FUNNY LITTLE WITCHES AND VENERABLE-LOOKING WIZARDS: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST STUDY OF THE PORTRAYAL OF GENDER IN THE *HARRY POTTER* SERIES

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I declare that FUNNY LITTLE WITCHES AND VENERABLE-LOOKING WIZARDS: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST STUDY OF THE PORTRAYAL OF GENDER IN THE *HARRY POTTER* SERIES is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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D. J. Rodrigues Date

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ABSTRACT

In this study I apply social constructionism as propounded by Vivian Burr (1998) to show that although J. K. Rowling uses stereotypes in the *Harry Potter* series as a reflection of how gender is constructed across a wide range of societal institutions in contemporary Britain, she created complex characters who on an individual level subvert social constructs and thereby offers her readers alternatives to culturally defined concepts of gender. I explore the all-pervasive social phenomenon of gender and examine how it is constructed in present-day Britain and reflected in the series (bearing in mind that the first book was published in 1997 and the last one in 2007). My analysis of female and male characters in the books, and their interpersonal relationships, shows that Rowling's often tricky portrayal of femininities and masculinities gives us an honest view of teenagers' lives and contemporary gender relations in an ever-changing, complex world.

Key words: Harry Potter, J. K. Rowling, contemporary Britain, social construction, postmodernism, gendering, femininities, masculinities, diversity, change

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INTRODUCTION

J. K. Rowling has not only smashed records and made an indelible imprint on the literary world[1] with her phenomenal success with the *Harry Potter* books, but the series has also become a centre of controversy in cultural battles that range from religious disputes to how the books influence the next generation's views on social issues such as racism and sexism. Following Cardinal Ratzinger's (who later became current Pope Benedict XVI) denunciation of the books as "subtle seductions" with the potential to corrupt young Christians[2] and the Vatican's chief exorcist comparing Harry Potter with the devil in an interview with Vatican Radio in 2003,[3] the official Vatican newspaper carried a rave review of the movie *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* in 2009, saying that it distinguishes between good and evil and "makes clear that doing good is right".[4] Amidst claims that the books encourage occult practices, witchcraft and rebelliousness in children, an "enlightened" postmodern world was shocked when overzealous Christians burned books together with Ouija boards and other occult paraphernalia in American cities;[5] an editorial in *Christianity Today* (an online magazine for evangelical Christians), however, described the series as "a 'Book of Virtues' with a preadolescent funny bone".[6] While some parents and teachers insisted that *Harry Potter* be banned from libraries and schools[7] and the books topped the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom's list of most challenged books of 2000,[8] librarians lauded them for renewing public interest in reading[9] and other educators (including Gina Burkart, who is a parent and an educator) showed how children can learn valuable lessons about fear, bullying, diversity and so on from the books.[10] The conflicting ways in which the books were received spread its tentacles to the famous author's life. In an interview Rowling, who is adored by millions of fans worldwide, recounted the following scary incident with a man in New York while she was shopping for toys:

[1]For example: In 2000 the *New York Times* had to create a separate bestseller list for children's literature after publishers complained of the number of times *Harry Potter* and other children's books appeared on their Best Seller list (CNN, 21 July 2000). When *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* went on sale in July 2007, 15 million copies of the book were sold worldwide within 24 hours, breaking the record that was set by each of Rowling's previous three books (Gibbs 2007:sp).
[2] Blakely 2005:sp.
[3] CBC News, 3 September 2006.
[4] Chance 2009:sp.
[5] BBC News Online, 31 December 2001; Serchuk 2006:sp.
[6] *Christianity Today*, 10 January 2000.
[7] BBC News Online, 29 March 2000.
[8] Maughan 2001:sp.
[9] Conkey 2007:sp.
[10] Burkart 2005:sp.

"Her voice gets hard as she recalls how he brought his face very close to hers. 'He says, 'I'm praying for you,' in tones that were more appropriate to saying, 'Burn in hell,' she says, 'and I didn't like that 'cause I was with my kids. It was unnerving. If ever I expected to come face to face with an angry Christian fundamentalist, it wasn't in FAO Schwarz.'"[11] On top of this, Rowling and her publishers became embroiled in legal disputes over copyright issues,[12] libel[13] and claims of plagiarism against the author.[14]

Literary criticism of *Harry Potter* has been equally enigmatic: In 2003 Harold Bloom wrote in a book review that "Rowling's mind is so governed by clichés and dead metaphors that she has no other style of writing";[15] other book reviewers compared her work to that of Roald Dahl[16] and Charles Dickens.[17] James Thomas, Professor of English at Pepperdine University, describes the books as follows: "They're easy to underestimate because of what I call the three Deathly Hallows for academics. They couldn't possibly be good because they're too recent, they're too popular, and they're too juvenile."[18]

Although the *Harry Potter* novels have become a literary phenomenon that has been openly revered (for example by Stephen King in 2003)[19] and reviled (for example by Bloom in 2003) in the mass media since the first book was published in 1997, surprisingly little scholarly work has been done on the series and even less on Rowling's depiction of gender in the novels. The global hysteria that has been dubbed "Pottermania" and the hype that followed the book releases of the fantastical life of "the boy who lived" seem to have had a detrimental effect on the literariness of the novels.[20] Lana Whited argues that "the serious discussion we ought to be having about the literary merits of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels is threatened by the cloud of commercialism encircling the books".[21] Even more surprising is that the public's (particularly parents') reaction to allegations that the books paint a bleak

[11] Gibbs 2007:sp.
[12] BBC News Online, 13 October 2003.
[13] Reynolds 2007:sp.
[14] CNN, 19 September 2002; BBC News Online, 18 February 2010.
[15] Bloom 2003:sp. Colin Duriez concludes that Bloom's claim that the books are cliché-ridden "does not reflect the usual care behind his great scholarship" (2007:253). Duriez counted the times one of the alleged clichés occurs in the first three books and found Bloom exaggerated and had not read the books carefully and attentively enough "perhaps because he took a dislike to it from the outset" (2007:255).
[16] Winerip 1999:sp.
[17] McGrath 2006:sp.
[18] Gibbs 2007:sp.
[19] King 2003:sp.
[20] Fenske 2008:1 & 2, 9.
[21] Whited 2002:12.

picture of females and reinforce gender stereotypes was a trickle compared to the deafening religious and parental outcry that Rowling was craftily luring children into witchcraft. It seems that it is more acceptable to society that children are taught to be submissive conformists where gender is concerned than it is to turn them into sorcerers and occultists. Or is it that they simply view the whole feminist debate around Rowling's portrayal of gender as a storm in a teacup?

As these many controversial issues surrounding the *Harry Potter* books have proven, few aspects of J. K. Rowling's fantasy world are as straightforward as they seem. Reading through many of the articles and books on Rowling's portrayal of gender can be as tricky as the 142 staircases at Hogwarts[22] if one is inveigled into simply accepting what appears to be a simplistic debate which sees her either as an enforcer of patriarchal values who mimics gender inequalities that exist in the real world or as a hero of feminist writing who empowers her female characters. This is because feminist literary theory and criticism have evolved into a multiplicity of perspectives and approaches that reflect the complexity of gender in an intricate world where every woman's experience is unique – and masculinity studies have added depth to the study of gender by exploring the ways in which men's identities are multifaceted and also affected by gendering.

Máirtín Mac an Ghaill and Chris Haywood[23] point out that even though Michael Kimmel[24] reminds us that historically we have been looking at men's lives all along, the general tendency in gender studies has been to locate men outside wider gender relations and focus on women because mainstream politics (government, economic management and institutional regulation) is still a predominantly male public space. However, there is increasingly an understanding in gender studies that men are also bounded by specific masculine cultural forms. Gender studies have moved beyond the empowerment of women into sophisticated debates about the discursive and psychodynamic fashioning of gender identity for both males and females. In order to form an opinion on how Rowling portrays gender in the *Harry Potter* series, one therefore cannot merely look at the ratio of men to women in the books, nor make sweeping statements about stereotypes on the basis of how a character is portrayed in one

[22] Rowling 1997:98.
[23] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:29.
[24] Kimmel & Messner 1995.

scene without taking into account the character's development in the entire series in terms of the broader social and cultural structures in which Rowling has situated her novels.

Apart from defending her feminist conscience by saying that Hermione is "the brightest character" in the books and a "very strong female character",[25] Rowling (whom reporter Jeffrey Weiss dubbed "the author who wouldn't shut up"[26] because of her tendency to give fans extratextual information about the novels) has remained stoically silent on the question of her feminist allegiances or otherwise. Annette Wannamaker is one of the few critics who display an awareness of the complexity and fluidity of contemporary gendering. She not only accepts that in terms of feminist and poststructural theory, a text can be read in different and often contradictory ways, but also moves beyond the platitudes of pro-feminist and anti-feminist interpretations of the books. In her article "Men in Cloaks and High-heeled Boots, Men Wielding Pink Umbrellas: Witchy Masculinities in the *Harry Potter* Novels" (2006), she offers an interesting alternative to the prevailing debate. After rightly affirming that both sets of critiques are valid, she claims that instead of giving us a feminist utopia, Rowling gives us the world as we know it and offers children and adolescents role models who cope extremely well in a world where they have less agency and power than the adults around them:

> Ultimately, these books are popular with so many child and adult readers, not because they didactically advocate *either* feminist or patriarchal ideals, but because, through their complex portrayals of characters, gender, and relationships, they depict the anxieties, tensions, and uncertainties about contemporary gender roles that readers of all ages are continuously working to define and to negotiate.[27]

Wannamaker looks at Rowling's portrayal of gender by concentrating on the male characters in the novels and how they perform a variety of male identities. She significantly warns against labelling unconventional forms of masculinity as "feminine" or "feminised" when they are actually masculine characteristics, although they do not conform to hegemonic masculinity. She defends her decision to step away from the existing debate by pointing out that many of the existing scholarly works on the topic focus on stereotypes and she argues that "identifying and listing stereotypes does not take into consideration the multi-faceted and interactive relationship readers have with a text within a culture, and the complexities

[25] *O, The Oprah Magazine*, January 2001.
[26] Weiss 2007:sp.
[27] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

of shifting, layered gendered identities that exist within, on the margins of, or in opposition to cultural forms".[28] She gives an overview of critical studies of gender in the novels and includes fan web discussions, saying:

> The fans of these books are not oblivious to the sexism in them, but they also see gender in the novels in more nuanced, less dichotomous ways that show that many fans are able to think critically about what they read. For example, in a lengthy discussion about gender issues in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, fans posting on the internet said things like, "why should we expect a world more or less perfect than our own if the Wizarding world is supposed to exist next to our own?", "if the characters, both female and male, behaved in such a way as to create [a 'feminist haven'], the books would be very dull indeed" and "I think most readers of all ages would rather engage with the complexities of flawed but real characters rather than [a vision] of a perfect feminist world."[29]

Rowling herself has said that she "wanted Harry to leave our world and find exactly the same problems in the wizarding world".[30] Harry's world, with its animated photographs, magical creatures and hidden doorways, is separate from and yet intertwined with our own.

Wannamaker's conclusion regarding the existing criticism about gender in the novels is that Rowling has succeeded in tapping into some of the contemporary anxieties about gender and that she portrays teenagers' and adults' anxieties in sympathetic and complicated ways: "In other words, critics have reached very different conclusions about gender in these books because the portrayal of gender in the *Harry Potter* series is often ambivalent, and mirrors less an ideal feminist or patriarchal vision of what boys and girls ought to be and more the messy, contradictory reality of what they are".[31] She then gives an analysis of some of the male characters in the books, showing that they often do not conform to the dominant version of masculinity that is favoured in Western culture.

Wannamaker's approach is especially valuable in that she shows that the world of the *Harry Potter* novels reflects our contemporary world in which the dominant gender ideology is reinforced, challenged and contested. Her study is, however, restricted because it focuses on the male characters and examines only six of the seven books in the series. To date, there appears to be no comprehensive study on how Rowling – who critiques important

[28] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[29] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[30] Rowling 2007b.
[31] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

social issues such as bigotry and disempowerment in her portrayal of the cruel enslavement of the house-elves and the dispossession of the centaurs whose territory is being encroached upon – portrays gender in her complex world.

My study is in harmony with Wannamaker's interpretation since contemporary gendering has evolved from dichotomous (man versus woman) readings into more holistic and androgynous interpretations of personhood. As Patricia Rich[32] explains, because of the Western world's deterministic and binary understanding of gender (sex informs gender), what is male has traditionally been viewed as excluding and standing in opposition to what is female (the more "masculine" one is, the less "feminine" one is) and vice versa. Thus the Western world has traditionally viewed women and men in terms of what they are not, rather than according to the "masculine" and "feminine" traits that are inherent in both sexes.[33] Today young women and men appear to be in crisis[34] because they are bombarded by contradictory images (in the media, in school, in their homes and on the streets – in fact, in all spheres of life) of what men and women should be. Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonick and Anita Harris[35] show that in an increasingly globalised world rapid changes compel people continually to self-invent and transform themselves in order to survive in new social, economic and political contexts; girls and women experience these changes in particularly gendered ways: "The neo-liberal incitement of individualism, rational choice and self-realization bumps up against discourses of femininity creating contradictory and complex positions for girls." Rich[36] points out:

> ... present day associations with gender are reaching a crisis point. Our relationship with our biology is taken for granted, and through our daily reality, we reinforce this fatalistic and deterministic account of the self. However, crisis doesn't have to be a bad thing ... rather than rejecting and sending to damnation our contemporary interpretation, if we seek to understand the presenting situation as an opportunity for investigation, learning and creativity, we will be able to engage in processes of peace. By deconstructing the deterministic approach to gender, we will be able to transform and to "act" our gendered identities in a multiplicity of ways.

[32] Rich 2010:sp.
[33] Rich 2010:sp.
[34] Salisbury and Jackson (1996) talk about a "crisis in masculinity" among young men; Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) say that young women are seen either as being empowered ("girl power") or in crisis ("Ophelia"). I explore this further in the other chapters of this dissertation.
[35] Aapola *et al* 2005:7.
[36] Rich 2010:sp.

This view is upheld by contemporary gender theorists such as Judith Butler (1990), Donna Haraway (1991), and Jeff Hearn and Michael Kimmel (2006) who maintain that femininities and masculinities are not merely innate, given or determined by the body but are social constructs; gender difference is manifested differently by individuals and in different societies at different times of human history.

In this study I draw on the insights of social constructionism – as propounded by Vivian Burr (1998) and expounded in terms of gender construction in the work of gender and cultural theorists such as Harriet Bradley (2007a) and Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2007) – to show that although Rowling uses stereotypes in the *Harry Potter* series as a reflection of how gender is constructed, maintained and reinforced in contemporary British culture, she uses literary devices such as caricature and parody to highlight the absurdity and constricting influence of social constructs and offers her readers alternatives to culturally defined concepts of gender through her intricate construction of individual characters. This is in line with contemporary gender theorists such as Butler and Kimmel, who acknowledge the complexity and fluidity of gender in an ever-changing world that is characterised by rapid cultural and social transformations.

It is obviously pertinent to begin my study of Rowling's portrayal of gender by reviewing existing critical work on gender in the *Harry Potter* series. After this, I examine some pertinent features of the construction of gender in the major institutions and other social constructs of present-day Britain and how these are reflected in the world of Harry Potter (bearing in mind that the publication of the series coincided with Tony Blair's reign as British Prime Minister from 1997 to 2007). Texts on cultural studies and contemporary gender issues in Britain, such as Paul Addison and Harriet Jones's *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939–2000* (2005) and Bradley's *Gender* (2007a), show that Britain is still very much a class-based country that basks in tradition and uses gendered social constructs and institutions to reinforce the patriarchal order. Although Elizabeth Heilman[37] concludes that "the *Harry Potter* books feature females in secondary positions of power and authority to replicate some of the most demeaning, yet familiar, cultural stereotypes for both males and females", one can counter her criticism by arguing that Rowling's books do not show

[37] Heilman 2003:222.

many women[38] in roles of authority because in the real world women are still restricted professionally by glass ceilings which rest on the assumption that men's social position and identity are shaped by their breadwinning role, while women's focus is more on family life.[39]

Personal relationships (such as friendship and romantic encounters) are an important site of gendering and identity development, and I explore this in chapter 3. In line with Wannamaker's approach, in chapters 4 and 5 I look at Rowling's often tricky portrayal of femininities and masculinities in complex female and male characters who test and contest gender norms in order to show that she has created a fictional world that gives an honest view of contemporary gender issues.

Contemporary gender identity is complex and since this is reflected in Rowling's work, one has to read beyond the surface simplicity of her fantasy tale for children/youth and not merely view her world in terms of stark dichotomies that form the basis of traditional Western thinking on gender. For example: Heilman[40] criticises Rowling for Hermione's physical transformation at the Yule Ball by saying that Hermione is "transformed to become physically acceptable" and that this sends a message to girls that they have to get a "makeover" because they are "not okay". Since many feminists have fought for the right of women to have control over their bodies, Hermione's decision to make herself more attractive can be regarded as an assertion of her femininity rather than a negation of it. Even if her transformation is intended to impress the "male gaze" or she wants to shock Ron into realising that she is in fact a girl, it is obvious that her wellbeing does not depend on the transformation. She already has a date for the ball in the form of a sports superstar (who is attracted to her because of her intelligence and the fact that she is different from the girls who follow him around in awe)[41] and she could have had her dentist father fix her teeth permanently if she regarded them as a vexing problem.[42] Furthermore, the corrective spell on her teeth is a consequence of an unfortunate accident which resulted in her front teeth

[38] There *are* women (such as Dolores Umbridge) who occupy important positions in the wizard world, even though they are few compared to the men in important positions.
[39] Crompton & Lyonette 2008:sp.
[40] Heilman 2003:228 & 229.
[41] Viktor makes no secret of the fact that he is taken with Hermione: he goes to the library every day to try and pluck up enough courage to talk to her (Rowling 2000:422), tells her that he "never felt this way about any other girl" (Rowling 2000:512) and confronts Harry as a possible rival to her affections (Rowling 2000:552 & 553).
[42] Hermione explains to Ron and Harry that she had wanted to have her teeth fixed for a long time, but her dentist parents insisted that she wear muggle braces instead of using magic (Rowling 2000:353).

extending beyond her chin and her using the situation to her advantage is therefore hardly an endorsement for using plastic surgery to enhance one's looks. Hermione dresses up for a special occasion and it is obvious that she plays and experiments with her image since her transformation is a once-off affair, which she discards the next day because it proves to be too troublesome. In a world where people are judged by their appearance and concerned activists[43] have raised alarm about an epidemic of eating disorders, Heilman should indeed be concerned about literature conveying negative messages about body image to adolescents. On her official website, Rowling herself has expressed concern about the culture of upholding emaciated girls as a norm for young women. She states:

> Maybe all this seems funny, or trivial, but it's really not. It's about what girls want to be, what they're told they should be, and how they feel about who they are. I've got two daughters who will have to make their way in this skinny-obsessed world, and it worries me, because I don't want them to be empty-headed, self-obsessed, emaciated clones; I'd rather they were independent, interesting, idealistic, kind, opinionated, original, funny – a thousand things, before "thin". And frankly, I'd rather they didn't give a gust of stinking Chihuahua flatulence whether the woman standing next to them has fleshier knees than they do. Let my girls be Hermiones, rather than Pansy Parkinsons. Let them never be Stupid Girls.[44]

Hermione is clearly a strong-minded individual who rejects social constructs, which imply that people are never good enough and should continually be at war with their bodies; she obviously has a healthy body image and self-esteem. Therefore, instead of Rowling encouraging female readers to become physically more acceptable by being transformed like Cinderella (as Heilman infers),[45] one can interpret this scene as Rowling parodying other teenage girls' superficiality and criticising both females' and males' obsession with physical beauty. This is also apparent in Rowling's depiction of the attractive but fraudulent Gilderoy Lockhart (over whom females swoon) and of the superlatively beautiful and mesmerising veela (over whom males swoon), whom she uses to show that external appearance is misleading: "… the veela lost control … Harry saw that they didn't look remotely beautiful now. On the contrary, their faces were elongated into sharp, cruel-beaked bird heads,

[43] Courtney Martin (2005:59) calls eating disorders the "famine mystique" of today's generation and argues that instead of women giving in to the housewife hype to make their lives as small and manageable as possible (as Betty Friedan illustrated 50 years ago), they have adopted a new method of shrinking their bodies "to make the grand potentiality of their lives as diminutive as possible".
[44] J. K. Rowling Official Site 2010.
[45] Heilman 2003:229.

and long, scaly wings were bursting from their shoulders …".[46] Another interpretation is that Rowling undermines the cultural expectation that an intelligent young woman should be ugly and nerdy, by showing that Hermione is both brainy and attractive. This is especially relevant since Hermione chooses to transform herself after realising that Ron has desexualised her.[47] In fact, increasingly more feminists have come to realise that women's experiences are as different as there are different types of women. Thus Lois Tyson[48] avers that "[c]ontrary to the opinions of many students new to the study of feminist literary criticism, many feminists, like men, think that women should be able to stay home and raise children if they want to do so, and wear bras". In Rowling's world women can therefore be equal to men without having to give up their femininity: Hermione the "mudblood" can determine her own freedom through personal strength and ingenuity; Molly Weasley can choose not to be an active member of the Order of the Phoenix but rather to continue as a doting mother; and Minerva McGonagall can be a noteworthy leader without having to step into Dumbledore's colourful and illustrious high-heeled boots.

Theorists on masculinities such as Raewyn/Robert Connell (1987; 2002) have pointed out that there are different forms of doing masculinity and femininity and different ways of being a man or a woman. This is reflected in Rowling's portrayal of the characters in the books. Thus, as Wannamaker points out, instead of portraying Neville Longbottom (as Heilman suggested prematurely in 2003 before the entire *Harry Potter* series was written and published) as a feminised character who lacks self-confidence and stammers through life as a foil for Harry's masculinity, Rowling is in fact giving us a complex character who is parallel to Harry in many ways. He might not conform to hegemonic masculinity, but Rowling's sympathetic portrayal of this fumbling adolescent shows that, in the end, he becomes a strong character who (much like Hermione) sets his own course despite restrictive social constructions of gender.

In fact, Rowling illustrates that "masculine" and "feminine" qualities often overlap in the same person. Even Harry, who is generally viewed by critics as a "masculine" hero, demonstrates sensitivity that is conventionally associated with the "feminine" (for example he feels empathy for Neville and Snape). The same holds true for the adult male characters

[46] Rowling 2000:101.
[47] Rowling 2000:400.
[48] Tyson 1999:83.

in the books. Hagrid is both manly and motherly: he knocks down doors and drives a macho motorcycle, but he also knits, bakes cakes and mothers baby creatures. Yet it is precisely these incongruent characteristics that make him such a beloved character for *Harry Potter* fans.

The complexity of characters such as Neville and Hagrid confirms Wannamaker's argument that "the *Harry Potter* novels are complex, character-driven works that often depict gender in nuanced, layered and contradictory ways".[49] I expand on her study by analysing both female and male characters over the scope of all seven of the novels in conjunction with looking at gender constructs and relations in contemporary Britain in order to provide a holistic and social constructionist study of Rowling's portrayal of gender. This is in line with gender theorists' insistence that gender is neither simplistic nor static because not all women or men are the same in all cultures all the time. I contend that Rowling gives her readers the world as they know it – with its patriarchal constructs and sometimes unbearable inequalities – but she also gives them various possibilities to determine their own identities and she makes it clear that those identities do not always have to conform to societal conventions.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the critical texts on the portrayal of gender in *Harry Potter* are rather predictable and can broadly be divided into two camps: (1) the anti-feminist view (which holds that Rowling reinforces patriarchy through her use of stereotypes and portrayal of one-dimensional females who are subordinate to males) and (2) the pro-feminist view (which maintains that Rowling's books do empower women through their strong female characters). The first view is held by the majority of the literary scholars, while the second view is espoused by fewer scholars and is mainly held by young readers of the books who have expressed themselves on blogs, podcasts and fan sites. Although this juxtaposition of scholars and young readers might seem strange, it is important to note that Wannamaker[50] argues: "Several *Harry Potter* fan web discussion lists … treat the topic of gender in the novels in intelligent ways that we, as academic critics, should not be so quick to dismiss." There are also some academic texts which, although they do not deny the presence of gender stereotypes in the novels, break away from simply branding Rowling either a pro-feminist or an anti-feminist and offer some refreshing perspectives (examples are Wannamaker's and Eliza Dresang's articles, the latter of which I discuss later in this chapter). Texts on

[49] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[50] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

the portrayal of gender in *Harry Potter* range from journal articles and contributions in collections that discuss various aspects of the novels to online articles and comments by fans.

Most of the scholarly works were written before the seventh book in the series was released and they can therefore not be regarded as providing a holistic picture of Rowling's portrayal of gender. Sanna Lehtonen's unpublished postgraduate thesis, "Contemporary British Society in the Magical World of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Books 1997–2000" (2003), is an informative and interesting study on how Rowling's books reflect social reality in contemporary Britain. However, it covers only the first four books of the series and is a content analysis of different social constructs (of which one is gender). Lehtonen concludes that the adult characters fulfil traditional stereotypical roles that are more in keeping with Britain's past than its present, that boys and girls in the books are on a more equal gender footing, and that the books are unbalanced because they have more male than female characters. Although Claudia Fenske's *Muggles, Monsters and Magicians: A Literary Analysis of the Harry Potter Series* (2008) covers all seven books, she concurs with the view that the novels are sexist and holds that Rowling indulges in stereotypes and clichés of men and women. She follows the popular route of analysing various male and female characters in terms of this view and devotes only a short part of her analysis (18 pages in a book of 472 pages) to gender issues.

The first scholarly study on *Harry Potter* was Elizabeth Schafer's book *Exploring Harry Potter*, which was published in 2000 and covers the first three books in the series. Fenske[51] criticises Schafer's superficial and at times inaccurate reading of the novels, for example she sees the Chamber of Secrets as a womb and the basilisk moving through the pipes of Hogwarts as a metaphor for giving birth. Schafer comes to the conclusion that although Hermione is a strong character who can be viewed as a "female warrior", she also "perpetuates stereotypical images of females being moody, fickle and unreliable".[52] However, in her cursory discussion of gender later in the book, she makes the interesting observation that although "each character is identified as male or female, most characters could be borderline androgynous, exhibiting personality traits ascribed to both females and males, as embodied in such characteristics as kindness and aggression".[53] This is a significant

[51] Fenske 2008:9 & 10.
[52] Schafer 2000:53 & 54.
[53] Schafer 2000:225.

remark that concurs with feminist constructionists' anti-essentialist stance that gender is complex and fluid.[54]

Also in 2000, Christine Schoefer caused uproar among fans with her online essay entitled "Harry Potter's Girl Trouble" in which she describes the first three novels as patriarchal and chauvinistic: "Girls, when they are not downright silly or unlikable, are helpers, enablers and instruments. No girls [sic] is brilliantly heroic in the way Harry is, no woman is experienced and wise like Professor Dumbledore".[55] Schoefer sees Hermione as Ron and Harry's sidekick and Professor McGonagall as Dumbledore's emotional and short-sighted helper; she believes that other female characters, like Ginny and Professor Trelawney, are belittled and ridiculed in the books. Schoefer concludes her essay by saying: "… I remain perplexed that a woman (the mother of a daughter, no less) would, at the turn of the 20th century, write a book so full of stereotypes. Is it more difficult to imagine a headmistress sparkling with wit, intelligence and passion than to conjure up a unicorn shedding silver blood? More farfetched to create a brilliant, bold and lovable heroine than a marauder's map?"[56] Although she admits that she has "learned that Harry Potter is a sacred cow. Bringing up my objections has earned me other parents' resentment – they regard me as a heavy-handed feminist with no sense of fun who is trying to spoil a bit of magic they have discovered",[57] she could not have foreseen the backlash from young fans who defended their beloved characters by saying that Schoefer overreacted and adamantly held that the books are not sexist.[58] The reactions of the young readers showed that they are not as ignorant about social issues as adults tend to believe they are. Perhaps it is their good fortune that they have not been so thoroughly conditioned by society to view life in terms of stark binaries that limit their vision. It is telling that Schoefer refers to Rowling as "the mother of a daughter, no less". Should this somehow qualify Rowling to be more sensitive or more aggressive about gender issues? Is Schoefer unintentionally allowing her own social conditioning to come to the fore here? Feminists such as Nancy Henley and Jo Freeman[59] maintain that the social

[54] Judith Butler, who more than any other theorist has constructed her theory on the idea that we do or perform gender rather than living out gender roles that are predetermined by our body configurations, argues: "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and the masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 1990:6).
[55] Schoefer 2000:sp.
[56] Schoefer 2000:sp.
[57] Schoefer 2000:sp.
[58] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[59] Henley & Freeman 2008:sp.

construction of gender occurs insidiously; it is such a casual, seemingly natural part of our lives that we often do not realise that it takes place continuously and that we are part and parcel of it. We are brought up to fulfil particular gender roles and are surrounded by constant reminders of those roles and what is expected of us; sometimes we even unwittingly reinforce and affirm them.

In 2003 the collection *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* (edited by Heilman) examined the books from a host of sociological, literary and political perspectives and contained a chapter entitled "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Gender Identity and Power", which was written by Heilman herself. Although Heilman gives a more in-depth study by providing countless examples from the books to support her argument, she basically agrees with Schoefer's argument that Rowling reinforces gender stereotypes. However, she takes the argument further and asserts that both females and males are stereotypically portrayed: "There are quite narrow and specific identities suggested for both males and females in the Harry Potter series. In the Harry Potter books, boys are stereotypically portrayed, with the strong, adventurous, independent type of male serving as a heroic expression of masculinity, whereas the weak, nonsuccessful male is mocked and sometimes despised."[60] Heilman's study was the first to add a new dimension to the gender debate on *Harry Potter* in that she points out gender inequalities affect both males and females:

> … both boys and girls potentially suffer from such power imbalances. In order for a theory of gender identity to be inclusive, gender identity conventions must be understood as *equally though differently alienating* for men and women. Female archetypes tend to describe types of powerlessness, whereas dominant male archetypes tend to describe types of powerfulness. To the extent that each distorts reality and circumscribes choices and free will, each is limiting, hegemonic, and alienating.[61]

Heilman states that she believes that part of the books' popularity stems from their familiar depictions of gender and power,[62] in other words Rowling's portrayal of gender is a reflection of real-life situations. Although she raises interesting and valid points about how gender (both male and female) is socially constructed, her study is curtailed because it looks at only the first four books of the series. Thus, for example, she sees Neville as a whimpering sissy,[63]

[60] Heilman 2003:231.
[61] Heilman 2003:230.
[62] Helman 2003: 236.
[63] Heilman 2003:234.

when a more holistic view of the series shows that although Neville does whimper and act like a nerd in the first four books, in the later books he explores his origins and derives strength from them to the point where he plays a pivotal role in Voldemort's demise in the last book.

A second edition of Heilman's *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter* was published in August 2008. This edition covers all seven books in the series and includes a chapter entitled "From Sexist to (Sort of) Feminist: Representations of Gender in the *Harry Potter* Series", which was written by Heilman and Trevor Donaldson. Apart from acknowledging the expanded number and development of the female characters in the later books, their argument does not differ much from what Heilman observes in the first edition and unfortunately they still maintain that Rowling reinforces gender stereotypes. Although they point out that the later books in the series contain less sexism, their basic argument is still that females are portrayed in accordance with demeaning cultural stereotypes and boys are likewise stereotypically portrayed:

> Harry Potter is a long and complex series with much going on and with multiple, contradictory, and even transgressive representations of gender. Yet ... while the last three books showcase richer roles and more powerful females, we find that women are still marginalized, stereotyped, and even mocked. The overall message related to power and gender still conforms to the stereotypical, hackneyed, and sexist patterns of the first four books, which reflect rather than challenge the worst elements of patriarchy.[64]

It is possible that Rowling intentionally increased and strengthened the female characters in the later books to counter sexist allegations, but this remains an open question that can only be answered by the author herself. There is to date no comprehensive study of her portrayal of gender that takes the entire series into account, concentrates on both the female and male characters, and takes the complexities of contemporary gendering into account in order not to become fantastically stereotypical itself.

Ruthann Mayes-Elma's book *Females and Harry Potter: Not All that Empowering* (2006) focuses on female agency, which she describes as "active participation in constructing an identity and resisting oppression".[65] Like other critics before her, she comes to the

[64] Heilman & Donaldson 2008:140.
[65] Mayes-Elma 2006:49.

conclusion that the first book in the series is full of gender stereotypes and portrays females as the enablers of male action; female resistance is "bounded" by traditional gender conventions. She points out what she perceives to be the irony that although the characters actively resist evil, they never resist gender stereotypes. She seems not to have noticed that gender is not one of Rowling's central themes, whereas the battle between good and evil is. Apart from criticism for limiting her study to the first *Harry Potter* book, even though five of the books had already been published at the time, Bradley[66] remarks that Mayes-Elma spends only one chapter (the shortest) on actual analysis of the novel while two-thirds of the book contains a review of her theory and methodology. The book was based on her dissertation "A feminist literary criticism approach to representations of women's agency in Harry Potter", which she completed at the Miami University of Ohio in 2003.[67] In 2007 Mayes-Elma published another book on gender in *Harry Potter*. This time it was entitled *Harry Potter: Feminist Friend or Foe?* and it continued her study of "bounded" female agency in books 2 to 6 of the series.

