USING ONLINE COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS TO EXPLORE PARASOCIAL
RELATIONSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Parasocial relationship research is becoming increasingly important as new media forms emerge. When parasocial relationships were first introduced, they were thought to be abnormal, a result of inadequate real-life friendships and interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Now, parasocial relationships – relationships that are formed with television and movie characters through repeated exposure – are seen as a natural byproduct of time spent with media. When parasocial relationship research first began, radio and television were the only means through which parasocial relationships could be formed. However, as Internet technologies have evolved, there are new media through which these relationships can form and develop. Online communities are one medium through which parasocial relationships can form. In these communities, members can discuss various topics with other individuals. In communities dedicated to television shows, individuals can discuss their views of the characters in the show. Discussions about characters can help parasocial relationships with characters to develop because members may potentially learn something new about the characters. Additionally, by participating in discussions in an online community, members may get to know each other on a deeper level, which may lead to parasocial relationships developing among those within the community.
Online fan communities are an important example of a medium through which parasocial relationships can be formed and developed. Online fan communities allow fans of a particular television show or movie to interact with each other by conversing about their favorite characters or scenes. They can also teach each other about aspects of their favorite characters that they may not have known previously. Additionally, fans that have the same favorite character can interact about that character and affirm each other’s feelings about their favorite character. Through these online fan groups, parasocial relationships can grow and develop.

However, there are other media that individuals can use to foster parasocial relationships. Fans can use social media such as Facebook and Twitter to learn more about their favorite shows in order to develop and maintain the parasocial relationships that they have with the characters in a television show or movie. On Facebook, fans can “like” pages that are associated with different characters and shows. On Twitter, fans can interact with the actors who portray their favorite characters. For example, actors from the television drama *Once Upon a Time* often ask their followers to tweet them any questions that they have about the show. Then, the actors provide their own personal feedback when they answer the viewer-submitted questions. Overall, there are many types of media that can influence the formation and development of parasocial relationships with fictional characters.

Parasocial relationships can also be formed through the purchase of consumer goods. For example, fans of the television sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* can purchase a book titled “The Bro Code” by Barney Stinson, one of the show’s main characters. Additionally, fans of the television sitcom *Parks and Recreation* can purchase a book
titled “Pawnee: The Greatest Town in America” by Leslie Knope, the main female character on the show. Fans of the television drama *Once Upon a Time* can go online and purchase prints of their favorite characters. By purchasing these items, fans are able to “own” a part of their favorite television shows. By “owning” a piece of their favorite show, fans may feel that they have a stronger connection with the characters that are a part of that show (Russell & Stern, 2006).

Parasocial relationships go beyond just a relationship with a fictional character on a television show or in a movie. Parasocial relationships can also influence how individuals view themselves in real life. For some individuals, parasocial relationships can help them feel better about themselves (Theran & Rodgers, 2010). Other individuals may change different aspects of their personality in order to become more like their favorite characters (Boon & Lomore, 2001). Additionally, as individuals form parasocial relationships with characters, they may begin to turn to online communities so that they can freely discuss their love for their favorite characters.

Past research has considered how the media affects the formation of parasocial relationships (Cohen, 1997; Cole & Leets, 1999; Cortese & Rubin, 2010; Hall, 2009; Tian & Hoffner, 2010). However, the question remains – how do online fan groups and other computer mediated communication influence the formation and development of parasocial relationships? Research has done a good job at showing the relationship between media and parasocial relationships. However, there is still a need to go deeper in studying parasocial relationships. Studying the interactions among participants in online fan communities is necessary for research in parasocial relationships to grow. By
studying these interactions, we can begin to understand how parasocial relationships with fictional content and individuals in the community form and develop over time.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationship research is still relatively new, as parasocial relationships were first introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956. Parasocial relationships are not relationships that are based on face-to-face interpersonal interaction. Instead, these relationships are formed by media consumers spending time with television and movie characters. As media consumers spend more time watching the programs, they begin to learn more about the characters, which leads the media consumers to feel like they know the characters that they are watching. Parasocial relationships require continued exposure to the mediated character in order for the relationship to be formed (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Horton and Wohl further state that, as time passes, the media consumer believes that he or she knows the character personally and understands different aspects of the character’s life, including beliefs, values, and ideals that the character holds.

Initially, Horton and Wohl saw parasocial relationships as an abnormality, a result of inadequate time spent with other people. However, as time has passed, that perception has been further examined. For instance, Perse and Rubin (1989), studied college students watching soap operas and as a result, found that parasocial relationships were a natural byproduct of the time spent with the shows. As a result of time spent with the
characters, uncertainty decreased. Consequently, parasocial relationships were able to develop (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Perse and Rubin also found that, as more time is spent watching television, media consumers begin to see the characters as friends and begin to feel a closer relationship with the characters. Conway and Rubin (1991) similarly found that parasocial relationships were formed with characters as time was spent watching television programs. These parasocial relationships helped media consumers to better enjoy the programs that they were watching. Conway and Rubin also suggested that individuals should feel more comfortable with characters with whom they have developed parasocial relationships. As a result, being involved in a parasocial relationship could result in less stress due to feelings of greater acceptance and affection from the relationship. As acceptance increases, their parasocial relationships with the characters within the show would develop further, thus allowing them to enjoy the program more (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Maltby, Houran, and McCutcheon (2003) examined the concept of celebrity worship, a type of parasocial relationship that was seen as abnormal and indicative of obsession with the celebrity. Maltby, et al. found that celebrity worship was not uncommon. They suggest that the motives for celebrity worship were indicative of different personality types. For example, celebrity worship for entertainment purposes was an indicator of extraversion, while celebrity worship for more personal reasons was indicative of neuroticism. Examples such as these show evidence that parasocial relationship research has developed on a broad level over several decades.

As parasocial relationship research has advanced, researchers have focused on different factors that may influence the formation and development of these relationships.
Cohen (1997) examined how parasocial relationships differed for men and women, finding that men turned to parasocial relationships to solve problems and to not feel lonely, while women used parasocial relationships for companionship. Both men and women engage in parasocial relationships to make up for a lack of interpersonal interactions (Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008). However, the reason for forming parasocial relationships differs for each gender. Some women may seek out parasocial relationships to make up for a lack of interaction with family members; some men may seek out parasocial relationships due to feelings of loneliness (Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008). Horton and Wohl (1956) initially saw parasocial relationships as an abnormal reaction as a result of a lack of social interaction. Over time, parasocial relationships were no longer seen as abnormal. Instead, they were viewed as a normal result of time with media. It is important to note that, even though some individuals use parasocial relationships to overcome feelings of loneliness, they are not always indicative of a lack of social interaction. Rather, parasocial relationships may be a byproduct of spending time with media. Overall, parasocial relationship research has helped us to better understand how men and women use these relationships, as well as how they respond to these relationships.

Research has also considered how parasocial relationships relate to interpersonal relationships. Like interpersonal relationships, the dynamic of a parasocial relationship can change based on events that take place in the relationship (Cohen, 2010). Parasocial relationships are living, dynamic relationships that require time, energy, and effort. However, unlike interpersonal relationships, there is not as much of a need for emotional involvement. For some individuals, it may be easier to form parasocial relationships...
because of the lack of face-to-face interaction and the lack of emotional involvement (Greenwood, 2008). These relationships may be more beneficial for individuals who struggle with responding to different emotions in real life. Although parasocial relationships may occur outside of interpersonal relationships, they should not be seen as a replacement for interpersonal relationships. Derrick, Gabriel, and Tippin (2008) suggest that it is beneficial for individuals to take part in both parasocial and face-to-face relationships. Although there are benefits of being involved in parasocial relationships, it is still necessary to have real life interpersonal relationships, as they can help to prevent feelings of loneliness (Cohen, 2004; Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, 2008).

Research has shown that parasocial relationships can help to shape individuals. Parasocial relationships can directly influence identity formation, as well as how individuals interact with others. When Horton and Wohl (1956) first introduced parasocial relationships, radio, television, and newspapers were the main media through which these relationships could develop. Now, parasocial relationships can develop through media such as social media and blogs. The following sections will examine how these media affect the formation and maintenance of parasocial relationships.

Parasocial Relationships and Media

When parasocial relationship research was introduced (Horton & Wohl, 1956), there were fewer channels (i.e. television and radio) through which these relationships could grow and develop. As technology has advanced, more channels have emerged through which media consumers can form and maintain parasocial relationships. This section focuses on how parasocial relationships with mediated characters form through these media channels, as well as how parasocial relationships may dissolve.
Some research has considered how interactions change depending on media consumers’ perceptions of characters. For example, media consumers tend to have stronger parasocial relationships with characters that they either like or have neutral feelings towards (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Tian and Hoffner further state that if a media consumer dislikes certain characters, he or she is engaged in a nonvoluntary relationship with those characters. In this type of relationship, audience members try to avoid the characters so that there are few, if any, parasocial interactions (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Hall (2009) also considered the impact of perception, examining how interacting with reality television influenced the formation of parasocial relationships with participants on the program. As consumers watched these programs, many of them saw themselves as actual participants in the programs. Additionally, consumers were able to relate with some of the participants and saw similarities between themselves and some of the less eccentric participants.

Researchers have also looked at parasocial relationships that media consumers form with television shopping program hosts such as Kathy Wolf, a Home Shopping Network host who has spent more than 22,000 hours on air pitching products to audiences (Thurston, 2012). Consumers viewed more television shopping programs because they felt an attraction to the hosts (Cortese & Rubin, 2010). This is not abnormal. In fact, creators of television shopping programs choose certain people to be the hosts of these programs because they want consumers to form parasocial relationships with the hosts. Grant, Guthrie, and Ball-Rokeach (1991) also examined this phenomenon in order to understand how dependency on television shopping influences parasocial interaction.
The more a media consumer was dependent on television shopping, the greater the parasocial interactions that took place.

Up to this point, much of the parasocial relationship research has focused on the development and maintenance of these relationships. However, there is a different side of parasocial relationships that must be considered – parasocial breakup, or the termination of a parasocial relationship. Cohen (2004) found that anxious media consumers were typically the most invested in parasocial relationships. These individuals were also the most concerned about the potential dissolution of a parasocial relationship. One of the best examples of parasocial breakup involves the television sitcom *Friends*. In 2004, *Friends* ended its television run after 10 seasons. Eyal and Cohen (2006) studied how students reacted to the *Friends* finale. The distress that media consumers experienced after this parasocial breakup was quite similar to the emotional distress experienced after the dissolution of a social relationship. However, the emotional distress experienced after the parasocial breakup was weaker than that of the real life interpersonal relationship. Lather and Moyer-Guse (2011) also studied parasocial breakup. However, they examined a parasocial breakup that was temporary. For this study, the researchers focused on how parasocial relationships with television were impacted by the writers’ strike of 2007-2008. Even though this parasocial breakup was temporary, media consumers still varied different levels of emotional distress. This study, like previous studies, showed that parasocial relationships operate very similarly to real-life relationship.

The previous studies examined how parasocial breakup affected media consumers when the media consumers had no control over the breakup. However, is this impact the same when media consumers choose to end the relationship? Cohen (2010) considered
the impact of parasocial breakup when media consumers chose to end the parasocial relationship. The researcher examined how expectancy violations affected a media consumer’s parasocial interaction with a mediated character, stating that females, compared to males, were more likely to react to expectancy violations. Additionally, Cohen found that media consumers tended to react more strongly to a sports figure who committed some sort of social violation than they would an actor, TV host, or singer who committed the same social violation.

