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The Trans* in Transformative Works:
Non-Dichotomous Gender in Fan fiction

Fictions of Masculinity

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June, 2014

The most iconic question in research regarding slash fan fiction is "Why do healthy, normative, heterosexual women find pleasure in stories about sexual relationships between men?" In this paper I reexamine parts of the question itself, and suggest that the characters are not necessarily men, and the writers are not necessarily women. Perhaps, in some cases, characters and authors share a gender, rather than just gender-related experiences, as previous research suggested.

Articles researching fan fiction rarely deal with gender, beyond feminist. The few that do, leave out transgender issues and readings. In this paper, I will explore aspects of transgenderism, gender subversion and non-dichotomous gender in the field of fan fiction, and in a character beloved by fan fiction writes, Dean Winchester from the original text, American television show *Supernatural*.

I will suggest that replies for the most common question in research of the field, 'why would heterosexual women be interested in stories about gay men?' (Kustritz; Keft-Kennedy), disregard complexities of gender. This results in research ignoring gender identities and desires of some fans, as well as interpreting the genders of characters favored in the field in a reductive way, which leaves existing research unaware of an important aspect of the field, as well as a range of replies to the question.

Fan fiction is a form of transformative work, a creation that takes elements such as characters or world building from an existing text. One example of this is Robin McKinley's novel *Spindle's End*, which retells the story of *Sleeping Beauty*, while focusing on the main character's relationships with the women in her life and developing them. While there are several examples of this genre in mainstream literature, most works are

not official, both as a result of legal issues and of their non-hegemonic status.

A popular genre within fan fiction is slash, or slash fiction. This genre focuses on romantic or sexual relationships between people of the same sex or gender¹. Slash fiction developed, in its current form, during the 1960s in the United States. At the time, most stories revolved around the relationship between characters Spock and Kirk, of the original text² television show Star Trek. The genre is named after the slash (/) sign, which appeared the stories' descriptions, "Kirk/Spock" (Keft-Kennedy 52).

Commonly, scholars consider fan fiction spaces and discourse ("fandom"), and particularly slash, to be generally populated by women only. Most gender-related research of fan fiction focuses on feminist aspects of slash writing, and on the exotic anecdote of the field – "Why would normative, red blooded women like gay male porn?" This question is problematic in many way, some of which will be addressed in this paper.

A common reply to this question was suggested by Anne Kustritz (372-382). In her view, slash authors and fans are women who feel the need for alternatives to current models of heterosexual relationships, and particularly the way men operate in them to oppress women. She considers slash a communal brainstorming process in which women refine imagined relationship models, perhaps as a step towards changing heterosexual relationships and power dynamics in their worlds. They write stories about relationships between males since it enables them to imagine equal, reciprocal relationships, in which no one is objectified and consent is a must. In fact, as she explains it, those characters are innately women, representing the authors and readers, written in male bodies in order to remove them from patriarchal oppression women experience, and allow fans to imagine alternatives.

¹ Another definition is 'a genre depicting desire or practice of romance, sex or life-partnership in a relationship that isn't heterosexual', though a new trend in heterosexual fan fiction today is 'queer het', moving away from heteronormative tropes approaches.

² The term "original text" refers to the work created by copyright holders (in this paper, mostly television series Supernatural), whereas stories based this text are referred to as "fan fiction" or "slash", as explained.

Articles exploring queer aspects of gender in fan fiction, or even simple transgender issues, hardly exist at all. Few refer to the relationship between slash and LGBTQ sexuality, beyond traditional homonormative relationships. For instance, Raven Davies wrote about the potential appeal of slash communities for bisexual men, Bridget Kies examined stories about threesomes involving a woman and two men, and Kristina Busse and Alexis Lothian wrote about stories in which the characters' genders were switched. Sonia Katyal (489), in discussing the legal aspects of fan fiction as a contributing factor to social change, mentioned that the field can be a sphere of reexamination of patriarchal and traditional gender constructs, and perhaps enable the imagination of alternatives. She did, however, leave this as a philosophical, unexplored idea of something that might make the world better for females/women, from a feminist practicality.., Keft-Kennedy (72) also mentioned that women may benefit from performing stereotypical masculine acts in slash fan fiction, though she, too, only touched on the topic briefly, focusing merely on its benefits for normative women.

Other than those, some articles mention in passing that fandom includes people of non-dichotomous gender and that they should be included in research, though mostly they didn't practice this advice (Osborne 4.4; Roddy note 4; Busker 1.7).

Another article addressing non dichotomous gender in fan work is not about western fan fiction but about Japanese Yaoi, a genre not unlike fan fiction, but rooted in different communities, conventions and tropes (McHarry). The article describes characters being presented as genderless, by way of stripping them from gender signifiers. While this is not the case when it comes to common characters in western fan fiction, it is worth noting that Yaoi fan communities also celebrate and create a form of non-dichotomous gender.

Not only does most research ignore queer aspects of fan fiction, most research seems insistent on removing it from suspicion of any abnormality, and specifically of gender and sexual abnormality. Scholars resolutely declare, time and again, that participants in the field are red blooded normative women. This nearly ritualistic

reiteration may have been intended to exorcize the ghosts of abnormality lurking along the edges of the stories. Anne Kustritz' explanation of slash as rooted in oppression of women also insistently characterizes these women as unthreatening. Not only does she generalize them as heterosexual women, but according to her, they are all middle class, married to men, collage educated heterosexual women. She goes as far as explaining that slash authors are overqualified for their jobs, and only compensate for the boredom with their harmless little hobby.

But perhaps this insistence itself implies that there are things about fan fiction that threaten the existing social structure. Kustritz's own description of a community of fans hell-bent on examining, changing and reimagining masculinity in order to reinvent heterosexuality, is, in itself, quite delightfully queer, and far from the unthreatening, heteronormative image she seemed to try to depict. Moreover, the assumption that masculinity can be reinvented may be based on a queer perception of gender as constructed rather than essential, even if Kustritz seemed to describe only a wish to bring forth feminist social change, which doesn't necessarily negate essentialism.

Even if we accept Kustritz' assertion that slash is generally written by women, and that they write from the point of view of men, this can be considered quite a-normative, and rather transgender. In fact, Kustritz' describes a writer community of people who express themselves in a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth. Not only that, if, as Kustritz claims, fan fiction characters are, in fact, women, she is describing an entire genre in which the main characters are women living in male bodies. If so, this is easily the most representation transgenders ever got in a prolific, popular genre. If we consider that these characters experience themselves as men as well as women – as seems to be the case, as will be demonstrated - this treasure of representation is, in many cases, of characters of non-dichotomous gender, a variety of genders which pretty much never receive any representation at all. While I trust some of the writers are, in fact,

cisgender³ women, perhaps for some writers, the trans-gender practice of writing, and these rare representations, are personally meaningful.

Similarly to some transgender communities, in some fandom communities "passing", behaving convincingly as men, has been an issue of concern. Writers are periodically accused of not depicting men "right", and guides are sites were dedicated to help authors write men more believably. This is reminiscent of transgender communities policing and concern with the adaptation of normative traits connected with the gender they identify with. Such articles and discussions were more prominent in fan fiction 10-15 years ago, and are less common today, perhaps similarly to a newer discourse in some transgender communities, insisting on reclaiming gender labels rather than passing. For instance, a common reply to the demand of transgender women to try to "act like women", is that the way they act is exactly the way women act, since they are women, or no less women than others.

