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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150525/Comm.v23.14>
ISSN 2415-0525 (Online)
Communitas 2018
23: 207-219

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PERCEPTION IS THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL: ONLINE FAN PERCEPTION OF ONCE UPON A TIME'S EVIL QUEEN

ABSTRACT

In the Brothers Grimm 1812 folklore version of the Snow White story, the Evil Queen is the main antagonist in the narrative. However, over time, as methods of storytelling have advanced, the Evil Queen has undergone numerous transformations in the manner in which she is portrayed and the medium through which her story is presented. Several scholars have undertaken the study of these changing narrative portrayals, from folklore to fairy tale, of which Zipes (1981; 2006) is arguably the most prominent. This article investigates how the Evil Queen's character evolution and transformation has altered fan perception. Jenkins' theory of participatory culture serves as the theoretical basis for this analysis. Several online sources, including the Once Upon A Time Fan Blog, and the Spoiler TV Plus page on spoilertv.com, have been selected for analysis, as these provide a satisfactory sample of fans' perception across a varied spectrum of opinion. At the hand of six themes ranging from "dislike" to "acceptance", the article argues that the developing discourse and narrative of the character as depicted in the Once upon a time television series (2011) played a role in the evolution of fans' perception of the character of the Evil Queen.

Keywords: online fan perception; folklore; fairy tales; participatory culture; popular media; media texts; discourse; narrative; online communication

INTRODUCTION

Whether they are known as oral tradition, stories, folklore or fairy tales, creations or narrative expressions of fictional and sometimes fantastical creatures and characters have formed a distinctive part of adolescent impression in certain areas of the world for centuries. In 1812, the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published a recorded folklore narrative of a young princess named Snow White and her evil stepmother, the queen. This folklore, presented by the Brothers Grimm, was first recorded in their collection of traditional German oral narratives *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which translates to *Children's and Household Tales* (Zipes 2014).

More than a century later, in 1937, The Walt Disney Company adapted the narrative to depict a variation of the Grimms' version and released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Cottrell *et al.* 1937). Through the decades that followed this depiction, the character of the Evil Queen has been portrayed and presented in a plethora of narrative structures and through many different media. It may be argued that fairy tales in the modern context evoke images of damsels in distress being rescued from an evil villain by a dashing prince. More often than not, the villain is reviled and disliked for evil deeds while the damsel and her prince, arguably, become the favoured characters. It may be further argued that throughout much of the history of fairy tale literature, the villain, specifically the Evil Queen, has been presented as a one-dimensional character without substance. Therefore, the audience lacks the capacity to identify with, and potentially understand, the character. Consequently, most fans' or viewers' perception of the villain is negative.

However, in 2011, the depiction of the Evil Queen was transformed with the premiere of the television series *Once upon a time* on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) network. Creators Adam Horowitz and Edwards Kitsis ushered in a new interpretation of fairy tale narratives, specifically with regard to the Evil Queen character.

It is through this specific depiction of the character that this article investigates the ways in which fans perceive this character in this setting and whether the subjective fan/viewer opinion and perception of the character has been altered in an online setting. Ultimately, the intention is to investigate whether the subjective fan opinion and perception of the Evil Queen character has been altered in an online setting.

DEFINITION OF FANDOM

In order to investigate the changing perception of the character it is important to understand the phenomenon of fandom. In the 1992 publication *The adoring audience, fan culture and popular media*, a fan is defined as "the most visible and identifiable of audiences" and that "only a fan can appreciate the depth of feeling, the gratifications, the importance for coping with everyday life that fandom represents" (Lewis 1992). Jenson (1992) defines fans as those that "display interest, affection and attachment, especially for figures in, or aspects of, their chosen field". Despite the fact that this definition of a fan was contributed in 1992, it arguably remains an acceptable definition in the 21st century. A decade later, Hills (2002) defined a fan as:

somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV programme, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on their object of fandom, and can quote their favoured lines or lyrics, chapter and verse. Fans are often highly articulate. Fans interpret media texts in a variety of interesting ways and perhaps unexpected ways. And fans participate in communal activities - they are not 'socially atomised' or isolated viewers/readers.