The above analyses of *Harry Potter* represent the majority opinion about the portrayal of gender in the novels: Rowling reinforces gender stereotypes and is therefore a sexist. These texts are not an exhaustive collection of the works that label the books sexist: other texts include Natasha Whitton's paper "'Me! Books! And Cleverness!': Stereotypical Portrayals in the Harry Potter Series" (2003) and Melissa Bradshaw's essay "The Sacrificial Lamb in Harry Potter: A Glance through the Lens of Feminist Theory" (2004). It is unnecessary to enunciate all the critical works that argue for Rowling as an unreconstructed sexist because they simply reaffirm the majority opinion.

I acknowledge that the *Harry Potter* books do contain gender stereotypes and portrayals of women and men that are disconcerting at first, but I do not agree that Rowling reinforces sexism. It is my view that she not only gives us a realistic view of contemporary British society, but also presents us with numerous verbal pictures and alternatives that enable us to understand the characters as multilayered individuals rather than mere representatives of two disparate and opposing gender types. Furthermore, because the *Harry Potter* books are primarily children's/youth literature (despite also having a wide adult readership), one tends to take them at face value and can easily ignore the fact that Rowling (who has won

[66] Bradley (JD) 2007:sp.
[67] Mayes-Elma 2007:sp.

numerous literary awards) is a talented author who uses a variety of literary devices to convey deeper meanings and deliver social commentary.

Journal articles and books that offer another view of gender in *Harry* Potter are sparse. In "Harry Potter and Feminism", an editorial that appeared on MuggleNet in 2005, Trixstar (one of the few critics who go against the grain) points out the following:

> I would like to argue that the *Harry Potter* series is actually the perfect vehicle for subversive feminism (which, face it, is the only kind that will get through the chauvinist book-reviewers' net) and that Ms. Rowling promotes perfectly the kind of equality that the magical world seems at first to overlook. If we are reading these books as adhering to patriarchal beliefs, I would suggest the fault is with us readers for the way we see the meanings in certain things and not in others, rather than a chauvinist traditionalism in the author. For the books are littered with examples of subtle pronouncements of Girl Power, and we must learn to recognise these if we are to represent to children the equality of the *Harry Potter* stories.[68]

Indeed, some of the critics do seem to show an eager tendency to see sexism in parts of the books where there is no sexism. Thus, for example, Schoefer[69] contends that Rowling describes Ginny Weasley as a "foolish little brat" and refers to her woes as "the silly little troubles of an eleven-year-old girl" when it is actually Tom Riddle (Lord Voldemort) who describes Ginny in this derogatory way. Bradshaw[70] compares Gilderoy Lockhart's immaculate appearance to that of the "sprouting" herbology teacher simply because the two teachers are described in the same paragraph and sees this as "a prime example of Rowling allowing her male character to be more visually appealing", when Rowling obviously did not intend this comparison but uses Lockhart's dandyism to mock and highlight his vanity and conceit. Rowling was also censured by critics such as Heilman,[71] because Hermione takes advantage of having her teeth fixed magically and Eloise Midgen tries to charm away her acne, but this can hardly be construed as sexist when many teenagers (boys and girls) in the real world opt to fix their bad teeth orthodontically and/or visit dermatologists to get help and relief for their skin problems.

[68] Trixstar 2005:sp.
[69] Schoefer 2000:sp.
[70] Bradshaw 2004:sp.
[71] Heilman 2003:229.

In his article "Harry Potter through the Focus of Feminist Theory: Examples of (Un)Founded Criticism" (2009), Krunoslav Mikulan[72] examines Heilman's and Dresang's opinions on gender in *Harry Potter* and agrees with Dresang that the novels can be read from multiple feminist perspectives. He points out instances where Heilman's criticism that Rowling portrays females in a negative light is unfounded (for example she views crying only as a typical female emotional reaction and fails to mention scenes in which male characters cry) and gives alternative interpretations to show that Rowling often portrays characters who have both "masculine" and "feminine" qualities. Mikulan stresses that Rowling did not set out purposefully to write feminist novels to promote the equality of women and she does not negate the gender differences that exist in the real world. He refers to Heilman's observation that the scary, evil characters in the books are mostly male and points out that if the situation was reversed (with most of the evil characters being female), Rowling would probably have been accused of portraying women as evil by nature.

In her essay "Hands off Harry Potter! Have Critics of J. K. Rowling's Books Even Read Them?", Chris Gregory (2000) rebuts a number of "perceived threats" in the *Harry Potter* books (including sexism) by showing that a shift in perspective results in a different reading of the books which goes beyond a surface reading. She reacts specifically to Schoefer's criticism and maintains that we are sometimes so obsessed with being politically correct in "today's hypersensitive cultural climate" that we stare ourselves blind against the magic and adventure of the books and end up missing all the joys of Harry's world – much like the Dursleys. She acknowledges that the books do contain stereotypes: the school bully, the history teacher who is so deadly boring that he is a ghost and the sports-mad captain of the Quidditch team are all examples of how the books are littered with stereotypes – but adds that Rowling uses many of these clichés to great comic effect. Similarly, Sybil Trelawney's scatterbrained incompetence (which some critics[73] found irritating and offensive) and her doleful pronouncements are so humorous that they "often steal the show" and have made her a favourite character. Gregory also acknowledges that the wizard world "seem[s] suspect because it is run by men", but she stresses that this is "only half the story" and goes on to show that the men are more often than not "blundering idiots" or "to steal one of Rowling's favourite words – dunderheads" and many of Hogwarts' respected and competent teachers are women. Whereas Schoefer was dismayed by Rowling's portrayal

[72] Mikulan 2009.
[73] See Schoefer (2000) and Bradshaw (2004) .

of Hermione and Ginny, Gregory notes that they remain on the sidelines for the simple reason that the book centres on Harry and the two girls have supporting roles; the same is true of other characters, such as Ron and Dumbledore. Gregory also does not see Hermione as a sidekick to Ron and Harry. She points out that Hermione accompanies Harry on almost all his adventures, is the reason why he does not end up dead early on in the novels and is an unmistakable part of the Harry–Hermione–Ron trio. She writes: "Schoefer has also chosen not to see one of the books' nicest touches: the (almost) solid friendship between two boys and a girl … in Schoefer's need to find sexism, she has ignored another wonderful touch: Harry and Ron accept Hermione Granger for exactly what she is – an often annoying, extremely intelligent and extraordinary brave and quick-witted girl." While the female Quidditch players might not be the centre of attention, Gregory points out that "Quidditch isn't just about catching the Golden Snitch – to win the Cup, those Chasers must put the ball through the Quaffle, which apparently involves a lot of spectacular flying, darting around other flyers and dodging big black balls called Bludgers. It's painful and bloody, and the girls certainly get their share of it". Gregory concludes that "[i]n the end, it seems that Rowling is guilty less of creating stereotypical female characters than of writing a book centering on a boy, one of whose friends happens to be a girl …".

In his essay "Harry Potter and the Good Life", Steven Tigner (2006) is also of the opinion that claims of sexism in the books are essentially based on the fact that the protagonist is a Harry and not a Harrietta. He writes:

> That this boy is the chief protagonist through the first four volumes cannot be denied. But the range of female characters with whom he interacts is very wide indeed. And while he may be said to have no equal as a seeker in Quidditch … in virtually every other venue he is outshown [sic] by Hermione Granger, modelled on Joanne Rowling herself. Hermione is academically more gifted and informed than Harry, intellectually more curious and hard working, morally more mature, tactically more incisive and bold, and actually more effective as an emulable model than any other character in the series, including Harry himself.[74]

Tigner has found that although his students identify with Harry psychologically and sympathise with him, it is Hermione who serves as an inspiration for them because they know exactly what they have to do to be studious and incisive, whereas it is not clear what they can do to emulate Harry. Hermione *earns* her heroic status while Harry's is, so to speak, thrust

[74] Tigner 2006:sp.

on him. Suman Gupta[75] also makes this point when he criticises the books because Harry does not earn heroic status – it is predetermined by his birth and by Voldemort's attack on him as a baby.

Trixstar (2005) also does not see Rowling's portrayal of gender in the *Harry Potter* books as sexist. This author notes that the most obvious gender stereotypes in the books are older female characters who are portrayed as homemakers or caregivers, such as Mrs. Weasley and Madam Pomfrey. However, this is a reflection of contemporary society where traditional family roles are still the norm: "Remember, these books are set in the 1990s – they are not science fiction!" Trixstar points out that it is the younger female characters who subvert traditional gender roles and especially Ginny proves to be a feminist. Ginny is the only daughter in an overwhelmingly male family, but is nevertheless a strong character who determines her own path (for example she breaks into her family's broom shed to practise Quidditch without her brothers' knowledge and becomes a talented player on one of the school teams) and can stand up for herself and others (for example she defends Neville on the train to Hogwarts and hexes Malfoy). Trixstar further points out that Quidditch, a sport that requires skill and dexterity and involves broken bones and bloodied faces, is another factor in the books that disproves the charges of sexism. Although this sport can easily be considered a "male" sport, it nevertheless has many talented female players (including at least two on the Irish National Team in the Quidditch World Cup). Trixstar finds that it is precisely because Rowling does not make a big deal of there being women on the national team (she slips in references such as "nearly knocking her off her broom")[76] which shows that sexism is not condoned or promoted in the books. In the real world all sports at school level are single-sexed. The Slytherin school team is an all-male team, which highlights their bigotry and male violence.

Although Hermione is logical and enjoys analytical subjects (and is therefore "male-brained"), she remains in touch with her emotions and also shows an uncanny grasp of the emotions of others (for example that of Cho Chang). "Just because you've got the emotional range of a teaspoon doesn't mean we all have", she snaps nastily at Ron.[77] I therefore acknowledge that Hermione does demonstrate some stereotypical female behaviour patterns

[75] Gupta 2003:155–161.
[76] Rowling 2000:101.
[77] Rowling 2003:406.

because she is a girl (including whimpering and expressing her emotions more than the male characters), but she balances these with logic and encyclopaedic knowledge (a trait that is traditionally viewed as a male characteristic). Regarding comments that the series follows the well-established hegemonic pattern that both the hero and the villain are male, Trixstar responds: "Well, since Harry Potter just 'popped into her head', I think we can allow Ms. Rowling the choice of her heroes!" She concludes her editorial with the following interesting insights:

> I was at first a bit surprised by the apparent lack of strong female characters in the *Harry Potter* books, and the stereotypical portrayal of girls in it … . But I slowly realised that the *Harry Potter* books are perfect examples of a world in which women are equal to men – and not just equal, but free to be feminine without being submissive (for example Cho, Luna). It was my own reading of the books that was skewed by present Muggle society, and I now think Rowling has provided a very honest view of teenagers' lives, while slipping in some important lessons.
>
> We have seen women in power in the books – Millicent Bagnold, Fudge's precedent as Minister of Magic was a woman … . But Rowling doesn't overemphasize this fact, because it is only when issues like "men vs. Women" cease altogether to be an issue that true equality has been gained, and this is why there is no mention of male–female dynamics in *Harry Potter* (other than romantic ones) … .

Surprisingly, young readers of the series often manage to come up with valuable insights about the novels. Wannamaker[78] points out that it is not always possible to determine their ages; however, this should hardly matter because it is the insights one can glean from their comments that are important. There are myriads of online comments of fans on a multitude of topics on *Harry Potter* and some are obviously more insightful than others. The following comments are relevant to this study:

- Now as for strong female characters, Hermoine [sic] is the smartest kid in the school, and McGonagal [sic] is second in command only to Dumbledore. How is that below the male teachers? She and Trelawney are both stereotypes but so are Flitwick and Snape and everyone else so that can't really be claimed as evidence of sexism.[79]
- I think JKR does put "messages" into her book, she has even said so, they are more organic, but they are there. One that kind of runs through the books is the idea of gender roles and she has men and women on both sides of what are traditional roles. Some of the traditional gender roles are shown, she also throws girls into situations they wouldn't traditionally be in, and I think sometimes she just does what's best

[78] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[79] http://www.online-literature.com/forums/showthread.php?t=38897: (accessed 18 March 2008)

for the story. After reading some of what's on her web page and some of her interviews, I get the idea that her views of the world come through in the books. Just the fact that she won't answer value questions or questions related to faith and similar topics show that her values are in the books because if we understood her, we'd probably be able to figure out more of the books hehe. But I see her as being an individual who both breaks tradition and keeps it at the same time. The roles of mothers in the books are very traditional. For the most part, the mothers in the books are very devoted to their children and possess a lot of those traditional mother roles ... We also have women who are very out spoken [sic] and are not as traditional in their actions. These include Rita Skeeter and many of the other female characters who are strong and show traditional male traits, and in some ways I'd include Hermione in this as well ... With the idea that there are gender roles confirmed and broken within the books, I'm not sure there's a true message gender wise other than the idea that it doesn't matter who you are, if you believe in yourself you can do anything (it's not like it's a feminist monologue or something hehe). I see her messages being more universal (like love) than anything specific to gender or age or any other category people are put into.[80]

- I don't know that I could pick a favorite female character. I think what makes the female characters so good is that they mimic real life they are not all smart, they are not all ditzy and dumb and blond. You have stern ones, nice ones, flirty, smart, ditzy, powerful, etc. Just like women in the real world. As for the comments about how we don't know how the Patil twins and Lavender Brown do in school but we do know that they are boy crazy, I have to say well of course they are. I personally am right around their age in the 6th book and I too am boy crazy that is what being a teenager is all about. But that doesn't mean that they can't have good grades as well, the two don't have anything to do with each other.[81]
- Have you actually read *Order of the Phoenix*? It is hardly awash with the "uncomplicated joys of childhood", and Harry is hardly unaware of his "burgeoning sexuality". HP is very much about growing up, coming to realizations about one's society and making moral choices.[82]

As I indicated earlier, few scholarly texts break away from the usual debate on Rowling's portrayal of gender, which follows a predictable pattern of analysing characters in the books in terms of whether or not they reinforce gender stereotypes. In "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender",[83] an essay in the collection of essays *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon* (edited by Whited), Dresang notes that gender portrayal in the novels can be read from different feminist perspectives since feminist criticism is not monolithic. She traces Hermione's "forerunners" by looking at her namesakes in mythology and literature, for example the daughter of Helen of Troy and Menelaus

[80] http://bookclubs.barnesandnoble.com/bn/board/message?board.id=HarryPotter&message.id=24546&query.id=795496#M24546 (accessed 17 April 2009)
[81] http://bookclubs.barnesandnoble.com/bn/board/message?board.id=HarryPotter&message.id=24546&query.id=795496#M24546 (accessed 17 April 2009)
[82] http://crookedtimber.org/2003/07/08/cave-hic-dragones/: (accessed 18 March 2008)
[83] Dresang 2002:211–242.

(King of Sparta) in Greek mythology and the "unfaithful" wife in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Although these women are still in some measure at the mercy of their husbands/fathers, they can nevertheless be regarded as strong and resilient characters – much like Hermione, who is individualistic, principled and a key player in the novels. Dresang emphasises Hermione's parallels with Rowling (an evidently self-resilient woman who managed to succeed against the odds) to point out that Hermione is a strong character and she sees Professor McGonagall as an independent and fair woman, although she admits that many of the other characters are stereotypes and that Hermione at times lapses into snivelling teenage behaviour (which I think, to be fair, only proves that she is a teenager!). Her study concludes that Rowling gives a "mixed and inconclusive picture" of gender[84] because she depicts the reality in which we live:

> If a feminist novel is one that sets up a world to which readers can aspire rather than one that more or less reflects the existing social order, Rowling does not write a feminist novel. She reflects a patriarchal, hierarchical world. Some of the females have the opportunity to be assertive, to take leadership positions, and to be heard, but the males are dominant and are in charge – at least for the time being. The social structure of this magical world as it relates to gender is closer to reality than it is to a vision of a better world – at least through the end of book four. Rowling tells a good tale, but so far it is not a story intended for reformation based on gender issues. Thus, when I take an overall look at gender issues in the Harry Potter series, I conclude that in a general sense it will represent for future generations the far less than ideal reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[85]

Ximena Gallardo-C and C. Jason Smith[86] reach a similar conclusion. They argue that "although Rowling draws long and deep from a fairy-tale and fantasy tradition steeped in misogyny and gender stereotyping, she is seldom at its mercy".[87] By reading the novel in terms of the Cinderella fairy tale, they see Harry as a "Cinderfella", whose feminine qualities and tendencies enable female readers to identify with him even though he is a male protagonist. The authors point out that feminine symbols (for example tunnels and caves) appear together with phallic symbols (for example wands and swords) and that the novels' awareness of "otherness" and the problems of bigotry and discrimination against goblins, house-elves, "mudbloods" and others can by extension be seen as creating a context for raising awareness of other social issues, such as gender inequalities.

[84] Dresang 2002:236.
[85] Dresang 2002:238.
[86] Gallardo-C & Smith 2003:191–205.
[87] Gallardo-C & Smith 2003: 203.

As mentioned, some of the young readers who posted their comments on the internet have a mature grasp of Rowling's portrayal of gender and this view is also expressed in some of the scholarly texts. In her book review of *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, Elisabeth Gumnior refers to a young reader who is quoted in Dresang's essay as saying that the wizard world is a copy of our society. Gumnior[88] then writes: "I think this young reader instinctively feels that Rowling does try to create a mirror in which we can see our own world and through which we could imagine and create a better one (much like the mirror of Erised)."

Despite their differing views and analyses of the characters in the *Harry Potter* books, it is clear from the existing critical texts on gender in the novels (whether pro-feminist, anti-feminist or beyond) that instead of giving us a feminist utopia, Rowling gives us a realistic portrayal of gender dynamics in contemporary Britain. In the following chapter I explore how gender is socially constructed in the real world and the extent to which it impacts the lives of men and women.

[88] Gumnior 2004:5.

CHAPTER 1
GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Judith Lorber[1] contends that gender is so much a part of our assumptions and so pervasive in our society that it is often hard for us to believe that gender is constantly created and recreated through our interactions and forms the texture and order of our social life. Gendering starts very early in life. Apart from the momentous occasion of the birth of their children, the most important event in many pregnant women's lives in the Western world is probably when they have ultrasound scans to find out the sex of their children. From this moment on, the child ceases to be simply a person: the nursery is decorated in pretty pinks or blues; gender appropriate clothes and toys are bought; and even before it enters the world, the child becomes a gendered body. This will have an impact throughout his or her life because being born with a particular set of reproductive organs is, as Allan Farber[2] points out (following Freud's famous dictum "anatomy is destiny", no doubt), not merely a biological fact – it is a biological fact with social implications that will shape every part of his or her life, including his or her education, employment opportunities, family, sexuality, and interpersonal and consumer behaviour.

In *The Second Sex* (first published in French in 1949) Simone de Beauvoir outlined how woman's role and status changed through the ages to accommodate man's increasingly privileged standing. She famously wrote that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"[3] and that woman is "defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other".[4] Rich explains the social construction of gender as follows: "Societal norms and values, aspirations and ideals are passed down to us through a process of socialisation where we learn to be functional and accepted members of society. We learn to be men and women; we may be born male and female, but we become men and women."[5]

[1] Lorber 1994.
[2] Farber 2008:sp.
[3] De Beauvoir 1988:295.
[4] De Beauvoir 1988:16.
[5] Rich 2010:sp.

Throughout history men and women have been "redefined, represented, valued, and channelled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways".[6] This pattern is clearly visible in ancient societies, which are generally regarded as the foundations of Western thought and culture. Although women were still stereotyped as wives and mothers in Ancient Egypt, they were allowed to own land, conclude business deals and even become queens on occasion. Herodotus wrote in 440 B.C.E.: "… but the Egyptians themselves, in most of their manners and customs, [do] exactly the reverse [of] the common practices of mankind. For example, the women attend the markets and trade, while the men sit at home and weave at the loom …".[7] Wisam Mansour,[8] Associate Professor of English Literature at Faith University in Turkey, notes that long before Judeo-Christian religions with their doctrine that woman led to the fall of man (hence her god-ordained subordination to man), Aristotle regarded women as imperfect creatures (deformed men).[9] Women in Ancient Greece were lowly and insignificant;[10] they were relegated to the home as wives and mothers and gave birth to children whose souls were provided by the male while the female supplied their carnal bodies. Although Greek mythology had strong goddesses (for example Artemis), they were superhumans in a world that was far removed from ordinary Greek women who were not encouraged to emulate them. Greek mythology is phallocentric and in general defines women as evil (Circe), jealous (Hera) and irrational (the Furies); whereas men are powerful (Zeus), rational (Hermes) and wise (Prometheus). In Roman times, women had citizenship and could own property but their social freedom and welfare depended on their husbands and fathers since they were under the authority of the *paterfamilias.*[11] Closer to our own milieu in the Western world, we find that although Victorian England was ruled by a queen, women were still subject to significant males (fathers, husbands, brothers and even adult sons) in their private lives and men dominated decision making in the political, legal and economic spheres.[12] In Britain today, young women are able to achieve more in public and private spheres than what their mothers could, but inequalities and sexual divisions continue (for example women earn less than men on average and have less leisure time than men, with housework and childcare still their primary responsibility).[13]

[6] Farber 2008:sp.
[7] "The History of Herodotus" 2008:sp.
[8] Mansour 2008:sp.
[9] Allen 1985:97.
[10] Hemingway 2000:sp.
[11] Cooper 2007.
[12] Marsh 2010:sp.
[13] Addison & Jones 2005:257.

Mac an Ghaill and Haywood explain that because of rapid global change, traditional gender roles in contemporary Western societies "no longer look the same, mean the same or feel the same".[14] They say that late modernity is characterised by globalisation, risk, individualisation and reflexivity and that individuals are intrinsically linked to social and cultural transformations which involve fragmentation, dislocation and mobility.[15] Since gender is "an area that intersects individually and collectively across a range of cultural arenas"[16] (for example politics, race, family and education), it has become a lens to make sense of a world in flux. Thus, for example, the restructuring of paid work is read through the lens of gender – and sustained by the media as a "sex war" – as marked by the feminisation of the workplace and the collapse of stable masculinities.[17] They point out that this means that traditional ways of looking at gender and gender identity formation (which tend to focus on redrawing the boundaries between men and women) should be reassessed because essentialist and dichotomous thinking no longer make sense in terms of shifting gender structures, identities and practices.[18] In an age of constant change and uncertainty, gender has become more complex, diverse, fragmented, fluid and negotiated.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler voices her opposition to gender binaries and calls for a new way of looking at sex and gender, which she sees as inexorably linked: "The consequence of such sharp disagreements about the meaning of gender … establishes the need for a radical rethinking of the categories of identity within the context of relations of radical gender asymmetry."[19] Butler is, of course, *the* pre-eminent theorist of gender as constructed and performative. She argues that gender is determined by how we behave at different times and in different situations rather than merely by what we are biologically: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."[20] Although human beings *are* gendered, gender is performative and therefore subject to change. For Butler, categorising men and women as two disparate and oppositional groups belies the complexity and diversity of human experiences and gender identities. She suggests that we think of gender as fluid rather than fixed; as contingent rather than

[14] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:1.
[15] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:3.
[16] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:1.
[17] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:5.
[18] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:5.
[19] Butler 1990:11.
[20] Butler 1990:33.

essential. Since our perceptions and assumptions of gender roles create and reinforce gender inequality, we have to deconstruct how society views gender roles in order to initiate change: "If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old."[21] She views her work as:

> … thinking through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity.[22]

In "Utopian Visions"[23] – a chapter in the *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies* – editors Kathy Davis, Mary Evans and Judith Lorber set out their suggestions for a more egalitarian and peaceful social order. Lorber[24] points out that despite legislation that is aimed at empowering women and prevents discrimination and harassment, women in the twenty-first century still find themselves being befuddled and tripped in job markets and homes that are the bedrock of gender inequality – what Evans[25] calls the "very sharp rocks of employment and motherhood". Lorber proposes a radical process of degendering (for example, using gender-neutral language and confronting gender expectations in interactions) that will remove restrictive boundaries completely and will lead to "a world without gender" – a world that will ultimately be beneficial for both women and men. She states:

> Because it works from social categorization to the individual, the gendered social order is very resistant to individual challenge. Its power is such that people act in gendered ways based on their position within the gender structure without reflection or question. We "do gender" and participate in its construction once we have learned to take our place as a member of a gendered social order. Our gendered practices construct and maintain the gendered social order. But our practices also change it. As it changes, and as we participate in different social institutions and organizations throughout our lives, our gendered behavior changes.[26]

[21] Butler 1990:149.
[22] Butler 1990:33 & 34.
[23] Davis, Evans & Lorber 2006:469–474.
[24] Davis *et al* 2006:472.
[25] Davis *et al* 2006:475.
[26] Davis *et al* 2006:47.

Evans stresses that we still have a long way to go before we can live in a "de-gendered" world and claims that in order for us to bring about substantial change, we have to confront and address the nature of institutions – "the values that are explicit in contexts".[27] She points out that "one of the great paradoxes of the individualism of the West is that it can often make us blind to the individuality of others".[28] We should therefore never merely write (or theorise) about gender, but always have to contextualise it. Davis's vision for an egalitarian and just world is grounded in the "globalisation" of feminism: a global theory and practice that is located in temporal and spatial frameworks, but reaches across borders for transnational co-operation to bring about change.[29] Although these three theorists' suggestions are termed "utopian visions", which implies that they are grasping after a social order that can never be more than an unreachable dream, they nevertheless express the certainty that society can change when we confront reality. It is interesting that utopias – of the theoretical or fictional kind – are always grounded in experienced social reality.

Lorber[30] also avers: "Gender is so deeply embedded in our lives because it is a social institution. It creates structure and stability, seeps into the practices of many social roles, has a long history, and is virtually unquestioned." In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Susan Bordo (1993) argues that cultural representations of gender (for example advertisements that depict skeletal women as normal and desirable) are directly related to an increase in eating disorders among women.[31] In this way cultural metaphors not only support the hegemonic control of women and their bodies, but also make women complicit in it. Henley and Freeman[32] point out how social interaction serves as a means of social control. In agreement with John Berger, who writes that women "are depicted in a different way to men – because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him",[33] they state:

[27] Davis *et al* 2006:475.
[28] Davis *et al* 2006:476.
[29] Davis *et al* 2006:476–480.
[30] Davis *et al* 2006:471.
[31] In a paper submitted to the American Psychological Association, Tracy Tylka (2006:sp) points out that there has been an increase in the objectification of men in the media. The portrayal of "perfect physiques" in fitness and fashion magazines often lead to health problems, including eating and muscle disorders, in both men and women.
[32] Henley & Freeman 2008:sp.
[33] Berger 1972:64.

> By being continually reminded of their inferior status in their interactions with others, and continually compelled to acknowledge that status in their own patterns of behaviour, women may internalize society's definition of them as inferior so thoroughly that they are often unaware of what their status is. Inferiority becomes habitual, and the inferior place assumes the familiarity – and even desirability – of home.

The irony is that although women are the ones who have been notably short-changed in the process, men have not remained unscathed in societies that favour patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. Today this is evidenced by the "crisis in masculinity", which (among other things) shows rising suicide rates among young men; underperformance of boys at school; increasing incidents of violent male behaviour; and an inability or unwillingness in men to articulate personal and emotional problems.[34] Jonathan Salisbury and David Jackson[35] attribute these problems to the culture of aggressive manliness with which the majority of boys have to grow up and to shifting social and family roles that leave many males feeling lost and confused. Bradley[36] points out that in an increasingly globalised world where many jobs have been "feminised" (brain is fast becoming more important than brawn, accompanied by a shift away from manufacture and industrial production to service-based and knowledge-based work) and men have all but lost their employment advantage over women, men have to find alternative forms of masculine assertion to hold onto their already fragile masculinity. In addition to these pressures, many men and women are asserting their right to make sexual and gender choices beyond the traditional constricting dichotomies of man/woman, male/female and masculine/feminine.[37] Gay, lesbian and transgender lifestyles have become legitimate options.

Salisbury and Jackson show how social forces (the media portrayal of heroic manliness, the emphasis on boys' virility rather than their sexuality, a militaristic culture, bullying and so on) shape the often confused adolescent boys of today into the macho men of tomorrow: "Popular culture provides many images of what real men are like. Boys realize that to be a man in this culture they must distance themselves from anything feminine in their own

[34] Morgan 2006:109–123.
[35] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:2.
[36] Bradley 2007a:58.
[37] Kimmel's pioneering work on men and masculinities (he is the editor of the interdisciplinary journal *Men and Masculinities* and has written numerous books on the subject, including *Changing Men* [1987], *The Politics of Manhood* [1996], *Manhood: A Cultural History* [1996] and *Men's Lives* [2006]) highlights the problems of inhabiting a constructed masculine gender.

character".[38] Boys are therefore not simply born "real men" – they become who they are through a lifelong process of learning that is largely determined by social expectations, influences and pressures. Herb Goldberg[39] puts it as follows:

> Our culture is saturated with successful male zombies, businessman zombies, golf zombies, sports car zombies, playboy zombies, etc. They are playing by the rules of the male game plan. They have lost touch with, or are running away from, their feelings and awareness of themselves as people. They have confused their social masks for their essence and they are destroying themselves while fulfilling the traditional definitions of masculine-appropriate behaviour. They set their life sails by these role definitions. They are the heroes, the studs, the providers, the warriors, the empire builders, the fearless ones. Their reality is always approached through these veils of gender expectations.

It is therefore clear that men, who are traditionally in a position of power and privilege, are also adversely affected by the sticky web of the social construction of gender. Although male and female experiences are different and one cannot dismiss the fact that women have wombs and men have prostrate glands, hegemonic masculinity is evidently as confining and oppressive as hegemonic femininity.

While social constructs are not fixed and heroic individuals such as Audre Lorde and Raewyn Connell (formerly Robert William Connell) have asserted their personal choice and have overcome numerous obstacles to break free from gender constraints in their lives, it is not easy to change the social order. Many gender theorists agree that although we have come a long way in addressing gender inequalities and establishing a more egalitarian order, the battle is far from won. Goldberg[40] points out that while the feminist movement has enabled women daringly and openly to own up to and voice their resistance and resentment against their constricting gender roles, men still have collectively to acknowledge and rebel against the stifling aspects of their roles. Inner pressure to conform tends to keep both men and women in social chains. Laura Kipnis[41] talks about "the collaborator within" with reference to women's experience and is of the opinion that without substantial female complicity (the ambivalence of the "inner woman" towards male power and female subjection), male privilege can be a thing of the past. Thus the status quo is maintained because the majority

[38] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:41.
[39] Goldberg 1991:61 & 62.
[40] Goldberg 1999:66.
[41] Kipnis 2007:xii & xiii.

of women and men succumb to inner and outer pressure to conform to society's dictates rather than fight actively for or enable gender reform.

What, then, is the best way to change the social conditioning that constricts and warps both women and men? Gender theorists such as Kimmel, Connell, Haraway and Butler agree that the answer does not lie in burying our heads in the sand and finding comfort in utopian dreams, but rather in confronting reality so that the causes of inequality and oppression can be addressed.

Social constructionism[42] is a multidisciplinary, changing and rapidly expanding epistemology that challenges our fundamental beliefs about ourselves and the world. It holds that although social phenomena appear to be natural and immutable, they are social constructs that arise from political and ideological interests; there is no absolute truth or reality because our ideas and practices change in accordance with the dominant ideology of our different cultures and communities. Since social conditioning is a process, social phenomena such as gender and gendered forms of behaviour are learned and *can* therefore be unlearned or changed.

Although Vivien Burr[43] points out that there is no single feature that points to an absolute constructionist position, she lists and discusses the following as fundamental principles or key assumptions of social constructionism. (They are summarised here because of their direct relevance to the construction and representation of gender in the *Harry Potter* series.) Many of these assumptions are reflected in contemporary theory on gender.

(1) *A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge*. Contrary to traditional science's positivist and empiricist assumptions that we can know the world through objective and unbiased observation, social constructionism is critical of the idea that our perception of our world is unproblematic because the categories in which we view it are not

[42]It is easy to confuse social constructionism (which is a sociological theory) with social constructivism (which is a psychological or perceptual theory) because many scholars use the terms interchangeably. In fact, when one does a literature search on social constructionism, one can easily be swept away and become befuddled by the flood of literature on social construction as a teaching and learning theory that is based on the work of Vygotsky, Piaget and Papert. Although both social constructionism and social constructivism are theories of knowledge that are concerned with how social phenomena develop in social contexts, the two are distinct epistemologies: "Social constructionism refers to the development of phenomena relative to social contexts while social constructivism refers to an individual's making meaning of knowledge relative to social context" ("Social constructionism" 2008:sp).

[43] Burr 1998:2 & 3.

necessarily real divisions. Burr points out that in the Western world we tend to see gender in terms of categorising human beings into men and women. She argues that social constructionism would question why this distinction, which is seemingly based on naturally occurring types of human beings, is so important that whole categories of personhood are built on it; human beings could, for example, have been divided into tall or short people equally well.