So, one way in which the common base research question – the allure of slash fan-fiction for heterosexual women - can and should be reexamined, is the assumption that fans are all hegemonic women. This claim hasn't been clearly mapped in quantitative research at this point, and would be a hard thing to achieve, too, since fan fiction communities are varied, continuously shift and change, and take place mostly online, where identities are hard to track, and the identity of silent readers is mostly unknown. Several articles cited as proof of participants' identity a few partial and statistically untrustworthy, very small scale vanity surveys, of the kind that might be conducted on Facebook these days, or simply cited each other (Kustritz 376; Keft-Kennedy 49; Davies 2). Another problem is that generally, such surveys often only provided two gender options, or two sex option, thus erasing representation of other genders, that, as mentioned, later researchers consider a problem (Busker 1.7).

In my own experience as a long time participant in slash communities, while I've met very few writers and readers who are men, perhaps most of the fans I happened to

³ A person who isn't transgender

interact with over years in the field were not hegemonic women, but POC, transgender or queer in other ways, or belonging to other disempowered groups. While my experience is not statistically valid either, it does make me wonder whether some of the researchers simply assumed the people they were interacting with online were white, heterosexual women, perhaps considering white women to be a universal state for anyone other than men. This sort of erasure can be seen in a paper by Keft-Kennedy (49) citing a survey in which every single participant reported they are attracted to both men and women (the only provided options). Almost amusingly, the survey was cited as proof that fan fiction writers and readers are heterosexual. One is left to postulate the researcher doesn't quite believe in bisexuality, let alone other options.

This sort of erasure is a common criticism directed at second-wave feminism, which a lot of fan fiction research seems to be based on. For instance, Kustritz' assertion that depictions of women in media are subject to the patriarchal gaze and are often part of violence against women, resonate Laura Mulvey (11-17) and Catharine MacKinnon (638-638). Her perhaps-idealized image of fan communities working together to bring forth social change for women everywhere resonates cultural feminism as well as Adrienne Rich's description of women as a safe, warm community with common goals (650-651). Current discourse in the field of fan fiction, as well as some more current research, agrees that such articles have been erasing people of disempowered groups (Busker 1.7).

While I don't deny that some fans are probably mostly normative, and hegemonic women, as much as such a term can be applied to people involved in illegal queer porn, perhaps for some the appeal of the field involves transgender desires, whether desire to be transgender or attraction to transgenders. Personally, one of the more meaningful and deep things I've been through in fandom was roleplaying as Spike (from the original text *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), in a relationship with another character of similar gender. For me, it was deeply meaningful to get to experience, even if in role play alone, moving in the world in a gender closer to the way I experienced my gender, and to be perceived that way by other as well. A similar experience was recording fan creations in audio form

(podfic). One of the appeals of it for me was getting to portray characters of genders I identified with, but pretty much never got to portray in theater or doing voice work. Regardless of identity, a female actor isn't likely to get roles like Spike or Dean Winchester., Characters of non dichotomous gender are rare, and actors of non dichotomous gender almost never get to portray them in the few cases they exist. As a result, actors of non dichotomous gender almost never get to play a character of their own gender. In podfic, I could choose from a glorious range of interesting, well written characters, whose gender I might identify with. Writing, and even reading, have a similar appeal.

I am not alone. Fan communities are often very friendly and knowledgeable of transgender issues, and fans themselves often express related fantasies or desires, both on themselves and on objects of their desire. In a recent vanity survey done by Supernatural fan Tebtosca ("Voice Meme"), one of the questions was what character from the show the survey participant would like to be for a day. Nearly all female participants chose male characters, stating reasons such as wanting to have sex as a male, wanting to experience masturbation from within a muscular and penis-wielding body, wanting to experience themselves or be seen in that body or wanting to be recognized as male or as a guy by others - be them lovers or society in general. While this survey is at most, due to its limited scope, indicative of a small part of the field, surveys of similar scope were used to indicate that fans were heterosexual women, so perhaps it should be considered with no less seriousness.

There has been some research regarding the perhaps-nonexistent gap between desire and identification in fan writing. Somogyi concluded (402) that fans of a specific female/male type of story based in the Star Trek universe are generally bisexual, and enjoy the female character both through identifying with her and seeing her as desirable through the eyes of her male lover, to whom they are also attracted. If such a large group of fans experiences desire and identification combined, perhaps that model applies to characters who aren't women as well. And perhaps the fans Somogyi describes may not only be attracted to, but rather identify with the male lover as well.

If so, it seems possible that in addition (and combination) to the reasons given by previous scholars, some fans derive a transgender pleasure or meaning from participating in fan fiction, be it time framed or lifelong, an identification or an attraction, a pleasurable exploration in self or a much needed expression of identity.

In continuation of Somogyi's model, perhaps the common attraction and interest in fan fiction towards cross dressing ("Crossdressing") and gender switching characters ("Genderswap") is indicative of the fans' own transsexual or non dichotomous gender tendencies. Moreover, as will be demonstrated on the character of Dean, a lot of the characters favored by fan fiction authors, both in the original text and as they are developed in fan discourse, have complex genders.

Perhaps, then, some of the fans' desire and identification is with non-dichotomous gender. For the purposes of this paper, I will consider "non dichotomous gender" to be any gender that is not comprehensively and continuously "man" or "woman". Some examples of this are multiple genders in the same person, no gender, a-normative genders or an identity of moving between genders continuously. I should clarify this paper refers to it not just to a philosophical concept or, necessarily, to an intention to undo gender completely, but to lived experiences and personal identities, often of people who identify as transgender . While some people experience non-dichotomous gender recreationally or casually, and some identify by it deeply or continuously, this term refers to genders no less serious, lived and in need of recognition than "woman" and "man".

Several scholars have discussed such non-binary identification, among them Monique Wittig, who explored 'lesbian' as a gender separate from 'woman'. According to Wittig, a deciding factor in womanhood is availability to be used by men in ways arranged by heterosexuality, therefore lesbians do not fit that category. Another example was given by Jacob Hale ("Leatherdyke Boys and their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men"), who considers 'leatherdyke boy' and 'Daddy' to be genders separate from 'woman' and 'man'.

Perhaps, then, similarly to Wittig's lesbians, some fans, perceived the characters they identified with as part of a different gender, "gay".

Personally, I don't connect to that definition. Over years of activism in queer and LGBT communities, I have watched gay people cynically prevent social improvement for more socially weak groups, such as people of non dichotomous gender. I don't identify with gay people as a group, and don't feel my gender is "gay". I perceive them as a social group much stronger than most if not all groups I am part of, and often as oppressors. While this is my experience and may not be indicative of others', it's a possible explanation why there is such little connection between slash communities – supposedly focused on writing gay romance – and gay communities, or even gay literature.

Mannerisms, culture, narratives and interests connected with the social construct "gay" rarely appear in slash stories. In the very few cases they do, it often seems to be meant as a statement, whether statement against the field's norms or a textbook didactic message that 'gay is OK'. These stories, often focusing strongly on coming out or marriage equality, stand out as different from what's common in the field, perhaps since the use of gay narratives veers noticeably from the norms in the field, where gay narratives are mostly absent (Pagliassotti; Kustritz 379).

Similar arguments can and should be made for constructs such as "bisexual" and "queer", the latter functioning today, to a great degree, not as a negation or deconstruction of structures, as it is sometimes perceived in queer theory, but as a social construct, including fashions, performances and policing. .

Perhaps some of these options are correct for different people, or even for the same people. Perhaps this gender constructs that interest writers and fans should be considered "fic gender". Perhaps they are simply newer variations on masculinity, or perhaps – femininity. At this point, it may be useful to examine more closely some of the possible options and aspects in one occurrence of this gender, and at some of the gender constructs it echoes or takes inspiration from.

