he has been given by heaven and start to help

Dean even at the expense of his “brothers.” A particularly striking image is the pairing of the repeated lyrics “what you don’t know won’t kill you” at the end of the song with images of Sam punching Dean and Uriel punching Castiel. The vid ends with an image of the God disappearing from Michelangelo’s fresco painted on the Sistine Chapel *The Creation of Adam*, a direct reference to the way God has disappeared from heaven within SPN canon leaving the angels in charge of themselves. Obsessive24 also “sets up” the vid by providing the following quote immediately after giving the lyrics to “Fall of Man”:

*"What's your answer?"*

*"That love is reverence, and worship, and glory, and the upward glance. Not a bandage for dirty sores. But they don't know it. Those who speak of love most promiscuously are the ones who've never felt it. They make some sort of feeble stew out of sympathy, compassion, contempt and general indifference, and they call it love. Once you've felt what it means to love as you and I know it - the total passion for the total height - you're incapable of anything less."*

- Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (2009, emphasis in original)

*The Fountainhead*, Rand’s first popular novel, is about an individualist that refuses to give up his artistic vision as an architect and create buildings that are more traditional and conventional. The quote is taken out of context and the “love” described within the book is the love for pure aestheticism; the quote is about love and appreciation for art. Within the context of the vid, however, the quote becomes about Dean and Castiel and the emotions that drive them throughout season four. What is unclear about the pairing of the Rand quote with the vid is if Dean, Castiel, or both are supposed to be the ones who experience love shallowly or as Rand describes love.

The response to “Fall of Man” is overwhelmingly positive, especially for the technical skills Obsessive24 displays in the vid. Many commenters only engaged with the technical aspects within their comments though several included a mix of praise for technique and for narrative. Giandujakiss, for example, writes: “Oh my gosh, this is amazing. I love the use of

outside footage, the way you captured a grandeur that the show doesn't really have the budget to do - and your parallels between Dean and Sam, and Castiel and Uriel, made me gasp” (2009).

Cathexys’s comments mention Obsessive24’s skill not only with technique but also with narrative: “I love all your vids, because your skill and aesthetics is marvelous, but when it's my favorite pairing and such an amazing critical take on the entire season \*and\* the mythology/religious issues behind it, it's just...” (2009).

Many of the commenters, like Cathexys, engaged with Obsessive24’s narrative. The point of entry for viewers was predominantly through the characters and for Dean and Castiel’s relationship with each other. The religious iconography used from both SPN canon and other sources and the character parallels within the vid also provided points of entry for viewers.

Some, like Eggblue, actually were drawn to the vid because of prior experiences with

Obsessive24:

I don't want to embarrass you, but... You made my favorite fanvid of all time, 'Change (in the house of flies)' for Clex<sup>53</sup>, and I still watch it all the time (more than any other vid), and I was never that much of a Clex'er, but I'm obsessed with Dean/Cas. So if someone had asked me what I wanted most in a fanvid, it would be a Dean/Cas fanvid done by you! And here I get my wish! So you can imagine I flipped when I saw your post at the deancastiel comm. AND OF COURSE IT'S JUST AS GORGEOUS AS I HAD HOPED FOR! There's too much to say (the black birds, the flash of Uriel(!), the paintings!, the parallels!) because I loved the whole thing, but I especially liked the fact that you used the whole season and found so much to fit together. Also, the way you fit the footage from different sources together. Even when I recognize the source, it's not jarring. I'm going to have to watch this over and over again. Your vids are so good, I want to pimp them out to people who don't even slash! Hell, you got me more into fanvids and slash again, and I thought I was diehard! I'm going to settle for downloading, putting it on my iPod, and recc'ing this in my LJ :) Ok? Seriously, dream come true! You do such a fantastic job (2009).

Here Eggblue explains that his point of entry to this vid comes from two locations: another fandom (Smallville) and then specifically through the advertisement of the vid as a “Dean/Cas

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<sup>53</sup> “Clex” is the portmanteau for the relationship between Clark Kent and Lex Luthor in the Superman-based television show “Smallville.”



fanvid” (2009). At the end of Eggblue’s comment, we also see a reconnection to the earlier comments and Eggblue continues to praise Obsessive24, specifically saying that “Fall of Man” helped re-ignite Eggblue’s love of fanvidding and slash. Further, Eggblue wants to share the vid with others to share the connection Eggblue feels with the vid. Compared to Eggblue’s much shorter comments about the narrative of the vid, this praise of Obsessive24 indicates the Eggblue would have enjoyed the vid *even if Eggblue had not connected with the narrative*. The connection as a viewer has less to do with the characters or the relationship but rather the appreciation of Obsessive24 as a vidder and the anticipation of compatible readings of the canon. Eggblue was also primed to enjoy the vid by the location from which Eggblue found the vid: a community dedicated to the promotion of the romantic/sexual relationship between Dean and Castiel. In terms of Eggblue’s interaction with the narrative of “Fall of Man,” the emphasis on “fit” throughout the whole season connects to Eggblue’s mention of “parallels” (2009).

Decadentdream contrasts Eggblue’s comment by deconstructing Obsessive24’s narrative choices regarding Castiel:

Well I doubt I can say more than anyone else has said, but I am grateful that you posted and used just enough information to tempt me to walk in. No doubt my angel obsession has risen highly since we were first introduced to Castiel, and I have often found many SPN vids lacking in the actual character that he was/is... but no fail here. (2009)

Decadentdream begins this comment by complimenting Obsessive24’s “set up.” By providing the right amount of “tease” about the vid, Obsessive24 is able to draw in Decadentdream as a viewer. What worked about the “tease” was specifically the mention of Castiel as a prominent part of the vid and it is through Obsessive24’s interpretation of Castiel as a character and his narrative arc throughout SPN that draws Decadentdream. In contrast to many of the other vids Decadentdream has viewed featuring Castiel, “The Fall of Man” manages to give an interpretation of the character to which Decadentdream agrees. What is unclear about

Decadentdream's assertion is whether other vids failed due to a lack of showing Castiel entirely (possible given the relatively small presence he had in my sample compared to the large presence Castiel's fans have within the larger SPN fandom) or due to an incompatible characterization. Decadentdream also provides an "insider" view, as a self-proclaimed vidder, on the technical skills Obsessive24 is displaying in "The Fall of Man" and even implies that the level of skill shown in the vid is something sie aspires to be able to do. Like the other commenters, however, Decadentdream's engagement with the narrative is limited comparative to the engagement with the visual effects and the technique of the vid.

Nonsenseprocess provides the most in-depth commentary on the narrative; the comments become so long that Nonsenseprocess requires two comments to say everything. The two comments focus specifically on Castiel's development and narrative arc, both within SPN and the vid itself:

I'd been looking forward to your Castiel vid since you mentioned you were making one, and when I saw you had finished it to Fall of Man I gave a little cheer. And then immediately watched it, and finished with my hands over my mouth just staring at the screen. In a good way! In a - wow, yes, *that* way.

The external footage you use here is *amazing* and I think kind of necessary to actually tell a story about *Castiel*, rather than just Castiel-as-seen-by-Dean. I love how alien and terrible this makes Castiel seem, which is what he *should* be. Having an angel on your side is not necessarily the best thing ever! (2009a, emphasis in the original)

Beginning the comment with a description of Nonsenseprocess's point of entry into the vid (Castiel), Nonsenseprocess then gives hir immediate reaction to the vid of amazement. Following this brief complimentary introduction, Nonsenseprocess then moves onto hir analysis of the narrative of the vid. Nonsenseprocess begins with the more broad parts of the narrative by focusing on the narrative point of view within the vid. Hir discussion of "a story about *Castiel*" begins:

*You beg me to stop, but I was never that nice*

Dean's ears bleeding to Pamela's eyes being burnt out to Jimmy being possessed - I love that series of images, all three of them being damaged in various ways by Castiel's power, even though I think in each time Castiel meant well. (As well as an angel with its own ethos and perspective of time and morality can mean, at least.) Jimmy's possession there especially struck me because the damage is so much about *consent*, whether it's even possible to believe Jimmy knew enough to make an informed decision there, especially because of how he viewed and regretted it later. (Nonsenseprocess 2009a, emphasis in original)

This is an interesting observation about the character of Castiel and the character's evolution within the series from commanding presence that orders Dean to do his bidding to willing co-conspirator with the Winchesters. When Nonsenseprocess mentions Castiel's different sense of "ethos and perspective of time and morality" (2009a) the reference is essentially to the way Castiel becomes less "alien" and more "human." The character learns about the morality of humanity – specifically the morality of the Winchesters – and begins to agree and help. Within this paragraph, Nonsenseprocess also hones in on one of the key narratives within SPN and how that narrative is articulated within "The Fall of Man." The narrative of "consent" throughout the show is key because it is deeply entangled with the idea of "free will." The dual narratives about consent and possession – demons not requiring it and angels needing it – provide an important guide throughout the first five seasons of SPN as *consent* becomes the key ingredient in Dean and Sam's rebellion against heaven and hell.

There's a moment around 2:00-2:07, where Castiel grabs Dean's shoulder and puts his hand over his mouth and there's that *look* that passes between them, which you illustrate with that great external source hand footage and Castiel pulling Dean out of Hell, followed by making Dean swear allegiance to the angels - the way you arranged that I was struck with how much Dean really doesn't have the option to say no to whatever Castiel is about to propose when he pulls the knife, that when Castiel covers Dean's mouth and just stares into his eyes, there's an absolute lack of any other option for Dean there than agreement. The same way that Jimmy is pretty much forced into agreeing to take Castiel into him again, because Castiel lets Jimmy's body be fatally wounded and Jimmy's daughter can't have known the extent of what she was agreeing to either (2009a, emphasis in original).

Agency is key within this part of Nonsenseprocess's comment. Where the agency narrative in the show is concerned about Dean and Sam's choices, Nonsenseprocess is honing in on the idea of *Castiel's* agency. For Sam and Dean, the pursuit of agency is absolute; to them, being taken over by another being (whether angel or demon) is something to be strictly avoided. They even tattoo themselves to avoid it happening, after Sam is possessed by the demon Meg in season two. Castiel, on the other hand, is presented in the beginning of his narrative as a being that is focused solely on obeying. Castiel obeys the orders given to him and while that is a kind of agency (the choice to obey vs. the choice to disobey), Castiel is consistently shown as a character that lacks agency and asks *Dean* to give up his agency as well. The two scenes Nonsenseprocess mentions are both scenes in which Castiel engineers a flawed "choice" for other characters (e.g., Dean and Jimmy).

1:16-1:29: *I look in your eyes, you look for your price*

I love that shot of a hellhound, the implication that if you look inside Dean's head that's what you'll see, forever - him being hunted after by hellhounds. ("You should show me some respect. I dragged you out of Hell, I can throw you back in." *Thanks, Cas.*) And Dean pouring the holy water against the close-up of his flashback Hell eyes, and then that tear.

I'm sort of jumping around at random, here, picking out the parts that struck me the first time around - oh, like that shot in the beginning of Castiel turning his head where you built in the wings behind him, or at 1:13 when the door closes behind Dean and over Castiel, and for the moment there's that shot of Uriel dead in the glass. Which is a great way of making use of an odd bit of blank space, especially because that shot traditionally closes with the other actor framed behind the glass and I was always a little confused what Supernatural was doing by having it instead frame an empty wall.

One of my favorite bits of movement here is at 2:47, where the flying demons flicker over the close-up of hands in *The Creation of Adam*. (I also love 0:48-0:53, the chapel becoming the roof of Bobby's panic room becoming the devil's trap Alistair is chained to.) (2009a)

Here Nonsenseprocess gives less analysis and more of a personal gut reaction to the vid. What makes this portion of the comment interesting is the dual focuses within this section. Nonsenseprocess connects the visuals of the vid with portions of the narrative *not* present, as seen through the reference to Castiel capitalizing on Dean's fear of returning to hell. This displays how easily Obsessive24 is able to mesh the alternate narrative of "Fall of Man" with the narrative presented in canon. Secondly, Nonsenseprocess, rather than discussing the narrative of "Fall of Man" explicitly, instead details the cinematic choices made by Obsessive24. Here is an interesting example of a commenter reacting to a vid not only as a story but also as a specific piece of art. Even the type of commentary given, such as commenting on the use of "blank space," is similar to the type of comments given to works of art in museums.

2:09-2:16 *Stick to the plan, the fall of man*

Castiel's blood becoming the figure falling off the rooftop and exploding into crows or ravens - first, that's just a gorgeous, incredibly well-timed shot, and second, it's one I keep coming back to to think about. You establish the Castiel-raven connection earlier with Castiel showing Dean his wings and the shot of the bird flying toward the viewer, so that moment of Castiel really, truly willfully disobeying Zachariah (who I think Castiel still believes is speaking for God?) really does represent the start of Castiel *falling* (or at least doing more than sauntering vaguely downwards<sup>54</sup>), and - oh, the blood floating up towards the light (before the Castiel-wings establishing shot was Dean with the sun rising in front of him, though at this point I might be reaching for symbolism that isn't there) in front of the Impala and Castiel painting the sigil onto the wall.

At 2:26, I love the statue's hand crumbling flickering back to the Creation of Adam, and the churches and cathedrals falling apart as Castiel and Dean are beaten, and finally that dual shot at 2:53 of the two of them standing to fight - and for what? (Nonsenseprocess 2009b)

Here is where both of Nonsenseprocess's approaches to the vid – investigating the narrative and investigating the vid as art – overlap. Nonsenseprocess uses the discussion of the cinematic effects centered on Castiel to emphasize the narrative of Castiel's "fall." This is an interesting

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<sup>54</sup> This is a reference to a line from the Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett novel, *Good Omens*, in which one of the main characters, the demon Crowley is titled "An Angel who did not so much Fall as Saunter Vaguely Downwards."

choice, especially considering the title of the vid and the pairing of Castiel “falling” through disobedience makes him both relatable to the viewer (who are presumably on the side of the Winchesters, as opposed to the angels) and more human. This makes the title of the vid – “The Fall of Man” – ironic, at least within Nonsenseprocess’s interpretation of the “symbolism” – as it is Castiel, an angel, who falls to become human, rather than the Winchesters as representations of humanity within both the vid and the canon universe. Further, Nonsenseprocess identifies the “crumbling” of religious iconography as another “symbol” of the narrative of Castiel’s fall into humanity. Nonsenseprocess is again addressing the vid as a piece of art by combining the visual symbols with the narrative.

The first time I watched this the last, lingering shot of the Creation of Adam painting reminded me of the end of Effigy, with that long still shot of Gwen turning into a nun<sup>55</sup>, and so I *wasn't expecting it to change*. I wasn't sure what the meaning of it was, or how it fit as the final, powerful crux of the vid, and so I was watching it with full concentration and when God began to fade out I gaped and brought my hands up to my mouth. It's - I mean, yes, *exactly*, that's what has to go there, and you foreshadowed it so beautifully (especially with the statue's hand crumbling), and it's an argument completely supported by the show and *necessary* for this story and oh, wow, what a powerful and simple way to show it. (2009b)

Here, toward the end of the comment, Nonsenseprocess establishes herself as someone familiar with Obsessive24’s work by referencing another video and techniques used within that vid and because of that familiarity was surprised by the “powerful crux of the vid.” The identification of this piece of the vid as the “crux” is a very accurate one as well. The symbolism of God disappearing from the painting is important just as the symbolism of Chuck’s narration followed by his disappearance within “Swan Song” is important. Obsessive24 is outright stating that God has disappeared within the SPN canon. This interpretation is supported heavily within canon by the actions and comments of the archangels, most of whom want apocalypse to happen simply so

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<sup>55</sup> This is a reference to another Obsessive24 vid for the British television series *Merlin* centered on the character of Guinevere in Camelot.

that life without God *ends*. This piece of the vid highlights one of the greatest ironies of the SPN canon: angels are considered the ultimate beings *without* agency within SPN canon. They were literally designed to serve God and for no other purpose. Yet despite this, every angel we see within seasons four and five act with agency such as the archangels attempting to start apocalypse and Anna and Castiel helping Sam and Dean of their own initiative. They are consistently shown as making choices but the canon frames those choices in such a way that agency is *only* rewarded if the “right” (i.e., being on the side of the Winchesters) choice is made.

I just read through the rest of the comments and someone mentioned that - hey, this is what Supernatural would be if they had the budget! \*laughs\* And I think that's one of the things I love about this vid, and what this medium can do, that you can make the hellhounds *visible* and present, and you can make Hell more than a few murky shots of chains and eyes, and you can take the character of Castiel and what he's trying to do (save the world, pull Dean onto the side of the angels, protect what's good and right with increasingly limited and suspect information) and present such a broader context for it. You can *show* Hell (and apparently I'm capitalizing that today, who knew), and *show* Castiel pulling Dean out of it, and show exactly what's at stake here. And make it be reeeally gorgeous.

This is awesome and surpasses anything I was hoping would be made about Castiel's storyline. Thank you so much for sharing it! (Nonsenseprocess 2009b)

Nonsenseprocess finishes hir extensive comment by interacting with other comments in conjunction with hir interpretation of the vid. Interestingly enough, despite the narrative-driven commentary, Nonsenseprocess interacts with other comments about the technical aspects of “Fall of Man.” Within this portion of the commentary, it is the expansion of canon that Obsessive24 provides through the use of outside material that “broaden” the both the vid and Nonsenseprocess’s connection to the canon.

## CONCLUSION

Within my sample of SPN vids, I found an interesting split between vids that reject canon and vids that uphold or negotiate with canon *identity presentation, narrative arcs, or cultural*

*narratives*. The outright rejection of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) is seen over and over within vids but expressed most especially in the themes of *shared suffering* and *the beauty of men's pain*. The reworking of the characters of Sam and Dean to present something much more gender fluid seems to be a common goal within the vidding fandom I surveyed. At least in the case of masculinity, we can see a clear progression of transformation from canon to fanon where the on-screen depictions of masculinity are rearranged and rejected in such a way to allow for less rigid forms of masculinity. The same can provisionally be said about the transformation of heteronormativity within the canon to a larger representation of homosexuality. The *narrative manipulation* from canon to fandom is one that changes the depiction of what is considered proper or right for masculinity redefines the nature of the characters of Dean and Sam. The transformation provided within *queering the narrative* is an explicit rejection of the text. However, the subtext of many of those vids often reproduces many of the more problematic markers of heteronormativity within a homosexual relationship, such as an emphasis on violent sexuality. Further, many of the vids within the *queering the narrative* theme rely on the closet to provide narratives; that is, the primary narrative within queered vids is one in which one or both men involved in the relationship are hiding or repressing their feelings, often resulting in pain, loss, and death. This narrative of tragedy prevalent within vids is one that is actually a classic within queer fiction and movies (Seidman 2004). While the rejection of heteronormativity is taking place in the creation of queered vids too often those same vids embrace narratives that *benefit* heteronormativity by highlighting how “bad” homosexuality is for people. Another clear rejection of canon is the usurpation of the sexualization of violence. Where in canon, women are seen as victims of sexualized violence in almost every episode, this is not the case within SPN vids. Rather, *men* are portrayed as being



victims of sexualized violence, such as we see with John Winchester in “John the Revelator.” Perhaps even more importantly, the commenters on these vids become confederates in these rejections by accepting, encouraging, and even requesting more representations of this breaking of the masculine front (Goffman 1959) through queerness and othering masculinity.

Where fanvids reject or subvert many of the canon ideas about masculinity, they wholeheartedly seem to accept the role women and men of color play within SPN canon: women and men of color are virtually nonexistent within SPN fanvids. Even one of the most famous SPN vids (placed outside of my sample), “Women’s Work” created by Luminosity and sisabet using the song “Violet” by the band Hole, reemphasizes the narratives surrounding women as only being victims or villains within SPN. “Women’s Work” gained widespread popularity, including Luminosity being featured in a New York Magazine article where she talks about the vid (Hill 2007). The vid gives an artful critique of both these portrayals and the emphasis on the sexualization of violence against women within the show. However, the vid *solely* shows white women and, even if it were included in my sample, would still only bring the count of vids featuring women heavily (or casting women as the main characters) to two. This lack of women in vids is stark especially combined with the complete absence of men of color in vids, even as villains. Vidders have completely rendered those narratives invisible or subjugated them to the narratives of the white men within SPN, a reflection of the way the narratives of women and women and color are treated within our larger society.

In the next chapter, I will move from SPN to my second source of data: *Star Trek*. In the next chapter, I will briefly describe the canon source I analyzed, the *identity presentation* present in the 2009 *Star Trek* film, the *cultural narratives* I identified, and a brief comparison between the “new” *Star Trek* film and the classic 1960s television show that inspired the film. Returning

back to the canon of *Star Trek* allows me to investigate the cultural landscape that influenced the creators of the movie before moving on to how the film is then rearticulated within *Star Trek* fandom by vidders.

## CHAPTER SIX

### STAR TREK CANON

Understanding the stories told within society helps us to understand the ideologies that society holds about important issues such as representations of gender, race, class, and other intersections or larger cultural values (Crane 1992; Loseke 2007; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011; Spillman 2002). By studying the canon, or cultural artifact, this can reflect the cultural values of the creators (Griswold 1987a; Griswold 1992; Griswold 1994). Arguably one of the most well-known and popular fandoms today, *Star Trek* received a new infusion of life (and fans) with the 2009 J.J. Abrams movie release. The original television show, created by Gene Roddenberry began airing in 1966, ran for three seasons on NBC, and highlighted the adventures of the crew of the starship Enterprise as they “boldly go where no man has gone before” (Daniels 1966). While the *Star Trek: the Original Series* (ST: TOS) was relatively short-lived, the enthusiasm Roddenberry and his fans had for the universe created an animated version (1973-1974), four different new television spin-offs<sup>56</sup> that kept the Star Trek universe on air for eighteen years, ten movies (six of which dealt with the actions of the original Enterprise crew and another four that featured the crew in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*), and over a hundred novels. ST: TOS featured a utopian universe that allowed viewers the chance to escape from the problems of the times (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) and see what a world of possibilities would be like. The glimpse of the future Roddenberry offered was both technologically advanced enough to inspire some real life technological breakthroughs (Evangelista 2004; Parsons 2006)

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<sup>56</sup> Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994), Deep Space Nine (1993-1999), Star Trek: Voyager (1995-2001), Enterprise (2001-2005)

and unique in its equality, featuring several ethnicities, a female officer, a character coded as “biracial,” and the first interracial kiss televised in America<sup>57</sup>.

By the release of the 2009 movie, *Star Trek* (ST), the entire franchise was a large part of the cultural landscape by sheer longevity if not popularity. Abrams, as the director, and his frequent collaborators Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman as writers, had forty-three years of canon and fan expectations to meet. The film, released on May 7, 2009, grossed over \$385 million worldwide (Nash Information Services 2012), received several positive reviews, was nominated for four Academy Awards, and eventually won the Academy Award for Best Make-Up. Rather than make a mistake with the some-what messy continuity of the established canon, Abrams, Orci, and Kurtzman decided to make an alternate timeline and build up a new mythology within and based on the larger established franchise. Their attempt at recreating the canon created a movie that is essentially about the struggles between competing ideas of masculinity and the primary themes underlying the movie – independence and individualism – are cardinal components to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Abrams, Orci, and Kurtzman have created a universe where the plot, the settings, and all the characters exist to uphold the “myth” of manhood. This is especially seen in the contrast between the two main characters of the movie: James T. Kirk, a rugged neo-liberal independent white man and Spock, a more controlled and gentle representation of “new” masculinity.

In this chapter, I will be analyzing the first “reboot” movie, though I did need a general understanding and knowledge of ST: TOS to understand connections, characters, and ideologies that were being rewritten into the ST reboot movie. I reviewed but did not directly analyze the three seasons of ST: TOS mostly for comparison purposes; I kept my analytical focus more

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<sup>57</sup> Season three, episode ten: “Plato’s Stepchildren”

directly on the movie, assuming that while the larger Star Trek fandom is passionate about the original, most of the more recent vids will be focused on the reboot compared to the older series. In this chapter, I will be giving a brief description of the movie's plot and characters. Then I will move directly into my analysis of the representation found within the movie. Primarily, this will be looking at the characters of Kirk and Spock as both main characters and binary oppositions (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) that provide narrative structure to the movie. Kirk and Spock are the center of the conflict and all other characters – even the nominal antagonist of the movie – revolve specifically around that pair. I will focus on the dual and dueling presentations of masculinity in my analysis. Then I will move onto a more general look at overall representation in ST. In these sections I will be addressing *identity presentation* and *narrative arcs* generally but with specific emphasis on Kirk and Spock. I then move to a brief discussion of the *cultural narratives* found within ST: (a) *rise to the challenge by any means necessary* and (b) *the best defense is a good offense*. I conclude the chapter with a comparison between the *cultural narratives* present in ST: TOS and ST as well as how the changes between the two different pieces of canon reflect cultural changes over the last forty years.

## FILM SUMMARY

The movie opens with a brief introduction to the main antagonists of the movie: the Romulan Nero and his ship the *Narada* before transitioning to the childhoods of what become the two main protagonists of the movie: James “Jim” T. Kirk and Spock. The movie follows their exploits as Kirk is recruited into the Federation Starfleet. Kirk and Spock meet each other at the Starfleet Academy, where Spock accuses Kirk of academic cheating and gains Kirk's animosity. Kirk's trial is interrupted by an attack from the *Narada* on the planet of Vulcan (Spock's home) and all cadets are assigned to ships to aid Vulcan. Spock is the second-in-command of the

Federation flagship, the *Enterprise*, under Captain Chris Pike, along with other officers Nyota Uhura, Pavel Chekov, Hikaru Sulu, and Dr. Leonard “Bones” McCoy.

McCoy sneaks Kirk onto the ship and Kirk offers his help, advising Pike successfully so that the *Enterprise* avoids a trap laid by Nero. Pike then leaves the ship to travel to the *Narada* to negotiate, leaving Spock in charge and Kirk as his second-in-command. Pike is taken captive and while Spock and Kirk are able to save some of the Vulcan citizens, Nero successfully destroys the planet, killing millions (including Spock’s human/Terran mother). Spock and Kirk fight about the next course of action and Spock maroons Kirk on a deserted ice planet. Kirk encounters monsters and is saved by an old man who turns out to be an older version of Spock (called “Spock Prime” in the film’s credits and played by Leonard Nimoy whom originally played Spock in ST: TOS) that was transported through time to the past. Spock Prime uses his telepathic abilities to give Kirk information both about Nero and his future as the Captain of the *Enterprise*. Spock Prime then leads Kirk to a Starfleet base staffed by Montgomery “Scotty” Scott, who transports all of them back to the *Enterprise*. Kirk goads Spock into a fight and Spock resigns his command for being emotionally compromised. Kirk then takes over as Captain and leads the crew in a successful attack against Nero and the *Narada* (for a more comprehensive plot summary of the film, see appendix B).

## REPRESENTATION IN STAR TREK

As the two main characters, Kirk and Spock receive the most screen time and characterization within the film. The two characters are set up as what Levi-Strauss calls “binary oppositions” ([1958] 1963). Levi-Strauss ([1958] 1963) argues that a primary feature of myths is that understanding can only be found within the pairing of contrasting ideas or symbols. For example, in *Snow White*, the basic binary opposition is shown through the pairing of Snow

White (Good) and the Queen (Evil). Essentially, our understanding of what it means to be “good” within the story of Snow White is directly bounded by the connection of what it means to be “evil.” Other common binary oppositions, beyond good/evil, include things such as “sane/insane,” “rational/irrational,” or even “beautiful/ugly” (Smith and Riley 2009). Within ST, the binary oppositions presented by Kirk and Spock are dueling representations of masculinity. In this section, I will be detailing the specific representations of dual and dueling masculinities as shown within ST, the other representations provided as support, and then discuss the effects these *identity presentations* have on specific narrative arcs. Following this section, I will then be moving onto looking at the embedded *cultural narratives* and the connections between all three items within ST’s narrative.

#### *James T. Kirk*

Kirk is characterized by bold, aggressive action. He is rarely shown in scenes that involve little or no movement. Further, he has been denoted as a leader even through his clothing. Kirk’s uniform is part of the standard Starfleet uniform, first in the red recruit/”dress” uniform that is only different between male (pants, long-sleeves) and female (skirts, short-sleeves) uniforms, and then followed by the “duty” uniform he wears while on the *Enterprise*. The uniform is a colored tunic with a black collar and ranking insignia embedded into the wrist sleeves of the shirt. The color also denotes specific departments: gold shirts are command and helm personnel (Kirk, Sulu, Chekov), blue shirts denote science and medical personnel (Spock, McCoy), and red shirts are operations, engineering, and security personnel (Uhura, Scott). Kirk’s assumption of the command uniform, particularly with ranking insignia on his sleeves, helps to set his character apart from all the other characters. Kirk’s characterization is also governed by the consistent acceptance of challenges (heavily related to the embedded *cultural narrative* of *rise to the*

*challenge by any means necessary*) and the willingness to do whatever is necessary – including cheat (e.g., the Kobayashi Maru) – to achieve his goals. Finally, Kirk’s personality is also highly sexualized, as shown by both his attempt to hit on Uhura multiple times early on in the movie and his scene with Gaila while they are in bed.

These traits are all important parts of a particular type of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) that emphasizes dominance to achieve what is considered a socially-acceptable masculinity. Kirk’s performance, like Dean Winchester in SPN, relies heavily on the performance of masculinity norms identified by Brannon, in particular “Give ‘em Hell” (1976). This category of Brannon’s (1976) masculinity typology is about being daring and aggressive, taking risks regardless of what others say in the pursuit of a man’s goals. “Give ‘em Hell” is not just about physical aggression but can also be about *sexual* aggression, both of which Kirk embodies within the film. For example, the first “true” introduction to Kirk’s character comes through the scene in which he steals a car. His aggression is shown both by his defying the car’s owner and the police. Kirk’s scene in the bar with Pike is also a narrative way of supporting this expression of masculinity. While Pike is ostensibly criticizing Kirk for the bar fight, he also explains about George Kirk “You know, that instinct to leap without looking, that was his nature too, and in my opinion, it's something Starfleet's lost.” Pike seems to believe that Starfleet has lost its aggression and daring. This is an interesting juxtaposition, of course, compared to ST: TOS. In ST: TOS, the mission of the Enterprise was essentially peaceful exploration; while they might need daring and risk-taking when confronted with challenges, the idea of “leaping without looking” is almost antithetical to the idea of peaceful exploration, especially given that Pike is describing this quality in the context of Kirk’s bar fight. To imply that Starfleet has lost their “edge” is also to subtly imply that Starfleet has also lost part of its



masculinity, or at the very least the people *within* Starfleet are no longer “man” enough to get to the job done. Kimmel describes that, for men, violence can be restorative and used to regain “honor” or “respect” and establish a “reputation” (2008). By linking Kirk’s bar fight with Starfleet, Pike is saying that the violence Kirk engaged in to protect himself and his reputation is needed in Starfleet. Pike wants Kirk as a recruit, not just because he is the son of George Kirk who saved hundreds of lives, but also because Kirk is a fighter and that is specifically the type of man Pike wants in and leading Starfleet. Pike becomes the main support, at this point in the movie, of the physically aggressive and challenging behavior Kirk displays as part of his “Give ‘em Hell” (Brannon 1976) masculinity.