(2) *Historical and cultural specificity*. The categories and concepts that we use to understand our world are historically and culturally specific. For example: while most Western societies have two gender roles (male and female) that are based on biological sex, some cultures have members who adopt a gender role that is the opposite of their biological sex and they therefore have a third gender role.[44] Our knowledge is therefore limited to time and place and we should not assume that our way of understanding is better than other ways of understanding.

(3) *Knowledge is sustained by social processes*. All ways of understanding emerge from social interaction between people. Knowledge – what we understand to be "the truth" – is determined by what people construct between them in their daily interactions and by the conventions of communication that they use at the time. In "The Sexual Politics of Interpersonal Behaviour" (2008), Henley and Freeman show how social interaction between men and women frequently reinforces inferior and superior gender status as a means of social control.

(4) *Knowledge and social action go together*. Our social reality is constructed by complex and organised patterns of communication and behaviour. Our understanding of our world is made up of a variety of social constructs and each construct invites different kinds of behaviour or action from people. For example: Before the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement in the late 1960s and 1970s, alternative sexualities were regarded as "unnatural" and gays, lesbians and transvestites often suffered harassment and were arrested.[45] Over time, there has been a move away from viewing alternative sexualities as a perversity or mental problem and today laws are being amended to accommodate alternative lifestyles (same-sex marriages were legalised in South Africa in 2006[46] and in 2005 same-sex couples in Britain were given similar rights to married heterosexual

[44] Herdt 1994:sp.
[45] Rivkin & Ryan 2004:885.
[46] "SA Legalises Gay Marriage" 2009:sp.

couples.[47] Our knowledge of our world (that is, social constructs) therefore sustains some social action and excludes others.

Burr[48] discusses these four key assumptions further in terms of how they differ from traditional psychology and sociology's views about knowledge and the world:

- *Anti-essentialism*. There are no "essences" that make things and people what they are. This includes notions that gender is determined by nature or nurture (or both) because it would mean that people, who are complex and continually evolving, have a definable and discoverable nature. Thus heterosexual people often become homosexual or bisexual later in life.
- *Anti-realism*. Reality is constructed by human beings at specific times and in particular contexts and therefore there are different "truths" in different societies. There is no such thing as an objective fact because all knowledge comes from looking at the world from a particular perspective that serves a particular interest. Thus dividing people into binary categories such as man/woman and black/white is part of an oppressive, patriarchal Western mode of thinking that compels people to *act* and *be* in certain ways.[49]
- *Historical and cultural specificity of knowledge*. Knowledge is a human product that is historically and culturally constructed. Since all theories and explanations are specific to time and culture, grand theories about human nature are invalid. Thus, for example, Foucault showed that before the nineteenth century the fixed sexual identity of "homosexual" did not exist and what we call "homosexual" practices today were part of an array of acceptable sexual activities for both men and women.[50]
- *Language as a pre-condition for thought*. We are born into cultures that already have their conceptual frameworks and categories. As we develop the use of language, these concepts and categories become part of our daily social interaction and understanding of our world. Our conceptual framework is therefore always already (to use Kristeva's term) provided by our language. In the Western world, for example, vernacular words for sexual intercourse are derived from the dominant (and penetrative) male perspective: "banging", "shafting", "screwing" and so on. This reinforces

[47] "Gay Marriages around the Globe" 2009:sp.
[48] Burr 1998:5–8.
[49] Haraway 1990.
[50] Bradley 2007a:18.

and perpetuates the idea of man as active and woman as subordinate and passive in her sexuality.[51]

- *Language as a form of social action*. Since language is a pre-condition for thought, it is not merely a passive vehicle for our thoughts and emotions. When people talk, they construct their world; the use of language can therefore be regarded as a form of action. For example, queer theory has re-appropriated and uses pejorative words such as "bitch" and "hag" to express female strength and power.[52]
- *A focus on interaction and social practices*. Social practices and people's interactions with one another, rather than the individual psyche or social structures, are the basis of social phenomena. For example, Bradley[53] stresses that "gender" is more than a fixed category or label for individuals; it only becomes a meaningful term when we consider the *relationship between* men and women and the broader contexts in which they live.
- *A focus on processes*. According to social constructionism, the aim of social enquiry is to look at the dynamics of social interaction – how phenomena and forms of knowledge are established when people interact with one another. Knowledge is therefore not an individual possession but what people do together. Bradley[54] says that gender "refers both to the lived experiences of men and women in relation to each other and to the ideas we develop to make sense of these relations and to frame them. Material experiences inform cultural meanings, which in turn influence the way lived relations change and develop".

It is important to note that social constructionism does not deny that there is a reality in the sense that we exist in a physical world or that we are physical beings. Thus Mark Bauerlein[55] can rightly claim that there are phenomena that cannot be defined as social constructs, for example Newton's laws of physics have been applied consistently in so many cultures and at different times in history that they transcend time and place. Social constructionism holds that *social reality* is embedded in the institutions and structure of society and that it is socially constructed in a particular culture at a particular time. Social constructs therefore refer to phenomena that have been developed and created by society and that have become the norm

[51] Bradley 2007a:67.
[52] Bradley 2007a:41.
[53] Bradley 2007a:5.
[54] Bradley 2007a:4.
[55] Bauerlein 2001:sp.

and are embedded in our lives to such an extent that they appear natural and immutable. This means that what is "truth" or "reality" in a specific culture at a particular time is not necessarily "truth" or "reality" in another culture at a particular time. The assertion that gender is socially constructed means that at this specific point in Western culture, the claim that gender is merely a result of biology is contested by theorists who have shown that gender is highly contingent on social and historical processes. It also means that society's current perception of gender has led to the oppression and marginalisation of certain groups and individuals and should be modified or eliminated.

Although social constructionism is more of a loose collection of theoretical perspectives than a single theoretical position and it draws its influences from different fields (including sociology and psychology), Burr[56] calls postmodernism the "cultural and intellectual 'backcloth' against which social constructionism has taken shape, and which to some extent gives it its particular flavour". Postmodernist feminists have raised concern that gender theories tend to essentialise and universalise gender when contemporary society and human experience are characterised by complexity, fragmentation and disorganisation. They maintain that it is therefore no longer possible to refer to categories such as "women" or "men" or to use large-scale theories or grand narratives such as patriarchy and class theory because individual women and men are too divided by the interrelated influences of age, class, ethnicity and so on.[57] It should, however, be noted that Chris Beasley[58] points out a number of differences between postmodernism and social constructionism, for example that social constructionism resists any fixed identities but also refuses postmodernism's antagonism to identity – thus it enables us to look at identities without reducing them to essentialist and universal notions of gender.

Social constructionism seems to function as a double-edged sword: although it clearly has benefits in that it enables us to look at identities without reducing it to essentialist and universal notions of gender, it has also been criticised for being weak in the face of the very principles that it propounds. Critics ask many questions: How does one define "gender" if there is no foundation for defining it? How can social constructionism address very real problems, such as sexual abuse, when it maintains that there is no fixed reality – is oppression

[56] Burr 1995:12.
[57] Pilcher 1999:sp.
[58] Beasley 2005:135–143.

not one perspective among many perspectives? If sexuality is a voluntary choice that differs from individual to individual, can we meaningfully address gender issues without resorting to essentialisms ourselves?

Constructionist theorists have countered these accusations in various ways. Some theorists (such as Burr)[59] point out that for many social constructionists, the aim of research is not to find "facts" but to find a way of bringing about change for those who need it; others (like Beasley)[60] maintain that social constructionists see gender and sexuality not merely as concerning identity differences but as being about a "hierarchical social division [that is] analogous to class and founded upon concrete material oppression".

As more and more feminists have started to question the efficacy of the women's liberation movement in ending the oppression of women amidst growing discontent that much of feminism has been constricted by theories that do little to alleviate the harsh realities of womanhood,[61] it may well be asked if social constructionism (especially with its extreme relativist position) is not just another fancy theory. Although social constructionism has indeed been criticised for being a fashionable buzz word for moral crusading that leaves us with no solid ground to question oppressive ideas because any opinion is as good as another,[62] it has also been lauded as a powerful challenge to essentialism; for liberating us from oppressive and apolitical notions of the self, society and power; and for giving a voice to previously silenced minorities in the struggle for emancipation and political choice.[63]

Janet Wesselius[64] points out that Bordo suggests the dilemma of contemporary feminism is "the tension between a gender identity that both mobilizes a liberatory politics on behalf of women and that results in gender prescription which exclude many women". She is of the opinion that social constructionism takes into account postmodern-influenced feminism's anti-essentialism while retaining some form of gender identity for political purposes: women *are* a marginalised group, not because of their nature but because of social conditions. Thus, by analysing essentialisms and looking at their historical conditions, ways can be found

[59] Burr 1998:162.
[60] Beasley 2005:134.
[61] Hubbard 1996:sp.
[62] Persky 1998:sp.
[63] Speer 2008:sp.
[64] Wesselius 2008:sp.

to address them and bring about change. Sally Young[65] – acknowledging that although most of the legislative obstacles to female participation in public life have been removed in Britain, inequalities still persist – suggests that a new approach (such as Butler's) to change attitudes towards gender and the status quo is needed. Since changing laws has evidently failed, what is needed is to change people's hearts and minds.

Literature can influence how people think and feel and has long served as a vehicle for social change, for example Charles Dickens's novels increased awareness of the injustices of poverty and social stratification in Victorian Britain and Victor Hugo's novel *Les Miserables* influenced nineteenth-century social and political attitudes in France. Howell Belser writes: "Stories are dangerous. They have the ability to re-make the world ... Stories activate our imaginations and rearrange the furniture of our minds ... . Historically, stories have been vehicles for moral formation, though their ability to influence the world has been used to subvert hegemonic power as well as to bolster it."[66] Rowling uses her immense success in the literary world and her influence with young readers to reach out to the youth of today – who will be tomorrow's adults – and shows them that despite living in a gendered and gendering world with social constraints and pressures, they can still choose who they want to be. Penelope Eckert argues: "… by virtue of their transitional place in the life course, adolescents are in a particularly strong position to respond to change in the conditions of life, and in so doing bring about lasting social change … They are not just resolving ethnicity, gender, class, and race for today but constructing permanent meanings that they will carry into adulthood, to be worked on by the next generation."[67]

Bradley[68] distinguishes three levels of gendering: (1) the micro or individual level (patterns of individual behaviour and interaction); (2) the meso or institutional level (rules, conventions and expectations that regulate behaviour and interaction in institutions); and (3) the macro or societal level (rules that govern societal interaction and institutions). She points out that although individuals might be broad-minded, liberated and gender aware, they have to adhere to the rules, conventions and expectations about gender in institutions such as religious organisations and schools to avoid being penalised; institutions, in turn, have to comply with broader gendered social structures such as the sexual division of labour.

[65] Young 2008:sp.
[66] Belser 2010:sp.
[67] Eckert 2003:45.
[68] Bradley 2007a:24.

Although we are relatively free to choose how we act on an individual level, resisting compliance on the other two levels is more difficult.

Rowling's portrayal of gender is contingent upon the institutional and societal contexts of gender in contemporary Britain. Although the *Harry Potter* novels have had a worldwide impact, in this study I focus on gender realities in contemporary Britain because this is the milieu of the novels. Rowling herself endorsed a "British" reading of the novels when she insisted that the film versions of the books be filmed in Britain with an all-British cast.[69] In addition, it is surely appropriate to read the series with reference to Britain as both their presented world and their context of production (as will be done in the next chapter).

[69] *The Times*, 30 June 2000.

CHAPTER 2
GENDER IN BRITAIN

Since social constructionism holds that we cannot detach any aspect of identity from the social or discursive context that gives rise to it, in this chapter I explore established British social institutions (such as government and the law) in order to ascertain their impact on the gendering of characters in the *Harry Potter* series.

Roberta Seelinger Trites[1] distinguishes children's literature from adolescent literature by saying that growth in children's literature is grounded on what the character has learned about himself or herself, while growth in adolescent literature focuses on what the adolescent has learned about societal limits and prescriptions on the individual's power. Adolescents have to learn to negotiate institutions, authority figures and their own power despite the limitations that constructs such as gender place on them. This is precisely what Rowling shows in her books. In the first book we are introduced to immature characters and, over time, they progressively get to know themselves and societal limitations to become strong and heroic individuals by the end of the seventh book. Rowling has said that the choice between what is good and what is easy is central to the novels because "that is how tyranny is started, with people being apathetic and taking the easy route and suddenly finding themselves in deep trouble".[2] By resisting giving readers a utopian world (which would have been an "easy way out" for a fantasy writer), Rowling enables the youth who read her books to see that despite the social forces that surround them, they can still grow towards independence and assert their individuality.

Although Rowling juxtaposes the wizard world and the muggle world, I have to stress that these are not two diverse worlds. Instead of a wizard world and a muggle world that exist parallel and distinct to each other, Rowling's fictional world is best described as a number of magical places that are hidden within the muggle world.[3] Furthermore, she equates the muggle world with the actual world of contemporary Britain so that, in fact, there is only one world: the muggle/actual world, which contains the secret magical places of the wizard world. Thus the wizard world's Diagon Alley is located behind a wall off Charing Cross

[1] Seelinger Trites 2001:473.
[2] *The Vancouver Sun*, 26 October 2000.
[3] Watts 2006:10 and Fenske 2006:105.

Road (an actual street in London, which Stouffer describes as the best street in the world to find bookstores of old and new books); Kings Cross Station (where the young wizards and witches catch the Hogwarts Express behind a wall between platforms 9 and 10) is an actual train station in a rather dodgy area of London;[4] and Hogwarts is in a rural area of Scotland (many believe),[5] but is visible only as a dangerous ruin to non-magical eyes. While Harry sits in his room in the Leaky Cauldron, he "could hear the buses rolling by in the unseen Muggle street behind him, and the sound of the invisible crowd below in Diagon Alley."[6] In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Rowling describes the divide between the two worlds as "the great, invisible wall that divided the relentlessly non-magical world of Privet Drive and the world beyond".[7] These worlds often overlap in times of crisis (as when witches and wizards openly move around in the muggle world at the beginning of the first book after the Potter baby survives the Dark Lord's onslaught) and the boundaries between them become increasingly fuzzier as the plot develops and Voldemort's baleful activities become more intense and widespread and reach into the muggle world. The Minister of Magic obviously corresponds to the Prime Minister of the muggle world and these two officials liaise with and consult each other about mutual threats to the safety and security of their domains. Rowling uses ingenious methods to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality in the minds of her readers. For example: whenever a new Prime Minister is elected, the Minister of Magic enters 10 Downing Street (the ultimate site of British political power) through a portrait of a wizard hanging on the wall to explain the wizard world to the newcomer and to set out the terms of their co-operation.[8] This forces the reader to wonder whether wizards really exist in England and whether there have been secret meetings between the Minister of Magic and the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.[9] We are therefore left with the assumption that the muggle world (with its secret wizard spaces) and the real world are the same, and it is within this context that we should read Rowling's portrayal of gender.

John Oakland[10] points out that the ruling elite in Britain (known as the "Establishment") traditionally consists of members of the interlocking institutions of the monarchy, Parliament (Westminster), the legal system, the Church of England, the civil service (Whitehall),

[4] Stouffer 2007: 76 & 98.
[5] Fenske 2008:115.
[6] Rowling 1999:45.
[7] Rowling 2003:39.
[8] Rowling 2005a:7–24.
[9] Stouffer 2007:200.
[10] Oakland 2001:10.

the older professions, the ancient universities (Oxbridge) and independent (private) schools (like Eton and Harrow). In contemporary Britain these institutions are still very much based on the hierarchical principles of male dominance and interests. Roberta Garrett[11] notes that the "culture of Westminster is often likened to a boy's public school" and the House of Commons "thrives on an atmosphere of masculine combat" with heckling, jeering and insults being commonplace. There are few female Members of Parliament (MPs) because of the electoral system, which allows local constituency executives to nominate the candidate who will most likely be elected – and this is usually a (white, middle-class) man. Although Margaret Thatcher's eleven-year reign had great symbolic significance for women because she was the first female Prime Minister and this inspired many women to attain great heights in their own lives, "the iron maiden" was often also referred to as "the best man for the job".[12] In fact, the overall number of female MPs decreased during her reign and she was an outspoken opponent of women's rights. In my view, this proves that "the same sex does not automatically an ally make". When the Labour Party won the elections under Tony Blair in 1997, a number of new female MPs were labelled "Blair's Babes".[13] Of the major political parties, the Labour Party has the strongest history of and commitment to gender inclusivity. Since 1997, the party has tried to combat discrimination, for example by promoting women in power-positions in the party and by compiling all-women electoral shortlists for some constituencies.[14] However, despite the party's pro-feminist sympathies and actions, it seems that the majority of female voters prefer the Conservative Party's strong law-and-order policies and commitment to traditional family values.[15]

Government, at both national and local levels, is highly centralised. In terms of policy making, the national government depends on the civil service for advice and policy implementation.[16] Women are still in the minority in the civil service and most of them occupy jobs at the bottom of the hierarchy; however, with the reforms that have been implemented (for example promotion and recruitment strategies), it is estimated that they will make up one-third of all senior civil servants by 2016.[17]

[11] Garrett 2007:126 & 127.
[12] Garrett 2007:126.
[13] Garrett 2007:127.
[14] Garrett 2007:127.
[15] Garrett 2007:127.
[16] Lovenduski & Randall 1995:18.
[17] Lovenduski & Randall 1995:167.

Feminists also find it difficult to change government policy via a tradition of constitutional interpretation by the courts or a conventional Bill of Rights because Britain has neither.[18] However, the Blair government did implement significant changes which, according to political scientist Vernon Bogdanor,[19] amounted to a "historic era of constitutional reform". These included the creation of a new Supreme Court; the Human Rights Act 1998 (which requires public bodies to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights) and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (which provides a statutory right to freedom of information).[20]

Positive developments on the political front seem to have been neutralised by evidence of major government corruption over the years. There have been allegations that party politics influenced top administrative appointments during the Thatcher era; this makes the neutrality of civil servants dubious and means that British feminist groups have to work in a bureaucratic culture where it is difficult to network with women in government to influence policy.[21] The situation is aggravated by the fact that local authorities (which are important in terms of services that have always been crucial to women, such as housing, social work and child care) can be created and abolished at will by Parliament, for example the metropolitan authorities (which had became the focus of the Labour Party's resistance to the national policies of the Conservative government) were simply abolished in 1984.[22] In 2006, six months before the announcement that he would retire, Blair was interviewed by police over the "cash for peerages" claim that the Labour Party had nominated some of its secret donors for peerages.[23] In 2009 journalist John Pilger wrote:

> The theft of public money by members of parliament, including government ministers, has given Britons a rare glimpse inside the tent of power and privilege. It is rare because not one political reporter or commentator, those who fill tombstones of column inches and dominate broadcast journalism, revealed a shred of this scandal. It was left to a public relations man to sell the "leak".[24]

[18] Andrew Blick (in Addison & Jones 2005:316) explains that "various Acts of Parliament, parliamentary law and customs, judicial decisions, conventions and the common law between them make up what is labelled the 'unwritten constitution'" in Britain. Although there is a Bill of Rights (dating from 1680), it does not "enshrine the civil liberties of citizens" but "guarantees the powers of Parliament in relation to those of the Crown".
[19] Bennett 2007:sp.
[20] Bennett 2007:sp.
[21] Lovenduski & Randall 1995:19.
[22] Lovenduski & Randall 1995:19.
[23] Bennett 2007:sp.
[24] Pilger 2009:sp.

Although regular national elections are held, British politics has long been dominated by two parties: the Conservative Party (which follows a centre-right philosophy of conservatism and British unionism) and the Labour Party (a centre-left party, which now describes itself as a democratic socialist party), both of which are patriarchal and therefore tend to be inflexible.[25] Pilger points out that "British parliamentary democracy has been progressively destroyed as the two main parties have converged into a single-ideology business state, each with almost identical social, economic and foreign policies".[26] Since this was continued under Blair and Brown, it is not surprising that "so many Labour and Tory politicians" were implicated in the corruption since it is "no more than a metaphor for the anti-democratic system they have forged together". He goes on to say that Blair had committed the "supreme international crime" by deliberately planning the invasion of another country and refers to "the lawless attack on Iraq" and "the murderous imperial adventure in Afghanistan". Pilger also mentions that in February 2009, the Justice Secretary blocked the publication of "crucial cabinet minutes from March 2003 about the planning of the invasion of Iraq, even though the Information Commissioner, Richard Thomas ... ordered their release". He ends his article with the following:

> It is as if our public language has finally become Orwellian. Using totalitarian laws approved by a majority of MPs, the police have set up secretive units to combat democratic dissent they call "extremism". Their de facto partners are "security" journalists, a recent breed of state or "lobby" propagandist. On 9 April, the BBC's Newsnight programme promoted the guilt of 12 "terrorists" arrested in a contrived media drama orchestrated by the Prime Minister himself. All were later released without charge.

Also, the British legal system (one of the oldest and most traditional institutions in the country) has often been accused of gender bias in its proceedings, sentencing and professional opportunities. Although an increasing number of women are entering the legal profession, they are still hampered by glass ceilings and few of them make it to the top.[27] Lovenduski and Randall[28] point out that the publicity that surrounded the nine female barristers who were made QCs (Queen's Counsels or senior barristers) in 1991 illustrates how difficult it is for women to reach the higher ranks of the profession. Garrett[29] notes that the British judiciary is notorious for its lenient attitudes towards the perpetrators of sexual

[25] Lovenduski & Randall 1995:20.
[26] Pilger 2009:sp.
[27] Garrett 2007:127.
[28] Lovenduski & Randall 1995:168.
[29] Garrett 2007:127.

assault and other violence, including domestic violence; female victims who retaliate are often held culpable for the crime.

All this seems surreal, but very familiar in terms of Rowling's fictional world. The ruling elite in the wizard world consists of those who occupy the top positions in the Ministry of Magic and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry:

> Though clearly modelled on exclusive British boarding schools like Eton, Hogwarts … operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Magic, the governing body of wizardry which, likened to a board of trustees, can enforce mandates on issues ranging from faculty employment to the curriculum, school security, sporting events, and the kinds of mythic beasts that are kept on the school grounds. Contingently, starting from the school, wizard governance seeps out into other aspects of the life of magic – setting the law, overseeing the bank, controlling trade, maintaining prisons … .[30]

The Ministry of Magic is the centre of power and government for British wizards/witches and magical creatures. Although it has numerous departments and sub-divisions, they have bureaucratic but rather ridiculous names (the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office, the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, and the Detention and Confiscation of Counterfeit Defensive Spells and Protective Objects Office, to mention but three). Exactly how the Ministry is organised, formulates laws and decrees, or develops and implements policy remains unclear. We are also not told how or by whom the Minister of Magic is appointed or unseated. Fenske[31] points out that although Dumbledore was "offered" the post on more than one occasion, we are never told who offered it to him (and, like Lao Tzu, he is always seen to have refused this position of prime leadership). The Minister of Magic himself has the power to appoint the Headmaster of Hogwarts without consultation and can make laws about how the school should be run, though he cannot expel pupils. He seems to have totalitarian power and this is worrying, considering that both Cornelius Fudge and Rufus Scrimgeour are incompetent leaders with dubious characters. Although women have in the past occupied high positions in the Ministry and other wizard institutions (for example Millicent Bagnold was the Minister of Magic before Fudge[32] and Elfrida Clagg was head of the Wizengamot in the 1300s),[33] the ministers in the Ministry during Harry's time appear to be mostly male; scatter-brained gossiper Bertha Jorkins and the toad-like Dolores Umbridge

[30] Goodman 2008:sp.
[31] Fenske 2006:292.
[32] Rowling 2003:88.
[33] Rowling 2001:14.

(who is the personification of bureaucratic madness and power gone awry) are almost the only two high-ranking females in the Ministry. However, it is not only the female officials who are portrayed in a negative light; the civil service seems to be packed with incompetent and/or deficient male officials whose primary motive is self-interest. Even good-hearted Mr. Weasley, who dedicatedly pursues improving muggle–wizard relations in his capacity as civil servant in the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office, seems farcical in his own bungling misuse of muggle artefacts.

Law and justice in the wizard world are portrayed equally dismally in their tyranny and totalitarian control. The officials of the Ministry detect and deter petty crimes; the Aurors (the band of sterling, accomplished and exceptional wizards and witches who defend the wizard world against the forces of Dark Magic and once had the dubious but brave Scrimgeour as leader) hunt down witches and wizards who commit serious (evil) crimes and the Wizengamot (which appears to be the Wizard High Court) is supposed to prosecute these dangerous criminals.[34] On occasion, however, the Court oversteps its authority and holds a criminal trial for a simple misdeed such as underage magic (as Harry experiences in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*) or sends an offender off to Azkaban without a trial (for example, Hagrid in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*). It is therefore clear that although the Court is supposedly made up of the best witches and wizards of the time, it is not free from undue influence and corruption. Trials are held in a dungeon and the accused is chained to a chair; the defence has no counsel and those who are found guilty are sent to Azkaban where they are driven insane by the Dementors' soul-deadening presence. Although, on the surface, the system seems to promote equality and justice, the fact that it works hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Magic in the administration of justice and its methods of enforcement seem to have issued from the dark torture chambers of the Middle Ages makes this doubtful. The Wizengamot has a Charter of Rights that contains the basic rights of wizards and witches, but laws are easily adjusted and court procedures are adapted at will.[35] We are not given an indication of the number of females who serve on the Wizengamot, although they are represented (two high-ranking females, one of which is Dolores Umbridge, flank Fudge as Chief Warlock during Harry's trial). However, one can assume that they follow the pattern of gender representation in the Ministry and that men outnumber women (as is also the case with gender representation among the Aurors

[34] Stouffler 2007:205.
[35] Rowling 2003:137.

and the Death Eaters). Umbridge's reign of terror at Hogwarts, during which she tortures pupils and Dumbledore is banished, takes place under the auspices of the Ministry of Magic.

Benjamin Barton,[36] Professor of Law at the University of Tennessee and an avid *Harry Potter* reader, writes the following about law and justice in Rowling's wizard world and points out that "her scathing portrait of government" is "particularly effective" because "it bears such a tremendous resemblance to current Anglo-American government":

> What would you think of a government that engaged in this list of tyrannical activities: tortured children for lying; designed its prison specifically to suck all life and hope out of the inmates; placed citizens in that prison without a hearing; ordered the death penalty without a trial; allowed the powerful, rich, or famous to control policy; selectively prosecutes crimes (the powerful go unpunished and the unpopular face trumped-up charges); conducted criminal trials without defense counsel; used truth serum to force confessions; maintained constant surveillance over all citizens; offered no elections and no democratic law making process; and controlled the press?

Perhaps even more eye-opening and closer to home is the fact that the dread and disquiet in the wizard world in the wake of Voldemort's anarchy and threat of total subjugation do not only have clear parallels with oppressive totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, but also mirror the anxiety and fear of the post-9/11 Western world. In July 2003, Michael Herman (who worked in the British government's intelligence service from 1952 to 1987) wrote:

> Not everyone was happy with President Bush's proclamation of the "war on terrorism" after 11 September 2001 ("9/11"), but there is now not much doubt that Al Qaida has been at war against the United States since the attack on the World Trade centre in 1993, and that the rest of the "capitalist West" (however defined) is now threatened as America's ally. At the time of writing (winter 2002–3) the British government is giving wide publicity to the threat of terrorist attack with chemical, biological or radiological weapons, and has warned the public that complete defence cannot be guaranteed. Assuming that this is well-founded, we live in a climate of serious threat, and one that will not be short-lived.[37]

Although Rowling is a master of the art of shrouding criticism of government and social commentary in literary devices such as allegory, humour, caricature, satire and parody, there are clear similarities between the political and legal systems of the wizard world and contemporary Britain. This shows once again that her complex world should not be taken

[36] Barton 2006:sp.
[37] Herman 2003:sp.

at face value. Barton,[38] acknowledging that some people will think it "ridiculously high praise", compares her to Mark Twain and Jonathan Swift in letting "the more typical elements of magic and childhood collide with satire and social commentary". He writes of the "half-crazed bureaucracy" in *Harry Potter*:

> Rowling's scathing portrait of government is surprisingly strident and effective. This is partly because her critique works on so many levels: the functions of government, the structure of government, and the bureaucrats who run the show. All three elements work together to depict a Ministry of Magic run by self-interested bureaucrats bent on increasing and protecting their power, often to the detriment of the public at large.

Fenske[39] explains that one of the important themes of the *Harry Potter* series is the moral legitimisation of power and that the magical world's deficient and inadequate official power structures reflect a basic distrust of officials and government. Rowling[40] describes Dolores Umbridge, the toad-like and highly bureaucratic but enormously evil Ministry of Magic enforcer of rules and regulations, as follows: "She is one of those people, and they do exist in real life, who will always side with the established order. As far as she is concerned authority cannot be wrong so she doesn't question it, and I would go as far as to say that whatever happened and whoever took over at the Ministry, Umbridge would be there, she likes power." In contrast, Harry does question authority and often breaks the rules but never reverts to anarchy like Voldemort. Rowling therefore implies that instead of obeying power and authority blindly, human beings should choose freedom and justice even when their choices are severely limited by the established social order.

Another social institution that is important for contextualising Rowling's portrayal of gender, especially with regard to the adolescent characters in the books, is Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Although the fantasy elements of the books add enjoyment and wonder to the school routine with an array of magical creatures and unusual school subjects and activities, Hogwarts is about more than classroom learning, mischief and sport; it "involves the mastery of a complex social order of loyalty and competition, and of problematic teacher–student relationships".[41] Salisbury and Jackson emphasise that secondary schools are sites of power and control where authority and limits are enforced

[38] Barton 2009:sp.
[39] Fenske 2006:288–290.
[40] Rowling 2005b:sp.
[41] Elster 2003:204.

and tested (between pupils and teachers and between pupils and pupils), corridors are patrolled, competition is encouraged and various gendered relationships are performed.[42] Seelinger Trites explains that as a site of socialisation and institutional power where the pupils have to adhere to set rules and are constantly under surveillance,[43] Hogwarts both limits and empowers adolescents: it "teaches them, increasing their knowledge and therefore their power, while it simultaneously represses those powers".[44] Pupils are taught both their abilities and limitations in terms of their place in their society. Seelinger Trites stresses that it is at Hogwarts that Harry first acquires some control over his life and learns about the power of money, explores his sexuality, becomes aware of problems of race and class, and realises that those with the most honour have the most power (Dumbeldore is the most powerful wizard in the wizard world because he is the most noble).[45] She also contends that Harry's most important empowerment comes from his sense of identity as a member of the school.[46] Acknowledging the importance of the school in the socialisation of its pupils, Nelly Stromquist (in her background paper for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008) states that "[s]chool research on gender today explicitly addresses issues such as the construction of masculinities and femininities, forms of violence such as bullying and homophobia, and the active role of peers in the formation of school cultures."[47]

Hogwarts has clearly been modelled on Britain's exclusive preparatory boarding schools (also called public[48] boarding schools) with their long-standing hierarchies and traditions, for example the school is divided into four houses that are headed by heads of houses and compete for annual inter-house prizes (which inspires perseverance, hard work and adherence to school rules, but also encourages competition, rivalry and factions). As its name suggests, the school is co-educational; apart from separate dormitories and bathrooms/toilets – and quite unlike the Beauxbatons Academy of Magic where the intelligent and (abnormally) beautiful girls are always in the limelight and the Durmstrang

[42] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:18–39.
[43] Pupils at Howarts are not only watched by teachers, but also by prefects, poltergeists and portraits on the walls (Seelinger Trites 2001:475).
[44] Seelinger Trites 2001:474.
[45] Seelinger Trites 2001:474.
[46] Seelinger Trites 2001:474.
[47] Stromquist 2007:6.
[48] Lehtonen (2003:38) explains that in Britain public schools are not actually "public" but expensive private schools which are often seen as elitist or socially divisive institutions that provide better education to children whose parents can afford the fees. Mike Storry (2007:81) also explains this misnomer and point out that these schools are disproportionately important in British life: Although only 7% of Britain's children attend them, they tend to be the gateway to prestigious universities such as Oxford and Cambridge and to the higher echelons of British society.

Institute for Magical Study where the surly and not so handsome boys clearly dominate – the boys and girls seem to be on an equal footing since they participate in the same educational and leisure activities and have the same opportunities. This means that, despite the apparent inequities of access to top positions in the Ministry of Magic, when young men and women leave Hogwarts, they are highly educated and ready to become capable members of the workforce. The school seems to cater only for human or half-human pupils in that it does not have pupils from the other magical races such as goblins and centaurs; other races are, however, represented on the school staff. The school was founded by two witches and two wizards: Godric Gryffindor epitomised bravery and strength; Rowena Ravenclaw valued wisdom and creativity; Helga Hufflepuff was known for her loyalty, hard work and cooking charms; and the racist Salazar Slytherin was possessed by a thirst for power and had the rare ability to communicate with snakes. Although the founders of the school can be viewed as gender stereotypes, one should remember that both boys and girls are sorted into the different houses on the basis of these characteristics and this reinforces that what are traditionally viewed as "masculine" and "feminine" traits (such as courage and intelligence) can be found in both females and males.