One example of a fan fiction character who embodies this gender is Dean Winchester, from the original text *Supernatural*, an American television series which follows two brothers as they fight monsters and other supernatural beings. The scope of this paper won't allow for real exploration of the ways Dean is depicted in fan fiction itself, and so focuses on Dean's depiction in the original text – a depiction Tosenberger (“The Epic Love Story of Sam and Dean” 1.3) believes to be embraced and developed in fan fiction rather than subverted, in most aspects.

I chose to focus on this depiction since it's a basis most fan fiction accepts and builds on. This is the depiction accepted by most fans, the fact that Dean has been passionately followed and written with great devotion for nine years now, is probably indicative of fans' connection to his character. I write this description from the point of view of a fan, basing it on aspects of Dean that I and other fans find interesting. As such, this analysis is somewhat indicative of fandom perceptions as well. Regardless, I believe similarly complex gender constructs can be found in a significant amount of characters favored by fan fiction writers and readers, and bring Dean's case here as an example only. .

Dean is the hero star of *Supernatural*, and has many classic masculine traits. Between the two main characters of the show, he's the leader of the monster-hunting team. He's a weapon's expert, has a gift for fixing cars and machines, and makes money hustling pool or working in construction. Stubbly, bowlegged, clad in jeans, leather and plaid, he drives his well-tuned muscle car through the back roads of the US of A, hunting monsters and saving people. He puts his boots, covered with road dust, on diner tables, orders greasy beef and black coffee, and calls waitresses "sweetheart" with such cheesy charm they're glad to take him home for the night. Dean uses violence on a nearly daily basis, is reckless about his own emotional, mental and physical safety, pretends to be invulnerable as a basic way of handling existence, jokes about serious issues and diverts the conversation when his feelings are addressed. He blasts Metallica,

roughhouses with other guys, uses "chick" and "gay" as derogatory terms, and calls women he dislikes "bitch". He echoes previous Deans, from James to Moriarty. If Clint Eastwood and Grease's Travolta had extremely heterosexual sex and birthed a bouncing combination of their masculinities, it might be something like Dean's.

As Manly as Dean is, his gender is often contrasted with more traditional masculinity, often with that of his father's, John. The comparison makes sense. Dean embraces John's way of life, including monster-hunting, petty-crime, and drifter existence, and talks about it as if it were best way to live. Like his father, he considers it the only moral way for them to live. Dean adopts and duplicates John's goals, skills, alcoholism, fashion style and body language. Most of the objects Dean uses to present his identity are his father's. Dean's muscle car, the most precious object in Dean's life, and an object that represents Dean himself or acts as his extension (Bruce 4.5), was given to Dean by John and belonged to John first. John seems to still feel he owns it (3.5). An element that gives Dean some small measure of subjectivity is his music - rebellious loud rock. That too has come from John - not only did John introduce Dean to this music, the very tapes Dean plays used to belong to John ("Pilot"). Even Dean's iconic leather jacket used to belong to John, abandoned and adopted by Dean ("Pilot").

For John, these classic symbols of rebellion - muscle car, metal rock and leather jacket - were a way to act out against a world that took away his apple-pie life when his wife was killed, setting him on the path of outlaw revenge. For Dean, they are anything but rebellious, imitated or adopted from the father he worships. While John is presented using these masculine elements effortlessly, as if it were completely natural to him, Dean puts thought and effort into employing them in his life. He takes care of the car with great skill and devotion, and still is criticized by John for not getting it right (Bruce 4.8). He regularly speaks up against music he doesn't consider "right", but is sometimes revealed to actually like it, and even know the lyrics, though he almost never allows himself this pleasure ("Simon Said"). While John's masculinity seems effortless, which can create an illusion that is it natural and "real", Dean's cultivated efforts to fit himself into this model highlight the differences, even though he is often successful. This is

reminiscent of Chodorow's (33) concept of masculinity as requiring continuous effort to maintain, John, an unavailable father, representing an unattainable masculinity that can't be kept. Being absent from corporal, everyday existence, John can be imagined to be the spirit of masculinity itself, desired but never fully attainable no matter what Dean does, just like John.

While Dean works hard to be a man like his father, in some aspects of his life he actively chooses to be different. While John is unavailable and neglectful, Dean is emotionally and physically available, initiates contact and companionship, and practices care and attentiveness.

One example of this is a scene from the brothers' childhood ("A Very Supernatural Christmas"). John, not father of the year, left his kids alone for a few days to go on a monster hunt – reminiscent of Chodorow's image of masculinity, more interested in being away, on the road, than in being there for and with his family (39). The few days turned into weeks, a twelve year old Dean taking care of his younger brother, Sam, trying to keep it together, promising Sam John would be home by Christmas – which he wasn't. During this time Dean took care of Sam's physical and emotional needs, trying to cheer Sam up, make him feel safe and looked after, and give him a Christmas as best he could.

The comparison between John and Dean was further highlighted by the text when Sam decided to give the gift he'd intended for his dad, to Dean. The act signified moving his trust and devotion from his father to Dean, where it remained for their lives to come. This can be seen as a variation on traditional masculinity, in that in order to win his father's place, Dean didn't need to best him in battle or kill him, as Freud (145-146) may have suggested. The way to best the father in this world, is to be available, to show care and compassion, traits usually perceived as feminine.

Perhaps, then, Dean presents a newer sort of masculinity, be it faulty or improved in comparison to John's.

Still, Dean fits a lot of models of femininity, with such consistence it might be a mistake to ignore it. A prominent scholar in Cultural Feminism, Carol Gilligan, characterized women as having a different sort of morality than men. Women's ethics are based not on universal, "one size fits all" justice, but on care (159), emotional attentiveness (165), relationships (59), a sense of responsibility towards loved ones (at times exaggerated) (136), and on judging each case individually (73).

Dean fits this model well, as Schmidt (4.11) also points out. One of Dean's most prominent characterizations is his deep devotion to taking care of his family, and particularly his brother, Sam. Since their mother died, when Dean was four, sending his father into a life of obsession for revenge, Dean took on the responsible role of caregiver for his family. He soothed, cooked, mediated and comforted, dressed wounds and tried to keep the family together. More than anything else in his life, Dean's identity is rooted in taking care of Sam. Dean has dedicated his life to Sam's wellbeing, doting, caring, protecting, and socializing, giving attention and thought to Sam's various emotional and physical needs.

Time and again, Dean makes moral choices based on his feelings and on the specific circumstances, rather than applying a single rule to various and complex cases. For instance, while Dean strongly believes all supernatural beings are evil, can never be trusted and must be killed, in some cases he spares, saves, protects and even befriends such creatures, based on the specific situation or on his relationship with them ("Citizen Fang").

A continuous example is Sam, always Dean's most vulnerable spot. Since the beginning of the series, it's gradually become clear Sam had been infected by demon blood, and might be slowly turning into a monster, probably the antichrist himself. Dean's father, whom Dean trusts to a fault and almost always obeys, orders Dean to be ready to kill Sam if necessary. Sam himself, terrified of causing harm, begs Dean to promise him to do so, which Dean promises, in order to calm Sam down. Still, even when Dean believes Sam had gone evil and killed allies and innocent people, Dean refuses to kill Sam, and

instead stands by him and takes care of his emotional and physical needs ("Born Under a Bad Sign").

