

Supercorp to Destiel: The effects of queerbaiting

Lauren Chapman

Student Number:9392784

Submitted: April 2022

Submitted as a dissertation to satisfy the requirements of the BA (Hons)

Degree in Sociology, Coventry University

Table of content:

Introduction	5
Literature review.....	7
Define queerbaiting	7
Examples of Queerbaiting.....	8
<i>Supergirl</i>	8
<i>Supernatural</i>	11
<i>Once upon a time</i>	13
Producers/actors.....	16
Fanfiction.....	18
Methodology.....	22
Research	25
Queerbaiting	28
Producers	31
Actors and Actress	33
Fanfiction.....	34
Discussion.....	36
Queerbaiting	36
Producers	38
Actors and actresses	39
Fanfiction.....	41
Conclusion	45

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all my friends and family members who have had to listen to me talk about queerbaiting for more than a year now, constantly.

A special thanks to Mark, Connor, Emma and Becky who have been supporting me throughout, I could not have completed my dissertation without your support.

Abstract

Does queerbaiting affect the LGBT community? This is a crucial topic to research, with queerbaiting being a new social concept, there has been minimal research into whether queerbaiting does affect the LGBT community. By conducting a questionnaire, I intend to find out if representation was significant to the LGBT participants. The participants believed that queerbaiting invalidated their sexuality, making them feel frustrated when witnessing queerbaiting. The participants stated that producers queerbait so that they would not lose viewers by incorporating queer representation in their shows, by queerbaiting they gain viewers and in turn increase their revenue. When it came to celebrities shipping queerbaited characters some participants felt apprehensive, but others found that it validated their sexuality. Finally, fanfiction does validate the participant's sexuality more than TV shows, as this is queer representation written by queer people, although fanfiction does not make up for the queerbaiting that producers show. Overall, these findings show that queerbaiting does invalidate the LGBT community's sexuality. By queerbaiting heterosexuality becomes the norm for society and other sexualities are viewed as invalid.

Introduction

This paper will be discussing whether queerbaiting invalidates the LGBT community. This is a new concept with minimum research undertaken around queerbaiting and the effect that queerbaiting could have on the validation of people's sexuality. There are a lot of TV shows; especially teen shows that will have elements of queerbaiting which could then be detrimental to the mental health of teenagers in their informative years whilst they are attempting to discover their sexuality with heterosexual characters being the normal concept on television. This is an indispensable topic because if queerbaiting does affect the validation of people's sexuality, then it should be understood and removed from media being replaced with actual positive LGBT representation, producers need to stop queerbaiting their characters just for viewership and revenue instead they need to give positive queer representation.

Mandhami and Lobo (2019) define queerbaiting as when producers hint and add subtext to a character's sexuality or to a queer relationship without explicitly stating their sexuality, this is done so that queer viewers will watch the program whilst keeping heterosexual fans engaged. This will then be delved into further by discussing whether queerbaiting reinforces a heterosexual society considering how queerbaiting invalidates someone's sexuality (Butler 2010). Halls (1993) theory of encoding and decoding characters will be discussed perceiving how producers will encode their characters and how LGBT audience members will decode those characters. Is the LGBT community looking for representation for the sake of representation or are producers truly encoding characters in a certain queer way to enhance LGBT viewership?

Producers leave the interpretation of a character's sexuality up to the audience and it will depend on the audience's background as to how they will decode the character's sexuality. Finding some examples of queerbaiting in *Supergirl* with Kara Danvers and Lena Luthor, where some fans have decoded their characters as romantic, with them sharing longing looks for each other and having similar dialogue to

other CW heterosexual characters that are in a relationship (CW being the abbreviation derived from the two parent corporations C for CBS and W for Warner Bros. Entertainment). *Supernatural* depiction with Dean and Castiel, as the producers have seen that some fans ship these characters, they have made jokes and references to their relationship becoming romantic in the program. Even going so far as to have a whole episode around them being in a romantic relationship. *Once Upon a Time*, Emma Swan and Regina Mills, share questionable dialogue that can be decoded to be romantic “How to get the Saviour to taste my forbidden fruit” (Ouatspec 2016). Regina chooses Emma over her true love; all these scenes and situations would have fans of the show believing that Emma and Regina were going to end up together.

Producers, actors and actresses have a role in the portrayal of queerbaiting. Producers are the ones who code the characters to display certain actions, they have control of how the characters act around each other, the dialogue and music that goes over the scenes. So, are they queerbaiting on purpose in order to gain more viewers or do they truly not understand what they are doing? For actors and actresses would it validate someone's sexuality more to know that the actresses and actors can also see the queerbaiting potential between their characters, or does this initiate false anticipation? The way that fans counteract the damage that producers cause from queerbaiting is by creating fanfiction. Fanfiction is a safe place where members of the LGBT community can take those queerbaited couples and characters authoring in a format that validates how the LGBT audience understands the representation of the characters. However, does fanfiction make up for the queerbaiting that producers do? These questions will be reviewed through a questionnaire that has been distributed to members of the LGBT community, discovering if queerbaiting does affect the validation of people's sexuality. The findings will then be related to the outcome of the literature review.

Literature review

Define queerbaiting

Queerbaiting is defined by Mandhami and Lobo (2019) as producers hinting and adding subtext to a character's sexuality or to a queer relationship without adding these characters or relationships to the show to keep their non-queer viewers engaged. To identify if a character is being queer baited is to look at how they dress the character, or how they speak and interact with the same sex; but to keep homophobic audience members watching they will never outwardly state that character's homosexuality (Ashbrook 2021). The reason why producers queerbait is due to society's compulsory heterosexuality, producers leave characters' sexuality up for interpretation, so that they still receive high viewership from both the LGBT community and homophobic viewers. The more that queerbaiting occurs in TV shows and movies the more the LGBTQ+ community will feel marginalised in society (Scott 2019).

Although even positive LGBT representation in TV shows can be harmful as Schneider (2018) reviews "Systematic structures of hegemonic heteronormativity show depiction of queerness", identifying that queer representation within TV shows is usually stereotypical, or the characters will only have homosexual subtext. Queer representation depicted in TV, or movies is mostly for the consumption of heterosexuals, queer people are represented in a stereotypical way, men being overly feminine and flamboyant or women being butch or stereotypically masculine. Queer people write their own representation through fanfiction, where characters are not stereotyped or are not murdered for the sake of representation (Bardley 2016 and Jowett and Frohard-Dourlent 2017). Queerbaiting causes a continuous cycle of the LGBT community being discriminated against in mainstream society (Schneider 2018).

Examples of Queerbaiting

Supergirl



Viewing *Supergirl* the relationship between Kara and Lena is constructed as romantic by some fans who use Supercorp as their ship name, if fans have a desire for two characters to be romantically involved, they will come up with a

(Louise 2018 Lena starring at Kara)
ship name, that is a mixture of their names or something that is prominent in their character, as Kara is *Supergirl* and Lena has a company called L- Corp, hence Supercorp. Though the producers say that the characters are just friends, their dialogue and scenes together do insinuate otherwise. Fierra (2019) found that even though the producers do not want to make Kara and Lena a couple they take a lot of effort in their scenes contradicting that statement, for example, in one episode Kara travels to three different countries to pick up Lena's favorite food then stating that Kara would break the law for Lena (even though Kara is the superhero *Supergirl*). At the end of this episode, there was a scene where Kara and Lena were staring longingly at each other, and romantic music was being played. Not only the longing looks and romantic music, but Kara and Lena share similar dialogue to the Flash (another CW program), Lena states "Supergirl may have saved me but, Kara Danvers, you are my hero" (*Supergirl* 2x12). This is the same dialogue that Iris said to Barry in their wedding vows in the Flash, "the Flash may be the city's hero. But you Barry Allen are my hero" (*Legends of Tomorrow* 3x 8).

Liszewski (2017) looked at the interaction that Kara has with Lena in Season Two compared to Kara's first love interest of Season one, James Olsen and, Season Two love interest Mon-El. With Lena and James, Kara giggles when either of them gives her compliments, they looked at each other longingly, however, compared to Kara's Season Two love interest (Mon-El) she did not look longingly at him or giggle at his compliments. Even in Season Five



(Kikiano n.d. Kara - left comforting Lena - right)

when Kara is about to go on a date with William, she asks for her sister Alex's advice on what top to wear, Alex says "blue always go with the blue" but on the date, Kara wears a purple top instead and then in a future scene with Lena we see Kara wearing the blue top. Fans were able to see that Kara had much more chemistry with Lena than she had with William, there was always underlining tension (Stacy 2020).



(Tenor n.d. Fan art of Lena on the left and Kara on the right kissing)

Even though the producers of *Supergirl* queerbaited Kara Danvers and Lena Luthor, *Supergirl* has positive representation, Alex Danvers came out in Season Two as a lesbian, when she started dating Maggie Sawyer, and in the final series married Kelly Olsen.

Supergirl also introduced the first transgender superhero, Nia Nul. It would be reasonable to concentrate on characters that are already part of the LGBT community within the show than to

continue to queerbait their audience with a possible relationship between Kara and Lena, especially when they could have just kept their relationship platonic (Rehrman 2021). The CW producers can see that when they queerbait the main characters Lena Luthor and Kara Danvers they continue to have an increased viewership of LGBT community, whilst maintaining homophobic viewers, CW understand that the LGBT community will continue to watch *Supergirl* in hope of seeing more positive representation. By having Lena and Kara have these pseudo-romantic moments and similar heterosexual dialogue utilised within other CW shows it is no wonder that fans have been decoding their exchanges to be romantic and believing that they will become a couple. However, because the CW has continued to queer bait their fans, they have invalidated their sexualities and reinforced a heterosexual view for society, if the CW left the representation at Alex, Kelly and, Nia, they could have shown the LGBT society in a positive light instead of continuing to queerbait their LGBT viewers.