Overall, media can have a great impact in shaping parasocial relationships. The previous studies show that parasocial relationships were stronger with characters that were similar to, as well as liked by, media consumers (Tian & Hoffner, 2010; Hall, 2009). Parasocial breakup was also introduced, with Eyal and Cohen (2006) noting that the termination of a parasocial relationship was as distressing as the termination of a social relationship. However, parasocial relationships are not wholly controlled by media, as media consumers may choose to end these relationships at any time (Cohen, 2010). While parasocial relationships do form through media such as radio and television, the emergence of social media has created new channels through which parasocial relationships can be formed. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the impact that social media have on the formation and development of parasocial relationships.

Parasocial Relationships and Social Media

A wide body of research on parasocial relationships has focused on the formation of parasocial relationships through television or radio (i.e. Hall, 2009; Tian & Hoffner, 2010; Cortese & Rubin, 2010); however, researchers have started to consider how parasocial relationships are formed through the Internet. Blogs are one medium through
which media consumers can form parasocial relationships. Blogs are personal websites where individuals can regularly share their opinions with an online audience (Random House Dictionary, 2013). By reading blog posts, media consumers can get to know the author on a deeper level. Thorson and Rodgers (2006), in looking at a politician’s blog, concluded that having a parasocial relationship with the politician influenced opinions about the politician. Additionally, individuals who had a parasocial relationship with the politician were more likely to vote for the politician. Because of this study, the researchers concluded that, just as parasocial relationships are present in television and radio, they are also present in online environments such as blogs and other social networking sites. Twitter is one such social networking site through which parasocial relationships can be formed. On Twitter, media consumers can follow and interact with their favorite actors, characters, and athletes. As these individuals become more active on Twitter, followers often feel more engaged with them, making the parasocial relationships stronger (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012).

Social media is a new channel through which parasocial relationships can be formed. Research has shown that interacting with individuals through blogs and social media such as Twitter can influence the perceptions of those individuals (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006; Frederick, et al., 2012). Online fan communities function in a similar manner to social media in that members of the communities are able to interact with one another in an online forum. Through these online interactions, community members are able to form perceptions of one another, as evidenced in Seabrook’s (1997) interactions with other members of The WELL.
As evidenced, parasocial relationship formation has been studied in a variety of contexts including media (Tian & Hoffner, 2010; Cortese & Rubin, 2010) and the internet (Thorson, 2006; Frederick, et al. 2012). However, one factor that has not been considered is how parasocial relationships with fictional characters are formed and developed through interacting with others in online fan communities. In order to examine this, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: How does interacting with other individuals in online fan groups influence the formation and development of parasocial relationships with fictional content?

As online communities continue to become more prevalent (Jones, Ravid, & Rafaeli, 2004; Ma & Agarwal, 2007), researchers can turn to these spaces to better understand how individuals interact with one another and form parasocial relationships. Researchers have found that although parasocial relationships may arise out of feelings of loneliness or lack of companionship (Cohen, 1997; Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008), they are not necessarily an indicator of a lack of social interaction, but rather an “extension of viewers’ social relationships” (Cohen, 2004).

Online Communities

Some individuals use online communities as a means of escape from the stresses of life, while other individuals may seek out online communities as a means of social support to help deal with the stress that they are dealing with. For many people, these communities feel like home, consisting of a “family of invisible friends” (Rheingold, 2001, p. xv). However, some people are alarmed by online communities because they think that individuals in online communities are spending more time with technology
than in real life interpersonal relationships (Rheingold, 2001). By being a part of an online community, members are provided closeness and warmth that may not exist in their real lives (Steinkuhler & Williams, 2006). These computer mediated exchanges have also been found to be more relationally positive than face-to-face communication with regard to similarity, relaxation, and depth (Walther, 1995).

Online communities are not a new concept. In fact, online communities have existed for nearly thirty years, with one of the first communities, The WELL, starting up in 1985 (Rheingold, 2001). These online communities have proven beneficial, as online fan communities have exposed many individuals to the new technologies that exist on the internet (Jenkins, 2006).

Traditionally, the term community refers to a group that lives in a close proximity under common rules (Random House Dictionary, 2013). However, online communities differ from real-life communities, as members of online communities often do not live in close proximity to each other. Rather, online communities tend to define “memberships through affinities rather than localities” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 137). Online communities usually form when people find and interact with other individuals who have similar interests. In doing so, these individuals create “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold, 2001, p. 3). Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2002) defined online communities as “groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism” (p. 273). Individuals in these online communities often become attached to
the community and may be frustrated if they are unable to log in and access the community. Seabrook (1997) illustrates the frustration of not being able to log in to an online community by comparing it to “the frustration of being stuck in traffic when you want to be home” (p. 157). For this thesis, an online community will be defined as a combination of the definitions from Rheingold (2001), Ridings, et al. (2002), and the 2013 edition of the Random House Dictionary; that is, an online community is a group of individuals who are joined by a common set of interests, ideas, and/or feelings and who communicate regularly over the Internet. This thesis is concerned with how members of online fan communities interact with one another in order to form and maintain parasocial relationships. By studying parasocial relationship formation in online fan communities, we can get a better understanding of how media help to form and develop these relationships. While it is important to understand what an online community is, it is equally important to understand the importance of online interactions in order to better understand how and why individuals choose to interact with others in an online setting.

Online Interaction

Like face-to-face interpersonal interactions, online interactions allow individuals to communicate with one another in a variety of ways. From instant messaging to online forums, there are many manners in which individuals can engage with one another in an online setting. Unlike face-to-face interactions, online communication provides individuals with the opportunity to interact with individuals in other regions and cultures. Some of these interactions may be instantaneous, while others may occur over a certain period of time. Examining online interactions allows us to see how individuals use media, such as computers and tablets, in order to improve communication. (Walther, 1996). In
online interactions, individuals are able to hold a certain degree of anonymity as they are able to share as much or as little as they desire with other individuals. Rheingold (2001) suggests that an advantage of online anonymity is that “people often end up revealing themselves far more intimately than they would be inclined to do without the intermediation of screens and pseudonyms” (p. 27). In addition to anonymity, there are many reasons why individuals may choose to interact with one another online. Recent research addresses some of the motivations for choosing to interact with others in an online setting. Britt (2011) examined the reasons that individuals choose to become part of online communities. For some individuals, the anonymity of online interaction allows them to be more open and say what is on their mind. For example, people tend to participate more if their comments are noticed and addressed by others (Britt, 2011). Ridings and Gefen (2004) considered additional motivations for joining an online community, finding that, regardless of the type of community, individuals tend to join online communities to exchange information. Other motivations for participating in online interactions may include seeking out and providing social support¹ (Loane & D’Allesandro, 2013; Obst & Stafurik, 2010) and friendship (Riding & Gefen, 2004). As evidenced here, there are many different motivations that may influence how and why individuals choose to interact with one another online.

Interacting with others online can take on different forms. From social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to video chatting services such as ChatRoulette, online interaction can occur through a variety of channels. This thesis focuses on

¹ Burleson (2003) defines social support as “specific lines of communicative behavior enacted by one party with the intent of helping another cope effectively with emotional distress” (p. 552).
interactions that occur within online fan communities. In an online community, some members may choose to interact regularly with the other members. Others may choose to rarely interact, and some individuals (lurkers) may choose to not participate at all, preferring to simply observe the interactions that take place. Seabrook (1997) initially acted as a lurker when he joined The WELL. However, Seabrook came to the realization over time that “eavesdropping on various discussion groups was no way to experience the groupmind” (p.166). As a result, Seabrook’s role in the community shifted from that of a lurker to that of an active participant. Seabrook’s experience in The WELL shows that the role that an individual adopts can potentially influence the types of interactions that he or she can take part in. As a result, these interactions can have an impact on the types of relationships that the individual forms.

Much can be learned from examining online interaction. This thesis examines how participation in an online fan community uncovers the formation and development of parasocial relationships. As such, the following research question is offered:

RQ2: How does interacting with other individuals in online fan groups influence the formation and development of parasocial relationships with members of the online fan community?
CHAPTER III

METHOD

For this thesis, I analyzed posts within an online fan community dedicated to the television show *Once Upon a Time*. The purpose of this thesis is 1). to understand how interacting with fans in an online fan community influences the formation and development of parasocial relationships with fictional content and 2). to understand how interacting with fans in an online community influences the formation and development of parasocial relationships with other members of the community. For this research, a thematic analysis was conducted using grounded theory. This section features a rationale for the chosen methodology, a brief synopsis of *Once Upon a Time*, and an overview of the data collection and analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data by examining the data to identify themes and patterns. Using thematic analysis allowed me to identify, analyze, and organize the themes that emerged from the data (Boyatzis, 1998). The tradition of grounded theory was used to form the thematic analysis that was used for this study. Grounded theory, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), allows researchers to begin to develop theory by analyzing qualitative data. When using grounded theory, researchers examine data to find codes and themes that emerge. This data may be in several forms,
including interview transcriptions, online blog posts, and online community posts. The themes that emerge may potentially be used to begin developing a new model or theory. Depending on the type of data that is obtained, grounded theory can help to shed light on the personal experiences and opinions of those who take part in the study (Engward, 2013). As a result, the opinions included in the transcripts and posts help to shape and develop any theory that may emerge (Corbin & Straus, 2008). This method was most appropriate for this thesis because it allows for a greater degree of freedom in data analysis.

Three types of coding occur during the coding process of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) – open coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. In open coding, data is examined and the researcher generates as many ideas, or codes, as he or she can. Next, axial coding occurs, a process where codes are compared to one another. Then, preliminary themes are created based on how codes are grouped together. Finally, theoretical coding occurs when the researcher examines the themes and determines how each of the themes is related (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Addressing the Research Questions

This thesis focused on how interacting with other members of an online community influences the formation and development of parasocial relationships with fictional content. This thesis also examined how parasocial relationships developed as members interacted with one another. Specifically, this thesis employed a grounded theory approach to gathering data. In a grounded theory study, data collection, coding, and analysis occur simultaneously (Oktay, 2012). Through this process, data collection continues until a point of theoretical saturation is reached. Reaching a level of theoretical
saturation allows for the richest data to emerge. For this reason, I sought to gather posts within the Once Upon a Time Fans community on Google+. Since this community has existed since September 2011, I gathered 1200 posts during the month of May, 2014. The gathered posts span over the course of one year (100 posts per month). Collecting 100 posts per month was necessary in order to reach a minimum level of saturation. To collect the posts that were analyzed, I used a random number generator at Random.org to select the starting collection dates for each group of 100 posts. Using a random number generator removed any potential bias from the dates that were selected for the posts. The gathered posts represent a random sample of posts dated from March 17, 2013 to April 11, 2014.

Coding occurred in three stages, in accordance with grounded theory and thematic analysis – open, axial, and theoretical coding. During open coding, an in-depth examination of the posts was conducted, where notes were made of any codes that were present within each of the posts. Early in the open coding stage, two participants were recruited to help provide additional perspective in analyzing the posts. These volunteers were given a set of instructions to analyze twelve posts and assign codes to them. I then examined their codes and made any initial adjustments to my own process that were necessary due to either redundancy or confusion with coding terms used before continuing with the open coding process.

Upon completion of the open coding process, axial coding began. In this stage, codes were grouped together based on commonalities that existed in order to create overarching themes. Primary themes were the focus of the data, though subthemes emerged as well and were very carefully noted. Codes that did not fit in a given location
were placed in a catch-all category. Afterwards, the primary themes were then developed from the groups of common codes. These codes helped to define the overall meaning and focus of the theme. Lastly, in the theoretical coding phase, themes were refined and appropriately renamed. Themes were addressed according to each research question. While there were themes that did not address the research question, these were retained to retain the integrity of this research project. Accordingly, in this thesis, each of the themes that answer the current research questions will be appropriately addressed.

