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Becoming a Wizard: The Harry Potter Fandom

The Harry Potter fandom is a large community with members located all over the globe who come together both online and face to face to celebrate JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* book series and the film adaptations. This is an example of a discourse community. A good example of how this fandom operates as a discourse community is the online fanfiction archive HarryPotterFanfiction.com. It is the longest running unofficial Harry Potter fanfiction archive online today and meets all of John Swales six criteria of a discourse community.

Swales first criteria is that a discourse community “has a broadly set of common public goals” (n.p.). The wide public goal of *Harry Potter* fandom is to celebrate the world of the *Harry Potter* books. HarryPotterFanfiction.com helps fans do this by giving them a place where they can read and share fanfiction based on *Harry Potter*. The second criteria is “has mechanisms of intercommunication among its members” (Swales n.p.). While in general *Harry Potter* fans communicate online via forums and various online communities, HarryPotterFanfiction.com specifically has a forum that members use to communicate with one another in addition to comment section on stories, and a way for members to email each other.

Swales third criteria for a discourse community is that it “uses its participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback” (n.p.). On HarryPotterFanfiction.com members don't just read and share fanfiction, they also use the

comment section “to provide information and feedback” (Swales n.p.) to authors about what they liked or didn’t like in the story. This allows authors to improve their writing and try to adjust the story to meet reader demands in order to keep or grow their readership. This is similar on other online communities like YouTube where people use the comment section to interact with each other and the author to discuss the work posted and how it was received or could be improved.

Swales fourth criteria for a discourse community is that it “utilizes and hence possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims” (n.p.).

HarryPotterfanfiction.com has several genres of communication that further their goal of sharing Harry Potter fanfiction: they have a forum for its members in addition to various podcasts of stories being read or discussed, and a review section on stories where readers and authors can discuss the stories. This is all in addition to the primary genre of writing on the website: the fanfiction itself which is written in many genres (romance, horror, etc.). This connects with Swales fifth criteria: “in addition to owning genres, it has acquired some specific lexis” (n.p.). HarryPotterFanfiction.com makes use of the basic fanfiction lexicon that you see in many fandom communities: slash, shipping, novella, one-shot, drabble, alternate reality, cross over, et cetera. Words specific to this site are The Dobby’s-an award given to fanfiction stories in the archive.

Swales final criteria is that a discourse community “has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and discursal expertise” (n.p.). This can be illustrated by the HarryPotterFanfiction.com’s homepage which states “Welcome to harrypotterfanfiction.com, the oldest, (and best) unofficial dedicated Harry Potter Fanfiction site on the net. Founded in February 2001, we currently hold over 80,000 stories and receive, on

average, over 30 million hits per month” (HarryPotterFiction.com). These facts illustrate the amount of “relevant content” that the archive has. The archive has statistics listed on the right side of their homepage which states that there are 37,470 authors, 95,720 members, and 2,126,800 reviews for their 81,653 stories. Their members include people who have been fans since the site’s debut in 2001 as well as new members. Some members have read the books and seen the films, while other fans are only familiar with one or the other.

While these elements are common to the *Harry Potter* fandom throughout the world, HarryPotterFiction.net itself illustrates well how this fandom operates as a discourse community. HarryPotterfanfiction.net and other *Harry Potter* websites act as discourse communities within the larger fandom where fans can meet others who share their interest and goals.

Works Cited

HarryPotterFanfiction.net. Fanfictionworld.net, 2001. Web. 25 February 2014.

Swales, John. *Genre Analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Web. 30 January 2014.