The scene with Gaila later in the movie is also an interesting expression of this type of sexually aggressive masculinity:

GAILA: Ahh.. Jim, I think I love you.

KIRK: That's so weird.

GAILA: Lights.

MALE COMPUTER VOICE: Lights On.

GAILA: Did you just say "that is so weird?"

KIRK: Yeah, I did but I...

GAILA: You don't love me too?

(the door opens)

GAILA: Oh, that's my roommate.

KIRK: I thought you said she was gone for the night?

GAILA: Well, obviously, she's not. Quick, you've got... get under the bed.

KIRK: Under...

GAILA: Look, under the bed.

KIRK: C'mon

GAILA: She can't see you.

KIRK: Why not?

GAILA: Because I promised her I'd stop bringing guys back to the room.

KIRK: Wait, how many guys have you...?

While this scene is not particularly important within the larger narrative, especially as Gaila is a very minor character (she only has one scene other than this one), this scene establishes two things that are important. The first, textually, is showing Kirk’s ease with women. He is being

explicitly shown as sexual and, perhaps more importantly, heterosexual. Gaila becomes the second female character Kirk interacts with in a deliberately sexual way; first with Uhura and his reference to her “talented tongue” and then with Gaila in this scene, as she is shown half-dressed and on a bed. Secondly, this scene sets up Gaila as very sexually active. Again, she is a minor character so the mention of “other guys,” as well as Kirk’s confused and negative reaction to her revelation of other sexual partners, becomes an instance of “slut shaming,” or the culturally-endorsed shaming of women engaged in sexual activity (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, and Seeley 2014; Papp et al. 2015; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, and Livingstone 2013). Kirk’s masculinity is impinged by Gaila’s multiple partners, despite her profession of love for him. He is more interested in knowing about her sexual history than the fact she may love him. Gaila being coded as sexually active becomes important not only in the context of how Kirk reacts to the revelation but also in the larger context of the portrayals of femininity within the film. Gaila becomes the fourth (and last featured) female character to have a significant speaking role in the film<sup>58</sup>. Two of those women are featured in the feminine role of motherhood (i.e., Winona Kirk, Amanda Grayson) and the other two women are shown initially as sex objects for Kirk (i.e., Uhura, Gaila). Further, this scene and the discussion of Gaila’s open sexuality set up her eventual fate. Through this scene, Kirk manages to enact the “Give ‘em Hell” masculinity (Brannon 1976) completely and the acceptance of the other characters of his actions (e.g., Pike, Uhura) mean that the overall narrative supports and endorses this type of masculinity as preferred.

### *Spock*

Spock, as the binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) of Kirk, is presented with a different type of masculinity. Where Kirk embodies “Give ‘em Hell,” Spock is much more like

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<sup>58</sup> Winona Kirk, Amanda Grayson, Nyota Uhura, and Gaila

Brannon's typology of "Be a Sturdy Oak" (1976). Essentially, "Be a Sturdy Oak" (Brannon 1976) is the idea that men should be strong and reliable in a crisis, being able to handle anything that comes their way. A man is the support necessary to weather any particular crisis. As Kimmel (2008) points out, the thrust of the masculine presentation within "Be a Sturdy Oak" is not simply that a man should be a person that can be relied on it is that a man should not show emotions, like a block of wood. Spock's characterization is highlighted by the emphasis on logic and emotionless decision-making. He even advocates potentially undergoing the Vulcan ritual of Kolinahr, which pursues all emotion, early on in the film asking for his mother's approval. Unlike Kirk, who is very rarely shown as still or not moving, shots of Spock is filled with much less movement and he is mostly expressionless throughout the entire film. Spock also provides an interesting analogy within the narrative as a character that is "mixed-species" between Vulcan and human. The analogy the character provides is likely that of a mixed-race individual and the ambiguities they face when being born into two different cultures (Khanna 2011; Khanna 2012; Pyke and Johnson 2011; Ruebeck, Averett, and Bodenhorn 2009; Thompson 2012) though beyond Spock's introduction scenes and interactions with his mother and father, this is rarely addressed. Finally, the binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) is made visually, as Kirk is shown as a blond in a gold command uniform, where Spock is dark-haired in a blue science uniform.

As a "Sturdy Oak" type of masculinity (Brannon 1976), the key scenes for Spock are when he is taught the "Sturdy Oak" ideology and when his front, or performance of masculinity (Goffman 1955; Goffman 1959), breaks. The first is heavily connected to his upbringing as a Vulcan and by his father Sarek. After Spock fights back against his bullies early in the film, Sarek explains that emotions run deeper in Vulcans than humans and Vulcans use logic to

temper those emotions. Spock confronts his father about marrying a human when Sarek insists Spock become completely Vulcan and Sarek gives one of the key lines in the film:

As ambassador to Earth, it is my duty to observe and understand Human behavior. Marrying your mother was logical. Spock, you are fully capable of deciding your own destiny. The question you face is: which path will you choose? This is something only you can decide.

This line is key in understanding Spock's character development throughout the film. The two "paths" Sarek speaks of are, for Spock, about which side of his heritage he should embrace but also serve to mirror the two "paths" of masculinity offered between the representations of Kirk and Spock. The scene is ultimately contradictory in that first Sarek urges Spock to be the complete "Sturdy Oak" (Brannon 1976) by embracing his Vulcan heritage and eschewing all human emotions but then, eventually, turns the discussion back onto Spock, still a child at this point. This is an example of Sarek not actually living up to his own example because he is visibly distressed by the conversation (i.e., showing emotion) and by verbally attacking Spock and displaying "Give 'em Hell" masculinity instead (Brannon 1976).

The second early scene with Spock is the scene with his mother and the confrontation with the Vulcan High Council. Here we see the repetition of the word "choice" associated with Spock. He is being depicted, early on, as someone with multiple options available to him. Spock rejects the Vulcan way and the opportunities he has as a Vulcan in the same manner they reject his mother and her humanity, opting instead to join Starfleet. In ST, Spock is pushed into "rebellious" through years of systematic emotional abuse. In the original scene with Spock as a child, we see Sarek with Spock and while Sarek ostensibly tells Spock he has a choice regarding his future and which part of his heritage to embrace, Sarek's words earlier, asserting that "Logic offers a serenity Humans seldom experience. The control of feelings, so that they do not control you," implies that Sarek believes human and human emotions are beneath him. Even the tone

used is one of superiority; Sarek sees Vulcans as the more “evolved” species. This is at odds with Sarek’s words about choice. Further, the implication that Spock has to *make* a choice, rather than being able to embrace both cultures is problematic in the context of the scene, the larger *narrative arcs* involving Spock, and the embedded *cultural narratives* about masculinity and identity within the film. Essentially, these scenes are manifestly advocating for Spock to accept his fate as a “Vulcan” and become the emotionless “Sturdy Oak” (Brannon 1976) masculinity his father and culture demands him to be but are latently endorsing Kirk’s “Give ‘em Hell” (Brannon 1976) masculinity, even while “punishing” or making Spock lose esteem or reputation when showing that aspect of masculinity. As Spock *is* Kirk’s binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) and one side of the duality must be shown as more correct or acceptable, this tendency to highlight the masculinity expressed by “Give ‘em Hell” over “Sturdy Oak” (Brannon 1976) is one way the overall narrative confirms which of the two is culturally wanted.

The two confrontations between Kirk and Spock are also key to not only Spock’s *narrative arc* but also the film’s overall *cultural narratives* and “explanation” (Griswold 1987b) level, or the connection of the narratives within ST to the larger social world, analyses of masculinity and masculine expression. During Kirk’s academic hearing following his attempt at the Kobayashi Maru, Spock says the lesson Spock is imbuing the test with is the idea that death is inevitable and a leader will face it gracefully in a controlled logical manner. This implication – the use of logic over emotion – is ironic given Spock’s resistance to the Vulcan patronization of humanity which often evokes emotional rather than logical responses in canon.

This is also one of the most subtle scenes that show the differences in representation of masculinity between the two characters. Kirk, as I have noted previously, is the embodiment of the “Give ‘em hell” ideology of masculinity (Brannon 1976) and has been consistently praised

for his risk-taking behavior and lack of respect for the opinions of others (even those in authority). Spock, in contrast, is much more the embodiment of “Be a sturdy oak” (Brannon 1976). Kimmel points out that the idea of being a “sturdy oak” has less to do about being calm in a crisis or being able to “respond fully and appropriately to the situation at hand, but rather than he resembles an inanimate object such as “[a] rock, a pillar, a species of tree” (2008:45). What Kimmel (2008) notes is that “sturdy oaks” are not “masculine” because they have cool heads in crises or are able to think logically under pressure (though I believe this does play into this conception of masculinity) but that during those times of pressure, men are expected never to show emotions, particularly “weak” emotions such as stress, worry, or fear. Spock, both in the sense that he is the embodiment and advocate of the strictly logical approach and the embodiment of eschewing emotionality, is the “sturdy oak” to Kirk’s much more aggressive “Give ‘em hell” (Brannon 1976) masculinity. Here, Spock makes it clear he believes Kirk to be a failure of a leader – and essentially failing at doing masculinity (West and Zimmerman 1987) – because Spock prizes the “sturdy oak” masculinity Kirk refuses to acknowledge or accept as valid in favor of his own brand of masculinity. When Spock speaks of Kirk “failing” not only the test to master the “fear of death” but also “failing to divine” what the test means, he is essentially calling Kirk the lesser man, something Kirk obviously resents.

This insinuation comes back to Spock later in the film as he, like in the earlier scenes of protest against his bullies and the Vulcan High Council, attempts to assume the masculinity traits of “Give ‘em Hell” (Brannon 1976) of aggression and action as examples of leadership directly after Kirk’s sudden promotion to first officer. Kirk and Spock are both surprised by the sudden promotion and Kirk’s rise immediately sets the pair back into the role of antagonists rather than cooperating. Spock even says, “Captain, please, I apologize. The complexities of human pranks

escape me.” With this sentence, Spock is easily expressing his disbelief both at Pike’s actions but also at Kirk’s capabilities. Unlike Spock, Kirk is still a cadet, he was under academic suspension and not assigned to the *Enterprise*, and Spock sees him as an incapable leader. To trust a relative unknown with a position of high authority – Spock’s former position – is unthinkable. This is also a point of separation between Kirk and Spock. Kirk has consistently undermined (e.g., the Kobayashi Maru) and challenged authority in the movie and here he is shown being explicitly rewarded for that behavior. Spock, in contrast, is seeing his objections and challenges to authority – the very same “Give ‘em hell” attitude (Brannon 1976) rewarded in Kirk – returned in the form of insults. The writers are privileging the aggressive and risk-taking masculinity of Kirk to the more logical, emotionless masculinity of Spock. When Spock shortly later discovers the impending destruction of his planet, Spock’s first thoughts when he realizes the severity of the situation is to find his parents. Despite his rocky relationship with his father, Spock immediately seizes upon that connection. The actions that he takes – beaming down to the planet alone to find his parents – are not particularly logical, nor are they necessarily a stellar example of leadership (i.e., the very thing he accuses Kirk of lacking). However, his actions – and the emotions they are based on – make him relatable to the audience. Had Spock remained in command, sent others for his parents rather than going himself, or acted otherwise, the audience may have lost sympathy for the character. Spock not only would have lost “charisma” as a leader with the audience but he also would have been done poorly in a masculinity contest compared to Kirk.

Kirk has, up to this point, been shown as an active figure and has been *rewarded* for taking action. He sees a problem and immediately attempts to fix it, such as reprogramming the Kobayashi Maru to allow a winning scenario or running out of the Sick Bay before he was

completely well to make sure the *Enterprise* did not warp into the middle of a battlefield. Both of these actions allow for Kirk to gain a leadership position on the *Enterprise* and gain attention of his superiors, Pike in particular. While there is logic behind his actions, particularly in his deductions regarding the *Narada*, Kirk's actions are taken so quickly that logic can often be mistaken for instinct instead of the use of a "genius-level intellect." Spock, in contrast, is a character that has been repeatedly punished for taking action; we see this first as he tries to defend himself as a child and is scolded by Sarek, by his refusal to enter the Vulcan Science Academy which loses him standing with the Vulcan High Council, and finally when he challenges Kirk, Spock sees Kirk "unjustly" promoted and at first believes this is a prank.

What these dual *narrative arcs* between the two characters show is that only *some* men are eligible for the hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) assumed through Brannon's (1976) "Give 'em Hell" typification. As Connell (Connell 1987; Connell [1995] 2005) points out, masculinity is essentially premised on the assumption of dominance of others, particularly women and other, "lesser," masculinities. Kirk's dominance is established by both the dominance of women (e.g., Gaila) but most especially through the dominance of Spock. The larger narrative upholds this dualism by continually punishing Spock and making the character experience loss or hardship when he attempts the same actions for which Kirk is continually rewarded. The ultimate dominance happens during the scene on the Bridge following Kirk's return from Delta Vega and his accusation that Spock never loved his mother. Here, again, we see that the contest between Kirk and Spock is ultimately rigged. Spock's actions here are contrary to his "sturdy oak" presentation of masculinity and much more in line with the "Give 'em hell" presentation of masculinity of Kirk (Brannon 1976).



Kirk takes over the *Enterprise*, dropping into the captain's chair with ease. This scene is pivotal in terms of both Kirk and Spock's development. Yet again, Spock is being reprimanded by the narrative for taking action while Kirk is rewarded. This is also the culmination of their antagonistic relationship. Where Spock had only attempted to confront Kirk verbally, this escalation to the physical is seen as a failing. This is a somewhat ironic twist on the masculine dominance component of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005); Kirk, as the "loser" of the physical fight is painted by the narrative as the victor, first by getting Spock to react in an emotional manner and second by using the fight to take over command of the *Enterprise*. Spock, the physical "winner" and clear dominant presence, loses overall because of the rage he displays. He fails the masculinity contest (e.g., Anderson 1990) by losing to Kirk but he also fails immediately by being Vulcan, that is being "biracial" (e.g., Anderson and Umberson 2011; Wingfield 2009) struggling with a more dominant white man. This scene plainly shows that "Give 'em hell" (Brannon 1976) is only an acceptable masculine presentation when done by white men.

The movie is about the heroic journeys of both Kirk and Spock as they become who they were meant to "be." In the case of the new timeline of ST, that means *playing the roles they are meant to have*, Kirk as a leader and Spock as a follower. To reach that goal, the narrative continually privileges Kirk, Kirk's story, and Kirk's actions, almost always at the expense of Spock. As Connell explains, hegemonic masculinity is only hegemonic in comparison to either feminine characteristics or masculine characteristics that do not fit the hegemonic "mold" (1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Within ST, Abrams, Orci, and Kurtz have created a masculine fantasy beyond that of simple science fiction wish fulfillment by exemplifying the creation of a hegemonically masculine character: Kirk. Kirk gains acknowledgment through the

legacy of heroism and service left behind by his father (two qualities highly prized as masculine), then by his use of cunning to defy the rules in the Kobayashi Maru test (rejecting authority or becoming an authority figure instead of bowing to the authority of another), his usurping of Spock's authority on the bridge of the *Enterprise* to become captain, and finally his ability (or luck) to achieve his goal of saving Earth. Kirk is privileged highly by ST's narrative but only at the expense of other characters. Spock takes the place of "lesser" masculinities and each time he acts is punished for acting (e.g., fighting back against bullies, his failure to rescue his mother) or his actions are only used to bolster Kirk's rise (e.g., Spock Prime's help, the fight on the bridge).

### *Supporting Characters and Star Trek*

While Kirk and Spock carry the bulk of the narrative "weight" and take up the most narrative "space" within the film, the ensemble cast also fills out much of the representation and *identity presentation* within the film. This is particularly apparent with Uhura, who as a woman of color, manages to fill two "check-boxes" in terms of representation. Sulu and Chekov also provide different representations, the first as a Japanese man and the second as a Russian man. All three characters have lesser character development and narrative space within the story compared to Kirk and Spock. The other three minor characters – Pike, McCoy, and Scotty – have less to offer in terms of representation as all three are white men. However, Pike and McCoy gain particular roles within the film as narrative support to Kirk; essentially these two characters "enable" most of Kirk's actions within the story. Finally, the character of Spock Prime provides the same sort of representation Spock does in terms of the multi-racial allegory, but also narratively is present simply to further help Kirk's narrative path.

*Nyota Uhura.* Uhura, as one of four women in ST, carries a place of supreme narrative space. Women are largely absent and the ones whom are present are largely "fridged" to advance

the plot and character development of the men around them. “Fridging” is a fandom term taken from the “Women in Refrigerators” website created by comic book writer Gail Simone which lists the “superheroines who have been either depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator” to further a male superhero’s story line (1999). Amanda, as Spock’s mother, is “fridged” to create audience sympathy for Spock when she dies and as the catalyst to eventually have Spock give command to Kirk. Winona, as Kirk’s mother, is present for his birth and has no other place within the story. Her absence is not a literal death but rather a figurative one and helps position Kirk as a youth as an orphan railing against an abusive caretaker (i.e., a traditional heroic journey). Gaila is solely in the film to, first, show Kirk’s prowess with women and second as a vehicle for information Kirk would need later on in the movie. Her “fridging” is particularly potent because she is removed from the narrative after showing non-monogamous sexual activity. This is a contrast and a compliment to both Amanda and Winona; while both of the mother-characters are never shown on screen in sexual activity or talking about sex like Gaila, they leave evidence of sexual activity in the form of their sons. The presence of all three of these female characters is necessitated by the story lines of the male characters they are related to (i.e., Kirk and Spock). Amanda and Winona are not even afforded the privilege of being verbally named within the movie. Even female characters that are not present within the film such as Jocelyn McCoy<sup>59</sup>, Leonard McCoy’s divorced wife, are mentioned in the movie solely to provide an explanation as to someone whom hates space and flying as much as McCoy does would join Starfleet (i.e., “she took the whole damn planet”). Uhura becomes the only woman within the movie to play any substantive role and even that role is within the more traditionally feminine “support” of male characters both in her personal life (e.g., Spock’s love interest) and her

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<sup>59</sup> I could not find any mention of her name in any of the ST materials so I assume her name is the same as ST:TOS.

professional life (e.g., information provider to Kirk, translator/communications expert for Pike and Kirk).

Uhura's role as "support" to Spock as his love interest is also wrapped up in the narrative binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) between Kirk and Spock. The scene in which Uhura embraces Spock and attempts to comfort him following his resignation of command establishes the dynamics of their relationship and the degree of affection and trust Spock has for Uhura. Spock, like other Vulcans, is a "touch telepath." He can exchange thoughts, emotions, and memories with another person by touching them. Due to this, direct touching of the skin is often discouraged by Vulcans unless there is a degree of affection between the participants (e.g., family, lovers, etc.). The specific form of deliberate touch telepathy, the Vulcan mind meld, is considered an intensely private act and to initiate a mind meld on an unwilling participant is seen within Vulcan culture as akin to rape. In the lift, *Uhura* initiates the interaction with Spock, touching and kissing him as an act of reassurance. As an accomplished linguist, Uhura undoubtedly knows the cultural, mental and emotional significance of this act; that Spock responds positively and does take comfort in her actions shows the amount of love and connection the pair share.

This presents an interesting juxtaposition of Uhura being the active member of the pairing. In this sense, for Spock, masculinity as aggressive is consistently punished, where masculinity as submissive – as shown with Uhura – is consistently rewarded. However, Spock not asking for emotional support *is* actually masculine under the tenets of "Sturdy Oak" (Brannon 1976) as the "Sturdy Oak" masculinity rejects the necessity of emotion, even emotion that is deemed acceptably "masculine" (e.g., anger). So this scene, while painting Uhura as active and Spock passive, also conforms to heterosexual relationship cultural norms such as the

man as the “breadwinner” and the woman as the “homemaker” and support (e.g., Tichenor 2011). In this case, masculinity and femininity norms are working in concert. Spock asking for help would be breaking the “Sturdy Oak” masculine norm (Brannon 1976) but he does not need to because Uhura, as is culturally expected of women, is taking the primary responsibility in the relationship to provide that support without having to be asked. The Spock/Uhura pairing, hinted at earlier with the exchange where Uhura argues her way onto the Enterprise, is made explicit by this interaction and presents several interesting things through representation. First is that this relationship is presented as “emotional” and thus “deeper” than the earlier romantic connection we see with Kirk and Gaila. In the Kirk/Gaila scene, not only is it presented within the context of sexual contact but there is also a blatant mismatch of feelings between the two characters. The juxtaposition between the Kirk/Gaila and Spock/Uhura serves to reinforce heteronormativity and sexuality (as opposed to asexuality/aromanticism) as a desired trait in accomplishing primarily masculinity but also femininity. Essentially, the narrative of ST argues that to be “complete” not only is heterosexuality compulsory (Rich 1986) but sexual/romantic connection with another is the only way to be fully integrated into society. Further, the types of connection displayed between the Kirk/Gaila and Spock/Uhura pairings also follow along the lines of masculinity that is being presented by the two male leads. For Kirk, part of the “Give ‘em hell” (Brannon 1976) attitude is not just physical aggression it is *sexual* aggression. Showing Kirk with Gaila *only* in a sexual context and, earlier, with Uhura in the context of him attempting to pick her up in a bar, highlights his sexual prowess. Spock, however, is in a deeper relationship with Uhura but this is also one in which he attempts to suppress or not display his emotions as is required of the “Sturdy Oak” (Brannon 1976). However, the extension of sexuality into the masculinity contest between the two characters means that ultimately the narrative is supporting one type of

masculine sexuality over the other. Given the extensive narrative support we have for Kirk and Kirk's actions, I would argue that the writers are also implicating that the "better" man is one who views women as sexual conquests rather than potential romantic partners.

The other side effect of this intersection is the positioning of both Spock and Uhura as representations of minority groups. Spock, as someone who is essentially coded as biracial becomes subordinate to Kirk, an example of "the social ascendancy of one group of men over all men" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:844) but is still shown as dominant over Uhura. Within Spock, we can see a very distinct example of the relational (e.g., Glenn 1999) way race works as an intersection with gender. Essentially, Spock's position on the hierarchy is dependent on his relationship to the other categories, in which the norm (Kirk) is considered most dominant. However, taking this picture of the Spock/Uhura relationship outside of the canonical narrative for a moment, we also have an image of what is an inter-racial relationship. While this is true within the narrative (Vulcan/Terran), the visual presented is the relationship between a white actor and a black actress. Further, this is the presentation of a black woman specifically providing emotional support to a visibly white man, which while it does depict a fairly loving relationship on her part, is not one that is shown as very reciprocal (e.g., Spock attempting to hold Uhura back to avoid "favoritism") and plays into long-held stereotypes (constructed to largely benefit white male desire) about the sexuality of black women (e.g., Collins 2000; Collins 2004).

*Sulu and Chekov.* Sulu and Chekov are, like Spock, portrayed as predominantly subordinate masculinities and this is particularly apparent by their paired introductions within the film. For both Sulu and Chekov to be introduced this way essentially makes their characters the butt of the joke *and* undermines any authority they might have as crew members of the flagship

of Starfleet. During ST:TOS, Sulu and Chekov were controversial characters; Sulu, as a Japanese/Asian character presented in a position of power so soon after both World War II and the Korean War was shocking to American audiences and Chekov – as a Russian character in the middle of the Cold War – was perhaps even more shocking. George Takei, who played the character Sulu in ST: TOS recalls in an interview that Gene Roddenberry called the Enterprise “a metaphor for starship Earth and the strength of the starship is in its diversity” (TVLegends 2011). Roddenberry created his bridge crew with a deliberate intention to have a diverse cast – including those that have been heavily othered such as Asian-Americans, Russians, and African-Americans -- and *portray them in a positive light* (Geraghty 2007; Penley 1997). While much of the historical context of the 1960s that made Roddenberry’s choices in casting so revolutionary are “gone”<sup>60</sup> by 2009 when ST was made, the introductions of Sulu and Chekov completely strip the characters of any positivity.

While the visible presence of that context regarding Sulu, Chekov, and even Uhura are gone, the underlying tensions are still there within our society and, given the more recent conflicts between the American and Russian governments, perhaps still as valid as during the 1960s. Where Roddenberry gave visible and powerful representation to groups that were oppressed or considered outcasts at the time, ST removes that and, instead, relies on stereotypes of Asians (e.g., “bad drivers”) and “foreigners” (e.g., “poor English speakers”) as humor, undermining their skills as crew members. This is in contrast to Kirk and Spock but also to McCoy and Uhura. All of these characters are introduced outside the contexts of their job and even McCoy’s introduction (i.e., drunk and visibly afraid of flying), while humorous, has no real

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<sup>60</sup> I do not mean to imply that the oppression of people of color and other minority groups is completely removed from our society by this comment. In some ways, the oppression may actually be worse as it is much more insidious when treated as “gone” or “absent” from society because it makes it easier for the oppressive groups to continue their treatment without ever acknowledging that what they are doing is racism or wrong.

bearing on the audience's interpretation of his efficacy at their job. Uhura, in contrast, is introduced outside the context of her job (at the bar) but still mentions her job as a way of fending off Kirk's sexualization. Her second introduction is in the same manner and used to highlight her skills and how she considers her job as the communications officer important. Uhura is, though, the *only* female crew-member that is featured as a main character and I wonder if the difference in presentation between her and Sulu and Chekov is because of the gender disparity shown in ST. If, for example, there were not only very few women but the one woman to receive significant screen time was *also* shown as incompetent in the same manner Sulu and Chekov are, I believe the movie would have received much more criticism than it did at the time of release.

*Pike and Spock Prime as enablers.* Pike and Spock Prime are, like Sulu and Chekov, paired as support characters within the film and occupy the same narrative role to enable Kirk's rise to the Captaincy of the *Enterprise*. Pike provides the initial challenge that gets Kirk to join Starfleet and, later, the mentorship and example of what is narratively constructed as "good leadership," as well as the opportunity for Kirk's advancement. Spock Prime takes on a similar mentorship role but acts as a guide for how Kirk should handle Spock and the leadership qualities that are necessary to survive the coming fight through the example Spock Prime provides during the mind meld on Delta Vega. Spock Prime also branches out as a guide not just to Kirk but to Spock as well.

Pike's inclusion and introduction during the bar scene at the beginning of the film explicitly links him not only with a specific type of masculinity that he idolizes (Brannon 1976) but also narratively with George Kirk:

PIKE: You know, I couldn't believe it when the bartender told me who you are.  
KIRK: Who am I, Captain Pike?



PIKE: Your father's son.

This specific reference and the continued references to the greatness of George Kirk and his actions that lead to his death, also links Pike to the role of fatherhood. Ultimately, Pike is the closest thing to a father figure Kirk is shown to have in the film and the interactions between the pair are heavily coded with this implication. The way Pike describes and urges Kirk to join Starfleet makes the scene a challenge for Kirk to prove his masculinity by engaging in the rite of passage that comes with service in Starfleet. While Starfleet is nominally a non-military organization devoted to peacekeeping and exploration, the film's depiction of how the organization is structured shows many influences from the military. Research into masculinity in the military suggest that, in the West, military service and war have been an important part of citizenship (Janowitz 1976; Tilly 1995) and are sites of heavy masculine construction both of men whom join but also in the society at large (Barrett 1996; Connell [1995] 2005; Morgan 1994). The *identity presentation* of Pike and the cultural ideologies that he espouses are thus heavily connected to the idea of military service as a defining point in "becoming a man," similar to what Sasson-Levy (2011) found when interviewing Israeli combat soldiers in which masculinity becomes specifically embodied through the creation of an ideal "warrior." The specific ideology of masculinity as "Give 'em Hell" (Brannon 1976) then is being modeled as manhood not only by someone whom is a superior officer but also a character that is placed in the role of father figure. Within that role as "father figure" to Kirk, Pike encourages gender conformity (Kane 2011) to that type of masculine ideology by rewarding Kirk when he displays "Give 'em Hell" and punishing Spock when he resists this masculine expression for his own preferred "Steady Oak" variety (Brannon 1976).

Spock Prime occupies a similar but slightly different role within the narrative. While he is still active as a mentor, Spock Prime's position within the narrative is closer to that of a "wise man" or "high priest," in his interactions with both Kirk and Spock. Spock Prime, when meeting with Spock at the end of the movie, has the following conversation that exemplifies his position within the narrative:

SPOCK: How did you persuade him to keep your secret?

SPOCK PRIME: He inferred that universe-ending paradoxes would ensue should he break his promise.

SPOCK: You lied.

SPOCK PRIME: Oh, I... I implied.

SPOCK: A gamble.

SPOCK PRIME: An act of faith. One I hope that you will repeat in the future at Starfleet.

SPOCK: In the face of extinction, it is only logical I resign my Starfleet commission and help rebuild our race.

SPOCK PRIME: And yet, you can be in two places at once. I urge you to remain in Starfleet. I have already located a suitable planet on which to establish a Vulcan colony. Spock, in this case, do yourself a favor. Put aside logic. Do what feels right. Since my customary farewell<sup>61</sup> would appear oddly self-serving, I shall simply say good luck.

We see the emphasis of emotional choices over logic when it comes to Spock's overall narrative within the movie. This is reinforced by the lesson being taught by Spock Prime, one Spock to another that logic will never be "right" in the same way emotionally-based reactions are "right." Ultimately, this means that the masculinity that Spock prefers – the emotionless "Sturdy Oak" (Brannon 1976) – is also one that never will be rewarded. Spock Prime also continues to strengthen the narrative and mystique of James T. Kirk as a leader. The entire narrative treats Kirk's assumption of leadership as a given, similar to the idea of the Divine Right of Kings to rule, and characters give weight verbally – Pike's challenge, Spock Prime's faith – even before Kirk displays substantive leadership qualities or even spends much time *leading*. The final touch happens as Kirk is "crowned" by Starfleet. Pike, in a wheelchair, has been promoted to Admiral,

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<sup>61</sup> "Live long and prosper" along with a Vulcan hand-based salute.

and in a ceremony with all of Starfleet watching, hands his command of the *Enterprise* to Kirk. This is where the inherent contradiction between the *narrative arc* between Spock Prime and Spock and Spock Prime and Kirk become evident. Kirk is consistently rewarded for emotionally-based reactions but these emotions are also very narrowly defined. Kirk is embodied predominantly by two emotions within the film: anger/aggression or sexual arousal. ST's narrative then validates those "Give 'em Hell" (Brannon 1976) emotions – and Spock Prime upholds – as the only "right" ones for a man to display. In that sense, Spock Prime's scene with Spock is not just about abandoning "Sturdy Oak" (Brannon 1976) masculinity and emoting but also about *only* showing the "right" emotions.