In the face of John's classically heroic and biblically endorsed choice to kill his own son for the sake of a universal ethic, Dean chooses ethics based on love, relationship and care, specific to the case. Dean's sense of responsibility towards Sam is a theme in the series, at times driving Dean to extreme behavior, to the point of offering his soul and his life to ensure it ("Trial and Error"). The choice, it should be mentioned, is characterized as small, perhaps selfish, loving, touching, but unhealthy. While Dean's compassion proves, more often than not, to have been a good choice, the lengths he goes to to ensure Sam's safety are sometimes presented as problematic, and perhaps unjustified.

Dean often expresses a personal need for Sam to be happy, explaining time and again that his sense of self and of worth are tied in with Sam's wellbeing. As he puts it, "Don't you dare think that there is anything, past or present, that I would put in front of you! [...] I need you to see that. I'm begging you" ("Sacrifice"), and the next day, "There ain't no me if there ain't no you" ("I Think I'm Gonna Like it Here"). When faced with the possibility Sam might put himself in serious danger instead of Dean, Dean clarifies he'd rather die than face a life without Sam, since he doesn't know how to be without him ("Do You Believe in Miracles?").

In one occurrence, Dean offers up his life specifically ensure Sam gets to live his own life, get married, have children and grandchildren ("Trial and Error"). The list sounds like what a stereotypical mother might want for her child, and might even pressure him into against his own choices – as indeed Dean does, in this episode. This fits Nancy Chodorow's (42) model of the mother basing her identity and sense of self in loved ones, and nagging them into resenting her and her femininity. While Dean does go around committing acts of manliness, like Chodorow's model of trying to maintain masculinity (39), Dean's priority, biggest efforts and deepest sense of self are rooted, like Chodorow's woman (33), in caring for the needs of the kid, regardless of Sam's age. Dean's sacrifice is presented as an act of care, but also of codependence and perhaps

obsession and weakness - an act done for himself, because he couldn't bear letting Sam go. This, too, fits Chodorow's model of devaluation of those feminine acts (33).

It is made clear throughout the series, that Dean's biggest fear is that Sam would die, or be hurt in a way Dean can't fix. His second biggest fear is that Sam would leave him. Even though Dean has been broken, killed and tortured horribly, and has literally gone through hell, one trauma Dean keeps reliving and going back to, is Sam leaving for college. He is often depicted as not allowing Sam to grow up, nagging, policing, staying perhaps too intimate and involved in nearly every aspect of Sam's life. This, too, fits Chodorow's model of femininity well (33).

While Dean isn't as close with anyone as he is with Sam, he often trusts other people of similar gender performance to his own, in a way reminiscent of Adrienne Rich's model of closeness between women. According to Rich, all women share a close, erotic, tender connection (636), based on an identification stemming from suffering under the same oppression (660). Eve Sedgwick pointed to a similar erotic loyalty between men, who might compete ruthlessly, but remain devoted to maintaining their privileged social position, and therefore to each other. Three differences Sedgwick pointed to are that for men the erotic nature of the connection is not smoothly continuous (3), but cuts between homosocial erotism and plain homosexuality, that between men the identification is based on competition, often over a woman (25), and perhaps most importantly, that for men the connection is about maintaining privilege rather than dealing with oppression (3).

Dean's relationships with characters of similar gender performance to his (here I will refer to them as men, though they very well might not be) can be read as strongly homosocial, in that Dean's world revolves around them, and he is strongly identified with them. But the way in which he practices this identification often fits Rich's model of femininity better than Sedgwick's model of masculinity.

First, the erotic aspects of the connections often move on the continuum of erotic identification, similarly to the way Rich described relationships between women,

as well as the continuum between emotional closeness and romantic love. This is often pointed out in the original text, for instance as Sam and Dean are often mistaken for a romantic couple ("Playthings"). In fan fiction, this is often brought out of subtext and into text ("The Epic Love Story of Sam and Dean"). However, a lot of stories leave this eroticism undefined. When called upon to label their stories as romantic or not, sexual or not, as is customary in the field, many label them as 'erotic if you squint', 'pre-slash', 'depends on the way you read it'. This common practice may indicate a smooth movement over the continuum of erotism rather than a more clearly defined cut.

While Dean spends a lot of his life in battle and competition, he rarely competes with people he identifies with. Dean is devoted to his connection with them. While sometimes he makes jokes that pretend to be competitive or engages in a prank war ("Hell House"), he trusts them with his and Sam's physical safety, looks up to them or helps them along, and often touches them with care and gentleness. In fact, Dean is so uncompetitive with men he identifies with, that in a less usual occurrence in pop-culture, Dean shares the title of "hero", as well as his position as the star of the show, with Sam (both inside the show and in the way it is presented to fans). Neither is the sidekick, neither can be easily pegged as more normative, and while there is some fluctuation to it, both points of view are developed and both are written as subjects⁴.

Being in competition over women is overwhelmingly far from Dean's style, throughout the series as well as fan fiction. While Dean often flirts with women, including Sam's girlfriend ("Pilot"), he is much more invested in getting his loved ones laid, and would probably back down if any of them had real interest in a woman he pursued. The most invested Dean gets over such romantic triangles is when he feels a woman might pull Sam away from him ("I Know What You Did Last Summer"; "We Need to Talk About Kevin") In fan fiction, the overwhelming general assumption is that if the unlikely happened, and Dean and another person actually happened to be interested enough in

⁴ This possibility for more than one main character, signified by the shifting point of view, is uniquely common in fan fiction as well, according to Somogyi.

the same woman to care , the woman would be left behind, or they would just go ahead and all be together.

Perhaps most telling, is that in most Dean's relationships with people of similar gender performance, they don't fight each other for spoils of war, but come together in the face of much stronger forces. They hope to postpone the inevitable, to have partial wins and keep the monsters at bay, this time, at great personal prices, until they can't anymore. To help each other and find comfort through as much as they can, to be there for each other when they can't, to at least be together as they fall ("Swan Song"). Throughout most of the series, they don't expect to completely win, let alone fight over privileges that come from this win. This state is much more similar to Rich's model.

Another noteworthy aspect of Dean's is the way he, and those around him, relate to his body. This is a topic worthy of its own paper, but I will touch upon some of its aspects. First, while, Dean's body is characterized in very masculine ways, with its stubble and muscles, it is also characterized in many feminine ways, both in the original text and in fan fiction. Even though Dean is muscular, his body seems to be soft, and he has a bit of a belly – lovingly described in many a story. His lips are plump, and often describe as made to be placed around a cock. . Dean's eyelashes are long, and his eyes are big and bright, and have been compared to the eyes of Disney princesses ("Super-Tangled").

Dean experiences his body as an object of a desiring gaze. According to Laura Mulvey (11-17), women's depictions in the media are sexualized and objectified both by male characters, and the camera, functioning as the audience's gaze. While most of the time Dean is covered in his customary four layers of clothing – undershirt, t-shirt, plaid shirt and jacket, with various weapons hidden in different layers - when he isn't, the camera movement over Dean's body is sometimes classically Mulvian (17-18), cutting parts of it out (" Heaven and Hell"; "Meta Fiction ") or sliding over his vulnerable sleeping form like a caress, allowing the viewers the pleasure of observing his legs and bottom in nothing but boxer briefs ("Phantom Traveler"). Moreover, Dean directly refers to feeling under a desiring gaze more than once. A recurring example is the way a male

character, Castiel, often watches Dean, both in the original text and in fan fiction. Dean mentions this gaze several times, once directly saying "Cas, not for nothing, but the last person who looked at me like that... I got laid" ("Point of No Return").