Synopsis: Once Upon a Time

This thesis focused on interactions in one online fan community organized around the television drama Once Upon a Time. Once Upon a Time, also known as OUAT, is a fantasy-drama that began airing in 2011 on ABC. OUAT follows the lives of the residents of the sleepy town of Storybrooke, Maine. The residents of Storybrooke are all fairytale characters who were transported from Fairytale Land to Storybrooke by a powerful curse cast by the character Regina, an Evil Queen. This curse ‘stole’ the identities and memories of every resident of Storybrooke except for the Evil Queen. For twenty-eight years, the residents of Storybrooke lived under a curse which caused them to never age and to do the same thing every day. However, things began to change when Emma Swan arrived in Storybrooke. Emma, the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming, had the power to break this curse, because she was the product of true love, which the writers of the show claim is the most powerful magic that can break any curse. When Emma was born, her parents sent her through a magic portal to save her from the curse. In the first season of OUAT, Emma comes to Storybrooke and, over time, accepts
that she is the only one that can break the Evil Queen’s curse. The second and third seasons follow the residents of Storybrooke after the Evil Queen’s curse is broken.

The first season of OUAT debuted strongly, with the premiere garnering a Nielsen rating of 3.9 in the 18-49 age demographic (Rubino, 2011) and a 3.2 rating in the 18-49 demographic for the season finale (Baysinger, 2012). The second season started strong with a 3.9 rating (Morabito, 2012), but dipped to a 1.7/5 share with adults age 18-49 by the end of the season (Baysinger, 2013). OUAT continued in its popularity in its third season, with its season premiere garnering a 2.6 rating (Morabito, 2013).

Additionally, OUAT expanded beyond Sunday nights with the release of a book, a graphic novel, and a short-lived spin-off TV show, titled *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland*. For this thesis, I chose to focus on a fan community dedicated to *Once Upon a Time* for several reasons. For one, I have held a personal interest in the show since its premiere. My interest in the show, as well as the popularity of the show and the robust online communities dedicated to the show contributed to my desire to study a community dedicated to OUAT.

**Data Source**

In this thesis, the “*Once Upon a Time* Fans” community on Google+ was selected for analysis. Google+ is a social media site that launched on June 28, 2011 (Miller, 2011). As of May 2014, Google+ had over 500 million active users (Miller, 2014). On Google+, users can post text-only messages, or they can choose to include media (i.e. pictures, videos, looping images) within their posts. On Google+, users can follow other users, as well as join other groups and communities. One reason why this community was
selected was because of its popularity. Choosing a community due to its popularity is important, as it shows that the community is active and well received by the members. Additionally, the host site, Google+, is useful in that members can include text and different types of media when they create posts. The “Once Upon a Time Fans” community site on Google+ had 6,442 members as of May 14, 2014. To join this community, members must be a Google+ user. To join Google+, members must provide their name, preferred username, password, birthday, gender, mobile phone and other email address. Once the account has been created, members can create their profiles and add other friends. There is no payment required to become a member.

For this thesis, I analyzed the 1200 posts from the main page of the community that were gathered during May 2014 using the random number generator. This page displays any messages that members have posted in the community, whether on the main page or on one of the subpages within the community. Focusing on the main page allowed me to analyze the thoughts and opinions that each of the members posted without fear of missing out on posts that may only be posted on the subpages of the community. In this community, members are free to post whatever they choose. Some members post content related to OUAT, while others post content that is seemingly unrelated. The moderators of the community view each of the posts and determine whether or not the content will stay or be deleted.

Specific Procedures

For this research, I analyzed posts on the “Once Upon a Time Fans” community website on Google+ in order to understand how participating in an online community
influences the formation and development parasocial relationships with fictional content. Additionally, I analyzed the posts in order to see how parasocial relationships formed and developed among members. Thematic analysis from a grounded theory approach was used to analyze the qualitative data.

Unit of Analysis

For this thesis, the specific unit of analysis was the sentences and phrases in individual posts written by members of the online fan community. A post refers to any textual comment that an individual posted in the community. Analyzing the sentences allowed for interpretation of the words that the community members typed to capture themes in the data. While coding the data, I also coded each post for the presence of media (i.e., videos, looping images, pictures) in order to understand how members used media to supplement the messages that they posted within the community. In some instances, members chose to post media without including any other text. Coding each post for the presence of media was necessary, as it allowed posts without text to still have meaning within the analysis.

Reflexivity

In this thesis, I was both a researcher and a fan of Once Upon a Time. My role as a researcher played a necessary role with regard to how the data was interpreted. As a fan of the show, I have a solid understanding about the content within. This content is at the core of the fan community analyzed in the thesis, so it is useful as a researcher to have an in-depth perspective. Despite this interest, a solid theoretical grounding was used in order to guide the chosen methodology. Using theory to guide the method used in this study
helped to ensure validity. During analysis, care was taken to keep any understanding of the content and characters from influencing the data.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

The first research question for this thesis asked: How does interacting with other individuals in an online fan community influence the formation and development of parasocial relationships with fictional content? Three themes – Interacting with Characters, Speculation about Characters, and Playing Matchmaker – were identified that answer this research question.

Interacting with Characters

The first theme that emerged was interacting with characters. As members shared their thoughts and ideas with the community, there were instances where members chose to interact with characters in different ways. Some members chose to speak to the characters in their posts, while others shared their emotional involvement with the characters. In some instances, interactions with the characters reached a point where members even became possessive of them. Interactions such as these go beyond just being a fan of the show or of a character. When individuals interact with characters in this manner, parasocial relationships are able to form because they exhibit physical manifestations of emotion and verbal interaction with mediated fictional characters.

Emotional interaction with characters was not out of the ordinary in this online community, as there were several instances where a member interacted with a character
on an emotional level. Examples of emotional interactions with characters include expressing happiness for a character, missing a character, and feeling sadness and sympathy for a character. Interacting with characters on an emotional level creates a deeper connection with the character where individuals believe that they understand what the character is feeling and can empathize with them. This empathy goes beyond a member simply saying that they feel bad for the character. Rather, when members show empathy towards a character, they also show an emotional reaction to what the characters are experiencing. For example, in season two, episode ten, Regina, the Evil Queen and Mayor of Storybrooke, was falsely accused of killing a psychiatrist in Storybrooke. As a result, the other townspeople believed the lie, causing Regina to become a pariah in the town. One member, Robert, saw this episode and said “I have now fanboyed for the second time ever. I WAS SO SORRY FOR REGINA! I WISH I COULD HAVE JUST POPPED INTO STORYBROOKE AND GIVEN HER A HUG OR SOMETHING!!!! AHHHHHH!!!!!!! She is now my favorite character. :'( #ReginaPityParty.” Although the term fanboy had a derogatory meaning in the past, fanboys are now seen as boys or men who exhibit some sort of enthusiasm, excitement, or emotion with regard to entertainment media such as movies, television shows, or technologies (Random House Dictionary, 2014). For Robert, this was the second time that he had felt an emotional connection to a character. It is one thing to see a character suffering and to feel bad for them. However, Robert felt such sympathy for Regina that he wanted to physically comfort her even though she was a fictional character. When the emotional bond with Regina began to form, a parasocial relationship also began to form. As this parasocial relationship formed, Robert began to see Regina as an actual person rather than a
televised, scripted character. As a result, he exhibited empathy for a character that he saw as a real person. Here, a parasocial relationship is able to develop because Robert began to view Regina as a real life friend rather than just as a televised character.

Another example of emotional interaction occurred after season two, episode sixteen. At the end of this episode, viewers watched as Cora, Regina’s mother and one of the main antagonists in season two, died in Cora’s arms. After watching Cora die, Marcela turned to the community, saying “I’m crying again... Barbara [Hershey] is a fantastic actress, I miss Cora.” When individuals say that they miss a character, evidence of parasocial relationship formation begins to appear. Individuals grow accustomed to spending time with and getting to know these characters on a weekly basis. Over time, they form a bond with the characters. However, when a character dies, the burgeoning parasocial relationship is suddenly, and often unexpectedly, cut off. As a result, a parasocial breakup has occurred. Parasocial breakup, according to Lather and Moyer-Guse (2011) and Eyal and Cohen (2006), occurs when there is dissolution in the relationship between a viewer and a character. Parasocial breakups such as these show proof of parasocial relationship formation because, if an individual says that they miss a character, then there had to be a connection with the character on some level.

The impact of parasocial breakup can potentially be felt beyond the initial breakup point (i.e., when the character died). In season one, viewers were introduced to Sheriff Graham and Daniel. Sheriff Graham was the sheriff of Storybrooke and Emma’s love interest, while Daniel was Regina’s stable boy and true love when she was eighteen years old. Members got a chance to know these characters throughout the first season. However, in season one episode seven, Regina, the Evil Queen, killed Sheriff Graham by
crushing his heart. Daniel, Regina’s stable boy and true love, died in a similar manner in season one, episode eighteen when Cora, Regina’s mother, crushed Daniel’s heart in front of Regina. Members were still mentioning Daniel and Sheriff Graham’s deaths a year and a half after they had died. After rewatching season one, Sharon said “I miss Daniel but I'm excited 4 RobinQueen.” During season one, Daniel was Regina’s chance at getting a happy ending. However, when Daniel was killed, Regina’s happy ending was put at risk because there was no one else, at the time, who could be considered a true love for Regina. However, in season three, Robin Hood emerged as a love interest for Regina. Sharon’s post shows two things. The first is that she misses Daniel, showing that there is still some level of attachment to Daniel. The second idea that emerges is that she approves of Robin Hood and Regina becoming a couple. This statement shows that Sharon has experienced some level of closure with regard to Daniel’s death. A similar perspective can be seen with regard to Sherriff Graham. In season one, Sheriff Graham was portrayed as Emma’s love interest. However, when he died, Emma’s happy ending was put in danger. As the series progressed, several different love interests for Emma emerged. Nicole referenced one of these love interests when she said “Even though I miss Graham and think he was an awesome character, I don’t want interference with my CaptainSwanness....” This quote shows evidence of some closure in the member’s relationship with Sheriff Graham. Nicole stated that she did miss Sheriff Graham. However, she saw a potential relationship between Emma and Captain Hook. As a result, while she did miss Sheriff Graham, Nicole realized that he needed to be gone in order for Emma to be able to pursue a happy ending with Captain Hook. Even though time has passed, these deaths still bring out emotion for some members. For example, Robin
shared her view about the saddest moments in the series: “I think the saddest moments were when we lost a character, like Graham, Daniel, Cora, and Neil.” When characters in a show die, some individuals may experience a sense of loss. When Robin says that “we lost a character”, there are implications of parasocial relationship formation. While the characters were living, individuals were able to spend time getting to know them and learning about their pasts. However, a statement of loss shows that there were personal relationships that were formed with each of the characters.

On five separate occasions, members used possessive language when speaking about characters in *OUAT*. One instance of this was when Caroline, in commenting on a fan made video featuring Regina, said “Regina, my girl <3”. Another member, Noelle, shared her thoughts about Tamara, Neal/Baelfire’s fiancée. During the second half of season two, Tamara, with the help of co-conspirator Greg, began targeting anyone in Storybrooke who was able to wield magic. Upon seeing this scene, Noelle responded by saying, “She’s coming into my town, and messing with my people.” Another member, Laura, commented on a promotional picture of Captain Hook and said “My captain hook!” In each of these instances, parasocial relationship development may be evident. Using possessive language may be indicative of parasocial relationship formation with the characters. When members form parasocial relationships with the characters that they regularly interact with, they may also form a personal connection with the characters. As members get to know the characters, they may feel a closeness and attachment to the characters. As a result, they may begin to use possessive language, indicating the closeness of the bond between the member and the character.
Overall, interacting with characters is a means by which individuals can form parasocial relationships with the characters that they watch. When an individual shows an outward expression of emotion towards a character, it is an indication that the member has formed some sort of connection with a character.