Supernatural



(Cheeda 2020 Castiel on the left, Dean on the right)

boyfriends, as they are seen standing closer together. There are jokes and queer references in supernatural referring to Deans' sexuality, and references identifying the possible deeper relationship between Dean and Castiel. Collins who played Castiel stated that the showrunner had told him to play Castiel as a “jilted love” whenever he was around Dean, thus creating a queer subtext within their scenes making fans feel like they are not just going insane and viewing representation (Gennis 2014).

Supernatural has queerbaiting as Talbot (2020) discusses how fans have viewed the connection between Dean and Castiel from the very beginning, the subtext surrounding them is very strong, other characters in the show identify them as

The producers created an episode surrounding the fanfiction that has been made around Destiel. One fan stated how they had to stop watching supernatural as the queerbaiting just got ridiculous, season after season the producers continued to



(Cheeda 2020 Dean on the left, Castiel on the right)

queerbait. This caused fans to give up any prospect that the characters would become an item (Tenbarga 2020). The ship had even won the teen choice awards for choice tv: chemistry (Talbot 2020), so many fans have established a connection between Dean and Castiel that they won the award that so many canon tv couples have received.

Roach (2019) investigated the ship Destiel, attempting to identify Deans' bisexuality and viewing any possible toxic masculinity, analysing when Dean becomes uncomfortable when Castiel gets too close to him or when Castiel compliments Dean. The idea of Dean's subtext and encoding by the writers he is struggle with his sexuality; therefore, Dean would not feel comfortable exploring his sexuality due to the toxic masculinity of society and falling back into compulsory heterosexual conformity that society advocates.



(Dixon 2022 Fan art Dean on the left and Castiel on the right)

When it comes to the relationship between Dean and Castiel there is gay undertone, an example is when Dean asks Castiel to move out of his personal space but not before staring at Castiel, looking at his lips, this would signify bisexual panic. The producers also acknowledge and mock the relationship in a specific episode where they acknowledge fans shipping Destiel and dismissed any notion of romantic subtext between Dean and Castiel,

therefore invalidating fans who ship them together and believe that they have chemistry (Talbot 2020). Some fans just want confirmation of Deans sexuality, so they know that their sexuality is valid however, fans reject the idea that they are fetishising Dean and Castiel's relationship (Talbot 2020).

Once upon a time



(Didiq666 n.d. Regina on the left, Emma on the right)

Once Upon a Time portrays the queerbaiting of Reginas and Emma's relationship. Here are some examples of the dialogue that they share (Ouatspec 2016):

Emma- "I think that this, whatever it is between us, needs to end".

Emma saying that they are "unique, maybe even special"

Regina "you thought we were friends?" Emma "I thought that maybe it was possible".

Emma - "With you Regina I always know when you are lying".

Regina - "My happy ending isn't a man".

Regina "How to get the Saviour to taste my forbidden fruit".

These lines leave open interpretation from the fans, from heterosexual or causal viewers they probably would not identify any subtext of these scenes between Emma and Regina, however, these scenes are always intense with eye contact being held longer than would be the social normal, invading personal

space, it's never explicitly stated that they are friends. Emma and Regina are quite literally opposites, Emma is the hero and Regina is the villain, Emma is one of two characters to believe that Regina can change (the other being their son) - they trust each other, believe in each other when others do not, Regina hates anyone who shows any romantic interest towards Emma. Regina chooses Emma over her true love and Emma sacrifices herself in order to save Regina (Ouatspec 2016). (If Regina was a man this whole relationship would be canon).

It would appear *Once Upon a Time* producers intended to set out to queerbait audience members, due to the lack of any representation in the media at the time of broadcasting knowing that queer audience members will watch the show for any glimpse of queer representation with these showrunners exploiting viewers (Out of the closet – On Your



(Didiq666 n.d. Regina on the left, Emma on the right)

TV n.d.). For every episode that had a heterosexual kiss between Emma and Killian or Regina and Robin, the showrunners found that they were losing thousands of viewers, a majority of fans believed that Emma and Regina should be romantically involved, so the producers started queerbaiting within the production to increase viewership, through posting 'romantic' videos or pictures of Emma and Regina, even in the costume department, they would make sure that Emma and Regina's clothes complement each other (Out of the Closet – On Your TV n.d.). By queerbaiting, producers affect the validation of the LGBT community, teasing fans that two characters of the same sex could be involved in a relationship, then removing representation from them is just exploiting any validation for the LGBT community (Nordin 2015).



(SQFanfic n.d. Fan art of Regina and Emma kissing)

The *Once Upon a Time* writers appeared to try and satisfy fans that believed they are queerbaiting by making other characters queer rather than follow through with the storyline on Emma and Regina. Marginalising the sexual tension that is being displayed between the two main female characters, then only adding additional queer characters into a couple of episodes to try and satisfy the LGBT community (fraufischer 2015). It took the writers several episodes to confirm this

representation for the character of Mulan and was just used to

move the storyline, with Mulan then not being an active character for a couple of seasons. This shows how the writers were not taking representation seriously, expecting LGBT viewers to be content with the bare minimum of any representation (N/S 2014).

Producers/actors

Franklin (2019) found there are three discourses around producers deliberately queerbaiting. The first is to acquire queer and homophobic audience members watching the program without dropping viewing figures, by making the queer coded characters have subtle references (Hall 1993). The second is that it is harmful to LGBT viewers, to raise their expectation of representation within the program then not implement it. The third is that producers will have the final decision in whether the representation is there, even if the subtext is obvious. As Scott (2018) discusses, how the producers can control the narrative of characters to suit themselves. For example, *Riverdale*, having Betty and Veronica kiss each other even though the producers knew they would never put their characters in a relationship, as the producers only had them kiss because there was a big LGBT fan base for them. It feels like they were mocking and trolling these fans by adding these scenes in, ultimately knowing they would put the woman with the main male characters (Collier 2015).

Producers look to “court fans through queerbaiting, a practice in which they give either in-show nods to fandom or incorporate into the canon common themes found in fan activities like slash” (Collier 2015:1). This allows producers to not have openly LGBTQ characters to retain homophobic viewers. The producers of *Sherlock* and *Supernatural* knowingly encoded their characters with homosexual subtext without explicitly stating their sexuality, to reach a larger target audience. With social media there is an increase in communication between fans and producers (Tenbarge 2020). As a result, producers will now see what is keeping fans engaged and use this knowledge to their advantage, even if it is just subtext, fans will then create their own media for the TV show, fanfiction, fan videos, ect (Collier 2015).

When the producers of *The 100* killed of Lexa from the ship Clexa protested, between Clarke and Lexa, he offered an apology saying that it was never his intention to hurt the LGBT community, however, most

fans did not take their apology well and believed it was shallow, due to other programs continuously taking similar actions. Fans have continuously been queerbaited by producers causing them to lose their trust (Scott 2015). Nordin (2019) found that fans on Tumblr came together to discuss queerbaiting, understanding that certain producers kept queerbaiting characters because they were achieving higher viewing figures. This caused fans to start listing how producers are queerbaiting characters, i.e., lingering touches or saying similar dialogue to heterosexual characters that are in a relationship.

It is not only producers that cause queerbaiting but also the cast members, Brennan (2018) looked at the subtle homosexual subtext of Merlin and Arthur and the casts' reaction to fans shipping them together, as they are seen to be each other's opposites. Whilst a lot of the cast encouraged fans to ship characters together, when the producers got asked similar questions, they refuted the situation.

Although some actors are very supportive, other actors can be dismissive as Mcdermott (2019) discusses Jeremy Jordan, who plays Winn Scott in *Supergirl*, invalidating the LGBT community by denying the possibility of Lena and Kara getting together which was a big discussion piece in the Supercorp fandom. This action marginalised and disregarded the LGBT community. This form of queerbaiting of Supercorp fans denies any possible validation through representation that they can see being coded (Hall 1993). There was even an incident at comic con where someone was discussing their bisexuality and saw similarities between her and Dean, however before she even finished the question she got booed and Dean's actor cut her off and told her not to ruin the occasion for everyone, which just completely invalidates that person's sexuality (Gennis 2014).

Fanfiction

Producers use queerbaiting to gain queer fans, without any plan to actual give the queer community true representation, producers queerbait to make sure that the non-queer fans would not speculate about the subtle representation and no longer want to engage with the show. With the rise of fans spotting queerbaiting in TV shows there is a correlation with the rise of fanfiction online. Fanfiction is used by queer fans to counteract the way that they have been handled within the TV media, to give positive representation and queer people validation in their sexualities (Koehm 2018).

Fanfiction and fandoms create a safe space where people can be themselves and have positive queer representation that they do not receive from mainstream media (Yatrakis 2013). LGBT couples on fanfiction sites are dominating these sites, encouraging different types of sexuality, asexual, romantic, and bisexual, these fans can see themselves in fanfiction where they are not represented in mainstream media (Yau 2016). Through fanfiction people can use characters and utilise certain subtext that has occurred in the program, whether it be a certain comment or action taken by the characters (Fagan 2020). When fans see a characteristically queer subtext then fans can create a world through fanfiction where those characters are together in a positive relationship compared to the TV show where the producers are queerbaiting their characters.