Dean seems to often be portrayed as a passive sexual object - in most of his love scenes on the show, and probably well over half of them in fan fiction. In most of his kisses on the series, he is maneuvered by his partner, stays still, being kissed by a more dominant partner ("Dead in the Water"), or even thrown on his back, looking up at his partner with awe ("Slice Girls"). In fan fiction this is much more complicated, but Dean written as a bottom or as submissive in sex and in romance is common and popular.

A more extreme aspect of the way Dean experiences his body was addressed in an article by Suzette Chan. Chan points out that throughout most of his life, if not all of it, Dean's body was owned, used and appropriated by outside forces leaving him with partial agency and subjectivity at best (1.2). This can be considered a feminine characterization. In current culture, women's bodies and female bodies are often considered to belong to others, as a starting point, their sexuality systemically appropriated and used, in reality as well as in the media (MacKinnon, 635).

While some of the ways Dean's body is used by others are traditionally masculine ('saving people, hunting things'), some of them are very unusual cultural representations for men. The original text very strongly hints that Dean was raped, probably repeatedly, when in hell. While, like many aspects of the show, this was left somewhat open to interpretation, it would not be outlandish in a show in which the other male lead, Sam, was also repeatedly raped, and in his case, not much room was left for doubt ("Repo Man", "Hello, Cruel World"). This in itself is nearly unheard of, for a male star of a show, written to be identified with and desired. More than that - Dean continues to be presented as the hero, has no less subjectivity, and is respected, desired and loved. This is a meaningful depiction, whatever Dean's gender is.

What makes the depiction even more unique is that it is developed further over several seasons. After being saved Dean becomes more sensitive about issues of rape

and consent in others and in himself. While in the past he would have sent a monster to hell with no hesitation, at times even killing innocents to do so, after what he went through he is shown to insist making sure "before we hand him over to a lifetime of demon rape" ("All Dogs go to Heaven"). He depicts different behaviors common to survivors, such as depression, feeling of worthlessness and in Dean's case, addiction. He mentions taking 'rape showers' ("Caged Heat"), which could be interpreted as sarcasm, but when Dean is distraught after being sexually assaulted again, Sam tells him he should take a shower to calm down ("Clap Your Hands If You Believe...").

A year after being saved from hell, Dean is put under enormous pressure from angels and demons alike, to consent to his body being penetrated by an angel and used to save the world. More accurately, Dean is pressured to go through the motions of consent, under threat of death, agony, suffering to his loved ones which would be his fault, and being responsible for the end of the world. The use of Dean's body is described in terms reminiscent of rape, and would leave Dean a shell of a person, so used and traumatized he would never be himself again.

While Dean regularly endangers his life to save the world, or even to save a single person, he remains resistant to this particular demand, though clinging to this resistance nearly tears him apart itself. This is a unique struggle for television, particularly for a hero's story arc. Put crudely, an entire season is dedicated to Dean crossing his legs and protecting his virtue, while celestial beings much more powerful than he is put horrible pressure on him to "say yes", be penetrated and used till none of himself is left. This is reminiscent of the way different feminist scholars describe women's standpoint in society, their bodies and sexuality so subjugated and used by men they themselves can't connect to what their subjective will might be (MacKinnon 638-639).

Dean being used sexually against his will, or being raped, is a very common topic in fan fiction. Many works revolve around the topic, and address issues of consent and its complexity, dissociation, recreating abuse, social expectations, aspects of emotional pressure and the confusion of "gray areas", dealing with the experience of not owning

your body, healing, as well as recovery through exploration of the topic, as some fans do through such stories.

While rape is definitely an issue relevant to everyone, and certainly men and boys, it is considered a women's issue in most representations. Arguably, every woman is exposed to sexual assault or harassment. Violence towards women is normalized and eroticized, so much so that women don't have access to their own sexuality without the filter of this oppression (MacKinnon 639-638). A character whose body is continuously appropriated, ogled and used sexually is likely to be a woman.

As described, Anne Kustritz considers fan fiction to be a field of reexamination and literary discussion of issues related to oppression of women (382). As such, perhaps this many-faceted exploration of rape and consent is to be expected. In continuation of the way Kustritz might describe it (377), authors and readers write these experiences on Dean's male body in order to remove them from being eroticized and appropriated, as depiction of women's rape often are. But, according to Kustritz, characters such as Dean are, in fact, women characters, objects of identification and self-expression for woman (377-379).

Perhaps, then, Dean can simply be considered a woman. There are different ways of looking at this. Perhaps, in accordance with most current transgender activism, we should consider the only relevant parameter for defining one's gender, to be the way that person defines themselves. This, too, is a complex question, and may not apply to characters and tropes. At any rate, going by the way Dean defines himself verbally doesn't help much. Dean seems uncomfortable seeing himself in the definitions "chick" ("Pilot") and "gay" ("Playthings"), though he doesn't directly say so. He doesn't comment on other possible gender definitions, including "man" or "guy". As described, he identifies himself strongly both with masculine and feminine characteristics, so his nonverbal implications don't clearly define him as either.

A more complex way of defining one's gender for them can be found in Jacob Hale's writing ("Are Lesbians Women?"). Hale chose a list of parameters of varying

importance, by which one can be defined as a woman. I'll try to examine Dean in their light.

In contradiction with Hale's first parameter (107), Dean probably has a penis, if so can be guessed from the fact that he often sleeps with normative women who don't know him very well, and never seems to expect any reaction from them but affection or playful fondness. In addition, on the show Dean once impregnated a woman ("Slice Girls"). This impregnation, however, was magical, and the impregnated woman was indicated by editing and positioning to have penetrated Dean. The episode strongly echoed a fan fiction sub-genre and narrative in which men are impregnated. But still, the woman was impregnated, so a penis might be indicated.

In general fan fiction, Dean's penis is often described and celebrated, not as large as Sam's but of good size, easily erected, and at times capable of giving Dean two or three orgasms a night – a trait both indicative of virility, and reminiscent of female multiple orgasms. Two noteworthy sub-genres depict Dean as not having a penis - having been born female or magically turned female – often by an angry female monster. Interestingly, while Dean never directly refers to his penis on the show, he does once refer to his hymen: when Dean's body is rebuilt from scratch by an angel, sans scars and wounds, Dean declares he must have been "rehymenated" ("Monster Movie"), and therefore must urgently get laid. Though Dean is playing around, this reference to not only his femininity, but possible femaleness, is probably the only direct reference to Dean's genitals on the show.

More clearly in contradiction with Hale's parameters for womanhood (108), Dean doesn't have breasts, other than in the mentioned sub-genres. His hormones (108) are probably not in the balance common for females, as can be guessed by the shape of his muscles and fat distribution. We have no information I'm aware of, regarding Dean's chromosomes (108), in this respect. Regardless, all these parameters are not crucial, according to Hale.

Some of Hale's parameters (109) remain unclear in regards to Dean. Dean doesn't make his living by having a traditionally feminine profession - he makes money hustling pool and committing petty credit card fraud. On the other hand, Dean spent most of his life taking care of Sam, which can be considered a feminine profession, though it generally goes unpaid. Hale refers to hobbies, as well, which is also a complex issue when it comes to Dean. On one hand, Dean is into cars, rock music and Star Wars, hobbies socially related with men. On the other hand, Dean is into his soap, *Doctor Sexy*, and enjoys cooking - both hobbies more socially related to women.

Another complex parameter is "Engaging at some point in one's life in some form of sexual/affectional relationship with a man who is commonly recognized as heterosexual, whose life history is consistent with that placement of him, and who either self-identifies as heterosexual or who does not self-identify as gay or bisexual, and not later renouncing one's status as heterosexual" (Hale 110). While each point in this parameter can be questioned, in the original text Dean does have a loving life-partnership with Sam. A paper similar to this could be written about Sam's gender, but for the purpose of examining this parameter, let's consider Sam to be a man.