Speculation about Characters

Speculation about characters is another means by which individuals can develop the parasocial relationships that they have formed with the characters that they spend time with each week. Speculation about the characters can come in several forms, ranging from sharing theories in the community to inquiring about a character’s history. Some members may write scenes about characters, while others may ask questions about who the characters are. Overall, sharing thoughts and theories about characters shows proof of parasocial relationship development because members get to know characters on a deeper level while being able to express themselves in the community at the same time.

Some members chose to post their theories about things that had happened in episodes that had just aired. For example, in season three episode twelve, viewers learned that Zelena, the Wicked Witch of the West, was Regina’s half-sister and that they had the same mother, Cora. However, Zelena’s father remained a mystery. In season two, episode sixteen, viewers learned that Rumplestiltskin and a young Cora had had a romantic history before she married Prince Henry, to whom she had been betrothed, in order to ensure that any of her future children would be a part of a royal lineage. When Zelena was revealed to be Regina’s half-sister, viewers began speculating that Rumplestiltskin had to be her father based on the fact that he had been Cora’s love interest in the past. Additionally, Rumplestiltskin and Prince Henry were the only men that viewers knew
that Cora had been romantically involved with. Rochelle shared her views about Zelena’s father, saying “So, they really are sisters, so who is Zelena's dad? It would have to be Rumple unless Cora REALLY got around. lol.” Rochelle’s question suggests the beginning of parasocial relationship formation. Her question served as a means of learning more about Zelena, a relatively unknown character at the time. In order for parasocial relationships to form with characters, individuals must learn more about the characters in order to develop a closer bond with them. For Rochelle, inquiring about a character’s history allowed her to gain additional insight about the character. From that point, it was her choice whether or not to continue pursuing a parasocial relationship with Zelena.

Shortly after Zelena was introduced in season three, members began asking questions and theorizing about who Zelena was so that they could learn more about her. One member, Phoebe, shared a theory based on the movie *Oz, the Great and Powerful*, a cinematic interpretation of *The Wizard of Oz* that was released in November 2013: “Is this what could have made Zelena green as well? A green apple?” Phoebe’s question demonstrates how other media can potentially influence an individual’s view of a character. Additionally, inquiry about a character helps parasocial relationships with the character to further develop. Phoebe’s question served as a means of her getting to know Zelena on a deeper level.

Members’ inquiries and theories were not limited to just Zelena. One member posted a theory about Peter Pan and his shadow. During the first episode of season three, Greg (aka Owen) died when his shadow was ripped off of him by Peter Pan’s shadow. Likewise, in season three episode ten, Peter Pan’s shadow ripped off the Blue Fairy’s
shadow, killing her. However, in season three episode eleven, Tinkerbell was able to capture and destroy Peter Pan’s shadow. After the shadow was destroyed, the Blue Fairy came back to life. After viewing this scene, Jacob posted the following question: “Owen had his shadow taken by Pan. The Blue Fairie had her shadow taken by Pan. When Pan's shadow was destroyed by Tink, it released the Blue Fairy. SO does this mean that Owen is alive???” Inquiring about a character’s history is a means by which members can form parasocial relationships with characters. Parasocial relationships are able to form and develop as individuals learn more about the characters and determine how they feel about the characters. If the member feels a positive connection with the character based on the information that they learn, then parasocial relationships can form. However, members can also choose to end parasocial relationship formation if they do not feel a connection to the character.

Some members began to think about the future of the show and started to pose speculations about characters dying in the future. In the first and second seasons, members got a closer look at Regina’s story, as several episodes explored Regina’s backstory in an attempt to show viewers how her past influenced her as she began turning evil. After watching seasons one and two, one member, Daniel, posted the following question and speculation: “When all is said and done... Do you think Regina will be redeemable, or killed/die? I think she is the tragic character here, and her end will be equally tragic.” Here, Daniel suggested a path that he saw for Regina’s future based on how he had gotten to know her over the course of two seasons. As he watched, Daniel saw beyond Regina’s evil exterior and saw the pain that she had endured in the past. While he had formed a connection with Regina, Daniel did not foresee a happy ending in
Regina’s future based on what he had learned and observed about her in the past. Daniel’s post here serves two purposes. By sharing a question with the community, as well as his own view about the question, Daniel is able to develop a closer parasocial relationship with Regina because he is able to hear other members’ opinions and views about who Regina is and what her future entails. The second purpose for Daniel’s post is that it allows for him to prepare himself to potentially lose Regina in the future. Although Daniel had formed a parasocial relationship with Regina, he also stated that he did not see her ending being a good ending. Sharing a statement like this may serve as a means of beginning to develop closure in his parasocial relationship with Regina. By developing this closure at an earlier stage, Daniel may experience less shock and emotional pain in the future if Regina were to die.

During the first half of season three, the executive producers stated that viewers would see a beloved character die by the end of the first half of season three. Upon seeing this news, Melanie shared her opinion of who she thought could potentially die: “So which beloved character dies? Might be Hook, sadly enough... at the hands of Pan or even Rumple.” Melanie’s speculation suggests that she would be saddened by Captain Hook’s death. This sadness could arise because she liked the character and/or because she had developed an attachment to him. As stated before, speculating about characters may potentially bring members into a closer relationship with the characters. However, speculating about a character’s death may serve a different purpose. For some members, speculating about a character’s death may be a means by which members prepare themselves to potentially lose a character. Lather and Moyer-Guse (2011) and Eyal and Cohen (2006) noted that, for some television viewers, parasocial breakup with a character
was an emotional experience in part because the viewers had no control over the dissolution of the parasocial relationship. By speculating about a character’s death, members may be preparing themselves to lose the character in the future. This preparation may help to lessen the blow that these members could potentially feel.

Overall, speculating about characters is a means by which parasocial relationships are able to develop. By sharing potential scenes and inquiring about the characters’ histories, members are able to learn more about the characters. Speculating about a character’s demise may also help to develop parasocial relationships. However, this level of speculation may also begin to provide closure in the parasocial relationship by allowing individuals to prepare themselves to lose characters with whom they have developed closer relationships.

Playing Matchmaker

Playing matchmaker was the final theme that showed evidence of parasocial relationship development. Playing matchmaker allows individuals to show the relationships that they had formed as they pair characters with one another based on their knowledge and understanding of the characters. This goes beyond simply liking a character. In this theme, individuals use their knowledge of the characters to determine who they think would be the best match for each character.

Playing matchmaker was not uncommon in this community, as several members posted comments describing how they wanted certain characters to become a couple and get married. The idea of creating couples emerged several times. Several members, upon noticing a connection between characters, began to long for the characters to become a couple. During seasons two and three, some fans began to question whether Emma would
be in a relationship with Captain Hook or Neal. However, these questions were put to rest in season three episode fifteen as viewers watched as Neal, Emma’s former love and Henry’s father, died at Zelena’s hand. After Neal’s death, Tanya said “I cried when Neil died but I hope it will make Killian (Captain Hook) and Emma get together.” For Tanya, while she did like and appreciate Neal as a character, she believed that he and Emma needed to be separated in order for Emma and Captain Hook to have any hope of becoming a couple. Another member, Victoria, responded in a similar member when she asked “Am i the only one who doesn't want Neil to come back so that Emma and Hook Can finally be together? He is the only one i think who is perfect for her!” For Victoria, Neal got in the way of Emma and Captain Hook becoming a couple. As she watched Emma and Captain Hook interact with one another, she saw a connection between the characters, even going as far as to say that Captain Hook was the only character that was perfect for Emma. Additionally, stating that she saw Captain Hook being perfect for Emma shows that she had formed a parasocial relationship with Captain Hook. In order for her to say that Captain Hook was perfect for Emma, Victoria would need to understand both Emma and Captain Hook on a deeper level, taking time to think about their pasts, their personalities, and their future aspirations.

After Neal’s death, fans began to see more interactions between Emma and Captain Hook. Caroline, after seeing a picture of Captain Hook with Emma, said “I cannot handle these two apart any longer.” Caroline noticed a connection between Emma and Captain Hook as she watched them throughout seasons two and three. As a result, she began to develop a strong desire for Emma and Captain Hook to become a couple. In suggesting that two characters become a couple, the members may have been using their
knowledge and opinions of their favorite characters to determine which other characters could potentially be the best match for the character. When individuals propose that two characters become a couple, parasocial relationships with both characters begin to develop. They may spend time getting to know both characters on a deeper level. For example, members may watch past episodes in order to learn about the characters’ backstories. Additionally, they may watch both past and future episodes in order to see how the characters interact with one another. As the parasocial relationships with both characters continue to develop, the desire for the characters to enter into a relationship with one another increases. This desire may continue to build until it either reaches a point of satisfaction when the characters become a couple or a point of heartbreak when another character pairing emerges.

Although it did not occur on the same scale as creating couples, there were some instances where members saw characters interacting with one another and were immediately turned off to the idea of the characters becoming a romantic couple. For example, Heather, in commenting on whether Emma should be with Captain Hook or Neal, said “Hook being with emma just doesn't sit right at all.” Unlike other members, Heather didn’t see the connection between Emma and Captain Hook because she had developed a closer bond with Neal. As a result, she saw Captain Hook as a threat to Emma and Neal’s happiness. Heather defended Neal against Hook, saying that “Neal has every right to hate Hook and now Hook wants his girl.” This shows evidence of parasocial relationship development because Heather learned who Neal was and the troubles that he faced in his past. As a result, she developed a closer bond with Neal and wanted to defend his potential relationship with Emma from anyone who would threaten
it. Another member, Lauren, said “Okay so what do you guys think should Emma go with Neil or hook? I think it would be kinda gross if she were to go with hook because he's like what thirty or twenty years older than her if u think about it... But I still don't know.” Alexis shared her own speculation of what could happen if Neal and Emma became a couple: “Okay, I know Neal and hook are buddies and all, but what if...Emma chooses Neal which turns hook bad again and Robin Hood falls in love with Mulan and Regina turns evil and Peter becomes a boy without parents and becomes a good guy and everything goes back to being sorta normal?” In her speculation, Alexis shared the couple that she wanted to see come together, as well as the potential impact that it could have. She used her knowledge and understanding of each of the characters to predict how they would respond. Additionally, her parasocial relationships with both Emma and Neal, coupled with her desire for Emma and Neal to become a couple, caused Alexis to develop an idealized scenario where all of the other characters in OUAT would return to their “normal” selves as a result of Emma and Neal becoming a couple.

Each of these examples provides an interesting perspective. There are several occasions where members observed the interactions between characters and determined that the characters were well suited for one another and should, therefore, become a couple. In addition to the parasocial relationships that are formed with characters, bias against a character may be a factor that plays into an individual’s desire for two characters to not become a couple. If an individual actively dislikes one of the characters and then sees the disliked character interacting with one of their favorite characters, they may begin seeing the disliked character as a threat and may begin to think of reasons why the two characters shouldn’t be together.
Overall, playing matchmaker is an effective way for individuals to develop the parasocial relationships that they have formed with characters. Playing matchmaker allows individuals to exercise their knowledge about the characters in order to choose what they believe is the best possible pairing. When individuals are not in a parasocial relationship with a character, they may still propose different character pairings for relationships. However, these individuals may not have as much of an interest in the outcomes of the characters. When people form parasocial relationships with characters, there is often a physical, real life aspect that plays into their preferences, ranging from them saying that they understand what the characters are feeling to them saying that they would be disgusted by two characters becoming a couple.

The second research question for this thesis asked: How does interacting with other individuals in online fan groups influence the formation and development of parasocial relationships with members of the online fan community? Two themes emerged that answer this research question – Community Discussion and Sharing Emotion.

Community Discussion

Community discussion is one means by which parasocial relationships among members are able to emerge. In an online community, members can discuss anything that they choose regardless of whether or not it relates to the show. In these discussions, members can share their ideas and thoughts with the rest of the community. This theme focuses on discussions centered around scenarios that members proposed, as well as discussions that focused on members sharing their opinions about various aspects of the show. In these discussions, members are able to relate and commiserate with one another.
as they share their ideas and beliefs with the community. As a result, members get to know one another on a deeper level, which may lead to the formation of a parasocial relationship.