Christina (2017) discusses how fans can create fanfiction to demonstrate how they view a TV show, these communities then create a shared vision, there is little queer representation in mainstream media and when there is representation it can be portrayed very negative or stereotypical. Fanfiction writers can then create this whole new world, with positive representation, no tragic endings, just living normal lives. This allows fans to realize their sexuality is valid in society and it's not something that needs to be hidden within a subtext or that is going to end tragically, which is something that mainstream media is

missing (Christina 2017). These fanfiction writers expand upon the subtext and create this content for the queer community in order to provide a positive representation for the queer community (Floegel 2020).

Dhaenens et al (2008) discusses the idea of slash fiction, mostly woman will create fanfiction, reading between the lines of the characters and glimpse the representation that could be in the program. In Star Trek the relationship between Spock and Kirk was one of the first slash fictions written about. This shows how different audiences interpret the coding of characters, creating their own representation, pushing against the heterosexual norms that TV shows are putting forward by queerbaiting (Hall 1993, Butler 2010). Wild (2020) looks at Tumblr users and fanfiction writers, discussing how fans of TV shows will use Tumblr and fanfiction sites to write stories or make fan art about TV shows. Some fanfiction writers say they are trying to resolve where the show has lacked diversity of LGBT representation, fixing the queerbaiting they see in TV shows (Wild 2018).

Disagreements occur when people do not understand why two characters are being shipped together, a lot of people follow the canon of the program so cannot understand why people would ship those characters with anyone else. It seems to be especially problematic with queer baited characters where queer fans can see the subtext relationship between the queer coded characters (Koehm 2018). Thus, shipping and creating content of them together in fanfiction. Milli and Bamman (2016) discuss the difference between canon within a TV show and fanfiction, fanfiction usually gives a bigger insight into a character, writers can take a small interaction or scene and develop the character's background or relationships, a lot of the time fanfiction writers are adding representation where the producers of the show have failed, usually enhancing LGBT representation. Fans will see the interaction between the two characters e.g Emma and Regina, and see that there is potential for romance, they are then able to write believable storylines where the two characters become a couple. A lot of fans rely on fanfiction to give them the representation that they are looking for (Milli and Bamman 2016).

"Fix-it Fics function as a form of accessible queer readings that encourage readers to recognize and deconstruct heteronormativity in dominant media." (Harza 2021: 109) people see fix-it fanfictions as ways to provide queer representation and move away from the heteronormativity of society. With programs such as *Supergirl*, *Once Upon a Time*, and *Supernatural* ending, a lot of queer fans felt they had been cheated of LGBT representation by the producers and as such they create fix it fanfiction, this is where fans will take the ending of a show and recreate it so that characters that were being queerbaited finally got their 'happy ending' and the queer community could have the representation that had been hinted at by the producers throughout the program.

Below are screen shots that highlights the amount of fanfiction that has been written about SwanQueen, SuperCorp and Destiel compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Archive of Our Own 3rd April 2022):

Supergirl:

1 - 20 of 18432 Works in Kara Danvers/Lena Luthor

Works Bookmarks RSS Feed

– Previous 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ... 921 922 Next –

1 - 20 of 1402 Works in Kara Danvers/Mon-El

Works Bookmarks RSS Feed

– Previous 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 ... 70 71 Next –

1 - 20 of 115 Works in Lena Luthor/James "Jimmy" Olsen

Works Bookmarks RSS Feed

– Previous 1 2 3 4 5 6 Next –

Once Upon a Time:

1 - 20 of 14263 Works in Evil Queen | Regina Mills/Emma Swan

[Works](#) [Bookmarks](#) [RSS Feed](#)

← Previous [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) ... [713](#) [714](#) Next →

1 - 20 of 11324 Works in Captain Hook | Killian Jones/Emma Swan

[Works](#) [Bookmarks](#) [RSS Feed](#)

← Previous [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) ... [566](#) [567](#) Next →

1 - 20 of 3862 Works in Evil Queen | Regina Mills/Robin Hood

[Works](#) [Bookmarks](#) [RSS Feed](#)

← Previous [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) ... [193](#) [194](#) Next →

Supernatural:

1 - 20 of 101637 Works in Castiel/Dean Winchester

[Works](#) [Bookmarks](#) [RSS Feed](#)

← Previous [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) ... [4999](#) [5000](#) Next →

1 - 20 of 2016 Works in Lisa Braeden/Dean Winchester

[Works](#) [Bookmarks](#) [RSS Feed](#)

← Previous [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) ... [100](#) [101](#) Next →

This shows that so many fans can view the queebaiting that producers are doing and create their own fiction around the characters, as can be seen the shipped fan fiction work surpasses the heterosexual counterparts.

Methodology

Using a survey, I have explored the encoding of certain characters, the invalidation of the LGBT community, and how queerbaiting reproduces heterosexual norms of society. Using both qualitative and quantitative research makes this a more reliable and valid discourse. Utilising a Narrative approach means that I can validate connections between people's experiences of queerbaiting, observing patterns, coded characters, how fans counteract queerbaiting, and the effect that queerbaiting has on people; validating if there are any contradictions in the narrative (Bryman 2015).

I am using online self-administered questionnaires to research queerbaiting's effect on the LGBT community; Utilising my own questionnaire so that I get an array of different answers and comparing the results in a graphical display. Before the participants answer the questions, I will give a definition of queerbaiting in case they have viewed queerbaiting but do not understand the terminology.

Acknowledging that their answers may be used in my research, the questions will be clear and concise (Bryman 2015). The participants will be part of the LGBT community, by using a snowball effect I was able to distribute my questionnaire through my friends and University, and they were able to pass the questionnaire to other members of the LGBT community. Conducting a questionnaire means I will get a substantial number of respondents to validate my hypothesis. Desk-based research means that I will have the groundwork to view patterns or any anomalies, to relate to my primary research (Bryman 2015). Interacting with currently published literature to either validate or question the research as a desktop study to corroborate my hypothesis. This data will be used to find out whether queerbaiting influences the validation of the LGBT community's sexuality, which will either prove or disprove my original hypotheses.

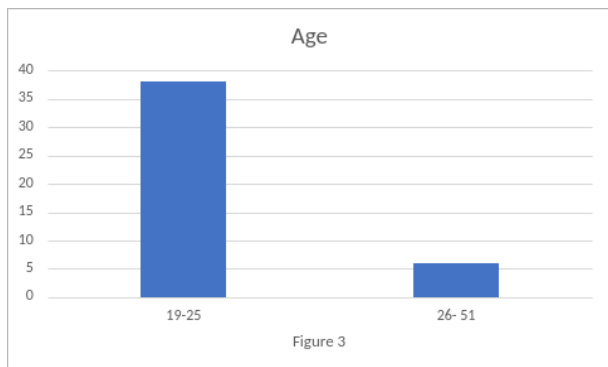
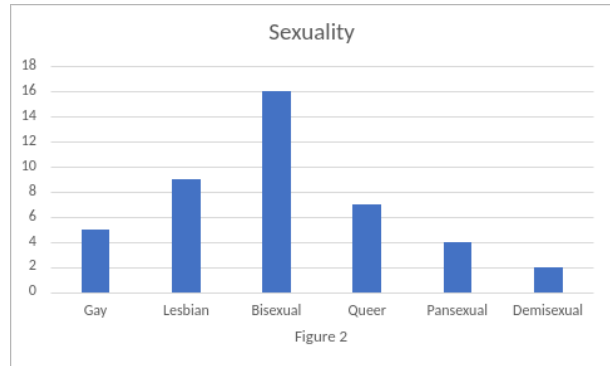
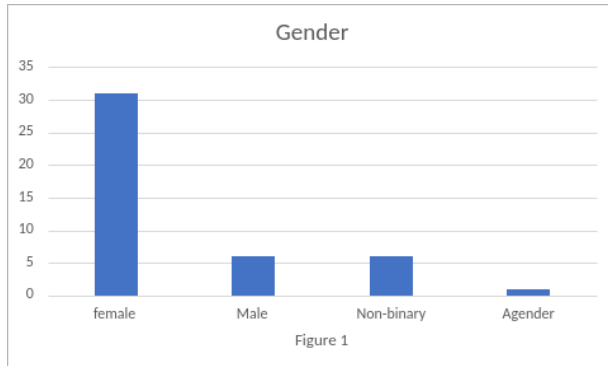
For all participants that take part in the questionnaire, there will be informed consent to read and agree to (see appendix). There will be no misleading information on the form of consent and the statement must not coerce the participant. The participants will know what the study is about, what their answers are being used for, confirming all correspondence shall remain confidential, and how I shall collect and keep the data safe, this will follow the ethical procedure of Coventry University. Under the General Data Protection Regulation 2016, there will be no information in my work that could identify an individual, no one of a third party will have access to this information. Questionnaires will be anonymous after the participant has taken part, it will be stated on the questionnaire that they can withdraw any time before they submit their answers or skip questions, they feel uncomfortable answering.

Some issues when using questionnaires are that respondents might be dishonest in their answers or can leave some questions unanswered, due to difficulty in understanding the questions. When interpreting the questionnaires, it will be difficult to understand their emotions or feelings from their response (Bryman 2015). As a result, the questions will be as clear and concise as I can make them. When analysing the data, I will make sure that I understand that some participants could be dishonest or could have misinterpreted the question. This is a sensitive topic, as representation is so paramount to the LGBT community, for them to see directors, producers, and writers queer bait characters may have a detrimental effect on the LGBT community. Due to the age range of participants, they would generally be familiar with queer baiting characteristics on TV, causing distress and mental health issues.