Dean and Sam have a special and close relationship. They spend most of their time together, share money, meals, residence, jokes and goals. They know each other's body very intimately, often sleeping in the same small room or car together, stitching up each other's wounds and comforting emotionally. And they know each other's personality as well, recognizing hidden cues and tells no one else can see. They were defined by the show as "soul mates" in the literal sense, a bond recognized heaven ("Dark Side of the Moon").

They very well might have a sexual relationship, judging by the ways they look at each other. For instance, in one early scene Sam came out of the shower wearing nothing but a low-riding towel. Dean stared at him, flustered, and ended up running away and hiding out in the bathroom till Sam got dressed ("Hell House"). Later in the show they were defined by another character as "Psychotically, irrationally, erotically codependent"

("Point of No Return"). In fan fiction, they are often depicted as having a sexual relationship, though according to the main fan fiction archive, Archive of our Own, at the time this paper is being written, their relationship is more commonly depicted as abnormally close, while not sexual ("Supernatural", 2014). Either way, according to Hale, the relationship can be 'affectual' rather than sexual, which it is. The two are life partners, and deeply devoted to each other.

Sam's sexuality isn't decided either. In fan fiction on rare occasions he does refer to himself as gay or bisexual, but generally he doesn't define himself, though he has romantic and sexual relationships with people of different genders. It is commonly accepted in fan fiction, as well as in the original text, that Sam has had romantic and sexual relationships with women or females several times in his life, and had intended to ask one of them to marry him. In the original text, Sam never said he was gay or bisexual, though the topic came up several times. In short, this parameter might indicate Dean is a woman. But it is not enough, according to Hale.

The most defining parameters, according to Hale (109-113), are whether the person identifies as a woman, whether they pass as a woman when it comes to looks, clothing, behavior and expression, and whether they did so growing up. Dean doesn't declare himself to be a woman on the show, and very rarely does in fan fiction, even when he is turned female. Growing up he wasn't read as a woman by his environment, according to the original text and to most fan fiction. As an adult, Dean still doesn't pass as a normative woman, though when he shaves, he can be read as a normative, if striking, dyke. As for clothing, Dean dresses in a decidedly masculine way, though both in fan fiction and in the original text, he has a secret fondness for pink satin panties.

In conclusion, despite some complexity, Dean doesn't properly fit the parameters Hale defines as important, and only partially fits some of the others. According to Hale, Dean is not a woman. But the exploration does point to some of the less normative aspects of Dean's gender.

This state of fitting and not fitting different gender aspects is common for people

of less normative genders. Perhaps, then, Dean's gender is neither "man" nor "woman" A few scholars have been looking at different social constructs as genders. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Wittig wrote about "lesbian" as a gender separate from "woman", and Hale considered labels such as "Daddy" to be their own gender ("Leatherdyke Boys and their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men" 233). Dean has a lot of masculine characteristics. Those are lovingly depicted both in the show and in many fan fiction stories, no less expansively than his feminine attributes. But one noteworthy aspect of Dean's masculinity is how over the top it is. Dean struts his stuff and shows off, and the contrived flavor to his performance sometimes brings to mind drag shows. Perhaps Dean's gender is "drag", perhaps "drag king", as a gender in itself.

Many depictions of Dean's masculinity characterize it as over the top, contrived, unnatural and constricting. Judith Butler considers all gender to be contrived and copied (180). She points to drag as an example where this is particularly clear, where putting on a gender and performing it is officially depicted as unnatural, as opposed to the way gender is often depicted as natural even when it's not (174). Much like this description, Dean's masculinity is often depicted as contrived and copied..

As described, many attributes of Dean's masculinity are copied from his father, and are never as seamless and convincing as John's. Dean adopted some of the ways John handles his body, his fondness of stubble, his rough bow-legged stride, the way he lowers his voice (sometimes described in fan fiction as 'John voice' or 'dad voice'), the way he reassuringly pats the shoulders of those he considers vulnerable. While John never seems to put thought or effort into the rough masculinity he oozes, Dean often actively chooses practices because he considers them masculine, or hides or refuses practices he desires because he feels they aren't right for the gender performance he's trying to create. While, if we go by Butler, John copied his gender as well, the process was never showed to the audience, and the imperfections in John's imitations are not pointed out. In that, John's gender is more similar to Butler's description of normative gender (Butler 174). John can be imagined to be naturally masculine, the true item, the

original to Dean's copy – even though according to Butler this is erroneous, and even as Dean's contrived gender highlights the contrived nature of gender in general.

Dean is often depicted as quoting or adopting attributes from cultural symbols of masculinity as well. He's gone as far as dressing up, often posing as, a fireman, a warrior leader (akin to William Wallace), a forest ranger, a tough sports teacher and a policeman, to name a few. On a case that took him to the past, Dean excitedly dressed as up as a cowboy, but did it in a way contrived enough to be mocked by the "real" cowboys. Sam claimed Dean's enthusiasm for cowboys was a fetish, thus removing Dean even further from the object of his performance ("Frontierland"). When forging IDs for himself, Dean names himself after metal rock stars, shining a light on both his identification with this performance and on it being fake. Such instances of performed masculinity disconnect Dean from this fantasized gender, framing it as playful, a passion, a show.

Dean's masculinity seems to be perceived as something to actively and playfully perform and imitate by the creators of the show as well. While Supernatural cast members are generally fond of imitating each other, Dean's masculine traits are by far most often imitated. Actors Jake Able, Brock Kelly, Sebastial Roche, Misha Collins, Richard Speight Jr, Matt Cohen, Dean's actor, Jensen Ackles, and Jared Padalecki, have imitated Dean for the audience on several occasions, the latter receiving from Ackles the comment "Not quite as over the top as I usually play it" (Padalecki and Ackles).

This continuous creation of over the top masculinity, officially depicted as contrived, is reminiscent of drag. Dean's continuous quotes of masculine tropes and of specific celebrities who are men, is a practice of classic drag. Many a drag king has depicted himself as a metal rock star, or as a cowboy, to the point of fetishism. Moreover, when discussing Dean's masculinity ("Playthings"), Sam described Dean as 'butch', a term generally used these days to describe either old masculinity tropes, or masculine lesbians or drag kings. In this conversation, Dean wondered why he is often read as gay by strangers, and Sam suggested Dean's over-the-top masculinity might be read as an over compensation. This further cements the perception of Dean's masculinity

as contrived, and therefore somehow queer.

Dean is likened to a lesbian several times on the show, mostly through his relationship with Charlie, a lesbian character. The show points out time and again how similar the two are, shows them exchanging stories about hitting on women, hunting monsters, caring for loved ones and having trouble letting them go. Being likened to a lesbian time and again may contribute to Dean's gender being considered queer, and since drag kings are classically connected with lesbianism, perhaps drag.

This can be considered congruent with a trend in drag performances, "man to man" or "woman to woman" drag⁵. A man might perform as a drag king, depicting what can be considered drag as a gender, or a structure different from "man", much like Dean's masculinity is different from normative masculinity. It can be described, though somewhat simplistically, as "man to woman to man" drag. These 'drag' or perhaps 'butch' options are those Gayle Rubin referred to when claiming there would always be more ways to be butch than there are to be a man, since the act of claiming these gender constructs by someone they were not intended for creates new gender constructs (Rubin, 474). Once the structures exist, one might not have to be of a specific gender or sex to perform them.