Some individuals chose to ask about other members’ opinions about the characters. For example, Kyle asked the community the following question about Regina: “Anyone thinks Regina is the best thing to happen to the show?” This question serves two purposes. The first purpose of this question is that Kyle is trying to engage with the other members of the community to hear about what they think of Regina. The second purpose is that Kyle is showing his support for Regina and hopes that he can find other like-minded individuals. James responded to Kyle’s question with another question of his own: “What would be of OUaT without Regina?” James, while not directly saying that he agrees, showed that he agreed with Kyle. By asking this question, James showed that he believed that Regina was an integral part of the show. Another member, Marcel, showed that he liked Regina for a different reason, saying “Regina draws me to the show. She’s a hot one. Young Cora was like that too.” Conversations like this allow community members the opportunity to get to know each other on a level beyond individuals just saying their names and their likes and dislikes. Here, members were able to bond because of the attraction to Regina that each of them shared. As individuals form parasocial relationships with other members, they may discover that they have more in common with the other members than they initially thought. Finding common ground allows individuals to recognize that they share interests with other community members. When individuals have common interests, it becomes easier to relate to one another. As members spend more time in the community, they may discover that they have more in
common with each other. As a result, they may begin to trust one another, which may then lead to the parasocial relationships developing into actual friendships.

Some individuals turned to the community to show their appreciation for the other members, as well as the group as a whole. Rebecca, one of the moderators of the community, showed her appreciation for the community when she posted “Great Posts Guys. Some of you all are so creative and def make this community fun!” As a moderator, some of Rebecca’s responsibilities include facilitating discussion and monitoring posts to make sure that they are in the correct section in the community. In both of these roles, Rebecca was able to interact with many of the members and get to know them on a deeper level. She was also able to share her opinions about the creative content that the other members shared with the community. Cassie, one member who had been appointed as a community moderator, said: “Thanks for making me a moderator!! +Johanna.” Appointing moderators in a community is somewhat difficult. Online communities may use different strategies for recruiting and appointing moderators. Some communities may use an open application or interview process where members actively volunteer to become moderators. In other communities, moderators may select individuals who they believe would be a good moderator for the community. Cassie understood the difficulty that goes into making the decision of who becomes a moderator and expressed her gratitude for being considered and granted the position. Evidence of parasocial relationships is present in both Rebecca and Cassie’s posts because they showed their appreciation for members of the community. Showing appreciation for members of the community can take several forms. One form is where individuals call attention to other members for sharing creative content with the community. For
example, Brendon shared a video created by another member with the rest of the community. He commented on the video, saying “Since we’re adding videos..i always thought this video was wicked! Can’t wait for Cruella!! .... Thanx Samantha.” Another member, Kathy, acted in a similar manner when she shared a fan made picture of Emma and Captain Hook kissing. She responded by saying “Feast your eyes dearies! Thanks +Janice.” Calling attention to members for their creative content allows for evidence of friendship to surface within the community. In each of these instances, Brendon and Kathy appreciated the time and the effort that each of these members invested in creating this content. By thanking each of the members, Brendon and Kathy showed that they respected and valued the work that both Samantha and Janice had done.

Parasocial relationships are also able to emerge as community members help each other. Brendon, one of the members in the community, posted the following message in response to another member’s question: “This is for Caroline. She wanted to know if Zelena was wearing the same dress that Regina wore when she first met Graham ...and NO she is in a different dress ...apparently, --they both have the same sense of style!!” A parasocial relationship is present here for several reasons. For one, Brendon saw Caroline’s post and chose to take time out of his day so that he could provide her with an answer to her question. This goes beyond mere discussion in a community. Brendon chose to give up time in his own life outside of the community in order to help another member better understand something. Additionally, by spending time to research and answer Caroline’s question, Brendon showed that he felt that Caroline’s question had merit. As a result, he wanted to show her respect and kindness by answering her question.
Other discussions in the community focused on individuals talking about their lives outside of the community. One member, Cassie, stated that she felt lonely outside of the community because none of her family or friends watched the show. She asked if the other members had ever experienced something like this. Sharon responded to Cassie by saying “+Cassie you are never alone. We are all in this together I bet you every person who likes once upon a time agrees with you.” Georgia also showed Cassie her support, saying “Don’t worry your not alone and I’m obsessed too.” In this instance, members may have formed parasocial relationships with one another due to the common understanding that they had with their obsession with OUAT. Sharing moments such as these allows community members to get to know each other on a deeper level beyond the context of the community. As a result of sharing personal experiences, members may begin to trust one another, which may result in friendships beginning to form.

Sharing Emotion

Sharing emotion with others is another means by which parasocial relationships can emerge. As individuals discuss the show with one another, they may display certain emotions, ranging from happiness and love for a character to sadness and anger towards a character. When people share their emotions and views with one another, other individuals may show their support and agreement with their emotions and views. As a result, parasocial relationships are able to emerge because of the common bond that is created between the individuals as they are able to commiserate and relate to one another.

Some individuals shared their love for the characters with the other members of the community. One member, Rachel, asked “Who loves Rumplestiltskin? Cause I do... ;) #OUAT #onceuponatime #robertcarlyle #rumplestiltskin #gif.” Charity responded to
Rachel, saying “Rumple is the main reason why I watch OUAT, actually. I like the series as such, but without him it would be bland. :-)”. In another instance, Michelle shared her love for Rumplestiltskin, saying “I love you Rumplestiltskin!” ;#OUAT #onceuponatime #rumplestiltskin #robertcarlyle.” Melanie voiced her agreement, saying “Love you Rumple :-)”. Using hashtags and emoticons is one way that people can show their emotions. People often use hashtags to share a simplified statement either describing a longer social media post or how they feel about a given situation. Emoticons are a means by which individuals can illustrate how they feel without having to describe the feeling using words. In each of the preceding posts, members voiced their passion for the characters with the other people in the community. As members disclosed their feelings about the characters, it was not unusual that others would respond, typically voicing their agreement and love for the characters. Posts like this show evidence of parasocial relationship formation within the community. When members share their love for characters and other individuals respond with similar feelings, common ground is established between the members. When common ground is established between two people, they are able to understand each other better because of the fact that they hold a shared view. As individuals spend more time conversing with and getting to know each other, they may discover that they have more in common. As a result, trust may begin to develop between both people, which may then lead to the formation of friendships.

Similar proof can be found when members discussed their sadness about certain events in OUAT. For example, in season three, episode fifteen, viewers watched as Neal died in Emma and Rumplestiltskin’s arms. Immediately after watching the scene, Susan responded by saying “Oh My God...... Neil is dead....... im crying tears streaming down
my face.” As Susan watched the episode, she experienced a physical pain because a character that she had grown close to was ripped from her life. Other members shared similar sentiments to Susan. Priscilla responded to Neal’s death by saying “I cried, I think I cried more than Emma and Rumple actually cried.” Here, Priscilla showed that she, like Susan, had developed a connection with Neal and emotionally responded to his death. Additionally, Priscilla also showed that she understood how Susan felt after the scene aired. Cassie shared her thoughts after Neal’s death, saying “I don’t even like Neal that much. But I cried so much more than when rumple died.” Although Neal wasn’t her favorite character, Cassie still developed some sort of connection to him. As a result, she, like Susan and Priscilla, showed the pain that she felt after Neal’s death. In each of these instances, members were able to relate to one another and show that they were able to understand what others in the community were feeling at the time. As members bond over the loss of a character, parasocial relationships are able to emerge. When individuals bond over the loss of a character, they show that they share a common opinion towards the character. As a result, they may begin to trust one another, as they understand each other on an emotional level.

However, there was one instance where two members went beyond simply relating to one another. In season three episode eight, viewers learned that Peter Pan was actually Rumplestiltskin’s father. In the same episode, Peter Pan trapped Rumplestiltskin in Pandora’s Box. At the end of the episode, Henry gave his heart to Peter Pan because he believed he could save magic and his family. As a result, Henry collapsed to the ground, dead. After viewing this scene, Cheryl responded by saying “Just watched Think Lovely Thoughts... Wahhhhhh waaaahhhhh waaaahhhhh!!!!! Worst day of my life!!!!!!! Ok I
started crying when Rumple's own dad shut him up in a box!!! Started balling when Henry died... Man this is the worst thing ever. :( sadness.” This episode caused Cheryl to display emotion because she felt as if she was losing both Rumplestiltskin and Henry. Her reaction was so strong that she went as far as to say that the events in the episode ruined her entire day and made it the worst day of her life. In an attempt to comfort Cheryl, Julianne responded to her by saying “I cried to! But Henry is not really dead. just watch the promo for the next episode it is called "Save Henry".” Julianne began her post by establishing that she understood exactly what Cheryl was feeling. She then attempted to comfort Julianne by showing her that everything would turn out alright. Julianne’s response physically impacted Cheryl, as she responded by saying “Yeah. U just made my day so much better +Julianne. But what about Rumple?” Here, Cheryl clearly tells Julianne that she has had an impact on her outlook of the day. Julianne continued to comfort Cheryl and address her fears when she said “If you watch the promo for the next episode "Save Henry" on YouTube. It shows Neal holding the Pandora's box and you see red smoke come out.” Here, Julianne gave Cheryl hope that she would not lose Rumplestiltskin, showing her that he would potentially be coming back in the next episode. Cheryl concluded the entire exchange by saying “+Julianne I love you so much. U just made life worth living.” Parasocial relationship formation is present in interactions like this one. Members are able to show that they care for one another by taking the time to show that they understand what the other individuals in the community are feeling. When members spend time relating to and comforting one another, they show that they care about each other even beyond the scope of the community.
Overall, both community discussion and sharing emotion show evidence of parasocial relationships among members of the community. Community discussion allows members to discover things that they have in common with one another. Community discussion is also a means by which members can show their appreciation for each other, as well as the community as a whole. Sharing emotion is a means by which members can bond with one another as they display similar emotions. It is through these common bonds that are created that parasocial relationships are able to emerge in the community.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis was 1) to understand how interacting with other individuals in online fan groups influences the formation and development of parasocial relationships, and 2) to understand how parasocial relationships form and develop among members in an online community. Thematic analysis based on grounded theory was used in order to develop the open, axial, and theoretical codes. These codes then contributed to the themes that were used in answering the research questions. In conducting the research for this thesis, five themes emerged that were relevant in answering the research questions. Three themes – interacting with characters, speculating about characters, and playing matchmaker – helped to show how parasocial relationships form and develop within an online community. These themes examined how community members discussed their attachment and involvement with characters within Once Upon a Time. These themes also help us understand how interacting with others can help individuals to form and develop parasocial relationships. Additionally, two themes – Community Discussion and Emotional Involvement – helped to show how parasocial relationships are able to form among members of the community.

Previously, parasocial relationship research has focused on a one-way relationship between an individual and a mediated figure (Horton & Wohl, 1956). However, with the
advent of interactive media such as Facebook, Twitter, and online communities, parasocial relationships may be evolving to a point of having an impact on real life relationships. As evidenced in the data, some of the interactions between members may suggest that friendships were able to develop through the parasocial relationships that were formed\(^2\). Qualities such as trust, intimacy, and enjoyment in one another’s company were present in several of the interactions between members of the community, as seen in the community discussion theme. This may suggest that parasocial relationships moving beyond one-sided interactions. As individuals go online and participate in online communities, they may develop parasocial relationships with the other members based on what they have learned about them. As members interact with one another over time, these parasocial relationships may evolve to a point where the relationship between members is reciprocal rather than one-sided. Further research will need to be conducted in order to better understand how potential friendships within an online community can emerge as parasocial relationships form and develop.

