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The Supernatural Family - Fandom and Production

Bachelor's project in FILM2000

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IN THE BEGINNING

Supernatural is an American television show, filmed in Canada, that first aired on what is now the CW, previously the Warner Brothers, network back in 2005. The show centers around two brothers – Sam and Dean Winchester – who has spent their whole lives hunting monsters with their father John Winchester, as a result of their mother, Mary, being killed by one such monster when the boys were small. The show stars Jared Padalecki as Sam and Jensen Ackles as Dean, and in the first two seasons, Jeffrey Dean Morgan played the recurring character of their father John. Erik Kripke was the original producer behind the show, however he moved on after the end of the fourth season, and the show has since had a row of different producers, usually marked as an ‘era’ from one producer to another.

Originally, the show was never supposed to be one with a cast ensemble, but as the show developed and progressed, regular characters were added over the seasons, usually at least in part to how the characters were embraced by the fans. Mischa Collins, Castiel the angel, being one such example.

While the show itself is an interesting study in the development and execution of a tv-series that has since grown to become a cult-show, it is the aim of this thesis to look at the fandom surrounding the show and how the cast and crew of the series itself has continuously kept up both indirect and direct communication with its fans. Given that the show is now in its fifteenth and final season, where the final episode was set to air in the end of May, but has since been postponed due to the Corona-virus situation, it would be far too extensive to look at the show as a whole in relation to this thesis. For that reason, a few specific episodes and scenarios will be used as a baseline in which to establish precisely how the fandom has helped evolve and move the show forward in the fifteen years it has been running. Fan theories, the build-up of narratives and exploration of the characters through the eyes of the fans is an important part of what makes *Supernatural* what it is.

However, in order to truly understand how a fandom – specifically the *Supernatural* fandom – has been able to so heavily influence the narrative of the show, it is important to truly understand the workings behind a fandom and how a fandom is not only created but sustains and grows, and how such a fandom can contribute to the work at its core.

UNDERSTANDING FANDOM

Mark Duffett writes in chapter five of his book *Understanding Fandom* “any discussion of how anyone becomes a fan has to contain a theory of why fans are *who they are* and why they *do what they do*.” (p.124). Duffett states in this chapter that researchers has a tendency to look beyond the beginning of a fandom as if fandoms have always existed, and further claims that most researchers studying the subject of fandoms seem to categorize it as being one of two things; it is either “*primarily about fascination/obsession (entirely personal) or about contagion/hysteria (entirely social)*.” What Duffett suggests to counter these views is that we begin to understand it as *both* personal and social, within which another question rises; how can we bring together the personal and social in a productive way that unravels the mysteries of the phenomena? (p.125)

While the question above is undoubtedly of significant importance to fully understand a fandom, what is just as important is understanding how one may find themselves joining a fandom. As it is with anything, for one to develop an interest for something, it must be certain aspects to that ‘something’ that speaks to the individual in question. Take for instance myself and my falling into the world of *Supernatural*. Long before the show ever aired, the interest for the occult and the supernatural existed. And years before *Supernatural* came to be, other shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), *Charmed* (1998) and even *The X-Files* (1993) were among the shows that fascinated me for its content alone. *Buffy* did not only have teenage drama and family issues, it had vampires and witches, magic and what one logical may know is unrealistic but finds themselves invested in just the same. *Charmed* was a different take on the same genre. It was about three sisters who discovered they were not only witches, but there were evil of all kinds in the world and it was their destiny to be the fighters of that evil. While *The X-Files* was much more of a science fiction in comparison to the other two shows, it offered the same level of suspense in an investigative manner. Then along came *Supernatural* (2005), who quickly painted itself to be a combination of *Buffy* and *Charmed*. It is a show about family, good vs. evil, monsters that in the beginning were portrayed as all bad, until the show began an evolution of a narrative that quickly declared that things were not always as black and white as one might think. As a pre-teen at the time *Supernatural* first aired, these were all things that seemed quite compelling at the time, and before the show even aired, my specific interests had already begun to develop as a result of the shows that caught my attention at an even younger age.