Dean both embodies and mocks dichotomous genders, connecting himself to them and differentiating himself from them at once. Dean himself is sometimes depicted as expecting people not to take all his masculine or feminine traits at face value. For instance, Dean flirts overtly and cheesily ("Monster Movie"), but he does so with enough conspiratorial charm for it to seem like he might mean it as a shared joke. On the other hand, Dean often mocks what he perceives as femininity in himself or in Sam. For instance, when Sam tells him he's not leaving Dean - one of Dean's greatest fears - Dean says "Hold me, Sam. That was beautiful", and tenderly touches Sam ("Scarecrow").

⁵ This is in contrast to the generally perceived understanding of drag as an attempt by the participants to conjure an image of "the other" gender, thus viewing drag-queens as "man to woman" and drag kings as "woman to man" performances.

In both cases, Dean mocks what he perceives as a practice strongly related to one dichotomous gender, while also somewhat meaning it. This is another common attitude in drag.

As mentioned, some fans might identify with the desire to pass or perform masculinity. Perhaps some can identify with Dean's efforts from that place, as well as with Dean's drag-as-gender. The act of writing slash is a lot like drag, itself - taking on a male role, depicting its point of view, traits and performance while not expecting it to be read as natural, for a period of time, and in front of a (readers) audience. Much like Dean's affinity for rock stars, fan fiction may also be likened to classic drag shows, in which drag artists depicted iconic characters or celebrities. The practice of slash and fan fiction as a whole is also similar to the practice of gay men being fans of female icons, each community playing and idealizing the other, and each building new gender constructs out of it.

If so, writing the character of Dean can be considered triple or quadruple drag. If we assume the author is a woman, Dean is a man, and drag kings are necessarily women, it would be "Woman (the writer) to man (Dean's character) to woman-to-man (Dean's drag-like performance of the male gender)". A different way of seeing this could be "whatever the gender of the author, to whatever Dean's gender is, to drag king as a gender". This, too, is congruent with current concepts of drag, by which anyone can perform any gender, since drag is about exposing and enjoying the contrived nature of gender.

Dean's gender is noteworthy enough to appear in many articles about the show, and interestingly, the characterizations cover a wide range of options. Schmidt (4.11) looks at Dean's dilemma, as she sees it, of being feminine in heart and ethics, and being pushed into masculine roles by patriarchal forces around him. Chan (note 3) characterized him not as masculinized by his surroundings, but as feminized by the text, noting his lips and long lashes, and the fact that he was named after his grandmother. Tosenberger ("Kinda Like the Folklore of its Day" 5.7) makes her opinion present by

writing that it's ironic that Dean would mock other people's gender as 'gay'. Felschow (3.6) raises and eyebrow women fans' ability to identify with Dean, despite what she perceives as Dean's heterosexual masculinity, and Åström (2.2) describes Dean as an emotionally unavailable man of action, rugged and masculine to a fault.

Personally, I agree with all of them.

Despite the vast differences between the articles' perceptions of Dean's gender, one thing they all have in common is the perception that Dan's gender is noteworthy, requires explanation or notice. Some seem troubled by the questions Dean's gender brings up, others simply describe it as a-normative or complex.

If Dean's gender can be described correctly by such a variety of gender constructs, perhaps choosing only one of them is reductive, leaving out important parts of Dean's characterization. Perhaps Dean's gender should simply be read as a construct made of several genders, and not wholly and only either of them – one of the common forms of non-dichotomous gender. McHarry wrote about characters in a Japanese transformative work, yaoi, being depicted as genderless, another form of non-dichotomous gender. Perhaps Dean, as well as other characters in fan fiction, have other forms of non-dichotomous gender.

On a personal note, using Alison Jaggar's methodology of considering the researcher's own feelings as an indicative tool (167-170), I'll say I am almost never attracted to men, be they flesh and blood or glorified by television. I've seen Dean's actor, Jensen Ackles, in different roles, and never found him remotely attractive or interesting. As Dean, however, I'm decidedly attracted to him – as I am to many fan fiction characters.

I am not alone. Reportedly, so are many other fans who generally are not attracted to men. A common conversation, for instance, appeared on website Tumblr: "I'm a dude who is not into other dudes, but even I would", replied by "pretty sure everyone is a little bit gay for Dean Winchester" (Supermishamiga). Even actor Matt Cohen spoke candidly more than once about the trouble he's had acting in scenes with

Dean, without being distracted by his attraction towards him. It is, of course, impossible to know a celebrity's sexual orientation from media, but while being outspoken about this attraction, Cohen is married to a woman, and never, to my knowledge, talked about being attracted to a man. Interestingly, Cohen mentioned two attributes of Dean's as particularly attractive – his deep, masculine voice, and his full lips, often described by others as one of Dean's most feminine attributes. He mentioned the combination of attributes to be particularly attractive. Perhaps it creates a gender presentation other than wholly 'man' or 'woman'. In short, if so many of us are attracted to Dean despite not being attracted to men, perhaps he is not one.

Another possible indicator of Dean not being exactly and wholly a man, is the way fans refer to him and to Sam. The two are commonly described as "the boys" and almost never "the men", despite being well over thirty. Perhaps this comes from a discomfort with sharing the field with men, if fictional, wishing to keep it a space for women (and people of non-dichotomous gender), not allow it to be appropriated (Busker). Differentiating between "boy" (or in some cases, "boi"), "man" and "woman", is not uncommon in transgender and non-dichotomous gender communities. In addition, Hale ("Leatherdyke Boys and their Daddies: How to Have Sex without Women or Men") wrote about 'leatherdyke boy' as a form of non-dichotomous gender, or genders. Perhaps, somewhat similarly (though possibly without conscious intent), the choice of word indicates Dean and Sam's genders are different from "men".

The complexity of Dean's gender is mirrored in his car, an object framed time and again on the show and in fan fiction to signify Dean. Bruce wrote about the car as both a strongly masculine and feminine presence. On one hand, the car is a classic symbol of masculinity – black, sleek, signifying agency, a drifter lifestyle and the ability to leave and become unavailable, passed down from father to son, wielding both a treasure of authentic metal rock and a trunk stacked with a badass range of phallic weapons. On the other hand, the car has been the only home Dean and Sam really had for most of their lives, and one of the very few constants in it. The car provides a bed for them to sleep in,

a place they've shared numerous meals in, as well as secrets, bonding and emotion. Bruce considers the car a source of continuous emotional and physical support for Dean and a conduit for the brothers to express emotions through. As Bruce shows, if Sam, Dean and John ever fought over any woman, it is the car (4.9). She describes a scene (4.2) in which Dean teaches Sam how to work on the car as reminiscent of teaching Sam how to pleasure a woman (or perhaps Dean himself), and indeed, Dean speaks to the car softly in second person, and his name for her is 'baby'.