The communal activities that Hills refers to have, arguably, expanded since 2002, with the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Through these platforms, fans are now able to engage with each other in real time and readily share their opinions and/or perceptions of their chosen object with like-minded online

users. In addition, fans/viewers identify and attach themselves to specific fandoms by creating or adopting the fandom names. In the case of *Once upon a time*, fans/viewers of this fandom are identified as “Oncers” while fans of the Evil Queen are more specifically known as “Evil Regals”. It may be argued that social media platforms have given rise to, or expanded, what Jenkins *et al.* (2016) define as participatory culture:

A participatory culture is one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other – one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices.

Entry to online participatory culture-based communities is generally without barriers and often encourages participation and expression online. In addition, observation of online communities and comment threads further shows that these communities, set around social media platforms, often transcend racial, age and geographical boundaries. Jenkins *et al.* (2016) hold that “the persistence of interactions, the spreadability of media, and the searchability of content – makes it easier to see participatory culture”.

INTRODUCTION OF THE EVIL QUEEN

In 1812 the Brothers Grimm presented the Evil Queen character in the story titled *Little Snow White*. However, Ness (2015) suggests that while the Grimms popularised the Snow White story for English audiences, the original tale was already well-known in some European countries. Ness (2015) further asserts that the Brothers Grimm’s recording of Snow White’s story was based loosely on an interpretation told in Germany and Italy. She states that “[i]n some retellings [...] Snow White is the youngest of three sisters; in another version, the Mirror is a small magical dog. And in many versions, Snow White is aided not by dwarves, but by robbers” (*ibid.*).

Despite the fact that it is exceedingly difficult to prove the oral origins of fairy tales, scholars such as Zipes support the view that these stories were spread through oral means by maintaining that people began telling stories as soon as they developed the ability to speak (Zipes 2012). Nevertheless, it is the Brothers Grimm who are considered and recognised as the first popular folklore scribes. However, the Grimms did not simply record stories as they originally heard or read them; instead the brothers attempted to adapt the language and register of the stories to something that all members of society could understand and relate to, not just those with extensive vocabularies. It may be argued that “[t]he Grimms were among the first to try to set such stories down in their supposedly ‘pure’ form, given no false shine by literary varnish” (Mondschein 2011). The Grimms’ *Märchen*, or stories, quickly gained recognition after their publication in 1812. Several versions were released in English and were also presented in different forms. The Grimms’ stories were some of the first to be adapted for the screen. In 1899, a French version of *Cinderella* was filmed and in 1937 Walt Disney released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (*ibid.*).

While the Brothers Grimm popularised the Snow White narrative for English audiences, it was Disney who first adapted the narrative to film. Gomery and Pafort-Overduin

(2011) write that the feature-length film was the first to contain full animation and was made in Technicolor. However, despite this ground-breaking advancement in storytelling, some scholars are of the opinion that Disney's version of the Snow White story is a great disservice to the Grimms' version. In this "diluted" and "disneyfied" rendition of the story, the audience experiences the Snow White character as a delicate, brunette princess living in the woods where she converses with the animals of the forest (Cottrell *et al.* 1937). Stringham (2011) notes that Disney "did not present a faithful representation of the Grimms' tale. Rather he presented a story which he felt would be more successful as an animated movie [...] Disney's portrayal loses most of the key elements which make this such an enchanting story."

After the 1812 version, the Grimms made several adaptations to the *Snow White* story, which culminated in a final publication in 1857. Along with several other stories in their collection, the narrative of *Snow White* was never aimed at a younger audience. Tatar (1987) states that "[f]olklorists are quick to point out that fairy tales were never really meant for children's ears alone. [They were] originally told at fireside gatherings or in spinning circles by adults to adult audiences."