The representations found within ST are all fairly static. Characters rarely change clothes, barring Scott (Scottish) and Chekov (Russian) the characters do not speak with accents or dialects, and the established social groups at the beginning of the movie continue to hold true throughout the film. Essentially, the *identity presentations* and representation do not change. This means that the emphasis of *identity presentations* and *narrative arcs*, both for the film generally and for individual characters, heavily support the two main *cultural narrative* themes I identified while coding the film: *rise to the challenge by any means necessary* and *the best defense is a good offense*. In the next section of this chapter, I will be discussing these two *cultural narratives*, their placement within the film, and the implications of what these themes say about our larger society, particularly in comparison to the ideologies advocated in ST: TOS.

## CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN STAR TREK

I am using the term *cultural narratives* specifically to identify the underlying ideologies that are present and inform the *identity presentations* and *narrative arcs*. This is also where I look more deeply at the "explanation" (Griswold 1987b) level of the film and discuss how

creative decisions specifically reflect the social environment and culture of the creators. Most important to remember in this section is Bourdieu's idea of human capital (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu 1989). Bourdieu describes the three types of human capital as economic, or the access and control an individual has over economic resources such as cash, property, and investments, cultural capital, or the education, intellect, dress, physical appearance, or speech of an individual that will enable them to gain the third form of human capital. Social capital, as the third form, is denoted through community membership and relationships or human networks to which an individual has access. I am most concerned with the cultural capital in this section as this is the driving force in the creation of ST. Cultural capital encompasses all the knowledge of the culture that an individual has; for example, an upper class individual would be expected to know the correct silverware to use at a dinner table where a lower-class individual might only be able to identify a fork, spoon, and knife. This is important in understanding the creation of ST specifically as a "reboot" partially because the film's creation involves tapping into the larger cultural consciousness but also tapping into the ideologies that influenced the creation of ST: TOS. ST becomes unique in comparison to SPN because of that deeper cultural connection. Interestingly, however, the two *cultural narrative* themes I identified in the movie are based more on contemporary culture than on any connection to the past or the past canon present within ST: TOS. The first, *rise to the challenge by any means necessary*, is heavily linked to the conceptions of masculinity present in the film. The ideology behind this theme is that any and all challenges must be accepted and met and the methods, regardless of what they might be, are all justified by the end result of victory. The second theme, *the best defense is a good offense*, is similarly connected to masculine ideologies but also to modern colonialism. As

the name of the theme suggests, ST advocates pre-emptive action to accomplish goals and as a form of protection.

*Rise To the Challenge By Any Means Necessary*

The idea of *rising to the challenge by any means necessary* is predominantly embodied through the *identity presentation* and *narrative arcs* of Kirk. For example, Kirk's use of cheating to pass the Kobayashi Maru test for the first time. While he is questioned about this decision, ultimately Kirk is never punished and the narrative rewards him for his actions by promoting him to Captain. The ends justified the means in this case. Similarly, Kirk's consistent questioning and challenging of authority is also rewarded throughout the narrative both in terms of Kirk's promotion to captain but also in success in defeating his enemies (e.g., Spock and Nero). Kirk, and the ST narrative more generally, appeal both to neo-liberal ideals of competition, lack of state intervention or "interference" by those in a position of authority, and individualism. ST's Kirk is a neo-liberal hero for his masculinity (Connell [1995] 2005); he thrives on competition and does his best work when challenged by a "rival" (e.g., Pike, Spock). He continually shows distrust for figures in authority (e.g., his uncle, the police, Pike, Spock) and instead works to climb his way through the ranks so that he is only answerable to himself. Finally, Kirk always puts himself in positions where he is at the center of action; he has a drive to handle all problems personally (e.g., Kobayashi Maru, leaving the escape pod on Delta Vega, invading the *Narada*). Ultimately, all the other characters are rendered lesser characters (e.g., McCoy, Uhura, etc.) or actively punished (e.g., Spock) for not displaying the same characteristics or preferences. That seems somewhat suggestive; particularly considering the cultural changes experienced both in America and abroad from the 1980s on and especially after the effects of 9/11. As Altheide (2006; 2009) and Glassner ([1999] 2009) point out, we are a much less hopeful society and a

much more fearful one. I believe ST reflects that cultural change and then, ultimately, tells viewers to reject their fear through violence and aggression. Or rather, ST reaffirms that violence and aggression are the best ways to maintain privileges traditionally held by those in power: white men. This theme embodies the use of violence to maintain or restore masculinity through honor or respect (Kimmel 2008). This is a trend that has been traced in other expressions of neoliberal masculinity. Voorhees, studying e-sports and online gaming (e.g., fantasy football), identified a trend that idolized and specifically endorsed masculine violence in those communities (2015). Ashe (2015) similarly discusses how this trend has been pointed out by profeminist scholars.

This is in stark contrast to the types of ideologies and masculinities shown in ST: TOS. Roddenberry's vision of the future was much more egalitarian (TVLegends 2011) and highlighted broadly Euro-American Western values of progress, technological innovation, progress, and societal independence though the values of kinship and small groups working together is rampant (Geraghty 2007; Kottak 1990). Even the original characters encapsulated the Western ideology regarding thought: Spock often functioned as the "logical mind" or "logos," McCoy as the "emotional heart" or "pathos," and Kirk as the ethical guide negotiating between the two distinct drives or the "ethos" of the triumvirate (e.g., Penley 1997). With ST's emphasis on *rise to the challenge by any means necessary*, much of that hopeful future has been suborned into a militaristic one. The situation of Kirk, Spock, and McCoy as a leadership triumvirate is also removed and logic, in the form of Spock, is ritually devalued, where emotion in the form of Kirk, is consistently rewarded. Ethos, or any system of ethics, is also non-existent in the movie. This speaks to the cultural change from the 1960s and the current ideologies that essentially advocates "every man for himself" and that group or communal work can only be achieved

through the guidance of an accomplished leader. ST's narratives highlight the necessity of hierarchy to achieve goals.

*The Best Defense Is A Good Offense*

This theme is also linked to the idea of the “Give ‘em Hell” masculine typology (Brannon 1976). Consistently throughout the film, preemptive attacks and attempting to provoke others are shown as not only part of “being a man” through restorative violence (Kimmel 2008) but as the best method to achieve an individual's goals. This is particularly embodied in the character of Nero though also within Kirk. Nero, as the antagonist whom has traveled to the past from the future, is a narrative device that is *designed* to preemptively attack. By trying to track and kill Spock *even before* the destruction of Romulus and his family, Nero is preemptively attacking the person he believes responsible for that eventual loss. Nero is attempting to restore his own masculinity through that violence. Nero, in something of a narrative twist, mirrors Kirk's depiction of masculinity by embodying the “Give ‘em hell” ideology (Brannon 1976). His aggressive attitude and actions are something that should, presumably, be rewarded within the narrative to mirror how Kirk's similar actions are often rewarded. However, like Spock, Nero is cast into the role of the antagonist. What Nero and Spock have in common – beyond their narrative placement – is their alienness; both characters are not completely human. Nero, as a full Romulan, is then placed in the position of primary antagonist where Spock, only half-Vulcan is the secondary antagonist within the narrative. Essentially, ST has created a situation in which men of color -- at least in the sense that “non-human” can be considered a proxy for men of color, a problematic, if common, literary device in science-fiction (Melzer [2006] 2010) -- are punished for doing the same type of masculinity (West and Zimmerman 1987) that white men are doing. Essentially, within the narrative of ST, men of color are punished for the “Give ‘em

hell” attitude (Brannon 1976). Spock is not sanctioned to the same extent Nero is throughout the narrative and I believe this difference could be due to the placement of Spock as a “friendly” or “helpful” alien/man of color. He is consistently sanctioned when competing with Kirk but ultimately *rewarded* when he stops competing for the same position (captain) and helps Kirk fulfill the role Spock originally had.

This ideology of “defending by attacking” is one that also reflects one war strategy of colonialism. For example, a country or group sees a second country or group as a potential threat and then attacks to take that country over and eliminate the threat. While this is the justification (Scott and Lyman 1968) used for the action, the invasion is often rooted in racism or desire for the resources of the other country (Nagel 2003). This is reflected in Nero’s actions against Vulcan. Vulcans are portrayed as more technologically and intellectually advanced than humans, superior in their attitudes, prizing logic and cold calculation, being controlled and, to a certain extent, being submissive. All of these things are anathema to a narrative that ultimately holds Kirk up as the perfect example of manhood. The paradigm divide between the two examples set by Kirk and the Vulcans (Spock especially) has to be resolved within the narrative beyond that of Kirk simply “winning” the captaincy; Kirk and by extension humanity have to “win” at the expense of not just Spock but *all* Vulcans. Where three of the female characters are “fridged” to advance Kirk and Spock’s story lines, the destruction of Vulcan happens to fundamentally show the superiority of passion, instinct, and bucking authority over intellect, logic, and submission to authority. Vulcan is destroyed to highlight the predominant themes within Kirk’s narrative. In the end, ST does not just show Kirk’s victory over Spock for the captaincy of the *Enterprise* but rather Kirk’s victory over the entire Vulcan way of life without Kirk having to take the blame for the genocide of Vulcan’s citizens. Nero becomes a proxy for this storyline. In real life and



outside the context of the film, arguably the same ideology was used following 9/11 to justify the invasion of both Iraq and Afghanistan in what McClanahan (2009) calls the “doctrine of preemption” and Yoo describes as “preventive war” (2014) so ST’s creators are simply reproducing events in recent memory. However, unlike the current sentiment regarding the Iraq/Afghanistan war, ST ultimately upholds and shows these actions as justified.

## CONCLUSION

ST is a fun movie with fast-paced action and snappy dialogue. It is enjoyable to watch and moves quickly, part of the reason why the movie’s general themes and representation pass by so easily. The other reason is that the emphasis of “Give ‘em Hell” masculinity (Brannon 1976) and *cultural narratives of rise to the challenge no matter what* and *the best defense is a good offense* are simply emphasized American cultural beliefs. The representation and *identity presentation* within ST is predominantly supportive of a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) that treats an aggressive and violent masculinity (Brannon 1976; Kimmel 2008) as the only “true” ways to be a man or regain the status of manhood. Representations of subordinate masculinities, in the form of Spock, Chekov, and Sulu, are consistently devalued and shown as lesser than the masculinity portrayed by Kirk. Femininity is similarly devalued though is not placed in binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) with masculinity in the way hegemonic masculinity/subordinate masculinity is within the film. Instead, femininity is largely absent, through the “fridging” (Simone 1999), or killing of three female characters to further the stories of Kirk and Spock. Uhura, as the sole female with more than two scenes, becomes the representation of femininity in the movie and it is one that advocates supportive heterosexuality that is only available for the use of the (predominantly white) men in her life (Collins 2000; Collins 2004; Collins 2009). Finally, the overall *narrative*

*arc* and *cultural narratives* within the film are less about “standing on their own” and more about circling around the ideologies of masculinity present. In essence, the *narrative arc* regarding Kirk’s rise to and Spock’s fall from leadership are only possible *because of* the masculine ideologies of “Give ‘em Hell” and “Be a Sturdy Oak” (Brannon 1976). The *cultural narratives* pull from current conceptions of masculinity to change and reinvent the original ideologies of ST: TOS. Instead of the Euro-American centered ideologies of Western progress and rational thinking of ST: TOS (Geraghty 2007; Kottak 1990), the 2009 version is heavily focused on violence and war as masculine restoration and ways of holding and keeping status (Janowitz 1976; Kimmel 2008; Morgan 1994; Morgan 2007; Sasson-Levy 2011).

In the next chapter, I will be shifting my analytical focus away from ST canon to ST vids. I will be describing the four main themes I found in ST vids as well as *identity presentation*, *narrative arcs*, and *cultural narratives* present within the vids I coded. I will also be discussing the ultimate *narrative manipulation*, or the ways in which the stories told in canon are transformed by vidders and how that reflects *cultural narratives* that may be similar or different from the *cultural narratives* that are present within ST canon. This will be followed by a discussion of the community response to those vids, predominantly using the same categories I identified as responses to SPN vids in the previous chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### STAR TREK VIDS

In the previous chapter, I discussed my analysis of the Star Trek (ST) canon provided by the 2009 film. During my content analysis, I identified several elements of representation that favored a particular aggressive and violence masculinity Brannon (1976) identifies as “Give ‘em Hell.” I also identified two basic *cultural narratives* themes that worked to support that presentation of masculinity; I termed those themes as *rise to the challenge by any means necessary* and *the best defense is a good offense*. Identifying those *identity presentations*, *narrative arcs*, and *cultural narratives* helps me identify the cultural expectations about ideal masculinity. However, this is only a piece of the puzzle as the media is essentially being treated as proxy for those larger ideologies and metanarratives (Loseke 2007; Spillman 2002). Those metanarratives then provide the frame and the background to the creators of media like ST (Becker 1982; Crane 1992). It is, however, up to the audience that consumes media whether to accept, reject, or negotiate the meanings and interpretations they take away from media (Hall 2001). I analyze fanvids as a well to determine that audience interpretation. ST’s popularity since the premier of the series (ST: TOS) in 1966 has remained strong enough to spawn an animated series, four different television spin-offs, and ten movies. The diversity of the original cast and the presentations of strong women in power made the series especially popular with minority groups. Women in particular embraced the series and created a thriving fandom that birthed the very first fanvid in the 1970s (Jenkins 2006a). The release of the “reboot” movies in 2009 (*Star Trek*) and 2013 (*Star Trek: Into Darkness*) not only refreshed a nearly-fifty year old canon but also refreshed a fandom that had been in existence for just as long.

For my sampling frame, I collected vids posted in March 2009 through December 2012; I deliberately stopped before 2013 as the second movie, *Star Trek: Into Darkness*, was released in theaters on May 16, 2013 and I wanted to avoid vids that focus on or used footage from the movie as it was outside my original sampling frame. This search left me with 41 vids and 2869 comments to analyze.

Table 7.1. ST Vid Comment Counts.

Number of Comments on Vid	Number of Vids
Under 10	17
11-20	4
21-30	7
31-40	1
41-50	4
51-100	1
100+	7
Total Number of Vids	41

Table 7.2 ST Vid Themes

Theme	Frequency
Taking Command	13
Finding Joy	19
Queering the Narrative	27
Ensemble Humor	11

*Note:* themes are not mutually exclusive.

I coded each of the forty-one vids four times, looking at *identity presentation*, *narrative arcs*, *cultural narratives*, and the vid-only category *narrative manipulation*. When coding comments, I took a similar approach but used some of the common responses I found within SPN vids such as the use of simple kudos as a starting point. The trends I found in SPN, such as congratulatory comments (i.e., kudos, narrative kudos, ship kudos) and emotional responses, were also present in ST fandom along with the new addition of critical responses.

The vids were a mix of quality, less because of the technical skills of the vidder and more to do with the source of the vid. Many of the early vids had poor quality video, likely due to the use of “cam,” or pirated footage of the movie taken in theaters, video files. Some vids, such as “Poker Face” by Talitha78, posted a week after the movie was released within theaters, were later remastered using better DVD footage. One frequently used technique was that of flash cuts, or extremely short and brief shots creating an almost staccato rhythm in the visuals to synchronize with the beat of the audio. Unlike SPN vids, which featured longer shots of the two main characters, ST vids seemed to emphasize a more frenetic look. The use of multiple sites to post vids also became more common. Whereas in the early SPN fandom, vidders would keep the vid in one location and link back to it in several communities, most of the ST vids were available in multiple locations and often both embedded through YouTube and as a download link. In terms of narrative, the vids overwhelmingly either featured Kirk, Spock, or both as main characters (n=33) and focusing directly on their story or featured a more ensemble effect (n=11). The ensemble vids often lacked an overriding narrative and felt more celebratory in nature, as if honoring or being excited about the characters and the source. Characters I identified as “supporting” in the previous chapter were also largely absent from vids unless the vid was ensemble-based. Uhura and McCoy proved to be the exceptions to this trend as Uhura was

heavily featured in two non-ensemble vids and McCoy was featured heavily in one non-ensemble vid.

In this chapter, I will describe the four types of narratives I found in my sample: *taking command*, *finding joy*, *queering the narrative*, and *ensemble humor*. I will focus specifically on vids that are particularly representative of those themes. The vids I choose to discuss are largely the more popular vids within my sample though there are a few vids I chose, particularly in the themes of *taking command*, *celebrate good times*, and *queering the narrative*, that are less popular but provide different, alternative, or unique observations on the theme. For example, within *queering the narrative* only one vid did not involve the Kirk/Spock pairing This vid, “Umbrella,” only received a very moderate response compared to other vids within this category but is discussed due to its narrative and character differences because as Maxwell (1996) argues, discrepant cases can point to potential flaws in interpretation or researcher bias. After describing the four themes, I will move on to a more general discussion of vid response, with a particular emphasis on responses to vids that were critical of the movie and vids that responded to narratives of sexualized violence. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with a brief comparison of the state of ST vids to SPN vids.

## VIDDING THEMES AND NARRATIVES

The four themes I encountered in the vids are *taking command*, *finding joy*, *queering the narrative*, and *ensemble humor*. *Queering the narrative* takes the same place within the fandom as it does in SPN fandom, focusing on ways in which the relationships between Kirk and Spock specifically are less than platonic. *Finding joy* vids feature and highlight the frantic action taking place within the ST movie. However, *finding joy* is a more comprehensive category. While fights or action sequences are highlighted as fun, the vids under this theme also celebrate the

characters, the relationships, and even the starship Enterprise. *Ensemble humor* encompasses vids with no overriding narrative other than to showcase or highlight humor similar to Danegen's "Luv Song." This humor is predominantly light-hearted but a few vids, such as Sloanesomething's "'Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor,'" combined both humor and canon critique. In the next section, I will begin discussing these themes more in depth, starting with *taking command*.

### *Taking Command*

*Taking command* (n=13) is perhaps the sole theme that is unique ST fanvids. The closest any of the other canons or fandoms comes to it is the theme of independence and self-reliance within SPN canon. Where SPN's narrative emphasizes bucking authority and trusting only in oneself as a method of moving forward in life, *taking command* is about the doubts and pleasures that come with leadership. SPN deals with the narrative of the subordinate, someone who is under the power of an authority figure, but taking command is about what it is like to *be* that authority figure. Taking command is a narrative that is simultaneously about having power and privilege and the hardships of command. These vids focus primarily on Kirk and the narrative path to leadership Kirk takes within the movie. The thirteen vids within this category often highlighted many of the same elements of Kirk's masculinity I identified in the last chapter, such as the "Give 'em Hell" (Brannon 1976) ideology of aggression and confrontation as part of what makes Kirk "fit" for leadership.

Lesbanana's "I Just Can't Wait" (2010) is an example of taking command that uses humor to make hir point. Using the song "I Just Can't Wait" from The Lion King, Lesbanana documents Kirk's narrative throughout the movie by casting him in the role of Simba who "just can't wait to be king." The song, in the context of the original movie, is both about the



expectation of young Simba being able to succeed his father as king of the lion pride.

Lesbanana's vid begins with the opening music paired with images of space, starships, Starfleet, and the Enterprise, establishing this as the "kingdom" within the song. Part of the humor of the vid is Lesbanana's specific choice of the song from a children's movie that is actually sung from the point of view of a child, both of which are unique in either ST or SPN fandom. The unexpectedness of the choice adds to the humor. Approximately five seconds before the lyrics start, the viewer sees their first shot of Jim Kirk as a young child driving his uncle's car before transitioning to Kirk as an adult looking at the Starfleet shipyards as he decides whether or not to take Pike's challenge and join the organization. The lyrics "I'm going to be a mighty king so enemies beware" start the song with a shot of Kirk walking into a beam on a ship, further emphasizing the humor aspect of the vid. The juxtaposition that makes this specifically humorous is the pairing of the lyrics suggestion Kirk as a "mighty king" with the visuals of Kirk being extremely clumsy by walking into the beam. Essentially, the humor comes from the incongruity of a man who walks into a beam being "mighty."

As the vid continues, the song becomes a duet between Simba and Zazu, an advisor to Mufasa (Simba's father). Where Simba happily proclaims his destiny, Zazu is rather reluctant and tries to disillusion Simba with lines such as "Well, I've never spoken to a king of beasts with quite so little hair" and "You've rather a long way to go, Young Master." In the vid, Spock takes the part of Zazu within the narrative, shown through disapproving looks and confrontations with Kirk. For example, Lesbanana shows a collection of shots of Spock leaving rooms when the lines "If this is where the monarchy is headed / Count me out / Out of service, out of Africa / I wouldn't hang about" or Spock using the Vulcan nerve pinch to subdue Kirk during the line "This child is getting wildly out of wing."

The humor of Lesbanana's vid just emphasizes the canonical narrative she is playing with in "I Just Can't Wait." When establishing Kirk as Simba, Lesbanana keys into the narrative of the movie that essentially gives Kirk "divine right" to rule the Enterprise by making Kirk the heir apparent to the throne, despite other possibly more experienced or wiser people available to do the job (i.e., Spock). The vid ends with a shot of Kirk sitting down into the Captain's chair while the camera pans out over the bridge, showing the others working and Kirk supervising – exactly Simba's wish in the song. While the lyrics of the song do not address Zazu overcoming his objections, Spock's presence within this shot indicates he too has bowed to Kirk's authority rather than being "counted out." In the case of "I Just Can't Wait," Lesbanana has adopted an identifiable theme from canon, fully supported that narrative while at the same time twisting the narrative into something more humorous. The irony of the choice of song is that by using the subtext of *The Lion King* – Simba's arrogance is what makes him unsuitable for the position of king in the eyes of Zazu – also applies to the dynamic between Kirk and Spock. Unlike Simba, ST's narrative shows Kirk's arrogance as being justified; he never goes through much of a visible transformation the way Simba does following the death of his father and his eventual fight with his uncle. Kirk's time on Delta Vega is supposed to work as a transformation point and his conversation with Spock Prime does work as an epiphany of rightness. Spock Prime reaffirms Kirk's place as the rightful ruler whom can do no wrong. Unlike Simba, who suffers a crisis of confidence, Kirk is shown by an iteration of his biggest opponent within the narrative how to continue to navigate the challenges he faces on his quest. The difference between ST canon and *The Lion King* is part of what makes the vid humorous. The incongruity between the two narratives combined with the lyrics makes Lesbanana's vid even more likely to cause laughter.

Heresluck's "The Test," using the song by Chemical Brothers featuring Richard Ashcroft provides a more serious interpretation of the *taking command* narrative. Heresluck provides the summary as "Now I think I see the light. Kirk, K/S" (2010) and the vid is likely one of the more technically proficient vids within my sample. "The Test" reconstructs the reality of the 2009 ST movie to contextualize it within the established television series and movie canon older Star Trek fans revere. As Killabeez puts it within his extensive commentary which Heresluck links as part of Heresluck's introduction to the vid:

But when it comes to vids, it becomes more difficult. Visually, the 60s TV show shares very little with its 2009 counterpart. Lighting, pacing, motion, framing, color, even aspect ratio are all different — not to mention that many of the actors don't look much alike. On a less obvious level, the original characters are different from their 2009 counterparts in motivation, physical mannerism, personal history, and relationships with one another. Since focusing on an emotional reading of character motivations and relationships is often a big part of fannish vidding, this becomes a significant hurdle in combining the sources — particularly for someone like me, who was a fan of the original source for more than twenty years, and who "knows" the original characters like they were family. That being the case, I've approached vids that combine the two sources with caution. I trusted heresluck's composition and editing skills to get me over the visual hurdles, but I still wasn't sure, watching "The Test" for the first time, whether I'd be able to follow the vidder's attempt to recontextualize scenes of the original Kirk and Spock in the visual and emotional language of the new Kirk and Spock. They are very different characters, in my eyes, so I wasn't sure I would be able to follow the connections that I suspected she'd be making.

As it turns out, the skill of the vidder made it work beautifully — and here's how (2010). "The Test" combines the two canons very well, both in terms of the visual narrative — as Killabeez points out — but in terms of the opposing narrative themes found within ST: TOS and the new ST. ST: TOS was more oriented on exposing social injustice and creating a sense of a utopian future (Geraghty 2007; TVLegends 2011). The new movie, more militaristic and neoliberal, is closer to a dystopia than seen in Roddenberry's original conception as I briefly demonstrated in the previous chapter. Heresluck accomplishes this by centering the combination of the two canons within a mind meld. The vid begins with Kirk's expulsion from the Enterprise

to Delta Vega and the build-up of tension between him and Spock that led to this point. The lyrics “can you hear me now” underline the narrative theme of communication breakdown within this early portion of the vid. As Kirk explores Delta Vega and meets Spock Prime, the first verse of lyrics “Devil came by this morning” are accompanied by the first shot of Spock Prime turning around after saving Kirk; essentially, Spock Prime becomes the “devil” that has “something to show” Kirk. At the lyrics “here we go now let’s slide on in through the open door” Spock Prime achieves a mind meld with Kirk and Heresluck uses this point as the transition phase, showing scenes from ST: TOS in which “Kirk Prime” and Spock Prime are interacting and establishing the good relationship Spock Prime remembers with “Kirk Prime.” In return, we see Spock Prime receiving images of what *this* Kirk is like and how his life evolved differently from “Kirk Prime.” What is interesting about this portion of the meld is the images Heresluck uses to represent Kirk; the lyrics “I’m seeing waves breaking from to my horizon / Yeah I’m shining” repeat throughout this and Heresluck uses images of Kirk triumphant prior to the Enterprise; his joy as he leaps out of the car about the crash and the large smile on his face as he steps onto the shuttle to Starfleet Academy. This deliberate choice seems to highlight that while Kirk *does* “shine” within the context of the movie’s narrative, he shines the most through Spock Prime’s eyes. The mind meld ends with a short look at the current state of antagonism between Kirk and Spock while the lyrics “Are you hearing me? / Like I’m hearing you?” play. Kirk is visibly shocked by the information and Heresluck uses a split screen to further emphasize this; she shows Kirk stumbling away from Spock Prime on the left half of the screen and images from ST: TOS in which Kirk Prime and Spock Prime are fighting or in which Spock Prime is visually emotional (breaking the Vulcan code). The lyrics “You know I always lost my mind / I can’t explain /

Where I've been" further highlight Kirk attempting to come to terms with the new world view he has achieved through the mind meld.

This is the point the tenor of the vid changes. Heresluck describes "The Test" as a "K/S" vid and the main narrative of the vid becomes the way Kirk and Spock begin to solve their relationship problems and work toward something closer to what Kirk sees between Kirk Prime and Spock Prime. However, the underlying narrative within the second half of the vid is not just about building a romantic relationship between the two characters but also creating a productive *leadership* relationship between the two characters. Where "I Just Can't Wait" uses humor to paint Kirk as the sole and God-given "king" of the Enterprise, Heresluck creates a narrative in which Kirk and Spock *together* becomes the best Captain of the Enterprise. Sie shows scenes of how they cooperate throughout the latter part of the movie and the accomplishments Kirk and Spock achieve together (e.g., saving Pike, saving Earth, etc.) and emphasizes the idea of "partnership" by continually using shots of Kirk and Spock standing next to each other. They are centered evenly; neither character is standing in front of the other or centered more in the frame. Instead, the two characters become the focus of each image but only together and presented as equals. The lyrics "now I see the light" and "My heart and soul, they are free / You know I almost lost my mind / but now I'm home and I'm free" further emphasize the narrative of connection, both in terms of the Kirk/Spock relationship but also the connection to leadership of the Enterprise. In essence, the vid states that Kirk is only himself with Spock and vice versa and this is no more apparent than when considering their cooperative approaches to command in the latter part of the film. Killabeez's (2010) commentary is correct; only through the use of the idea of memory is Heresluck able to combine the vastly different styles and narratives between TOS and ST in such a way that makes ST seem much more like its older counterpart. In effect, the

“test” of Heresluck’s vid becomes whether or not Kirk and Spock can cooperate to become the effective leader as is implied to Kirk by the mind meld.

*Taking command* is a category that is about the construction of leadership and leadership qualities. As the ST canon is ultimately the story of Kirk’s journey to captaincy of the *Enterprise*, this category could be seen as a validation of canon. That is, by endorsing leadership and the leadership of Kirk specifically, the *narrative manipulation* within these vids is essentially upholding the canonical *cultural narratives* regarding *rise to the challenge* and *the best defense is a good offense* as the ideal leadership qualities. This is also a validation of the *identity presentation* given to Kirk in canon and the “Give ‘em Hell” (Brannon 1976) aggressive masculinity Kirk displays as a necessary quality to achieve leadership. While this is certainly the case in the six vids that feature Kirk as the sole protagonist, such as in “I Just Can’t Wait,” there is a second underlying canonical rejection taking place in the *taking command* vids as well. Vids such as “The Test,” the six other vids like it, offer an alternate narrative of *shared* leadership. In “The Test,” Kirk and Spock are ultimately shown to be better leaders when working together which is in stark contrast to the canonical narratives in which Spock is consistently punished for challenging Kirk and Kirk’s leadership.

This challenge to the canonical narratives regarding Kirk, Spock, and leadership could be speaking a desire for more communal or inclusive leadership. Spock is textually coded as biracial and provides an important countering voice to Kirk, even if his challenges are canonically punished. Ultimately, one potential reading of this inclusion of Spock and Kirk together as ideal leaders speaks to a vidder’s desire to reject or restrain both the “Give ‘em Hell” masculinity (Brannon 1976) Kirk displays and the *cultural narratives* embedded in ST canon that advocate aggressive styles of leadership. Heresluck, in “The Test,” constructs a new

narrative from both the old and new ST canons that reject the sole style of leadership displayed in canon. Instead of Spock Prime acting to encourage Kirk to take command as he does in canon, Heresluck has recreated a new canon in which Spock Prime is encouraging Kirk to work with Spock to take command *together*. “The Test” rejects the canonical punishment of Spock and instead rewards both characters when they act in concert, something that deeply disrupts both the *cultural narratives* of the film but also the ideology of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) which advocates masculine leadership solely through dominance of other men to gain status (Kimmel 2008).

### *Finding Joy*

ST is, at heart, a disaster-oriented action film. Sorrento describes the classic disaster film narrative as a “‘ship of fools’ ensemble motif aims to reflect a social microcosm, implying that a community banding together could discover a means to survive” (2013:39). ST’s narrative deals heavily with both the threat of loss (e.g., Earth) and the consequences of loss (e.g., Vulcan, the *U.S.S. Kelvin*) and those losses drive the plot along inexorably toward the conclusion in which the heroes narrowly avert total disaster, though the loss of Vulcan is posed as not nearly as devastating in terms of the plot as the potential loss of Earth, an interestingly ethnocentric narrative choice. The narrative theme within ST vids that accompanies the disaster narrative is the idea of *finding joy* (n=19). In ST vids, this theme is about finding joy in life despite the conflicts that happen or through those conflicts; that is, enjoyment *despite* adversity (or at least the main conflict provided within ST’s narrative). These vids tend to showcase the joys of connection between the Enterprise crew and the cooperative nature of their work through disaster or to highlight the amazement of living and working in space even during a time of crisis. The idea behind *finding joy* involves narratives in which the characters find things around them that

make living worthwhile even in the middle of a disaster. This theme is both contrasting and complimenting the previous theme I discussed: *taking command*. Vids in this category contrast taking command because they feature characters working together toward a goal; this is a direct opposite to the six vids within *taking command* that upheld Kirk's canonical sole leadership. However, the very use of communal action, though predominantly highlighting Kirk and Spock, means that *finding joy* actually complements the subtextual or underlying *narrative manipulation* I found within vids like "The Test" in the *taking command* category. As with the previous category, I believe this speaks partially to a vidder rejection of the narrative of the "lone hero." That is vidders recognize that Kirk is not the only person who contributes to the success of the *Enterprise* in ST and they work to incorporate the other characters who supply their talents and skills.