One could add to that, the car's contrived, maybe drag-like attributes. It is officially an "authentic" car, bought by John in the seventies. But technically, it's been broken down so many times, and rebuilt by Dean, that one might wonder whether there is any authentic part left. The show specifically mentions that Dean leaves in some blemishes he considers meaningful, every time he recreates the car ("Swan Song"). This is reminiscent of gender being rebuilt, copied and recreated time and again, contrived enough for Dean to bother to include elements for significance rather than function. And what car is more of a pop-culture trope, such as might be the car version of masculine drag, than the hero's muscle car, doted over and called baby. If the car represents Dean himself, this complex gender description is congruent with Dean's own gender

The construction of the show often supports Dean's gender as more than one gender, as well. On the show, assertions of Dean's masculinity, and at times, femininity, are often paired with elements that subvert them. Again and again, Dean's defining moments include both masculinity and femininity. For instance, in the "rehymenation" scene mentioned ("Monster Movie"), in which Dean both refers directly to his supposed female genitalia and status as a female virgin, and considers it his cue and duty to promptly find a woman – 'bar wench', as he called her - to have sex with. Dean's imagery pairs a traditionally masculine practice and trope – a guy losing his virginity in a one night stand to a blonde who might be a prostitute – with queer bodies and practices – Dean's male looking body and its hymen, his lover's female looking body and its ability to break that hymen. It is, perhaps, a combination of these images that allows her to both be told

about the existence of monsters, and be the one to kill the monster and save the day. Perhaps, having a supposedly-monstrous, phallic body, she is allowed to know about the world of monsters, as well as wield a weapon effectively. In addition to the subversion in including both contradicting images, Dean goes against both of them. The queer, perhaps monstrous bodies are negated by treating himself, his lover and their act as utterly normative, even poking fun at Sam for not getting into the spirit of things. The 'objectifying sex with a prostitute' trope is negated by both the script and Dean, treating the 'wench' with shared humor and respect, Dean being uncharacteristically honest with her, taking the time to discover she's sharp, brave, sarcastic, empathic.

Another of many examples occurs in a meta episode where the brothers discover that there is a book series called *Supernatural*, accurately describing the most private aspects of their lives. A fan of those books discusses character-Dean's behavior with actual-Dean, not knowing they are the same person, saying "[I]f only real men were so open and in touch with their feelings. [...] I mean, no offense - how often do you cry like that?" ("The Monster at the End of this Book"). This echoes Dean's common claims that "true" masculinity can't include crying or recognition of emotion ("Pilot"). Dean seems to recognize this apparent accusation and replies with a sarcastic "I'm crying on the inside" ("The Monster at the End of this Book"). This reply both reasserts the boundaries of the masculinity Dean is trying to embody, and of his own masculinity as fitting it, being both sarcastic and emotionally held back. On the other hand, this exchange clarifies that Dean is anything but held back emotionally, since character-Dean and actual-Dean are emotionally open to the exact same amount, and cry the exact same number of times (often), being mirrors of each other. If so, in this exchange we're either told this model of masculinity is faulty, or that Dean doesn't fit it.

In fact, a lot of Dean's key moments depict unusual gender. In the most climactic moment of the series, built up towards for five seasons, the brothers face both heaven and hell in an attempt to stop the apocalypse and save humanity ("Swan Song"). All seems to be lost, Lucifer is walking the earth, and has taken control of Sam's body, and he and Michael are about to go into the final battle. Dean is told to run, rather than stay and

watch Michael kill Sam. He chooses to stay, despite his complete helplessness to change the situation against these strong powers, in order to at least be there with Sam so he doesn't die alone. Dean drives up to the battlefield like the reckless idiot he is, blasting a Def Leppard song about rock and going out in a blaze of glory on his tape deck and smiling cheekily – all stereotypically masculine behaviors. Lucifer, controlling Sam's body, pull Dean's entire body across his car, and beats Dean up for long minutes, breaking his face, as Dean reassures Sam he is there, and won't leave. Dean's refusal to let loved ones go, and his emotional care, both feminine attributes according to Chodorow (34)

and Gilligan (165), lead Dean in this scene, and save the day. Dean's emotional and physical availability, as well as flashes of memory of their lives together brought forth by Dean's car, enable Sam to do the impossible, take momentary control of his body back from Lucifer, and jump in the pit, taking Lucifer with him and stopping the apocalypse. Dean's passive, emotional, powerless devotion, along with his insistence on the smallest subjectivities he had left – refusing to allow his body be penetrated and used, as described, and the choice to allow himself to be beaten, perhaps to death, in order to be with Sam - were the heroic actions (or rather, inactions) that saved humanity. This reclaiming of what may be considered feminine attributes as meaningful and heroic might only be accepted as heroic, at this time, done by a character who has a lot of stubborn masculine attributes, and perhaps only one played by a male actor (this in congruence with Chodorow's concept of devaluing women and their acts) (33). On the other hand, the memories that brought Sam back were of Dean's muscle car, Dean fixing it, the brothers playing with toy soldiers and Legos in it, and carving their initials with knives in it - all masculine practices. This combination of genders seems so basic to Dean's characterization it appears time and again in his most important scenes, never a single gender without at least some attribute to deepen and complicate it, and create Dean's specific character flavor.

Dean himself sometimes mentions his gender in queer ways, both in the original text and in fan fiction. For instance, in one episode Dean mentioned in passing that had he been able to choose the form of his body, he'd certainly wish to be a hot female

cheerleader (“After School Special”). This, too, uses a trope from the field of masculinity and subverts it in a queer way, by blurring the line between desire and identification. In a different episode, Dean masculinely clashed with a future, rougher and more dominant version of himself. While fighting, the two get into a conversation about their secret – that when they were younger, they were persuaded to try wearing pink silk panties, and liked it (“The End”).

As mentioned, Dean fits Chodorow's concept of femininity, as well as some attributes from her concept of masculinity. Dean gets to live out Chodorow's masculine fantasy (39), living on the road, as he does, a new path to discover every day, with no mother or wife to nag him, or even much of a feminized urban society to police him. In fact, he also gets to live out Chodorow's feminine fantasy. Dean was not raised by a woman, and perhaps hasn't developed the fear of femininity Chodorow describes – at least not to the extent of living by it. Perhaps, like his car and his music, his continuous drive across America, is merely inherited, adopted from John like John's younger son and rebellious mannerisms. Perhaps for Dean, life on the road is not flight.

Dean lives his life on the road – and he gets to bring Sam, the kid he raised, with him. In fact he gets to drive to Sam's collage, pluck Sam out of his separate life and relationship with a woman, and get Sam back where Dean wants him, in the shotgun seat of Dean's car. Between having his car and Sam with him, life on the road is less flight and more of a home is movement, for Dean. So Dean gets to live out both fantasies, roaming the back roads of rural America in his cool car, his beloved Sammy at his side, always together, always moving on.

In conclusion, like many characters favored by fan fiction writers, Dean Winchester embodies both masculine and feminine attributes, as well as attributes of less dichotomous genders. If we consider fan fiction to be a field of reimagining and

reinventing social constructs, as Kustritz (381-381) sees it, this can be read as a developing structure of masculinity, a developing structure of femininity, or a developing structure of non-dichotomous gender – and I believe it to be all of those. The latter is most dear to my heart, both out of a political desire to focus on the least empowered social group, and perhaps more importantly, since I consider it the most comprehensive, as it includes the others. But I believe this gender to be a social structure, whose meaning is defined in a large part by how people use and perceive it.

Dean is not a unique occurrence, and there is room for analyses of the genders of many fan fiction favorite characters. It might be interesting to discover differences and similarities between characters and fandom, as well as explore and compare more deeply the characters' genders in the original text, fan fiction in general, and various sub-genres of fan fiction. Reexamination of characters' genders should include characters commonly perceived as female women, reexamining the validity of the basic division of fan fiction into sub-genres based on the characters' commonly perceived genders.

In his paper I raise the idea that the interest in characters such as Dean is sometimes based in transgender desires fans have, as well as a desire for alternatives for not only dichotomous masculinity, as Kustritz claimed, but also dichotomous femininity and other structures. I hope this can be further explored in further research, perhaps including in depth interviews with authors and readers of fan fiction, which might shed further light on their identities, experiences, motives and benefits from participating in this field.

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Dean's deep voice

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