Tatar's statement is underlined by the violent discourse of the Brothers Grimm's 1812 story *Sneewittchen*, or *Snow White*, as it is known in English. The main antagonist in the story, the Queen, is unable to find peace once the mirror declares Snow White "a thousand times fairer" than her. Overcome by her need to be the fairest of all, she orders a huntsman to stab Snow White to death and to return with her liver and lungs as proof that she is dead. The huntsman does not kill Snow White and instead presents the Queen with the lungs and liver of a boar. The next part of Grimms' version is one that paints a vivid and macabre picture for the reader as the Queen proceeds to cook, salt, and eat what she believes to be Snow White's lungs and liver.

The main antagonist in the story is simply referred to as "the Queen", with no indication or direct phrasing of her as evil. Instead, in the initial part of the narrative, the Queen is referred to as "beautiful". As Snow White grows up and reaches the age of seven she surpasses the Queen's beauty and, at this point, the Queen is described as becoming envious and hateful of Snow White. In this version, there is no reference to the use of magic or magical objects. Magic is not mentioned when the Queen disguises herself to gain Snow White's trust later in the narrative, nor when the Queen makes a poisoned apple.

One of the most striking details of this story is that there are two instances that provide specific indications that the Queen is Snow White's biological mother. There is no mention of her mother dying after Snow White is born or of her father marrying someone else who would become Snow White's stepmother. It may thus be argued that the Queen, who becomes envious of her beauty and who tries to kill Snow White, is her biological mother. The second instance where the Queen is referred to as Snow White's mother is evident in the discourse towards the end of the narrative. As her wedding to the prince is planned, it is mentioned that Snow White's "godless mother" is also invited to the festivities. This is a clear reference to the Queen being Snow White's mother.

The Grimms' 1812 *Children's and household tales* was not the only publication released by the brothers during their lifetime. Zipes (2006) writes that between 1812 and 1857 the brothers published seven large editions, which contained 211 stories. It is the final edition, published in 1857, that is considered "the standard if not definitive edition" (Zipes 2014).

The 1857 version of *Little Snow White*, as translated by Margaret Hunt, has slight grammatical differences to the original. However, the central message of the narrative remains unchanged. It is in the second paragraph where the first major adaptation is noted:

The paragraph starts with the Queen giving birth to a daughter, who was as white as snow, and as red as blood, and her hair was as black as ebony; and she was therefore called Little Snow White. And when the child was born, the Queen died (Grimm & Grimm 1857).

The story continues to read that the King remarries in a year to a beautiful but proud woman who becomes Snow White's stepmother. In the original story, published in 1812, the Queen does not die and attempts to murder her daughter. Zipes (2014) notes that the Brothers Grimm likely made the alteration from mother to stepmother because they "held motherhood sacred". In an interview with *The Guardian*, Zipes surmises that the changes made by the Brothers Grimm were a result of "reflecting sociologically a condition that existed during their lifetime" (Flood 2014). Zipes (2014) further details that during the Brothers Grimm's lifetime, many women died as a result of childbirth and that it was not uncommon for the father to remarry a young woman who would be close in age to his oldest daughter.

In the original story the Brothers Grimm did not attach any negative element to the Queen's beauty. The reader is told that the Queen was the most beautiful woman in the land and that she was very proud of her beauty. Further, she owns a mirror, in front of which she stands in the mornings to confirm her great beauty. However, in the adapted version of the story, the Brothers Grimm provide some traits of the Queen that could be considered undesirable. She is described as "haughty" and that "she could not bear that anyone else should surpass her in beauty" which, it may be argued, made her superficial and conceited (Grimm & Grimm 1857). This could have served to form a specifically negative perception of the character.