"Time to Pretend" by Knightbusdriver, uses the song "Time to Pretend" by MGMT and cam footage of the movie to create hir "second fanvid ever" (2009) that recasts the narrative of ST to one that more explicitly follows the narrative of a disaster film. Beginning with shaky shots of a screen that says "Collision Course Engaged" and "Impact" with a countdown, Knightbusdriver immediately creates a sense of threat. As the countdown hits zero, the music begins and we see Kirk and McCoy's first vision of the Enterprise. Following this, each of the supporting characters (Sulu, Uhuru, Scott, Chekov) on the bridge is introduced. The lyrics begin with "I'm feeling rough / I'm feeling raw" accompanied with images of Kirk fighting in the bar. Kirk is posed as a heroic figure overcoming obstacles here before being transitioned into a member of Starfleet "having the time of my life." Once the establishing images have finished, the song lyrics "This is our decision to live fast and die young / We've got the vision, now let's have some fun / Yeah it's overwhelming, but what else can we do? / Get jobs in offices and wake



up for the morning commute?” begin. Knightbusdriver uses examples of all the characters contributing to the fight against the *Narada*. At “Yeah it’s overwhelming” the images transition to Spock’s past and we see him confronting the Vulcan council and telling them “Live long and prosper.” Over and over throughout the vid, Knightbusdriver highlights not only scenes where the characters are visibly stressed by the events going on around them but also pairs those scenes with shots of the characters smiling or laughing, enjoying themselves often with other members of the Enterprise crew.

“Life fast, die young” becomes the overall narrative of “Time to Pretend” but in such a way that this philosophy is not linked with “hard living” through excess or over-indulgence but rather through a conscious decision to protect. When describing disaster movies, Ebert notes that the genre is about the “loss of at least one character we hate and one character we like” (2006). As Sorrento notes, the loss of the hated character is “to punish” and the loss of the liked character is “to wound the microcosm’s well-being, to imply its slow death” (2013:93). Knightbusdriver keys into this and uses this aspect of the Enterprise crew’s actions in the movie to construct his vid’s narrative by creating a narrative in which the ensemble is constructed as the characters “we like” through their heroism and willingness to face danger on behalf of others. However, Knightbusdriver also eschews the latter part of the genre formula by only showing the danger to the ensemble cast but never actually showing their loss. The implication within the vid is similar to that of “The Test” in *taking command*; essentially, danger and loss can best be averted by working together.

Rae1013’s “So What,” using the song by Pink, takes *finding joy* in an opposite direction than “Time to Pretend” by keying into both the homoeroticism and the antagonism of the Kirk and Spock relationship in ST. Rae1013 describes the vid as “Wherein Spock is a tool, Kirk is in

denial and he may or may not be as awesome as he thinks” (2011) and uses the song lyrics to craft a narrative in which the antagonistic relationship between Kirk and Spock becomes the centerpiece and *reason* for finding joy in being alive; Kirk is cast as finding enjoyment by being a challenge to Spock and getting in his way; Kirk is shown as feeling a thrill when he bests Spock. The song begins with the lyrics “I guess I just lost my husband / I don't know where he went” and Rae1013 pairs this with scenes of Kirk and Spock at the academic hearing following the Kobayashi Maru test, specifically scenes of Kirk watching Spock turn his back and walk away. The lyrics continue “So I'm gonna drink my money / I'm not gonna pay his rent” with Kirk in the bar in which he meets the Uhura and her fellow Starfleet cadets. “I got a brand new attitude” continues the vid with images of Kirk in the captain's chair of the Kobayashi Maru, smug and confident, implying that Kirk's confidence in the situation is directly in response to Spock's, as the “husband,” indifference. “And I'm gonna wear it tonight” is paired with a cut of the sex scene between Kirk and Gaila and “I'm gonna get in trouble / I wanna start a fight” shows Kirk and McCoy racing the bridge of the Enterprise to warn Pike about the Nerada, with Spock and Uhuru looking surprised and angry at the intrusion. The song continues into the chorus with the lyrics “So, so what / I'm still a rock star / I got my rock moves” and Rae1013 accompanies these lines with shots of Kirk throwing the first punch in the bar and skydiving down to the drilling platform. In combination with the lyrics, both are presented as triumphant moments for Kirk, even though within canon Kirk effectively loses the bar fight and needs Sulu's help to take over and destroy the drilling platform.

The vid continues with the main thrust of the narrative in the second half of the chorus: And I don't need you / And guess what I'm having more fun / And now that we're done / I'm gonna show you tonight / I'm alright / I'm just fine / And you're a tool.” Rae1013 places Spock in

the roll of the “tool” so each lyric is accompanied with shots of Kirk’s triumphs (e.g., leaping from platform to platform within the Nerada) followed with a shot of Spock’s reaction to something Kirk is doing. For example, at the lines “So, so what / I am a rock star / I got my rock moves / And I don't want you tonight” Rae103 pairs Kirk confronting Nero with a shot of Kirk and Spock talking on Spock Prime’s ship, culminating with Kirk turning his back and walking away from Spock at the line “I don’t want you tonight.” This shot is a deliberate mirror of the opening and sets the theme of the vid’s narrative: Kirk is finding joy in proving Spock wrong and all things he can accomplish in spite of or without Spock. This is the “denial” Rae1013 (2011) describes in his set-up to the vid; Rae1013 has constructed a characterization of Kirk that is in denial, first, about his loss of connection to Spock and, second, about the potential harm to himself and others his aggressive actions might cause. The vid’s narrative shifts slightly at around the two and a half minute mark with the lyrics “You weren't there / You let me fall” accompanied with the scene of Kirk and Spock’s confrontation on the bridge where Spock releases his emotions and attempts to beat Kirk. Rae1013 pairs these lyrics with Spock’s expression of disbelief and horror as if to imply Spock now understands what he has done by leaving Kirk. “So What” is a revenge anthem. Where “Time to Pretend” is about finding small moments of enjoyment within the chaos, “So What’s” joy comes from Kirk being able to both prove Spock wrong for leaving and prove he’s better off without Spock. Further, “So What” is a direct validation of the type of masculinity Kirk displays in canon. The tenet of “Give ‘em Hell” masculinity is that men should be aggressive and never back down from any challenge (Brannon 1976). Finally, the Kirk in “So What” is explicitly using aggression and violence as a way to “restore” his manhood and masculinity status (Kimmel 2005; Kimmel 2008) following the loss of status and pain caused by Spock.

“Time to Pretend” and “So What” showcase opposite sides of the emotional spectrum. “Time to Pretend” highlights connection through heroism and self-sacrifice, which are generally considered positive emotions, where “So What” focuses on the more negative emotion of revenge. Both provide examples of the way in which *finding joy* is done outside of the main narrative conflict. Even “So What,” which is built on finding enjoyment through conflict, is crafted in such a way that the “conflict” within the vid is one that is not present at all within the canon source. Rae1013 manages through the use of images and lyrics to craft a completely new queered narrative.

### *Queering the Narrative*

“So What” not only fits under the theme of *finding joy* but also becomes one of the more elaborate examples of *queering the narrative* (n=27). Like with SPN in which 41 of the 64 vids I analyzed fell under this category, a large number of the vids for ST were devoted to queering the strongly heteronormative canon narrative of the film. Between Kirk’s exploits and the relationship shown between Spock and Uhura, ST is a canon that is steeped in heterosexuality. Also like SPN fandom, the only characters that are queered within ST vids are men. The long-standing tradition of slash (the fandom term for homosexual pairings, usually between two men, taken from the “/” used to separate names in the pairing) within ST (e.g., Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Woledge 2005) makes it unsurprising that Kirk and Spock slash vids are some of the most popular within the fandom, judging by the amount of comments received, but are also almost the *only* slash relationship found within my sample. Combining the emotional support and long-standing relationship between the two characters for viewers of ST: TOS with a new element of “enemyslash” (2014) that is provided by the new more antagonistic relationship in ST, Kirk/Spock fanvids try to use the dramatic tension provided by their scenes together.

Talitha78's "Poker Face" (2009) is one of the earliest-posted ST vids, posted nine days after the movie's US release using cam footage (and later remastered by a fellow vidder Kuwdora). Talitha78 is an example of a vidder whom deliberately plays with the antagonistic relationship to create sexual tension within Kirk and Spock in hir vid. Within this vid, Talitha78 recasts the fight scene on the bridge of the Enterprise between Kirk and Spock for control over the ship into a sex scene, contrasting the parts of Lady Gaga's song where she moans with scenes of Kirk on his back, mouth slightly open as Spock touches him (to strangle him). Similar to the pairing of lyrics and out of context imagery to present a sexualized image of SPN's John Winchester in pain in "John the Revelator," "Poker Face" recasts Spock's assault of Kirk as a sexual act. Also like "John the Relevator," this is a very explicit recasting of the masculine and feminine roles portrayed in scenes of sexualized violence common in many movies, television shows, and other media (e.g., Breger 2014; Collins 2011; Jones 2013; Schick 2014; Tetlow 2015). Instead of the "feminine" role played by a woman, Talitha78 puts Kirk – the main character and the only character shown interacting or expressing desire for multiple women – into the submissive role. Talitha78 plays both with gender norms of masculinity regarding sexual aggression being linked to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell [1995] 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Quinn 2011) but also the cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986) regarding presentations of sexuality and appropriate sexual contact within our media.

Summarizing the vid with the lyrics "I wanna roll with him, a hard pair we will be" and describing it in hir author's notes as "Oh, my friends, this one is rough: straight from my id to yours. Unbeta'd and unapologetic," Talitha78 does the unexpected and centers the vid on Spock's character. This makes for an interesting juxtaposition as Lady Gaga's lyrics are of an outsider describing and attempting to interpret the actions behind the "poker face" and failing to

“read my poker face.” At the top layer, Spock becomes the “poker face” and Kirk the outsider trying to understand. At a deeper level shown through the choice of images of facial expressions, the “poker face” is *also* Kirk as Spock struggles to understand his emotionalism and actions within the movie.

The vid begins with shots of Vulcan and scenes from Spock’s early childhood before switching to the scene of Spock refusing his admission to the Vulcan Science Academy. His “breaking” of his front (Goffman 1959) with the children who insult his mother and his obvious disdain for the Vulcan Council (whom also put down his mother) are central character moments for Spock and Spock’s motivations. The lyrics begin with “I wanna hold 'em like they do in Texas, please” and the first shots of Spock in Starfleet as he watches Kirk attempt and win the Kobayashi Maru test. Spock’s expression is subtle but visibly surprised and curious, matching the lyrics. In this case, rather than Spock being the one “holding the cards,” Kirk is portrayed as the one with the winning hand. The lyrics continue with “Love game intuition play the cards with Spades to start / And after he's been hooked I'll play the one that's on his heart” combined with images of Spock and Kirk on the bridge as Kirk tries to get Spock to change his orders about reporting to help the fleet. At the line “and after he’s been hooked,” Talitha78 shows Spock using the Vulcan nerve pinch on Kirk to knock him out while Kirk struggles with security officers. Spock’s expression during these scenes is always cool and confident; he is secure in his “winning hand” over Kirk. At “I’ll play the one that’s on his heart,” Talitha78 shows Kirk gazing at the Enterprise from orbit as McCoy sneaks him onto the ship. This combination implies that Spock even realizes that the Enterprise is the key to Kirk’s character and motivations. This is an especially interesting interpretation of the way the characters interact given that at this point in the canon Spock has no respect for Kirk and thinks him irresponsible and unsuited for command.

For Talitha78 to connect Kirk to the Enterprise in a vid that is situated through Spock's perspective further emphasizes a "natural" connection between the two characters. Despite the scenes of fighting that had been shown previously between Kirk and Spock within "Poker Face," Talitha78 is *also* showing that the two characters understand each other at multiple levels. One possible interpretation, given the potential for "enemyslash" (2014) in the Kirk/Spock relationship, is that Kirk and Spock understand each other that well *because* of or through the fighting between them.

The most interesting sequence of the vid happens next with the lyrics "Russian Roulette is not the same without a gun / And baby when it's love if it's not rough it isn't fun, fun." Where the post-chorus sequences had been about cooperation, this portion of the vid swiftly returns the antagonism to the relationship between Kirk and Spock. The line of lyrics that begins with "Russian Roulette" shows Kirk and Spock arguing on the bridge; Kirk is deliberately antagonizing Spock to try and get him to lose control and give up command for being emotionally compromised. At the word "gun" Spock hits Kirk and the fight becomes physical. The next lyrical line changes the context of the images even more. Where "Russian Roulette" references the "game" Kirk is playing with Spock as he tries to draw out an emotional reaction, "and baby when it's love if it's not rough it isn't fun, fun" moves the scene out of canon completely by adding a sexualized component to the fight scene being displayed. As Spock pins Kirk to a console on the bridge, his hand gripped tightly around Kirk's neck, the lyrics become "Oh, oh, oh, oh, ohhhh, oh-oh-e-oh-oh-oh / I'll get him hot, show him what I've got." Kirk's mouth drops open slightly and the combination of music and images creates the simulation of sexual intercourse.

Unlike “John the Revelator,” in which the scene is contextually sexual in the vid and becomes *subtextually* sexualized violence when a vid watcher is familiar with the canon and the scene in canon *Sacrilegious* uses to imply a sexual act, this scene in “Poker Face” is explicitly and contextually sexualized violence. “Poker Face” shows the violence – Spock beating Kirk – where “John the Revelator” shows the results of the physical violence. This becomes the pivotal scene within the vid in establishing a romantic relationship between Kirk and Spock especially because it is the only scene in the vid in which Kirk and Spock are shown touching. This is further emphasized by ten seconds later in the vid in which Talitha78 shows Kirk and Spock Prime meeting on Delta Vega. Talitha78 pairs the lyrics “I’ll get him hot, show him what I’ve got” with Spock Prime initiating the mind meld with Kirk and Kirk’s shocked reaction. This is the only other scene in which Kirk and Spock, either version, are shown touching. The implication of this connection of violent sexuality from Spock to a more tender and gentle touch from Spock Prime seems to be to show Kirk that the relationship he is building with Spock will last. While this is probably not an intended interpretation of the conjunction of scenes, it could also serve to show the drastic differences between the two canons, similar to the way “The Test” does. In that, Talitha78 lifts directly from canon as that was Spock Prime’s intention in showing Kirk his past in the mind meld.

The most significant portion of the vid is definitely the moment of sexualized violence on the bridge and many of the comments on the vid respond specifically to that scene, which I will discuss in more detail in the later comment/response analysis section.. The sheer amount of response that scene received speaks to how it becomes the focal point of the vid and the interaction between Kirk and Spock. Despite the most memorable scene in the vid being one of antagonism, the “flip-flops” in character interaction portrayed in “Poker Face” (bad to good and



vice versa) actually seem to help accentuate the lyrics; the “poker faces” of Kirk and Spock are hard to read because their own emotions are changing rapidly. “Poker Face,” like “John the Revelator” in SPN, is significant because it “flips the script” in terms of the sexualization of violence. Within media, women are overwhelmingly portrayed as the victims of violence (Breger 2014; Collins 2011). This is not a recent trend. Bleakley, Jamieson, and Romer, when looking at 855 of the top-grossing films produced from 1950 to 2006, found that over 90% of the films in their sample included violent content, the “average proportion of female characters who were recipients of violence was .28 (SD: .38),” male characters were much more likely to be perpetrators of violence than women, and that there is a moderate correlation between explicit sexual and explicit violent content (2012:77). While vids like Talitha78 (Poker Face) and Sacrificious (John the Revelator) are working with heavily male-dominated canons, they have both crafted a narrative in which men *rather than women* are the ones that are shown within the context of scenes of sexualized violence. The characters of John Winchester and Kirk have been explicitly cast in ways that highlight the attractiveness of their pain or the sensuality of the violent acts being done to them. These vids, and the positive reaction to “Poker Face’s” scene of sexualized violence between Kirk and Spock, reflect the larger cultural ideologies about the nature of sexuality. Both the deconstruction of the typical portrayal of sexualized violence and the widespread fandom acceptance of this reworking suggests that American culture has essentially programmed consumers to find violence and violent content sexually arousing. So while women are not the victims within vids such as “Poker Face,” this vid does however suggest that there is a domain expansion (Best 1987; Best 1990) in the media trope of sexualized violence to now include violence between men as arousing.

The only vid that was not Kirk/Spock oriented that fit in this category was Sensori's vid to All Time Low's cover of the Rhianna song "Umbrella" (2010). Where vids like "Poker Face" or even "So What" play on the antagonism in a relationship as a substitute for deliberate on-screen sexual tension, "Umbrella" takes another route by portraying a relationship between Kirk and McCoy as friends. McCoy is shown taking risks and supporting Kirk's decisions, even against his better judgment. "Umbrella" capitalizes on this by making McCoy the "umbrella" Kirk "stands under." Sensori repeatedly uses images of McCoy supporting Kirk physically (e.g., McCoy holding Kirk up during Kirk's allergic reaction) as the main component of the relationship. These images are often paired with the lyrics of the chorus:

Told you I'll be here forever / Said I'll always be your friend / Took an oath / I'mma stick it out 'till the end / Now that it's raining more than ever / Told you we'll still have each other / You can stand under my umbrella.

This makes the vid somewhat repetitive to watch but allows Sensori to hammer home her point about the relationship between Kirk and McCoy as one of encouragement and aid (albeit mostly in one direction).

"Umbrella's" perspective on relationships provides a strong contrast to the ones shown in most of the Kirk/Spock vids within this theme and the difference in reaction to these vids is just as stark. The queered vids with the most comments were predominantly ones that utilized the rivalry between the two characters. For example, "Poker Face," one of the most popular vids within my sample, received a total of 500 comments between Livejournal, Dreamwidth, and YouTube. "Umbrella," on the other hand, only received 22 comments. Even the one vid within my sample that showed an heterosexual relationship, Bleeding\_muse's "When You Say Nothing At All" (2011), both combines heterosexuality (Spock/Uhura) and a one-way supportive relationship similar to "Umbrella" only receives a moderate 48 responses, one of which picks up

on the problematic nature of the relationship as presented. Spocklikescats mentions specifically that “While I’m not crazy about the lyric “when you say nothing at all,” especially as applied to a woman, I \*will\* acknowledge that Uhura pours her very soul out of her eyes for her Spock!” (2011). The relative lack of popularity for vids that show a relationship not built on rivalry becomes an interesting comment on how relationships, especially relationships between men, are viewed within our culture.

The relationship between Kirk and McCoy within canon and shown within “Umbrella” could conceivably be classified as examples of “bromance,” or the celebration of close platonic relationships between men in media (e.g., *Superbad*, *The Hangover*, *I Love You, Man*, *Hott Fuzz*, etc.) . As Woodworth (2014) points out, the “bromance,” which is simply a portmanteau of the words “bro” and “romance,” is an outgrowth of the “buddy” film genre and that bromances are often using the conventions of couples, dating, and partnerships within a friendship. However, bromances are often the province of straight, white masculinity, traditionally at the expense of women who are shown as “killjoys” trying to ruin men’s fun, prioritize homosocial relationships between men over heterosexual ones, and often portray homophobic ideologies (DeAngelis 2014a; Woodworth 2014). Even the idea behind “bromance” is an example of the homophobic “no homo” ideology; while the “bromance” uses conventions and even terminology of a romantic relationship, the characters (and concept) are specifically about and for *straight* men.

For female viewers, particularly ones that are inclined to see homosexual rather than homosocial relationships, as the large portion of vidding (and fanworkers more generally) are assumed to be (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Jenkins, Jenkins, and Green 1998; Meyer and Tucker 2007; Penley 1992; Woledge 2005), the combination of misogyny and the rejection of homoeroticism could potentially be something that excludes them and makes them less likely to

enjoy “bromantic” portrayals of relationships. While Sensori’s “Umbrella” is not coded either in Sensori’s set-up to the vid or textually within the vid as “bromance” (i.e., it does not show the rejection of homosexual relationships) and is instead explicitly coded as “McCoy/Kirk” indicating a romantic relationship between the characters, I believe it may be possible that the growing frequency of “bromance” in the culture more generally may mean that women – at least the women within media fan communities – are looking elsewhere for their representations of relationships. The close *narrative arc* connection between the one-way supportive relationships in vids like “Umbrella” or the Spock/Uhura vid “When You Say Nothing At All” may not be seen as “appealing” as the more aggressive and violent sexuality portrayed through “Poker Face,” as evidenced by the greater number of comments the latter received versus the former.

I also believe the attachment to “enemyslash” (2014), or the fandom term to describe homosexual relationships between rivals (e.g., “Poker Face”), compared to the slash of supportive/friendship-based variety (e.g., “Umbrella) is directly connected to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). If men are unable to be fully conceived as achieving masculinity without domination, this cultural attitude continues over into romantic (and platonic) relationships. “Enemyslash” (2014) and vids such as “Poker Face” or “So What” have little to do with connections and friendship between men and more to do with passion and domination. The entire narrative of “So What” is about Kirk dominating Spock as a method of revenge for a failed relationship and “Poker Face” idolizes disconnection between the two characters except for in cases of force (both physical and mental). The attraction of the Kirk and Spock relationship as it is presented in ST and in vids such as “Poker Face” and “So What” also becomes about how we perceive masculinity. The relationship between the characters

becomes a masculinity contest (e.g., Anderson 1999) and the game of “one-upmanship” played between Kirk and Spock is part of the allure of the vid for the viewer.

Within queering the narrative we see the clearest example of overt and covert meaning in ST vids. The overt meanings of the vids are to queer the canon and strip the assumed (or shown) heterosexuality of the characters. Queering the narrative adds an element of diversity and difference that is not available within the canon narrative. Covertly, however, these vids reaffirm more traditional ideologies about masculinity and masculine behavior. Where vids in the SPN fandom queer the narrative through the breaking of masculine norms through showing of vulnerability and emotion, ST vids emphasize the performance of traditional masculine behavior (West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995) such as the use of force to take what you want (i.e., “Poker Face”), competitiveness (i.e., “So What”), and domination and strength as paramount. While ST’s version of queering the narrative does subvert cultural ideologies (Williams 1995) about heterosexuality and heteronormativity it simply upholds the norms provided about masculinity in canon and, in extension, within culture.

### *Humor*

Humor, especially parody, has been a long-used source of cultural critique (e.g., Feltmate 2013; Kuiper, Kazarian, Sine, and Bassil 2010; Tavory 2014). Laughter makes it easier for us to examine our foibles and prejudices often without pressure or blame. Humor in vidding accomplishes the same task, particularly in ST vids. Within my ST vids sample, I found two different types of humor (n=11) vids: “humor” (n=7) and “critical humor” (n=4). “Humor” vids are ones that are made expressly to entertain or make the viewer laugh. They often did not have any overriding narrative, other than what was necessary to set up the joke. “Critical humor,” on the other hand, often strides the line between poking fun at ST and poking holes into ST. These

vids use humor as a method of critiquing or pointing out problematic elements of the movie's story or characterizations.

Such\_heights's "We Go Together" (2009) is one of the most popular of the "humor" vids I found, with 382 comments. Using the song "We Go Together" from the musical *Grease*, Such\_heights summarizes the vid as "'Remembered forever like shoo bop shoo wadda wadda yipitty boom de boom...'" with a note saying "I'm really not even embarrassed about this. Hey, I didn't inflict the megamix on you, that's all I'm saying" (2009). Within the musical, "We Go Together" is the song performed at the finale and is a rousing full-cast ensemble number that celebrates a successful romance between the two main characters from different social worlds and the friendships/relationships between the supporting characters growing stronger. Such\_heights takes that song, and the expectations surrounding it, to create the humor in hir vid. Combining the lyrics with close-ups of characters, Such\_heights highlights the main cast of the movie and their work in their roles. Such\_heights even includes Gaila, a fairly peripheral cast member within the ensemble. Early on in the vid, Such\_heights tends to show pairs of characters – Kirk/Spock, Spock/Uhura, Chekov/Sulu, Uhura/Spock – in combination with the lyrics having to do with "togetherness," though only Spock and Uhura are shown as explicitly romantic and essentially become the "Danny" and "Sandy"<sup>62</sup> of the vid. For example, Such\_heights combines the lyrics "We'll always be like one, wa-wa-wa-waaah" with quick shots of Kirk and McCoy looking out a shuttle window at the Enterprise, Kirk and Uhura fighting as she throws him out of her shared dorm, and Spock using the Vulcan nerve pinch on Kirk on the bridge of the Enterprise. The dissonance between lyrics and images – the lyrics emphasizing harmony and the images showing conflict – is what provides the humor to this section of the vid.

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<sup>62</sup> Danny and Sandy are the two romantic leads in *Grease*.

The response to “We Go Together” is overwhelmingly positive. Further, it proves that while the vid has no “real” narrative or overarching story, the feelings behind the vid and the emphasis on working together and teamwork of the Enterprise crew fully showed through. “We Go Together” takes the same place within ST fandom, as represented by my sample, as “Luv Song” occupies within my sample’s version of SPN fandom. The sole purpose is to entertain, even so much that “For someone who didn't like the new Star Trek that much, I'm surprisingly enjoying the hell out of all the wonderful fanworks” (Fallingtowers 2009).

Butterfly’s “Circus” (2009) manages to run a happy medium between “humor” and “critical humor.” “Circus,” using the Britney Spears’s song with the same name, is as popular as “We Go Together” with 453 comments on LJ and 48 on Dreamwidth. The vid is a commentary on how “Kirk's a "put on a show" kind of girl (oh, you know he is)” (Butterfly 2009). Specifically, “Circus” explores the style of leadership Kirk displays within the movie. Ostensibly, this vid could also be included in the *taking command* narrative category except that the vid is not about building or taking leadership, “Circus” explicitly puts Kirk already in the leadership position. He has command within the limited narrative of the vid and uses that command to “put on a show.” Even more, Butterfly sets up the vid such that Kirk’s attention-seeking attitude and entertaining command style spreads to the other members of the cast, most notably Spock. The vid begins with the lyrics “There's only two types of people in the world / The ones that entertain, and the ones that observe” to create a clear dichotomy between Kirk, “the one that entertains,” and Spock, whom observes. Even at this early point in the vid, Kirk the entertainer is established in a leadership role with Spock as his follower. The chorus provides the most elegant examples of the mash-up between lyrics and images:

All the eyes on me in the center of the ring  
Just like a circus (ah, ah, ahaha-hah)

When I crack that whip, everybody gonna trip  
Just like a circus (ah, ah, ahaha-hah)  
Don't stand there watching me, follow me  
Show me what you can do  
Everybody let go, we can make a dance floor  
Just like a circus (ah, ah, ahaha-hah, ha, ha, ha, ha, ho, ho, ho)

Each time the chorus plays, Butterfly uses similar types of images for each line. For “all eyes...” she often uses images of Kirk alone, doing something dramatic, such as his dive to the *Nerada*’s drilling platform, young Kirk stealing the car, or Kirk making large jumps from platform to platform on the *Nerada* at the end of the film. All of these are actions that would get him noticed and within the narrative of the movie he is set up as being “in the center of the ring.” At “when I crack that whip,” Butterfly uses images of Kirk giving orders or others following his command; for example, we see Kirk and McCoy running from Sick Bay to the Bridge, or the bridge crew acting within their roles. Although the scenes are often taken out of context (e.g., the scenes with the bridge crew are occasionally taken from when Pike or Spock were in command of the Enterprise), the link between image and music is strong enough to imply that Kirk is in control of all those actions and events, even if the viewer knows otherwise. “Don’t stand there watching me” is accompanied with images of Kirk observing the other Enterprise crew at their jobs as if he had inspired them to do more and better. This final section of the chorus is where the viewer sees the most images of the cast working together in concert or even paired up as a team. “Circus” casts Kirk as the ringmaster to the Enterprise’s circus.

What makes “Circus” sociologically interesting, other than its relative popularity, is the critique of both the way leadership by Kirk is portrayed within ST but also Butterfly’s own use of some of the same techniques to entertain. The incongruity of a Britney Spears song, something many of the commenters noted, about being an entertainer while creating a vid designed to entertain, creates an interesting resonance. Further, while this behavior is mostly



glorified within the lyrics and the vid, the other side of Kirk's ringmaster-like behavior is the tendency to be a glory hog or adrenaline junkie; that is, there is the implication that Kirk puts himself and others in danger deliberately just to entertain himself. Even more than that, the lyrics imply that Kirk asks the rest of the Enterprise crew to follow his example and become his confederates in the act of seeking out danger (i.e., "don't stand there watching me, follow me / show me what you can do"). This potential critique also applies to American cultural values of masculinity and the characteristics of "action hero," as seen not only in ST but also numerous other movies. For example, when Roblou analyzed superhero movies over the last fifteen years, found that many of the films showed a portrayal of masculinity "in crisis," but is also painted as an ideal, emphasizing physical power (though often with technological aid), solitary action and loneliness/isolation, with the inclusion of the essence of masculinity being passed on between generations by a "wise white mentor" (2012). Part of that cultural assumption of masculinity relies on the idea of masculinity as "active" while femininity is "passive"; often this formula relies on men being shown using logic to create conclusions and plans and then acting on those plans and women being shown as *controlled* by emotions in such a way that their actions become support for the men around them or are ultimately ineffective. Kirk is presented within ST as the only character willing and able to push past those obstacles, often at the expense of Spock as his foil. "Circus" twists this tendency slightly; Spock is still cast within the weaker, more passive role (i.e., "the ones that observe") but instead of becoming an artificial foil where every action is wrong, Spock is cast in "Circus" as devoted follower of Kirk. He becomes part of Kirk's circus act and "trips" when Kirk "cracks the whip."

"Circus" also upsets the narrative affirmation about masculinity found in ST canon. In canon, Kirk's aggressive and violent masculinity falls under what Brannon (1976) identifies as

“Give ‘em Hell” in his typology of masculine characteristics.. While this certainly fits with the reading of “Circus” that potentially portrays Kirk as a “glory hog” or “adrenaline junkie,” this limited presentation of masculinity does *not* fit with the implication of Kirk as the “mastermind” when he is shown as the ringmaster. This is more in line with Brannon’s (1976) conception of “Be A Big Wheel,” which puts power and status as central to masculinity. While Kirk does, in the end, embody “Be A Big Wheel” by becoming “Captain of the Starship Enterprise” by the end of the film, the qualities of power and status are ones that Kirk is gifted with by other characters (and the narrative more generally) rather than something he carries throughout the entire film. By placing this piece of masculinity as central in “Circus,” Butterfly becomes a confederate to the canon narrative to elevate Kirk to his position of Captain, regardless of whether he belongs there.