I do not see sexism in the teacher composition nor the duties of the teachers at Hogwarts: according to Rowling, the male to female teacher ratio is 50:50[49] and even though the Defence Against the Dark Arts teachers are mostly male[50] (and either are incompetent or have a shady past), Professor McGonagall is the capable deputy headmistress who teaches the difficult and hazardous subject Transfiguration,[51] while Madam Hooch is an enthusiastic and energetic referee at Quidditch matches and teaches the pupils how to master the intricacies of broomstick flying. As with any school, Hogwarts has extremely competent male and female teachers and also utterly boring and incompetent male and female teachers. Yet patriarchal values such as a hierarchical power structure and competitive sport[52] are clearly espoused at the school and this might be because of the British public boarding school's long tradition as boys-only schools (co-educational boarding schools are a relatively modern phenomenon

[49] Radio CBC, 23 October 2000.
[50] Dolores Umbridge teaches the subject during her reign at Hogwarts (Rowling 2003:190).
[51] In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Professor McGonagall tells her first-year pupils that "Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic" they will learn at Hogwarts (Rowling 1997:100).
[52] According to Lehtonen (2003:46), organised sport in British public schools was believed to build character in future leaders since it was aimed at promoting manliness and chivalry through team spirit, loyalty, bravery, fair play and so on.

in Britain).[53] With its inspiring as well as mediocre teachers; its individual and groups of "cool" and "uncool" pupils who vie for authority, acceptance and status among their peers and in the school's hierarchy; and its enthralling magical school subjects that can at times also be torturing and boring, Hogwarts is a parody of the public school in Britain.

Teachers are important role models and key actors in schools because they often become surrogate parents to their pupils. As headmaster and because of his compassion and ability to find something to value in everyone,[54] Professor Dumbledore is a father figure for many students. Teachers in the real world, as well as at Hogwarts, have a positive and/or negative influence on pupils. Anne Alton describes Professor McGonagall as "the ultimate example of propriety as well as discipline" and even though Professor Snape imparts his impressive knowledge of the dark arts and potion making to his pupils, she regards him as "an anti-role model, with his favouritism of Draco Malfoy and the Slytherins and his grudge against Harry".[55] The diminutive but imaginative Professor Flitwick (who delightfully makes Neville's toad zoom around the classroom during a Charms lesson and wisely lets his pupils play games in his class when their minds are saturated with plans for the festive season) is another positive role model; whereas Gilderoy Lockhart is not only an incompetent and arrogant fraud, but also a coward who does not hesitate to save himself at the expense of his pupils – his whining in the dangerous Chamber of Secrets irritates Ron to such an extent that the teenager lashes out and kicks his teacher.[56] Teachers do at times behave in a less than exemplary manner, for example when the usually tolerant Professor McGonagall tells bungling Neville off in front of the other pupils,[57] she not only embarrasses and humiliates him but makes it seem that the reputation of the school is more important than supporting a weak pupil.[58] Professor Snape also embarrasses Neville by warning Professor Lupin in front of the other pupils that the boy cannot do anything that is difficult.[59] However, the negative influences of teachers can be ascribed less to gender bias on their part than to personal ill will and weakness.

[53] Lehtonen 2003:39.
[54] Rowling 2007a:24.
[55] Alton 2003:152.
[56] Rowling 1998:219–221, 224.
[57] Rowling 2000:208.
[58] Lehtonen 2003:45 & 46.
[59] Rowling 1999:100.

Hermione tends to be the most misread of Rowling's characters and seems always to be the unfortunate scapegoat at the centre of criticism that Rowling reinforces gender stereotypes in the *Harry Potter* books. Thus Elster is of the opinion that the books depict gendered knowledge and learning since Hermione is successful at book learning and is less adventurous than Ron and Harry, who grudgingly do their homework and enjoy sports.[60] Yet Hermione bravely opposes Umbridge's belief that proper education entails studying "the theory hard enough" to pass the examination and insists that the whole point of Defence Against the Dark Arts is to practice defensive spells.[61] She also embarks on her own adventures, for example she solves the puzzle about how Rita Skeeter gets her information on her own and captures the journalist in a glass jar in her animagus form[62] and she lures Umbridge into the dangerous Forbidden Forest to be carried off by the antisocial and violent centaurs.[63] Elster seems to be unaware that Hermione is one of Rowling's most well-rounded and androgynous characters: she is rational[64] and emotional;[65] studious[66] and adventurous;[67] a conformist[68] and a non-conformist.[69] According to Stromquist, a frequent and widespread research finding on education is that "boys enjoy more challenging interaction with teachers, dominate classroom activities, and receive more attention than girls through criticism, praise, constructive feedback and help".[70] This seems to apply equally well to Hermione, who subverts many common expectations of femininity and masculinity in the classroom: she is not only unafraid to speak up in class,[71] but is fiercely independent and makes no excuses for her love of learning. She earns the respect of her teachers[72] and fellow pupils.[73] Although she tends to be a stickler for rules and respects authority, she is not scared openly to oppose and rebel against the despotic Umbridge's narrow-minded teaching methods[74] or loudly voice her disdain for the dubious knowledge Professor Trelawney teaches in her Divination class.[75]

[60] Elster 2003:208 & 209.
[61] Rowling 2003:218–220.
[62] Rowling 2000:630–632.
[63] Rowling 2003:662–668.
[64] Rowling 1999:112.
[65] Rowling 1999:196; 2000:313 & 314.
[66] Rowling 1997:79; 1999:101; 2005a:101.
[67] Rowling 2003:662–668.
[68] Rowling 1997:115–120.
[69] Rowling 1997:131, 177; 1998:120–125.
[70] Stromquist 2007:8.
[71] In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Hermione continually interrupts Snape even though he lashes out at her and reproves her repeatedly (1999:128 & 129).
[72] Rowling 1999:253.
[73] Rowling 1998:73.
[74] Rowling 2003:218 & 219, 283 & 284.
[75] Rowling 1999:82–85; 2003:324.

Stromquist refers to the findings of a study that was conducted in Britain by Warrington, Younger and Williams (2000):

> Boys initiated fewer interactions with teachers to request help or ask questions than the girls, and showed greater interest in such areas as sports, friends, and out-of-school activities. Responses of teachers to boys, then, reinforced stereotyped behaviors. The researchers found that boys were likely to withdraw from academic competition rather than be seen to fail. Boys saw themselves as more disruptive and felt their behaviour was worse than girls' behaviours. Girls were more likely to talk and giggle; boys were more likely to shout, tell jokes, throw things, and start fighting in class – which resulted in a greater amount of teacher attention.[76]

There is no doubt that there are gaggles of giggling girls and rascals of fighting boys[77] at Hogwarts, and Rowling should be lauded for portraying gendered behaviours so realistically because these stereotypes show that she has succeeded in mirroring adolescent normative behaviour that occurs at schools in the real world. However, through her intelligent manipulation and subversion of traditional constructs of femininity and masculinity, Hermione sets herself apart from the gaggling girls and creates her own construction of girlhood.[78] She participates in Ron and Harry's (often life-threatening) out-of-school activities, has fighting spirit enough to punch the school bully Malfoy in the face[79] and disarm the daunting Professor Snape,[80] and proves that she can be a disruptive force in the classroom. Hermione unconventionally chooses the companionship of two boys over that of girls and through the interdependency and loyalty that exist among the members of the Harry–Hermione–Ron trio, they demonstrate their equality. As Gallardo-C and Smith note with reference to gendering in Quidditch, the "series acknowledges gender differences (real boys and girls often play differently) but does not advocate gender cleavage (same-sex groups)".[81]

Overall, education at Hogwarts is gender neutral since there is no difference between boys and girls in terms of teaching methods and the objectives and expectations of education. Although there are signs that certain characteristics and talents are inherent (as is evident

[76] Stromquist 2007:12.
[77] Heilman (2003:226) writes: "Quidditch is not the only context for giggling. The second two books are littered with references to giggling girls, although there is not a single reference to giggling boys." She also writes: "Nearly all the males seem to be engaged in power struggles" (2003:231).
[78] Limbach 2009:3.
[79] Rowling 1999:216.
[80] Rowling 1999:265.
[81] Gallardo-C & Smith 2003:199.

in the sorting hat ceremony), these occur on an individual level and are not cast in stone; nurture is also shown to be important in that the pupils are enabled to develop their own identities and to strengthen their weaknesses through mentorship and guidance, for example Harry (who chooses to align himself with the noble traits of Gryffindor rather than that of the supremacist and racist Slytherin) and Neville (whom Professors Lupin and Moody help and encourage to develop his strengths). Dumbledore attaches great value to this ethos. He tells Cornelius Fudge: "You place too much importance, and you always have done, on the so-called purity of blood! You fail to recognise that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow up to be!"[82] Sadly though, the assumption that the school system is egalitarian belies the fact that it serves and privileges the dominant culture of magical society while it disadvantages other magical creatures.

In the context of a boarding school such as Hogwarts, school is also home. Furthermore, Rowling repeatedly states in the books that for Harry, Hogwarts is more "homely" than the Dursleys' home. This also applies to other outcasts and misfits such as the orphan Tom Riddle (Voldemort), the werewolf Remus Lupin and the half-giant Rubeus Hagrid, who find a haven and a sense of belonging at the school. At the end of the series, when Harry finally realises that he has to meet Voldemort in a final confrontation that will require him to sacrifice himself, he walks amidst the devastation at Hogwarts: "Ripples of cold undulated over Harry's skin … . He wanted to be stopped, to be dragged back, to be sent back home … . But he *was* home. Hogwarts was the first and best home he had known. He and Voldemort and Snape, the abandoned boys, had all found home here …".[83]

Mac an Ghaill and Haywood[84] describe the contemporary family in Western societies as a paradox: on the one hand, it is projected as a safe haven that continues to be central in people's lives; on the other hand, it is viewed as a site of crisis where women and men are trading places and as a consequence are endangering the very fabric of society. They explain that in line with other social transformations, especially work life, the family is undergoing significant changes and a wide range of family formations and altered relations between family members are evident: cohabitation, single-parent families, gay/lesbian partnerships and so on are emerging alongside the traditional extended family and nuclear family.

[82] Rowling 2000:614 & 615.
[83] Rowling 2007a:558.
[84] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:43.

In addition, because they study further or struggle to find employment, more young people are not leaving their parental homes when they finish school and many stay single for longer or prefer not to marry at all. Coupled with these changing family lifestyles is the realisation that mothers' and fathers' experiences and conceptualisations of motherhood and fatherhood are multifaceted and diverse, for example unemployed men often take on increased domestic and paternal responsibilities.[85]

Aapola *et al*[86] emphasise that although there have been changes both in social institutions that affect the family and in ideologies about gender roles, parenting and childhood/youth, these changes need not be seen as a death knell to the family but as providing people with more choices and positive possibilities to make their own family-related decisions. Imelda McCarthy points out that "[w]hat the death of the 'family' therefore implies is that no universal, fixed connotation of family constitutes a taken-for-granted reality."[87] Addison and Jones[88] explain that at the end of the twentieth century, social researchers who explored family relationships found a positive notion of the family as consisting of flexible, interconnecting and supportive relationships. The social definition of "family" has expanded to include increasing diversity in family forms and relationships, and the very factors that pessimists regarded as undermining the family have strengthened its central role in the lives of many people. They conclude: "The continuing strength and importance of the family through a period of rapid social change is more striking than its breakdown."[89] In their study on parent and adolescent gender role attitudes in Britain, Keith Burt and Jacqueline Scott[90] found that, although adolescent girls supported egalitarian gender roles in the family, adolescent boys were more reluctant to change traditional male roles and that this could prove problematic in shaping men and women's future behaviour. This is reflected in Rowling's magical world by Ron and Harry, who accept unquestioningly that Hermione acts as their nurse[91] and cook[92] while they live in a tent during their search for the horcruxes. Especially Ron, who was raised in a household where his mother cooked and cleaned and did the childrearing, annoys Hermione with his whining and traditionalist expectations.[93]

[85] Mac an Ghaill & Haywood 2007:44 & 45.
[86] Aapola *et al* 2005:106 & 107.
[87] McCarthy 2001:266.
[88] Addison & Jones 2005:55.
[89] Addison & Jones 2005:55.
[90] Burt & Scott 2002:244 & 245.
[91] Rowling 2007a:269.
[92] Rowling 2007a:228.
[93] Rowling 2007a:235, 237.

Salisbury and Jackson acknowledge that "many boys are still clinging onto more traditional values about being masters of their households – 'You get someone to do your washing and cooking'", but add that "there are signs that some boys are beginning to look around themselves and are turning a questioning eye on themselves".[94] Anne-Maria Lakka refers to Alston who argues that although there have been vast changes in the constitution of the family in the twentieth century, there remains a cultural tendency (almost an obsession) with the family that *should* ideally exist; a "tendency to yearn for a lost golden age of nuclear family values, to promote the family that eats and plays together with a father, a mother and their children".[95]

Rowling pursues this ideal in the magical world: Harry finds a surrogate family in the Weasleys (who most represent traditional family values in the books) and his constant yearning for his parents shows his longing to be part of this ideal (as is clear when he gazes into the Mirror of Erised in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*). Rowling's advocacy of motherhood and the responsibilities of fatherhood are also apparent in the relationship between Remus Lupin and Nymphadora Tonks.[96] Tonks is so smitten with Lupin that his rejection of her affects her rare magical abilities; however, he refuses to pursue a relationship with her and to marry her because he reasons that because of his poverty and the ostracism he has to endure, her life with him will be beset with problems.[97] Mr. and Mrs. Weasley convince him to marry her nonetheless. When he later wants to desert his pregnant wife under the pretence of joining the trio in their quest for the horcruxes because he fears his child will also be a werewolf or despise him, Harry calls him a coward and asks him: "My father died trying to protect my mother and me, and you reckon he'd tell you to abandon your kid to go on an adventure with us?"[98] Lupin angrily returns to his wife, their son is born and the three of them are a happy family. Here Rowling emphasises the primacy of family in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds and it is ironic that the two parents then leave their baby to fight in the battle at Hogwarts, where both perish.

Family is a central theme in the *Harry Potter* books. The main families in *Harry Potter* are the Dursleys, the Weasleys, the Blacks and the Malfoys; there are also minor families such as

[94] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:9.
[95] Alston, quoted by Lakka 2009:33.
[96] Richards 2010:sp.
[97] Rowling 2005a:94, 582.
[98] Rowling 2007a:176.

the Grangers and the Crouches. Although Rowling espouses traditional family values, she does not uphold the nuclear family model as the norm for all families. Sometimes unforeseen eventualities happen: parents die or are incapacitated and leave behind children who have to be reared by relatives (for example Harry and Neville) and godparents (for example Lupin and Tonks' son, Teddy). Although Rowling does not include transnormative family types such as same-sex families in her books, there are clearly alternative families in the magical world and few of her main characters grow up in traditional families with two biological parents. Tom Riddle (senior) practically divorces Voldemort's mother when he deserts her and his unborn son. Other examples of this are Luna's one-parent family and the dysfunctional Gaunt family.

We know very little about Hermione's parents and her parental home. Mr. and Mrs. Granger are not named and are mentioned only briefly, when they shop with her in Diagon Alley or when she talks about them. We know that Hermione is an only child, that both her parents are dentists and that they like to go on holiday (either together with her or alone if she prefers to remain at Hogwarts over the holidays or to stay with the Weasleys).[99] Her muggle parents appear to be supportive of their magical daughter since they visit the magical world with her to buy her school supplies.[100] Her disciplined approach to education and independent spirit are most likely attributable to her upbringing, which tends to be conservative as is evident in the fact that her parents insist on her using muggle braces instead of magic to fix her teeth.[101] Hermione loves her parents since the thought of her modifying their memories to protect them and the possibility that they might never again know that they have a daughter sadden her.[102] The reason why we are not told more about Hermione's family life might be because her parents live in the muggle world with which we (non-magical people) are already familiar. However, more details about her family could have added more depth to her as a main character.

As with everything else about Harry's caricatured relatives, the Dursley household is patriarchal to the extreme: the skinny and fragile Mrs. Dursley cooks, cleans and coddles her obnoxious son, while the heavy-set and moustached Mr. Dursley is the breadwinner and protector of his family. The Dursleys' greatest desire and chief motive in life is to blend into

[99] Rowling 1998:39; 2003:440; 2007a:297.
[100] Rowling 1997:56 & 57.
[101] Rowling 2000:353.
[102] Rowling 2007a:84.

conventional suburban life and be respectable; their exaggerated pursuit of normality when they are anything but normal is comical.[103] They refuse to regard Harry as part of their family and their fear of the magical causes them to be nasty and mean to him and to exert excessive control over him. However, although they are obsessive and repressive, they do care about each other and Harry grows up in a house that is not totally devoid of love and affection. His life with the Dursleys is far from happy, but we learn towards the end of the series that growing up with his insufferable aunt, uncle and nephew did hold advantages for him: because of his mother's undying love, the Dursleys' dreary home was the one place where he was truly safe from Voldemort.[104] In addition, Dudley's bullying has equipped him to rise above the ostracism he experiences in the magical world and enables him to have empathy for and to identify with the underdog.[105] Likewise, Harry has learned domestic skills by being forced to do chores in the Dursleys' home.

The close-knit Weasley family and their nest-like home, the Burrow, to an extent fill the aching void in Harry to be part of a traditional family. When Ron tries to make excuses for the family's lack of comfort and luxury, he tells Ron that it is "the best house" he has ever been in.[106] Although the Weasleys are poor, they are generous, hard-working people who welcome Harry even though his presence in their home places them in constant danger. Mr. Weasley is a Ministry of Magic official who works in a small dusty office and gets little money and acknowledgement in return;[107] Mrs. Weasley is a housewife whose life consists mainly of doing household chores and taking care of her husband and seven children. She accepts Harry as her own child and tries to protect him as she does with her own children.[108] Both Harry and Hermione visit the family often and find emotional support and comfort in their midst. It is with the Weasleys that Harry learns about many of the wonders of the magical world, including where to find the "gate" to the magical platform to catch the Hogwarts Express, how to use Floo powder to travel and attending the Quidditch World Cup. The members of this loving family support each other and thrive on traditional family values, even in times of difficulty, such as when the ambitious and reprehensible Percy turns his back on his family.[109] The warm-hearted and lively Weasleys with their overcrowded ramshackle

[103] Rowling 1997:7–12; 2000:43–48.
[104] Rowling 2003:737.
[105] Rowling 2003:573.
[106] Rowling 1998:36.
[107] Rowling 2003:69.
[108] Rowling 1998:37; 2003:84–86; 2005a:327.
[109] Rowling 2005a:319 & 320.

house are juxtaposed against the mean-spirited and conformist Dursleys with their immaculately kept and stagnant house as Rowling shows how important it is for young people to grow up in an emotionally secure and succouring family environment.[110]

There are women in the *Harry Potter* books who opt to become full-time housewives and mothers after marriage: Petunia Dursley spends her days craning her neck over the fence to watch the neighbours and running her household; Fleur Delacour is the only female Triwizard champion, but ends up spending much of her time in the kitchen after her marriage; the longsuffering Mrs. Crouch is the stark opposite of her pompous, overbearing husband and wastes away from grief after her son is imprisoned. However, there are also numerous witches who are not housewives and work as professors, healers, shopkeepers, ministry officials and so on. The magical world is therefore as diverse as contemporary Britain where women and labour are concerned. Even if we assume that the snobbish Narcissa Malfoy is a housewife (we are not told whether or not she is) and apparently has few interests outside her family, she is actively involved in the Death Eaters' uprising and passes on information to Voldemort.[111] Although Molly Weasley is the epitome of motherhood and a stereotypical housewife, she is nevertheless one of the strongest females in the books. Harry describes her as "a sabre-tooth tiger" when she is angry.[112] She enforces discipline, reprimands and advises her husband when needed, has the decisive say in the household and at times acts as the protector of her family.[113] In addition to managing her household efficiently, she is a member of the Order of the Phoenix (though even then she primarily fulfils the role of caregiver by cooking and cleaning the Order's headquarters) and is a skilled combatant who kills Bellatrix (one of Voldemort's fiercest Death Eaters) in a duel.[114] Clearly, in Rowling's world a woman can be a fulfilled homemaker and/or career woman.

Gupta finds the ambivalent position of the house-elves puzzling (Dobby's transgression of his elfin bounds and gratitude at being freed are dissonant with the apathy of the other house-elves and what seems to be the "natural" condition of his species) and writes:

[110] Rowling 1997:19; 1998:37.
[111] Rowling 2003:732.
[112] Rowling 1998:30.
[113] Rowling 1997:223; 1998:30–35.
[114] Rowling 2003:81, 109 & 110; 2007a:589 & 590.

> The reversal in the presentation of house-elves in *Goblet* makes both the house-elves incomprehensible as a species and Dobby incomprehensible as an individual house-elf. The natural predetermination to servitude is so completely arbitrary, so completely at odds with the human characteristics of the house-elves, so contradictory to the possibilities that Dobby's character has revealed, that it is impossible to reconcile all these elements into a satisfactory whole. Hermione's is in fact the only understandable reaction within [the] Magic world that is imaginable, and that it is presented as an eccentricity and taken as an eccentricity by all around her either shows that the Magic world is incomprehensibly irrational from any [sic] our world perspective, or that the picture is flawed in its presentation.[115]

Kathryn McDaniel also notes that the position of the house-elves and the liberal values in the *Harry Potter* books seem disparate. She suggests that the house-elves are a metaphor for housewives who are "constrained within [their] domestic role":

> Many house-elves, like many twentieth-century house-wives, derive enjoyment, a sense of purpose, the very core of their identity from their service to home and family, and so have no wish to be "liberated" ... [Liberation] is not unequivocally desired, [and] can be devastating ... [M]any in fact derive satisfaction from their status as a "helpmeet", subordinate though it may be.[116]

The Hogwarts house-elves are content with their domestic servitude and all of them – except intoxicated Winky who carelessly messes on her un-elflike clothes, which in her mind symbolise her "unnatural" status of not having a master[117] – wear domestic garb (tea-towels emblazoned with the Hogwarts crest) as a mark of their enslavement.[118] They regard Dobby as a disgrace[119] and resent Hermione's efforts to emancipate them by knitting and leaving elf-sized clothes lying around the Gryffindor common room so that they can inadvertently free themselves.[120] The house-elves are described in domestic terms that echo patriarchal views about women's place in society: Nearly Headless Nick explains that they "hardly ever leave the kitchen by day" and "come out at night to do a bit of cleaning"[121] and Ron jokes that helping his mother clean the house in preparation for Bill's wedding is "like being a house-elf … [e]xcept without the job-satisfaction".[122] McDaniel shows that like many housewives in the real world, whose talents and unpaid domestic labour are often taken for granted

[115] Gupta 2003:120.
[116] McDaniel 2007:185 & 186.
[117] Rowling 2000:466.
[118] Rowling 1998:133.
[119] Rowling 2000:330–334.
[120] Rowling 2003:341 & 342.
[121] Rowling 2000:161.
[122] Rowling 2007a:91.

and regarded as having little or no value, the house-elves are treated with indifference and dismissal by the magical community and their powerful magical powers are confined to the domestic sphere. Bradley[123] explains that even though women today have increased participation in the workforce and sociologists (such as Rosemary Crompton) believe that the male breadwinner regime is in decline in Britain, women continue to sacrifice their careers to take care of their children. In dual-career families where both spouses work, most women still do the bulk of the housework: "Despite discourses of equality, the male breadwinner tradition is deeply embedded. There is a vicious circle of conformity: gendered economic inequalities impel couples to choose the higher-earning man to be the main breadwinner, which leads women to stay at home, which helps perpetuate the pay gap."[124] Garrett points out that even when women are the primary earners in families, they often still do the bulk of the housework, childrearing and caring for elderly relatives.[125] Thus many women in the twenty-first century are still bound to a role of domestic servitude by the invisible chains of culture and tradition. As Betty Friedan pointed out many years ago in *The Feminine Mystique*,[126] these women are expected to find identity and meaning in their lives through caring for their husbands and children, but end up losing themselves in the process. McDaniel likens them to the house-elves in Rowling's magical world since many of them become complicit in their own enslavement because they are anaesthetised by the security and comfort of the familiar. Instead of a "feminine mystique", the house-elves are bound by an "elfin mystique" that chains them to domesticity and makes them fear liberation. In her portrayal of the house-elves Rowling shows that like Dobby (who dies a Free Elf)[127] and Kreacher (the old grump who gradually mellows under kindness and leads the charge of the house-elves during the battle at Hogwarts),[128] the choice to be free and to embrace freedom has to come from the enslaved themselves. McDaniel illustrates that a second-wave feminist reading of the novels reveals Rowling's subtle understanding of how problematic liberation can sometimes be for the enslaved and that her liberal views and gender position are consistent throughout the books, even though it is more complex than what it at first appears to be.

The Snape family is one of the dysfunctional families in the magical world. Severus Snape grew up in an impoverished, abusive family and was physically and emotionally neglected

[123] Bradley 2007a:95 & 96.
[124] Bradley 2007a:96.
[125] Garrett 2007:131.
[126] Friedan 1963.
[127] Rowling 2007a:384, 389.
[128] Rowling 2007a:588.

as a child.[129] His muggle father verbally abused his witch mother (most probably also physically since Harry sees her cowering in Snape's memory) and he becomes an outsider, who was victimised and bullied at school: "... a hook-nosed man was shouting at a cowering woman, while a small dark-haired boy cried in a corner ... a greasy-haired teenager sat alone in a dark bedroom, pointing his wand at the ceiling, shooting down flies ... a girl was laughing as a scrawny boy tried to mount a bucking broomstick –".[130] Snape's family is an example of how the traditional, male-dominated nuclear family structure can be detrimental to women and children as a social institution where men often use violence to exert control over their families.

The Malfoy family belongs to the wizard nobility and their ancestry can be traced back to the seventeenth century. They are wealthy snobs who do not hesitate to use their status and position in society to further their own aims. They are also extremely arrogant, cold-hearted and prejudiced. Ron explains to Hermione after Draco calls her a "mudblood": "There are some wizards – like Malfoy's family – who think they're better than everyone because they're what people call pure-blood."[131] The Malfoys are ruthless, scheming and cruel. After a confrontation with Dumbledore which leaves him at a disadvantage, Lucius Malfoy takes out his anger and frustration on his helpless house-elf: "He wrenched open the door, and as the elf came hurrying to him, he kicked him right through it. They could hear Dobby squealing with pain all the way along the corridor."[132] The father and son's aggression and lack of compassion extend to human beings, magical folk and animals. Draco treats the hippogriff Buckbeak with disdain and viciously stamps on Harry's face when Harry lies defenceless and motionless on the floor of the Hogwarts Express.[133] Narcissa Malfoy, a descendant of an equally ancient and prejudiced wizard family, looks down on those who are on a lower societal rung and of a lesser breed than her with disdain and loathing that matches that of her husband and son. Harry describes her as a woman "wearing a look that suggested there was a nasty smell under her nose".[134] The family is part of Voldemort's Death Eaters, a male-dominated supremacist group with a ruthless pecking order. They switch sides back and forth to avoid danger. Voldemort, with his gift of legilimency

[129] Rowling 2007a:532–536.
[130] Rowling 2003:521 & 522.
[131] Rowling 1998:89.
[132] Rowling 1998:247 & 248.
[133] Rowling 1999:90; 2003:147.
[134] Rowling 2000:92.

(mind reading), is aware of this because he calls Lucius "my slippery friend".[135] The Malfoys fall out of favour with Voldemort when Lucius fails to retrieve the prophecy the Dark Lord wants from the Ministry of Magic. Later, Voldemort takes over their manor house and humiliates them despite their noble blood and lofty status.[136] They become a laughing stock among the Death Eaters and are reduced to grovelling servants of the Dark Lord in their own home. Although males outnumber females, power dynamics among the Death Eaters seem not to be based on gender but rather on who holds the most power at a given time.

The noble and most ancient House of Black is one of the largest and most prominent wizard families in Britain. The Blacks' family tree dates back to the Middle Ages and, like the Malfoys, they too have a long tradition of class and racial prejudice. Sirius Black avers of his family: "… I hated the whole lot of them: my parents, with their pure-blood mania, convinced that to be a Black made you practically royal …"[137] The Blacks are connected not only to other prominent "pureblood" families like the Malfoys and the Lestranges, but also to families of mixed blood like the Tonks family. Sirius explains: "The pure-blood families are all interrelated … . If you're going to let your sons and daughters marry pure-bloods your choice is very limited; there are hardly any of us left."[138] Over the years, a number of male and female members of the family have rebelled and defied their ancestors' supremacist values and principles. They turned their backs on social prestige and privilege by marrying outside the bloodline (for example Andromeda, the mother of Tonks and sister of Bellatrix Lestrange and Narcissa Malfoy) or following their own ideals (such as Sirius, who ran away from home when he was 16 years old).[139] These members were simply disowned and blasted off the family tree. The Black family is divided and fight against each other on opposite sides of the war that threatens to ravage both the magical world and the muggle world: on the one side are the Death Eater family members who support Voldemort and on the other side are the family members who oppose supremacist ideals and fight against Voldemort. The House of Black is fraught with internal strife and violence (for example, Bellatrix kills her disowned relatives Sirius and Tonks in battle), and this is reflected in the dirty screech-filled house which becomes the headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix.

[135] Rowling 2000:564.
[136] Rowling 2007a:14–17.
[137] Rowling 2003:104.
[138] Rowling 2003:105.
[139] Rowling 2003:103 & 105.

Social stratification is one of the aspects that powerfully shape individuals' performances of gender. In the magical world, ancient families like the Blacks and Malfoys are the nobility, who live in huge mansions, own house-elves who are at their beck and call, and have bank vaults full of gold and other treasures. They tend to be arrogant snobs with social and political clout who look down on beings whom they consider inferior to them. Harry and Hermione belong to the middle class, while the Weasleys represent the poor in magical society: they live in a ramshackle house and have to find the best bargains on school supplies and make do with second-hand textbooks.[140] Yet they are self-reliant and Harry realises that they will stubbornly refuse any financial assistance he offers: "Harry would willingly have split all the money in his Gringotts vault with the Weasleys, but he knew they would never take it."[141] Although most of the Weasley children are self-confident and content, Ron often feels embarrassed about his second-hand clothes and scruffy pets[142] and is ridiculed by wealthy pupils such as Draco Malfoy.[143] This undoubtedly contributes to his initial low self-esteem and sense of inadequacy. Percy Weasley seems hell bent not to end up like his father; he rebels and deserts his family because of their insufficient finances and low social status, but later returns to their fold.

In the multiracial society of contemporary Britain, social class and race remain pertinent issues. Britain is still built on notions of social class and the queen maintains her position at the top of the social class structure.[144] Despite claims of a classless society in which "the barriers between the classes no longer exist",[145] Storry and Childs affirm that pronouncing the death of class in Britain is premature:

> A recent wide-ranging survey of public opinion found 90 per cent of people still placing themselves in a particular class; 73 per cent agreed that class was still an integral part of British society; 52 per cent thought there were still sharp class divisions. Thus, class may have become culturally and politically invisible, yet remains an integral part of British society. Britain seems to have a love of stratification and hierarchy.[146]

[140] Rowling 1998:38.
[141] Rowling 2000:140.
[142] Rowling 2000:139 & 140.
[143] Rowling 2000:149 & 150.
[144] Class is STILL the Issue the IWCA's Analysis of Class in Modern Britain 2010:sp; Wikipedia 2010:sp.
[145] "Social Class in Britain Today" 2007:sp.
[146] Storry & Childs 2007:180.

Although economic inequality is at the root of many social ills and various definitions of social class group people on the basis of occupation, education and income, theorists such as Annette Kuhn and Pierre Bordieu argue that the concept involves more than wealth since it marks people as superior or inferior. Social class influences political discourse and social policy; it also has sociological and psychological implications for people's identities because it penetrates to and influences notions of who they are. Kuhn writes:

> Class is not just about the way you talk, or dress, or furnish your home; it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it, nor is it merely about whether or not you went to university, nor which university you went to. Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your psyche, at the very core of your being. In the all-encompassing English class system, if you know that you are in the "wrong" class, you know that therefore you are a valueless person.[147]

Bordieu maintains that class is embedded in a person's history and that social mobility is difficult to achieve since one does not automatically move to another class when one's economic circumstances improve. He argues that this is due largely to social and cultural capital, which is the prestige or recognition that people acquire over time. Social and cultural capital is embodied in what we do and how we do it; where we come from; and how we use language and pronounce words (our accents).[148] In the *Harry Potter* books, the elite and privileged in society uses dress, education and language to set themselves apart from "inferior" classes and races.[149] Umbridge speaks to Hagrid in a patronising way which suggests that he is a dimwit who cannot speak properly and the house-elves' language abilities differ markedly from that of their masters.[150]

Contemporary Britain is a melting pot of different ethnicities. Apart from its four separate indigenous populations (the English, the Scottish, the Welsh and the Northern Irish), the country has to cope with an ever-increasing influx of immigrants. An ICM opinion poll on race relations, commissioned by BBC News Online in 2001, revealed that although most of the participants in the study agreed that British society was more racially tolerant than a decade previously, more than half of them believed they lived in a racist society.[151] The study also showed that 47% of the white participants felt that immigration had harmed British

[147] Kuhn 1995:98.
[148] Bordieu 1993.
[149] Fenske 2008:282.
[150] Rowling 2000:89 & 90; 2003:395–397.
[151] BBC News Online, 20 May 2002.

society in the preceding 50 years (compared to 28% who felt it had benefited Britain) and that almost two-thirds of them believed immigrants did not make a positive contribution to the country.