In connection to this, Duffett refers to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who argued that “*Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier*” (p.129), which Duffett recognizes as Bourdieu classifying taste as a social system rather than a purely personal choice. (p.129). “*As they unconsciously strived to locate themselves in social space, each individual cultivated (mentally stored up) a personal stock of learned predispositions in what Bourdieu called his or her ‘habitus’.*” (p.130). Even so, it could be deemed far too easy to simply lean on Bourdieu’s theory in relation to fandoms. As Duffett points out, it may be more useful to attribute the French sociologist’s idea in a way it is used to look at how fans find their roles *within* a fan community. (p.131).

Another important aspect to understanding a fandom is recognizing the difference between fans and the common audience. It is possible to like a film, TV-show or a book without being part of a fandom. What separates the two is among other things the loyalty and dedication a fan devotes to the film/show/book as opposed to the regular interest of a common audience member. What seems an obvious key to each fandom is the shared passionate interest for the text in which the fans unite behind.

In the case of *Supernatural* the fandom began developing at a very early point. The show first aired in September 2005, and in October 2006 the very first *Supernatural* fan convention was hosted under the name of ‘WinchesterCon’. “*The concerted efforts of the mass media and internet fan community have made fame and franchises grow more efficiently than ever.*” (p.240). On the website fanfiction.net, *Supernatural* is the number one most written-about tv-show with more than 126.000 stories written as of this May 6, 2020. Numbers two and three on the list are *Glee* (2009) with 108.000 and *Doctor Who* (2005) with 76.000. And this is only touching the surface of what being part of a fandom, or simply referring to oneself as a fan, entails.

In this modern day and age with resources such as the worldwide web, where fans from different countries across continents can come together to share in a mutual interest, it is safe to say that fandoms in general have developed in significant ways. The beauty of being part of a fandom can be found in many things, for example one can look past differences such as religious and ideological beliefs and simply focus on what each member of a fandom have in common, namely the shared interest in a show such as *Supernatural*.

Duffett asks, ‘how do fans organize themselves collectively?’ and ‘is there any meaningful difference between a fan base and a fan community?’. He further refers to how academic

studies seem to have an assumption that a fan community is ‘pre-constituted’; ‘a set of norms against which individual fans measure up.’ (p. 243). Truthfully, there may be no one answer to these questions. To assume that every fandom is built the same, and that all members of a fandom have joined for the same reason, is problematic to say the least. There are several reasons why someone may join a fandom, and the way a fandom is built, or more correctly put, organized, varies from fandom to fandom. Comparing one fandom to another is naturally beneficial in an assignment such as this one, but that does not necessarily mean that one grows any wiser for it. If I were to compare the ‘Supernatural fandom’ to that of ‘*Glee*’ for instance, it is doubtful my conclusions would make much sense for the simple reason that not only are the two fandoms disparately different, but the shows themselves have hardly anything in common. An obvious point if comparing the two, is to once again mention how they are the two shows who have garnered the most fanfiction to this day. Obviously, there is something about both shows that clearly inspires a dedicated fan base to which people can relate to parts of each show. Perhaps it is the characters themselves, or the narratives, but it would be more beneficial, if I were to get some real conclusions to my comparisons, to compare my chosen theme, the ‘Supernatural fandom’, to perhaps the fandom of shows such as *Buffy* or even the NBC show, *Grimm* (2011). Both of which follows much the same outline as *Supernatural*. At the center of the show is a hero or heroes hunting monsters with a liberal amount of drama interspersed across the seasons.

So, how does one answer the questions posed by Duffett? While researching the topic of fandoms, it has become quite clear that most of such fandoms have their own websites where fans are encouraged to contribute, and grow their interest by sharing thoughts, interpretations and understandings of certain things. *Supernatural* has its own wiki fandom, a Wikipedia for all things *Supernatural*. It could not be much clearer than supernatural.fandom.com. A sight where fans from around the world can read – write – about the characters, the actors portraying the characters, the writers and producers of the show, as well as anything fandom related. One can find information such as where and when the first *Supernatural* fan convention was hosted, literature and articles written about anything remotely related to the show, and it offers an online community where fans can come together to discuss the episodes through commentaries and different forums. In addition to this, fans come together across a multitude of social media platforms such as Tumblr, twitter, YouTube, Facebook and so on.