Sloanesomething’s “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor,” using the song with the same name by “Flight of the Concorde,” is an example of critical humor. The song itself is written by a New Zealand based comedy duo and is a funny commentary on club atmospheres. When combined with images from ST, Sloanesomething creates a biting funny critique on the, as she explains in her vid set-up, “NOT ENOUGH LADIES, TOO MANY MANS” within the movie (2009c). The vid is one of the shortest within my sample at 1:18 minutes and manages to feature all four women within the movie. The chorus with repetitions of “too many dicks on the dance floor” begins the vid with flashing images of several of the men given significant parts within the movie (e.g., Kirk, Spock, Chekov, Sulu, Pike, etc.). Uhura becomes the center point in the images following the first verse. “Going to the party / Sippin’ on Bacardi / Wanna meet a hottie” is accompanied by Uhura in the bar early on in the movie as she tries to order and gets waylaid by Kirk hitting on her before switching back to flashing shots of the men in ST. At “The only boobs I’ll see tonight will be made of origami,” Sloanesomething transitions back to Uhura, in

her bra, shutting the door of her dorm room in Kirk's face after she's kicked him out. "Tell the players, make it understood / It ain't no good if there's too much wood" features men in action, from Pike taking command of the Enterprise, to Kirk and Sulu fighting on the drill platform. Sloanesomething uses this formula over and over, combining lyrics about "too many misters / not enough sisters" with images of the men of ST; even the shots of background extras, such as in Kirk's Academy hearing, seem full of men only. Sloanesomething even uses the lines of the second chorus – "too many dicks on the dance floor / easy to fix / too many dicks on the dance floor / spread out the dicks" – to highlight what is missing. During this sequence in the vid, sie shows images of all four women in the movie (i.e., Uhura, Gaila, Winona Kirk, and Amanda Grayson).

The humor of the vid is fairly blatant and by using the easily-made connection between the lyrics and the images. From both the comments Sloanesomething makes on the vid and from the images on the vid, sie did not need to work very hard to find images of multiple men in one scene. In contrast, the critique "Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor" makes of the film is that Sloanesomething *did* have to work hard to find, or as sie points out, *not* find, women within the film. "Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor," while funny, is a good example of a larger trend within film and Hollywood more generally. This trend follows the cultural one that sees "men" or "masculinity" as the default (Smith 1978; Smith 1987). Even within the background, the casting directors on ST could not conceive of women taking part in a pseudo-military occupation such as Starfleet. While Roddenberry had originally conceived as Starfleet as a peace-keeping exploratory force ("to boldly go where no man has gone before"), ST its sequel turn Starfleet into a much more militaristic organization. The importance of Starfleet as militaristic is the deep cultural connection between the military and conceptions of masculinity and the masculine body

(Morgan 2007; Rutherford 2005). The cultural value that is placed on masculine body is linked to military service, even in the age of technological-aids that reduce the “necessity” of the masculine body over the feminine one in a military force. Still, the idea of masculinity as a prerequisite for military service (as seen through such things as selective service) seeps into the visuals presented within ST; the point becomes fairly clear: no women allowed. This is the cultural ideology being parodied in Sloanesomething’s vid.

Of entire ST sample, the *humor* category is the only one to present significant challenges or critiques to ST canon. A common trademark of comedy is the juxtaposition of meanings. This might be a juxtaposition between “what’s said and what’s meant,” “what’s said and what’s seen,” “what’s said and what’s said,” and “what’s seen and what’s seen” (Detweiler 2012:728). “I Just Can’t Wait,” for example, is funny because of the juxtaposition of “what’s said” (i.e., the lyrics) and “what’s seen” (e.g., Kirk in a leadership role). Across different veins of comedy, the ideas surrounding ideal masculinity remain prevalent and television shows such as *Home Improvement* idolize “Give ‘em Hell” aggressive masculinity (McEachern 1999) or *The Man Show* which shows how “mediocre” men can be dominant through the objectification of women and men of color (Palmer-Mehta 2009). Even “bromance” is a category about establishing masculine privilege through domination (or the rejection) of other identities (DeAngelis 2014b; Woodworth 2014).

The use of humor, then, can be seen as culturally more conservative; that is, humor is used to uphold current cultural values rather than to critique them or offer alternatives. That the humor category within my sample was the *only* category to include explicit critiques of canon reveals something interesting. First, is the importance within fandom of the juxtaposition of meanings on which humor relies (Detweiler 2012). The discrepancy in presentation between

canon and vid is a situation not only for humor but also for critique. “Circus,” for example is a juxtaposition between “what’s said and what’s meant” in Butterfly’s rearticulation of Kirk’s masculinity. “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” highlights the difference between “what’s said and what’s meant” in an alternate way. Sloanesomething’s vid juxtaposes the canon, or “what’s said,” with something female audiences value seeing (i.e., more women with substantial roles in films) as the “what’s meant.” Secondly, humor may be the only venue that vidders feel comfortable expressing critique of a canon without experiencing backlash from other fans.

### *A Vidding Outlier*

One vid, Loki’s “Fortune Days” (2012), falls outside of these basic categories. Loki, a prolific vidder within SPN fandom, only made two vids for ST (one of which is outside of my sample as it is based on *Star Trek: Into Darkness*). “Fortune Days” follows a formula Loki uses frequently within his SPN vids; “Fortune Days” is an alternate universe retelling of ST. Rather than being set in the future, Loki uses images and clips from other movies with the same cast (e.g., Mission Impossible for Simon Pegg, Columbiana for Zoe Saldana, etc.) and the song “Fortune Days” by The Glitch Mob to create a:

heist!AU (inspired by this post on tumblr  
<http://captainsulus.tumblr.com/post/53315361686/star-trek-heist-au-pike-recruits-a-team-of-the><sup>63</sup>) Kirk is the mastermind, Bones his right-hand man. Uhura is a brilliant con artist, Spock the hacker and IT expert. Sulu is the muscle and getaway driver, Chekov a rookie genius pickpocket. Scotty is the slightly mad scientist who makes things go boom. Together they form the best damn crew ever to be assembled, and the only one capable of pulling off the impossible score (2012).

“Fortune Days” is unique both in terms of Loki’s other work in the SPN fandom and also within the larger group of ensemble-based ST vids. Where Loki’s description casting Kirk as the “mastermind,” the vid itself actually features Uhura in a much more prominent role. Using a

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<sup>63</sup> This link is included in the quote for accuracy but the link itself is now dead.

combination of dialogue from these other movies to help create the “heist” narrative, Loki creates a visual narrative in which most of the action is centered on Uhura/Zoe Saldana. Her character is shown frequently doing things, in contrast to most of the other characters, but especially Kirk. Kirk is given a much more passive and observatory role within the vid; while this fits with the general idea of a “mastermind,” the absence of Kirk actually doing anything but standing or sitting until two minutes into the vid creates a more powerful role for Uhura whom ends up with the most amount of clips and the most action within the vid.

The use of Uhura as a central figure in “Fortune Days” is different from Loki’s more male-centric work within SPN. While the alternate universe element still exists within this vid, the shift of the strong emphasis on Uhura, particularly as a strong and dynamic lead character, is a stark contrast to many of Loki’s vids in SPN which focused on specifically breaking or subverting the hegemonic narrative about masculinity within the characters of the Winchesters. Within the ST vidding fandom “Fortune Days” is also unique. Most of the more ensemble-driven vids still feature one or two characters over the rest; these characters are predominantly Kirk and Spock. Even two of the vids I highlighted earlier, “Circus” and “We Go Together,” focus or emphasize those two, even while including the other characters in peripheral roles. The practical reason for this difference may simply have to do with the use of an alternate universe. Loki expands beyond what is available within the ST canon and is thus able to use clips from other movies. Zoe Saldana has a reputation for playing “strong female characters” and the two movies Loki pulls Saldana’s clips from (*Columbiana*, *The Losers*) are action-oriented spy/heist films. In contrast, the other male actors have not been in as many movies or television shows with a similar theme that would easily fit the narrative Loki is attempting to construct within his vid. In contrast with the wider availability Loki is working with, other vidders restrict themselves

simply to what appears on screen within the ST film and the narrative of the film (and the filmmakers) prioritize Kirk and Spock over all the other characters, making it harder for a true ensemble presentation within a vid.

## FANVIDS VS. CANON

In the SPN vids chapter, the underlying similarity between all four categories of vids I identified was a desire to transform or change the surface narratives being presented within SPN. For ST, however, there was very little in the way of *narrative* or even *character/identity presentation* transformation. Instead, ST vidders seemed much more concerned with transforming and elaborating relationships. ST's narrative focus was clearly on the characters of Kirk and Spock as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. What vidders seem to want as reflected by the same is not only the highlighting of Kirk and Spock but a specific type of relationship between the two characters. Further, the use of ensembles within vidding indicates fans wanted more depth or interaction. That is, while they liked Kirk and Spock, they *also* wanted more emphasis on other characters.

Despite critical vids like “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor,” vidders ultimately upheld most of the *identity presentation*, *character arcs*, and *cultural narratives* within ST canon. The areas of discrepancy and true *narrative manipulation* within ST vids seem to be in terms of rejecting the heteronormativity of the canon. Like with the two popular pairings in SPN fandom (i.e., Wincest and Destial), the pairing of Kirk/Spock is both traditional (at least in terms of fandom) but interesting because it *is* the representation of an interracial relationship, though no vidder seems to key into that aspect. Further, the practice of slash, combined with the “common knowledge” originated in early fan studies work of the 1990s (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Penley 1992) that most slash is written by straight women, has been criticized as

an act of fetishization of queer relationships (i.e., lesbian pornography being filmed for the straight male gaze). On the other hand, this desire to go to extremes speaks of a strong desire for LGBTQ representation in popular media. Rather than just fetishizing the ideal of two men having sex together, the popularity of this pairing speaks to a larger desire of the audience to see queerness normalized.

A second area in which fanvids reject canon is through an underlying theme of “cooperation.” In ST canon, it takes approximately 100 minutes in a 127-minute movie before any of the characters actively work together to accomplish their goals and even this is shown as only possible through Kirk’s sole leadership. Vidders, however, challenge the idea that Kirk is or should be a sole leader. In “Circus,” Butterfly implies that Kirk’s leadership is only possible because of the people “watching” or supporting him. “Poker Face” keys into the rivalry between Kirk and Spock and ultimately paints Spock the victor between the two characters and ensemble vids highlight the actions everyone takes, rather than just Kirk. Essentially, this thread within vids is about the deconstruction of the “ruler” or “sole authority.” Vidders seem to prefer to show cooperative leadership, people working together as a team, or at least multiple voices for ideas and possibilities (as is the case in many of the Kirk/Spock “enemyslash” vids).

In terms of accepting canon, perhaps the best example is the lack of vids that showcase or highlight women or men of color in any narrative sense. The emphasis on Kirk and Spock in canon is carried over into fandom, often at the expense of any of the other characters. Vids such as “Fortune Days” or “When You Say Nothing At All” that highlight other characters are rare and Sulu, as the only “visible” man of color within the film, was not a featured or main character within any vid.



In the next section of this chapter, I will move away from analyzing vids to analyzing the comments and response the vids received within the fandom. The four previously identified response types (e.g., *kudos*, *narrative kudos*, *ship kudos*, *emotional response*) are all present within the responses made to ST vids. There is a new and additional type of response I classify as *critical response*.

#### VID COMMENTS

Ultimately, the acceptance or rejection of narratives carried out in SPN vids also happens within the context of the larger fandom community. In turn, viewers of vids also have a choice to accept or reject the altered narratives. To gauge responses, I analyzed all 2869 comments available but paid special attention to the comments on the 8 vids with more than 51 comments. Within vid response, comments largely fell into congratulatory categories and many comments overlapped and fell into multiple categories. The categories are *kudos* (92%), *narrative kudos* (34%), *ship kudos* (56%), *emotional response* (22%), and *critical response* (26%). *Technical kudos*, which was a theme present in SPN fandom, was not found within ST vid response. All three of these categories are heavily related. Kudos, or a “kudo,” is usually given as praise for exceptional work. Kudos, within fandom, is often given in short one-word or sentence format without any critical or engaged commentary. *Kudos* is also a way to compliment a fanworker without engaging their narrative. *Narrative kudos*, while also following the same format as *kudos*, are comments and congratulations given specifically because of a component of the narrative within the vid. *Ship kudos*, similar to *narrative kudos*, are to congratulate a vidder on the presentation of a particular romantic relationship within a vid.

On average, there seemed to be fewer in-depth or analytical responses to vids within the ST fandom, compared to the SPN fandom. The vids within my sample that received the most

comments – “Poker Face” (437), “The Test” (412), “Don’t Stop Believing” (378), “We Go Together” (373), “Too Many Dicks On the Dance Floor” (361) – all received overwhelmingly, and generally short (some as short as one word), positive responses. X\_pixel\_x, for example, posts on “Poker Face” “AWESOME / Like I might convince myself that going to see the movie for the 3rd time this afternoon would be a good idea because this vid makes me that happy” (2009). This comment is typical of the sort of responses the earlier vids (such as “Poker Face”) received. “Poker Face,” posted just a week after the film premiered, urges a person to go back to the theaters and see the film again. Allzugern also posts something fairly typical of early responses to “Poker Face” when sie says “WHEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!! Oh, god. I haven't even seen the movie yet, but there was no way I was going to let being spoiled keep me from watching. After years of being a Trekie I never, ever dreamed that there would be new, scorching Kirk/Spock. I LOVED THIS!! ♥” (2009). Allzugern’s response is both typical in its type of kudos given and interesting in the way the sie constructs hir expectations both about the vid and the film prior to seeing ST. Coming to the vid without having seen the movie, Allzugern’s perceptions of the vid are solely focused on the element of slash and the relationship between Kirk and Spock. Even “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor,” a vid that predominantly critiques the canon, received many comments agreeing with the sentiment as much as the humor of the message. Responses to “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” and the other critical humor vids, had an element of what I term *critical response*.

### *Critical Response*

When I use the term *critical response*, I do not mean that a commentator was critical of the vid. Rather, *critical response* speaks to the mirroring effect between vid and respondent. Essentially, the vid that critiques canon is likely to evoke commentators that either (a) agree with

that critique or (b) express other similar critiques of the canon. By having a vidder make a critique of a character or narrative, seems to invite others to add their own negative judgements of canon. Cupiscent comments on “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” that “I find this intelligent, incisive and an excellent application of critical theory to modern pop culture. ALSO MADE OF MOTHERFUCKING WIN!” (2009). This is an example of the first type of *critical response* as Cupiscent is explicitly agreeing with the arguments Sloanesomething makes about ST. Obsession\_inc has a longer response to the vid’s critique:

Oh my God, this was totally worth waiting for my stupid internet to load. YESSSSSSSS. Because, yes, EASY TO FIX, and yet they didn't to the point of mentioning neither Amanda's nor Winona Kirk's names\*. Uhura is awesome but the burden of being the only female main character is a heavy load to carry. TOO MANY MANS.

\*I am still not over this. I may never be over this. Winona can say "GEORGE! GEORGE!" eighty times in two minutes, but we don't have him say her name once? (2009)

In response, Sloanesomething simply quotes back the song: “RIGHT? NOT ENOUGH LADIES. IT IS EASY TO FIX” (2009a). Inboots, like Obsession\_inc’s comment, obliquely offers a suggestion for ways the movie could have improved gender representation. Inboots loves “how every single group shot highlights this point to an almost hilarious degree” (2009), pointing out the lack of women even represented in the background of the movie. Both of these two comments are examples of the second type of *critical response* as both Obsession\_inc and Inboots are pointing out related problems with ST beyond the “too many mans” issue Sloanesomething highlights. While Inboots’s suggestion – having women present and acting in the background – would not fix the substantial issue of the narratives of women’s lives, especially the “fridging” narratives, or the use of a woman’s death to further a man’s story (Simone 1999), present in the movie, the inclusion of more women in the background would be a first step. Even Uhura, ostensibly a major character and the film’s female lead, is often

relegated to the background within ground shots as Toft\_froggy points out and Sloanesomething adds to:

OMG TRUE STORY. Great song choice, great clipping - I loved how suddenly Uhura was at the centre of the frame in that clip of the Spock/Kirk challenge in the bridge, and so much more noticeable - genius. NOT ENOUGH LADIES, TOO MANY MANS! (Toft\_froggy 2009)

Thank you! It was shockingly easy to find group shots where Uhura was either absent or totally marginalized. TOO MANY MANS. (Sloanesomething 2009b)

In terms of the criticism leveled at the ST canon through ST vids, there was largely *agreement* on the part of the viding audience. This is possibly due to the format the criticism took place through (humor) as opposed to the more “serious” critical vids. None of the audience needed to be defensive about a vid like “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” because they felt the criticism was justified enough to not feel like an attack on their own identity for enjoying a problematic canon (Altheide 2000). Instead of feeling alienated or condemned for their choice of liking a canon that underrepresents women, “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” allows the audience to not only critique the canon for this but also to *laugh* at the canon for committing the error. In that sense, humor may have created a better environment for acceptance of the message Sloanesomething meant to convey.

ST is also unique in terms of its variability and longevity of both the canon and the fandom. This variability may have helped in terms of message reception for “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor.” While ST, even the newest rendition, is a fairly beloved canon, Sloanesomething was *only* critiquing the 2009 movie and not the entire canon. There is no indictment about representation available in the vid for ST: TOS, or *The Next Generation*, or even the movies. The *only* piece of canon being critiqued is the 2009 film and this separation of

“established canon” compared to “new canon” may have made the criticism in “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor” more palatable to viewers.

### *Responses to Sexualized Violence*

Another point of interest is the extreme responses received to “Poker Face.” The vid was well-received as a slash vid and several of the commenters noted one spot within the vid as striking: when the fight between Kirk and Spock is presented within a romantic context. Thehoyden, for example, comments “I have seriously watched this six times in a row, and I'm still on the level of EEEEEEEEEEEEEEE! But more coherently, I loved the cutting and especially "if it isn't rough it isn't fun" clip -- really, it's just fabulous and the song choice is awesome” (2009). Anoel calls the vid “OMG SO FUCKING HOT!!!!!! / \$\*^(@&)\$\_#+\_@Q)( No words, just daaaaamn. They are so freaking hot, I can't even fathom. Brilliantly edited. Their little poker faces! My favorite part is if it isn't rough, it isn't fun and their fight. Yum \*wipes drool off lip\*” (2009). Both of these comments are examples of the widespread acceptance of the sexualization of violence portrayed within the vid. The viewers of “Poker Face” predominantly see this edited fight scene, even including the explicit choking, as sexually arousing. On one hand, the idealization of the sexualization of violence within the commentaries on “Poker Face” is problematic; this indicates the acceptance of violent sexuality, especially practiced by men (e.g., MacKinnon 1987; Seidman 2003) as common or even welcome. As women are predominantly portrayed as the willing recipients of this violent sexuality (e.g., enjoying being controlled, approving of stalking behaviors, etc.) within media (Braithwaite 2011; Breger 2014; Gill 2009; Schick 2014) and often the victims of violent sexuality (e.g., rape, stalking, street harassment, etc.) within real life (e.g., Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2011; Higginson 1999; hooks 1993; Kimmel 2005; Markovitz 2006; Polletta, Trigos, Adams, and Ebner 2013), the

acceptance of this scene within the vid as “hot” or arousing can be seen as fairly troubling. This is one of the most insidious parts of “rape culture,” or a culture that creates an environment where male dominance/domination leads to the assumption of constant female sexual availability or that women are always and only sexual beings (Kimmel 2005). Women live in a “toxic” cultural environment and eventually contribute to and endorse even some of the worst offenses of rape culture. We see that women “have not unlearned a heterosexist-based ‘eroticism’ that constructs desire in such a way that many of us can only respond erotically to male behavior that has been coded as masculine within the sexist framework” (hooks 1993:355). Essentially, the viewers of “Poker Face,” presumably a group predominantly made of women as other researchers have demonstrated (Jenkins 1992; Jenkins, Jenkins, and Green 1998; Meyer and Tucker 2007; Woledge 2005), are women who have been programmed by the rape culture that surrounds them to see sexualized violence as specifically desirable, regardless of their own sexuality. The violence of Spock choking Kirk *is* what is arousing for these viewers.

This expression of rape culture, however, becomes slightly twisted when taking into account the queer reading of the vid. Rather than showing a violent heterosexuality, as is common within media and rape culture more generally, “Poker Face” portrays the trope between two men. Cicioni, when researching erotic slash fanfiction in the *Professionals* and *Professor Morse* fandoms critiques earlier readings (Penley 1992; Russ 1985b) of slash erotica as simple pornography:

In the definition of the leading radical feminist Helen Longino (1980), pornography is the representation of “sexual behavior that is degrading or abusive to one or more of the participants *in such a way as to endorse the degradation even if the person has chosen or consented to it*: (p. 43, emphasis in original). Slash sex scenes, far from representing degrading behavior, are usually set in the contexts of deep emotional closeness, which, as Russ (1985a) herself points out, are as much part of the fantasy as the sexual activities themselves. Sado-masochistic scenes, which would meet Longino’s definition, are relatively infrequent (Cicioni 1998:168).

I find it hard to believe that either (a) there has been a large cultural shift within fandom in the eleven years between the publications of that article and the publication of “Poker Face” to encourage more “degradation” or violence within sexual presentations or (b) that the norms of what is generally considered “erotic” are vastly different between fanfiction and fanvideos. Instead, more likely scenarios include: (a) what is considered “degrading” is culturally different between mostly-US producers (“Poker Face” and its audience), an Australian reader (Cicioni) and British producers (*The Professionals*, *Professor Morse*), (b) the norms within those specific fandoms Cicioni (1998) chose are an exception in terms of erotic content, or (c) the sample size of fanfiction was simply too small to capture the full nuances of “acceptable” seen within larger “megafandoms,” with massive audiences producing large numbers of fanworks (i.e., Harry Potter would be considered a “megafandom” given its world-wide appeal and longevity; Harry Potter also has nearly 700,000 fanfic available on fanfiction.net alone to browse).

There is a large difference between Cicioni’s (1998) findings on fanfiction that showed scenes of violent sexuality as infrequent and scenes of emotional closeness as preferred by fanfic writers and the responses I see to “Poker Face” (i.e., violent sexuality) versus “Umbrella” (i.e., emotional closeness). The case here is that we have an audience that is likely mixed between straight and queer (Jenkins, Jenkins, and Green 1998) finding heterosexist-coded violence (Seidman 2003) between a queer couple arousing. Fans/respondents are forming a collective identity around the vid; not only are viewers responding specifically to “Poker Face” as a slash vid or ST vid – both of which can be contained within identities (e.g., “slash fan,” “Star Trek fan”) – but specifically a vid in which an explicit act of domination is displayed. Arguably, the “if it isn’t rough it isn’t fun” portion of the vid could be considered a display of bondage-discipline, domination-submission, sadomasochism (BDSM) which could potentially bring in a

third identity and subculture. However, I would argue that this line has less to do with actual BDSM subculture and more to do with *idealized* BDSM and romantic tropes. I call this “idealized BDSM” because this is a presentation of BDSM with no connection to BDSM cultural norms of “safe, sane, and consensual” (Taylor and Ussher 2001; Thompson 1991). Rather than presenting negotiation of power and control and firm agreements on boundaries and limits, idealized BDSM removes that and focuses specifically on power struggles and explicit domination. Often idealized BDSM romanticizes obsessive, controlling or manipulative behavior from one, usually male, partner in internationally successful works such as *Twilight* or *50 Shades of Grey* (Dymock 2013; Jones and Mills 2014).

In the case of “Poker Face,” Spock, the character who is continually narratively dismissed in favor of Kirk and is considered a “half-breed” within ST canon, is physically dominating Kirk. The scene becomes a power fantasy where a member of a subordinated or oppressed group is able to overcome their oppressor. Even beyond the element of sexual arousal and the linking of violence and sexual arousal in a primarily female audience, the power fantasy available within the vid must be appealing. “Poker Face” becomes both traditional in its portrayal of romance, drawing on romantic tropes of rape fantasies (Critelli and Bivona 2008; Radway 1984) to create the element of eroticism but is also transgressive in the *expression* of that rape fantasy. Rather than the more traditional heterosexual presentation, this trope has been reinterpreted within a queer mixed-race (“species” being a cultural code for “race/ethnicity” within the larger Star Trek universe) relationship. This indicates, both in the original expression of sexuality portrayed within “Poker Face” and through the overwhelmingly positive response to that portion of the vid, that while this may be a sign of women still are internalizing heterosexist



norms about their own sexuality (hooks 1993) there is also a strong desire for more diversity of representation in sex-roles and sexual identities (Thurston 1987) in media.

SPN vids were usually attempting to transform the canon in different ways through shifts of narrative focus (e.g., Obsessive24's "Fall of Man"), the rejection of the representation of masculinity in SPN (e.g., "John the Revelator"), the creation of alternate universes (e.g., Loki's "In the Mirror Distorted"), or through the queering of canon (e.g., Turquiosetumult's "Losing my Religion"). ST vids were predominantly supportive of the canon, even embracing the flaws within the canon by gently poking fun at them (e.g., "Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor"). The responses to ST vids followed this same pattern.. While the number of people engaging with ST vids were proportionally higher (2869 comments on 41 vids) compared to SPN vids (3640 comments on 64 vids), the *level* of engagement was lower in ST fandom. Compared to responses to SPN vids, such as Obsessive24's "Fall of Man" which could involve a multiple-comment critical analysis of the vid, the responses to ST vids were much more simple "kudos"-type responses.

### *Why Only Kudos?*

Some of the lack of criticism or critical analysis within viding is likely due to the excitement surrounding new canon in the larger Star Trek universe. Prior to ST, the most recent iteration providing new canon was the television show *Enterprise*, detailing the exploits of Jonathan Archer and the Enterprise crew on its very first mission; *Enterprise* was set prior to the beginning of ST: TOS and was not very well received and was eventually cancelled after four seasons in 2005. The possibility of a "reboot," revitalized long-time fans of Star Trek and the switch from a lower-budget television show to a big-budget, high production movie was sure to bring in new fans. Further, many of the vids themselves were uncritical of the canon or there was

very little divergence from the canonical narrative that left viewers little with which to take apart for analyzing. The two exceptions to this would be Loki's alternate universe vid "Fortune Days" and the larger genre of slash, particularly Kirk/Spock. The response to "Fortune Days" was relatively small at 15 comments on Loki's LJ post, especially in comparison the comments Loki received on his SPN vids. However, the type of vid Loki produced in "Fortune Days" is different than his type of vids produced in the SPN fandom. While the *genre* – alternate universe – is the same, "Fortune Days" is much more of an ensemble focus than Loki's SPN vids which were often focused on specific characters such as Sam and Dean, whom as the most popular characters and part of a fairly popular ship were likely to draw a larger audience than an ensemble vid.

Slash, while technically a "divergence" or transformation from canon by queering the narrative of two (predominantly male characters), is actually considered one of the norms within ST fandom (and most larger fandoms). This idea of a narrative norm that becomes accepted and widespread throughout fandom is known as a "fanon," which meshes the words "fan" and "canon" together. Slash is a fandom norm and many fandoms accept certain pairings as "fanon," or easily accepted and embraced within that fandom. In SPN, the fanon pairings are Dean/Sam and Dean/Castiel. However, Star Trek fandom is the fandom that actually gave rise to the term "slash" through Kirk/Spock fanfiction, fanart, and ST APAs (Jenkins 1992; Jenkins 2006a). In that sense, slash is a predominant ST fandom norm; if the 2009 film had actually not included any interaction between Kirk and Spock at all, there would still likely be a large number of fanvids for the pairing produced. The popularity of slash and Kirk/Spock in particular likely contributed to less critical analysis on vids. Even Heresluck's "The Test," which received the most in-depth commentary among all the vids in my sample, only received eleven comments longer than three lines, most of which were about the technical and narrative aspects of blending

ST: TOS and ST together, Killabeez's comment being one of the most extensive. The widespread acceptance of slash within ST fandom also likely contributed to the lower amount of analysis or criticism.

In terms of the place of ST in fandom culture more generally, ST is fairly similar to SPN. This is partially due to the time overlap (i.e., both canons existing at the same time), partially due to the relatively high activity level of vidders in both canons, but also due to the way vidders adapt and adopt the canon narratives to the point that they become *fanon* narratives. A popular pairing, or ship, can often be elevated to the level of fanon. Coppa (2006) argues that fanfiction is less literary and more performative; essentially, fanfiction is created specifically with direct feedback from a live audience. The same is, of course, true for fanvids. In that sense, the idea of "fanon" really is simply the norms and accepted values within the subculture and to provide a "popular" or "accurate" performance, the vidder has to both incorporate elements of "canon" *and* "fanon." This is where I would argue that SPN and ST are alike, at least in terms of this sample. Generally, the vids in both fandoms included elements of both canon and fanon but what the most *popular* vids (i.e., the vids with a most successful performance) was include the *right* fanon: the pairing. Sexuality, pairings, shipping, and the idea of the "OTP" or "one true pairing" is extremely important within fandom. We can see the obsessive focus on creating romance and relationships both in SPN and ST by the specific focus and highlighting of the pairings of "Wincest," "Destiel," and "Kirk/Spock," all of which I will discuss in my next chapter.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

Narrative is a very powerful tool in the hands of a creator. Narratives can affect emotions, causing viewers to sympathize with characters, narratives create sense of identity through that sympathy and a sense of connection to other people who have similar feelings (Altheide 2000). Narratives provide guiding principles and ideals for organizations under the guise of “mission statements” and narratives even guide nations (Loseke 2007; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011; Polletta and Lee 2006; Spillman 2002). Narratives are intricately linked with our self-concepts and how we see the world around us; how we understand communications, tools, and the people around and even how we think about the past is influenced by narrative. Narrative, essentially, becomes unconscious life and understanding for people. Understanding the power of narrative and its effects on both individuals and society at large makes the need to understand the *messages* of that narrative even more important. Reception theory (Allen 1989), rising out of literary theory, became a guidepost for attempting to understand how narratives were understood and received by fans by trying to see how much of, first, the canon was accepted or rejected by fans and, second, how much of the new narratives in fanvids were accepted and rejected by the larger community. In this dissertation, I have attempted to understand both the messages of the narratives of *Supernatural* (SPN) and *Star Trek* (ST) but also the power consumers let those messages have over themselves. In this chapter, I will begin with brief summaries of my collective findings, beginning with *identity presentation* in both canons and fanvids. Then I will look at *cultural narratives* within both canons and fanvids. Following that, I examine the limitations and strengths of this research and finish with a discussion of potential research paths to take in the future.

## IDENTITY PRESENTATION IN CANONS AND FANVIDS

I have discussed the use of *identity presentation* within the individual canons in an in-depth manner in each chapter of this dissertation. At this point, I will be looking at the ways in which gender is used across and between the canons, as a representation of the larger culture and cultural ideologies about gender and intersectionality. Following this, I will move onto a comparative analysis about the presentation and place of relationships, romance, sex, and sexuality across and between the canons and the vids produced from those canons. Then I will end with a discussion of the smaller spaces given to both class and race in canons and vids.