Diane Abbott, a female British MP of African descent, reminds us that "there are many lifetimes of war, conquest, history, literature, culture and myth behind the idea that Britain is a racially pure society".[152] She explains:

> From the days when the Norman French invaded Anglo-Saxon Britain, we have been a culturally diverse nation. But because the different nationalities shared a common skin colour, it was possible to ignore the racial diversity which always existed in the British Isles. And even if you take race to mean what it is often commonly meant to imply – skin colour – there have been black people in Britain for centuries.

Abbott outlines how the British Empire was built on a creed of racial superiority in terms of which people whose lands had been conquered were portrayed as inferior and their "inferiority" was used as legitimisation for taking over their countries and ruling over them as subordinates with second-class status and deficient cultures. Thus archaeologists believed for a long time that black people were incapable of creating the sculptures and carvings of the city of Benin in Nigeria; history and textbooks proclaim that Europeans "discovered" countries like Australia and the source of rivers like the Nile when the indigenous populations of these places "knew perfectly well where the source of the Nile was". She mentions ways in which different races have enriched contemporary British life and concludes: "Britain is a more open, more multi-racial society than ever before. And one where different races and cultural influences are beginning to be positively acknowledged and given equal respect. We have come some way but there is still further to go."

A notable feature of the magical world is that racial prejudice and oppression is not based on skin colour but on blood status. Although there are a few non-white characters in the books (for example Angelina Johnson is described as "a tall black girl with long, braided hair"[153] and names such as Parvati Patil and Cho Chang identify the girls as Asian), Rowling uses racial descriptors as if a character's skin colour/race has no more significance than the colour of his or her eyes or hair. Mikhail Lyubansky explains that this colour-blind ideal is part of

[152] Abbott 2009:sp.
[153] Rowling 2003:202.

the contemporary neo-conservative racial ideology in terms of which race as a biological given is regarded as being of no consequence because although every person is viewed as unique, all people are considered to be essentially equal as human beings. He points out that critics of this ideal maintain that colour-blindness does nothing to ameliorate or curtail the institutional and interpersonal racism which is a real part of the daily lives and painful experiences of people of colour; pretending and acting that racism does not exist (similar to the Ministry of Magic's denial that Voldemort has returned) actually serve to maintain the racial hierarchy because in order to see and address racism, one first has to see and acknowledge race. Critics also argue that race is an integral part of people's identities because it shapes their cultural experiences and sense of self; ignoring race or pretending that it does not exist can render people of colour "invisible" and give them the message that their plight is unimportant. This is especially important because although cultural differences generally go unnoticed in Rowling's multicultural magical society, they are sometimes celebrated (for example Seamus Finnigan's shamrock-covered tent and the decorations of the different nations and ethnic groups at the Quidditch World Cup).[154] Lyubansky argues that Rowling's portrayal of race is problematic even within neo-conservative ideology because even though she intended her world to parallel the demographics of contemporary Britain, it has only a few (insignificant) non-white characters and only Cho Chang's character seems to have been developed to a degree. He points out that by describing characters as "black" (even in an attempt to show the absence of racism) Rowling inadvertently refers to race and signifies acceptance of racial categories.

Racial tension in the *Harry Potter* books centres on "pureblood" superiority, which functions as a metaphor for racial intolerance and oppression in the real world and our "obsession with interracial sex and marriage".[155] Racial prejudice, inequality and oppression in Rowling's world persist not only between wizards/witches and muggles but also between wizards/witches and other magical beings such as giants and goblins, whom most witches and wizards regard as inferior and culturally and morally deficient. Only witches and wizards are allowed to carry or use wands[156] and they do not share their knowledge of magic with other magical beings.[157] In addition, other groups (such as the merpeople, werewolves and centaurs) are denied rights and are segregated or restricted to certain geographical areas

[154] Rowling 2000:76 & 77.
[155] Lyubansky 2010:sp.
[156] Rowling 2000:119.
[157] Rowling 2007:395.

by the Ministry of Magic. Racism (the belief that one's race is the best) is not only apparent in its extreme form in Voldemort and his followers, but also in a more covert and subtle form in wizards and witches who oppose Voldemort's ideology (for example, Ron cannot be bothered with the plight of the house-elves and Arthur Weasley's career in the Ministry of Magic has ground to a halt because Cornelius Fudge thinks Arthur lacks wizarding pride because of his fondness for muggles).[158] The goblin Griphook tells Harry: "As the Dark Lord becomes ever more powerful, your race is set still more firmly above mine! Gringotts falls under wizarding rule, house-elves are slaughtered, and who amongst the wand-carriers protests?"[159]

Gupta[160] affirms that blood as lineage in the magical world is analogous to race in the real world and that the fascist politics of the magical world resonate with the politics of race which in various forms "has subsumed and continues to subsume our world".[161] She observes further:

> Even as I write this (summer 2002) in London, the newspapers I read are occupied with the so-called immigration "problem" in Europe, the rise of the far right in a range of Western European countries in local and national elections (Austria, Denmark, France, Holland, Italy, Germany, Britain), the fall-out of the terrorist attacks of 11 September in the US, the terrible bloodshed between Israelis and Palestinians – and all of these are at the root to do with the politics of race. In Britain the heightened awareness of institutional racism following the Stephen Lawrence murder (April 1993) case; a continuous bubbling of hysteria directed against allegedly vast numbers of asylum seekers who are targeting Britain; a series of racial riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in summer 2001; Britain's delicate role of chief instigator of the "war against international terrorism" after the US following the terrorist attacks of 11 September; the gains made by the far right British Nationalist Party in local elections in May 2002 – all these have kept the politics of race on the forefront. Lurking behind these immediate manifestations, a long history of imperialism and discriminatory politics, as well as hard-fought emancipator battles, stretches backward. In our world the pervasiveness of the politics of race is difficult to evade; unthinkingly or otherwise the presentation of magical races and the wizard politics that devolves from the conflict between them is bound to become a gesture made in the politics of race in our world.[162]

[158] Rowling 2000:125, 197–199, 617.
[159] Rowling 2007:395.
[160] Gupta 2003:99–110.
[161] Gupta 2003:103.
[162] Gupta 2003:103 & 104.

For Butler, gender, race and class are always interwoven: "Race and class are rendered distinct analytically only to produce the realization that the analysis of the one cannot proceed without the other."[163] Bradley also maintains that race, class and gender are linked because they are all sites of inequality and oppression: "It has become almost a commonplace to say that classes are gendered and that gender relations are class-specific. Similarly the other dimensions of race/ethnicity and age impinge on individual class and gender experience and in any particular concrete example it is hard to separate out the different aspects."[164]

Merope Gaunt (Voldemort's mother) is probably the most problematic and enigmatic of Rowling's female characters because the dynamics of gender, race and class inequality and oppression converge so blatantly in her life. Merope is a poor, dirty and ugly witch: "Her hair was lank and dull and she had a plain, pale, rather heavy face. Her eyes, like her brother's, stared in opposite directions. She looked a little cleaner than the two men, but Harry thought he had never seen a more defeated-looking person."[165] The Gaunts (as remembered by Dumbledore) were a prominent ancient wizard family who became unstable and violent because of their penchant to marry their cousins to keep their blood pure and they ended up living in squalor and poverty because they squandered their wealth. Merope's father prefers his dim-witted son over his hard-working daughter. She lives in a shack with her father and brother, who abuse her emotionally and physically. She has to cook and clean the shack and is little more than a downtrodden slave. Her father's degrading words, which paint her as a good-for-nothing-squib, become a self-fulfilling prophecy and she is unable to do magic while she lives with him. However, her magical talents re-emerge when her father and brother are imprisoned in Azkaban and she is freed from their abuse. She grows strong enough – on her own initiative and through her own contrivance – to bewitch Tom Riddle (senior), the wealthy and handsome son of a squire with whom she is besotted, and they elope. Dumbledore says of this social outrage: "Little Hangleton enjoyed a tremendous scandal. You can imagine the gossip it caused when the squire's son ran off with the tramp's daughter Merope."[166] Tom, who has made no secret of his derision for the Gaunts prior to his bewitchment, deserts Merope and his unborn son when she stops giving him love potion because she hopes he has learned to love her during their brief marriage. Dumbledore speculates that she no longer wanted to be a witch after her husband rejected and deserted

[163] Butler 1998:sp.
[164] Bradley 2007b:19.
[165] Rowling 2005a:194.
[166] Rowling 2005a:202.

her, since she did not use magic to improve her lot, but instead lived as a pauper in London, selling her valuables and family heirlooms to survive. Although her magical powers might have been weakened by sadness and depression (as Dumbledore suggests), she might also have refused to use magic to protect her unborn son from the abuse she suffered while growing up, because she knew the Ministry of Magic could detect where and when magic was used and could have helped her father to find her. If this is the case, her sacrifice makes her a heroic figure in the mode of Lily Potter, who also sacrifices her life for her son. This poverty-stricken witch resorts to artifice and cunning to transgress gender, class and racial boundaries for the sake of love, but the odds are stacked against her and she fails. Merope Gaunt (the "pureblood" and direct descendant of the supremacist Salazar Slytherin) dies destitute in a muggle orphanage while giving birth to her "halfblood" son who would become a social scourge.[167]

Poor single mothers in contemporary Britain are doubly oppressed because of gender and class inequalities and relationships of power. If they do not have the right skin colour or ethnicity, the problems that stem from racial inequality and oppression add to their crippling burdens. In her paper on the social construction of single mothers' inequality and poverty, McCarthy argues that women's inequality is partially constructed by social discourse in politics and the media.[168] She explains that in the shift from government-based social provision to an individually responsible government-organised provision of welfare, a justification had to be found for measures that would financially deprive single mothers with dependent children. The consequence was that a stereotype of single mothers as a homogenous group was created, which represents them as "unmarried" mothers who live in poverty and are typically sexually promiscuous teenagers. This simulacrum of poor single mothers switches attention from the government's withdrawal of support from women and children to a call for greater moral rectitude and the stamping out of promiscuity.[169] Consequently public discourse portrays poor single mothers as a burden to the state; they are bad and incompetent mothers whose families are detrimental to communities of good citizens because they inevitably churn out fatherless petty criminals and undesirables in a bid to get council houses and live off welfare benefits. McCarthy points out that this discourse is propagated despite research in the West showing that percentages of very young unmarried

[167] Merope's story appears in *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (pp. 189–203 and 244–250). She is also mentioned fleetingly elsewhere, for example in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*.
[168] McCarthy 2001.
[169] McCarthy 2001:263 & 264.

mothers are in fact decreasing.[170] Poor single mothers (irrespective of whether they are divorced, widowed or have never been married) are marked as the "other" in and by society; they are portrayed as a socially deviant group outside mainstream society and the patriarchal nuclear family becomes a backdrop against which these women and their families are marginalised, vilified and judged.[171] The social construction of their identities places them at a disadvantage both in terms of being treated fairly in the welfare system and having access to resources and opportunities that will enable them to climb out of the poverty trap and lead better lives.

Because the magical world is part of Britain, it is inevitably a world beset with social problems and injustices that reflect the stereotypes and biases of British culture. However, as with sexism, the fact that there are bigoted characters in the books does not mean that their author or the books are inherently bigoted. Rowling unequivocally makes clear her own position on gender, class and race. Rothstein points out that her "heroes are the hybrids, the misfits, those of mixed blood, all bearing scars of loss and love: the half-giant Hagrid, the mudblood Hermione (whose parents were not wizards), the poverty-stricken Ron, the orphaned Harry".[172] Amy Sturgis writes:

> She explores Prejudice in her series through a variety of relationships and metaphors. Whether it is the elite Malfoys' distaste for the poor or non-pureblood magical folk, or the Dursleys' fear of anyone abnormal, or the wizarding community's prejudice toward giants and werewolves and Squibs, or the centaurs' disdain towards humans, or even the headless ghosts' dismissal of the nearly headless, Rowling provides a variety of examples of how bigotry hurts its victims and, in the end, the bigots themselves, as well.[173]

Seelinger Trites observes that "everything in adolescent literature is designed to teach adolescents their place in the power structure"[174] and Lisa Hopkins[175] points out that a notable characteristic of the villains in *Harry Potter* is that they "do not learn and tend to be dismissive of the modes and ideology of knowledge acquisition". George Bear, Herbert Richards and John Gibbs[176] explain that in order "to act in a moral way, a person must first understand how his or her actions affect the welfare of others, judge whether such actions

[170] McCarthy 2001:264.
[171] McCarthy 2001:264 & 265.
[172] Rothstein 2007:sp.
[173] Sturgis 2004:7.
[174] Seelinger Trites 2001:480.
[175] Hopkins 2003:30.
[176] Bear, Richards & Gibbs 1997:14.

are right or wrong, intend to act in accord with this judgement and follow through with this intention." Although the wizard world appears to be a clear-cut moral universe in which good and evil are juxtaposed, it is in fact a nuanced and multifarious space where adolescents who have to develop into socially responsible adults are taught to make moral choices in the midst of increasing chaos and uncertainty. Seelinger Trites argues: "In order to mature, teenagers must understand that sexuality is a powerful tool, that they are mortal and will therefore die, that they must both break free and accept the authority figures in their lives, and that they are institutionally situated creatures, as all people are."[177] It is significant that Voldemort's ultimate aim is to conquer death through immortality. Seelinger Trites[178] describes him as "something of a teenager run amok – a rebel who refuses to internalise the repression mandated by his civilization. He wants to have power so that he can use it to dominate others."

Social institutions shape an individual's experience of himself or herself as a gendered being. The feminist slogan "The personal is political" (every part of our personal lives are influenced and affected by sociopolitical forces) is also true with regard to peer and amorous relationships in the *Harry Potter* series. I explore gender in personal relationships in the next chapter.

[177] Seelinger Trites 2001:480.
[178] Seelinger Trites 2001:481.

CHAPTER 3
THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL

As I have shown in the previous chapter, despite some changes that have improved their lives, women are still in a disadvantaged position relative to men across a wide range of societal institutions in contemporary Britain. Stereotypical views of men and women, for example that "men are from Mars and women are from Venus",[1] continue to influence the experience and expression of emotions and the communication of camaraderie and control in personal relationships. In the *Harry Potter* series (especially in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*) Rowling not only explores the complexities of and constraints on gender dynamics in personal relationships, but also portrays the similarities and differences between males and females as a continuously constructed and reconstructed process that emerges from their interactions as friends and love interests. Instead of perpetuating the common assumption that women and men come from different psychological and sociological planets, she shows that human beings are complex individuals and that they are both alike and different in many ways (in sympathy with a lot of current anti-essentialist research into gender).

Peer interactions and relationships play a central role in adolescents' identity development and it is in this field that gendered relationships and power play are most evident at Hogwarts. Heilman and Anne Gregory[2] say that "the peer group serves as the context for sociable behaviour, the exploration of social relationships, and it provides a sense of belonging for the adolescent". The friendship between Ron, Hermione and Harry provides ample space for self-expression and is conducive to the development of self-esteem, their own identities and an understanding of the other/s – precisely because it does not only consist of loyalty, commitment and support but also gives the friends the freedom to disagree with each other and opportunities to work through tension and conflict. Hermione does not give up her principles to be popular with her friends[3] and there are occasions when the friends rebuff one another[4] or are not on speaking terms.[5]

[1] Gray 1993.
[2] Heilman & Gregory 2003:248 & 249.
[3] Rowling 1999:173.
[4] Rowling 1999:186.
[5] Rowling 2000:251–259.

As Dumbledore tells Neville: "It takes a great deal of courage to stand up to your enemies, but a great deal more, to stand up to your friends."[6] Despite being a mixed gender group, the three friends forge a strong and lasting friendship that endures from their first year at Hogwarts into adulthood and it is only with the help of his friends that Harry defeats Voldemort. The relationship between the three is also a friendship that expands often to include adults (for example Hagrid and Sirius) and other adolescents (for example Luna and Neville) of both sexes.

Except for the marauders' relentless bullying of Severus Snape, the friendship between Hermione, Harry and Ron mirrors the close bond that existed between James Potter, Remus Lupin, Sirius Black and – to a lesser extent – Peter Pettigrew. Three of the friends transgressed magical law and became unregistered animagi to help Lupin during his terrible transformations into a werewolf. James (Prongs) became a noble stag, Sirius (Padfoot) a huge black dog and Pettigrew (Wormtail) a scurrying rat so that they could provide Lupin with companionship without endangering themselves and keep him from harming himself and other people during full moon. Lupin voices his appreciation for their loyalty, trust and unselfishness when he tells Harry: "… they didn't desert me at all. Instead they did something for me that would make my transformations not only bearable, but the best times of my life. They became Animagi."[7] Although Wormtail was a member of the marauders, who created the marauder's map (which displays the grounds of Hogwarts and enables one to track the goings and comings of the school's residents and therefore move around unencumbered), he seems to have been a weakling who joined the group out of self-interest and was barely tolerated. Sirius tells him: "… You always liked big friends who'd look after you, didn't you? It used to be us … me and Remus … and James …" and "… you never did anything for anyone unless you could see what was in it for you. … You weren't about to commit murder right under Albus Dumbledore's nose, for a wreck of a wizard who'd lost all his power, were you? You'd want to be quite sure he was the biggest bully in the playground before you went back to him, wouldn't you?"[8] The four Gryffindors bullied the troubled Slytherin Snape and soured his school life to such an extent that as an adult, he still harbours bitter animosity towards them. Although James and Sirius were the

[6] Rowling 1997:221.
[7] Rowling 1999:259.
[8] Rowling 1999:271.

ringleaders in the bullying, Wormtail cheered them on and Lupin (himself a despised outsider) did not stop them. As with Ron, Harry and Hermione, the marauders had no visible leader and treated each other as equals. They joined the Order of the Phoenix as adults and broke up when they were hurled into a cloud of betrayal and deceit in the wake of Lily and James Potter's murders.

Dudley's gang is a bunch of hooligans who terrorise children and vandalise the pristine and law-abiding neighbourhood of Little Whining.[9] Dudley is the leader of the group and is physically the biggest and strongest, which means he can intimidate people more easily. His best friend Piers Polkiss is a scrawny, rat-faced boy who usually "held people's arms behind their backs while Dudley hit them".[10] The other members of the gang are Dennis, Malcolm and Gordon. These five boys deceive their parents, sadistically delight in the wails of those who are weaker than them, and indulge in unproductive and destructive delinquency.[11] Unlike Hermione, Harry and Ron, who are strong individuals and combine their different talents and characteristics to form an even stronger group, these boys find power and strength as a group and are rather weak and insignificant as individuals.

The friendship between Ron, Hermione and Harry also contrasts with the egotistical and short-lived relationship between Draco Malfoy and his cronies Crabbe and Goyle. Draco is not physically imposing and relies on his two overgrown and thick-skulled "bodyguards" to intimidate others and do most of his dirty work for him. They "seemed to exist to do Malfoy's bidding"[12] and he rarely goes anywhere without them, but their allegiance is grounded in self-interest and not true friendship. Crabbe and Goyle turn against their leader during crisis towards the end of the series and desert him when it is no longer beneficial for them to be associated with him.[13] Of the four houses of the school, Slytherin represents gender stereotypes most and this is reflected in Draco's all-male band, which mirrors Dudley's gang and leaves little space for individuality and self-development. Although Pansy Parkinson is often seen with Malfoy's gang,

[9] Rowling 2003:8.
[10] Rowling 1997:22 & 23.
[11] Rowling 2003:8.
[12] Rowling 1999:63.
[13] Rowling 2007a:506.

she is not a member of the group but a hanger-on and romantic interest who fawns over Malfoy.[14]

Malfoy's and Dudley's peer groups thrive on masculine violence, conformity and domination: they bully others through physical violence,[15] verbal abuse,[16] teasing and mocking,[17] and intimidation.[18] The marauders also indulge in bullying by belittling and humiliating Snape. Salisbury and Jackson explain that bullying is a form of conventional masculinity that centres on power and control of others, particularly those who are weaker and/or marginalised.[19] It is perpetrated by individual males or groups of males who

> struggle to become more masculine in a male-dominated culture. It is about the way many boys try desperately to reassert power and mastery over events and others in a situation where they feel increasingly weak and vulnerable … . There is a link between power and vulnerability in boys' lives – about how they try to get their own way to counter their fears about their anxiety, dependency and a sense of their own weakness.[20]

The corrupting influence of and thirst for power is an important theme of the *Harry Potter* series. On a group level, it leads to groupings and associations of one-sided convenience, mutual convenience and even exploitation. On an individual level, it is especially evident in the self-centred Voldemort and the bungling Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge. In the first book, Fudge "pelts Dumbledore with owls every morning asking for advice",[21] but he later descends into unreasonableness because of his ambition for power and status (to the extent that he stubbornly refuses to acknowledge Voldemort's return and tries to arrest Hogwarts' wise and respected headmaster). Percy Weasley also succumbs to his thirst for power and status, and Dolores Umbridge becomes more corrupted by power and more sadistically vicious as the series progresses. Voldemort's whole existence and quest for immortality is grounded in the lust for power and invincibility (including the power over death).

[14] Rowling 1999:94; 2005a:142–145.
[15] Rowling 2003:17; 2005:147.
[16] Rowling 2003:19; 2003:365 & 366.
[17] Rowling 1998:12; 2003:398.
[18] Rowling 1997:28; 1999:95.
[19] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:121 & 122.
[20] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:128.
[21] Rowling 1997:51.

As Tom Riddle (junior), Voldemort gathered a gang of followers around him. They shared Riddle's dark ideals and were mostly of recruits from Slytherin House. Dumbledore says: "They were a motley collection; a mixture of the weak seeking protection, the ambitious seeking some shared glory, and the thuggish gravitating toward a leader who could show them more refined forms of cruelty."[22] Riddle claimed the members of his gang were his friends, but the relationship between them was a parasitic one that was based on fear and self-interest and not on loyalty and trust; they merely used each other as stepping stones to achieve their own self-centred ambitions. This early gang of Tom Riddle was a forerunner of the Death Eaters and many of its members became the first Death Eaters after they left Hogwarts.[23]

Because of his parents' allegiance to Voldemort, Draco finds himself in the male-dominated culture of the Death Eaters where the weak and vulnerable often have to pay for their shortcomings with their lives. As with his early gang, the Death Eaters serve Voldemort (the arch-bully)[24] more out of fear than loyalty and are motivated by self-interest rather than friendship and trust. In the last two books of the series, it becomes increasingly clear that Draco is in over his head – his family are mere puppets in Voldemort's ruthless hands,[25] he is given a deathly mission that is intended to torture his parents slowly[26] and he feels so overwhelmed that he resorts to crying in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom: "'No', said Myrtle defiantly, her voice echoing loudly around the old tiled bathroom. 'I mean he's sensitive, people bully him, too, and he feels lonely and hasn't got anybody to talk to, and he's not afraid to show his feelings and cry!'"[27] It is significant that Draco finds refuge in a toilet and that he cannot share his fears with his cronies. Hermione also flees to the toilet to be alone and cry during her first year at Hogwarts when Ron is nasty to her.[28] Bradley[29] remembers her own terrors of being different at school in early adolescence and how she hid in the toilet during break so that no one would see that she had no friends. Alice Mills[30] writes:

[22] Rowling 2005a:338.
[23] Rowling 2005a:339.
[24] Rowling 1999:271; 2005a:250.
[25] Rowling 2007a:15–18, 515.
[26] Rowling 2007a:547.
[27] Rowling 2005a:433.
[28] Rowling 1997:127.
[29] Bradley 2007a:26.
[30] Mills 2006:1 & 2.

> For schoolboys, the toilet is a place where, it is rumoured, bullies force their victims' heads down the bowl and flush water over them as a form of torture … the girls' toilet becomes a place of refuge, where the victim can weep without being publicly shamed (though everyone seems to know what she is doing, and where). Sometimes her tears flow because of being bullied – but not by being physically assaulted and held down over the bowl while the toilet is flushed, as is the common threat for boys. Rather, for the weeping girl, the toilet is the optimal place to escape any bullies, and to cry without fear of reprisal.

Rowling is obviously aware of the traditional gendered uses of toilets: Dudley tries to bully Harry by threatening to flush his head in the toilet[31] and Moaning Myrtle met her death there while hiding from a bully and crying because the girl had teased her about her glasses.[32] By letting Draco cry in the toilet and confide in a girl (albeit a ghost), Rowling subverts the traditional gendered uses of toilets and androgynises Draco's character. Mills also writes that since Moaning Myrtle becomes increasingly in command of and more mobile in Hogwarts' plumbing system, she can pop out of any tap, toilet, shower or bath and becomes a modernised version of the "typical water-torture threat in the English schoolboy-story tradition, replacing the male bully with a voyeuristically aggressive female character".[33]

Harry and Draco are often at loggerheads because for Harry, "Draco Malfoy made Dudley Dursley look like a kind, thoughtful and sensitive boy".[34] The conflict between Harry and Draco can be seen as a conflict between two approaches to masculinity: Harry's version is communal and inclusive, while Draco's is aggressive powermongering. Salisbury and Jackson explain that in addressing bullying amongst schoolboys, it is important to enable them to show and express their emotions since they are often too scared to do this with their peers because they fear being viewed as less than manly.[35] It is therefore significant that the animosity between Harry and Draco abates towards the end of the series when Draco starts to acknowledge his emotions and seems to move towards an alternative masculinity; instead of his usual delight in cruelty and his eagerness to impress his father, he demonstrates reluctance in identifying Harry, Ron and

[31] Rowling 1997:28.
[32] Rowling 1998:221.
[33] Mills 2006:9.
[34] Rowling 1998:27.
[35] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:120–122.

Hermione when they are caught by Voldemort's henchmen and taken to Malfoy Manor.[36] (Harry and Dudley also manage to patch up their differences when Dudley struggles to voice his emotions but still manages to let Harry know that he loves him when their paths part for good.)[37] However, Fenske[38] points out that in the concluding chapter of the series, we see that Draco has named his son "Scorpius" after a poisonous animal – which suggests that the boy has been earmarked to carry on the family tradition of inequality, cruelty and hegemonic masculinity.

Of course, girls are also subjected to bullying – and not only by boys; they are often mean and nasty to each other and resort to "vicious games of inclusion and exclusion".[39] Aapola *et al* refer to Hey who observes that "girls' divorces are often messy". They continue: "In a peer review, girls mentioned several behaviours that other girls used against persons they were angry with, and which can be classified as indirect aggression: excluding a person from social interactions, sulking, talking behind someone's back and seeking other friends as revenge."[40] They go on to explain that because it is still culturally more unacceptable for females to express aggression than it is for males, females tend to "other" each other (for example by gossiping about their opponents/rivals or defining them as unattractive or sexually promiscuous).[41] An example of a female bully in the wizard world is Pansy Parkinson, who is Draco's counterpart in many ways: she leads her own pack of girls,[42] makes snide and cutting remarks about other pupils[43] and spreads rumours about people she dislikes.[44] Even Hermione is vicious at times, for example she tells Harry and Ron that Pansy is a "complete cow" and "thicker than a concussed troll".[45] The animosity between Hermione and Pansy parallels that between Harry and Draco and, perhaps, also centres upon their approaches to femininity: Pansy is dependent and unambitious, while Hermione is an academic overachiever whose values – rather than her need for approval – govern her choices.

[36] Rowling 2007a:372.
[37] Rowling 2007a:39.
[38] Fenske 2006:197.
[39] Bradley 2007a:27 (quoting Gilligan 2002:91).
[40] Aapola *et al* 2005:117, 119.
[41] Aapola *et al* 2005: 119 & 120.
[42] Rowling 2000:471.
[43] Rowling 2000:277; 2003:261.
[44] Rowling 2000:444.
[45] Rowling 2003:171.

Rowling's portrayal of adolescents' gender socialisation through peer pressure is in harmony with Carol Giligan's[46] view that in early adolescence, the rules of young masculinity are more powerfully enforced than the norms for young femininity (for example boys who show their emotions are easily branded "sissies" as in the case of Neville, whom Pansy calls a fat cry-baby)[47] and young females are given more freedom to explore different types of gender roles (for example they can run with boys without censure, as Hermione does).

Because the *Harry Potter* series traces the development of the adolescents in the books, it naturally also includes their sexual awakening and awkward erotic experiences. Stromquist,[48] referring to Redman, argues:

> Sexual identity builds on cultural practices and unconscious identification processes during adolescence and early adult years … . In the U.K., "having a girlfriend" is taken for granted in the last years of primary school and this fosters the creation of a heterosexual culture for boys from which to exercise authority and autonomy. As students move into high school, peer cultures encourage the sexualization of girls, the demonstration of heterosexual skills by boys, and the active policing by peers of boys who are not perceived to occupy appropriate forms of masculinity.

The adolescent's bewilderment at being confronted with the unknown territory of romance and his or her own burgeoning sexuality is aptly portrayed in Ron's overeager amorous behaviour with Lavender Brown and his awkward and more confusing and serious interest in Hermione. Ron buckles under social pressure to have a girlfriend since he hooks up with Lavender after a heated argument with Ginny during which she belittles him because of his inexperience with girls and informs him that Hermione kissed Viktor Krum during his stay at Hogwarts. His exhibitionist snogging sessions with Lavender are as much an attempt to prove his manhood as an insensitive and immature way of dealing with his feelings for Hermione. Although Ron is always somewhat of a comical figure, he comes across in this episode as a sexed-up and insecure simpleton. Lavender openly compliments and flirts with him and she becomes so overwhelming and obsessive that when she finally ends the romance because of her jealousy of Hermione, Ron is immensely relieved. She brazenly transgresses normative gender behaviour by being assertive

[46] See Bradley 2007a:29.
[47] Rowling 1997:110.
[48] Stromquist 2007:20.

in and about her sexuality, despite the fact that girls who are perceived as sexually confident or aggressive are readily labelled "scarlet women" (to use Ron's mother's term).[49] Ron's rejection of her in favour of Hermione, who transgresses gender norms in more subtle ways by using her "feminine wiles", can be construed as reinforcement of the status quo. However, his choice is not a simple either/or matter: he has known Hermione for years, is fully aware that a relationship with her means constantly hovering between love and war,[50] and yet truly cares for her. Harry notices the attraction between the two long before they acknowledge their feelings for each other.[51] Hermione deserves another feather in her cap for her ingenuity in using social constructs about gender to further her own aims in her love–hate relationship with Ron.

Although Ginny says that Hermione kissed Victor when he was at Hogwarts, there is little evidence in the books that Hermione uses him to ignite or fan Ron's jealousy. She might be flattered by the attention she gets from the star athlete (as any heterosexual girl would be, especially if she has been desexualised because she is brainy and considered one of the guys), but it is obvious that she regards him as a friend and does not encourage his romantic feelings for her. For example, after the second task of the Triwizard Tournament, Hermione does not pay much attention to Viktor even though he tries his best to hold her attention: "Fleur was clapping very hard, too, but Krum didn't look very happy at all. He attempted to engage Hermione in conversation again, but she was too busy cheering Harry to listen."[52] Although she explores romantic relationships, she does not regress into silliness. She shows a mature grasp of adolescent male–female relationships[53] and does not let romantic interests sidetrack her from more important matters, such as helping Harry with his tasks for the tournament and uncovering Rita Skeeter's secret method of gathering information. At the Yule Ball, she appears genuinely surprised when Ron expresses his jealousy of Viktor.[54] Rowling complicates the relationship further when Rita drags Harry into the fray by portraying Hermione as a "scarlet woman" who toys with the affections of Harry and Viktor in one of her articles. Fortunately, both Harry and Viktor are mature enough to sort out the matter through a simple discussion that is devoid

[49] Rowling 2000:445.
[50] Rowling 2007a:321.
[51] Rowling 2005a:264 & 265.
[52] Rowling 2000:440.
[53] She advises Ginny, Ron and Harry about romantic relationships (Rowling 2005a:603; 2003:504 & 505).
[54] Rowling 2000:366–368.

of Ron's hotheadedness. Hermione too refuses to react impulsively and is confident enough in her sexuality to find the journalist's assertions laughable and hardly worthy of her attention.