When it comes to understanding a fandom, it could be argued that an objective study of a fandom would never give the proper insight to truly *understand* what makes a fandom. It is

my argument that to achieve the understanding Duffett points to, it is at the very least, an advantage, if not a necessity, to have some personal experience with what it means to belong to a fandom.

Here I would like to introduce the views of Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen, academic scholars who have specifically chosen *Supernatural* as the focus of several studies. One of their works, *Fandom at the Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationships* speaks to precisely the topic of this assignment; namely the relationship between the show's fans and the cast and crew of the show itself. They claim that it is difficult to pin down the definition of fandom because, as they put it, "the modes of fannish engagement are as diverse as the people who come to fandom" (Zubernis & Larsen, 2012, p.9).

In their research, Zubernis and Larsen expend a great deal of effort into the study of the number of different fan-spaces, or platforms. They claim that different types of fans seek out different platforms, finding one or more where they feel a sense of belonging and recognition. Since it first aired, now nearly fifteen years ago, *Supernatural* has been elevated to the status of being a 'cult-show', one that caters to the interests of a very specific group of fans and as such, while there is undoubtedly a massive fan culture surrounding the show, fans of *Supernatural* may feel as if this is not the case. It is no secret that the show has never been the CW show with the highest viewing rates, and yet the numbers have remained steady for the most part, precisely because of the dedication of the fans.

'THE MONSTER AT THE END OF THIS BOOK' – *A greeting to the fans*

With this newfound knowledge and understanding of how fandoms work, how can this be applied to *Supernatural* and not just in its entirety, but to specific episodes? Take for instance season four, episode eighteen, titled '*The monster at the end of this book*'.

In this late season four episode, the Winchesters discover a series of books titled 'Supernatural' in a comic book store. The books detail their lives as hunters down to the last detail, and they immediately begin to investigate, suspecting something sinister may be at fault. During their research into the books and the author behind them, going by the pen name Carver Edlund, they discover the 'real' presence of a 'Supernatural fandom' complete with fanfiction stories, websites dedicated to the 'books', and not to mention the concept of 'shipping'. They learn there are 'Sam-girls', 'Dean-girls' and 'slash fans'.

To quote Sam (Jared Padalecki), "as in Sam and Dean... together." To which Dean (Jensen

Ackles) replies, “they do realize we’re brothers, right?”. In the real fandom, the one dedicated to the TV-show, all of this is very real, and as Sam points out, it does not seem as if the fans care that they are brothers. Labeled ‘Wincest’, this ship has been a point of contention in the fan community, where some have viewed it as a taboo topic. Later in this thesis it is shown that it seems the show’s cast throws no judgement for the ship, after all it is all fictional. This is the first episode of the series where the fans are directly mentioned in an episode, but it is certainly not the last as I will get back to. However, this episode, was and remains, one of the most monumental episodes both in turns of story development as well as the beginning of a long relationship between fans and the show’s producers.

In the show’s early days, it was never the intention that the show would remain on air for fifteen seasons, let alone five, and while the show may not be as popular as other shows on the CW network, like *The Vampire Diaries* or *Arrow* to name a few, the true and earnest dedication of the show’s fans greatly contributed to keeping the show on air for as long as it has. As important as this episode was to the fans, it could be argued that it was just as important to the continuation of the show in the later seasons.

The author of the books, ‘Carver Edlund’, was later in the episode revealed to be ‘Chuck Shurley’, a man who it was revealed by the angel Castiel (Mischa Collins), both to Chuck himself and the Winchesters, was in fact a prophet of the lord who was destined to write what would eventually be known as *The Winchester Gospels*. The character of Chuck will later be revealed to hold an even bigger importance, much to the fandoms utter delight. The importance of this episode regarding the fandom, is, how the show chose to bring the very real ‘Supernatural fandom’ into the actual narrative of the story. To this day, the episode remains a big fan favorite, as many of the fan-centered episodes are.