Overall, the research being gathered via my questionnaire will be used to find out whether queerbaiting that producers do, invalidates the LGBT community. Looking at how they feel about this invalidation and whether fanfiction is a useful tool to re-validate their sexualities and find a community of similar minded people, relating this all back to the literature review.

Research

The graphs below represent the general gender, sexuality and age of the participants who took part in the questionnaire.



To initiate the discussion, I asked if the LGBT+ community believes representation within TV shows is important and why. The following responses generally appear to concur that it is a valid requirement for the LGBT+ community to be represented and will assist in people attempting to understand their community and social interaction in society.

Below are some typical responses to the question:

“Incredibly; growing up we had to spend hours on the internet trying to find queer media that represented us in order to help process and understand ourselves and even now in our adult, daily lives

we require it in order to validate our identities because we didn't have that as a kid. Now it's even more important because we're a lot louder and more visible so they can't completely ignore us (although they will make the representation awful)" Participant 3

"Yes, it's important to see positive role models to look up to. Especially as a child, if I had seen more representation of bisexuality, I would have discovered I was queer earlier on. I also believe it could reduce homophobic bullying as representation helps to normalise non-heterosexuality." Participant 5

"Yes. People from especially smaller populated towns are exposed to less than those in larger populated areas. For example, my town happens to be mainly white, and straight. By including LGBT representation in tv shows I know for myself it educated me a hell of a lot to what that means. Which helped me in my overall understanding of gender and sexuality in general, and on a personal level. As due to literally never meeting anyone else or even knowing anyone else who was part of the community, I didn't know how to label myself, or if I was even normal." Participant 8

"I believe any form of representation and inclusion is important, but it should never be forced. Forced representation creates negative stigma and backlash for the community being falsely represented"

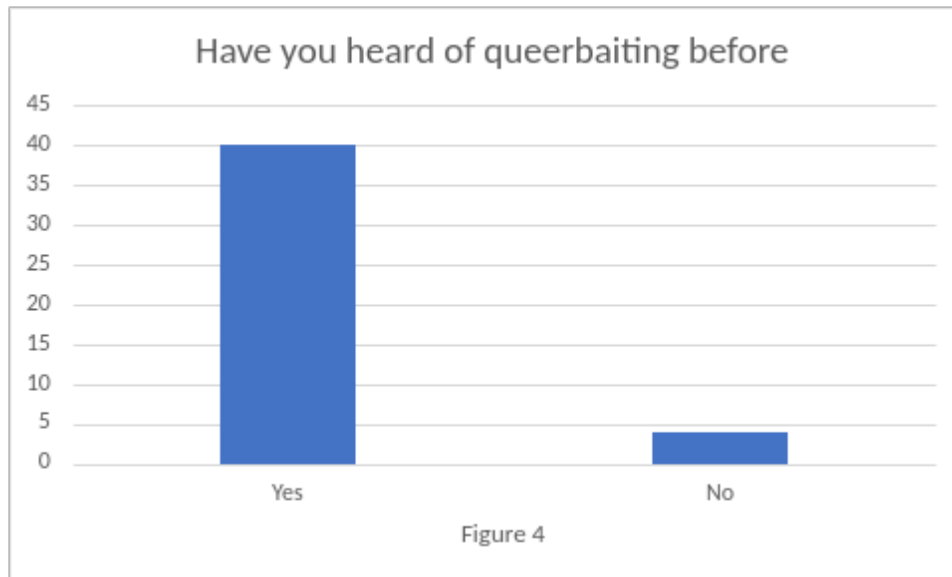
Participant 22

"I do believe LGBT+ representation is important in tv shows because it can help people realise their sexuality and help break down heteronormativity, before realising I was bi I didn't know how a relationship between two girls works, not just sexually but romantically, seeing more representation helped me realise it's something that happens and is what I would want in life" Participant 23

Most responses received share a similar opinion that greater representation of romantic and unforced LGBT relations within media would justify and validate their place within the societal structure and understand that not everyone follows heterosexual norms.

My next question was incorporated to understand if the people taking the survey had heard of the term queerbaiting before undertaking this questionnaire. As explained in my literature review page 16 I gave a brief explanation of queerbaiting as understood by this author as the tool that producers use to keep queer viewers watching the program by adding hints or subtext to characters' sexuality without committing to the subtext.

Queerbaiting



The audience of the questionnaire is generally of the age range 19-25, this age range understands the term as it is a general terminology utilised within the social media platforms.

All the people that answered yes to, what's the first instance of queerbaiting they witnessed, between 19 – 25, and were more likely to have watched TV when they were growing up, seeing the effect of representation on their validation of sexuality. Some of the examples received were Rachel and Quinn in *Glee*, Kara, and Lena from *Supergirl*, *Supernatural*, John and Sherlock from *Sherlock*, Merlin and Arthur from *Merlin* BBC television series, *Riverdale* when Betty and Veronica kissed, the general response whereof them, "felt attacked" like their identity was just a joke, Jade from *Victorious* had a subtext of a queer character, *Supergirl* and *Sherlock* were the most common themes mentioned. *Supergirl* and *Supernatural's* queerbaiting has been previously discussed in my literature review, which validates the views that producers' queerbaiting their audience does have an impact on the LGBT audience generally they so recognise the queer subtext of characters. These examples are teen shows that most of these participants would have watched growing up, this would have had an impact on the validation of their

sexuality. This is vital because if these participants had positive representation when they were growing up, they would feel more validated and confident in their sexuality; instead of being afraid that they were different because they could not find a character displaying the same characteristics that they were feeling.

A lot discussed why queerbaiting even occurs, as it would just be easier to give the LGBT community representation. Although one did state that it is very crucial that it is not just the audience causing queerbaiting, creating a narrative that suits them, looking for something that is not there, as some fans can view two characters interacting a couple of times and believe that they should be 'shipped' together, even though there was no intended queer subtext or any reason that they should get together. However, the people that answered no to the question were over the age of 25, when growing up there could have been fewer examples of queerbaiting to view as most shows were heterosexual or showed stereotypical homosexual characters, meaning that television would have been less likely to affect the validation of their sexuality. The other potential reason why the people over the age of 25 could not view the subtext that producers are currently portraying could be because the television shows who showed representation either got cancelled, like Ellen DeGeneres show or the context was suppressed, *Xena the warrior princess*. Randell-Moon (2019) investigated the subtext of Xena and Gabrielle's relationship. Other characters had commented on their relationship calling them girlfriends, the actress playing Xena and Gabrielle were playing them to include gay subtext until producers told them to stop. Xena was first produced in 1995, if they stated that their characters were together, the show would have been cancelled. It was not until the program had finished that the producers said that they intended to be together, as the show could no longer be cancelled. So, viewing queerbaiting probably would affect their sexuality because they never had a positive representation growing up.

The participants were asked to explain how they felt when witnessing queerbaiting, this was asked to see if the use of queerbaiting undermined the LGBT community. Nearly everyone who took part in the

research, no matter their sexuality or gender, believed that queerbaiting invalidated their sexuality. In my results, there were two general reactions to queerbaiting. There was a dejected reaction where people were shocked, annoyed, hurt, and uncomfortable. Then there were dismissive reactions where people felt angry, frustrated, manipulated, misled, and fetishised. All the responses received demonstrated a negative effect on their sexuality due to the producer's queerbaiting within TV shows and not showing actual LGBT representation.

Producers

Many believed that it was unethical for producers to queerbait the LGBT community, as it gives the community false hope believing that they could have representation, however, this inclusion could then be withdrawn. They do not understand why producers feel the need to queerbait when they could provide appropriate positive representation so that the LGBT community can feel valid in society. The participants that took part in the questionnaire who were non-binary and agender, and majority identifying as female (Table 1), had more enraged responses, participant 18 believing it was “immoral and detrimental to the community”, participant 21 “a dirty underhanded trick” and participant 25 “exploitative”. There is little to no representation in TV shows of agender and non-binary inclusion is understandable why they are angered more when producers queerbait because at least there is a modicum gay, lesbian and bisexual representation in media.

There is then the issue of why producers queerbait, some participants stated that producers queerbait “To gain LGBT viewers” because producers know that the LGBT community will watch their TV show as they are starved for any representation in the TV media, that just the small promise will get them to watch. Participant 18 stated that producers' queerbaiting is a form of “tokenism”, producers will appear to be supporting the LGBT community by adding representation but do not make them canon. Others believed that producers queerbait to gain more revenue, it's a marketing ploy. If they continue to queerbait two characters, then the LGBT community could watch the program because they will believe that characters could become canon. They profit from the LGBT community wanting valid representation in mass media.

Although two participants had interesting replies, both stated that it is unethical to queerbait, participant 8 said that “it is acceptable for producers to queerbait if they are testing the waters”, they go

on to discuss Grey's Anatomy, with Ameilia's storyline, a couple of seasons ago she gathered up the courage to ask Dr. Deluca out, however. Amilia instead of asking the question, joined Dr. Deluca's study. However, 4 seasons later Ameilia is now in a relationship with a non-binary character. This is a case where producers queerbaited to see audiences' reactions, and saw they were positive, so representation occurred. However, if audiences did not react positively then it would have just been another case of queerbaiting. The second participant discussed how queerbaitng can be stopped in western countries however it becomes more complicated in countries such as China, as they have censorship of LGBT identities in mainstream media, so they cannot show representation on TV, therefore they could queerbait to get some representation out there but that is no excuse for western countries where they are not censored.