After the Queen utters the famous line of "[m]irror, mirror, on the wall, who in this land is fairest of all?", she learns that Snow White is the fairest in all the land. In the later adaptation the Queen "turned yellow and green with envy [...] whenever she looked at Snow White, her heart heaved in her breast, she hated the girl so much" (Grimm & Grimm 1857). In the 1812 version of the narrative "she became pale with envy, and from that hour on, she hated Snow-White". What is intriguing to note is that the Queen's hatred of Snow White is instantaneously established in both narratives at the moment she learns that her beauty has been surpassed. However, in the later version of the narrative, as illustrated in the quote above, the Queen's hatred primarily comes to the fore, at least physically, only when she looks at Snow White. This is in contrast to a more pervasive hatred in the earlier version.

The Queen's order for the Huntsman to kill Snow White remains unchanged, but in the later adaptation of the narrative she requests the girl's heart as a token (Grimm & Grimm 1857) instead of her lungs and liver as proof that he had killed her. In this section of the discourse, the Queen is also referred to as wicked, which suggests a darker aspect to her personality than mere jealousy.

In both versions, the Huntsman allows Snow White to escape before felling a boar that crosses his path. In the 1812 version he returns with the lungs and liver of the boar, which the Queen cooks, salts and eats, believing them to be the lungs and liver of her daughter, Snow White. However, in the final 1857 publication of the story, the Huntsman cuts out the heart of a young boar and presents it to the Queen as belonging to Snow White. In this version, the cook prepares the heart with salt before the Queen eats it (Grimm & Grimm 1857).

These specific adaptations may appear to be minor differences and they do not necessarily have an impact on the overall narrative. However, the image created and the perception in the reader's mind is altered. The picture that the Brothers Grimm paint in the 1857 version (of the Queen eating Snow White's heart) remains a gruesome one, but it is less grisly than the image of a gleefully victorious Queen standing over a boiling pot of lungs and liver, to which she adds a dash of salt to improve the flavour of her meal; of what she believes to be her daughter's internal organs.

In both versions, the Queen learns that the Huntsman has deceived her when the mirror informs her that Snow White is the still fairest and therefore still alive. Similarly, in both the 1812 and 1857 versions, the Queen disguises herself as an old peddler and travels to where Snow White is living with the seven dwarfs. She attempts to sell her a lace bodice and convinces Snow White to let her lace up the bodice. The Queen tightens it to the point where Snow White loses her breath and falls down as if she were dead (Grimm & Grimm 1857).

This is the Queen's second attempt at ending Snow White's life, but the first time that she takes matters into her own hands. Again, the Queen believes she has been successful and returns to the mirror with the expectation that it will declare her as the fairest of all but she is told that Snow White is alive and well. At this point, the Queen experiences the sensation of fear: "When she heard that, all her blood rushed to her heart with fear" (Grimm & Grimm 1857). It may be argued that the fact that the Queen experiences fear suggests that she is experiencing some doubt as to whether she will be able to defeat Snow White. Although slight, it allows for the first glimpse into the Queen's psyche, in that it shows the reader a different side to a character that, up until this point, has been portrayed as categorically resolute in reaching her goal.

DISNEY'S EVIL QUEEN

In 1937 Disney released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Cottrell *et al.* 1937). Although the Brothers Grimm made several adaptations to the story throughout their various publications, as evidenced above, by the time Disney released its 1937 version of the Snow White narrative, it had undergone additional changes, some of which were more fundamental than others.

Before the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) Disney had already established itself with a specific tradition of the type of entertainment it produced. Inge (2004) maintains that the *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* film needed to adhere to “Disney Studio’s tradition for safe, family entertainment that amused and edified and that demonstrated the creative knack for being at the forefront of new techniques and challenges in film animation”.

One of the biggest changes Disney made to the Brothers Grimm version is evident before the story begins. After the credits, the opening scene of the film reveals a book that encompasses the narrative of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The story starts by providing the context of the relationship between Snow White and the Queen. It reads: “Once upon a time there lived a lovely little Princess named Snow White. Her vain and wicked Stepmother the Queen feared that someday Snow White’s beauty would surpass her own. So she dressed the little Princess in rags and forced her to work as a Scullery Maid” (Cottrell *et al.* 1937).