Hermione deals with her feelings for Ron and her anger with herself for falling in love with a boy who has the "emotional range of a teaspoon"[55] in a more mature and constructive way than he does. Although she becomes withdrawn and moody, instead of belittling herself or damaging her reputation by snogging boys in public in retaliation for his fling with Lavender, she expresses her emotions and confronts the situation with calculated calm. Even when she vents her hurt and jealousy in ways that are not very mature, she succeeds in doing it with panache: she conjures up an unforgettable little flock of golden canaries to attack Ron maliciously[56] and resorts to traditional female behaviour (notably uncharacteristic of her) to get back at Ron by broadcasting that she has a date with Quidditch player Cormac McLaggen (who is a more capable and experienced athlete than Ron – and by implication also more masculine), knowing full well what the outcome will be: "At once Lavender and Parvati put their heads together to discuss this new development, with everything they had ever heard about McLaggen, and all they had ever guessed about Hermione. Ron looked strangely blank and said nothing. Harry was left to ponder in silence the depths to which girls would sink to get revenge."[57] If irrationality and emotionality are traditional feminine qualities, Ron fits the bill in engendering these qualities, while Hermione shows that she can rise above them even though she does sink into manipulative behaviour. At the same time, she shows her affection for Ron by visiting him regularly in the hospital wing after he is poisoned and later in the series cries for a week (or longer) after he deserts her and Harry during their search for the horcruxes.[58] Ron also becomes more mature, shows his true affection for Hermione and is even willing to die for her when the three friends are captured by the Death Eaters and taken to Malfoy Manor.[59] Glenna Andrade quotes Modleski to point out that Hermione's romance "simultaneously challenges and reaffirms traditional values, behaviour and attitudes".[60]

[55] Rowling 2003:406.
[56] Rowling 2005:282 & 283, 292.
[57] Rowling 2005: 293 & 294.
[58] Rowling 2007a:308.
[59] Rowling 2007a:375.
[60] Andrade 2008:11.

Harry's sexual awakening is evinced by his turbulent and short-lived feelings for Cho Chang and his realisation that he cares for Ginny Weasley, who has always had a crush on him. His confusion about this new aspect of his life is reflected in the following extract, which describes his and Ron's horror and sense of being overwhelmed in having to find partners for the Yule Ball:

> Harry had never known so much people to put their names down to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas ... . This year, however, everyone in the fourth year and above seemed to be staying, and they all seemed to Harry to be obsessed with the coming ball – or, at least, all the girls were, and it was amazing how many girls Hogwarts suddenly seemed to hold; he had never quite noticed that before. Girls giggling and whispering in the corridors, girls shrieking with laughter as boys passed them, girls excitedly comparing notes on what they were going to wear ... .
> "Why do they have to move in packs?" Harry asked Ron, as a dozen or so girls walked past them, sniggering and staring at Harry. "How're you supposed to get one on their own to ask them?"[61]

Viewed from Harry's adolescent perspective, it seems that girls have mysteriously multiplied and suddenly crawled out of the woodwork at Hogwarts. This humorously illustrates teenagers' heightened awareness of the opposite sex and their angst and confusion about their newfound sexuality and gender roles.

Harry is physically attracted to Cho[62] and wants to ask her to accompany him to the Yule Ball, but is too afraid and insecure to do it. When he eventually scrapes together enough courage to ask her, he learns that she has already accepted Cedric Diggory's invitation. Cho and Cedric's romance becomes a thorn of jealousy for Harry and the rivalry between the two Hogwarts participants in the Triwizard Tournament is essentially competition over the heart of the Asian beauty. Seelinger Trites[63] argues that the tournament serves as a mechanism for the two teenagers to work out their male aggression as they compete for the affection of the same girl. She writes: "By the tournament's end, both Cedric and Harry have descended to an underworld of death as they fight Voldemort, who is reborn into a new body during the enterprise. And Cedric, one of the characters who have felt sexually attracted to Cho Chang, dies there."[64]

[61] Rowling 2000:338 & 339.
[62] Rowling 1999:191 & 192.
[63] Seelinger Trites 2001:478.
[64] Seelinger Trites 2001:478.

Thus sexuality and death are linked as an essential element in the maturation of adolescents: "Accepting sexuality and mortality gives adolescents the ability to better understand the power and limitations of their own bodies."[65] This is an important theme in Western thought and can be traced back to the Garden of Eden where primeval man and woman became mortal after partaking of the forbidden fruit, which is often associated with unbridled desire and sexuality.

Ginny is an independent, wilful girl who acknowledges and is confident about her sexuality. She is romantically involved with a number of boys, which is not surprising since adolescents often experiment with different relationships to discover and refine their desires. On Hermione's advice, she overcomes her crippling crush on Harry and learns to relax around him. Growing up as an only daughter among boys has toughened her and she does not cry as easily as Cho[66] or take nonsense from anyone, including her friend Hermione.[67] In *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince*, Ginny and Ron have a heated argument during which Ron implies that she is promiscuous because of her popularity with the boys. Ginny rejects his depiction of her and cuts him down to size.[68] Meredith Cherland writes: "He invokes the fear of what people might say about her behavior. Without using the word, Ron positions her as 'slut'. But Ginny is quick to refuse this subject position. She stands her ground, points to the unfairness of a sexual double standard, and declares herself free to act as she pleases".[69] Her forceful personality and courage are contrasted with Cho's emotional volatility, indecisiveness and neediness.

Rowling portrays Harry as essentially a sexual person whose romantic attraction to girls are accompanied by strong physiological responses such as jolts and swooping sensations in his stomach and goose-bumps erupting on his neck.[70] The first time he saw Cho, he "couldn't help noticing, nervous as he was, that she was extremely pretty. She smiled at Harry as the teams faced each other behind their captains, and he felt a slight jolt in the region of his stomach that he didn't think had anything to do with nerves."[71] His attraction to Ginny is also powerfully physical and sensual. He first gets an inkling of his feelings for her in the Potions class

[65] Seelinger Trites 2001:478.
[66] Rowling 2007a:99.
[67] Rowling 2005a:496.
[68] Rowling 2005a:268–270.
[69] Cherland 2008:277 & 278.
[70] Rowling 1999:192; 2007a:281, 318.
[71] Rowling 1999:192

when he smells a cauldron of Amortentia (the most powerful love potion in the world), which makes one smell whatever one finds most attractive. One of the smells he sniffs is the flowery scent of the Burrow where the Weasley family lives and he later links this smell with Ginny.[72] He has always found her mischievous "bright brown eyes" and dancing "flaming red hair"[73] attractive and as he spends more time in her company, she becomes more than just Ron's little sister and despite his fear of alienating his best friend (which constrains him from wooing her): "... she kept cropping up in his dreams in ways that made him devoutly thankful that Ron could not perform Legilimency."[74] His attraction for her soon grows into a "monster" that "claws at his insides" and "roars"[75] with jealousy, but "purrs" and "sniffs hopefully"[76] when he thinks about her or becomes hopeful about his prospects with her. Although he often cannot keep his eyes off her, Rowling shows that their relationship involves more than physical attraction by letting them share a wicked sense of humour.[77] Ginny and Harry both place a high premium on family, they enjoy Quidditch and are excellent players, they realise that they have to make personal sacrifices in the fight against Voldemort and they have fun together. Harry values humour and laughter[78] and Ron realises that his friend's break-up with Cho was largely due to her still grieving for Cedric while Harry needed someone he could laugh with:[79] "You're well out of it, mate ... I mean, she's quite good-looking and all that, but you want someone a bit more cheerful."[80]

A prominent climax of the sexual tension and racing hormones of the pupils at Hogwarts is the Yule Ball, which is an ideal setting for romance and physical closeness (dancing) in the mode of *Cinderella* and other fairy tales. Rowling uses the event to highlight the centrality of heterosexuality and the subjectivity of gender performance, for example the boys wear "dress robes" and Ron's second-hand one even has an embarrassing lacy trim.[81] Bradley writes: "In contemporary western societies gender identities are so deeply imbued with heterosexual meanings as to be virtually indistinguishable. The cultural and social processes which create

[72] Rowling 2005a:174–176.
[73] Rowling 1999:35, 226.
[74] Rowling 2005a:286 & 287.
[75] Rowling 2005a:268, 499.
[76] Rowling 2005a:270, 396.
[77] Rowling 1999:57 & 58; 2005a:106, 267, 278 & 279, 500.
[78] Rowling 2000:278, 635.
[79] Rowling 2003:407.
[80] Rowling 2003:763.
[81] Rowling 2000:139 & 140, 358.

gender are tied up with our physical beings."[82] Although the couples who are mentioned attending the ball are heterosexual, one would hope that somewhere in the sea of unnamed duos one or two transcend heteronormativity because – between the boys' panicked scramble to find dates and the girls excitedly making plans to look their best – the event does give us examples of subversive gender roles: several girls transgress the gender stereotype of dating (where the male has to take the lead and pursue the female) and take the initiative by asking Harry to accompany them to the ball; Harry and Ron, who out of sheer last-minute desperation not to lose their masculine credibility ask the Patel twins to accompany them to the ball, both behave unchivalrously by not dancing with the twins and not paying appropriate attention to them. Perhaps this is a last-ditch denial of the undeniable eruption of sexuality that they are both experiencing?

While upholding monogamous, heterosexual dating and marriage (which is prominent in Western society since the majority of people "are happy to accept a given sexual identity and to enjoy the experiences of conventional sexed gendered bodies"),[83] Rowling does not give us whitewashed fairy-tale romances but realistic teenage relationships that are riddled with doubt, fear of rejection, misunderstanding, passion, elation and heartbreak. She shows that it is not always easy for adolescents to deal with the pangs of first love, jealousy and insecurity and at the same time weigh up their desires against social expectations. In a world where many teenagers indulge in sex from an early age and are exposed to negative sexual outcomes such as unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS) but are often too scared to talk to their parents or trusted adults about their sexuality, literature can play a major role in demystifying sex. A year after Ron's difficult introduction to the world of romance, his brothers give him a "manual" on courtship and he tells Harry: "This isn't your average book ... . It's pure gold: *Twelve Fail-Safe Ways to Charm Witches*. Explains everything you need to know about girls. If only I'd had this last year, I'd have known exactly how to get rid of Lavender and I would've known how to get going with ...".[84] Although this shows that Ron realises that he has problems with romantic relationships and is willing to change and work on his relationship with Hermione, Rowling obviously pokes fun at his naivety and continued ignorance since a self-help

[82] Bradley 2007:20 & 21.
[83] Bradley 2007:21.
[84] Rowling 2007a:97.

book with 12 fail-safe steps is a rather simplistic view of girlhood and what is often an agonising problem for teenagers. However, it does highlight the fact that sexuality is often an emotional and physical minefield for teenagers and that young people need guidance and advice so that they can have accurate information and can discover and refine their own sexualities. Because Rowling's wide readership includes children as young as five years,[85] this means that she is restricted in how she writes about sex since Western culture constructs children as asexual and tends to view sex as inherently damaging to youth. Sociologist Nancy Fischer observes: "Sexual discourse in Western society is divided into a dichotomy of pleasure and danger."[86] Storry and Childs point out that "British censorship laws are still stricter than many other European states" and Britain is one of a few countries where "a government minister will be forced to resign over a minor sex scandal".[87] Taking into account society's moral sensibilities, the most Rowling can do is include sexual tension, erotic allusions and innuendos about sex in her stories: her adolescents sleep in separate dormitories (although nothing precludes them from indulging in liaisons on Hogwarts' expansive grounds, as Arthur and Molly Weasley did during their schooldays)[88] and indulge in necking (albeit very passionately since Harry describes his first kiss with Cho as "wet" and Ginny views Ron kissing Lavender as "eating her face")[89] rather than more risky sexual activities that leave nothing to the imagination.

This might also be the reason why Rowling does not or cannot openly portray Dumbledore's sexuality in the books, although one has to concede that it would have been easy for her to include homosexuality together with heterosexuality in the series as just another aspect of the diversity of human sexuality. Surprisingly, when she announced in 2007 that Dumbledore was gay,[90] the shock waves that rippled around the world soon quietened down – perhaps because Dumbledore did always transcend conventionality, or because his sexuality was less troublesome to many readers and parents because he failed to "come out of the closet" and her revelation came after his death. A year before, Pugh Tison and David Wallace[91] criticised the prevailing

[85] Scholastic's 2008 Kids and Family Reading Report's study on the impact of Harry Potter on children's reading attitudes and behaviours included readers aged five to 17 years.
[86] Fischer 2003:2.
[87] Storry & Childs 2007:138.
[88] Rowling 2000:535.
[89] Rowling 2005a:281.
[90] Rowling 2007b:sp.
[91] Tison & Wallace 2006:263 & 264.

heteronormativity in the *Harry Potter* books; expressed their disappointment that from the many characters in the novels, not one questions his or her sexual identity; and said that the "omission of queer characters flattens the marvellous range of diversity that otherwise defines Potter's wizarding world". Like many other ardent readers, they did not even suspect that Dumbledore was gay and concluded that "these texts that trumpet resistance to normativity are actually mired in the very normativity they promise to escape."[92] A week after Rowling's announcement, Edward Rothstein[93] wrote an article in the *New York Times*, which reads:

> … it is possible that Ms. Rowling may be mistaken about her own character. She may have invented Hogwarts and all the wizards within it, she may have created the most influential fantasy books since J. R. R. Tolkien, and she may have woven her spell over thousands of pages and seven novels, but there seems to be no compelling reason within the books for her after-the-fact assertion. Of course it would not be inconsistent for Dumbledore to be gay, but the books' accounts certainly don't make it necessary. The question is distracting, which is why it never really emerges in the books themselves. Ms. Rowling may think of Dumbledore as gay, but there is no reason why anyone else should.

Rothstein's article touches on an important debate in literary theory and criticism about who has the final authority on the interpretation of a text: is it the author, the reader or the text itself? This could be an interesting research topic on *Harry Potter* in terms of Rowling's propensity to provide extratextual information; however, it is not relevant to my current study. What is important here is that Rothstein argues that Rowling's announcement seems to confirm "her gossip-mongering character" Rita Skeeter's untrustworthy insinuations and says that Dumbledore's "two months of insanity", which led to a lifetime of regrets, evidently refers to "profound betrayals latent in his behaviour and his ideas during that period: He resented his troubled siblings; he took on an inflated idea of his own importance; he thought wizards superior to Muggles. These attitudes had tragic consequences that ultimately transformed his views of virtue and power and altered his ambitions. Gayness is irrelevant". I tend to agree with Rothstein that Dumbledore's two months of madness had to involve a more profound realisation than sexual identity since it became the motivating force behind his active opposition to Voldemort's cruel terror and supremacist ideals. To concede to Rowling's belated claim would mean that if Dumbledore was indeed gay, this man who utters such enduring wisdom about tolerance

[92] Tison & Wallace 2006:276.
[93] Rothstein 2007:sp.

and being true to one's self became so ashamed of his own deviancy that he chose not to acknowledge it openly or live a truthful life. This is the same man who says: "My own brother, Aberforth, was prosecuted for practicing inappropriate charms on a goat. It was all over the papers, but did Aberforth hide? No, he did not! He held his head high and went about his business as usual!"[94] Accepting Rowling's assertion would therefore not only trivialise Dumbledore's life mission (for which he sacrifices his life) but also call into question her liberal stance on many of the critical issues in her books, particularly because it would appear that she portrays queerness as an undesirable quality. It is more probable that she sought to give him a deviant sexuality as a token homosexual to counter accusations of exclusive heterosexuality or to highlight his arguably androgynous insistence on love (which is a more "feminine" value than the usual values espoused by heroes).

Apart from Rita Skeeter's dubious and sensationalist assertions (she proves repeatedly that she is a biased reporter and her main source for her book about Dumbledore is senile),[95] the only direct allusion to homosexuality in the books is in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* when Dudley chides Harry about moaning in his sleep and asks him if Cedric is his boyfriend.[96] One can argue that by making the sneer come from a bigoted bully, Rowling shows her disapproval of homophobia. Of course, in a world of intolerance where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people face homophobia on a daily basis, one can also argue that by making Dumbledore a gay person who willingly smothers an integral part of himself, Rowling is showing how difficult it is for gay people openly to acknowledge their sexuality and bravely face the stigma and ostracism attached to being different. Although homosexuality is no longer a criminal offence in Britain, research shows that homophobia is still prevalent: of 1145 lesbian, gay, and bisexual pupils who participated in a study about the experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools, 92% reported that they had been subjected to verbal abuse and 41% had been physically assaulted.[97] Bradley affirms that gay young people and young people who do not conform to dominant gender identities are more vulnerable to violence and harassment than other young people. She also mentions that attacks and even murders on gay and lesbian people are still common

[94] Rowling 2000:394.
[95] Rowling 2007a:132.
[96] Rowling 2003:19.
[97] Stonewall 2007:sp.

in Britain.[98] Yet one would have expected Dumbledore to rise above these challenges, to grow beyond his fear of ostracism and violence (if he had any), and to fight against homophobia with the same unyielding fortitude with which he fought for muggle rights and against Voldemort. After all, he who counts the celebrated alchemist Nicolas Flamel and other respected wizards and witches among his acquaintances and wrote a number of noteworthy papers in learned publications,[99] has the influence to fight for gay rights in a manner that might not only help any deviant pupils at his beloved school but could spread much further than Hogwarts. Surely this would have been "for the greater good"!**[100]**

Rubeus Hagrid and Olympe Maxime are anything but a conventional couple. Their fleeting romance not only adds humour to the highly-charged sexual awakening of adolescents in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, but also highlights social and moral ills. They are adult half-giants from different sociocultural backgrounds, but both are no doubt acquainted with prejudice and discrimination. Hagrid (who has never been good at social niceties) wears "his best (and very horrible) hairy brown suit, plus a checked yellow and orange tie", uses "large quantities of what appeared to be axle grease" on his hair and puts on eau-de-Cologne with a "truly horrible smell" to impress Madame Maxime.[101] All of this contrasts with the French madame's well-groomed elegance and social grace. Although she spends time with him and values his company, she does not seem to be impressed by his efforts as a suitor. The differences between the two are further reflected in their speech: Hagrid speaks a rural English dialect, while Madame Maxime has a strong French accent.[102] Their tête-à-tête at the Yule Ball is especially memorable and parodies traditional romance in its excessiveness: "They [Harry and Ron] had reached a large stone reindeer now, over which they could see the sparkling jets of a tall fountain. The shadowy outlines of two enormous people were visible on a stone bench, watching the water in the moonlight."[103] The romance peters out before it starts and their relationship reverts back to friendship after Hagrid insults her by having the nerve to suggest that she is a half-giant (a fact she wishes to hide, most probably to avoid prejudice). Later though, she joins him in his mission

[98] Bradley 2007a: 124 & 125.
[99] Rowling 2007a:22.
[100] Rowling 2007a:291.
[101] Rowling 2000:232, 234.
[102] Rowling 2000:285, 371–373.
[103] Rowling 2000:371.

to the giants and this suggests that she has come to terms with her ancestry. In this area, Rowling leaves the door "open" with a slight possibility of Hagrid and Madame Maxime reaching a romantic understanding.

Other romantic relationships that Rowling touches on are the love between the metamorphmagus Tonks and the werewolf Lupin; the complicated love of the "pureblood" Merope for the muggle Tom Riddle (senior); the unrequited love of the "halfblood" Snape for the "mudblood" Lily Evans; and the love between the half-veela Fleur and the "pureblood" Bill Weasley. Ursula Bergenthal writes:

> In *Harry Potter* matchmaking focuses on intercultural relationships: Harry falls in love with Asian Cho Chang; Ron [is infatuated] with French Fleur Delacour … Hagrid with the French headmistress Madame Maxime. Even the couples forming for the Yule Ball are bi-cultural: Harry asks Parvati Patil out, Ron her twin sister Padma, and Cedric wins Cho Chang's favour. Rowling thus integrates relevant storylines like globalisation and multiculturalism without overtly moralising or preaching. The message is rather stereotypical: Love can cross boundaries – in times of modern globalisation these boundaries are also cultural ones.[104]

According to the UK 2001 census (the most recent census),[105] 2% of all marriages in Britain are interethnic and about 1,5% of the population is mixed race. Although these percentages are very low, one has to bear in mind that the country's minority ethnic population is only 7,9%. The BBC reports that "the United Kingdom has one of the fastest growing mixed-race populations in the world, fuelled by the continuing rise of inter-ethnic relationships".[106] Jonathan Duffy states in another BBC report: "Cross-racial relationships are becoming just another part of the diverse ethnic landscape. The UK has one of the fastest growing mixed-race populations in the world, not only through Caucasian-Caribbean relationships, but a whole variety of ethnicities coming together."[107] He adds that class plays a role in racial prejudice since "mixed-race couples further down the social order" and "single mums with mixed-race children" face the worst prejudice. Duffy also argues that often hostility does not come from the white, British side of the family – "white people today are less prejudiced against mixed people than Asian and Black Britons".

[104] Bergenthal 2011:5.
[105] Office for National Statistics 2010.
[106] John 2010:sp.
[107] Duffy 2005:sp.

Before Voldemort kills the teacher of Muggle Studies at Malfoy Manor, he tells the Death Eaters who are present: "... The dwindling of the pure-bloods is, says Professor Burbage, a most desirable circumstance ... she would have us all mate with Muggles ... or, no doubt, werewolves ..."[108] Ironically, Voldemort's "pureblood" ancestors became violent and unstable as a result of inbreeding.[109] Earlier, Ron explained to Hermione and Harry: "Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn't married Muggles we'd've died out."[110] The fanatical insistence on "blood" among several wizard families (most notably, Voldemort and the Death Eaters) is a reminder of the ban on miscegenation in the real world.

Bradley[111] points out that the micro-politics of gender "reminds us both of the ubiquity of gender and of the inextricable link between gender and power". She argues that we are constantly engaged in numerous acts of negotiation as we perform being a man or a woman; sometimes our acts confirm the status quo and at other times they challenge it. Our personal, supposedly private, relationships are microcosms of the societies that shape them and my observations in this chapter should be read about what I have said in previous chapters about social forces that shape gender identities. Stephen Whitehead[112] writes:

> The private lives of men and women are political. There is no aspect of our lives that is not caught up by the political. How we spend and negotiate our time in relationships is political. How we exercise our power at work and home is political. How we exercise our sexuality is political. How we educate is political. The very language we use is political. To be gendered is to be political. It is not necessary to be a feminist or a member of the Christian promise-keepers to engage in this political condition. Such associations are simply a more direct expression of what goes on across all societies between all men and women in all cultures – daily.

In this chapter and the previous chapter, I set out a number of the structures on the institutional and societal levels of gendering (see Bradley's three levels of gendering on p. 38 of this dissertation) which show that Rowling's portrayal of gender in the *Harry Potter* books mirrors social issues and gender realities in contemporary Britain. As I pointed out previously, it is

[108] Rowling 2007a:18.
[109] Rowling 2005a:200 & 201.
[110] Rowling 1998:89.
[111] Bradley 2007a:198.
[112] Whitehead 2002:148.

more difficult to withstand gender bias and oppression on a societal or institutional level than it is to resist compliance with oppressive gendered social constructs as individuals. In the next two chapters of this study, I look at the individual level of gendering by analysing some of the characters in the novels in terms of Rowling's depiction of masculinities and femininities – which, of course, have to be examined against the broader political and social contexts that I have already outlined – and how individuals can negotiate and subvert social constructs. Aapola *et al*[113] repeatedly emphasise that teenagers' "highly contextual, relational, contradictory, changeable, and diverse" identities should be studied against the backdrop of the interrelated social constructs that form the intricate layers of their lives in a postmodern world. Rowling's writing is incredibly dense and often has multiple meanings and complexities hidden beneath the surface simplicity of her words. "If we do not reflect on and judge what we read, then when we read *HP* we are in danger of missing its critical voice and of becoming unwittingly slaves of the ideology present in its surface imagery", writes Peter Dudink.[114] Since it is not possible to analyse all the *Harry Potter* characters within the limited scope of my study, I focus on the main characters and some of the minor characters whom I consider cast the most light on Rowling's portrayal of gender.

[113] Aapola *et al* 2005:15.
[114] Dudink 2002:3.

CHAPTER 4
FUNNY LITTLE WITCHES

Rowling has had to endure harsh criticism, which claims that she reinforces and therefore perpetuates gender inequality. In keeping with her resolve to situate her books in realism and let her characters encounter real-life issues, the three main social institutions of magical society in Britain that impact on their lives (government in the form of the Ministry of Magic; school in the form of Hogwarts; and the family, especially as represented by the Dursleys) are patriarchal. Although a number of women hold important positions in the Ministry of Magic, most of the powerful top positions are occupied by men; the majority of the animated portraits of previous principals in the *headmaster's* office at Hogwarts, who act as advisors and sources of encouragement to the current incumbent, are of males; and in magical families, the father is the breadwinner and the mother the primary caregiver. Although magical society still panders to male dominance and privilege, many of the characters traverse restrictive gender norms and expectations to assert their independence and construct their own personhood. In addition, Rowling has made Hogwarts a co-educational institution where witches and wizards have the same educational opportunities and career prospects, and Harry can befriend a girl as easily as he befriends a boy.

Jes Battis[1] argues that magic in youth literature is an interstitial space that both reinforces and allows characters to transgress gender norms. She avers: "Harry Potter's magical successes are part of what make him a visibly masculine character, even though he is constantly being undermined by the knowledge and prowess of Hermione."[2] She also states:

> Magic as a site of agency in contemporary children's and adolescent fantasy writing is both *gendered* and *transgendered* – that is, it is both constrained by gender norms beyond the text, while simultaneously allowing for the possibility of gender insubordination (and gender variance) within the text. In some instances, magic can be read as "genderless", in that shared magic between the sexes might be seen at first to erase sexual difference. But magic within youth fantasy traditions almost always operates according to specific gender norms, and often, powerful female wizards (such as Hermione in *Harry Potter*) find themselves doing or saying things that deliberately undermine

[1] Battis 2006:sp.
[2] Battis 2006:sp.

> the power of their magic by reinstating them as women needing to be saved by a male protagonist. [original emphasis][3]

Battis explains that, apart from Rowling's world hinging on the distinction between magical witches/wizards and non-magical muggles, "there is also a sort of transparent gender binary of male/female at work throughout the texts".[4] For example: Hermione embodies "learned or competent magic", while Harry has "intuitive or creative magic".[5] The binaries of male/female and rational/irrational also come to the fore when Hermione tries to help the house elves and Ron regards her efforts as silly and unnecessary. Hermione is the most competent witch among her peers at Hogwarts and her logical deductive abilities enable her to solve many puzzles and mysteries to help Harry to overcome Voldemort:

> Over the course of the five novels, she manages to alter time, fend of [sic] all manner of monsters with her defensive magic, freeze people in stasis, obliterate door-locks, and patiently explains matters of history and philosophy to the clueless Ron and Harry. Yet Hermione declares Harry to be "a great wizard"… . When he protests, citing her various contributions to their adventures, Hermione completely elides her own skills as a talented wizard by dismissing them as "books! And cleverness! There are more important things – friendship, and bravery, and – oh Harry, be *careful* … . Harry thus becomes emblematic of friendship and bravery, while Hermione's "oh Harry!" utterance repositions her as a frightened girl rather than a powerful wizard in her own right.[6]

Battis stresses that, even when magic seems constrained by gender assumptions, "it can still deconstruct and derail those assumptions through imaginative readings and re-reading".[7] Thus one can, for example, argue against Battis's interpretation in the above quotation by saying that Hermione's "oh Harry!" positions her as a frightened (eleven-year-old) girl *and* a powerful witch (in her own right) who is concerned about her friend's wellbeing. However, what I want to highlight here is that both muggle and magical societies operate in accordance with traditional gender binaries and roles, but Rowling's depiction of individual female characters is diverse and many of them subvert traditional gender roles. Rich observes about the real world:

[3] Battis 2006:sp.
[4] Battis 2006:sp.
[5] Battis 2006:sp.
[6] Battis 2006:sp.
[7] Battis 2006:sp.

> For us to engage with a holistic interpretation of gender relations, we must question how we become men and women in today's British society. … our perceptions of gender are premised upon a dichotomous interpretation of the world, which divides man and woman, physical and cognitive. In relation to gender, we are presented with idealised and demonised examples of man and woman to which we are not only asked to conform, but are continually judged by our ability to live up to. Idealised man and woman are modelled as opposites, while woman is sympathetic and intuitive, man is sensible and rational; while woman is able to multitask, man is single minded, only able to focus on one thing at a time: our gendered identities are essentialised to exist within the stereotypes of "the nurturing and empathetic woman and the powerful, logical man.[8]

Stereotypes that are often ascribed to women in Western societies represent them, among other qualities, as being submissive, dependent, unintelligent and incapable, emotional, receptive, intuitive, weak, timid, content, passive, cooperative, sensitive, attractive because of their physical appearance and therefore sex objects. Men are viewed as dominant, independent, intelligent and competent, rational, assertive, analytical, strong, brave, ambitious, active, competitive, insensitive, sexually aggressive and attractive because of their achievements.[9] Through socialisation and duress, women and men are taught that they are worlds apart and that they have to smother parts of their personalities that are natural and integral components of their humanity: instead of celebrating human complexity and diversity in acknowledging, for example, that strong men can have brawn and also be emotional and women can be sensitive and also brave warriors, society labels and shuns individuals who are unwilling to compromise their complexity and embody a range of "feminine" *and* "masculine" characteristics as "sissies" or "butch". Wannamaker refuses to play into this social conditioning and argues:

> Although several critics discuss some of the male characters in the novels as being feminine, I have purposely avoided using the terms "feminine" or "feminized" in this essay to describe unconventional relationships or behaviours on the part of male characters in order to raise a particular point: these conventional forms of masculinity are masculine characteristics, not feminine, even if they do not fit the mold of hegemonic masculinity. In her essay "Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity", Sharon Bird argues that when we view non-conventional forms of masculinity as "feminine", we deny men and boys access to aspects of their masculinity that are not hegemonic. She argues that "the presumption that hegemonic masculinity meanings are the only mutually accepted and legitimate masculinity meanings helps to reify hegemonic norms

[8] Rich 2010:sp.
[9] Sobis & Schuller 2005:9 & 10.

> while suppressing meanings that might otherwise create a foundation for the subversion of the existing hegemony".[10]

Many of Rowling's characters are androgynous in performing a mix of both "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics. Wannamaker points out that Rowling does not portray unconventional masculine behaviours (and by extension also unconventional feminine behaviours) negatively and her characters are often at odds with the norm.[11] In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, we are introduced to the veela (the mascots of the Bulgarian team at the Quidditch World Cup), who offer an extremely "feminine" performance of gender. They are "the most beautiful women" Harry has ever seen, with skin shining "moon-bright" and "white-gold hair" fanning out behind them without the wind blowing.[12] These creatures have strange mesmerising powers over men and even Harry, who has not yet shown a romantic interest in girls, becomes senseless when he sees them:

> The Veela had started to dance, and Harry's mind had gone completely and blissfully blank … . And as the Veela danced faster and faster, wild, half-formed thoughts started chasing through Harry's dazed mind. He wanted to do something very impressive, right now. Jumping from the box into the stadium seemed a good idea … .[13]

The veela and their entrancing dancing remind us of the sirens or bird-women of Greek mythology, whose seductive singing lured sailors to shipwreck on the rocks they inhabited. This association evokes the stereotype that females are sexual beings who are dangerously seductive and hold destructive power over men.[14] Rich, referring to Natasha Walters's *Living Dolls* (in which she analyses the return of sexism and deconstructs biological determinism by asking "Why it is we are allowing the stereotypes of the nurturing, empathetic woman and the powerful, logical man to be seen as natural and inevitable?") and Susie Orbach's *Bodies* (in which she looks at our contemporary obsession with our bodies and why "body hatred is becoming one of the West's hidden exports"), writes:

> Both Walter and Orbach expose the sexualisation of our (particularly women's) bodies as a facet of consumerism; that we are sold this ideal through advertisements, television programmes, news media, music videos, and glossy magazines (to name a few examples) and it is one our society is increasingly

[10] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[11] Wannamker 2006:sp.
[12] Rowling 2000:93.
[13] Rowling 2000:94.
[14] Cherland 2008:275.