In direct reference to what one may consider a fan phenomenon, in one scene of the episode, Sam and Dean meet a woman who is a self-proclaimed ‘superfan’ of the books, and has taken it as far as getting a tattoo identical to the one both Sam and Dean have, which in the show’s narrative is in actuality a devil’s trap used to protect them from demonic possession. It is worth mentioning that the woman in question is the publisher of the books, and the boys must pose as ‘superfans’ themselves, showing her their tattoos, to get her to reveal Carver Edlund’s real name and whereabouts.

While this episode does not necessarily have any real communication between the show's producer and the fandom, it was the beginning of a long and mutually beneficial and appreciated relationship between the two.

It can be argued that the relationship between the 'Supernatural fandom' and the producers of the show is quite unique in comparison to other fandoms, precisely given how truly interwoven the fandom eventually becomes in the show. The fandom becomes a part of a larger 'Supernatural family' through its dedication to the show, and the gratitude and mutual dedication to its fans that the show has a habit of giving.

THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS – *Fan conventions on and off screen*

Episode nine of season five is another episode that is both a fan favorite and a further evolution of the relationship between fan and producers. The episode description reads; "Sam and Dean goes to a 'Supernatural-convention' where fans of the books have dressed up as them and other characters from the 'books'. The situation turns scary when real ghosts turn up".

This episode aired in November 2009, but the first Supernatural convention was held in Nashville, Tennessee in October 2006. The real-life convention was titled "Salute to Supernatural", whereas the fictional convention in the episode was titled simply "Supernatural Convention". To the fandom, this was a highly amusing and entertaining episode where the producers were mildly mocking of the fandom, as well as addressing some of the topics frequently visited within the fandom. However, it seems to be an agreement between both the fandom and the producers of the show that the episode was meant as a tribute to the fandom.

In many ways, this episode brought together aspects of the real world and the fictional show, as well as paying tribute to the fans by bringing up some of the 'issues' that fans had debated through the first five seasons of the show. It sought to bring some of the fandoms wishes to life, as in the episode we are introduced to two characters LARPing (Live Action Role Playing) as Sam and Dean, who it is later revealed that the two are a couple. Hereby, in a way, granting the wishes of all the 'slash-fans' out there. The writers of the episode seem to have had a great deal of fun in being slightly self-deprecating and picking up on some of the issues in which the fans have at times been annoyed. One of the characters in this episode, a German

fan having dressed up as ‘The Hookman’ from season one of the show, points out when faced with three ghostly children, “Yeah, how original. *Supernatural* bringing in more creepy children”, and as all *Supernatural* fans are aware, creepy children is an often used cliché of the show, whether they are ghosts, demons or other monsters, and in one case simply creepy human children reduced to their most basic animalistic nature.

In *Fandom at the Crossroads*, Zubernis and Larsen often refers to the ‘safe space’ that fans seek out, and how important it is for many to keep some of the fandom secret to uphold that safe space. What the cast and crew of *Supernatural* is essentially doing with these ‘fan-tribute’ episodes, is bring the *Supernatural* fandom into the limelight, disparaging all notions of secrets and ‘safe space’. Perhaps though, in their own way, it could be interpreted as the producers behind *Supernatural* attempting to send the message that the show itself is a ‘safe space’ for its fans. The ‘Supernatural fandom’ have often been referred to as the *Supernatural family* by several cast and crew members, sending the message that the fans are as much a part of what makes the show as the people actually working on it.

It was argued by Mark Duffett that people seek fandoms in an effort to belong, and it certainly stands to reason that a large community such as the ‘Supernatural fandom’ offers precisely that. The beauty of a modern-day fandom is that one can belong to such a thing without necessarily physically meeting anyone belonging to said fandom. It is enough to simply have a working computer with internet access, and a whole world opens up where one can explore their interests without being judged by those who do not understand that interest. On the other hand, if one craves social interaction on a physical level, that could easily be accomplished as well, for example through fan gatherings such as conventions and other similar events.