By starting his adaptation of the story with the relationship between the Queen and Snow White, Disney omitted the story of Snow White’s biological mother, her birth, the King and his re-marriage to her stepmother. In doing so, Disney’s film version of Snow White lacks a proper start to the narrative, as it does not provide a contextual basis for Snow White’s life, nor for how the Queen came to be her stepmother.

The book in the opening scene of the film turns to a second page, which directly introduces the element of magic into the story: “Each day the vain Queen consulted her Magic Mirror” (Cottrell *et al.* 1937). This is a development of the Brothers Grimm 1857 version that introduced the element of witchcraft. As the film progresses to its first actual scene, the Queen is shown addressing the magic mirror. The first line she says is, “slave in the magic mirror” (*ibid.*), which further establishes the notion that all are subservient to her; thereby informing the potential for a negative perception of the character.

CHANGE IN PERCEPTION OF THE EVIL QUEEN

In contemporary storytelling, Disney’s main motivation for invoking changes remains relevant, as target audiences are an important part of television and film today. With specific reference to television, Bryant and Oliver (2009) write that “[e]ven with the expansion of cable and satellite channels serving ever narrower *niche* audiences, most television programs are by commercial necessity designed to be watched by large and heterogeneous audiences”.

In Disney’s version of Snow White, the Evil Queen is the main antagonist in the film. Despite the integral role that the character plays in the story, she may be seen as a fairly one-dimensional villain due to her lack of a backstory. It may be argued that Disney’s depiction of the Evil Queen received very little development, especially pertaining to her motivations; hence, she may be considered a character that is superficial and lacking depth. Propp’s (1928, in *The Narratologist* 2014) character theory suggests that a narrative is composed of a specific structure in which types of characters are developed throughout the narrative. The Evil Queen would be characterised, according

to Propp's theory, only as the villain, and therefore perceived only as evil. On the other hand, the adaptation of the character in the *Once upon a time* (2011) narrative offers further treatment of the character, and this is portrayed and presented in such a manner that more than one of Propp's seven characters can be identified in her.

The manner in which the narratives of contemporary television series and films are developed for contemporary audiences could be seen as further motivation for the adaptation and transformation of the character. Mittel (2006) argues that "a new form of entertainment television has emerged over the past two decades [...T]his model of television storytelling is distinct for its use of narrative complexity as an alternative to the conventional episodic and serial forms." The use of narrative complexity is not confined to contemporary media and its audience, but has been a hallmark of fairy tales for some time. In direct reference to fairy tales, Zipes (2006) explains that "with each retelling the tale touches on basic instincts and moral codes and also adapts itself to the environment in which it is produced". As result of the more complex style of television storytelling, the character of the Evil Queen has been transformed to fit with the "new form of entertainment" (Mittel 2006).

In the 2011 series *Once upon a time*'s version of the Evil Queen has lent itself to a change of insight that can be seen in fan perceptions of the character. Throughout its time on air, *Once upon a time* (2011) has garnered a considerable following and fan base, which has prompted the creation of several online fora and forum threads dedicated to the series and all topics related to it. While the popularity of online fora is not a new phenomenon in the 21st century, it provides insight into the fan/viewers' perception, and the change of this perception, of the character of the Evil Queen.

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

In order to obtain as clear an understanding as possible about the above-mentioned change of perception, several online sources have been selected for analysis. Specifically, the *Once Upon A Time Fan Blog*, the *Once Upon A Time* comments thread on the *Fan Forum* website, as well as comments from the *Spoiler TV Plus* page on *spoilertv.com* have been selected for analysis. The motivation for the selection of these specific sources stemmed from the fact that they may be said to adequately represent the fans/viewers' perception across a varied spectrum, ranging from dislike, to neutrality, to acceptance of the character, and in so doing present the change in perception.