Actors and Actress

Most participants do not care or mind if actresses and actors are shipping their characters together even if they might not get together, some stating that they do not “rely on the validation of others” (participant 20). Whereas others felt “uncomfortable to witness actors ‘fake’ ship their characters when or they know their characters are not going to get together” (participant 14). Some felt annoyed, irritated, disappointed when actors and actresses ship their characters together, especially when they know that the characters will not become canon. They feel like the actors and actresses are making a joke out of their sexuality; like it’s a façade. Some believed that it did depend on the actors and actresses understanding of their commitment and context to support the LGBT community or whether they are just shipping their characters together as a marketing ploy.

However, some stated that it does depend on the authenticity, of the actors and actresses. Participant 24 discussed how Oscar Isaac really wanted his character called Poe in Star Wars and Finn to become canon, he was disappointed when the producers did not make their characters gay (Marston 2019). Andrew Garfield and Misha Collins are two examples that were used where actors would support the sexual identity of their characters. Andrew Garfield wanted spider-man to be bisexual, stating “why can’t we discover that Peter is exploring his sexuality? It’s hardly even groundbreaking!... so why can’t he be gay? Why can’t he be into boys” (Vilkomerson 2013). Misha Collins knew how important Destiel was to his fans and wanted to be able to support them in Castile’s final scene by having his character confess his lover to Dean (Al-Ghamdi 2020). Whereas the cast of Teen Wolf would only ship their characters together so that they can keep their viewing figures up by queerbaiting. Participant 23 discusses Jensen Ackles who plays Dean from *Supernatural* who just denies any possibility of his character being anything but straight causing fans to feel invalidated due to the portrayal of the character within the show.

Fanfiction



The final three questions revolved around Fanfiction to understand how many of those answering the question read Fanfiction and if this form of writing assists in validating their sexuality.

These charts above show the importance of fanfiction for the LGBT community, most of the participants that had taken part in the questionnaire had read fanfiction and believed that fanfiction validates their sexuality more than TV shows. This is mainly due to fanfiction being authored by people who live in their community, they understand the experiences of the LGBT community in creating valid storylines based on the subtext of the characters, this, in turn, makes the queerbaited feel validated, that they are not just viewing representation for the sake of representation. Although one participant stated that because fanfiction is not official it is not as groundbreaking as having actual representation in TV shows. Another stated that fanfiction can be grossly inaccurate, as they can write about perverted ideas of these relationships, which are usually just pure smut (sexual content).

Most people who took part in the questionnaire did not know what 'fix it' fanfiction was, however, most of the participants that did answer the questionnaire believed that 'fix it' fanfiction does not make up for the queerbaiting. Some participants believe that it should not be down to the fans to fix the representation that the producers have created. Although those who answered yes say that it does help their validation and makes up for the lack of representation but only if it is undertaken correctly.

Discussion

Through my research representation is a particularly crucial factor in LGBT identity, people need positive representation to understand themselves. As participant 8 stated “Yes. People from especially smaller populated towns are exposed to less than those in larger populated areas. For example, my town happens to be mainly white, and straight. By including LGBT representation in tv shows I know for myself it educated me a hell of a lot about what that actually means. Which helped me in my overall understanding of gender and sexuality in general, and on a personal level. Due to literally never meeting anyone else or even knowing anyone else who was part of the community, I didn’t know how to label myself, or if I was even normal.” Without positive representation, the LGBT community have difficulty in understanding their identity and the LGBT youths feel isolated, they struggle to understand what they are feeling. Seeing someone that has the same sexuality as them in the media would mean LGBT youths know their sexuality is valid in society. However, due to queerbaiting their sexuality can be invalidated and therefore ultimately supporting a heterosexual society (Butler 2010).

Queerbaiting

The participants that answered yes to having viewed queerbaiting before and commenting on their first instance of queerbaiting corresponds with the literature review, *Supergirl*, *Supernatural*, and *Once Upon a Time*. *Supergirl*, with Kara and Lena having romantic scenes and music in the background, always looking longingly at each other, having similar dialogue to their heterosexual counterparts (Fierra 2019). Fans can view the chemistry that Kara and Lena have compared to when they have both had male love interests in the past (Lisewski 2017). *Supernatural*, with Dean and Castiel having queer subtext around their characters from the beginning with producers telling the actor of Castiel to play a “jilted love” when around Dean, even having other characters comment on their relationships (Gennis 2014). *Once*

Upon a Time, Emma, and Regina, are each other's opposites, even the love interests would be their counterparts, if Regina were a man, she would be in a relationship with Emma because this would reinforce the heterosexuality of society instead of taking a risk and putting two women in a relationship (Out of the Closet – On Your TV n.d.). The LGBT community notice that they are not just trying to comprehend representation on TV for the sake of representation because all members of the LGBT society are identifying this connection between characters. This shows that the decoding of certain characters can be particularly significant, as queer people can perceive if producers have added a queer subtext to a character (Hall 1993). This will validate the individual knowing that they are not just trying to see representation for the sake of it, instead, they have a community around them that can also see the queerbaiting being instigated on the screen.

I found that the participants who had witnessed queerbaiting all had a similar reaction no matter their sexuality or gender, meaning that all the LGBT community can identify queerbaiting. The participants felt uncomfortable, annoyed, shocked, manipulated, frustrated and fetishised when they witnessed queerbaiting. As participant 10 stated, "Angry at the teasing, disappointed at the lack of representation of what could have been a genuine story of homo-demisexual love, a category to which I belong and of which, for all intents and purposes, there are no representations on TV." This relates back to my findings, where the LGBT community felt marginalised and they do not feel like their sexuality is being truly represented within the TV media. Queer representation is usually stereotypical or a subtext in programs, meaning that the LGBT community feels like they cannot represent themselves in society or have positive representation in the media (Scott 2019). This shows the impact that queerbaiting has on the validation of people's sexuality with the heterosexual normative society being the predominant output within the show. Queerbaiting has a negative effect on people's sexuality. By producing this type of representation, the community has difficulty in understanding their sexuality producers keep queerbaiting it just reinforces a heterosexual society (Butler 2010).

Producers

In my research, I found that participants were angry when producers queerbaited characters. Producers keep giving the LGBT community false hope when they anticipate a positive representation, the participants believed that producers queerbaited due to knowing that the LGBT community will watch the program due to them being so starved of any representation with hope that a producer may create a positive role model. As participant 5 stated "I don't believe it's ethical, it gives members of the LGBTQ community false hope for a representative storyline. I feel it further pushes the narrative that it's normal for women to "experiment" with women while being/ identify as heterosexual, pushes this narrative of women being fluid in their sexuality (invalidates both heterosexual and queer sexualities)." This is because they want to gain viewers so that they have increased revenue, by using queerbaiting as a marketing ploy (Franklin 2019). As participant 23 stated "For money, it generates hype around the characters and almost fetishises them and ultimately gets more views and money". Producers claim to support the LGBT community but will continue to queerbait for revenue. This relates back to my findings, as Franklin (2019) found that there are three discourses around producers deliberately queerbaiting these three factors are utilised, to keep queer viewers and homophobic viewers watching, raising LGBT expectation that there will be positive representation, however with producers having the final say even if there is queer subtext about a character. This shows how harmful queerbaiting is to the LGBT community, being queerbaited means that they doubt their own sexuality as there are no examples in the media. This then just reinforces Butler's (2010) performance theory, as queerbaiting makes queer people feel invalidated in society, therefore, reinforcing heterosexuality. As Scott (2018) discusses that producers have full control over their characters, which means that producers must know that they are queerbaiting and continue to reinforce a heterosexual society by denying the LGBT community positive representation. Due to social media producers can now go online and observe what

is keeping audience members engaged in their show, and they will use this knowledge to their advantage (Tenbarga 2020). This could be by playing up the queerbaiting that is happening between two characters, for example in *Supernatural* when there was a whole episode surrounding Dean and Castiel fanfiction, that is just causing fans to have false hope (Tenbarga 2020).

Although contradictory to what most participants said and what is in my literature review, two participants discussed how there can be some acceptable forms of queerbaiting, say if producers are testing the waters to go for a certain storyline as participant 43 stated “it gets more complicated in countries like China, where government censorships prevent anyone from depicting LGBT identities in mainstream media at all and hinting at queer identities may be the only way people get to see themselves represented at all”. This shows that it is not always producers' fault or intent to queerbait, sometimes producers could just be testing the waters for their audience members, and other times they are not allowed to show queer relationships or characters on their program due to the law. Therefore, that it depends on how the audience are decoding characters in places like China having to be subtle in their approach (Hall 1993).

Actors and actresses

There was a mixture of opinions when it came to whether actresses and actors shipping their queerbaited characters together is an issue, some felt uncomfortable when witnessing actors and actresses shipping their characters. The participants believe that the actors and actresses who ship queerbaited characters together are making a joke out of their sexuality, that their feelings do not matter as they are not approaching the issue with a positive attitude. As participant 8 stated “It gives hope that it could one day happen. Especially if their character is similar to yourself in personality or physical appearance, seeing a relationship like that on TV could give an enormous amount of

reassurance to that person. To then see the idea squashed could give a huge amount of negative feelings to the viewer.” This can be shown in the example of *Teen Wolf* where the actors and actresses were shipping queerbaited characters so that more queer people would watch the program. Also, the cast of *Supergirl*, where at comic con Jeremy Jordan sang a song denying the existence of Supercorp, believing that the shippers were misinformed and did not understand what they were seeing, these actions cause the LGBT society to become marginalised because they do not feel like their sexuality is valid (Mcdermott 2019).