While this research did yield interesting findings, there were several weaknesses. For one, threaded posts were not gathered; only the first posts for each thread were collected. While some conversations did emerge in the posts, it was harder to see how bonds formed in the community. Lastly, the open, axial, and theoretical coding processes were all conducted within a two-month period due to time constraints. Had more time

\(^2\) Fehr (1996) defines friendship as “a voluntary, personal relationship, typically providing intimacy and assistance, in which the two parties like each other and seek each other's company” (p. 7). Fehr further explains that when people define friendship, they “list features such as intimacy, loyalty, honesty, trust, enjoyment in one another’s company” among other characteristics (p. 16).
been available, coding may have been more extensive, which may have resulted in richer themes overall.

Future research should consider the concept of parasocial breakups within an online community. Researchers have focused on the concept of parasocial breakups with characters (Cohen, 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011). However, these studies focused on parasocial breakups resulting from shows ending. In several cases, fans were prepared to lose the characters with whom they had developed parasocial relationships. In the “Once Upon a Time Fans” community, there were several instances in the ‘interacting with characters’ theme where participants exhibited emotions such as grief and anger in response to unexpected character deaths. These feelings may have an impact on real life behaviors. For example, some members of the community were able to commiserate and comfort one another about the loss that they felt. Future research may seek out the differences in parasocial breakup patterns when a character dies and when a show ends. Additionally, future research may seek to understand the real life implications that parasocial breakup can have on an individual.

With these considerations in mind, this research helps us to gain a better understanding of how parasocial relationships can impact real life behavior. This study suggests that the dynamics of parasocial relationships may be changing as a result of the use of interactive online media, as individuals are able to engage in communal relationships and friendships with one another. In fan communities dedicated to television shows and movies, individuals are not only discussing the content and characters within the show or movie. Rather, they share day to day life experiences with one another. Over time, this may mean that relationships develop throughout the community. Human beings
are able to benefit from media such as these because they are able to interact with and develop new relationships with individuals across a wide population. Studying online communities such as the “Once Upon a Time Fans” community is beneficial, as it helps us to better understand different communication processes.
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APPENDIX

Theoretical Codes

Theme: Interacting with Characters
- Emotional Interaction with Characters
  - Missing Character (Also, Member Misses Character) (7)
    - Longing to see Character (1)
  - Love for Couple (4)
  - Love for Character (22)
  - Hatred for Character (3)
  - Angry with Character (1)
  - Amused by Character (1)
  - Annoyed by Character (3)
  - Excited to see character again (1)
  - Excited that Character is alive (2)
  - Excitement for Character’s Birthday (1)
  - Able to Understand Character’s Emotions (Also, Understands Character’s Hatred) (2)
  - Empathy for Character (2)
  - Sympathy for Character (5)
- Verbal Interaction
  - Shouting at Character (1)
  - Saying Goodbye to Character (1)
  - Cheering for Character (1)
  - Speaking to Character (2)
  - Blaming Character (1)
  - Defending Character (1)
- Ownership/Possession (5)

Theme: Community Interactions
- Member Dynamics
  - Positive
    - Love for Community Members (1)
    - Thanking Member (5)
    - Complimenting Community (1)
    - Complimenting Member (1)
    - Respecting Members who haven’t seen the episode (1)
- Begging Community (1)
- Apologizing to Community (3)
- Acknowledging Community (1)
- Inviting Members to Group Event (1)
- Introducing members to community (1)
- Introducing Self to Community (1)
  - New Member to Community (6)
  - New to Watching Show (1)
- Thanking Community (3)
- Opinions of Community
  - Enjoys being in community (1)
  - Excited about Community (1)
- Greeting Community (Also, Greeting Followers) (2)
- Saying goodnight to community (1)
- Proposing Community Wide Hangout for first half of season (1)
  - Gauging Members' interest regarding live discussion of new episode (1)
- Negative
  - Interpretation of Moderators actions (1)
  - Moderators' power has a negative impact (1)
  - Abuse of Power in Community (1)
  - Desire for abuse of power to be addressed (1)
  - Confused as to why people are posting spoilers (1)
  - Upset about amount of spoilers posted (1)
    - Unfair to other viewers who watch the show later (1)
- Stating Issue in community (ALSO, Noted Issue in Community) (2)
  - Curiosity about people leaving community (1)
- Moderator/Owner Roles
  - Will provide spoiler post (Also, Providing post where members can post spoiler content) (2)
    - Post acts like a virtual living room (1)
  - Instructing Community (11)
    - Reasoning for not posting spoilers (1)
  - Stating Consequence (3)
  - Community Regulation
    - Trying to encourage members to help grow the size of the community (1)
    - Wants community to grow (1)
    - Excitement about community growth (1)
  - Searching for moderators (1)
  - Stating Duties (1)
  - Reminding Community Members about Guidelines (Also, Stating Rules of Community) (5)
Referring Members to Post Suggestions Section (1)

Announcing Contest (5)
  - Introducing Contest (3)
  - Rationale for Contest (1)
  - Stating Categories for Participation (1)
  - Instructing Community about Contest (5)
  - Introducing Scenario for Contest (1)
  - Trying to excite community about contest (1)
  - Updating Community about Contest (3)
  - Stating Prize for Contest (1)
  - Proposing Contest to community (1)

Desire for members to respect each other (2)

Desire for community members to have fun (ALSO, Encouraging members to enjoy participating in the community) (3)

Encouraging Participation in Community (1)
  - Wants members to participate in community (1)

Encouraging members to enjoy the show (2)

Addressing Selected Groups
  - Addressing ComicCon Fans (1)
  - Stating target audience for post (4)
  - Addressing members who have seen episode (1)

Community Uncertainty
  - Confusion with Post Placement (1)
  - Uncertain about when members can discuss episode (1)

Theme: Discussion
  - General Discussion
    - Open to Other Members' Opinions (6)
    - Open to Other Members' Explanations (1)
    - Wants members to read post with an open mind (1)
    - Calming fan fears (1)
    - Curiosity about other members' excitement (3)
    - Response to Member (1)
    -Spoiler Warning (17)
  - Show-Related Discussion
    - Posing a question to community members (34)
      - Curiosity about which realm members would want to live in (1)
      - Asking members to choose a side (1)
    - Desire to hear members’ opinions (11)
    - Wants to discuss new show (1)
    - Opinion of Producers' Actions (1)
  - Episode Discussion
    - Desire to hear members’ opinions about episode (1)
    - Discussing Plot Point (Also, Discussing Plot Points from Episode) (2)
    - Posing a question about plot point (1)
- Uncertain if others had the same question (1)
  
  - Opinion of Episode
    - Light moments were needed to break up the heaviness of the episode (1)
  
  - Reaction to Episode
    - Reaction to Event (Also, Personal opinion regarding episode events) (2)
    - Reaction to Plot Twist (Also, Plot Twist was Unexpected) (3)
  
  - Episode brought some doubt (1)
  
  - Commenting on cost of effects (1)
  
  - Connections between characters (1)
  
  - Eventful Episode (1)
  
  - Excitement from Scene (1)
  
  - Loved twist with character (1)
    - Member intrigued by character twist (1)
  
  - Member learned something from episode (1)
  
  - Mission Exposing Complex Family Tree (1)
  
  - Excited about prediction (1)
  
  - Couldn't stop watching character (1)
  
  - Freaked out when seeing character (1)
  
  - Learned truth about character (1)
  
  - Member believes actions were a bit over the top (1)
  
  - Never know what to expect with show (1)
  
  - Mixed Emotions for story (1)
  
  - Reference to Previous Episode (4)
    - Tired of discussing previous episode (1)
    - Reference to scene (Also, Mentioning Past Scene) (2)
      - Reference to Seer's Prophecy (Also, Stating Seer's Prophecy) (4)
        - Member argues that they should be careful about interpreting the meaning of the words used in the prophecy (1)
  
- Discussing Favorites
  
  - Stating Favorite Badass Scene (1)
    - Member loves scenes with Regina or Cora (1)
    - Member has many favorite scenes (1)
  
  - Stating Favorite Character (ALSO, Asking Community about their Favorite Characters AND Member believes Regina is the best character) (3)
    - Character was member's favorite before OUAT (1)
  
  - Stating Favorite TV Show (1)
  
  - Stating Favorite Villains (Also, Pan is Favorite Villain) (2)
  
  - Favorite Couple (1)
  
  - Sharing Favorite Kiss (1)
- Favorite animal-friendly celebrity (1)

- Justification
  - Justification for why Pan is favorite villain (1)
  - Rationale for Opinion (2)
  - Reason for Liking Article (1)
    ▪ Better understanding of certain events (1)
  - Reason for Disliking Character (2)
  - Reason for Question (4)
  - Reason for Speculation (2)
  - Reason for surprise (1)
  - Reason for assumption (1)
  - Reason for Loving Quote (1)
  - Reason why character should die (1)
  - Reason why character shouldn't appear (1)
  - Reason why Rumple was a Good Father (1)

- Stating Progress with Show
  - Won't be able to see episode unless a rerun is aired (1)
  - Views episodes on own time (1)
  - Member missed show (1)
  - Episode hasn't aired yet (1)
  - Ready to watch show (1)
  - Rewatching Season (2)
  - Has fallen behind with episodes (1)
  - Member just saw preview for new season (1)
  - Forgot about show airing (1)
  - No time to watch series (1)
  - No TV - uses app (1)
  - Excited to be caught up with show (1)
  - Member will fall behind if she begins watching now (1)
  - Excited to begin watching OUAT (1)
  - Desire to Watch Show
    ▪ Wishes season was on Netflix (1)
    ▪ Freaking out about not finding season (1)

- Methods of Handling Hiatus
  ▪ Watching New Show during Hiatus (1)
  ▪ Watching bloopers to fill need for show (1)
  ▪ Curiosity about what others will do without show (1)