For the purpose of identifying specific themes in the discourse and narrative of the character, as depicted in *Once upon a time*, six key descriptive themes have been formulated. The first theme identified and utilised as a means of establishing the fans/viewers' perception is "dislike". By identifying the theme of "dislike" the negative perception towards the character's actions and behaviour may be established. The second theme is that of "sympathy" as it pertains to the potential expression of compassion towards the character. The third theme is "understanding". In this instance the theme of "understanding" refers to an expression of willingness to tolerate as well as justify the character's behaviour

and actions. The fourth formulated theme of “advocacy” endeavours to identify instances in the fans/viewers’ comments that specifically demonstrate support for the character. The fifth theme of “taking sides” is defined as the deliberate selection of siding with the character in opposition to the other characters. The sixth and final theme of “acceptance” pertains to acquiescence to the character, the character’s traits, and the character’s background.

In order to successfully analyse the potential shift of the fans/viewer’s perception of the Evil Queen character (named Regina in the *Once upon a time* series), these six themes were highlighted and identified in the comments written by the fans/viewers on the *Once Upon A Time Fan Blog*, the *Once Upon A Time* thread on the *Fan Forum* website, and the comments section of *SpoilerTV Plus* from *spoilertv.com*.

In conjunction with the introduction of the Evil Queen in season one of the series, the perception expressed by several fans included a dislike of the character. With specific reference to the second episode of season one it may be argued that the users’ comments on the *Fan Forum* website denoted a distinctly negative perception of the character, which included the element of dislike.

“They are trying to get sympathy for regina .. not having any of it. she does not love henry. i am curious to find out how she came about to adopt henry.. did she she wake up and decided I want a baby.. i think that was the ‘magic’ in the town egging her to do it [sic]” (Renka21 2011).

It may be argued that the theme of dislike is identifiable in this comment as the user clearly states an objection to sympathising with the character. Further, another user clearly voices their dislike for the character by writing, “Team Anyone-But-Regina! [sic]” (Obthatvariable 2011).

Several other fans/viewers noted their dislike of the character by deeming her selfish and villainous:

“Both women were adviced [sic] by their parents to do the right thing but only Emma did it while the Evil Queen let her selfishness get the best of her. That’s why one is our hero and the other is our villain” (Vega 2011).

“Not a huge Fan of Regina/Evil Queen” (SaraSideStokes 2011)

“At this point I don’t feel sorry for her and to be honest I don’t really want too [sic]” (OldHollywoodStarlet 2011)

As the narrative and discourse of the character began to develop and unfold throughout the first season, the fans/viewers were provided with more insight that led to a change in perception. In episode eighteen of the first season, titled *The stable boy*, a part of the Evil Queen’s backstory is revealed, which started the perceptual transformation of the character in the mind of the fan/viewer.

In the comments thread for this episode, fans/viewers began to express sympathy for the character.

“But we’re talking about a young woman who grew up being a victim of physical and emotional abuse and who had to watch her own mother kill her true love right in front of her, reminding Regina of her power and the hopelessness of her situation in the most painful way. The very same mother who then also made it very clear that she was going to stop at nothing to make sure Regina married a man who could easily be her father and whom she’d met all but once. That’s trauma on multiple levels and I don’t blame Regina for reacting emotionally instead of rationally to what had happened to her at this point” (Koda 2012)

This comment illustrates the change in perception from dislike to a feeling of compassion and sympathy. Several other fans/viewers echoed the theme of sympathy towards the character in their comments. On the *Once Upon A Time Fan Blog* a user wrote:

“When Regina kept kissing him several times to see if ‘true love’s’ kiss would work to bring him back and it obviously didn’t work, broke my heart (although this particular scene could have been so much more). No matter who she blames, could you imagine knowing that your true love is gone forever and there is nothing you could do, while everyone around you has there [sic] true love and happy endings. It’s beyond depressing. It makes me love her character even more” (Chase 2012)

In reference to the *Stable Boy* episode, one fan/viewer comment exhibited both the themes of sympathy and “taking sides” against other characters in the narrative:

“This episode clears everything up! It makes me want to actually be sympathetic towards Regina and hate Snow for being such a naive girl” (Sho 2012).