Contradicting this are the actors and actresses who positively support the LGBT community, Andrew Garfield who wanted spider-man to be gay or Oscar Issac who wanted Poe and Finn to be canon in Star Wars (Marston 2019 and Vilkomerson 2013). The cast of *Merlin* encouraged their fans to ship Arthur and Merlin together, because everyone believed that they were each other's opposites. This shows actresses and actors being supportive of their fandom, shipping their characters together because they know how imperative it is for people to feel validated in their sexuality. Take the actress Katie McGrath who has been in *Supergirl* and *Merlin*, knowing that the characters that she plays can be decoded in any way, McGrath supports any ship or sexuality that a fandom deems her character to be, in *Supergirl* McGrath was incredibly supportive of fans shipping her character Lena Luthor and Kara Danvers together because she saw how vital validation and representation is to fans. As McGrath has stated “I feel like what we do is art, and it's the same as painting a picture and one person sees a sunflower and another sees a kettle: that's the point of art, is that you take away from it what you see,” McGrath also stated. “That's their response to the show and that's what's important to them. If anything, the fact that we can create such passion in people is amazing. When I meet people who ship Lena and Kara, I'm not going to, and I know nobody else on the show is going to, deny them that. We make the show, and the viewers watch it, and it becomes their show once they watch it....Once we finish a day, for me, it's no longer mine; it's theirs” (Burlingame 2017).

This then becomes complicated because to what extent can actresses and actors support their queerbaited ships, as everyone would interpret their actions differently. Oscar Issac would have known that Poe and Finn would not have been made canon in *Star Wars*, he assisted in helping support the ship on social media, what makes his actions different from others (Marston 2019). Lana Parrilla, talking about SwanQueen, Emma and Regina from *Once Upon a Time*, stated that “I always see their relationship as best friends and sisters... I’m nervous to say that because there are so many SwanQueens out there that see something else, and I don’t want to take that away from them” (Matt and Jess Tv Commentary 2016). Half of the SwanQueen fandom accepted this, in the sense that people can decode characters differently Parrilla also received a lot of backlashes from this comment even though she said she supported people who ship SwanQueen but does not recognise herself, it all depends on fans reactions.

Fanfiction

To counteract the queerbaiting that producers do, a lot of fans will use fanfiction to make their queerbaited ship come to life, creating a community where they feel valid in their sexuality. As my research found that the participants that took part in the questionnaire believed that it validated their sexuality, knowing that they were not crazy for seeing the connection that two characters may display. Participant 9 stated “Definitely, because they are written by people who live what they write. Queer characters don't always have queer authors behind them. These authors, writers and producers don't know what it's like to be queer.” This relates back to the literature review as Yau (2016) and Yatrakis (2013) discussed how fanfiction is a safe place for the queer community to express themselves and explore certain romantic queerbaited tropes. These fans can decode the queerbaiting that producers have done and create their own representation so that they can feel valid in their own sexuality. The

reason that participants read fanfiction is to get positive representation, they can view themselves in a piece of media and understand their sexuality, it is a way for them to understand who they are.

Fanfiction that has been created is by queer people, they understand the damage that queerbaiting can cause in their community, they create their own worlds that have positive representation, no tragic endings that usually happen to queer characters in mainstream media (Christina 2017). This shows the positive effect fanfiction has on the LGBT community, after being queerbaited people can find fanfiction online that gives them the representation that they have been looking for, instead of society just reinforcing heteronormativity (Butler 2010). Although there is still the issue of fanfiction over sexualising different sexualities, one participant stated that some fanfictions are just pure smut, which would relate to Dhaenens et al (2008) who looked at slash fiction where, mostly women, will create smut about two male characters. This can then make fanfiction a negative place for people to explore, as they could just be looking for a positive representation of their sexuality and instead find pure smut with this type of fanfiction, further degrading how people should feel and act.

Even though fanfiction can be used as a valuable tool in validating sexuality, after being queerbaited a lot of participants stated how it did not make up for the queerbaiting that they witnessed in TV shows. 'Fix it' fanfiction does not fix what the producers failed to do, as it should not be up to fans to produce their own representation. As participant 44 stated "Yes as it often fuels these communities within fandoms to read into the relationships further than intended and to make up for a lack of relationship or representation and bad writing within a show, often allowing a show to get credit for "incredible representation" in a show where that queerbaited relationship is a hollow, fake attempt at representing a demographic while still being "family -friendly" or "marketable" to networks on tv where queer relationships are still rarely accepted or portrayed as they're seen as less likely to "sell" to audiences" This is contradictory to what I found in my literature review, as Harza (2021) found that people see 'fix-it' fanfiction as a way of providing positive representation moving away from a heteronormalised society.

People can provide their own media with these characters, putting them in a relationship together after seeing all the subtexts of their characters, giving them a happy ending. Fans should not have to make up for the lack of representation by creating their own media because they have been queerbaited by producers. This does not mean that fans cannot go out and create their own media if they wish but they should not have to create their own media just because producers keep subtexting queer relationships and characters causing the queer community to feel invalidated.

Overall, through my research, I have found that queerbaiting affects the LGBT community negatively by invalidating their sexuality. Representation is a very important aspect of LGBT identity. But when producers keep repetitively queerbaiting, it just reinforces Heteronormativity. Producers' queerbaiting so they can keep homophobic and LGBT viewers watching the same program to increase their viewership, therefore, increasing the amount of money that they earn. The effect of actors supporting or dismissing queer representation within their program would depend on how they interoperate that queer representation, a bad example would have been *Supernatural*. At Comic-Con the actor who plays Dean dismissed the decoding of Dean's sexuality from a fan. The fans felt very invalidated within their sexuality and betrayed by the actor's comments because they could see themselves in Dean's character. The continued queerbaiting has caused fans to write fanfiction where they can express themselves within the characters without feeling embarrassed or made to believe that their interpretation of the character is a joke. They're able to create a community that has these shared ideas around the subtext that the producers put into the program and create their own content to create positive representation. Although queer people should not have to be out there creating their own content, they should not have to be continually queer baited in different programs so that producers receive an increased viewership there should also be positive content out there for LGBT people. It should not be up to them to create their own content. The solution to stop the cycle would be for TV shows, and producers/writers to stop stereotyping the insinuation of characters possibly being an item that ultimately

degrades the LGBT community when they should create characters that provide a positive representation. The media can control the perceptions of society, so if they did represent LGBT characters in a positive light and do not make a big deal of this representation, then society, over time, will come to accept and understand more knowing that sexuality is not a new concept (Schneider 2018).

Conclusion

Most queer people no matter their gender and sexuality would have come across queerbaiting at one point in their lives according to my research. The participants were disappointed, annoyed and some even felt fetishised. This shows the impact the queerbaiting has on the LGBT community and the validation of someone's sexuality, believing that they do not belong in society or understand what they are feeling because they have never viewed positive representation. Queerbaiting is usually viewed in teen shows, such as *Sherlock*, *Supernatural*, *Supergirl*, and *Merlin*, however, the participants that took part who were over 25 years old had not viewed queerbaiting or had not understood the concept of queerbaiting. This shows the impact that modern-day TV shows have on youth because those over 25 did not have any representation in mainstream media when they were growing up. The only reason that queerbaiting happens in TV shows is that producers have full control of their characters and code the characters in certain ways to give the LGBT community false hope of positive representation. Producers continue to queerbait so they receive higher viewership, knowing that the LGBT society will watch the program even if there is even just a hint of representation because there is so little representation on mainstream media. Although there can be certain reasons that producers must queerbait, for example in China where the government prevents people from depicting LGBT couples on TV shows, that is no excuse for all the other queerbaiting that happens in western programs.

Now when it comes to actresses and actors it is different as they usually have no control over how their characters are written but they do have control when it comes to supporting ships. There are positive examples of actors and actresses who support fans who want their characters to explore their sexuality, such as Katie McGraft, Andrew Garfield, and Issac Oscar. These actors and actresses have been supported by fans, however when it came to Lana Parrilla who stated that she does not see the ship of

Emma and Regina herself, but she supports the fans that do, this came with a massive backlash from the fans who shipped those characters. What makes Parrilla's statement different from Kaitie Graft who has also said that she supports whatever people ship, observing we all take something different away from the portrayal of the characters. In these situations, it is the individual's choice as to how they take the statements that actors and actresses say about the sexuality of their characters. However, there are some actors and actresses that purposefully promote queerbaited ships so that their program will get more viewers, such as the *Teen Wolf* cast. Overall, actors and actresses should not encourage fans to be queerbaited they should support how the characters have been decoded but discouraged further queerbaiting or dismiss decoding of the sexuality of a character, as Jensen Ackles did. Instead, they should show their support so that the LGBT community can be empowered and that their sexuality is valid in society. Due to all the queerbaiting caused by producers', fans turn to fanfiction in order to get positive LGBT representation. Fanfiction is an online platform where fans can create their own content about queerbait characters especially if it is queer people writing the fanfiction because they can understand the sexuality and can develop the character's involvement on a more personal basis. People who read fanfiction stated that it validates their sexuality but overall does not make up for the queerbaiting that producers do, it should not be up to the fans to make up for the lack of representation caused by producers.

This dissertation utilised data that was successfully gathered early surrounding queerbaiting, this meant that I had plenty of time to analysis the data and make connections and understand the issues with queerbaiting on a deeper level. Doing a questionnaire benefited the topic with questions that were asked, as I got a substantial number of respondents. However, most of the respondents were women/bisexual, this meant there was not an equal number of genders and sexuality to look at. So, the data collected would be biased towards most women and bisexuals. Additionally, most participants did not understand the term 'fix it' fanfiction, I should have included a definition. I would change the breadth of

my discussions, limiting my questions and discussion to a single topic instead of a broader approach, fanfiction or actors could have had their own dissertation written about the effects of queerbaiting. If I were to do this research again, I would condense my research area and investigate a section in more depth. I would try to broaden the range of participants answering the questionnaire, reaching out to different genders and sexualities the work would be more widespread which would get a more appropriate response from the LGBT community.