- Questioning Community (45)
  - Show Related
    ▪ Questioning Community about Episode (1)
    ▪ Questioning about Character Reveal (1)
    ▪ Questioning Community about Plot Twist (1)
    ▪ Asking where to watch show (Also, Curiosity about where to watch Season 2)
• Curious about when episode will appear on app (1)
• Curiosity about when Season 2 will appear on Netflix (2)
  ▪ Asking if time is right for a spinoff (1)
  ▪ Asking about delay (1)
    • Questioning when show is returning (1)
 ▪ Questioning Community about Character Preference (1)
 ▪ Questioning Community about Future of Show (1)
 ▪ Questioning Community about Obsession with Show (1)
 ▪ Questioning about potential cliffhanger (1)
 ▪ Questioning about Character (9)
  • Curiosity about Character (1)
    o Inquiring about a Character's History (3)
    o Wondering how Hook escaped (1)
    o Wondering if Character is alive (1)
    o Wondering if character has appeared (1)
    o Wondering who character could be (1)
    o Curiosity about repeated phrase (1)
    o Curiosity about how characters captured Hook (1)
 ▪ Questioning about ship (1)
 ▪ Questioning Character's Motives (1)
  • Curiosity about Character's Motives (3)
    o Interested to see how character's motives play out (1)
 ▪ Questioning about Plot Point (5)
  • Uncertainty about Show Events (1)
    o Uncertain as to how Hook escaped Neverland (1)
 ▪ Questioning about Events in Show (1)
 ▪ Questioning about where character is (1)
    • Curiosity about when character would return (1)
    • Curiosity about seeing character (1)
 ▪ Questioning about Character's Actions (1)
 ▪ Questioning about Garment in Episode (4)
 ▪ Questioning Community about when show airs (1)
 ▪ Questioning when show is returning (1)
 ▪ Questioning Community about Readiness for Episode (4)
 ▪ Questioning community about what will happen next (1)
 ▪ Curiosity about who will watch new show (1)
 ▪ Curiosity about who will watch new season (1)
  o Non-Show Related
    ▪ Questioning Community about other show (1)
• Discussing Actors
  o Fact Based Discussion
    ▪ Actor Appears in Another Program (Also, Informing Community about Actor's Appearance In Another Program) (2)
• Actor appeared in JAG (1)
• Informing Community about Actor in Movie (ALSO, Connecting Actor to Film) (2)
  ▪ Referencing Past Work Actor has Done (1)
  ▪ Stating Actor's Role in OUAT (1)
  ▪ News Related (1)
  o Opinion Based Discussion
    ▪ Actor looks too innocent (1)
    ▪ Complimenting Actor's Appearance (1)
    ▪ Commenting on actor's ability (1)
      • Actor is talented (1)
    ▪ Actor would be better suited in another role (1)
    ▪ Wants to see actor more (1)
    ▪ Excitement about Actor (1)
    ▪ Excited to see Actor (1)
    ▪ Excitement for Actor's Birthday (1)
  o Quoting Actor (1)
• Interpreting OUAT
  o Character Related
    ▪ Quick Character Evolution (1)
    ▪ Understands that character did die (1)
    ▪ Interpreting Character’s Actions (Also, Member's Interpretation of Character's Actions) (5)
    ▪ Favors are very important (1)
    ▪ Character's popularity linked to ratings (1)
    ▪ Didn't agree with Regina's response to her mother's death (1)
    ▪ Doesn't want character to sacrifice his life (1)
    ▪ Downside to Character's Redemption (1)
    ▪ Noting Character's Actions (1)
    ▪ Redemption was a sign of Victory (1)
    ▪ Stating what character did to make viewers be able to hate him (1)
    ▪ Surprised by character's lies (1)
    ▪ Regina should have been punished (1)
    ▪ Rumple can control Dark Side (1)
    ▪ Character's Motives Unknown (1)
    ▪ Member thought that Rumple killed Henry (1)
    ▪ Rumple used the curse to reunite with his son (1)
    ▪ Wishes Bae knew the truth (1)
    ▪ Asking why everyone close to Emma gets hurt (1)
    ▪ Believes that Tamara is a Fairy Tale Character (1)
    ▪ Character has been selfish from the start (1)
    ▪ Character is very clever (1)
    ▪ Member believes character cannot be beaten (1)
- Character's life turned upside down after birthday (1)
- Interpreting Interaction (2)
- Interpreting Character's Facial Expressions (1)
- Member believes that character is being honest (1)
- Hook has taken people from Neal's life (1)
- Hook is well known (1)
- Member believes Regina was hurt throughout her life (1)
- Perception of Character (6)
- Observation about Character (9)
- Assumption about Character (1)
- Initially thought Peter Pan was also another character (1)
- Observation about Magical Characters (1)
- Believes kiss was a long time coming (1)
- Analyzing OUAT Families
  - Love between characters (2)
  - Love for Mother-Son Relationship (1)
  - Loves how character finds family (1)
  - Member thinks Regina should be Henry's mother (1)

  - Show Related
    - Expect the Unexpected (1)
    - Complicated Family Tree (1)
      - Interpreting Family Tree (1)
    - Interpreting Events from Episode (3)
      - Knew something bad had to be coming (1)
    - Interpreting Scene (1)
    - Believes town should be protected (1)
    - Common Theory in Community (1)
    - Common Assumption about Prophecy (1)
      - Member believes meaning of prophecy is different (1)

Theme: Shared Content in Community
- Sharing Creative Works
  - Worked hard on picture (1)
    - Drawn out process (1)
  - Sharing Self-Created Picture (3)
    - Describing Self Made Picture (1)
  - Sharing Fan Made Image
    - Describing Fan Made Image (10)
    - Love for Fan Made Image (1)
    - Commenting on Fan Made Image (4)
    - Complimenting Picture (1)
    - Desire to know if picture is a real promotional picture (1)
    - Reaction to Fan Made Picture (11)
    - Responding to text in fan made picture (3)
- Sharing Art with Ship Supporters (1)
- Made an effort at making picture (1)
- Presenting Community with Fan Made Video (1)
  - First experience creating video (1)
  - Describing Fan Made Video (2)
  - Title of Video (6)
  - Liking Song in Fan Made Video (1)
  - Complimenting Fan Made Video (1)
  - Hopes members will view video (1)
  - Reaction to Fan Made Video (2)
  - Reaction to Video Creator (1)
  - Desire for Advice (1)
- Sharing Fan Fiction with Community (1)
  - Describing Fan Fiction (1)
  - Quoting Character in Fan Fiction (1)
  - Member found fan fiction humorous (1)
  - Hopes Community will Read Fan Fiction (1)
- Sharing Podcast with Community (1)
  - Describing Contents of Podcast (Also, Stating Content of Podcast) (3)
- Sharing Looping Image with Community (ALSO, Providing Looping Images from New Season) (2)
  - Complimenting Looping Image (1)
  - Commenting on Looping Image (1)
  - Reaction to Looping Image (Also, Response to looping image) (6)
  - Character in Looping Picture (1)
- Stated Self-Created Video (1)
- Desire to hear members’ opinions (13)

- Sharing Other Content
  - Shared Content (175)
    - Show site posing question (Also, Posing a Question to Readers) (20)
    - Show site sharing quiz (2)
  - Sharing Art Videos with Community (1)
  - Sharing Spoiler Picture with Community (1)
  - Sharing Soundtrack Cover (1)
  - Sharing Quiz Results (5)
    - Response to Quiz Results (2)
    - Agreement with Quiz Results (4)
    - Disagreement with Quiz Results (1)
    - Excitement about Quiz Results (2)
  - Sharing Promo (3)
  - Sharing Sneak Peek (ALSO, Providing Community with Sneak Peek Photos AND Providing Sneak Peek) (6)
  - Shared some pictures with community (1)
- Sharing picture of Lego figure (1)
- Providing Link (77)
- Posting Song Lyrics (1)
- Providing HD Version of Commercial (1)
- Introducing Video (6)

Theme: Real Life Impact
- Sees complicated family tree in fairy tales thanks to OUAT (1)
- Addiction to show (Also, Obsession with Show) (7)
  - Desire to be part of OUAT storyline (1)
  - Desire to be a part of the OUAT family tree (1)
  - Hesitant to admit obsession with character (1)
  - Obsession with Character (1)
  - In love with show (1)
  - Sharing Problem with Community (Show Cancellation in Country) (1)
- Real Life Achievement (1)
  - Unique Item (Car/License Plate) (1)
- Economy has impacted show (1)
- Attracted to Actor/Actress (2)
- Congratulating Actor (1)
  - Connecting Real Life News to Show (1)
- Able to watch show because of friend (1)
- Connection between OUAT and real life (1)
- Connection with Ship (1)
- Connection to Self (1)
  - Stating when birthday is (1)
- Episode changed/ruined perceptions of character (2)
  - Cannot think of the character the same way ever again (1)
  - Portrayal of Characters may influence opinion of story (1)
  - Portrayal of Characters in OUAT shattered past perceptions of characters (1)
- Character Qualities Rubbing Off (1)
- Desire to Own Jewelry (1)
- Desire to Own Garment (1)
- Emotional Reaction for Character (1)
- Member connected character to person in her life (1)
- Transparency
  - Feeling Alone (1)
    - Reason for Loneliness (1)
  - Parents saw emotion (1)
  - Personal Story of how member began watching show (1)
    - Grandmother Introduced Member to Show (1)
    - Grandmother's cancer diagnosis (1)
    - Watched one episode together (1)
- Grandmother's death (1)
  - Began watching OUAT after grandmother's death (1)
  - Watches OUAT as a tribute to grandmother (1)
- Emotional Reaction to Character Death (1)
  - Unable to handle character death (1)
- Characters Inspired Part of Trip (1)
- Member has discussed future of OUAT for a while (1)
- Proposed Scene for OUAT (3)
  - Proposed Content for Seasons Four and Five (1)
  - Proposed Ending for Current Season (Also, Member's hopes for season finale) (2)
  - Personal Hope for Character Interaction (3)
  - Member Speculation_Predicting Ending of Show (1)
  - Member Narrative_Speculation (2)
  - Sharing Ideas about Final Scene for Finale (1)
  - Proposing how character would emerge (1)
  - Desired Interaction Between Characters (3)
  - Giving Task to Community (1)
  - Proposing Fight between Characters (1)
  - Member knows interaction probably won't happen (1)
- Show influences outlook on day (1)
- Show influences member's speech (2)
- Wanted to Comfort Character (1)
- Incorporating habits from show into real life (1)

Theme: Speculation about Character(s)
- General Speculation
  - Speculation About Character (Also, Member Theory_Speculation AND Member Opinion_Speculation about Character) (15)
    - Member feels like character is hiding something (Also, Member believes Rumple is hiding something) (2)
    - Member believes Snow will fall to her dark side (1)
    - Member implying that Rumple isn't Baelfire's father (1)
    - Character will be caught (1)
    - Member believes Henry has magic (1)
    - Speculation about what character will do (1)
    - Speculation about Character's Reaction (1)
    - Speculation of relationship between characters (2)
    - Speculation about meaning of what Pan was saying (1)
    - Characters will free Rumple (1)
    - Possible New Characters (1)
    - Speculation about Backstory (1)
    - Speculation about fight between characters (1)
  - Speculation about Character through Inquiry (15)
• Speculating about Character Match Ups
  o Cora would've defeated Tamara (1)
  o Believes Regina and Rumple could easily beat Jafar (1)

• Death Related Speculation
  o Speculation on how Rumple could kill Pan (1)
  o Rumple killing Pan would darken the Disney image (1)
  o Believes characters are alive (1)
  o Speculation on how Pan will die (1)
  o Doesn't believe Rumple will kill Pan (1)
  o Believes that characters may die (Also, Member believes Regina will die) (2)
  o Opinion of how character might die (1)
  o Speculation of what could happen if character dies (1)

• Speculation about the Unknown
  o Curiosity about unknown character (1)
  o Curiosity about what happened to character (ALSO, Curiosity about what will happen to character) (2)
    ▪ Doesn't know what happened to character (1)
  o Curiosity about mystery character in the cage (1)
  o Speculation about Potential Character (1)
  o Speculation of what may happen to character (1)
  o Curiosity about the nature of the Dark One (1)
  o Curiosity about what character will encounter (1)
  o Curiosity about how Regina's Story Ends (1)

Theme: Speculation about OUAT

• General Speculation
  o Speculation about Show through Inquiry (9)
  o Speculation about Events (2)
  o Speculation about Spoiler (1)

• Speculation about the Present
  o Speculation about Current Season (1)
  o Speculation about what will happen during season (1)
  o Speculation about what Episode Title Means (1)

• Speculation about the Future
  o Inquiry about Future (2)
  o Speculation about how show will end (1)
    ▪ Member believes series will have to end on a happy note (1)
  o Curiosity about what will happen in new season (1)

• Speculation about Storylines
  o Prediction about Storyline (1)
  o Speculation about Storyline (also, Speculation about where storyline may go AND Curiosity about what will happen with storyline) (4)
  o Curiosity about how storyline will end (1)
• Speculation about Writers
  o Member believes that writers want to shock viewers (1)
  o Speculation about what writers will do (1)
  o Writers preparing viewers for battle (1)
• Speculation about Actors
  o Wondering if Character will be Recast (1)
  o Speculation about Actor's Return to Show (1)
• Show Related Fears
  o Fears that writers will think that audience is uninterested with character (1)
  o Worried that Network will Ruin Show (1)