### *Gender in Canon*

Both SPN and ST are narratives that are dominated by images and ideologies regarding masculinity. Both canons set up narratives that rely strongly on “binary oppositions,” (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) or one of the primary features of myths that are found through the pairing of contrasting ideas or symbols, when showing gender and gendered behaviors. Within SPN, the show’s creators have crafted a narrative of tensions between different types of masculinities, such as Dean Winchester’s traditional form of working-class masculinity and Sam Winchester’s attempts at rejecting both the older hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and the more modern “guy code” (Kimmel 2008) achieved by Sam’s peers. In ST, the contrasts are between the more aggressive James Kirk, whom follows the ideology of “Give ‘em Hell” masculinity, and his counterpart the cool and logical Spock that advocates the emotionlessness of the “Be a Sturdy Oak” masculinity (Brannon 1976). In that sense, the “binary oppositions” (Lévi-Strauss [1958] 1963) in both SPN and ST are between competing images of masculinity rather than between a binary of “masculinity/femininity.” Further, within both the canons one form of masculinity is always privileged and shown as right

in comparison to the other. For SPN this is Dean's working-class hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and for ST this is Kirk's aggressive and violent "Give 'em Hell" (Brannon 1976) masculinity. To be considered as having successfully "done gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) in either SPN or ST a man must be shown with the qualities of those two similar types of masculinity.

The idea of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987), or the performance of gender as accomplishment that is externally based and judged, is simultaneously extremely important and not important at all within both canons. The narratives are all set up so that the performances, ideologies, critiques, and messages within the narrative are heavily dependent on gender. However, neither SPN nor ST truly makes gender "apparent" within the show. By "apparent," I mean that not only is gender an integral part of the canon narrative but also gender is explicated on-screen within the narrative. With SPN and ST, the narratives only work because gender – or in the cases of these two canons *masculinity* -- is invisible. SPN and ST build upon notions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) that play with the cultural assumptions and ideologies of masculinity (Swidler 1986) and that convince the viewers their narratives are plausible solely because the characters that dominate those narratives are men. SPN and ST make gender an *implicit* narrative. Gender happens "backstage" (Goffman 1959). For Goffman (1959), "backstage" meant the behind-the-scenes preparations needed to complete an identity performance; for example, the way the cooks in the kitchen of a restaurant act is a backstage performance and different than the way the wait staff acts in a front stage performance for the customers. With SPN and ST, there is a similar process; while the characters are "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987), the first performance is largely front stage. Any judgments on successfully "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) primarily happen

“backstage” within the viewer’s mind. While there are specific instances of gender norming and boundary enforcement in which characters actively judge and enforce lines of “acceptably” masculine or feminine behavior (e.g., Connell 1987; Connell [1995] 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Goffman 1963; Martin 2004; Smith 1987; Thorne [1993] 2008), presented in both SPN and ST (e.g., “no chick flick moments”), this judgment is left largely up to the viewer rather than presented as an interaction on-screen.

SPN and ST are narratives that are almost exclusively about men and heavily dominated by male characters and masculinity, specifically hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). SPN and ST both emphasize narratives of power through dominance and victory and the lack of women characters in both canons only underscores the narrative thrust. SPN and ST strictly advocate dominant masculinity. SPN especially emphasizes homosocial interactions by showing the two brothers consistently together and working toward mutual goals. As Kimmel (2010) notes, men feel like they are in power while they are in a group but do not feel they are powerful as individuals. Further men require approval from other men but this need for judgment also creates a sense of fear of other men and this is apparent particularly within the presentation of masculinity shown in SPN. SPN’s presentation of norms relies on some of the more violent and regressive types of masculine gender norms, for example the condoning the use of violence more generally and specifically violence against women, bullying, and gay-bashing to maintain traditional male privilege and authority (Katz 2010 [1999]; Katz, Jhally, Earp, and Rabinovitz 2013).

SPN’s presentation of masculinity is predicated on domination, thus to be considered “men” Dean and Sam must dominate others. This struggle for dominance impacts the relationship between the two men within the narrative, creating a sense of tension and struggle

between them. Dominance even characterizes more light-hearted teasing, from prank wars to dialogue such as when Dean calls Sam a “bitch” and Sam calls Dean a “jerk.” The dialogue is said in such a manner that the audience can conclude this is how arguments/teasing end with the pair of brothers frequently. This very short example of dialogue does “double duty” within the masculinity contest in the narrative, first by establishing conflict as a way to domination, and second by establishing masculinity as the absence of femininity (Connell 1987; Connell [1995] 2005; Kimmel 2005; Kimmel 2010) through the use of “bitch” as an insult, however jokingly. The use of “bitch” as an insult, or the use of the suggestion of femininity as an insult, is only the beginning of the narrative of misogyny SPN shows. Adding in the repetition of dramatic images of violence against women, particularly sexualized violence against women, the small number of female characters, the practical non-existence of women of color (four within five seasons), and the continual “fridging,” or killing off of female characters to generate a story arc for male characters (Simone 1999), the show is firmly problematic in its representation of masculinity and cultural values about masculinity and allows no room for alternate presentations of masculinity. The show upholds hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), specifically through the character of Dean, as paramount and ridicules or even kills off characters that fail to meet this standard.

ST shows this same sort of masculinity contest but on a smaller scale. While there is the larger contest within the narrative arc between Kirk and Nero, most of the real conflict happens between Kirk and Spock. Kirk and Spock are used as examples of differing types of dominant masculinity; Kirk is cast as active and physical, oriented toward the “Give ‘em Hell” masculinity in Brannon’s (1976) typology that advocates violence whereas Spock is the logical and detached scientist, closer to the emotionless “Sturdy Oak” masculinity (Brannon 1976). While Kirk is



shown to be supreme in the masculinity contest between the two, the viewers are asked to simultaneously embrace and reject pieces of their identities, even the ones that are considered traditionally “good” or “masculine” (Brannon 1976). Ultimately, the fight ends by showing the combination of logic and action as the most effective measure; that is, neither Kirk *nor* Spock is the ultimate expression of masculinity and, rather, that logic subjugated to action is the best, or most productive, outcome. While the majority of the film’s narrative is extremely neo-liberal (i.e., focused on competition, lack of state intervention or “interference” by those in a position of authority, individualism) and centered on traditional masculine values, this combination of upholding Kirk and Spock together as the best practice makes ST fairly different from SPN. The other examples of masculinity shown in SPN often denigrate the use of logic, reason, and dispassion in their masculine characters. Generally, those that are shown with those character traits as dominant are the characters that are presented as “evil” or “bad.” SPN is particularly reliant on the connection between logic and evil as long-term planning is what drives the overarching narratives within the seasons and across the show but that planning is *always* done by the villain of the piece. While the Winchesters and their allies do show instances of logic and forethought, these moments usually are only episodic and are in reaction to actions taken by their narrative foils.

In the next section, I will be describing how these presentations of masculinity are reconceptualized and transformed by consumers. The creation of fanvids allows vidders to create new stories and iterations of the characters within the canons that fall upon a spectrum of “convergence” to “divergence.” That is, fanvids run a spectrum between vids that consistently uphold the narratives, values, ideologies, and representations found in canons to vids that completely reject the narratives, values, ideologies, and representations in canons.

## *Gender in Fanvids*

Fanvids across the two fandoms tend to twist the representations of gender shown within the canons. While fanvids, overall, tended to focus much more exclusively on male characters, there were instances of highlighting women and men of color (e.g., “Fortune Days” in ST). In comparison to the canons themselves, the fanvids provided much more intersectionality and representation, even if the vidders had to work in the gaps provided by canon or extrapolate outside of the given canon to create something new (de Certeau 1984). Further, while masculinity was still shown as paramount within the vids I analyzed, this dominance only came through a numeric count as opposed to a narrative one. While there was an obvious overrepresentation of men, particularly white men, as the narrative leads in vids, this trend was *not* accompanied by any trend to glorify or uphold traditional masculinity. Instead, vidders were much more likely to deconstruct masculinity through role reversals or the attribution of traditionally feminine characteristics to the male leads. This was especially apparent when looking at the intersections of gender representation and sexuality, which I will discuss in the next section.

The “breaking” of masculinity is an overarching theme within vids for both the fandoms, even vids within ST which were much more likely to portray or show women substantially within the narrative. This trend seems to mostly be built on a theme of *disempowerment* when considered across the canons. The predominantly white male characters become less masculine by default when their sources of power are removed or they are put in situations in which others, generally women or men of color, have power over them. “Poker Face” is a particularly potent example of this as the narrative within Talitha78’s vid is one in which Spock, narratively coded as biracial, shows physical and sexual dominance over the white male lead Kirk. In ST vids,

Spock and to a lesser extent Uhura, Chekov, and Sulu become the points of reference when addressing power and representations of intersectionality (Collins [1993] 2004). Uhura, as a woman of color, and Chekov and Sulu as presentations of alternative ethnicities<sup>64</sup> – while their various ethnicities are never specifically addressed – all provide a contrast to the predominantly white American masculinity embodied by Kirk. Spock provides an ethnic representation that is, essentially, one-step removed. As an alien/non-human, Spock becomes a symbol for ethnicity.

Spock receives the most amount of attention within vidding and vids draw attention to his relationship with Kirk as central both to the canon and the vid narratives. The preeminence of Spock as a character within the fandom, as seen through the vids I analyzed, is interesting in what it potentially reveals about the interests and tastes of the fannish audience. Hunter (2000) in his analysis of the movie *Showgirls* argues that the popular response to a movie rarely has a connection to the fandom response and, even for the purpose of academic study, is mostly irrelevant. This divide between meaning and interpretation between groups is clear in the way Spock becomes a central and driving figure in so many of the ST vids. Kirk is the lead of the movie and the character that carries the story; essentially the audience is watching what unfolds through his eyes, his perspective, and his emotions. While there are scenes in which that narrative lens shifts from Kirk to Spock, those perspective changes are not enough to present Spock as an equal lead character within the movie. Further, many of Kirk's accomplishments are founded on Spock losing confrontations and contests with Kirk. While the canon eventually presents the two men *together* as the most viable leadership option, that narrative choice is only made possible by Spock's ultimate subordination to Kirk. Within the fanvids I analyzed, Kirk's place as narrative lead is usually usurped by Spock. Even vids like "So What?" which keep Kirk

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<sup>64</sup> Chekov in the original TV series was a particularly controversial character as a Russian with a prominent role and moderate amounts of power on a television show that was airing in the midst of the Cold War.

as the point-of-view character in the vid's narrative, still empower Spock to a place of narrative importance. In contrast to the ST canon narrative in which Kirk's achievements are all firmly placed on the shoulders of Kirk, "So What?" ultimately credits Spock for Kirk's achievements as it is Kirk's own desire to out-do and show Spock up. Kirk is the main character and the point-of-view character but he is not the driving force behind the action that takes place within the vid, Spock is. In "Poker Face," the perspective switches back and forth between Kirk and Spock but the action is usually centered on Spock.

This emphasis on Spock within the fanvids is interesting in light of several things. Spock, as a non-human, is both the most visibly addressed example of racial/ethnic difference within the canon narrative. While there is representation of other (human) ethnicities in the presence of Uhura, Sulu, and Chekov, that difference is never addressed narratively in the way that the human/non-human divide is within ST. In a sense, despite casting ethnic actors within those parts, ST essentializes the divide between dominant and minority groups with a line of "human" and "non-human." This becomes something of a problematic narrative when ethnicity is presented as a metaphor and "non-white" or "minority" has now been cast as "alien" or "non-human." Further, Spock is not just identified as "non-white" within the narrative, he is essentially biracial and struggles between the two different ethnic identities he carries (i.e., Vulcan and human). This narrative casting as "less than human" or "other than human" could potentially be why many vidders identify with and portray Spock as a powerful or dominant character within their vids, especially if past research and assumptions about the character of members of fandom being predominantly women are true (e.g., Bacon-Smith 1992; Bury 2005; Jenkins 1992; Meyer and Tucker 2007; Penley 1992).

Women are using fandom to reverse power dynamics they are confronted with daily; instead of Kirk, as a representation of dominant hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), the fanvids are usurping that power and privilege and assigning it to the representation of an “oppressed” minority. I use the term “oppressed” here warily as, while Spock does encounter conflict and prejudice from other Vulcans when he is a child and during the scene in which he is granted admission to the Vulcan Science Academy, and verbally in the form of McCoy later in the movie, there are no real examples of systemic or institutional oppression (e.g., his life chances are not impacted by his biracial status). However, the presence of that verbal (and in the case of his introduction scene physical) prejudice and discrimination make him the most likely candidate to stand in for “oppressed group” within the narrative. Uhura is likely the next closest in narrative form, as Spock attempts to assign her outside of the Enterprise. However, this is narratively neutralized (Sykes and Matza 1957) by Spock claiming he only does this because of their personal relationship rather than her gender or race. Regardless of the actual place of narrative oppression within the canon, fans identify with Spock far more frequently than they identify with Kirk.

Interestingly, this trend does not exist in the same manner within SPN fandom and videos. Where Spock, a character that represents the “other,” is the key character in most ST vids, SPN vids instead embrace the dominant male leads and then work to *undermine* the very narrative that makes Sam and Dean dominant. This trend to altering the masculinity shown on screen is not, however, coupled with a desire to show non-white masculinity or women in vids (judging by the lack of both within my sample). This suggests both a desire for alternative narratives or narratives that offer different representations of masculinity but also potentially a case of internalized misogyny. The term “internalized misogyny” is typically used to indicate

when women internalize sexist values, attitudes, and behaviors and then enact on those values in their self-concept or their dealings with other women (Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, and Stewart 2009; Tosone 2009). Internalized misogyny can be seen as similar to Du Bois's idea of a "double consciousness" (2009) in that through media – and culture more generally – women are constantly forced to see themselves through the "male gaze" (Mulvey 1975). The combination of wishing for alternate narratives for men and the absence of women within vids in my sample overall provides an interesting paradox. Essentially, vidders welcome alternatives to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) for men but ignore alternative paths for women – or simply ignore women altogether.

This is interesting both in the sense that women are generally assumed to be vidders behind these narratives and due to the way women originally created the field of vidding (Coppa 2008; Jenkins 1992; Jenkins 2006a). However, these are fairly divergent attitudes and behaviors being displayed, as societally men are often policed more strongly and sanctioned more harshly for gender deviance compared to women (e.g., Kane 2011; McGuffey and Rich 2011; Thorne [1993] 2008; Wingfield 2009). So vidders are simultaneously breaking the gender boundaries by creating cultural space for men to deviate in terms of their gender and sexual expression but that space is still limited only to white men. The paradox, of course, comes in two forms: first, that it is women attempting to carve out this cultural space about men and women whom consume the products of these transformed narratives about men and women whom encourage and ask for more of these transformed narratives about men. Secondly, there is paradox of the inclusion of Spock as a central character. While Zachary Quinto, the actor who plays Spock, and all of the

other actors portraying Vulcans within the movie are white<sup>65</sup> Spock is *narratively* biracial as the product of two different species. Spock is, by default, othered according to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and accordingly othered within the narrative of the film as well.

Vidders embrace the representation of diversity Spock provides and then go further to give or highlight Spock as someone with power and control even despite his narrative losses (generally and to Kirk specifically). This creates two points of divergence. First, in terms of moving away from narratives about primarily white men and second that Spock's alternative narrative is not about *taking away* a man's power but *giving* Spock power. Vidders are empowering Spock rather than disempowering him the way they frequently do with Kirk, Sam, or Dean. This is, of course, juxtaposed by the *lack* of empowerment offered to female characters overall, Uhura being the sole exception to this rule. A possible explanation for the lack of women overall is that vidders do not see women as viable characters to vid. This is partially a practical equation and partially a cultural one. Essentially, for these canons, women are not present within the narrative which leaves very few women for vidders to portray. Vidders are unable to work with things that do not exist in canon as "Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor" obliquely points out when commenting on the ST canon. There simply is not enough screen time of women and female characters for vidders to use, compared to the screen time and action allotted to men.

Culturally, however, these vids hint at a media trend that advocates the internalization of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975) and other misogynistic principles held within media. The lack of women in vids also points to our lack of cultural space for female stories and narratives that involve women more generally. Or more specifically: we do not have cultural space in which

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<sup>65</sup> Star Trek: Voyager (1995-2001) did feature the character, Tuvok, a Vulcan played by black actor Tim Russ in a senior command position but Vulcans throughout Star Trek's history have largely been played by white actors.

girls and women are allowed to be the *heroes of their own stories*. Women are continually turned into objects within media (e.g., Mulvey 1975) and thus taught to view themselves as objects. Penley (1991; 1992; 1997), drawing on Russ (1985a; 1985b) describes the act of writing fanfiction, particularly slash fanfiction, as both feminist and subversive because slash creates a fantasy world where equality between romantic partners can be achieved when the two partners are the same sex in a way that equality cannot be achieved between heterosexual partners. While the “equality theory” of slash is debated both by academics and members of fandom, I see some support for this idea when I looked at the vids being produced within the fandoms I explored. However, rather than equality through the exploration of empowerment, as Penley (1991; 1992; 1997) suggests, what I am seeing in vids is *equality through disempowerment*. Rather than attempting to raise women to the same status as men (which would be practically difficult in terms of vidding), vidders are instead pulling male characters *down* to the status that women generally occupy. Where Penley (1991; 1992; 1997) generally argues slash is a subversive act, I believe this disempowerment is paradoxically oppressive and subversive.

Male-dominated vidding narratives are oppressive for women, particularly when created by women, because they continue to perpetuate the lack of cultural space for women’s stories. Further, when women are introduced within vids, they are presented in very rigid and gender normative fashions. The vids are especially problematic when considering issues of race and gender, such as “If You Say Nothing At All,” which implies that women of color are only good as silent support for the men in their lives and furthers the media trope of black women as sexually available (Collins 2004; Collins 2009) In this sense, Horkheimer and Adorno are right when they describe the futility of media as escapism:



Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality ([1987] 2002:116).

Horkheimer and Adorno are arguing that the cycle the culture industry and media creators produce is one that encourages even more consumerism of media being produced by the culture industry; the very objects that foster a sense of powerlessness within reality are the same objects that are used to forget reality, creating a never-ending spiral of consumption. This spiral is further enhanced by the subconscious awareness we have of the media messages as well as things such as short advertisements or billboards that continue to sell consumers gender values and norms along with products (Goffman 1979; Jhally and Killbourne 2010). Within this spiral, we lose the ability to retreat or refuse to engage, particularly because our peers help enforce the cultural industry's wishes by deriding, ridiculing, or ostracizing those that do refuse to participate. While Horkheimer and Adorno ([1987] 2002) are speaking more generally about mass media and mass culture, some of this criticism applies to the ways in which fans negotiate representation in canons. Women consume media that highlights and glorifies masculinity and men while simultaneously sexualizing and, often, infantilizing (e.g., "damsel in distress") femininity. Women who consume these narratives begin to internalize those same narratives and then perpetuate and share those narratives, often through simply adopting representations of masculinity and rejecting representations of femininity, repeating and keeping the ideologies of gender hegemonic. Fans have, in essence, been programmed to see masculinity as empowering or pleasurable at the expense of femininity. Fans, especially female fans, have been taught to oppress not only themselves but other women. This was a result I did not ultimately expect to see within my findings. I was not expecting the sheer number of vids that would uphold cultural values rather than renegotiate or reject cultural expectations of gender. The privileging of the

white masculine perspective within vids is one that continues to perpetuate the cycle Horkheimer and Adorno ([1987] 2002) describe as women encourage other women to consume and glorify masculine/male-centric media.

Despite Penley's (1991; 1992; 1997) arguments that the act of writing slash is both subversive and empowering, Tosenberger (2007), citing fan concerns with Penley's "equality theory," points out that the popularity of slash may paradoxically be oppressive because it continues to privilege masculinity and the male perspective while removing cultural space for women's stories, even when women are the storytellers. I do not believe Horkheimer and Adorno ([1987] 2002) are completely correct when removing all agency from consumers when they speak of the powerlessness of escapism. While men are numerically overrepresented as main/point-of-view characters within vids the *narratives* about what white masculinity means within vids were frequently very subversive as those narratives were about disempowering and dismantling masculine ideologies. Althusser argues that ideologies are simply conceptual frameworks "through which men interpret, make sense of, experience and 'live' the material conditions in which they find themselves" (Hall 1980:33). When this is applied to fanvids, particularly the vids within my sample, the obvious answer is that these vids are created and bounded both by the canon they have to work with (unlike fanfiction or fanart, which is less restrictive in terms of what a fan can create) but also the culture in which the fan lives. The vid is not simply a way for a fan to engage with a canon, creating a vid also taps into engages with the larger culture. So for fans, vids are a chance to "make sense of, experience, and 'live'" (Hall 1980:33) a culture that privileges masculinity. Further, vidders are consistently *rejecting* those canonical and cultural views of masculinity and replacing them with traditionally feminine traits such as emotionality, openness, caring, and empathy. Vids that do not explicitly reject

hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) by replacing those characteristics, such as Loki's "Acid," often reframe hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) in such a way that the qualities that are considered "necessary" to be considered masculine are all seen in a negative light. In Loki's "Acid" the aggression and physicality displayed by Dean and Sam are not actually glorified but rather (literally) demonized. The connection between being possessed by a demon (e.g., "Through A Mirror Darkly") or being a serial killer (e.g., "Acid") with the traits of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) is a subtextual rejection of those traits. The viewer of those vids is not supposed to glorify or celebrate Dean and Sam but, rather, be horrified by their actions. To put it more simply, vidders are attempting to do two things. First, they are attempting to recreate their lived experiences as women, in which masculinity is often something to be feared, through the eyes of men. Essentially, vidders are recreating what hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) looks or feels like specifically to women. Secondly, they are attempting to reproduce the experience of disempowerment and devaluing of femininity by applying those concepts to masculinity and shaping narratives in which dominant white men experience the lived experiences of disempowerment and devaluation.

### *Shipping, Sex, and Relationships*

The place of relationships has long been of paramount importance within fandom and has often been noted by researchers as something unique. In the early days of academic research on fandom, in which researchers were more likely to see fans and fandom as a deviant activity, the connection of sexuality to being fannish was something researchers saw as integral (Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1992; Jensen 2001). Even within the media portraying a "fan's" story, the

representation was usually sexualized within the sixties, seventies, and eighties (Sabal 1992). Essentially, being a “fan” was seen as an inherently sexualized act; this is particularly true for women, who are seen as becoming fans due to sexual desire for a celebrity. When academics began looking more in-depth at fans and fan culture in the nineties there was almost a prurient interest in the ways that fanworks discussed sexuality and relationships. Slash, or the focus on relationships between two men, was of particular interest (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Penley 1991; Penley 1992). Even today, the academic interest in fan shipping and the fan obsessions with relationships between fictional characters or fictional relationships between real people in the case of “Real Person Fic” (RPF) is of high interest. Even within this dissertation shipping takes a preeminent spot within the analysis as I see shipping as central to the narratives that vidders are creating. Further, shipping is a bonding activity within fan communities and created points of entry for many of the viewers. In the case of some of the more unknown vidders, the ship may have been the sole point of entry for viewers in contrast to more popular vidders in which previous knowledge of their work may be all viewers need to watch a vid in fandoms in which they are unfamiliar.

Further, like gender, some of the most interesting pieces of the vids I sampled had to do with expressions of sexuality and relationships more generally. For the most part, vidders preferred to portray romantic relationships but there were instances of platonic relationships, mostly constructed between blood or found family. Vids such as “Circus” were not overtly romantic or sexualized, perhaps due to the sheer number of characters involved within the vid. “Circus” used the entire main cast of ST to create a narrative about Kirk’s leadership style. The intensity of the focus on shipping overall, however, helps reveal an important cultural narrative embedded within fan communities: you are only whole if you are part of a pair. The most

important relationship, according the vidding fandoms I sampled, is a romantic relationship. Further, those relationships are only acceptable when between two people, rather than any sort of poly-relationship (e.g., threesome). Largely, that relationship is seen as a heterosexual one though the popular culture has been changing with the introduction of more LGBTQ+ friendly entertainment to the point that even Joe Biden cites the sitcom *Will and Grace* as part of his inspiration for his support of gay marriage (Berman 2012). This is one instance in which fan cultures have been ahead of popular culture because slash fiction, art, and vids have been popular for decades (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Penley 1992). In some ways, the sheer ubiquity of the representation and glorification of queer relationships within fandom makes the act much less subversive than it was when academics first started exploring slash fiction. Now, after decades of slash being on the outskirts, even occasionally within fandoms, slash has a dominant place at the “shipping table,” to the point that even media producers are counting on slash fans and the enthusiasm of slash fandom to help do their own advertising for them. For example, when the social media accounts for the MTV television show *Teen Wolf* honed in on fan outrage at the lack of inclusion of slash couples – particularly the extremely popular pairing of Stiles/Derek from *Teen Wolf* -- from an *Entertainment Weekly* (EW) online poll about which “couple you’re shipping like crazy.” MTV then used that outrage to increase their number of followers and website views when fans shared, liked, or tweeted about the EW exclusion (Romano 2012). It stands to reason that cultural and media producers, then, have long been aware of the power of fandom and slash fandom in particular and in this case the cultural diamond (Crane 1992) is reversed in that media producers follow the will of media consumers in terms of providing LGBTQ+ content.

If the *existence* of LGBTQ+ content is no longer subversive the question then becomes if the *narratives* of slash are subversive. Like with the representations of masculinity, slash within vidding is simultaneously conformist and radical. The narratives themselves are almost troublingly conformist, particularly because many of the narratives rely on the sexualization of violence. While the trend is something I found within both fandoms, two vids became emblematic of the sexualization of violence I saw: Sacrificious's "John the Revelator" in SPN and Talitha78's "Poker Face" in ST. SPN especially had many vids devoted to the sexualization of violence, particularly from the vidder Loki, but "John the Revelator" stands out in terms of how that sexualization is crafted. In fact, what makes both vids stand out is the way the sexualization of violence is crafted. Generally, when we talk about the "sexualization of violence in media," the discussion centers on the two words that are assumed within the phrase; realistically, what we are talking about is "the sexualization of violence [against women] in media."

"Poker Face" is more explicit in its sexualization of violence with the construction of the scene on the Enterprise bridge between Kirk and Spock, putting Spock in the role of the aggressor and repainting what is a fight scene into Bondage /Discipline, Domination/Submission, Sadism/Masochism (BDSM). "Poker Face" is also distinct in terms of vids that show this trope due to the sheer amount of response specifically to that portion of the vid that condones, glorifies, and asks for more in the vein of "if it doesn't hurt it's not fun fun fun." "John the Revelator" stands out because it not only shows the sexualization of violence in its depiction of John Winchester, but it also exemplifies the objectification of a male character. Within "John the Revelator," John Winchester is completely on display and exposed for the gaze of the viewer, a gaze that is presumably a female one. This objectification is accomplished by showing the

sexualization of violence being done to John and showing John as a passive participant or victim without ever portraying or highlighting the person doing the violence to John. John Winchester is the only character of note within that vid which makes both the objectification and the use of the sexualization of violence trope all the more stark.

MacKinnon describes sex as part of the basis of male domination within society and that sexuality is a construct of that male domination (1987). As men have the control over the definition of sex and sexual pleasure, our cultural scripts are such that sex and sexuality are treated as “force. Force is sex, not just sexualized; force is the desire dynamic, not just a response to the desired object when desire’s expression is frustrated” (MacKinnon 1987:75). Essentially MacKinnon is arguing that women have been enculturated to accept dominance through scripts that romanticize or eroticize force as a reasonable or desirable form of lust or passion. Within the larger cultural trope of narratives of the sexualization of violence we can see some evidence of support for MacKinnon’s (1987) argument about the linking of male domination with sexuality in the research on rape fantasies and especially the type of fantasy Bivona and Critelli describe as “sexual,” which idealize aggressive seduction (2009; 2008). However, the ways in which vidders simultaneously adopt and *twist* that narrative trope, reconceptualizing it for different participants or audiences, suggests that MacKinnon’s (1987) argument is only correct on the surface. Like the “equality” argument of slash (Bacon-Smith 1992; Penley 1991; Penley 1992), what is going on is much more complex than past research suggests.

This complexity is both in the way the narratives are expressed – men predominantly as *victims* – but also by whom and for whom those narratives are expressed. If media fan cultures are predominantly populated by women, what does it mean that women are adopting and transforming narratives that are traditionally seen as harmful to women? Are these vids an

acceptance and normalization of the sexualization of violence or are they a critique and a rejection of the normalization of the narrative? Further, the vids must be taken in context of the positive response from viewers. “Poker Face,” for example, received multiple comments that remarked on the “sexiness” or “hotness” of the reworked scene between Kirk and Spock. These are all complex questions that can only be peripherally answered within the context of the methods I chose; I am judging and analyzing through a layer of abstraction, rather than asking these questions to vidders and people who view vids. This layer of abstraction makes untangling the complexity of the narratives, counter-narratives, and response to both even harder. What little I can see and understand, however, tells me that this trend of sexualization of violence within vidding does mean that our cultural conceptions about sexual scripts and the place of feminine and masculine bodies within relationships has changed and evolved.

While the scripts themselves remain the same, there is a domain expansion (Best 1990) to whom those scripts apply. Further, these scripts are becoming less hegemonic through practice within fan communities. Hebdige calls this the “style in subculture,” theorizing that the symbols are there to interrupt “the process of ‘normalization’” (1979:18). Essentially, what Hebdige (1979) argues is that the rituals of subcultures are there to reject the ideas of consensus or hegemony. Hebdige (1979) looked primarily at the punk subculture, a subculture built on resistance to dominant values, but I believe the argument applies to fan cultures as well. While fan cultures are built around the celebration of dominant cultural *artifacts*, a primary part of fan cultures is building new symbols out of the pieces of that cultural artifact that fail to satisfy; in effect, fan works are built out of *dissatisfaction* with the final cultural product. This dissatisfaction could be from wanting to see a different relationship highlighted (“shipping”), dissatisfaction with heteronormativity of the cultural artifact (“slash”), wanting to see different



parts of the canon universe explored (“original characters”), or even simply asking “what if” (“alternate universe”). This idea of dissatisfaction not only applies to the forms of the narrative but also *to the narrative itself*.