“THE FLYING FANGIRL” AND THE RULES OF A FANDOM

However, as including as the creators of the show might be towards the fans, the fandom itself is not always as accepting or welcoming, sometimes it can even be cruel. Zubernis and Larsen shares a story of “*The Flying Fangirl*”, a woman who was so overcome with emotion at seeing one of the show’s stars, Jensen Ackles, at a *Supernatural* convention in Birmingham in 2007, that she proceeded to ‘attack’ him, and had to be forced away by security. Her lapse of emotional control led to her being ostracized in the *Supernatural* fan community, and showed that while there is much freedom to be found within a fandom, there are also rules one are expected to follow.

“[...] There are lines fans are not allowed to step over, even if sometimes you don’t know where they are until you’ve crossed one. But once you do, the fans themselves will let you know. And it will not be pretty.” (Zubernis and Larsen, 2012, p.117). As you can see, there is not only joy to being part of a fandom, but much like it is in any other society, if one does not obey by the rules, written or unwritten, one must face the consequences. In the matter of “the flying fangirl”, she was not only ostracized, but also humiliated and turned into an example of what *not* to do for all other members of the ‘Supernatural fandom’.

In the same chapter in which they speak of “the flying fangirl”, they also refer to another incident that happened at the same fan convention, titled *Asylum*, in which one of the fans asked Jensen Ackles for his opinion on fanfiction.

We were still reeling from the swift and lethal way that fandom turned on one of its own when another incident at *Asylum* brought to light one of the nastiest rifts within what until now had seemed like an idyllic fan community. A fan dared to ask Ackles his opinion on fanfiction, and the audience literally gasped in horror. Loudly. The actor responded to the even greater shock of the convention and the fans following along online, by saying, tongue firmly in cheek, “My favorite is Wincest.” Ackles’ decision to explicitly acknowledge one of the fan practices that fans would prefer to keep hidden took the question in an even more taboo direction, even as the actor eased his way out of further discussion by adding with a smirk, “I just hope my grandmother doesn’t stumble over it. (p. 117).

This incident brings us back to the first episode in which the fandom was included in the series, episode eighteen of season four as previously mentioned, where Sam and Dean discuss the reality of slash-fans, which in the Supernatural fan community is commonly referred to as ‘Wincest’. In the episode ‘*The Real Ghostbusters*’, this is once again brought up when in the beginning of the episode and the host of the fictional convention relays the panels of the convention, one of them being “The homoerotic subtext of Supernatural”, to which Sam and Dean look on in disbelief. Here a topic that has been practically taboo to mention in the fan community, is brought into the spotlight in a very real way that contributes to alleviating the shame that has surrounded ‘Wincest’ since practically the beginning of the show. Whether or not this has been effective in a way that members of the fandom feel more comfortable speaking of such things in the open today, is not for me to say, however it stands to reason that it makes it less of a taboo for those who follow that ship.

The characters previously mentioned who were dressed up as Sam and Dean at the convention, also serves to give the fans of a ‘Wincest’ a scenario in which their ship comes true.

FANFICTION – The real fan tribute

Episode 200 of *Supernatural* aired on the series tenth season, and quite fittingly as it was indeed a fan tribute, was titled “Fanfiction”. The episode itself centers on a story in which Sam and Dean are investigating the disappearance of a high school teacher, only to discover that students at the high school are putting on a musical based on ‘Carver Edlund’s’ books, which in reality is the story of their lives. In the form of young students portraying varying characters from the show, the fans get to revisit a cacophony of old beloved characters from the show. Mary and John Winchester, Bobby Singer, which was like a second father figure to Sam and Dean before his death in an earlier season, as well as Sam and Dean’s younger half-brother Adam that had not been mentioned in the show since season six.