Theme: Sharing Emotion
• General Emotion
  o Emotional Reaction (4)
    ▪ Emotional Reaction to Episode (5)
    ▪ Emotional Reaction to Scene (6)
    ▪ Emotional Reaction to Thought (1)
    ▪ Crying out for help (2)
  o Sadness (4)
    ▪ Saddened by thought of character's death (1)
    ▪ Sadness from Episode (1)
    ▪ Sadness from Character's Death (1)
    ▪ Sadness with losing character (1)
    ▪ Sad to see show end (1)
    ▪ Distraught about Missing Dog (1)
• Happiness
  o Happy to see character (2)
  o Happy that character is dead (1)
  o Happiness for Character (1)
    ▪ Happy that Gepetto didn't lose his son (1)
  o Happy to be watching show (1)
• Excitement
  o Excitement for Ship (1)
  o Excitement for show (8)
    ▪ Excited to begin watching OUAT (1)
    ▪ Excited to see show earlier (1)
  o Excitement for Episode (11)
    ▪ Excitement for Season Finale (1)
    ▪ Excited by show synopsis (1)
  o Excitement for Exploring a New Land (1)
  o Excitement from Scene (2)
  o Excitement for New Season (ALSO, Excited for New Season to Air) (15)
    ▪ Excitement for OUAT to begin filming new season (1)
Excitement for New Character (3)
  - Excitement for Ariel (also, Excited to see Ariel in Episode ) (3)
  - Excitement for Ursula (1)
- Excited by character (1)
- Excitement for confrontation between characters (1)

- Upset
  - Upset about character's death (1)
  - Upset about events in episode (1)
  - Upset about what happened to character (1)
  - Upset from Episode (1)
  - Upset that season is ending/ended (2)
  - Upset that episode is ending (1)
  - Upset with losing character (Also, Upset about losing character)(2)
  - Upset with plot twist (1)
  - Upset with Tamara hurting Regina (1)
  - Member's heart broke during scene (1)
  - Upset for character to be cast aside (1)
  - Upset about Character being replaced (1)
  - Upset with Missing Show (1)
  - Member will be upset if character dies (1)
  - Will be upset with cliffhanger (1)

- Impatience (8)
  - Upset to have to wait to watch show (6)
  - Upset with awards show taking place of OUAT (1)
  - Upset about having to wait to see episode (1)
  - Wishes season was on Netflix (1)
  - Bored without show (1)
  - Frustration with having to wait for cliffhanger resolution (2)
  - Desire for New Episode (1)

- Shock
  - Shocked by Episode (26)
  - Shocked by Couple (1)
  - Shocked by Singer in OUAT (1)
  - Shock about New Character (1)
  - Still in a state of disbelief (1)
  - Disbelief with Plot Point (1)
  - Still trying to wrap mind around events (2)
  - Episode left member speechless (1)
    - Episode Reaction_Gibberish (1)
  - Surprised by story (1)

- Confusion
  - Confusion about character (2)
    - Confused about whether or not Rumple is Baelfire's father (1)
    - Confusion about how Regina can be attractive yet evil (1)
Confusion with Character's Motives (1)
Confusion with how OUAT and OUATIW timelines relate (Also, Confusion about timeline between shows) (2)
Confusion with Scene (1)
Confusion About Quote (1)

Theme: Informing Community

- About Show
  - Informing Community (12)
  - Stating Ship Name (2)
  - Informing Community about Character (Also, Stating what happened to character) (20)
    - Character's Birthday (2)
  - Informing community about character's appearance (1)
  - Characters in Scene (1)
  - Informing Community about Characters Present in Show (1)
  - Informing Community about Date Show Returns (3)
    - Stating when next episode airs (1)
    - Episode Delay (1)
  - Informing Community about Episode (Also, Synopsis of Episode) (8)
    - Providing Countdown (11)
  - Informing Community about Episode Title (Also, Sharing Episode Title AND Stating Episode Name) (41)
  - Informing Community about New Character (Also, New Character) (2)
  - Informing Community about New Promo (1)
  - Stating Plot Point (ALSO, Stating Plot Point in Episode) (8)
  - Stating Focus of Episode (Also, Focus of Episode) (12)
  - Informing Community about New Show (Also, Sharing News about New Show) (4)
    - Stating how new series will operate (1)
    - Stating when New Show Airs (1)
  - Informing Community about Recap (3)
  - Informing Community about Review (7)
  - Informing Community about Season Premiere (2)
    - Providing Countdown to New Season (1)
  - Informing Community about Show (Also, Sharing News about OUAT) (2)
    - Advertisement (20)
  - Informing Community about Sneak Peek (1)
  - Providing Episode Information (24)
  - Informing Community about Theory (1)
  - Informing Community about what happened in episode (1)
  - Informing Community about Voice Actor (1)
  - Informing Community about Plot Point (4)
  - Informing Community about New Casting Decision (2)
  - Informing Community about New Character Promotional Pictures (1)
- Informing Community about Name (2)
- Stating where show is filmed (1)
- Stating who has come to Storybrooke (1)
- Informing Community about Actor (4)
- Informing Community about Actor Appearance (1)
- Information about New Realm (1)
- Stating Knowledge from Episode (1)
- Stating knowledge so far (1)

**About Community**
- Informing Community about what will happen with contest (1)
- Informing Community about Spoiler Post (2)
- Informing Community about end of voting (1)

**About Other Media**
- Informing Community about Season 2 Soundtrack (1)
  - No soundtrack release date (1)
  - Unable to predict soundtrack release date (1)
  - Member's Prediction for Soundtrack Cost (1)
- Informing Community about Quiz (2)
  - Focus of Quiz (1)
- Informing Community about Page (1)
- Informing Community about DVD Release (1)
- Informing Community about New Commercial (1)
- Informing Community about Contents of Preview (Also, Stating Content of Preview) (2)
- Informing Community about Magazine (1)
- Informing Community about Blog (1)
- Announcing Website Content (1)
- Announcing Graphic Novel (1)
- Content Source (8)
  - Stating where picture comes from (1)
  - Stating where information came from (1)
  - Stating origin of text in picture (1)
  - Stating Origin of Picture (1)

**About Conference**
- Informing Community about ComicCon (ALSO, Sharing Information about ComicCon) (2)
- Informing Community about Conference (1)
- Informing Community about ComicCon Panel (2)
- Informing Community about Influx of Spoilers (1)
- Actors will appear at Comic Con (1)

**About Memorabilia**
- Informing Community about Purchased Memorabilia (2)
- Title of Book (1)
- Describing Memorabilia in Picture (1)
Theme: Sharing Opinions

- About Show
  - Thinks OUAT is successful (1)
  - Member thinks plot point is stupid (1)
  - Show is growing old (1)
  - Liked Episode (2)
  - Liked Twist (Also, Loved twist with character) (2)
  - Love for Episode (8)
  - Liked story line (1)
  - Liking Season Three (1)
  - Member Opinion_Season Improving (1)
  - Dislike for Scene (1)
  - Hopes show will improve (1)
  - Disappointed by Season Two (1)
  - Feels writers are straining for material (1)
  - Stating Personal Thoughts about Episode (1)
  - Too much repetition (1)
  - Thought episode was a dream (1)
  - Felt episode was common, but something stood out (1)
  - Member's opinion on happiest and saddest moments in show (1)

- About Character
  - Loved Character's Toughness (1)
  - Loves evil side of character (1)
  - Loves how character controls everything in Storybrooke (1)
  - Loving Character's Actions (1)
  - Member Intrigued by Regina (1)
  - Prefers characters with long hair (1)
    - Regina was more attractive with long hair (1)
  - Prefers how characters look in Fairytale Land (1)
  - Doesn't like character's alter-ego (1)
  - Stating Personal Opinion (1)
  - Opinion of Character (8)
    - Emma is better than Regina (1)
    - Rumple would defeat Regina (1)
    - Opinion based on observation (1)
  - Characters are evolving (1)
  - Member Opinion_Character is Indispensable (1)
  - Member sees Pan as disposable (1)
  - Comparing Characters (3)
    - Comparing Characters as Fathers (1)
    - Opinion of Peter Pan as a Father (1)
  - Angry side of character is unattractive (1)
o Personal Desire for Character to Die (1)
o Member finds it difficult to hate Regina (1)
o Hated how character changed (1)
  ▪ Wants character to return to normal (1)
o Regina should have been punished (1)
o Captain Hook is popular in community (1)
o Character not aging is strange (1)

Theme: Playing Matchmaker
  • Creating Couples
    o Wants Characters to Become a Couple (1)
    o Desire for Characters to Become a Couple (8)
    o Desire for characters to have a baby together (1)
      ▪ Desire for certain gender for baby (1)
    o Liked Interaction between Robin Hood and Regina (1)
    o Loved characters as a couple (1)
    o Member thinks couple is perfect (1)
    o Desire for Hook to find love with morally good character (1)
  • Breaking Up Couples
    o Characters do not work as a couple (1)
    o Reason why characters being a couple is unsettling (1)
    o Uncomfortable with characters being a couple (1)
    o Disgusted by thought of Emma and Hook (1)

Theme: Offering Suggestions
  • Character Related
    o Wants confrontation between characters (1)
    o Hope Character Stays on Show (1)
    o Hope characters will stay alive (Also, Hopes character lives) (2)
    o Hope for character redemption (1)
    o Hopes to learn more about character in the future (1)
    o Hopes to see tough side again (1)
    o Desire for New Characters (Also, Desire to see character(s) in OUAT
      AND Desire to see character's father AND Really wants to see character
      on OUAT) (7)
    o Desire to see more attractive male characters (1)
    o Desire to not see character (2)
    o Desire to learn more about character (2)
    o Desire to learn character's backstory (1)
    o Offering Suggestion for Character to Appear on Show (Also, Suggestion
      for character in OUAT) (2)
    o Wants Ariel to get a happy ending (2)
    o Wanted to learn about character (1)
    o Wants character to remain dormant (1)
    o Wants character to feel pain (1)
• Wants confrontation to play out on screen (1)
• Wants to see character again (2)
• Member wants Belle to return to normal (1)

• Show Related
  • Desire to see different realms in OUAT (ALSO, Desire to see realms in OUAT in comparison to other realms) (2)

Theme: Outside Media and Social Media Influence

• Reacting to Media
  • Laughing at Picture (1)
  • Liked Article (1)
  • Interpretation of Article (1)
  • Interpretation of Picture (1)
  • Liked Video (1)
  • Love Quote (2)
  • Love for picture (2)
    ▪ Loves character's expression in picture (1)
  • Love for Video (3)
  • Loved Promotional Video (1)
  • Member found video humorous (2)
  • Excitement from News (1)
  • Excitement from picture (1)
  • Immobilized by video (1)
  • Sadness from Video (1)
  • Intrigued by Promo Video (1)
  • Action Related Reaction
    ▪ Excited to share video with community (1)

• Social Media Influence
  • Providing Actor's Twitter Handle (6)
  • Providing Twitter Handle (3)
  • Use of Emoticon (120)
  • Use of Hashtag (205)
  • Encouraging Members to +1 (9)

Theme: Connection to Other Media

• Comparing OUAT to Movie (1)
  • Using other media as an example (1)
  • Providing example to prove point (1)

• Comparing Situation to a Movie (1)
• Comparing Storybrooke to horror story town (1)
• Comparison to Harry Potter (1)
  • Executive Producers employ a strategy similar to J.K Rowling (1)
• Member believes that songs are fitting for show (Also, Song is appropriate for character) (2)
- Member believes that video is fitting for couple (1)
- Member connecting seer to another character (1)
- Connection to other show (also, Reference to other TV show) (3)

Theme: Curiosity
- Character Related
  - Curiosity about character's actions (1)
  - Curiosity about Character's Reaction (1)
  - Curiosity about how character fits in to storyline (1)
- Show Related
  - Curiosity about OUAT special (1)
    - Asking how special relates to finale (1)
  - Curiosity about how story will end (1)
  - Curiosity about New Season (2)
  - Curiosity about Future Direction (1)
  - Curiosity regarding Different Plot Points (1)
  - Curious about series ending (1)
  - Wondering if storytelling trend will continue (1)
  - Wondering if story will continue in comic (1)