Overall, my primary and secondary research concludes that queerbaiting does invalidate people's sexualities. With producers continuing to queerbait people will just become unsure of the authenticity of their sexuality because they would not provide with a positive role model. They would still have to rely on other people going through the same mindset to produce fanfiction this assists them to understand what they are experiencing, that's if they are aware that fanfiction exists and know that their sexuality is valid in society. Society and the media should no longer be engaging in reinforcing a heterosexual society anymore, instead, the media should be expressing all these different genders and sexualities, so people have role models to look up to. Compared to a new comedy program called *Our flag means death*, where they made both leads gay and in love with each other, they added longingly looks, romantic and jealous scenes, and fans are both shocked and relieved when these two characters finally kissed (Cejer 2022). The showrunners and creators made sure to "balance the through-line of humor by ensuring that nothing about their characters' heartfelt declarations or the kiss comes off as a joke. Stede and Ed in love isn't a punchline" (Hale-Stern 2022). There is some queer representation on TV but what makes this different is that they used queerbaiting techniques whilst also making character's queer, which shows how ridiculous queerbaiting has become. Not only are the two main male leads in love but there was also a non-binary relationship and another queer relationship. This just shows how easy it is now to add queer relationships into programs, there is no longer an excuse for queerbaiting as representation is so important. The next step would be to create a positive relationship

in Dramas to further support the LGBT community. Take the first trans superhero Nia Nul in *Supergirl* many children and adults were encouraged by the representation that they were given. It means so much for people to be able to see themselves in the media, to know that their identity is valid.

Participant Information and Consent

Lauren Chapman
Sociology
Department of Sociology, Coventry University

Before you decide whether you would like to take part in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done, and what it would involve for you.

Please take the time to read the information below carefully. This tells you about the purpose of the study and what will happen if you take part. Contact details for the student researcher and academic supervisor are provided below.

If you would like to receive a pdf copy of this information, please get in touch with the student researcher using the email below:

Contact Details:

Lauren Chapman
Email – chapma90@uni.coventry.ac.uk
Supervisor:
Emma Sheppard
Lecturer in Sociology
ad4043@coventry.ac.uk

In the unlikely event that you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the researcher, please contact the supervisor.

What is the purpose of the study?

The project is interested in the viewing effect queerbaiting has on the LGBT+ community within television shows. Queerbaiting is a marketing technique for fiction and entertainment in which creators hint at, but then do not actually depict, same-sex romance or other LGBT+ representation. The research will explore whether queerbaiting causes the LGBT+ community to feel more invalidated in society and reinforces a heteronormative society.

What will be involved?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a short survey, starting on the next page. This will take you around 10-15 to complete.

Your responses will be anonymous, and while you will be asked to provide some biographical data, this will not include any identifying data. This information will be used to give a picture of the responses as a whole.

The survey data will be analysed, and the findings will be written up in the final year dissertation, which will be submitted to Coventry University and marked by appointed academic staff, including the supervisor named at the end of this document. If you would like to see a final copy of the findings, please let me know.

Do I have to participate?

Absolutely not. You are under no obligation to participate and it is your free choice to be involved in the research.

You can withdraw by closing this webpage at any point.

You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.

By clicking "next" you confirm the following:

- You are over 18 years of age;
- That you are part of the LGBT+ community;
- You have read the above information carefully.

staff, including the supervisor named at the end of this document. If you would like to see a final copy of the findings, please let me know.

Jump ▾

Do I have to participate?

Absolutely not. You are under no obligation to participate and it is your free choice to be involved in the research.

You can withdraw by closing this webpage at any point.

You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.

By clicking "next" you confirm the following:

- You are over 18 years of age;
- That you are part of the LGBT+ community;
- You have read the above information carefully;
- You are aware that you can withdraw from the survey at any point by closing the browser window;
- You are happy to take part in the survey.

Add item

n. 2 Page 1

Add item

Questions that were asked

1 T What is your gender? *

Jump ▾

Add item

Add item

2 T What is your sexuality? *

✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

3 T What is your age? *

✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

4 ☰ Do you believe that LGBT+ representation within TV shows is important? If so why...

✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

5 ☰ Have you ever heard of queerbaiting before this questionnaire? Queerbaiting is a marketing technique for fiction and entertainment in which creators hint at, but then do not actually depict, same-sex romance or other LGBT+ representation.

✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

6 ☰ If you answered 'yes' to the previous question then what was your first instance of queerbaiting that you witnessed?

✎ ⚙

7 [☰] How did you feel when you witnessed queerbaiting? Jump ▾

Add item

Add item

8 [☰] What are your thoughts on the ethics of queerbaiting from producers? ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

9 [☰] Why do you think that writers and producers queerbait their characters? ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

10 [☰] Is there any queerbaiting on TV that affected you more than others? If so why did it affect you more... ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

11 [☰] Does actors/actress shipping their queerbaited characters together invalidate your sexuality more? ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

12 [☰] How does actors/actress shipping their queerbaited characters together make you feel? ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

Jump ▾

12 [☰] How does actors/actress shipping their queerbaited characters together make you feel? ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

13 [T] Have you ever read fanfiction? ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

14 [☰] Do you feel like fanfiction validates your sexuality more than TV shows? ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

15 [☰] Does Fix it fanfiction constitute for the queerbaiting received in TV shows ✎ ⚙

Add item

Add item

p. 3 Final page ✎ ⚙

Add item

References

Al-Ghamdi, A. (2020) 'Supernatural's Misha Collins weighs in on Dean and Castiel's romance controversy' *Screen rant* [online] 26 November. available from < <https://screenrant.com/supernatural-dean-castiel-romance-misha-collins-defense/> > [9 February 2022]

Archive of Our Own (2022) [online] available from < <https://archiveofourown.org/> > [3 April 2022]

Ashbrook, A. (2021) *A Museum's Guide to Queer Inclusivity* [online] Thesis. State University of New York College at Buffalo. available from < https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=museumstudies_theses > [14 January 2022]

Bradley, A. (2018) 'Slash Fanfiction and Media Representation of the LGBTQ+ Community' *Department of sociology* [online] 13(1) 1-6. available from < https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1624985/m2/1/high_res_d/BradleySociology-1-0.pdf > [15 January 2022]

Brennan, J. (2016) 'Queerbaiting: The 'playful' possibilities of homoeroticism' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* [online] 21(2) 189-206. available from < <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1367877916631050> > [18 December 2021]

Bryman, A. (2012) 'Social Research Methods' [online] 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press. available from < https://bibliu.com/app/?query=socail%20research%20methods%20%20#/view/books/9780192529497/epub/OEBPS/10-Bryman-Chap10.html#page_229 > [14 March 2021]

Burlingame, R. (2017) 'Katie McGrath on How 'Supergirl' Courts Controversy and the SuperCorp Shippers' *comicbook* [online] 16 October. available from < <https://comicbook.com/dc/news/katie-mcgrath-on-how-supergirl-courts-controversy-and-the-superc/> > [21 March 2022]

Butler, J. (2010) 'Performative Agency' *Journal of Cultural Economy* [online] 3 (2) 147-161. available from < <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17530350.2010.494117?needAccess=true> > [17 March 2021]

Cejer, A. (2022) 'Our Flag Means Death Shows That TV Has No More Excuses For Queerbaiting' *ScreenRant* [online] 27 March. available from < <https://screenrant.com/our-flag-means-death-stede-blackbeard-relationship-queerbaiting-reject/> > [3 April 2022]

Cheeda, S. (2020) *Supernatural: 15 Times Destiel was Canon* [online] available from < <https://screenrant.com/supernatural-destiel-canon-moments/> > [27 March 2022]

Christina, M. (2017) *Minding the gaps: deducing meaning in Sherlock Holmes fanfiction* [online] Thesis. DePaul University. available from < <https://via.library.depaul.edu/etd/231/> > [1 December 2021]