Supernatural has throughout the course of its journey built not only a loyal fanbase, but a worldwide *family* of fans. In the book *Fan Phenomena: Supernatural*, edited by once again, Lynn Zubernis, there is a chapter written by Mary Frances Casper, specifically dedicated to the *Supernatural* family and how the show and the CW network from early on has encouraged the fans to create personal and meaningful connections to the show and the people involved in making it, both on and off screen. “Early on in the series, Dean’s cell number is given, and for a while the studio had it set up so that anyone dialing the number would hear Jensen Ackles reading the message: ‘This is Dean Winchester. If this is an emergency, leave a message. If you are calling about 11-2-83, page me with your coordinates.’ [...] So began the inclusion of fans into the lives of characters, and the characters into the lives of fans.” (Zubernis, L. (ed.), 2014, p.77). In the same chapter, Casper describes how a family grows from history, how stories and narratives change, myths are created and expanded and most importantly, the power a family the size of the *Supernatural* fandom holds. Through more than a decade of growing and spreading, the fandom has created websites, videos, online forums, conventions and ‘safe space’ for the fandom to grow into a family.

Episode 200, *Fanfiction*, is as much a retelling of the main characters lives and troubles throughout the seasons, as it is a retelling of the story that made so many people across the world come together in a common interest. The episode was monumental in many ways, not only marking the great number of episodes already aired, but also it could be viewed as the beginning of the end in some ways. There is no denying that the brothers at the heart of the show live an extraordinary, yet tragic life, and through watching their characters develop and transform, so has the ‘Supernatural fandom’, or family if you will.

The Supernatural Family exemplifies how storytelling creates cultural myths, which then become part of the fandom’s culture and identity. Myth is, in essence, a pool of beliefs and interpretations that create and bind unique cultures (Casper, 2007). Myths are shared through stories about the experiences and histories of supernatural or larger than-life personages (O’Flaherty, 1988); in this case the Winchesters, using language that gives ‘meaning and value’ to life’ (Eliade, 1963, p.2). As these theories are passed down, signs and their associated meanings build and identify communities by ordering facts and ideas (Barthes, 1972, Leeming, 2004). They become ways to demonstrate family membership, to indicate belonging, and to express family identity. The stories take on a life of their own, creating a family narrative that exists independent of the programme that inspired it. Outsiders may grasp the meanings present in family narratives, but lack the cultural experience to embrace them or see them as ‘natural’. (p. 77-78).

The musical, which is under production during the episode, is an excellent example of how storytelling ‘creates cultural myths, which then becomes part of the fandom’s culture and identity’. In the fictional world of *Supernatural*, the musical is the young director’s vision of what she has yet to understand is the ‘real life’ of Sam and Dean. As witnessed by various YouTube videos titled ‘Fans react’, this episode is high up on the list of favorite episodes for *Supernatural* fans all around the world.

Undoubtably the highlight of the episode, is the closing scene in which the cast of the musical put on a performance of “Carry on my Wayward Son”, which is as close to a theme song as the show has. The song has been used in every season finale since the series beginning, and for many fans, ‘Carry on my Wayward Son’ is synonymous with *Supernatural*.

FAN THEORIES BROUGHT TO LIFE

What has been lacking in this thesis until this point, is an account of how it can be argued that the fans have impacted the narrative of the show. In the episode first mentioned, *The Monster at the End of This Book*, there is a point in which the character ‘Chuck Shurley’ tells Sam,

“Obviously, I’m a God... I write things and they come to life. Yeah, no, I’m definitely a God. A cruel, cruel, capricious God.” After this episode, rumors and theories began dispersing among fans that Chuck was, in fact, God, and at the end of the fifth season, when Chuck seemingly disappears in a spark of bright white light, these theories grew even stronger. In season eleven, it was eventually revealed that Chuck was God after all, and it has later been stated by producers that it was not always their intention to have Chuck be God, but it was a good theory that made sense and the fans were thrilled to have their theory confirmed, even if it took six seasons for it to happen.

Another longstanding theory that had to survive through several seasons before it was confirmed, was the theory that the Archangel Gabriel, with whom the brothers had interacted with over the course of a number of episodes, was not killed by his big brother the Archangel Lucifer in season five as implied. This theory was confirmed in season thirteen, to the great pleasure of the fandom.