> buying into; "The image of female perfection to which women are encouraged to aspire has become more and more defined by sexual allure". Both authors explain the danger that this is posing, as ever younger biological females are attempting to adhere to this sexualised ideal. [15]

In the same vein, Meredith Cherland writes:

> Poststructural theory explains how it happens that children re-create gender hierarchies from generation to generation. Female children learn to take up the subject position of siren in different points in their lives. The position of siren is only one of the subject positions offered to girls in the Harry Potter novels, of course, but it is one that is offered to them again, on a daily basis, in clothing stores, in films and music videos, in advertising, and in fairy tales. The subject position of siren inscribes itself on girls' bodies as they paint them, starve them, pierce them, and bare them to attract men, as they speak and write themselves into existence. And the sirens may also inscribe themselves on the emotions of male children who take up the pleasures of the irrational with guilt and then learn to excuse themselves from the unacknowledged force of their own destructive desires. This is one way in which men construct themselves as people who can make war.[16]

Cherland[17] goes on to explain that Rowling uses the veela to subvert the social discourse of rationality/irrationality that marks males as reasonable and females as foolish. While Harry's and Ron's minds go "blank" and become "dazed", Hermione remains unaffected and rational; she makes a loud tutting noise, pulls Harry back into his seat and exclaims exasperatedly: "*Honestly*!".[18] Rowling reinforces the absurdity of the situation when a few minutes later, the veela become enraged and transform into shrieking creatures, reminiscent of harpies in Ancient Roman mythology, with "sharp, cruel-beaked bird heads, and long, scaly wings".[19]

Tison and Wallace[20] assert that the gender roles in the *Harry Potter* novels are problematic because women's physical appearance is described stereotypically. They claim that, although many of the characters (including the males) are essentially caricatures whose physical attributes signal their internal attributes, the women are assigned descriptors that are "problematically connected to regressive constructions of feminine beauty and ugliness, which are notably absent from male physiognomic descriptions".[21] I disagree with this view

[15] Rich 2010:sp.
[16] Cherland 2008:276.
[17] Cherland 2008:275.
[18] Rowling 2000:94.
[19] Rowling 2000:101.
[20] Tison & Wallace 2006:269.
[21] Tison & Wallace 2006:269.

because there are both males and females who are ugly or beautiful in Rowling's world and they are not representative of an entire gender group, nor are ugly/beautiful features necessarily indicative of an evil or good nature (as is seen so clearly in Snape's unpleasant features). It is true, as these authors say, that Dolores Umbridge is described as "toad-like" and her absurd pink ribbons are scorned, but one should remember that most of what happens in Rowling's books is presented from Harry's adolescent point of view and these unflattering descriptions of Umbridge serve to highlight her sadistic cruelty, which she hides beneath a thin veneer of respectability and exaggerated femininity. Rowling uses a similar strategy with Gilderoy Lockhart, whose preoccupation with his hair and clothes highlights his vanity and conceit. I also agree with Tison and Wallace that Hermione is judged on her appearance by pupils such as Draco Malfoy and other Slytherins who make fun of her prominent teeth; however, we know that these bullies are malicious and that Hermione is quite an attractive young woman, which is attested to by her eye-catching appearance at the Yule Ball in her periwinkle dress and with her new hairstyle and magically adjusted teeth. Furthermore, Tison and Wallace note:

> … Harry is also judged by his physical appearance both positively and negatively, and in *Half-Blood Prince* Harry is surprised to find himself the object of many young women's romantic desires. In contrast to Hermione's obvious artifice in changing her appearance, Harry's sudden attractiveness occurs through no effort of his own. As Hermione explains to him, the Ministry of Magic's sudden adoption of him as "the chosen one" who will defeat Lord Voldemort gives him a celebrity that is part of his attraction, but she also notes that Harry has "never been more fanciable" because he has "grown about a foot over the summer".[22]

Unfortunately we still live in a world where gender divisions – which are largely based on the difference in male/female physicality – are enacted, reinforced and perpetuated on a daily basis: women are valued foremost in terms of their bodies, while men are validated primarily on the basis of their achievements.

In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, we find the following description of witches and wizards from Harry's perspective:

> Harry ate breakfast each morning in the Leaky Cauldron, where he liked watching the other guests: funny little witches from the country, up for a day's shopping; venerable-looking wizards arguing over the latest article

[22] Tison & Wallace 2006:270.

> of *Transfiguration Today*; wild-looking warlocks; raucous dwarfs and, once, what looked suspiciously like a hag, who ordered a plate of raw liver from behind a thick woollen balaclava.[23]

Schoefer takes issue with this description of witches and wizards, saying that it succinctly reflects Rowling's sexist estimation of males and females and her reinforcement of the conventional assumption that men do and should rule the world.[24] Admittedly, since Harry is a growing and impressionable young man in a patriarchal society – and lives with a superlatively conventional family who use a variety of ways to try and squash and forcefully mould him into conforming to their preconceived ideas of personhood – he does have stereotypical misconceptions about girls (such as when he refuses to believe that the half-blood prince might be a woman because he thinks women are incapable of achieving such a high level of magical skill).[25] However, his friends include a group of assertive, independent young women who do not hesitate to dispel some of his misconceptions. Hermione, Ginny and Tonks are strong and dynamic females. Ginny (the only daughter in a family with six sons), Hermione (who forms a strong friendship with two boys instead of with the girls in her peer group) and Tonks (who works in the tough, male-dominated profession of the Aurors) are assertive, brave and intelligent individuals who challenge gender stereotypes and societal norms. Witches in traditional stories are mostly negative and an outstanding feature of Rowling's portrayal of the witches in her books is that most of them are not only positive, but also unconventional. Rowling's female characters grow in complexity and evolve as they are exposed to new situations and experiences over the course of the series. They make logical decisions that are sometimes influenced by their emotions and they fight bravely in murderous battles.

Fleur Delacour is described as "a vision of perfection"; a "woman of such breathtaking beauty that the room seemed to have become strangely airless. She was tall and willowy with long blonde hair and appeared to emanate a faint, silvery glow."[26] Fleur is part veela and therefore automatically attracts male attention. Like the veelas at the Quidditch World Cup, she renders Ron and other boys speechless and brainless with her sexual allure and presence. She arrives at Hogwarts together with her silk-clad and highly skilled fellow pupils from the ostentatious Beauxbatons Academy of Magic to participate as her school's champion

[23] Rowling 1999:42.
[24] Schoefer 2000:sp.
[25] Rowling 2005a:503.
[26] Rowling 2005a:90.

in the Triwizard Tournament and seems to be haughty and pretentious. She is the only female champion in the tournament and although she participates bravely, she ends last of all the contestants. Cherland argues that even in the tournament, Fleur continues to be associated with the irrational:

> She is attacked by Grindylows during the second task of the tournament and fails to rescue her hostage. (Harry is, of course, able to overcome them.) Fleur becomes hysterical when her little sister Gabrielle is missing, and foolishly grateful to the wrong person. She deprecates her own efforts in the second task ("I deserved zero", p 435). As the third task commences, Fleur screams and is not heard from again. I think it is important to note that Fleur's beauty is mentioned frequently, and this may make the subject position she occupies (as the weak and irrational one) more desirable for girls to take up. [27]

Rowling clearly uses the prevailing gender construct of female physical attractiveness as a basis for many of the characters in the magical world (and her readers) to form opinions and conceptions that label this young woman as "weak" and "shallow" on the basis of her appearance rather than who she really is. Ginny, for example, compares her to a "cow" and calls her "Phlegm", while Hermione says "She's so full of herself".[28] However, Fleur does not remain "the weak and irrational one" for long. After Harry saves her sister from the merpeople during the second task of the tournament, he earns her eternal respect and we learn that she is not as superficial as we were led to believe. She is genuinely grateful and her concern for her sister supersedes any self-concern or self-interest she might have in participating in the tournament. We also learn that she is not obsessed with her physical appearance: "Fleur had many cuts on her face and arms, and her robes were torn, but she didn't seem to care, nor would she allow Madam Pomfrey to clean them … 'You saved 'er', she said breathlessly. 'Even though she was not your 'ostage'."[29] After her fiancée Bill Weasley is attacked and disfigured by a notoriously brutal werewolf in *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince*, Mrs. Weasley expects her to break off the engagement. However, Fleur breaks away from the cultural practice of ostracising werewolves and refuses to turn her back on Bill. She angrily rejects Mrs. Weasley's preconception, fiercely pushing her aside and snatching the ointment from her to attend to Bill's wounds herself: "'You thought I would not weesh to marry him? Or per'aps, you hoped?' said Fleur, her nostrils flaring. 'What do I care how he looks? I am good-looking enough for both of us, I theenk! All these scars show is zat

[27] Cherland 2008:278.
[28] Rowling 2005a:90, 92.
[29] Rowling 2000:439.

my husband is brave!'"[30] Perhaps because she has first-hand knowledge of how society misjudges and validates people on the basis of their bodies and outward appearance, she shows courage and virtue in her decision to stand by Bill and still marry him. She could easily have relied on and used her beauty and the power of her physical attributes to lead a life of comfort and privilege by, for example, marrying a handsome, wealthy man. Instead, she follows her heart and marries Bill despite his family's lack of money and his disfigurement. This is an example for girls and young women that there is more to being a woman than striving for a "perfect" body or having sex appeal.

Ginevra Weasley, like Fleur, is a beautiful girl. She has dancing flame-red hair and bright brown eyes. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, she falls victim to Riddle/Voldemort, who possesses her and preys on her innocence and vulnerability to commit crimes at Hogwarts. Harry saves her and, in addition to her crippling crush on him, she now also shares a bond with him as her rescuer. After following Hermione's advice and "getting a life of her own", she grows into a strong and willful woman who actively works to bring down the Dark Lord. She is witty but also has a sense of humour that can be biting and acerbic, especially when she is angry. She performs hilarious, but sometimes demeaning, impersonations of people such as Umbridge. During a fierce argument with Ron during which he questions her sexuality and insinuates that she is a slut, she mercilessly cuts him down to size by reminding him of his inexperience with girls: "Been kissing Pigwidgeon, have you? Or have you got a picture of Aunt Muriel stashed under your pillow?"[31] Ginny shares Harry's sense of fun and dry humour, and the two soon become romantically involved. She does not pine for Harry while he is away looking for Voldemort's horcruxes, but plays a leading role in the resistance of Dumbledore's Army at Hogwarts. Although she is often portrayed as a dangerous temptation (for example she takes Harry into her bedroom and kisses him passionately before he leaves to find the horcruxes), she stands her ground and shows that girls can and should have the same freedom as boys. She is an intelligent, magically skilled, athletic, assertive and quick-tempered young witch. Ginny is similar to Hermione in that she sets her own course and learns to overcome her own shortcomings and societal obstacles to achieve her dreams.

[30] Rowling 2005a:22.
[31] Rowling 2005a:269.

Hermione Granger is best known for her intelligence, assertiveness and independence. She is very rarely seen with her parents and sets her own course from an early age. Although she has several "feminine" traits (including giggling, worrying, urging caution and sticking to rules), she is also extremely "masculine" in that she is rational and analytical, adventurous, brave, competent, ambitious, competitive and a high achiever. This shows clearly that she is not stereotypical or one-dimensional. Instead of being Harry's sidekick (as she is often called), she outshines both Harry and Ron in many areas. Throughout the series, she proves that she is an authority on magic, facts, people and relationships: "She consistently modifies the reader's perceptions of people and things, acting as the rational, balanced voice opposing Harry's anger, suggesting alternative understandings of people, relationships and facts."[32] Her indispensible help is especially evident in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, where her forethought and planning enables them to survive in the wilderness. She takes along a magical bag that contains everything they need to carry out their quest successfully (including library books), heals their wounds and casts protective spells around their campsite. Ironically, even though she is often the reason why Rowling is called a sexist, Hermione is the strongest female role model in the *Harry Potter* series. Tigner[33] avers: "Hermione is academically more gifted and informed than Harry, intellectually more curious and hard working, morally more mature, tactically more incisive and bold, and actually more effective as an emulable model than any other character in the series, including Harry himself."

Luna Lovegood is an eccentric young woman who resembles Sybill Trelawney, but she does not isolate herself from the world and maintains relationships with her peers. Her name is the Latin word for "moon" and other pupils call her "Loony Lovegood" because of her strange beliefs and behaviour; her surname reflects "her character as a lover of goodness".[34] She is described as follows:

> She had straggly, waist-length, dirty blonde hair, very pale eyebrows and protuberant eyes that gave her a permanently surprised look. … The girl gave off an aura of distinct dottiness. Perhaps it was the fact that she had stuck her wand behind her ear for safekeeping, or that she had chosen to wear a necklace of Butterbeer corks, or that she was reading a magazine upside-down.[35]

[32] Behr 2005:117 & 118.
[33] Tigner 2006:sp.
[34] Fenske 2008:268; Duriez 2007:90.
[35] Rowling 2003:168.

Luna is dreamy and believes that imaginary plants and creatures such as gurdyroots and crumple-horned snorkacks really exist, but she is also a highly talented and perceptive witch with a knack of speaking uncomfortable truths. Part of her allure is that one never knows whether her beliefs are truth or fictive because the line between the two is blurred in her mind. This is evident in the following conversation between her and Ron:

> "I thought we settled that", said Luna maddeningly. "We're flying!"
> "Look", said Ron, barely containing his anger, "you might be able to fly with a broomstick but the rest of us can't sprout wings whenever we – "
> "There are ways of flying other than with broomsticks", said Luna serenely.
> "I s'pose we're going to ride on the back of the Kacky Snorgle or whatever it is?" Ron demanded.
> "The Crumple-Horned Snorkack can't fly", said Luna in a dignified voice, "but they [the thestrals] can, and Hagrid says they're very good at finding places their riders are looking for."[36]

Luna has a quirky dress sense and wears radish earrings, strange hats and bright robes, which accentuate her individuality. She often goes barefoot because pupils hide her shoes and other possessions. She does not find this nor the pupils' teasing upsetting, but treats it as a natural part of her life and simply believes her belongings will eventually show up again. She has the ability to remain calm in difficult situations and often comforts other people. Although she has few friends, she is very loyal to them and fights bravely alongside them. I do not agree with Fenske that Luna is a flat and static character. In my view she is a multidimensional, colourful and interesting character who once again demonstrates that one has to look at individual characters beyond stereotypes in order to understand their complex natures.

Nymphadora Tonks is a metamorphmagus, an Auror and a member of the Order of the Phoenix, who is comfortable and at ease with her body and her femininity. Although she can change her appearance at will and can therefore easily transform herself into a sensual goddess, she cares little about superficial beauty. She plays with the colour of her hair and changes her nose into different shapes to entertain her friends. She is also clumsy and prone to accidents, which exasperates Molly Weasley into preferring her not to help with household chores. Tonks's mother, Andromeda Black (Sirius's cousin and the sister of Bellatrix Lestrange and Narcissa Malfoy), abandoned her family's "pureblood" ideology and married a muggle-born wizard, which lead her family to disown her. Tonks follows her mother's example in this regard because she falls in love with and marries a social outcast

[36] Rowling 2003:671.

(the shabbily dressed and poverty-stricken werewolf Remus Lupin, who is older than she), which shows that she is an independent woman who makes her own choices and governs her own life. She is outspoken, intelligent, resourceful and – despite her clumsiness – a formidable fighter/warrior. Tonks is loyal to her friends and loves deeply, which is evident from the fact that Lupin's initial refusal to get romantically involved with her affects her metamorphosing abilities. Both she and Lupin die during the battle at Hogwarts.

Tonks's aunt Bellatrix Lestrange, who has spent 14 years in the dementor-ridden prison of Azkaban, is probably Rowling's most ambivalent female character. Although her name is a Latin word that means "female warrior",[37] she is the epitome of female subservience. As befits a daughter from the aristocratic Black family, she adheres to her family's "pureblood" supremacist ideals and marries a "pureblood" wizard. She is portrayed as a proud, highly-strung, irrational/insane, heartless and vicious person (which, no doubt, is largely due to her incarceration in a psychological hellhole), who is also a sadistically cruel and fanatical follower of the Dark Lord. She cruelly tortures Neville Longbottom's parents to the extent that they are driven insane and institutionalised, kills her cousin Sirius Black and later her niece Nymphadora Tonks, and tortures Hermione with the Cruciatus curse. Although she is a powerful witch and renowned Death Eater, she cowers in Voldemort's presence and acts like his puppet. However, even this horrific, cackling madwoman has a more humane side: as the harmful effects of Azkaban wear off, she slowly changes from a ruthless madwoman to a more vulnerable Bella. She accompanies her younger sister to Spinner's End to meet Snape, apparently to take care of her sibling and to ensure her nephew's safety without the Dark Lord's knowledge. She has fallen from grace in Voldemort's eyes and he tortures her and demeans her for failing to procure the all-important prophecy. In addition, she learns from Harry that her master is in fact a "halfblood". In the end, she seems more loyal to her family than to Voldemort, but is not strong enough to break free from his powerful grip. She dies at the hands of Molly Weasley during the battle at Hogwarts. It is worth noting here that slaying Bellatrix is Molly Weasley's most powerful victory as a mother: an act in which she displays to spectacular advantage the protective maternal aggression that has kept her children safe in a conflicted world. Bellatrix fails as a woman and a Death Eater, but Molly Weasley's version of her gender role triumphs in this incident.

[37] Duriez 2007:87.

Although Minerva McGonagall appears to be a prim and proper bespectacled witch, she is not a conventional woman – especially not according to the Dursleys' standards of normality. When we first meet her, she is a magical tabby cat on a wall near the Dursleys' home in the muggle world, unflinchingly and unblinkingly awaiting Dumbledore's arrival. Wannamaker observes: "In addition to first coming on the scene transformed as a cat, McGonagall is described as a severe-looking woman wearing an emerald-green cloak and looking 'distinctly ruffled' … Our first impression of these great and powerful wizards [Dumbledore and McGonagall] is that they are quirky folk who don't quite perform their gender properly."[38] Although she did not intend it as such, Schoefer gives an apt description of McGonagall's mixed and androgynous characteristics:

> The only female authority figure is beady-eyed, thin-lipped Minerva McGonagall, professor of transfiguration and deputy headmistress of Hogwarts. Stern instead of charismatic, she is described as eyeing her students like a "wrathful eagle". McGonagall is Dumbledore's right hand and she defers to him in every respect. Whereas he has the wisdom to see beyond the rules and the power to disregard them, McGonagall is bound by them and enforces them strictly. Although she makes a great effort to keep her feelings under control, in a situation of crisis she loses herself in emotions because she lacks Dumbledore's vision of the bigger picture. When Harry returns from the chamber of secrets, she clutches her chest, gasps and speaks weakly while the all-knowing Dumbledore beams.[39]

Although Dumbledore is the more advanced wizard and her superior, McGonagall is important in her own right and is the only witch in the *Harry Potter* novels who is regarded as wise. She has more than 30 years' teaching experience, is an ace at the advanced and highly cerebral[40] subject of Transfiguration, and teaches her pupils to work collaboratively and to find the answers to questions and the solutions to problems for themselves. As the Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts, she is second only to Dumbledore in authority at the school. She respects the headmaster and although she sometimes questions his decisions (for example whether Hagrid was the right person to transport the infant Harry Potter to safety), she heeds his advice and accepts his judgment, not only because of her role as his subordinate, but also because she values his wisdom. During Dumbledore's intermittent absences from the school in search of Voldemort's horcruxes and after his death, she acts on her own authority when she has to lead the school. She follows a more collaborative

[38] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[39] Schoefer 2000:sp.
[40] Rowling 1999:84.

leadership style by consulting her colleagues in her decisions instead of issuing decisive orders or acting secretively like Dumbledore. She takes her duties as Head of Gryffindor House seriously and refuses to show partiality for Gryffindor pupils even though she cares about them and supports them wholeheartedly at Quidditch matches. In this respect, she fulfils the role of a dedicated parent who has to instil high moral standards in her pupils; she is stern but also nurturing. As a member of the Order of the Phoenix, she performs her duties with equal dedication and resolve. However, despite her tendency to conform to rules, she transgresses regulations when the school and its pupils are threatened during Umbridge's reign of terror: "… Harry witnessed Professor McGonagall walking right past Peeves, who was determinedly loosening a crystal chandelier, and could have sworn he heard her tell the poltergeist out of the corner of her mouth, 'It unscrews the other way.'"[41] She is one of the few characters who are brave enough openly to defy Umbridge and is in the thick of the final battle against the Death Eaters at Hogwarts. Minerva McGonagall is a leader in the magical world who exhibits a range of "masculine" characteristics (the bun on her head is a corporeal example), which tend to overshadow her "feminine" traits, causing her to be regarded as excessively stern and stiff; but, unlike Umbridge, who appropriates a leadership position at Hogwarts through her connections at the Ministry and for self-aggrandisement, she does not revert to cruelty or force, but remains a committed and just leader who cares deeply about the wellbeing of Hogwarts and its pupils.

Dolores Umbridge is Rowling's most unlikable female character and is a villain in the mode of Lord Voldemort.[42] Duriez observes that Stephen King describes her as a horror as follows: "The gently smiling Dolores Umbridge, with her girlish voice, toadlike face, and clutching, stubby fingers, is the greatest make-believe villain to come along since Hannibal Lecter …".[43] Her name is derived from "dolorous", which means "causing or involving pain or sorrow".[44] She loves cats, has a cat patronus (a quick-moving protective animal)[45] and adopts a kitten persona in public, but her innocently sweet and obtuse bearing hides extremely sharp claws and a cruel and power-hungry personality. As the Ministry's High Inquisitor at Hogwarts, she delights in disrupting the school community: she seems to care more about her kitten plates and doilies than the pupils in her care; aims at "weeding out" bad teachers,

[41] Rowling 2003:598.
[42] Rowling 2003:220.
[43] Stephen King, in Duriez 2007:127.
[44] *Collins English Dictionary* 1995:487.
[45] Duriez 2007:101.

while she herself is an incompetent educator; and displays favouritism towards the pupils. Her superficially friendly and old-fashioned auntie-like exterior hides a nasty personality; she likes to inflict pain on others and is a control freak: she sadistically forces Harry to write punishment lines with a quill on his hand that cuts into his flesh and she constantly creates new decrees to suit her own ends so that she can exert absolute control at Hogwarts. She follows a "pureblood" ideology, like Voldemort, unconscionably sends dementors to attack Harry in Little Whinging and is willing to use an unforgivable curse (from the Dark Arts) on him to get information from him. Later, as the Senior Undersecretary to the Minister of Magic, she hangs the deceased Mad-Eye Moody's artificial eye in her door so that she can (literally) keep an eye on her colleagues and she oversees the SS-like Muggle-born Registration Commission to enforce "pureblood" supremacist beliefs. She is the female character in Rowling's novels in whom conventional "feminine" traits and hegemonic "masculine" traits converge most. Although she is domineering and cold-hearted, she is also incredibly stupid in that she lets Hermione dupe her into going into the Forbidden Forest, where she insults and is carried off by the centaurs.[46]

Like Umbridge, Petunia Dursley is excessively feminine and cold-hearted. She keeps her house immaculately clean and prepares scrumptious dishes as a dutiful housewife, but disregards her duty to act as a mother to her deceased sister's son. She is also socially ambitious, spends most of her time spying on her neighbours, and has a shrill voice and a false laugh like Umbridge.[47] Together with her excessively masculine husband and spoiled son, she bullies Harry verbally and physically, constantly reminding him that he is abnormal and forcing him to remain a largely invisible presence in their house. However, despite the fact that the Dursleys regard their obligation towards Harry as a burden, Dumbledore does not judge Petunia for her neglect of her nephew. He tells Harry: "She may have taken you begrudgingly, furiously, unwillingly, bitterly, yet still she took you, and in doing so she sealed the charm I placed upon you. Your mother's sacrifice made the bond of blood the strongest shield I could give you."[48] This tells us that there is more to Petunia Dursley than meets the eye and we become more aware of this when Harry tells the Dursleys of Voldemort's return and Petunia can no longer uphold the pretence she has constructed around her and her family:

[46] Some readers have suggested that the centaurs carry Umbridge off and rape her. Although this might be an inferred reading of the incident, I think it is fanciful.
[47] Fenske 2008:238.
[48] Rowling 2003:737.

> All of a sudden, for the very first time in his life, Harry fully appreciated that Aunt Petunia was his mother's sister. He could not have said why this hit him so very powerfully at this moment. All he knew was that he was not the only person in the room who had an inkling of what Lord Voldemort being back might mean. Aunt Petunia had never in her life looked at him like that before. Her large, pale eyes (so unlike her sister's) were not narrowed in dislike or anger. They were wide and fearful. The furious pretense that Aunt Petunia had maintained all Harry's life – that there was no magic and no world other than the world she inhabited with Uncle Vernon – seemed to have fallen away.[49]

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Snape's pensieve memories reveal that Petunia despises Harry because of his magical abilities and his link to the magical world (things she secretly yearned for as a little girl but was excluded from). She envied her sister: "… '[M]y dratted sister … came home every holiday with her pockets full of frog-spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was – a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family!'".[50] Because the Dursleys fear and despise the magical world, they try to build a world of their own that centres on bourgeois normativity and conventionality. However, by denying the existence of the magical world, they stifle and limit their lives and personal development.

Like Petunia Dursley, the Divination teacher at Hogwarts lives in an alternative universe of her own. Named after the sybils (female oracles or prophetesses) of Ancient Greece and Rome, Sybill Trelawney is the eccentric clairvoyant who believes that "human destiny may be deciphered by the planetary rays".[51] Rowling describes her as a rather ridiculous-looking figure (with a soft, misty voice that "came suddenly out of the shadows"), who reminds Harry of a large, glittering insect: "Professor Trelawney moved into the firelight, and they saw that she was very thin; her large glasses magnified her eyes to several times their natural size, and she was draped in a gauzy spangled shawl. Innumerable chains and beads hung around her spindly neck, and her arms and hands were encrusted with bangles and rings."[52] Rowling portrays her as a vulnerable but complex character, who is as delightfully eccentric in her predictions of doom and gloom over tea-leaves, palms, crystal balls and star charts as she

[49] Rowling 2003:39.
[50] Rowling 1997:44.
[51] Rowling 2000:177.
[52] Rowling 1999:79.

is pathetic in her social isolation while her mind distractedly orbits with the planets[53] and in her later habit of drunkenly roaming the school's corridors smelling like sherry after Umbridge unsuccessfully tries to sack her and throw her out of Hogwarts. Trelawney's classroom is dimly lit and the heavily perfumed smoke tends to lull her pupils to sleep. Her classes seem to be a waste of time, since it is known that she has only uttered two true prophecies in her life, which she is unaware of because she made them during a trance: one prophecy was about the Chosen One who would vanquish the Dark Lord – and prompted Dumbledore to hire her to teach at Hogwarts where she could be protected from Voldemort – and the other one was that the Dark Lord would return and his servant would join him. Most of the students make fun of her by inventing dreams and prophecies for their homework in order to test her knowledge and she believes "examination passes or failures are of the remotest importance when it comes to the sacred art of divination"[54] since one either has an Inner Eye or not. Harry, Ron and Hermione agree that she is a charlatan and her fortune-telling is "really no more than lucky guesswork and a spooky manner".[55] This is confirmed by McGonagall:

> ... Sybill Trelawney has predicted the death of one student a year since she arrived at this school. None of them has died yet. Seeing death omens is her favourite way of greeting a new class. … Divination is one of the most imprecise branches of magic. I shall not conceal from you that I have very little patience with it. True Seers are very rare, and Professor Trelawney … .[56]

However, Sybill Trelawney might be a true seer. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, a number of the predictions she makes during Harry and his classmates' first lesson actually do come true: Hermione leaves the class before the Easter revision period ("… around Easter, one of our number will leave us for ever"); Lavender's pet rabbit dies ("… that thing you are dreading – it will happen on Friday the sixteenth of October"); Neville breaks two teacups ("… after you've broken your first cup, would you be so kind as to select one of the blue patterned ones? I'm rather attached to the pink"); and Harry is stalked by Sirius in his animagus form as a huge, black dog ("My dear … you have the Grim").[57] She also sees the outcome of Hagrid's problems with Buckbeak (that the Ministry will decide the hippogriff has to be executed) in Harry's tea-leaves before she falls into a trance and warns

[53] She tells her Divination pupils: "… descending too often into the hustle and bustle of the main school clouds my Inner Eye." (Rowling 1999:79).
[54] Rowling 2003:214.
[55] Rowling 2000:177.
[56] Rowling 1999:84.
[57] Rowling 1999:80 & 81.

Harry that Voldemort will rise again with the help of his servant. Amazingly, in *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince*, she even predicts the tragedy of the lightning-struck tower and Dumbledore's death: "'The Headmaster has intimated that he would prefer fewer visits from me … . If Dumbledore chooses to ignore the warnings the cards show – … . Again and again, no matter how I lay them out – … the lightning-struck tower … calamity. Disaster. Coming nearer all the time …'".[58] Contrary to appearances and magical beliefs, Sybill Trelawney seems to be a true diviner even though she is nearsighted, and this, together with her dimly-lit, smoke-filled classroom and her penchant for death and tragedy which clouds her mind, prevents her from seeing the shapes in the tea-leaves or interpreting her predictions accurately. Her background also points in this direction: she is a descendant of Cassandra, who in Ancient Greek mythology was cursed by the god Apollo to make accurate prophecies that no one would believe.

Far from being a one-dimensional and conventional female character, Trelawney, like Rowling's other female characters, is multifaceted and complex: she represents stereotypical feminine qualities such as irrationality, as shown by her flighty and emotional behaviour, but she is also brave (as she shows by throwing crystal balls at the Death Eaters during the battle at Hogwarts) and tends to be cruel in her pronouncements of tragedy and death in young people's lives. Rowling's portrayal of Trelawney and divination addresses an important issue in her books: fate and free will. This dichotomy is also evident in the centaurs, who "are sworn" not to set themselves "against the heavens". The centaur Firenze, however, is aware that evil, in the form of Voldemort, is gaining strength and decides to do something about it, despite his fellow centaurs' passive acceptance of fate and their growing animosity towards him. He tells Harry: "The planets have read wrongly, before now. I hope this is one of those times."[59] Cherland points out that the *Harry Potter* novels take a humanistic view of agency and presents Harry as an individual who makes choices and acts as a free moral agent.[60] In fact, all Rowling's characters make choices and act as free moral agents.

My analyses of female characters in the *Harry Potter* books show that they are multilayered women who differ from each other and from men as individuals. Rowling does not portray the men and women in the magical world as unequal, because both females and males have

[58] Rowling 2005a:506.
[59] Rowling 1997:262.
[60] Cherland 2008:276 & 277.

individual strengths and weaknesses that contribute to the richness of their characters. Rowling's females are a wide spectrum of dynamic young women and older women who stand up for and fight for what is important to them, despite the difficulties and gender barriers they often encounter. They are strong women who can take initiative during difficult situations; take care of their families and build homes; and can fight side-by-side with men in dangerous battles. Hermione, Ginny, McGonagall and other female characters are complex and androgynous individuals who exhibit both traditional "feminine" and "masculine" characteristics; many of the young girls evolve during adolescence and blossom into maturity as the series develops.

In keeping with the complex and globalising world of the twenty-first century, Rowling's female characters cannot be categorised into absolute gender binaries because they are complex and grow as their experiences and relationships evolve. The magical world reflects our own world in that many gender issues have been addressed and have led to improved lives for women and men; but women are still severely limited by traditional gender roles and practices. In the final analysis, hegemonic masculinity not only harms women, but also men, despite their privileged position in Western muggle and magical societies.

CHAPTER 5
VENERABLE-LOOKING WIZARDS

In her article "Men in Cloaks and High-heeled Boots, Men Wielding Pink Umbrellas: Witchy Masculinities in the *Harry Potter* Novels",[1] Wannamaker focuses on the male characters in the novels and how they perform a variety of masculine identities. Her identification of alternative masculinities demonstrates her awareness of a spectrum of masculine identities and fluidity on that continuum, which concurs with contemporary studies on masculinity. Salisbury and Jackson[2] also point to this continuum:

> Instead of seeing men and boys as representing an undifferentiated, monolithic system of power that is static and unchanging, the new literature has drawn attention to the transformative implications of *variety*, *difference* and *plurality* both between men and men and within individual boys and men. It has also stressed the positive results of the *contradictoriness* and *fragmentariness* of boys' masculine identities. Finally, it has pointed out that *gender relations are historical* and always in a state of constant flux, depending on the prevailing, governing models of masculinity that are in the ascendancy, at a particular time in society. [original emphasis]

Wannamaker explains that many of Rowling's male characters do not conform to conventional norms and assumptions about gender and Rowling does not portray them negatively. She points out that the reason why Mr. Dursley is such an unlikable character is because of his excessive conventional masculinity and his abhorrence of anything that does not fit in with his standards and world view. His attempts at fashioning Dudley into a simulacrum of himself are not only laughable but highlight the dangers of rearing our sons by manipulating and bullying them to fit in with hegemonic masculinity. Salisbury and Jackson point out that this type of fatherhood keeps sons in "a state of permanent insecurity". They explain:

> The cycle of father–son estrangement does mean that boys grow to learn to applaud qualities of independence, pride, resilience, self-control and physical strength. All of these are worthy qualities for sons and daughters alike. But for boys, the learning and example goes beyond these to stress competitiveness, toughness, aggressiveness and power. Boys grow to appreciate that it is these latter qualities which provide the silence and the distance between them and their fathers. Fathers who call their sons "poofters" or who encourage them

[1] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[2] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:7 & 8.

> to *prove* they are not weak in the face of taunts from others are encouraging their sons to fight back. A combined collective paternal pressure to have sons to be proud of, in a vigorous "real lad" kind of way, yields large numbers of boys who are swayed by the same pressure – so they all fight back. Boys continually talk in violent terms. Examples of "You're dead" or "I'll rip your head off" or others, fall from boys' mouths on a daily basis in response to real or imagined injuries to pride. Are fathers with their "stand up for yourself" advice teaching that violence is normal, appropriate and necessary behaviour of power and control? [original emphasis][3]

The same overbearing approach that is apparent in Vernon Dursley's treatment of his son is also evident in the relationship between Lucius and Draco Malfoy and that of Bartemius Crouch and his son Barty. Significantly, Rowling does not portray these father–son relationships as positive.