Another user directly attributed the theme of sympathy towards the character in reference to the revelation of how the feud between *Once Upon A Time’s* Snow White and the Evil Queen began:

“We understand Regina now and can feel for her” (October 2012)

On the *Spoiler TV* comment thread, which polled the fans/viewers’ response to the *Stable Boy* episode, the theme of sympathy towards the character extends further. One fan/viewer made a case in defence of the character by placing the blame for the character’s behaviour on her mother and not the character herself:

“Great episode. Poor Regina. Her mother basically manipulated her into everything. Fairytale world continues to be a really creepy place. How many women are being forced to marry people they don’t want to?” (Sara 2012)

As soon as Regina’s mother is revealed as an integral part of her life, the perception and theme began to change from sympathy to acceptance in some fans/viewers’ comments:

“Dayum .. well I guess we know where Regina learned how to be a cold- hearted witch. There are some serious issues in that family, and they all go by the name of ‘Cora’. I liked seeing a softer side of Regina, though. It still doesn’t make me feel for her, but I understand how everything molded her into who she is now [sic]” (Lissie_Bee 2012)

This comment illustrates a gradual change in perception as the user still has some reservations about the character; however, there is a willingness to understand and accept the behaviour of the character. This may be attributable to the revelation of the character’s background.

The theme of advocacy is identifiable in a fan/viewer's comment that defends the character's actions and justifies her behaviour:

"REGINA, YOU POOR AWESOME YOU... :[I guess that explains why you hate everyone's happy endings. You did not really get your own...- I do not blame Regina fro holding that grudge. Its not about logic or reason. In Regina's eyes Snow White was the catalyst of the end of her love. And she technically was. For Regina, those reasons WHY do not matter. Its the result that is there and she has lost what she loved the most [sic]" (Borednow 2012).

From these selected comments, a change of fan/viewers' perception can be identified. Further, the fans' comments tending towards the same change in perception, from dislike of the character towards one of understanding and sympathy, enforces Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, which "requires us to move beyond a focus on individualized personal expression; it is about an ethos of 'doing it together' in addition to 'doing it yourself'" (Jenkins *et al.* 2016).

CONCLUSION

Given the analysis above, one could argue that the developing discourse and narrative of the character as depicted in *Once upon a time* played a role in the evolution of fans' perception of the character of the Evil Queen and that the motivation for the change in perception stems from the portrayal and presentation of the character in the narrative structure in *Once upon a time* (2011). The most important element that aids the perceptual change towards the character is the ability of the television viewers and fans to relate to the character on a personal level.

Ultimately, if the fairy tale element, the magic, the costumes and the computer generated graphics were to be removed from the narrative of this series, what would remain is a character who has made significant mistakes in her life, but who shows that it is never too late to change by choosing to do what it is right. At its core, the principal theme of the character represents the possibility of hope, regardless of how dire the situation may appear. The creators of this television narrative, Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis, have echoed this exact sentiment by confirming that "at the end of the day, our show at its core is about hope" (Abrams 2014).

In the 1937 film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Disney created an unrealistic and one-dimensional Evil Queen character who is not relatable to fans. The writers and creators of *Once upon a time* (2011) have transformed the character through its complexity into one that is relatable and have thus provided for a change in perception of the character.

Jenkins *et al.* (2016) argue that "participatory culture is by its very nature a work in progress, as are our ongoing agendas for research and social change". A change in perception towards this character could be identified through fan studies, and with the application of participatory culture the study of fans' online perceptions remains a developing and constantly evolutionary field of study.

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