The symbols that denote the sexualization of violence in “Poker Face” and “John the Revelator” are all about disrupting the normalized narrative. If the normalized narrative is a narrative of the sexualization of violence against women, those vids represent the rejection of both that normalized narrative *and* the negative connotations associated with the narrative. When hooks talks about unlearning “heterosexist-based ‘eroticism’” (1993:355), hooks is embedding a cultural critique of the eroticism associated with domination and dominance, particularly dominance of men over women. What seems to be happening here in these vids is not only the expansion of the “dominance/violence as sexy” narrative to include men being dominated by other men and potentially women but also a rejection of Russ’s (1985b) observation that the deep emotional closeness in slash sex scenes is part of the fantasy for the women writing the stories. Rather than the end result being emotional, vids such as “Poker Face” or “John the Revelator” are about a *physical* pay-off. In many ways, I see the twisting of the narrative of the sexualization of violence as a return to the idea of interpellation (Althusser 2006; Fiske 2008). As vids are created by women and primarily *for* women, what this trend in vids may show is simply women reacting to the patriarchal subjectivity they are oppressed by, using the dominant masculine subjectivity found in most media, and then transforming the two to better express their own desires. Whether those desires, as hooks (1993) points out, are *also* part of the patriarchal values and dominant ideologies – or even need to be unlearned -- is a matter of debate that cannot be answered within in this dissertation based on the data I have. I do believe, however, both from the amount of vids that played with narratives of sexualized violence, the overall

positive response to those vids, my own experiences as a member of fandom prior to any experience as an academic, and finally my experiences as an “acafan” (Jenkins 2006b) who attempts to straddle the line between researcher and fan, that female fans may find fandom the only safe place they have to express “abnormal” desires, in which they are able to be dominator and subject, instead of dominated object. The role of the sexually aggressive woman – particularly in media – is still subject to the male gaze (Mulvey 1975) and a sexual double standard of judgment from other women and men is still in effect (e.g. Sagebin Bordini and Sperb 2013).

### *Class and Race*

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the canon sources, class and race were relatively absent and unexamined both within canons and fandoms. The only canon which directly deals with class is SPN, which relies fairly explicitly on a working class aesthetic as a basis for the show. This aesthetic is rarely directly addressed in the show other than through costume choices such as repeated outfits, set designs such as the showcasing of cheap motels, and occasionally the ways in which Winchesters gain money (e.g., gambling, credit card fraud). Nearly all the victims they encounter are presumably middle- to upper-class, positioned with large houses or nice cars. The few occasions in which characters are portrayed as explicitly lower class they are often portrayed as the villains<sup>66</sup>.

Throughout both canons, both class and race are what I call “subordinant” statuses. While class and race are master statuses and have significant effects on life chances (e.g., Acker 2011; Bettie 2003; Collins [1993] 2004; Conley [1999] 2010; Daniels and Heidt-Forsyth 2012; Feree and Hall 1996; Fields 2005; Glenn 1999), both are presented within the canons as only important

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<sup>66</sup> For example, season one episode fifteen, “The Benders,” in which a backwoods Minnesotan family is portrayed as cannibals, complete with rotten teeth and dirty clothes and bodies.

when linked to another status. For example, with SPN, class is only important when connected to masculinity. Dean embodies traits of a very specific type of working class masculinity while Sam, at the beginning of his character arc, exchanges Dean's type of masculine values for upward mobility. ST ignores class completely at all levels, equalizing the members of the crew through uniform, and race is never directly confronted except through the somewhat problematic abstraction of Spock (i.e., alienness as an allegory for race).

Given the limited portrayal of class and race in canons, particularly in comparison to gender and sexuality as statuses, it is no surprise there are also limited references and representation of class and race within vids. In SPN vids, there were very rarely any instances of race being shown at all. ST vids provide the best examples of visual representation of race but race is rarely engaged with in the narrative, beyond the example of Spock. One example that does – perhaps unintentionally engage with race – is Bleeding\_muse's "When You Say Nothing At All" (2011), which shows a relationship between Uhura and Spock in which Uhura is unconditionally supporting Spock. Spocklikescats, in a comment on "When You Say Nothing At All," mentions specifically that "While I'm not crazy about the lyric "when you say nothing at all," especially as applied to a woman, I \*will\* acknowledge that Uhura pours her very soul out of her eyes for her Spock!" (2011). Here we can see the intersection of race and gender in the vid; while Spocklikescats is commenting specifically on the aspect of Uhura supporting Spock silently, the implications of Uhura being subsumed by Spock as she stands at his side is even more problematic for Uhura as a black woman.

Class in vids tends to follow the same narrative conventions as canons. SPN vids are the ones that are most likely to make use of class-coded narratives simply because of the way the canon codes class through clothing, music, and geography. Ironically, while canons tend to

connect race and class, vids tend to connect class and sexuality. This is especially apparent in SPN vids, particularly Wincest vids. Most Wincest vids are premised on the idea that Dean and Sam only have each other. For example, Loki's "Two Twenty-Two" (2009), which is a mix of a monologue from Dean to Sam's dead body in season two episode twenty-two, interposed with scenes of them bonding previous to that event. Loki describes the vid simply, summarizing it as "He really tried to keep him safe" (2009). Within this vid, the explicit connection is made between class and Dean's job of parenting Sam; Loki is highlighting (in a way that is often understated within the canon) the way that Dean took over managing the household and became Sam's parent due to Mary's death and John's absence. The connection to sexuality is the implication that Dean and Sam's unusual closeness – which often creates the Wincest subtext – is due specifically to Dean taking over John's paternal role within the family while John is absent.

What is perhaps most interesting, in both the representations presented in canon and fanon, is the sheer invisibility of class and race. This is not necessarily a surprise, particularly for class (Sloan something 2009c), it does suggest that – both for creators and for fans – class and race are statuses that happen "in the background." Race can be explained fairly easily as the product of privilege. White has long been considered the default in America and, further, there is a sense that those that are white are "without" race. The term "race" is popularly applied to those that are non-white often without a real sense of "white" being a racial category with a history and culture behind it. In Hollywood, race is only visible *if the characters are non-white*. Until recently, this trend has not been true in the reverse; Hollywood has a long history of "racebending," or "situations where a media content creator (movie studio, publisher, etc.) has changed the race or ethnicity of a character. This is a longstanding Hollywood practice that has

been historically used to discriminate against people of color” (Cupiscent 2009). Racebending is a modern and inclusive term that accounts for actions such as “blackface,” “yellowface,” “redface,” and “whitewashing” more generally. Essentially, historically even characters of color were played by white actors so that even when “representation” was present, it was often nullified by the presence of a white actor under make-up. This further erased the presence of diversity within film and television. As I have pointed out before, that fans follow this is at least partially due to the constraints of vidding; vidders are restricted by the visual medium they have chosen and most vidders prefer to use *only* the canon as a source for vids. The few vids that incorporate outside materials within their vids are often using stock footage or artwork, such as Obsessive24’s “Fall of Man,” or are using alternate sources with the same actors, such as Loki’s “Fortune Days.”

The absence of class is simultaneously both as easily explained as the absence of race and more puzzling. As Ross (1998) points out, early films, prior to World War I, were actually very focused on the economic disparities present at the time and the issues of labor, even being used as an organizing tool by labor unions. After the first war, however, the film industry had changed, solidified in Hollywood, and was then subject to censorship. These conditions led to the studio-controlled Hollywood and a fear of being associated with “radicals” such as unions so both representation within films and production of films became a middle-class venture. Once Hollywood was middle-class, visible class narratives largely disappeared from the screen. Holtzman (2009), when examining a list of the all-time Top 100 box office successes in the U.S., found that only nine of the top one hundred focus on class themes. Further, Holtzman found that when class was presented it was presented within two contexts: (a) love conquers all, in which cross-class relationships are presented and class is shown as a barrier to the relationship to

overcome, and (b) the “bootstraps” narrative, which advocates that one can change their class circumstances through work hard and tenacity (2000). While my samples are not nearly as exhaustive as Holtzman’s (2000), I also noticed the linking of romance and love with class in canons (though far less in vids). Unlike Holtzman’s (2000) conclusion of “love conquering all,” class is much more likely to be a barrier when it is presented in canons such as SPN, particularly through Sam and Jess and Dean and Lisa’s relationships. With the former, Sam’s attempt at a middle-class and upwardly mobile lifestyle is destroyed specifically when Jess is killed. Similarly, Dean’s sole attempt at a middle-class lifestyle is through his promise to Sam to “settle down” with Lisa following the confrontation with Lucifer. In SPN, class becomes embodied within women and rather than love conquering all, within the canons I studied, class commonalities and class sensibilities are far more likely to hold characters back from romance.

In the next section of this chapter, I will move away from representation and *identity presentation* within canon and fanvid to look at the *cultural narratives* in both. *Cultural narratives*, or the underlying ideologies that are present and inform those identity presentations and narrative arcs, are the reflections of the values of a culture that produces a cultural artifact. The cultural narratives present within the canons of SPN and ST are actually fairly similar, relying on ideologies about male aggression and willingness to fight to underpin the stories being told. For example, SPN’s *do the right thing no matter what* is heavily linked to the narrative in ST of *rise to the challenge by any means necessary* because both cultural narratives reject the considerations of consequences. This *cultural narrative* is applied disproportionately to men in both canons which further embed an ideology of a particular type of masculinity – one that rejects potential consequences to actions as unimportant -- as “right” and valued within the canons. By following the *cultural narratives* from canon to fanvid, we can see which ones are

salient and relevant for media consumers; that is, this is where we can see what larger ideologies and values citizens tend to accept or reject from their media.

## CULTURAL NARRATIVES WITHIN CANONS AND VIDS

What I have done in this dissertation is identify several “strips,” or an “arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity, including here sequences of happenings, real or fictive, as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them” (Goffman 1974:10). Studying strips of canons and fanvids expose biases about race, class, gender, sexuality, and other statuses. These strips expose *stories* we tell about those statuses and, in effect, how well those stories are received by the audience and to what an extent other stories seep into and counter or compliment the stories of canon. Further, those stories expose our *cultural narratives*. Within this dissertation, I have used the term “*cultural narratives*” to describe the underlying ideologies that are present and inform the *identity presentation*, *narrative arcs*, and *narrative manipulation* that occurs in canons and fanvids. However, *cultural narratives* are also reflections of larger societal values and norms.

Looking at both the canon and the fandom provides insight into what overarching narratives people accept and adopt as important or central to their own personal narratives. Essentially, this allows me to see what audiences key into as the things they either believe in or *wish* they believed in. For SPN, the predominant *cultural narratives* were: (a) *doing the right thing no matter what* and (b) *evil is all I see*. The ideology behind the first theme is that individuals should attempt to do “the right thing” no matter the cost. The second theme is heavily influenced by the “politics of fear” (Altheide 2006; Altheide 2009) and reflects the realization of decreasing safety within our modern world post-9/11. For ST, the predominant *cultural narratives* were (a) *rise to the challenge by any means necessary* and (b) *the best defense is a*

*good offense. Rise to the challenge by any means necessary* indicates that any and all challenges must be accepted and the methods, regardless of what they might be, are ultimately justified by achieving victory. *The best defense is a good offense* advocates pre-emptive action to accomplish goals and as a form of protection.

Both sets of canonical *cultural narratives* are linked heavily to the presentations of masculinity within the canon. The *cultural narratives* of *doing the right thing no matter what* and *rise to the challenge by any means necessary* are embodied specifically within male characters (i.e., Dean and Kirk). Further, both themes advocate the use of violence to maintain or restore masculinity through gaining honor, respect, or status (Kimmel 2008). This is a trend that has been traced in other expressions of neoliberal masculinity, such as online sports and gaming (Voorhees 2015). Both *cultural narratives* also heavily encourage a conservative belief in individualism, as both SPN and ST's narratives consistently uphold Dean and Kirk's actions as the sole right choices and both characters make those decisions while rejecting help or input from other characters. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, both narratives essentially tell consumers that consequences do not matter; specifically, there will be no lasting consequences for the "heroes" and no one else matters. Similarly, *evil is all I see* and *the best defense is a good offense* are linked. Both *cultural narratives* are predicated on the ideologies that we should be afraid because everyone is an enemy. Further, the best method of removing enemies is to attack and destroy them before they can destroy us.

Interestingly, those narratives often diverge in fandom from canon. For example, a narrative that is strongly present within SPN is the idea of free will being paramount, linked to the individualism required within the *cultural narratives* of *doing the right thing* and *rise to the challenge*. In contrast, many of the SPN vids tend to reject this idea entirely and present



narratives that show free will as an illusion. This is an interesting transition between canon and fandom, particularly when viewed in light of a class perspective. The idea of “fighting for free will,” especially in a show that centers on working class masculinity, could be read as an allegory for upward class mobility. In contrast, “free will is an illusion” could be read as a rejection of the “boot-straps” and “hard work” narratives (Weber 2003) and an acknowledgement that class mobility is, in present society, very difficult to achieve and often requires factors outside of just “hard work.” SPN’s narrative is – despite the issues with representation of women and men of color – ultimately a hopeful one. Dean and Sam struggle through many different hardships but still are able to achieve their goals, though at a cost.

Within SPN vids, the narratives are often hopeless; centering on the inability to achieve goals or a character that wants things they should not have (or are not good for them). When goals are achieved, this is often paired in the contexts of either (a) great loss, such as “Fall of Man,” in which Castiel learns to understand humanity but only at the cost of his angelic divinity, or (b) insanity, such as in Loki’s “Acid,” where Sam and Dean are shown as successful serial killers. I suggest that the reason these sorts of narratives are appealing to fans is two-fold. First, those narratives of “lack of achievement” or “achievement only at great personal cost” are ones that resonate with the viewer because these are problems and emotions they feel in their own personal lives. Vidders are rejecting the attempts at emotion setting in canon and replaced those emotions with ones that more strongly reflect their own personal experiences; essentially, vidders set the feeling rules (Hochschild 1983) for the community with the vid, then wait for the response in comments to continue to establish – or transform – the feeling rules within the fan community. Secondly, this narrative is appealing because it is, first and foremost, highly dramatic. “Free will is an illusion” creates a sense of tension and of conflict, both internal and

inter-personal, in the characters, and is a narrative that is easily built in small gestures and looks – something on which vidders rely heavily.

I touched on this earlier in the chapter but another stark difference between canon and vid is through the rejection of “compulsive heterosexuality” (Rich 1986). Rich (1986) argues that the idea of “heterosexuality” is actually a political institution in society and hallmarks of that institution, such as marriage are regarded as normal, and are used as vehicles of socialization to teach citizens that heterosexuality is the paramount expression of sexuality and anyone that deviates from heterosexuality is “abnormal.” This idea is very much present in both SPN and ST canon as only SPN provides an example of a queer character that is killed immediately after expressing that queerness. In ST, queerness does not exist at all. Fanvids, however, reverse this reality by the overwhelming way *queering the narrative* is popular both in production and reception. From the “strip” (Goffman 1974) SPN and ST fanvids provide, being *heterosexual* is actually abnormal. However, this popularity is again heavily intersected with gender. In vids, homosexual *men* are the norm, while queer women, transgender characters, polysexual relationships, or asexuals are invisible. Essentially, vidders value queerness and find it normal specifically for white men. This is something that further erodes the presentation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) within vids by removing heterosexuality as part of a male character’s base of power.

I have speculated on this in previous chapters, indicating both internalized misogyny (Szymanski, Gupta, Carr, and Stewart 2009; Tosone 2009) and a gendered double consciousness (Du Bois 1994) as potential “culprits” for this discrepancy. Regardless of the reason, the preference in both mass-produced “culturally approved” media and the fan communities of “regular” people is toward male characters, stories featuring and highlighting male characters,

and exploring masculinity. This is hardly a surprise given that both the canons, and presumably, the fanvids I analyzed were produced by people living in a patriarchal culture. Even my analysis focuses much more on masculinity than femininity, partially because of the emphasis on men over women as characters in the canons, but also because I am also a product of a patriarchal culture and find it easier to understand and explain the actions taken by characters when viewing “men’s stories.” This is further complicated by the dominance of the movie and television industries by men and the larger cultural attitude of “men are from Mars and women are from Venus,” leading men to believe they cannot understand the actions, motivations, or inner lives of women – some of which is then reflected in the media produced (Tannen 2007). Women, when watching shows or movies about men, and then creating vids based on shows or movies about men, have to do less code-switching within our society as “masculine” is seen as the norm.

This is where the divergence gets interesting, however. Where masculinity is portrayed as the norm within our culture and within the canons I studied and even as something that is often heroic, fans crave something different. Vidders are, on the whole, rejecting this view of traditional masculinity, of ruggedness and lower class sensibilities, in favor of something darker. Within fanvids, masculinity is being reconstructed into something more complex and in extreme cases more villainous. We can see this especially in some of the more popular vids that I analyzed. For example, “Fall of Man” in SPN is roughly about how Castiel comes to terms with *becoming* a man; he is changing from something in-human to something distinctly human, patterned off the role models he has available of Dean and Sam Winchester. Almost all of Loki’s entire slate of vids focuses on transforming the heroes into something monstrous. “Poker Face” in ST depicts Kirk and Spock in the middle of a fairly destructive relationship and “So What” essentially makes Kirk a character centered on petty revenge. Fans are rejecting the masculinity

presented to them and repainting it as something grotesque but also simultaneously sexualizing and endorsing that violent sexuality.

Masculinity, in fanvids, has become the abject (Kristeva 1982). Alternately, if not abject (Kristeva 1982), masculinity is portrayed as “missing” something. In this sense, fanvids create a world in which a single man is not complete until he has found his partner. This partner is, predominantly, another man – such as in “Umbrella” with McCoy balancing out and supporting Kirk but can also be a woman, as in “If You Say Nothing At All.” This iteration of fanvid is usually the type that, rather than simply deconstructing traditional hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), does more to feminize the male characters being featured. I do not mean this in a sense that the characters themselves become feminized in actions, looks and clothing, or words, as this feat may be beyond the limitations of what a vidder can produce, but that the *roles* within vids that are given to men are traditionally feminine ones. The romantic narratives in vids are ones that are often about longing, wistfulness, and desire from afar as the point-of-view character. If the point-of-view character is not shown as someone acting passively in a romantic context, they are generally portrayed as active *only within a supportive role*. For example, Dean’s actions in most vids are shown as supporting his father and brother, rather than something he decides to do on his own. “Umbrella” focuses solely on what McCoy does to help and support Kirk; Kirk is cast as a hero *because* of the friendship McCoy provides. These are roles that are traditionally seen as “feminine” ones as the actions are much more centered on other people than on the character themselves.

There are discrepancies between SPN and ST vids. With SPN vids, there was an underlying desire to change or transform the *cultural narratives* and *identity presentations* in the SPN canon, particularly through the rejection of narratives of agency and heterosexuality. For

ST, however, there was very little in the way of change between canon to fanvid. Instead, ST vidders seemed much more concerned with elaborating relationships (e.g., rejecting heteronormativity). Despite critical vids in ST such as “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor,” vidders ultimately upheld *cultural narratives* found in ST. What is interesting about the *narrative manipulation* from ST canon to ST vid is how the vidders routinely changed the *focus* of those narratives. *Rise to the challenge* and *the best defense* are narratives that are heavily dependent on Kirk as a character and his displays of aggressive and violent masculinity. Within ST vids, Spock became a central focus character instead of Kirk which provides an interesting paradox. First, vids in which Spock is a central/point-of-view character are often ones that sexualize violence perpetuated by Spock (e.g., “Poker Face”). This is an expression of the same types of *cultural narratives* found in ST canon. However, outside of that sexualized violence, Spock’s more emotionless and logical “Sturdy Oak” masculinity (Brannon 1976) is idealized. Essentially, this means that the ST vids ultimately uphold the *cultural narrative of rise to the challenge* through the linkage of using violence within sexual situations. However, by using Spock, vidders are simultaneously rejecting the violent masculinity that upholds the *cultural narrative of rise to the challenge* within ST canon.

The change in SPN antagonists from canon to vid also provides a very interesting shift that rejects not only the violent and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) of the Winchesters (and specifically Dean) but also the *cultural narratives* such as *doing the right thing*. Rather than being portrayed as the heroes of the story, as they are in canon, the Winchesters are nearly as likely to be portrayed as the villains in vids. This is a drastic change from canon to fanvid. This could potentially mean that for vidders hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), particularly the type advocated

and represented in canon by Dean, is viewed as a type of toxic masculinity. An alternate explanation for influence is the love of villains. Villains are often more complex characters in motivations and rationales than heroes in stories. *Sympathetic* villains, or ones that have understandable motivations and backstories, are ones that especially seem to catch the imaginations of fans as seen through the popularity of characters like Marvel's Loki or Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter. So, it is possible that the idea of a heroic character turned into a villain is something that captures the imagination of vidders. A third potential explanation is that the vidders feel there is more drama – or even more challenge – in creating this sort of alternate universe. Finally, this change could also be where vidders are rejecting the lack of concern for consequences that arises from the *cultural narrative* of *do the right thing no matter what*. The focus of that theme is that the consequences are worth the end result of success; in contrast, vidders have created narratives where the consequences actually *become* the end result (e.g., Dean and Sam losing their moral centers in “Monsters”) rather than success.

Essentially, what the differences between canon and fandom show is a subtle sort of culture war. Generally, when academics talk about “culture wars,” they are discussing larger concepts; the differences between elite or “high” culture and “popular culture,” the ideological wars between liberal and conservative, or even the struggle against cultural appropriation and cultural imperialism fought by many non-Western nations. Instead, this subtle culture war is an internal one: the war of the media on its fans and the myriad ways fans work to undermine and transform the messages they are supposed to accept wholesale. This runs from criticizing the representation in a show (e.g., “Too Many Dicks on the Dance Floor”), to offering alternate interpretations of the representation provided in the canon (e.g., “Poker Face”), to rejecting the representation entirely (e.g., “Acid”). In this case, the media is most assuredly not a

representation of what people wish to see in their entertainment or, arguably, within the larger culture that provides that entertainment. Unfortunately, however, these canons do in many ways reflect the power structures and dynamics, the ideologies and narratives, of American society in ways that are both intended and unintended. The frames provided in the canons hint at the oppression of people of color, of women, and the toxic masculinity that we should be attempting to change, though these things are often couched as “good” or “right,” such as the continuing triumphs of Kirk – the hero – over Spock, his antagonist.

While many vids did continue to perpetuate some of the problematic representation – such as the dearth of female-centric vids overall – I found many more attempts at reconstruction or transformation than I did at canonical narrative acceptance. What fans want – at least shown through fanvids and the positive response to fanvids – is a much wider world than the one available on screen in canons. This is the subtle culture war: media producers attempt to recreate and tell narratives that reflect society. These narratives, however, are bounded by the prejudices and privileges of the people who produce them, which often create unequal or problematic representation for women and people of color. Fans, in turn, create new narratives in fanvids that provide something closer to (a) what they want to see (wider and more diverse representation, at least in terms of sexuality and masculinity) and (b) something closer to the reality they understand.

In the next section, I will move on to detail the limitations and strengths of this dissertation. Common limitations of qualitative methods include these findings being more easily influenced by my own biases, rigor is more difficult to maintain, assess, and demonstrate, and the volume of data collected is often more difficult and time-consuming to analyze. Common strengths of qualitative methods include the possibility of a more in-depth examination,

complexities that may be missed in quantitative/positivistic inquiries can be uncovered and discussed, and while the findings are not generalizable to the larger population, they can be transferred to another setting. In the next section, I will be looking beyond those common limitations and strengths to discuss the ones specific to this dissertation research.

## LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

Understanding the connection to emotion as people consume canon and fanvid is, perhaps, where this dissertation is the weakest. As I am viewing these narratives through an abstraction, that is, looking at the work and judging the context and emotions of content creators and content viewers based on my own observations, I can only make guesses about the strength of emotion that both canon and fandom creates in participants. This is a weakness specifically because fandom – and fans more generally – *require* passion. Passion for characters, stories, and the cultural objects they love is the engine that drives fans to create and interact with each other. Unfortunately, the context of emotion – beyond the obvious excitement and enthusiasm – is something that is largely absent from this dissertation and, when present, is more about the techniques a vidder uses to evoke emotion than the emotions themselves. While there is some emotional connection to be found in the comments, understanding and teasing out the deeper connections both vidders and commenters feel toward the canon, the characters, and other fans could use more work through interaction and interviews.

Secondly, this dissertation is weak in that it does not allow for “outside influences.” When discussing narratives within canon and, more specifically, vids, I am looking *only* at that narrative and rejecting any outside sources that may have inspired both the original canon creators – for example, SPN owes a narrative debt to H.P. Lovecraft – and the vidders. This is ultimately not within the scope of the dissertation but studying or including the larger context of



media influences during the time period of the canon/vid samples would have yielded more comprehensive information and understandings of my analytical categories.

Third, I have included no real examination of “fandom overlap.” Some fans, such as Eggblue, in hir comment on Obsessive24’s “Fall of Man” mention how they followed another BNF into a new fandom (2009). What drives fans to shift from fandom to fandom and if those narratives are similar is not explored in a wider sense in this dissertation. However, I did somewhat deliberately choose canons that have similar heroic narratives, largely due to their popularity and size but also because I would be able to more easily see narrative “overlap” between the canons due to similarities of genre.” Science fiction and fantasy have long been considered ways of commenting on society without actually addressing the current society. Aliens become stand-ins for ethnicities and monsters are allegories for the things we fear in ourselves and in our society.

Another major limitation of this dissertation is that I am relying heavily on canon/fandom popularity. To ensure that I gathered enough data for analysis, I deliberately chose fandoms I knew were popular when they aired/were released and remained popular today. The very popularity of the fandoms *should* encourage diversity in narratives within the fanvids. Due to the sheer number of people producing fanworks, this should allow for different types of narratives to emerge as everyone has a place to go within fandom to watch or read or interact with others whom appreciate the same sorts of stories they do. However, what be happening is that rather than encouraging diversity, larger fandoms repress diversity. As fandom is a communal activity, fan creators may produce work that fits a popular aesthetic simply to get people to look at their work amidst the deluge of fanworks available in a popular fandom. If enough people continue to create narratives that are considered “popular,” either by including popular “ships” or pairings,

or just writing narratives they know will get people interested and viewing their vids or reading their fics, this means that rather than encouraging diverse narratives, the sheer numbers within the fandom has stifled diversity in favor of conformity of narrative to gain followers. Fanvids certainly encourage a sense of similarity between narratives, if only because the narratives are bounded by the influence of two outside mediums in the form of the visual canon and the inclusion of outside music. Within the realms of fanart and fanfic, there is likely a greater diversity as the creation of both is not limited by sources outside of anything other than an individual creator's talent and imagination.

Another weakness of this dissertation is my lack of focus on the labor of fanworks such as fanvids. While my interest is primarily in how the story changes and what that reflects in our society, the actual labor component in the production of fanvids must be considered as well. I mean "labor" both in the sense of the actual work that goes into making the product of a "fanvid" within the "fan market," so to speak, but also the labor that may be coopted by the "official" media production companies for free advertising. The story presented in both products – canon and fanvid – is heavily affected by the markets in which fans are being drawn. Understanding that market and its effect both on canon and fanvids is something missing from this dissertation.

Finally, this dissertation is limited because I have no self-report data from vidders or commenters about their demographics. I am forced to rely on the assumptions made by previous researchers as this research was designed specifically to be content analysis. For the purpose of the dissertation, this demographic data was unnecessary; authorial intent was not really the point of what I was trying to understand by studying vids. While I attempted to be very conscious, both while analyzing and while writing, of the variability of interpretation I believe this very variability is part of what makes this research valuable. Lyotard (2009b) points out that the idea

of a “grand narrative” is essentially dead, similar to Barthes’s ([1970] 1975) conclusion that the “author is dead.” The post-structuralists of literary theory (such as Barthes) and the post-modernists of sociological theory (such as Lyotard) agree on the same idea: what the creator intended *does not matter*. Instead, the plethora of meanings that are possible within one work – essentially Barthes’s ([1970] 1975) “readerly” texts which invite multiple interpretations – are what give shape and form to the ideologies that we allow to influence us as individuals and as members of a larger culture. Theoretically, the interpretations and the re-interpretations I identified in canon, fanvid, and comments are all as equally valid as the interpretations the creators at each stage intended. So demographic data is not something I, theoretically, need to understand interpretations and meanings.

However, I am purposefully stressing the word “theoretically” when I write this because as much as I agree with Lyotard’s (1985) and Barthes’s (1977) conclusions that authorial intent is extraneous to the creation of the interpretations of others, I am also highly aware of the impact of status on identity formation (e.g., Collins 2000; Collins [1993] 2004; Goffman 1955; Goffman 1959; Goffman 1963; West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995) and the influence that status has on the cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986). This idea of *identity* is one that is simultaneously very present in cultural studies and fan studies but also conspicuously absent.

Sarup notes that:

Drawing on contemporary French theory, I think it could be said that identity is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accomplished by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. It seems useful to ask of every identity what it tacitly implies and what it does not say. Either all around or in its wake, the explicit requires the implicit. Just as in speech, in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said; we could say: in order to be anything, there are other things which one cannot be. What is important in identity is not only what it cannot say but also what is cannot be (2009:24).

Sarup (1996) is describing the paradox of identity and how, as an identity, we are both the things we *are* or believe ourselves to be but also what we are is influenced and bounded by the things we cannot be. For example, a white woman is constituted not only by white privilege and female oppression but also by the history and context that a black woman experiences as a white woman's foil and mirror within society. I believe this observation is also true for the stories we tell and share with others. The people and art worlds (Becker 1982) that create the canons I analyzed are bounded as much by the identities they hold as by the ones they do not. Identity influences the narratives we select and reproduce and the lack of demographic information about the people producing the content – either official canon or within fandom – makes this dissertation weaker. I can only make guesses and assumptions about demographics based on earlier studies, many of which are either outdated (e.g., Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Penley 1991; Penley 1992), qualitative studies (e.g., Bury 2005), or in most cases both. As far as I know, no one has attempted a comprehensive quantitative study to understand and map the actual demographics of fandom more broadly. While that sort of endeavor is neither within the purview of this dissertation (nor within my interests), I do think that sort of information would be extremely valuable.

One question I hear from people outside of either academia (though occasionally from those within it) or fandom when I describe my research is “so what?” The implication to asking this question is that people want to know what the real world impact is or what I could change or fix by doing this research. Early on, I had trouble answering this question, mostly because this research will not create any large changes; it does not strive to fix social problems such as poverty, hunger, or homelessness. I doubt any media creator will ever read this dissertation research so the likelihood of my conclusions having an effect on the cultural production of

Hollywood and the U.S. is fairly slim. After all, I am only researching *stories* and those are not as important as feeding the hungry or ensuring everyone has sufficient clean drinking water or any number of potential research projects with “real world impact.” However, the more I read about culture and narrative, particularly within social problems and social psychological research, the more I realized exactly how key those simple stories are to creating social change. There is no direct connection or no “real world impact” but the stories we tell influence how we see the world and the people in it and the stories we tell and believe influence how we feel about ourselves (Gubrium and Holstein 1998; Maines 1993; McAdams 1996; Plummer 1995; Polletta, Chen, Gardner, and Motes 2011). “Fan,” the people whom create and watch fanvids, becomes a central piece of their identity, with a backstory and a narrative of connection and interaction with others of its own.