As it is, episode 200 itself was a fan theory, or perhaps more of a fan wish, come to life. *Supernatural* is by no means a show in which it is natural to have a musical episode, and yet through the extraordinary world in which the show lives, the creators discovered a way to make it happen, thus pleasing fans everywhere as well as creating one of the arguably best episodes of the entire series.

It is clear that the show’s production crew has gone above and beyond not only to please the fans and keep them engaged, but they have also taken the opinions of their dedicated fandom into thought when building the narrative of the series.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE SUPERNATURAL FANDOM

Through the various discussions, explanations and reasonings in this thesis, it has been pointed out numerous times that the ‘Supernatural fandom’ is more than *simply* a fandom, but a large international family from all corners of the world. Something about the show has ensured a level of loyalty and devotion among its fans that has not only resulted in a unique relationship between the fans and the creators of the show, but through their dedication the show has survived and *thrived* for fifteen seasons over the course of as many years. The intended goal of this thesis has been to reveal and explore the nature in which the ‘Supernatural fandom’ not only exists but is valued and supported by the very show they are fans of. It is undeniable that the show would not have lasted as long or become what it is if

not for the influence of the fans, something that has been acknowledged not only by the show's main cast, but also its creators. In this thesis, three episodes have been highlighted as important in the fan-producer relationships, but there are several more episodes who have done precisely the same thing, only in different ways.

Take for instance the season six episode, *The French Mistake*, in which Sam and Dean are unwillingly transported to an alternate reality by the angel Balthazar, in which they are actors Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles, and they are only portraying the characters of Sam and Dean on the television show, *Supernatural*. The episode is very meta, with the real-life actors playing their characters, playing the actors playing the characters of Sam and Dean Winchester. In this episode, the actress who played the demon Ruby in season four, who in real life married her counter-part Jared Padalecki, is indeed 'Jared's' wife in this episode, referred to by 'Dean' as "fake Ruby".

Also, this is one of the episodes in where direct communication between fans and cast took place. Mischa Collins, who plays the angel Castiel and has been a regular member of the cast since its fourth season, is well known among fans on twitter. During this episode, where he was in fact playing himself, he sent out a tweet at the exact same moment as his on-screen self did so on the episode. To the great delight, and shock, of the fans following his twitter-account.

While writing this thesis, there has been surprises, revelations and a growing understanding of what not only it means to be part of a fandom, but also the power such a fandom can wield. The creators of the show have taken great pains to include fans in many aspects of the show, and there is no doubt that the effort is appreciated by the fans. However, as in the case of "the flying fangirl", the fandom can be harsh and unforgiving of its own members and does not always approve of narratives and story or character development, as I suspect it is with most fandoms.

Whether a fandom is drawn to a film, a television show, a book or anything in which a fandom can be built around, at the core of every fandom is the *fans*. As suggested early on in this thesis, being drawn to a fandom can amount to an array of reasons. It could be individual, social, it could be both and it could be neither. What is a given is that a fandom offers a place of belonging along likeminded peers with similar interests who will not judge your chosen niche, and that one can find acceptance and support in the community.

Something else that has become abundantly clear concerning the ‘Supernatural fandom’ and *Supernatural* the show, is that it is very much a give-and-take relationship. Both parties benefit from the relationship in different ways; the show by maintaining a steady and loyal fan following, and the fandom receives what it desires through the show and what it can offer the fans.

To conclude, there are numerous ways in which the ‘Supernatural fandom’ and producers of the show communicate with one another. Whether it is through the stars appearances at fan conventions, ‘fan tribute’ episodes, or the fans reaching out the show through the various platforms they use, the communication is very much there. Even as the show is rapidly approaching its end, the fandom has grown through fifteen years and will undoubtedly continue to grow in years to come as the show is discovered by younger generations or revisited by early fans. The ‘Supernatural fandom’ is truly a force of its own, and without its existence, *Supernatural* the show would not be what it is today.

