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### What Do the Bits Become, Eric? Queering Queerbaiting in the CW's Supernatural

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# What Do The Bits Become, Eric? Queering Queerbaiting in the CW's *SUPERNATURAL*

Presented by Kayci Rudge, Faculty Mentor Dr. Ann Merriwether

## Background

- Although genuine LGBTQ+ media representation has increased overtime, queerbaiting—the process of drawing in queer audiences with empty promises of representation to increase viewership—still runs rampant (McInroy & Craig, 2016).
- Previous scholars have discussed the role of subtext in perpetuating queerbaiting, as well as the effect of queerbaiting on LGBTQ+ fans, but queerbaiting as a whole has yet to be operationally defined (Ng, 2017; Boisvert, 2020).
- Once defined, does operationalized queerbaiting have the potential to reveal underlying social connotations behind false representation?

## Methods

- Instances of queerbaiting (IOQ) were tallied across 267 / 320 episodes of *Supernatural*. Data collection was performed through reading transcripts + watching episodes on 2x speed.
- We codified fifteen realms of queerbaiting to help determine IOQ: queercoding of Dean, queercoding of Castiel, queercoded comments within the pair, queercoded comments made by one about the other, queercoded comments made about the pair by another, parallels to within-universe couples, parallels to pop-culture couples, jokes about queer potentiality, homoerotic tension between Dean and another, homoerotic tension between Castiel and another, retroactive queerbaiting, unprecedented intimacy through wordless actions, unprecedented intimacy through verbal interactions, and general queerbaiting.

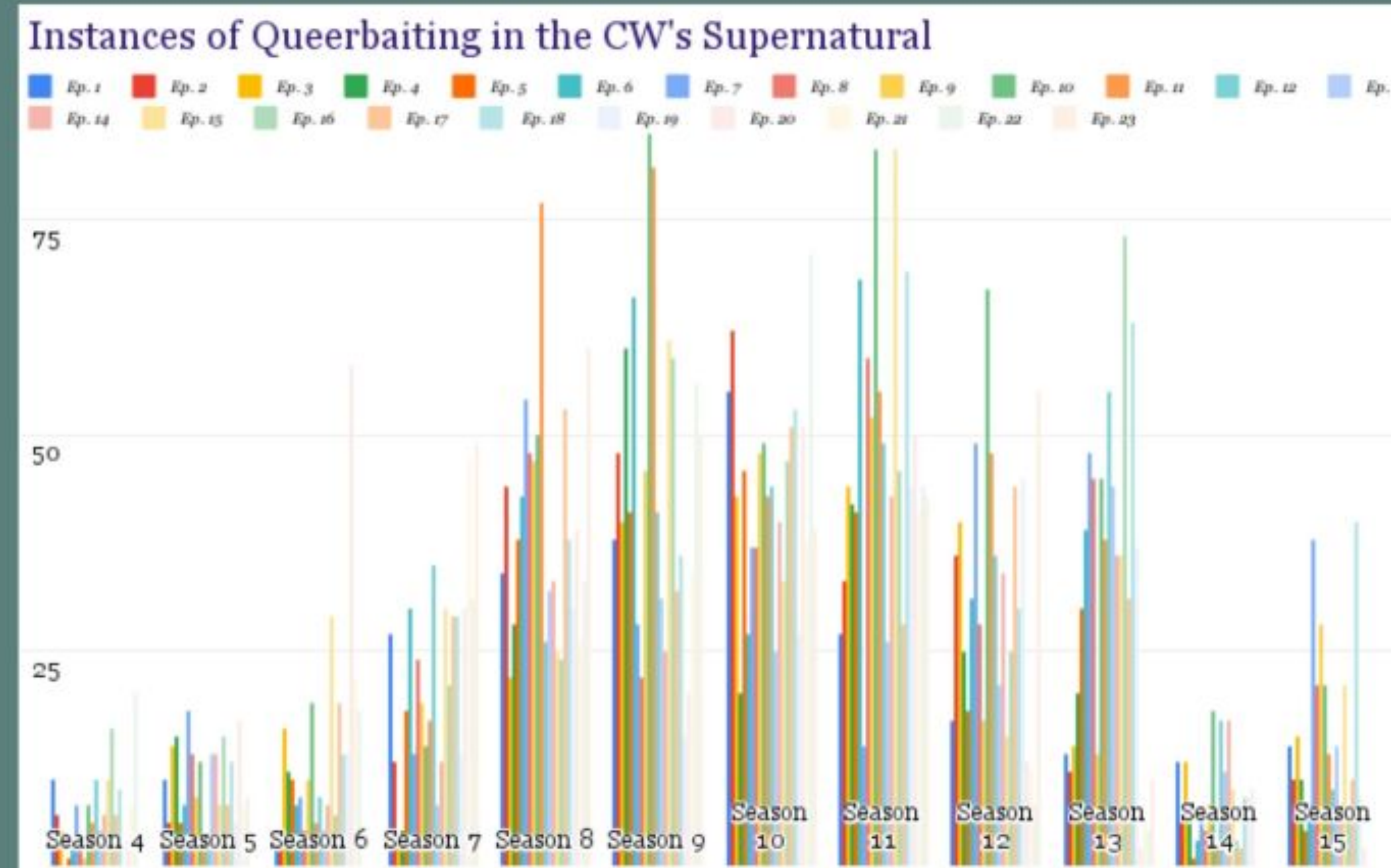


Figure 1 IOQ Totals



Figure 2 Avg. IOQ

## Results

- **Instances of Queerbaiting, Totals:** 138 across 22 episodes (S4), 216 across 22 episodes (S5), 292 across 22 episodes (S6), 514 across 23 episodes (S7), 894 across 23 episodes (S8), 1,015 across 23 episodes (S9), 986 across 23 episodes (S10), 1,084 across 23 episodes (S11), 711 across 23 episodes (S12), 713 across 23 episodes (S13), 159 across 20 episodes (S14), 298 across 20 episodes (S15).
- **Average Instances of Queerbaiting (Per Season):** 6.27 per episode (S4), 9.59 per episode (S5), 13.27 per episode (S6), 20.22 per episode (S7), 36.70 per episode (S8), 41.96 per episode (S9), 41.17 per episode (S10), 45.26 per episode (S11), 28.52 per episode (S12), 30.57 per episode (S13), 7.95 per episode (S14), 14.90 per episode (S15).

## Conclusions + Future Work

- The data suggests that the CW's *Supernatural* increasingly employed different forms of queerbaiting until reaching a peak in Season 11 and quickly declining. This seems to imply a nefarious intentionality, as Season 11 aired in late 2015, aligning with the landmark case *Obergefell v. Hodges*.
- There is extensive future work already in progress. Data collection will be performed again to include Seasons 1-3; the queer potentiality and general queerbaiting realms will be expanded to incorporate the show's frequent use of emasculation; the data will not only be split by episode and season, but by writer, showrunner, production and air dates, specific realm of queerbaiting, and so on (in order to further discuss the nuanced intentionality behind queerbaiting).

Boisvert, S. (2020, May 22). 'Queering' TV, one character at a time: How audiences respond to gender-diverse TV series on social media platforms. *SAGE Journals*.  
 McInroy, L. B., & Craig, S. L. (2016). Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction and impact of LGBTQ media representation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(1), 32-46.  
 Ng, E. (2017, June 15). Between text, paratext, and context: Queerbaiting and the Contemporary Media Landscape. *Transformative Works and Cultures*.



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