Watching and seeing someone like you on screen – what is the essential part of representation – makes a viewer feel like they are visible and the things the character is doing is possible for the viewer as well. Watching representations of people who are different than us can influence how we think about those groups in real life. For example, SPN carries a problematic message about black masculinity that reflects a cultural consciousness that is still prevalent today. SPN constructs black masculinity, over the course of five seasons, as something to be feared by casting all of only *four* roles for black men as antagonists (or people who are turned into antagonists) to the Winchesters. This sort of representation likely had no direct influence in the events that lead to events such as the shootings of Mike Brown (Ferguson, Missouri), Trayvon Martin (Sanford, Florida), or others like them that started the “Hands Up Don’t Shoot” movement within the U.S. But representations such as we see in SPN contribute to the mindset that black men are dangerous (Swidler 1986). The reverse is also true. ST is a canon that – on the

surface, at least – presents women in roles of power, complexity, and relative equality to the men in the film. To a lesser extent, SPN could be argued as doing the same as well. This picture of “equality” given in movies and television shows obscures the very real inequality that women face in the work force (Acker 1990), at home (Carter 2011; Hochschild and Machung [1989] 2003), and society more generally. So one type of representation – ethnicity – reflects, exposes, and condones the inequalities people of color face, the other type of representation – gender – nominally ignores, obscures, and also condones the inequalities women face. Two very different types of representation, one that is negative and one that is positive, actually end up doing the same thing within our culture.

This is where I believe this research achieves “so what.” By investigating not only the canons but fanvids, I can see the differences in narrative and representation. I can see what fans value in contrast to what media content producers believe we should value. I can see the differences in focus and relationships. Swidler describes the idea of a cultural toolkit as the “symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in configurations to solve different kinds of problems” (1986:273). Swidler then argues that researchers should use these cultural toolkits to understand the ways people use bits and pieces from their kits to form “strategies of action,” or a “general way of organizing action (depending on a network of kin and friends, for example, or relying on selling one’s skills in a market) that might allow one to reach several life goals” (1986:277). What I am seeing within this dissertation is the ways in which vidders are specifically negotiating those cultural toolkits they have available to them by confirming existing stories, rejecting existing stories, or offering alternate stories. Narratives in fanvids become a proxy to see those changing *cultural narratives* and, more specifically, which

pieces of and what ways those narratives are used as a specific type of organizing action, something that has been understudied in other research on fans.

In the next section of this chapter, I will briefly discuss potential avenues for future research and ways this dissertation could be a starting point for gaining a larger understanding of fan culture, fan practices, and the ways consumers and media producers continue to manipulate and change stories to suit their personal needs. Expanding or changing methods and analytical strategies could potentially yield deeper and more comprehensive results, widening our understanding of the ways in which stories are intricately connected to our identities and relationships with others.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Using my own research as a starting point, I have mapped four potential approaches to future research, including expanding this type of analysis through the more-easily accessible fanfic, examining less popular canons/fandoms, attempting a research design that tries to account for identity and demographics, and extending the analysis beyond the initial transformation process from canon to fandom. This dissertation is simply a “snapshot” taken at one small point in time in two popular fandoms. The popularity of SPN and ST is still strong, largely due to the new content being released for both. SPN is moving into its eleventh season and a second ST has been released; both canons have content that were excluded from this dissertation as well as fandom content that was *also* excluded from this dissertation. The landscape and content will be completely different in another ten years, both in terms of the types of stories that are being produced by Hollywood but also the stories that are being reworked by fans.

The real process of understanding socially changing narrative is one that must be ongoing and deep. The first way of going deeper would be by looking at change over time both

within and between fandoms. I try to do this to a limited extent in this dissertation but I believe looking at fanworks over a longer span of time would be more productive. Secondly, I focused on an understudied area within the broader field of “fan studies”, which traditionally focuses more on fanfiction. Fanfiction would have been just as an effective gauge of narrative and representation shift over time, perhaps even more so given the sheer numbers of fanfiction available compared to fanvids. Further, fanfiction offers a wider range of entry to fans into fandoms, as creating fanvids requires specialized equipment and knowledge, making the gate people have to climb over to become “vidders” compared to “fic writers” is much higher. Reproducing a dissertation like this with fanfiction would allow for a longer time frame within data collection as a researcher could easily gather fanfiction from ten or twenty year periods in a single fandom.

A second avenue of exploration would be to move beyond simply looking at “popular” canons/fandoms. Comparing between more and less popular fandoms may yield very different – if equally interesting – results regarding the diversity (or lack thereof) of narratives available. There is a possibility there is no difference, of course, as many fans are not involved in just one fandom. So a BNF in a fandom as large as SPN may become interested in a smaller fandom and bring followers with them simply due to their status. Investigating this difference could provide a deeper understanding of representation and *cultural narratives* present both within canons (i.e., why is this type of story more popular than this other type of story?) and fanvids (i.e., are vidders encouraging diverse *identity presentations* and *cultural narratives* regardless of the size of the audience?).

The question of the impact of personal biography on media narratives that we identify with or narratives that we reject is one I am deeply interested in. Is, perhaps, part of the reason



fans are driven to create fanworks such as fanfic, fanart, or fanvids due to the exclusion of stories and representations to which viewers can relate? Is fanworks a way of inserting themselves into the media? These questions are all intriguing ones, even if they often reject the more post-structuralist (Barthes 1977) or post-modern (Lyotard 1985) view of media, media producers, and media consumers. In the end, authorial intent *does* matter because identity is very heavily tangled with authorial intent. The sheer number of fanvids that I found that played with character identity in different ways – deconstructing gender, introducing disability, queering sexualities – speaks strongly to the connection between identity and intent. Unfortunately, this is a connection I cannot truly explore in these data. I can make hypotheses about the types of identities that are more likely to be accepted by fans, given the transformation from canon to fanvid, but I have no way to trace or link that transformation to the identities of the creators.

I believe patching these gaps within the research and this dissertation more specifically is the next step. Trying to better understand the connection between identity and creation, particularly in the context of creative communities as fandoms are, would enable us to better understand identity flux and other influences on identity expression. While we are always touched by pieces of identity, both in our internal worlds and in the external world, not every piece of our identity is relevant at all times. Looking at fandom – a leisure activity – could potentially give us a better understanding of what happens when those pieces of identities or roles are not as significant. Essentially, trying to find ways to better investigate the connection between meanings or interpretation – the central focus of this dissertation – and personal identity is what I believe is the next logical step for this kind of research. Representation is so important for identity; the simple act of seeing ourselves in television and movies, in books and games, enables someone to feel as if they are a valid part of society. The less representation there is for a

particular marginalized group, particularly if the representation that is given is negative, the more marginalized and invalid members of that group feel as part of a society. This connection between image and identity is one that I very loosely explored through examining the types and ways representation is present in both canon and fandom. Understand the people behind the computer screen, both through surveys or in-depth interviews, would further enhance our understanding of the connection between image and identity and, further, the ways in which fans transform both themselves as part of the larger fandom community and the images they see to reflect their own inner narratives more closely.

Another potential future avenue of research is to look at the continuing cyclical nature beyond just the canon to fandom process I have studied. Media producers do pay attention to the content fans produce and desire and use that to produce new content that caters more to those desires. This can, however, lead to situations of things such as “queerbaiting,” where shows tease at a homosexual or queer relationship without ever having the intention of following through. SPN, for example, is notorious for queerbaiting (Sloanesomething 2009a). The cycle continues when fans, again, take the content that is produced and tweak it to their liking. Griswold’s culture diamond (1994) places the cultural receivers (in this case, the fans) at the opposite side as the cultural creators. I would argue that Griswold’s conception is incorrect as the diamond does not truly take into account the reciprocal effect audiences and audience interpretation have on content production. SPN’s creators did not intend or expect the widespread popularity of “Wincest” or “Destiel,” but when they did see those pairings rise in popularity, they began to play to their audiences.

This is a subtle culture war playing out between creators and fans regarding the idea of visibility. I do not mean visibility in the sense of representation, as I have focused on in the rest

of this dissertation, but visibility in terms of the importance of fan contributions have on media producers and the cultural objects they create. Understanding the “next” step in the chain, that is, the effect fan contributions have on media producers and cultural objects is not within the scope of this dissertation but would be an important step forward. I mentioned SPN as a show notorious for queerbaiting; this would not be the case if it were not for the fan demand for bisexual representation in the character of Dean Winchester, or the demand for more scenes and plots that use the chemistry between the characters of Dean and Sam or Dean and Castiel. It is through fan demand that queerbaiting is actually possible on SPN. Even prior to the internet and the closer communication possible through social media such as Twitter, Tumblr, or Facebook, network executives were concerned about fan responses to shows and movies in the form of letters (Sabal 1992). Now, however, that one-to-many communication has been expanded by social media and fans feel a sense of propriety about their favorite shows *because of* that expanded communication. They are able to talk directly with writers, show runners, actors, and others involved in the creation process of their favorite cultural objects; through social media, fans feel as if they are part of the creative process.

Despite the limitations in scope and methods, I believe this dissertation is a valuable step toward understanding the position of narrative in our larger culture. Further, this dissertation provides a good starting point for multiple paths of future research. I have managed to essentially use the transformation from canon to fandom as a narrative proxy for cultural change – or at least for narratives fans want to see changed, such as the inclusion of more queer stories. I have also identified several types of narratives that are commonly accepted, regardless of their potentially problematic nature, such as the sexualization of violence or the emphasis on romantic and sexual love above all other types of narratives. These things point to deficiencies both in narrative and

in representation in the media we are producing in the U.S. as well as narratives that are stable and enduring, so much so that fans add them even when they are not present in canon. These are the stories our culture, right now, is built on; essentially, these are the narratives that are part of the cultural ideologies (Swidler 1986; Williams 1995) that reflect hopes, dreams, beliefs, and ideologies of the people within our society.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### *SUPERNATURAL SUMMARY*

The series begins in 1983 in Lawrence, Kansas at the Winchester house, where we meet father John, mother Mary, four-year old Dean, and infant Sam. The family is picture perfect until Mary goes to check on her infant son one night while John sleeps downstairs. She screams and John wakes up, rushing to Sam's nursery to check on his son and wife. Drops of blood fall onto his hand and looks up at the ceiling, where Mary, dressed in a white nightgown, is splayed out, bleeding from her stomach. Mary then bursts into flames. John grabs Sam from his crib and hands the infant to Dean, telling him to run. The house catches fire and we see the three members of the family left outside, on top of John's Chevy Impala, watching it burn down.

The show then jumps twenty-two years into the future, where Sam is attending Stanford, preparing for law school, and lives with his girlfriend, Jess. He is surprised in the middle of the night when Dean breaks into his apartment to tell Sam that their father is missing; Dean then asks Sam to come with him to search for John. Sam initially refuses but eventually gives in, agreeing to go for the weekend. The pair, still with the Impala we'd seen in the opening, journey and fail to find their father but destroy a "Woman in White"<sup>67</sup> in the process. Dean returns Sam to Stanford and leaves. Sam, when he enters his apartment, finds Jess on the ceiling in a direct mirror of the opening scenes with Mary and John. Dean, who had a "bad feeling," returns to the apartment in time to pull Sam out before it burns down. Jess's death convinces Sam to continue "saving people, hunting things...the family business"<sup>68</sup> with Dean.

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<sup>67</sup> Based on the legend of the "White Lady," this is a ghost associated with local tragedies in which the woman commonly loses her husband or children. The Mexican legend of "La Llorona" is a common example of a "White Lady."

<sup>68</sup> Season one, episode two: "Wendigo"

This pilot episode provides two very important details, first for imagery which will continue throughout the next five seasons and for characterization. The images of the three women in white (Mary, the ghost woman, Jess) all become symbols of femininity. By having all three characters wear white this taps into not only the grief and loss inherent in the “Women in White” mythos but connects white with innocence, love/romance, and death. All three meanings are connected to traditional Western symbols, such as the white lambs used in Biblical references as sacrifices, to the white of a wedding dress, and finally to the color white being associated not only with women in white but also the association with the Horseman of Death. Given the subject matter of the show and the later appearances of Death as a character, I believe two of the three symbols embedded in the white dress were very deliberate. The third – connotations of love and romance – may not have been deliberate in the same way but is there all the same due to the position of the three characters in romantic relationships.

Over the course of the first season, we discover that Sam had walked out on Dean and John to attend Stanford, fed up with the vagrant and dangerous lifestyle of a hunter and their authoritarian father. Dean, used to playing peacemaker between his younger brother and father, split apart from John and began hunting alone following Sam’s departure but still kept in contact with John. Dean, unlike Sam, idolizes his father and loves being a hunter. He appreciates the chance to be a hero. While they travel across the country, we find out that the being that attacked and killed Mary was actually a demon and John has gone “off the grid” to find a weapon which could kill the demon permanently (a gun made by Samuel Colt and enchanted to kill anything) and track the demon. Sam and Dean manage to find the Colt and meet up with their father to battle the demon, which eventually possesses and takes over John’s body. Dean shoots John in the leg with the Colt, so he survives, and the demon flees. The season ends with John, Sam, and

Dean in their Impala, moving away from the scene. As they escape, a semi-truck runs into the car and we see the three of them bleeding and unconscious.

Season two begins with Sam driving off the possessed truck driver and getting his father and Dean to a hospital. Sam is relatively unharmed and John wakes up with mild injuries shortly. Dean, on the other hand, is gravely injured and the doctors are unsure if he will ever wake up. Dean meets a “Reaper,” or a psychopomp, an entity that helps usher souls onto the afterlife, and tries to run from death. In the land of the living, Sam is searching desperately for a way to help Dean and is angry with John for seeming not to care that Dean might not wake up. What he doesn’t realize is that John has concocted a plan to call the demon that killed Mary to the hospital; Sam, when he discovers this, believes John plans to do it to kill the demon and they argue. However, John sells his soul to the demon: Dean is healed and in return John hands over the Colt and dies immediately after being able to see Dean to ensure the deal was upheld. Dean wakes up, he John and Sam have a conversation with each other. John expresses how proud he is of both Dean and Sam and asks to speak to Dean alone. Following their conversations, John leaves Dean’s room only to drop dead on the hospital hallway floor.

Dean spirals down throughout the rest of the season, both from the suspicion that John sold his soul to save him and from the weight of the information John gave him which he refuses to tell Sam regardless of how much Sam asks. They continue to work hunts while searching for more information on the demon. They gain some help in the form of other hunters, primarily Bobby Singer<sup>69</sup>, as well as discovering a hunter “hangout” their father was familiar with: the Roadhouse. The Roadhouse is run by Ellen Harvelle, the wife of a deceased hunter (who had actually teamed up with John in the past), her daughter Jo(anna) and an MIT dropout Ash. Ellen

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<sup>69</sup> Bobby appears initially at the end of the first season finale, “Devil’s Trap,” but is fleshed out more during the second season.

proves to be a valuable source of information, Jo accompanies Dean and Sam on a hunt, and Ash gives Dean and Sam the means to track the demon. They now call their prey the “Yellow-Eyed Demon” due to the demon’s unique characteristic of yellow eyes; most other demons they encounter display completely black eyes to denote possession. Over the course of the season, Dean reveals to Sam that the Yellow-Eyed Demon<sup>70</sup> had fed Sam his blood while Sam was an infant; this blood gives Sam psychic powers which, until that point, had primarily manifested as premonitions and visions. In one episode, Sam displays telekinetic powers to escape a trap after receiving a vision of Dean being shot. They discover this has happened to several other children Sam’s age. At the end of the season, Sam is magically kidnapped and transported to a deserted town in the middle of Montana along with two of the other psychic children Dean and Sam (Ava, who has premonitions, and Andy who can make people do what he wants by talking to them) had met through the course of the season, as well as two new psychic children. Sam finds out the town is a killing ground; all of the children are supposed to fight each other until only one remains to become the leader of a demon army.

Meanwhile, Dean and Bobby are desperate to find Sam after his disappearance and head to the Roadhouse to find help. They arrive there to discover the bar has burned; Jo and Ellen escaped but Ash dies in the fire. Andy uses his abilities to contact Dean telepathically to let him know their location before Ava, who had been trapped in the town for six months, kills him and turns on Sam. Jake, a black Marine, snaps Ava’s neck and distrusting Sam attacks him as well. Sam manages to get the better of Jake. Dean and Bobby arrive at the town and Sam, distracted by them, turns his back on Jake as he recovers and Jake stabs him in the back. Sam dies in Dean’s arms. Dean follows his father’s example and sells his soul to a crossroads demon to bring Sam

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<sup>70</sup> The Yellow-Eyed Demon’s name is Azazel, though this is not revealed until season three, episode four: “Sin City”

back to life and is given a year before his soul will be collected and taken to hell (the usual demon contract being ten years). Ellen shows up and gives Bobby, Dean and Sam a map Ash had left in the Roadhouse's safe of a location in Wyoming and information about Colt's gun. In addition to being a gun that can kill anything, the Colt is also key to a Devil's Gate, or a doorway to hell. The Yellow-Eyed Demon takes Jake to that location and forces him to open the gate. Dean, Sam, Bobby, and Ellen arrive too late to stop Jake from opening the door but Sam shoots him in the back and finishes him off as he begs for mercy. Demons begin pouring out of the mausoleum that acts as the Devil's Gate and Bobby and Ellen struggle to close the Gate. The demon manages to take the gun back in the chaos and threatens Dean, mocking him about his deal and asking him if Dean believes what came back is "one hundred percent pure Sam"<sup>71</sup>. John Winchester's spirit escapes through the door and manages to distract the Yellow-Eyed Demon long enough that Dean is able to take back the Colt and shoot the demon in the heart, finally killing him. Bobby and Ellen finally manage to close the Devil's Gate and Dean and Sam watch John's spirit flicker out of existence as he, presumably, moves on.

Instead of the regular twenty-two episodes a season SPN receives, season three was cut short to sixteen episodes due to the Writer's Guild of America strike in 2007-2008. The bulk of the season is spent by Dean and Sam trying to find a way out of Dean's contract with Hell and trying to track down and stop the demons that were released from the Devil's Gate. They discover that the contract is held by a powerful demon named Lilith from an "acquirer," or thief who works in the supernatural black market, named Bela Talbot. Bela reveals she has sold her soul at fourteen to kill her parents and brief flashbacks imply she did so to escape an abusive father. Bela's contract is also held by Lilith and when it comes due she begs Sam and Dean for

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<sup>71</sup> Season two, episode twenty-two: "All Hell Breaks Loose (Part 2)"

help and they refuse. Dean and Sam also meet Ruby, a “good” demon who takes an interest in Sam and tries to help him with his powers as well as claiming to be able to save Dean. Ruby gives the brothers a knife with the power to kill any demon. As the season ends, Dean, Sam, and Ruby track down Lilith – possessing the body of a little girl and terrorizing her family – and attack her, trying to kill her to end the deal. Lilith is unable to stop Sam due to his psychic abilities and flees before Sam and Dean can do anything to her. Dean’s contract comes up and hellhounds kill him and drag his soul to Hell. The season ends with a shot of Dean, in Hell, desperately shouting Sam’s name.

Season four begins with Dean crawling out of his own grave. He was brought back from Hell by an angel named Castiel, telling Dean Heaven has work for him. Dean, Sam, and Bobby work under Castiel’s orders to stop Lilith from opening the sixty-six seals keeping Lucifer in his cage in Hell. Sam and Dean’s relationship deteriorates as Dean discovers that Sam has been working with Ruby, even having a sexual relationship with her, during the months Dean was dead. Ruby had been encouraging Sam to use his demonic abilities, even teaching Sam how to exorcise a demon with his mind. Sam perpetually sides with Ruby against Dean about his abilities and their quest to kill Lilith. Dean makes a deal with the angels to try and save Sam only to learn the angels, led by archangel Zachariah, want to start the Apocalypse as much as the demons do so they can create a paradise on Earth (presumably without humans). The key to both sides are Dean and Sam; Dean is the only body fit for possession by the archangel Michael and Sam is the only body fit for possession by Lucifer. When Dean refuses to become Michael’s vessel, the angels trap him in Heaven. Sam track Lilith to a church and Sam manages to kill her. Dean, who has escaped with Castiel’s help, shows up immediately after Lilith’s death to reveal that Lilith had actually been the final seal needed to free Lucifer. Ruby begins to gloat as the



floor cracks and black smoke begins to flow up from under the ground. She had been in on the plan and loyal to Lucifer the entire time, leading Sam on so he could eventually kill Lilith. Dean kills Ruby and the season ends as Lucifer escapes.

The fifth season tells the story of Sam and Dean's struggle to kill Lucifer and keep their humanity against the assault from Heaven – urging Dean to consent to Michael's possession – and Hell – urging Sam to consent to Lucifer's possession – so the Apocalypse can finally progress. They discover they have a half-brother, Adam Milligan, who is killed shortly before actually meeting the Winchester brothers and his form was taken over by a monster called a ghoul. Adam, who is in Heaven, is approached by angels and offered a deal: the angels will resurrect his mother (also killed by ghouls) if Adam agrees to be Michael's vessel. Adam agrees and Michael takes him over. Dean and Sam attempt to kill Lucifer using the Colt only to find out that the Colt will not kill him or the inferior vessel he is possessing; they lose Jo and Ellen trying. After being unable to defeat Lucifer directly, they begin collecting the four rings of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse (i.e., War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death) so they can reopen Lucifer's cage and put him back in Hell. Over the course of the season, Dean and Castiel forge a tentative friendship while Dean and Sam grow apart. The finale comes with Sam agreeing to become Lucifer's vessel in hopes of being able to control him long enough to send Lucifer to Hell. Lucifer, in Sam's body, kills Castiel and Bobby, and hurts Dean while Dean scrambles to open the gate to Lucifer's cage. Michael, possessing Adam, shows up and the two prepare for their showdown. Sam, thanks to his deep bond with Dean, is able to regain control of his body long enough to throw himself – still containing Lucifer – and Adam/Michael into the pit. Dean, who had promised his brother to try and find a normal life if anything happened to Sam, returns to an old girlfriend Lisa and her son Ben to settle down. The final scene shows Sam under a

flickering streetlight outside of Lisa's house, staring in as Lisa, Ben, and Dean have a family dinner.

## APPENDIX B

### *STAR TREK* SUMMARY

The movie opens with a brief introduction to the main antagonists of the movie: the Romulan Nero and his ship the *Narada* the officer until he reaches a large cliff. The boy attempts to break and turn the car but fails. The boy dives out of the car just as it goes over off the cliff. The police officer moves close to the boy and asks his name; the boy answers “James Tiberius Kirk.” Next is the scene of a second young boy, Spock, with pointed ears and black hair in a bowl cut, in the middle of a complex mathematical problem at school. He finishes his problem and then is surrounded by three other boys. They mock the Spock for his half-Vulcan, half-Terran (human) heritage and Spock ignores them until one of the boys calls Spock’s mother a “human whore.” This finally causes Spock to react and attack the other boys. After this, Spock is shown being scolded by his father and told to contain his emotions. Following this, the scene shifts again to the future in the same hallway. Spock, now an adult, is talking with his mother, Amanda Grayson , as she tries to reassure him. Spock then enters the room they are outside of and addresses the Vulcan Council, of which his father is a member. He has been offered an invitation to the Vulcan Science Academy and a place in Starfleet. When a Council member mentions Spock overcoming the “disadvantage” of having a human mother, Spock turns down the Vulcan Science Academy invitation and leaves.

The next scene in a bar in Iowa and introduces the character of Nyota Uhura. Uhura is first shown wearing the short, red dress of a Starfleet recruit with her long hair pulled back into a ponytail. When she moves to order a drink, she is hit on by an obviously drunk Kirk and this action gains the attention of one of Uhura’s fellow recruits who attacks Kirk and starts a fight to stop Uhura from being hassled. The fight only ends at the arrival of a commanding officer:

Captain Pike. Pike recognizes Kirk as George Kirk's son and attempts to recruit him to Starfleet. Kirk initially rebuffs Pike but in the next scene we see Kirk driving a motorcycle to the shipyards where Starfleet recruits are gathering. He enters the flight and a female academy officer pulls a man likely five or six years older than Kirk out of the restroom. The officer forces him into a seat next to Kirk. As Pike announces the flight is cleared for take-off, the man turns to Kirk and announces he might throw up on Kirk before introducing himself as Leonard McCoy.

Three years later as Kirk, McCoy, and Uhura are advanced cadets at the Starfleet Academy, Kirk is talking to McCoy, explaining he is about to take an Academy test, the Kobayashi Maru, for the third time. McCoy is visibly frustrated, explaining that nobody passes the test and he does not want to be there to see Kirk fail again. Kirk then says, "I got to study" and the scene shifts to a bedroom. Kirk and Gaila, an Orion (green-skinned humanoid alien) female are on a bed together when they are interrupted by Uhura. Gaila forces Kirk to hide under the bed until Uhura discovers him and throws him out. The scene shifts to a simulated bridge deck; Kirk is in the captain's chair looking unconcerned and eating an apple. Both McCoy and Uhura look visibly displeased to be there. Kirk prevails and all the enemy ships are destroyed. The instructors in the room observing are baffled at how Kirk beat the simulation and the camera pans to show Spock, also looking confused, as he says, "I do not know."

Kirk is taken to a hearing to decide if he violated the Starfleet code of conduct by "cheating" during the Kobayashi Maru. Kirk immediately asks to speak to his accuser and Spock steps forward and they have a discussion about the purpose of the test (to experience fear of death and be able to work around it). The hearing is interrupted by a distress call from Vulcan and the cadets are assigned to various ships and ordered to attend to the distress signal from Vulcan. Kirk discovers he is not to be deployed because of his academic probation. Nearby,

Uhura is assigned, along with Gaila, to the USS Farragut. Gaila is happy with her assignment and Uhura is visibly angry. She approaches Spock and convinces him to change her assignment to the *Enterprise*.

While Spock and Uhura are discussing her assignment, McCoy sneaks Kirk onto the *Enterprise* with him. On the bridge, Spock arrives and is greeted by Captain Pike. We see Sulu, the helmsman, attempt to engage the ship to maximum warp speed on a course to Vulcan. The sound of the ship's systems flare up but the ship does not move. After a short exchange, Pike comments that Sulu left the "parking brake on" and Sulu disengages the ship's inertial dampeners so the *Enterprise* moves into warp following the other ships in the Federation fleet which have been ordered to report to Vulcan. As they finally get underway, Pike turns to an Ensign, Chekov, who he describes as "Russian whiz kid" and has him make a ship-wide announcement regarding the situation the *Enterprise* is flying toward. His thick accent makes interacting with the computer system difficult as the computer misunderstands him.

In the Medical Bay, Kirk and McCoy listen to the announcement and Kirk insists they stop the ship. The pair runs toward the bridge and bump into Uhura; the threesome rushes off toward the bridge. When Kirk busts in and asks Pike to stop the ship, he meets resistance from both Pike and Spock. Pike eventually lets Kirk explain his reasoning and Uhura backs up Kirk's knowledge. Pike orders the ship's shields up to full as they come out of hyperspace in the middle of a space battle between the *Narada* and the fleet and is hailed by Nero. Nero denies association with the Romulan leadership, identifies Spock by name, and demands negotiations with Pike. Pike stands and outlines a plan that sends Kirk, Sulu, and an engineer (Olsen) to approach the drilling platform that is currently attacking the planet Vulcan and rendering the *Enterprise's* transporters useless. While they are trying to stop the drilling, Pike will travel to the *Narada* to

meet with Nero, acting as a distraction. Pike then promotes Kirk to first officer, a promotion to which Spock immediately objects.

The action continues as Kirk, Sulu, and Olsen sky dive down to the platform. The drill stops, though Nero notes that the Romulan ship has managed to drill far enough into the planet's core that any attempts to stop them will not matter. He orders a piece of "red matter," taken from the ship the *Narada* captured earlier loaded into the drill and sent to the core of Vulcan. Meanwhile, as Kirk and Sulu's efforts with the drill have been successful, Spock orders Chekov to run scanners and decipher what the *Narada* had been doing to the planet's core. Chekov explains the planet likely only has minutes left and Spock tells Uhura to alert the Vulcan High Council and urge them to start a planet-wide evacuation. Spock goes to the transporter room to beam down to evacuate the Vulcan High Council personally. On Vulcan, Spock is able to find his parents and hurries his mother along to a spot where she and the other Vulcan High Council can be transported out and onto the *Enterprise*. While Chekov is able to beam the other Vulcans, including Spock and Sarek, Amanda is left behind. Spock is beamed to the Transporter Bay still in a kneeling position, his face covered with dirt and ash, reaching out to catch his mother before she falls into a crack on the planet's surface. The scene shifts to Sick Bay, while Spock's voice-over gives a quick update of his actions since the destruction of Vulcan. He leaves Sick Bay and we see Uhura follow him into the turbolift, or elevator, and stop the movement of the lift. She turns to Spock and embraces him, offering comfort.

We then see Pike, strapped to a table, and Nero talking on the *Narada*. Nero is questioning Pike about Earth's defenses and how to get past them while Pike is attempting to resist. In the middle of the questioning, Nero reveals his ultimate motivations and the reason why he has been attacking Vulcan and the Federation. Nero reveals that he was a simple miner and

the *Narada* was a mining vessel. He had a wife and was expecting a child while he was off of Romulus, his home planet, to work. While he was off-planet, the Federation and “Ambassador Spock,” who had promised to help, allowed Romulans “to burn while my planet broke in half.” He describes Spock’s inaction as a “betrayal.” Pike continues to refuse to help Nero by giving him defense information and Nero begins to torture Pike. On the *Enterprise*’s bridge, Spock is questioning his crew for more information and Uhura explains that the *Narada*’s trajectory suggests they are going to Earth. Kirk, who is seated in the captain’s chair, suggests intercepting the *Narada*. Spock resists Kirk’s arguments and orders the *Enterprise* to follow Pike’s last order and meet up with the rest of the fleet. Kirk objects strongly and tells Spock he is making a mistake. Spock reacts badly to Kirk’s assertion of authority, incapacitates him and then calls the security team to toss Kirk off the ship, landing on a deserted snowy planet called Delta Vega. Kirk digs himself out of the pod and is attacked by a large monster. Kirk runs and falls into a cave. He is about to be eaten when an older man shows up, waving a torch to scare the monster away. The man introduces himself as Spock. Like Nero and the *Narada*, this version of Spock (called “Spock Prime” in credits to distinguish the character as the “original” version from ST: TOS) is from the future who has traveled back in time.

The pair starts a fire and Spock Prime starts to explain before initiating a mind meld with Kirk, showing his actions regarding the star that went supernova and destroyed Romulus. Spock Prime leads Kirk to a Starfleet installation where they meet an engineer named Montgomery “Scotty” Scott and an alien named Keenser. Spock Prime convinces Scott to take Kirk, Keenser and himself back to the *Enterprise* while Spock Prime stays behind, implying that if he met with his alternate a disaster might happen. Spock Prime also tells Kirk how to handle Spock and take command from him when Kirk reaches the *Enterprise*.

Kirk arrives and fights his way back to the bridge to confront Spock. Spock expresses surprise at Kirk and Scott's appearance and questions them both. Kirk goads Spock about the loss of his mother and Spock loses control and attacks Kirk. When Sarek, Spock's father, ventures onto the bridge, Sarek stops Spock and Spock resigns command for being "emotionally compromised." Kirk takes over the *Enterprise*, dropping into the captain's chair with ease. Kirk devises a plan to rescue Pike and stop Nero. Kirk's plan to infiltrate the *Narada* and destroy the ship succeeds and they rescue a now-injured Captain Pike in the process. At the end of the film, Pike hands over to Kirk his captaincy and Spock Prime meets with Spock, encouraging the younger version to stay with Starfleet while Spock Prime helps the few remaining Vulcan people.



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