- Collier, C. (2015) *The love that refuses to speak its name: examining queerbaiting and fan-producer interactions in fan cultures* [online] Thesis. University of Louisville. available from < <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3268&context=etd> > [16 December 2021]
- Dhaenens, F., Bauwel, V, S., Biltereyst, D. (2008) 'Slashing the fiction of Queer Theory: Slash fiction, queer reading and transgressing the boundaries of screen studies, representations and audiences' *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 32(4): 335-347., 2008
- Didi666 n.d. *Shipping Fandom* [online] available from < https://shipping.fandom.com/wiki/Swan_Queen > [27 March 2022]
- Dixon, S. (2022) *Twitter* [online] available from < <https://twitter.com/ScarlettMichKat/status/1492476684141948929> > [25 March 2022]
- Fagan, E. (2020) 'The Importance of Fanfiction' *The Nerd Daily* [online] 26 September. available from < <https://thenerdaily.com/the-importance-of-fanfiction/> > [27 November 2021]
- Fierra, A. (2019) 'When it comes to Kara and Lena, the 'Supergirl' writers say one thing and do another'. *hypable* [online] 25 October. available from < <https://www.hypable.com/kara-lena-supergirl-season-2/> > [14 January 2022]
- Floegel, D. (2020) "' Write the story you want to read": world- queering through slash fanfiction creation' *Journal of Documentation* [online] 76(4) 785-805. available from < <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2409030707?accountid=10286> > [17 December 2021]
- Franklin, M. (2019) 'queerbaiting, Queer Readings, and Heteronormative viewing practices'. in *Queer baiting and fandom*. ed. By Brennan, J. Iowa: University of Iowa press, 41- 52
- Freifraufischer (2015) *Queerbaiting in Once Upon a Time.... a short history* [online] available < <https://freifraufischer.tumblr.com/post/131185807321/queerbaiting-in-once-upon-a-time-a-short-history> > [10 December 2021]
- Gennis, S. (2014) 'Supernatural has a queerbaiting problem that needs to stop' *TV Guide* [online] 17 November. available from < <https://www.tvguide.com/news/supernatural-queerbaiting-destiel-1089286/> > [10 December 2021]
- Hale- Stern, K. (2022) 'Our Flag Means Death' Just Delivered a Mortal Blow to Queerbaiting' *The Mary Sue* [online] 25 March. available from < <https://www.themarysue.com/our-flag-means-death-kills-queerbaiting/> > [3 April 2022]
- Hall, S. (1993) 'Encoding, Decoding' [online] 2nd edn. London: Routledge. available from < <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbmVwZ2JvYXJkZW5nbGlzaHxneDoyYmEwMmQ4YjBiNzMzMzAy> > [17 March 2021]
- Hazra, N. (2021) *Queerer than Canon: Fix-it Fanfiction and Queer Readings* [online] Dissertation research Journal. University of Seattle. available from < <https://scholarworks.seattleu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1207&context=suurj> > [16 December 2021]
- Jowett, L., Frohard-Dourlent. (2017) 'Introduction to Queering the Whedonverses: Interrogating Whedon from a Multiplicity of Queer Perspectives' *The Journal of Whedon Studies* [online] 15.2(46) 1- 7.

available from <

http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/13076/1/Jowett_Lorna_Frohard_Dourlent_H_I_ne_JWSA_2017_Introduction_to_Queering_the_Whedonverses_Interrogating_Whedon_from_a_Multiplicity_of_Queer_Perspectives.pdf > [12 January 2022]

Kikiano n.d. *Fandom Encyclopedia* [online] available from <

[https://fandomencyclopedia.fandom.com/wiki/Supercorp_\(Kara/Lena\)](https://fandomencyclopedia.fandom.com/wiki/Supercorp_(Kara/Lena)) > [29 March 2022]

Koehm, D. (2018) *Revision as Resistance: Fanfiction as an Empowering Community for Female and Queer Fans* [online] Thesis. University of Connecticut. available from <

https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/604/ > [3 December 2021]

Legends of Tomorrow (2018) [DVD] Warner Bros. Home Ent

Liszewski, B. (2017) 'Supergirl's responsibility when it comes to kara and lena's friendship' *the tv junkies*

[online] 10 may. available from < <https://www.thetvjunkies.com/supergirl-responsibility-kara-lena/> > [16 January 2022]

Louise, S. (2018) *TSR Week of Ships| SuperCorp: Female Empowerment and Positivity Power This Ship*

[online] available from < <https://theseriesregulars.com/tsr-week-of-ships-supercorp-female-empowerment/> > [27 March 2022]

Mandhami, M., Lobo, S. (2019) 'Shipping Is the Queer Community on Board?' *Eidos* 9(1) 60-65. Available from < <http://xaviers.edu.in/ojs3/index.php/eidos/article/view/99/62> > [14 January 2022]

Marston, G. (2019) 'Oscar Isaac Ship Poe & Finn from 'Star Wars' But Says 'People Are Too Afraid'

Space.com [online] 11 December. available from < <https://www.space.com/star-wars-oscar-isaac-ships-poe-finn-people-too-afraid.html> > [21 March 2022]

Matt and Jess TV commentary. (2016) 'Once Upon a Time' season 5: Lana Parrilla offers support to Swan Queen fans after Emma, Regina comments [online] available from <

<https://cartermatt.com/190686/once-upon-a-time-season-5-lana-parrilla-offers-more-support-to-swan-queen-fans-after-emma-regina-comments/> > [21 March 2022]

Mcdermott, M. (2019) 'From canon to politics Queerbaiting and the CW's Supergirl'. in *Queer baiting and fandom*. ed. By Brennan, J. Iowa: University of Iowa press, 118- 120

Milli, S., Bamman, D. (2016) *Beyond Canonical Texts: A Computational Analysis of Fanfiction 'In Proceedings of the 2016 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing'*. Held November 2016 at Austin, Texas. Association for Computational Linguistics.

N/S, K. (2014) 'And They Lived Heterosexually Ever After: Why I'm not recapping Once Upon A Time

Anytime' *Autostraddle* [online] 17 April. available from < <https://www.autostraddle.com/and-they-lived-heterosexually-ever-after-why-im-not-recapping-once-upon-a-time-anymore-233838/> > [15 December 2021]

Nordin, E. (2015) *From Queer Reading to Queerbaiting: The battle over the polysemic text and the power of hermeneutics*

[online] Thesis. Stockholm University. available from < <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A839802&dswid=1431> > [16 December 2021]

- Nordin, E. (2019) 'From denying your queers to pretending you have them'. in *Queer baiting and fandom*. ed. By Brennan, J. Iowa: University of Iowa press, 25 -40
- Ouatspec. (2016) 'the difference between queerbaiting and BBF coding' *Word Press* [online] 19 March. available from < <https://ouatspec.wordpress.com/2016/03/19/the-difference-between-queerbaiting-and-bff-coding/> > [9 December 2021]
- Out of the Closet – On Your TV (n/d) *Queer,,,baiting?* [online] available from < <https://outoftheclosetonyourtvp.wordpress.com/2016/10/07/queer-baiting/> > [12 December 2021]
- Randelle-Moon, H, E, K. (2019) 'Queering subtext and fandom in Xena: Warrior Princess'. in *Queer baiting and fandom*. ed. By Brennan, J. Iowa: University of Iowa press, 112 – 117
- Rehrman, M. (2021) "Supergirl is back, and it looks like the queerbaiting is too" *Medium* [online] 2 April. available from < <https://medium.com/incluvie/supergirl-is-back-and-it-looks-like-the-queerbaiting-is-too-c3e1779e4e9a> > [17 January 2022]
- Roach, E, E. (2019) 'Supernatural Wincest and Dean Winchester's bisexual panic'. in *Queer baiting and fandom*. ed. By Brennan, J. Iowa: University of Iowa press, 65- 81
- Schneider, E. (2018) 'Disrupting hegemonic heteronormativity through queer intervention strategies : the negotiation of queercoding and queerbaiting in fandom spaces' Thesis. Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz. available from < <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/obvugrhs/2581595> > [18 December 2021]
- Schneider, E. (2018) *Disrupting hegemonic heteronormativity through queer intervention strategies: the negotiation of queercoding and queerbaiting in fandom spaces* [online] Thesis. The University of Graz. available from < <https://unipub.uni-graz.at/obvugrhs/2581595> > [15 January 2022]
- Scott, L. (2019) *They Won't: Analyzing Queerbaiting and Compulsory Heterosexuality in Popular Television* [online] Thesis. Baylor University. available from < <https://baylor-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/2104/10716/SCOTT-THESIS-2019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> > [13 January 2022]
- Scott, S. (2015) 'Towards a theory of producer/ fan trolling' *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* [online] 15(1) 143- 159. available from < <https://www.participations.org/Volume%2015/Issue%201/9.pdf> > [11 December 2021]
- SQFanfic (2013) *Twitter* [online] available from < <https://mobile.twitter.com/SQFanfic/photo> > [29 March 2022]
- Stacy, S. (2020) 'Supergirl: Is the series alienating fans with queerbaitng?' *Fansided* [online] N/D. available from < <https://culturess.com/2020/02/25/supergirl-alienating-fans-queerbaiting/> > [17 January 2022]
- Supergirl (2017) [DVD] Warner Bros. Home Ent
- Talbot, S. (2020) "'Supernatural' has a pattern of queerbaiting" *Queens journal* [online] 6 october. available from < <https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2020-10-05/pop-culture/supernatural-has-a-pattern-of-queerbaiting/> > [14 December 2021]

Tenbarge, K. (2020) "Supernatural's queer fandom kept it alive for 15 years, but the show never gave them what they really wanted" *Insider* [online] 19 November. available from <<https://www.insider.com/supernatural-last-episode-when-destiel-queerbaiting-end-fandom-tumblr-2020-11>> [13 December 2021]

Tenor (n.d.) *Supercorp Supergirl GIF* [online] available from <<https://tenor.com/view/supercorp-supergirl-lena-luthor-kara-gif-7502901> <https://theseriesregulars.com/tsr-week-of-ships-supercorp-female-empowerment/>> [28 March 2022]

Vilkomerson, S. (2013) 'Andrew Garfield on Spider-man's sexuality: 'why can't he be gay?'' *Entertainment weekly* [online] 10 July. available from <<https://ew.com/comic-con/2013/07/10/andrew-garfield-spider-man-gay/>> [9 February 2022]

Wild, N. (2018) 'The active defense of fanfiction writing: Sherlock fans' metatextual response' *European Journal of Cultural Studies* [online] 23(2) 244-260. available from <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1367549418790453>> [14 December 2021]

Yatrakis, C. (2013) Fan fiction, fandoms, and literature: or, why it's time to pay attention to fan fiction [online] Thesis DePaul University. available from <<https://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1147&context=etd>> [3 December 2021]

Yau, J. (2016) 'The Importance of Fanfiction' *Her Campus* [online] 23 September. available from <<https://www.hercampus.com/school/st-andrews/importance-fanfiction/>> [25 November 2021]