As the "director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills",[4] Vernon Dursley is the conventional successful male of Western capitalistic societies: he has worked his way to the top of the corporate ladder (making drills, which is not only a powerful macho product that denotes physical strength and is therefore a symbol of his manliness, but also has sexual connotations of dominance) and is financially secure; he is a big, beefy, moustached man who heads his household with authority and aspires to have a conventional family with a conventionally masculine son. His son Dudley is a big, seemingly macho but semi-literate bully who does not participate in "girly" activities such as reading, studying and household chores.[5] Wannamaker contends that Dudley's extra room[6] "illustrates much about the way his character is revealed as excessively, stereotypically, and negatively masculine".[7] Mr. Dursley's baleful influence on his son is especially clear in the family's discussions about Smeltings, the expensive private school he attended and which Dudley also attends. The name of the school ("smelting" means processing a substance containing metal by heating until it melts so that the metal can be extracted and chemically changed)[8] points to the social construction of hegemonic masculinity, which dictates that boys are often expected to undergo violent rituals to build character and make them stronger in preparation for

[3] Salisbury & Jackson 1996:276.
[4] Rowling 1997:7.
[5] Wannamaker (2006:sp) points out that while Harry and Ron are not as studious as Hermione, reading is a central part of their lives at Hogwarts (with its well-fitted library and abundance of textbooks, letters, diaries and newspapers). In addition, Aunt Petunia forces Harry to do household chores and Ron is part of a big family where both boys and girls are expected to perform household duties.
[6] Rowling 1997:32.
[7] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[8] *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary* 1995:1574.

manhood: Smeltings pupils "carried knobbly sticks, used for hitting each other while the teachers weren't looking. This was supposed to be good training for later life."[9] However, while Dudley maintains a macho persona in the streets and on the playground as the alpha male of his gang of vandalising friends who terrorise and bully the neighbourhood's children and throw stones at passing cars, at home he is "a boisterous little boy"[10] (according to his over-indulgent mother) who exhibits "feminine" characteristics by whining, sulking and pretending to cry in order to get his way. These traits often come to the fore during his skirmishes with Harry; for example, he scurries into the house when Harry reminds him of the pig's tail Hagrid gave him.[11] Dudley is a boy without a definitive identity of his own, who seem stuck between excessive manhood and overindulged infantility. Whether it is because he eventually matures despite his parents' warped parenting skills or because his experience with a soul-sucking dementor has shown him that emulating his father's example in bullying others and exhibiting physical force and intimidation is not true manliness and does not make one invincible, Dudley seems to move towards a more positive form of masculinity towards the end of the series. When he bids farewell to Harry in the seventh book, he expresses uncharacteristic concern and affection for Harry (which, in his stilted language, Harry realises, amounts to saying "I love you").[12]

Lucius Malfoy is an arrogant and egotistical man who has passed on his prejudicial beliefs and hegemonic masculinity to his son. His cruelty towards his house-elf and loathing of muggles and magical creatures show that he wholeheartedly shares Voldemort's beliefs and resolve that "purebloods" should rule the world. He relies on his wealth, status and ancestry and uses his social capital to exert influence to achieve what he wants in magical society.[13] During Harry's second year at Hogwarts, Lucius bullies his fellow school governors into suspending Dumbledore as headmaster of the school and his son Draco assures Snape that he will get Lucius's vote if he applies for Dumbledore's job.[14] Lucius also exerts his harmful influence over his son and makes clear his expectations of him, berating him in front of others for not measuring up and letting a "mudblood" such as Hermione outshine him.[15] Draco seems to be incurably snobbish and egotistical and is portrayed as conventionally

[9] Rowling 1997:29; Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[10] Rowling 2000:29.
[11] Rowling 1997:15, 21& 22, 25, 32 & 33; 1998: 13; 2000:42, 45.
[12] Rowling 2007:37–40.
[13] Rowling 1999: 87, 215.
[14] Rowling 1998:198.
[15] Rowling 1998:44.

masculine for much of the series, with a penchant for bullying and cruelty. However, later we see another side of this hitherto one-dimensional character: he is utterly miserable and morose because of the horrible task Voldemort has forced upon him (assassinating Dumbledore) and he hysterically confides in Moaning Myrtle. Harry is shocked when he finds Draco crying in the toilet and Draco becomes enraged when he realises that Harry has witnessed his show of emotion and that "he has been exposed as unconventionally masculine before the gaze of a male peer".[16] Rowling shows that Draco is in fact a terrified teenager who has been tyrannically assigned the mammoth task of killing his headmaster. He feels isolated and alone, and cannot rely on the protection of his father or the support of his so-called friends. At the end of the fifth book, when Draco has let the Death Eaters into the castle and has cornered Dumbledore alone and defenceless, he is unable to kill the wise old wizard. He starts to lower his wand at Dumbledore's remonstrations and admits that he is terrified: "'I haven't got any options!" said Malfoy, and he was suddenly white as Dumbledore, 'I've got to do it! He'll kill me! He'll kill my whole family!'"[17] Here it is evident that Draco does have a conscience and is not as egotistical and heartless as he seemed previously: he loves his family and cannot kill the headmaster he has probably grown to love and respect as much as the other pupils at Hogwarts. By the end of the series, Harry views Draco more sympathetically and his character has become more ambiguous: "Where, Harry wondered, was Malfoy now, and what was Voldemort making him do under threat of killing him and his parents?"[18] Wannamaker argues: "This new understanding of Draco Malfoy is partly due to Draco's demonstration of behaviour that is not stereotypically masculine, and in part, to Harry's increasing maturity and ability to feel empathy."[19]

Bartemius Crouch is another dysfunctional father. He is a power-hungry, ruthless and brutal high-ranking Ministry official who has no mercy for transgressors and follows magical law to the letter when it pleases him: as a judge on the Council of Magical Law, he ostensibly takes his position so seriously that he disowns and convicts his only son to life imprisonment when the young man is implicated in torturing two wizards during Voldemort's first uprising. This conviction is tantamount to issuing a death sentence since few inmates survive Azkaban and is also hypocritical because he easily digresses from the law when it suits him, for example he incarcerates Sirius Black without a trial. Years later, he heartlessly sacks and thereby

[16] Rowling 2005a:488; Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[17] Rowling 2005a:552.
[18] Rowling 2005a:596; Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[19] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

irremediably shames his house-elf Winky when she brings him into disrepute.[20] His rigidity and conformity reminds us of Vernon Dursley's obsessive conventionality: "Barty Crouch was a stiff, upright, elderly man, dressed in an impeccably crisp suit and tie. The parting in his short grey hair was almost unnaturally straight and his narrow toothbrush moustache looked as though he trimmed it using a slide-rule. His shoes were very highly polished."[21] He has little respect for his inferiors and forgets Percy Weasley's surname even though he is Percy's boss.[22] Sirius, referring to Mr. Crouch, observes: "If you want to know what a man's like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals."[23] Mr. Crouch is a workaholic who neglects his son and wife to further his political ambitions; he displays further overbearing cold-heartedness towards his family by ignoring their pleas for mercy during his son's trial and instead imprisons him in the soul-destroying Azkaban where the young man in all probability becomes mentally unstable. This inflexible bureaucrat does seem to have a softer, more emotional side, though: he later breaks the law and smuggles his son out of the wizard prison and for years takes care of him in secret to comply with his wife's dying wish.[24] While his obsession with rules is clearly "masculine", his belated care for his son is "feminine". However, although it seems that his love for his wife compels him to reveal a non-traditional "feminine" side of his character, the morality of someone who lets his frail and dying wife spend her last days in a prison like Azkaban – even if it is to save their only child and on her request – remains questionable. Mr. Crouch's son Barty is an intelligent and skilled manipulator who successfully impersonates Mad-Eye Moody and in so doing, manages to dupe powerful wizards and accomplished mind-readers such as Dumbledore and Snape. He is also a cold-hearted murderer: he is one of the Death Eaters who mercilessly torture Neville's parents and he eventually kills his own father. Barty seems to have inherited his father's ruthlessness and he fanatically devotes his life to the Dark Lord. Voldemort calls him "my most faithful servant" and Barty proudly compares himself to Voldemort: "'Both of us, for instance, had very disappointing fathers … . Both of us suffered the indignity, Harry, of being named after those fathers. And both of us had the pleasure … the very great pleasure … of killing our fathers, to ensure the continued rise of the Dark

[20] Rowling 2000:123 & 124; 596.
[21] Rowling 2000:83.
[22] Rowling 2000:83 & 84.
[23] Rowling 2000:456.
[24] Rowling 2000:593–600.

Order!'"[25] Killing one's father is a traditional masculine act. The assumption behind it is that there can only be one alpha male in a family.

In the light of the above, Ronald Weasley is fortunate in that he is part of a free-spirited and rather chaotic family who have little regard for rigid conformity and stifling conventionality. He grows up in a household where rules are often broken and gender lines are blurred, for example everyone is expected to help with the household chores and Ginny (the only daughter) is not treated differently from her brothers. His father has a weird fascination with muggles and is too soft-hearted to deal with the pesky gnomes in the garden; his mother swears like a sailor and fights like a tigress when her children are threatened; his sister is an independent and brave witch who is especially known for her unladylike Bat-Bogey Hex, which changes dried snot into an attacking bat. Ron's five brothers are two fun-loving pranksters who drop out of school to become the highly successful owners of an unconventional joke shop, an adventurous dragon-tamer who works in Romania, a curse-breaker for Gringotts Bank in Africa who dons a ponytail and an earring when Harry meets him, and a pompous careerist who openly rebels against his family.[26] Rowling describes Ron as "tall, thin and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet and a long nose" and later as "long and lanky".[27] He is Harry's loyal and trusted friend throughout the series. He sacrifices himself during the brutal chess game so that Harry can find the Philosopher's Stone; he accompanies Harry into the dangerous Chamber of Secrets even though he knows a monstrous snake lurks there; he fights bravely against the Death Eaters in the Department of Mysteries and is severely injured; he endures hardship and danger with Hermione and Harry to find and destroy Voldemort's remaining horcruxes; he plays an active role in the battle at Hogwarts and Voldemort's demise. However, although he is a well-liked and generally confident young man with a good sense of humour and a supportive friend with many hidden talents (such as his ability to come up with wry sayings and his substantial practical knowledge of the magical world), he feels overshadowed by his talented siblings and best male friend. In his first year at Hogwarts, he is already aware of pressure to keep up with his brothers' legacy. He tells Harry:

[25] Rowling 2000:565, 589.
[26] Rowling 1998:28 & 29, 33; 2007a: 589 & 590; 2000:49 & 50.
[27] Rowling 1997:70; 2007a:44.

> I'm the sixth of our family to go to Hogwarts. You can say I've got a lot to live up to. Bill and Charlie have already left – Bill was Head Boy and Charlie was captain of Quidditch. Now Percy's a Prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they still get really good marks and everyone thinks they're really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it's no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five brothers. I've got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand and Percy's old rat.[28]

The fact that Ron's best friends are the famous Harry Potter (who is a talented Quidditch seeker and is constantly in the news) and the intelligent Hermione Granger (who is by nature a high achiever) does not help to alleviate his sense of being a second-rate person who never quite measures up or makes his mark in the magical world. Although he values his friendship with Harry, his insecurity about his abilities and his yearning for recognition catch up with him when Harry is selected as one of the participants in the Triwizard Tournament and he vents his pent-up jealousy of his close friend. He is physically more developed than Harry, but is sexually hopelessly naïve (as his energetic but short-lived relationship with Lavender Brown and his refusal to dance with his date at the Yule Ball testify) and is often effeminised: "There was just no getting around the fact that his robes looked more like a dress than anything else."[29] This is also obvious in his hero-worship of Viktor Krum: "Ron hovered behind the bookshelves for a while, watching Krum, debating in whispers with Harry whether he should ask for an autograph – but then Ron realised that six or seven girls were lurking in the next row of books, debating exactly the same thing, and he lost his enthusiasm for the idea."[30] Ron's admiration of Viktor's manly athletic abilities (which he so sorely lacks) might be a contributing factor in his burning envy of the athlete and irrational behaviour when he finds out that Hermione is rumoured to have kissed the Bulgarian, especially since one of his worst fears is that she thinks he is not good enough for her. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Voldmort's horcrux discloses his deep-seated fears and taunts him: "*Least loved, always, by the mother who craved a daughter … least loved, now, by the girl who prefers your friend … second best, always, eternally overshadowed …* ."[31] Like Rowling's other adolescent characters who develop and mature over the course of the series, Ron overcomes his debilitating self-doubt and conquers his fears to achieve even more than the aspirations he sees in the Mirror of Erised, which reveals one's deepest desires: he becomes a successful Quidditch player and a prefect, who also wins the girl of his heart. The brave, loyal,

[28] Rowling 1997:75.
[29] Rowling 2000:358.
[30] Rowling 2000:325.
[31] Rowling 2007a:306.

mischievous, light-hearted, resourceful, moody, angry and at times foolish teenager learns that he does not have to emulate others to find his place in the world.

Neville Longbottom is another complex character in the *Harry Potter* novels. Apart from being a candidate with Harry for the Chosen One in Trelawney's prophecy about the boy who would vanquish the Dark Lord, he is parallel to Harry in many other ways. Neville was born on 30 July and Harry a day later; their parents were members of the Order of the Phoenix; both have had a difficult childhood without parents (who were harmed by Voldemort); they have seen death and can therefore see thestrals; and both of them are Gryffindors. Neville is initially portrayed as a clumsy, round-faced boy who is unable to hold onto his toad, is tied to his formidable[32] grandmother's apron strings, forgets spells, messes up passwords to gain entry to the Gryffindor Common Room, harbours a paralysing fear of Snape, and excels in nothing except Herbology.[33] He tells his friends that because he did not show signs of magical ability before he was eight years old, his great-uncle recklessly tried to scare him into doing magic (one attempt involved hanging him out of an upstairs window by his ankles and another pushing him off the end of a pier so that he nearly drowned).[34] Afterwards his grandmother constantly compares him to his father, making him use his father's old wand and telling him that he has to uphold the family honour.[35] All this pressure to measure up to his family's expectations has made him an insecure and socially inept boy. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, he tells Luna "I'm nobody" when he is introduced to her on board the Hogwarts Express and he confides in Harry, Ron and Hermione: "Gran's always telling Professor Marchbanks I'm not as good as dad".[36] Neville is a prime candidate for bullying, especially since he seems to endure taunts and insults without crying, complaining or retaliating. He is at the centre of many of the humorous situations in the books, for example: as a new pupil at Hogwarts, he falls over on his way to the stool during the Sorting Hat Ceremony and runs off with the hat after being sorted; in his second year at the school, he is lifted by his ears and hung from a candelabrum by the misbehaving Cornish pixies; in his fifth year, he lets a cactus splatter stinksap all over his friends in the Hogwarts Express during a hapless demonstration of the plant's properties.[37] Yet, as Wannamaker points out,

[32] Rowling 2000:149. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Neville's grandmother (Augusta Longbottom) "goes on the run from the Death Eaters and later fights in the Battle at Hogwarts" (Duriez 2007:89).
[33] Rowling 1997:78, 103, 116; 1999:95, 101–104; 2000:195.
[34] Rowling 1997:93.
[35] Rowling 2003: 624, 700; 2000:168.
[36] Rowling 2003:168, 624.
[37] Rowling 1997:90; 1998:79; 2003:169 & 170.

Neville's "quirky behaviour makes him one of the more interesting and admirable secondary characters in the novels".[38] With the proper encouragement and support from his teachers (especially from professors Lupin and Moody) and the few friends he has, his confidence grows and he gradually blossoms into a truly gifted and heroic young man.[39] Wannamaker writes:

> Neville is not popular or handsome; he is not good at sports nor is he an outstanding student, except in the study of herbology. However, Harry and the reader learn, with each additional book in the series, that Neville has a strength of character that many lack; he bravely battles Death Eaters in the fifth and sixth books in the series, and, like Harry, he wants to avenge the hurt that Voldemort has done to his family. Neville is an important character because he is always portrayed sympathetically by Rowling even though he is rarely stereotypically masculine. He is part of a large cast of characters depicting a wide range of gendered behaviours. The complexity of his character – a stammering lack of self-confidence contrasted to bravery in the face of real danger, secrecy about his family, loyalty to his male and female friends, and evidence of a deep pain and loss that parallels Harry's – makes him far more than a mere character foil for Harry or a stereotypical or conventional character.

In the last book, Neville is fully involved in the resistance against Voldemort at Hogwarts and it is clear that this entails suffering, determination and perseverance: he is unkempt and has swollen eyes and gouge marks on his face.[40] He fights resolutely and unswervingly during the battle at Hogwarts and Harry entrusts him with the important task of killing Voldemort's snake Nagini, a duty which he completes with great courage. Throughout his transformation from a fumbling, bullied boy to a loyal friend and hero who bravely destroys one of Voldemort's most dangerous horcruxes, Neville remains a sensitive adolescent who lovingly nurtures and cares for his plants, but is also prepared to fight to the bitter end to protect the people he holds dear.

By complete contrast, Tom Riddle (junior) physically degenerates from an intelligent and handsome boy to a mutilated villain; a weakened, disembodied creature; and eventually a reconstituted and ghastly serpentine fiend in his merciless quest for immortality and power. Even as a sweet-faced little boy, he learns to frighten, control and exploit others; steals to selfishly appropriate what he wants; uses his magical abilities to bully his peers; strangles

[38] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[39] Rowling 1999:31, 96 & 97, 100, 105; 2000:189, 194 & 195; 2003:670–672, 699–710; 2005a:131, 135,576–578.
[40] Rowling 2007:460.

and hangs a rabbit from the rafters; collects trophies of his misdeeds; and sadistically tortures at least two of his fellow orphans in the orphanage where he was born and lives.[41] Voldemort's life and psyche are full of contradictions. He discriminates against "halfbloods" and "mudbloods", while he himself is the offspring of a muggle father and a witch mother; and he represses his feelings of inadequacy, while mercilessly condemning and brutally punishing weakness in others. Apart from his megalomania and narcissism, he has no regard for society's laws (for example, he spills unicorn blood with no regard for its sanctity), is unconscionable, and expects and authorises his Death Eaters to follow his example and do his bidding unswervingly. Fenske sets out his violent nature and lack of moral responsibility under the heading "Magically Mutilated – Profile of a Mass Murderer";[42] Sirius describes his manipulative tendencies as follows: "'Voldemort doesn't march up to people's houses and bang on their front doors … . He tricks, jinxes and blackmails them. He's well-practised at operating in secret.'"[43] His portrayal as a loner who shuns dependency on others, and yet demands complete loyalty from his followers, conforms to the psychological profile of a psychopath. Dumbledore explains to Harry:

> I trust that you also noticed that Tom Riddle was already highly self-sufficient, sensitive and, apparently, friendless? He did not want help or companionship on his trip to Diagon Alley. He preferred to operate alone. The adult Voldemort is the same. You will hear many of his Death Eaters claiming that they are in his confidence, that they alone are close to him, even understand them. They are deluded. Lord Voldemort has never had a friend, nor do I believe that he has ever wanted one.[44]

Voldemort is clearly the disturbing product of warped masculinity and suppressed self-loathing, which have resulted in a tortured psyche that is as deformed as his mutilated physique. His insatiable hunger for power and control, his denial of his vulnerability (repression of feelings of weakness), his murderous ruthlessness and lack of social connection are all symptoms of a perverted understanding of what it means to be "a man". In many ways, he and Harry have led parallel lives (as he eloquently points out to Harry in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*):[45] both are orphaned as babies and raised by muggles, they only become aware of the magical world when they are summoned to attend Hogwarts, both are "halfblood" parselmouths and they have wands with phoenix feather

[41] Rowling 2005a:250–256, 260.
[42] Fenske 2008:179.
[43] Rowling 2003:90.
[44] Rowling 2005a:259 & 260.
[45] Rowling 1998:233.

cores from the same phoenix; they are each other's nemesis and even have access to each other's thoughts. While either Harry or Neville could have been Voldemort's opponent, the Dark Lord chose Harry and marked him with his famous scar when attempting to kill him as a baby. Dumbledore explains to Harry: "He saw himself in you before he had ever seen you, and in marking you with that scar, he did not kill you, as he intended, but gave you powers and a future, which have fitted you to escape him not once, but four times so far".[46] Harry finds it unsettling and disturbing that he is so similar to the arch-villain, but Dumbledore points out that Voldemort inadvertently recreated some of his own characteristics and powers in Harry when he tried to murder him as a baby. The wise wizard explains to Harry that he is still "very *different*" (Rowling's emphasis) from Riddle/Voldemort and points out: "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."[47] Harry chooses to follow the path of self-sacrifice and love, while Voldemort knows only discontent and seeks to obliterate any vestiges of humanity (which he sees as weakness) that are still left in him.

Yet Harry Potter is far from the ideal, masculine hero. Dana Goldstein[48] refers to a blogger who points out that Harry's tendency to love and to fight only when necessary undermines the warrior misogyny of traditional fantasy tales. Wannamaker[49] observes that Rowling portrays her protagonist as a complex and imperfect boy who has both conventional "masculine" and unconventional "feminine" characteristics. In the first book of the series, Rowling describes Harry as follows:

> Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark cupboard, but Harry had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier than he really was because all he had to wear were old clothes of Dudley's and Dudley was about four times bigger than he was. Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair and bright-green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Sellotape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose.[50]

As I pointed out in my first chapter, Gallardo-C and Smith regard Harry as a "Cinderfella" because of his "feminine" qualities and tendencies. They maintain that he is "feminised" by the abuse he suffers in the Dursleys' home and that he inhabits "feminine spaces" such as

[46] Rowling 2003:742.
[47] Rowling 1998:245.
[48] Goldstein 2007:sp.
[49] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[50] Rowling 1997:20.

the cupboard under the stairs. Gupta[51] also likens Harry to Cinderella. Harry has to do household tasks for his aunt and is excluded from Dudley's activities and circle of machos-in-training friends; he has an intense longing to belong and to be part of a family; one of his best friends is a girl; he sometimes acts emotionally and unthinkingly (as when he reacts to taunts about his parents); and he empathises with and identifies with the underdog because he knows how it feels to be an outcast. Although Harry is in tune with his emotions most of the time, he also often has to work through overpowering and/or conflicting emotions as he moves towards maturity (as when he discovers that his father and his friends mercilessly bullied Snape when they were pupils at Hogwarts). Wannamaker[52] points out that although empathy is traditionally viewed as a "feminine" trait, one should not forget that it is normal and natural for boys to have emotions. Harry has to find his way in the context of hegemonic masculinity: he enjoys and excels in sport, does his homework reluctantly, laughs at pranks and at times also sinks to bullying. When he is struggling to come to terms with his resentment and churning emotions after Cedric's death, he purposefully seeks out Dudley to tease him about his achievements and to vent his hurt and frustration on him; he is nasty to Dudley without provocation and uses language as a weapon.[53] Notwithstanding this instance when Harry reverts to typical male behaviour because he is unable to cope with or express his emotions (because there is no one in whom he can confide), Wannamaker[54] explains that compared to Dudley and Mr. Dursley's hyper-masculinity, Harry does not exhibit stereotypical gendered behaviour. She points out that Harry and some of the other male characters' complex masculinity should be understood in the context of contemporary boy culture, where boys construct and maintain hegemonic masculinity by enforcing strict laws of acceptable masculine behaviour and unconventional masculinity leads to social censure. For example, Harry is taunted for months by his peers because he faints when a dementor accosts him on the Hogwarts Express while Ginny, who is in the same compartment and is "shaking like mad", is not taunted. Lupin (whose masculinity is also problematic) explains to Harry that he has nothing to be ashamed of and that it is acceptable for boys to feel and express their emotions.[55] Wannamaker also mentions that Harry has to maintain a brave façade and not show emotion when he is injured or knocked off his broom while playing Quidditch. A further example of how males are constricted by their culture occurs in

[51] Gupta 2003:111.
[52] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[53] Rowling 2003:17–19.
[54] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[55] Rowling 1999:140; Wannamaker 2006:sp.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire when, after his ordeal with Voldemort during which Cedric is killed and Voldemort is eerily "recreated", Harry fights against crying and howling out his misery in Mrs. Weasley's arms while wishing Ron "would look away"[56] because he does not want Ron to witness his emotional outburst. Wannamaker points out that hegemonic masculinity is often enforced through the male gaze, which compels males to perform their gender appropriately in one another's presence:

> Contemporary boys working to negotiate their identity must reconcile feelings they have that may sometimes be at odds with perceived norms of behaviour, and they must navigate through often contradictory messages about masculinity presented to them in popular culture and enforced by their peers. It is not enough, then, simply to ask boys or male characters to be less stereotypical or "more sensitive" without also understanding the social contexts for masculine behaviour. Rowling is able to depict Harry's emotional vulnerability within a realistic context that makes it believable enough for boys to relate to.[57]

Harry has to forego a normal childhood and adolescence to fulfil the responsibility that has been thrust on him to rid the world of Voldemort's violence, predation, and unquenchable thirst for domination and control. Although he grows up as the target of abuse and ridicule in the Dursley household, he soon learns that the magical world also harbours sinister violence and deceit. While he is still an impressionable and trusting child who gapes in awe at the wonders of the magical world in the first three books, in the last four books of the series he becomes a disillusioned and suspicious adolescent who increasingly realises that the world is not a simplistic sphere of clear-cut morality and unambiguous truths: heroes often end up dead and parents are fallible. Harry's memories and hero-worship of the father figures in his life are shaken and he is forced to re-evaluate his own beliefs and values: he learns that his idealised father and godfather were insensitive bullies like the despicable Draco Malfoy in their youth, and even his mentor Dumbledore seems not to be the just and transparent wizard he always believed him to be. Wannamaker says: "… the focus on the male protagonist and his struggles with the various father figures in his life is a common motif that assumes and works to perpetuate an inheritance of patriarchal systems of power, and that plays out as an ancient Oedipal struggle that distances women and constructs them as Other."[58] These moments of disillusionment force Harry to re-evaluate the type of masculinity embodied

[56] Rowling 2000:620.
[57] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[58] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

by his male role models, and probably play a determining role in his own performance of masculinity.

Because James Potter died at the hands of Voldemort when Harry was a baby, much of what we know about him is constructed from the fractured memories and idealised conceptions of his son. It is Professor Snape's searing memories of him in the irrefutable honesty of Dumbledore's pensieve that severely undermines the image of James Potter as the brave and noble hero his son worships and the paragon of heroic masculinity.[59] However, we also know that Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall were fond of the young man and that, despite his boyhood ignorance and insensitivity, and not having been a school prefect, he later became Head Boy. Although both Dumbledore and McGonagall were aware of his reputation as a conceited trouble-maker, they also knew that he was essentially a good person.[60] All these different views of James Potter make him an ambiguous and complex character, like his son. Both adolescent mischief-making and strong bonds with friends are characteristics of stereotypical masculinity.

From what other characters say about him and Snape's memories in the pensieve, we know the following: James is a "pureblood" wizard who is born into privilege and considerable wealth – circumstances which surely contribute to his arrogance, boastfulness and excessive self-confidence. He is part of a mischievous all-male group who hex bystanders simply because they are bored or find them annoying.[61] Much of their mischief is done to impress each other and to affirm their status as an audacious and impudent masculine group.[62] An unabashed Chantecler who basks in the glory of his many talents and habitually ruffles his hair to make it untidier and attractive to girls, he also manages to ruffle Severus Snape's ego and fan to life lasting hatred in Snape through his conceited and irresponsible behaviour.[63] Yet he dislikes prejudice and treats "mudbloods" and werewolves whom he cares about with respect and understanding.[64] He is a highly talented and intelligent wizard who, together with his friends and to make their werewolf-friend's life more bearable, impressively teaches himself the difficult magic to be an animagus at a young age; he is a daredevil with an adventurous spirit. He is also an excellent broom flyer, a star Quidditch

[59] Rowling 2003:573, 576.
[60] Rowling 1999:311; 2003:155.
[61] Rowling 2003:571, 590.
[62] Rowling 2003:568–571.
[63] Rowling 2003:568 & 569, 571.
[64] Rowling 1999:259; 2003:571.

chaser and a skilled duellist.[65] James is smitten with the vivacious and outspoken Lily Evans, who is one of the few students who are unimpressed by his considerable talents and manages to make him feel like a fool every time his efforts to impress her fail. She ignores his attentions and calls him a "toerag".[66] Lily's rejection and her close friendship with Snape make James envious and fuel the enmity between the two teenagers because Snape is also in love with Lily. James and his friends' continual ill-treatment and deep dislike of Snape almost lead to tragedy when the hapless Snape is lured to a werewolf's lair and nearly ripped to pieces. James risks his life to save the loathsome young man who follows him and his friends around with the sole purpose of getting them expelled.[67] James, with his aversion for the Dark Arts (which Snape finds fascinating and empowering), evidently is good at heart and mature enough to realise that mischief and impressing one's friends have their limits. This incident propels him towards maturity; he changes his childish ways, becomes a responsible pupil who can be trusted in a leadership position at Hogwarts and eventually wins Lily's heart.[68] After they finish school, James and Lily marry and they both join the Order of the Phoenix to fight against Voldemort and his supremacist ideals. James, caught unprepared and without a wand, dies bravely defending his family against the bloodthirsty Voldemort.

Although James Potter values all his marauding friends (even financially supporting Lupin who struggles to find employment because he is shunned by society for being a werewolf), he shares a special bond with the rebellious and independent Sirius Black, who runs away from his parental home at 16 and moves in with James and his parents. Sirius and James are often described as two peas in a pod: Lupin describes them as "the cleverest in the school" and McGonagall says: "Black and Potter. Ringleaders of their little gang. Both were very bright of course – exceptionally bright, in fact – I don't think we've ever had such a pair of troublemakers".[69] Sirius is James's best man at his wedding and becomes Harry's godfather. He performs a different, but related, form of masculinity from James. He rejects his aristocratic family's supremacist ideology at an early age and buys his own house at 17 with money he inherits from his uncle. He becomes a dashing young man with gray eyes and dark hair: "He was very good-looking; his dark hair fell into his eyes with a sort of casual

[65] Rowling 1999:259, 310, 312; 1997:113; 2003:569.
[66] Rowling 2003:570; 2007a:541.
[67] Rowling 1999:261.
[68] Rowling 2003:591 & 592.
[69] Rowling 1999:21, 259.

elegance neither James's nor Harry's could ever have achieved, and a girl sitting behind him was eyeing him hopefully, though he didn't seem to have noticed."[70] However, after Wormtail frames him for the Potters' murders and he spends 12 years in the soul-crushing dreariness of Azkaban before his dramatic escape (mostly in his animagus form as a large, black dog to escape the debilitating presence of the dementors), he is described as gaunt and unkempt and seems almost demented: "A mass of filthy, matted hair hung to his elbows. If eyes hadn't been shining out of the deep, dark sockets, he might have been a corpse. The waxy skin was stretched so tightly over the bones of his face, it looked like a skull. His yellow teeth were bared in a grin. His eyes were fixed on Harry."[71] Sirius often displays dog-like characteristics when he is not in his animagus form: he barks when he laughs, bares his yellow teeth in a grin, and tears off large chunks of meat and gnaws chicken bones in a dog-like manner.[72] These animal features that blend with his refined aristocratic qualities are not the only qualities that complicate his masculinity: although he undoubtedly has the brave, loyal and noble character traits of Gryffindor, as a "pureblood" wizard from a long line of distinguished but prejudiced Slytherins, he is at times also shockingly haughty and vicious. He is prone to violent outbursts, loathes Wormtail with such fervour that he kicks him away when he begs for mercy (saying that he has enough filth on his clothes without his old friend touching him), and is particularly harsh and cruel to his unpleasant house-elf Kreacher. Apart from his and James's heartless bullying of Snape, Sirius's impulsive and reckless decision to tell Snape how to get into the passage to the Shrieking Shack when he knew the full moon renders Lupin extremely dangerous is a reprehensible deed that would not only have been fatal to Snape, but would also have had dire consequences for Lupin. It is ironic that this man, who makes the mature decision as a young adolescent to sever his ties with his bigoted family, often behaves like an immature and self-centred adolescent as an adult. Molly Weasley accuses him of being blind to Harry's needs and treating his godson as though he is James because he yearns for James's companionship and the glory days of his youth, and Hermione tells Harry and Ron with considerable insight that she thinks part of Sirius wants Harry expelled from school so that they can be outcasts together.[73] Sirius takes on the role of Harry's surrogate father for a while in the third and fifth books of the series; but instead of being the father figure Harry craves and needs, he at times seems caught up in regaining the close friendship he shared with Harry's father and the freedom he enjoyed

[70] Rowling 2003:565.
[71] Rowling 1999:248, 272.
[72] Rowling 2000:452; 2003:155.
[73] Rowling 2003: 84, 145.

while heedlessly roaming the Forbidden Forest as Padfoot with his marauder friends. At one point, when Harry worries about his safety as a fugitive and the risk of him being imprisoned again if they dare to meet, he maliciously tells Harry: "You're less like your father than I thought. … The risk would've been what made it fun for James. … I'll write to tell you a time I can make it back into the fire, then, shall I? If you can stand to risk it?"[74] While James Potter decides to leave his immature and potentially dangerous pranks behind to grow up (perhaps also motivated by his love for Lily and her dislike of his childish antics), Sirius (a compulsive loner who feels constricted when he cannot roam around as a dog and significantly remains aloof from girls) seems to have been stunted in his emotional development and fails to grow to maturity. His failure to create a mature heterosexual partnership demonstrates his arrested growth.

Remus Lupin differs markedly from James and Sirius, and is the one member of the marauders who most notably does not conform to the prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity. He not only refrains from participating in the bullying of Snape, but is also "poor, shabbily dressed, and a werewolf (an "other" in the Wizarding world)".[75] Yet he is one of Rowling's most enigmatic and sympathetically portrayed characters. He does not inspire much confidence when we first meet him: the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher with his battered suitcase lies asleep in the Hogwarts Express, seemingly oblivious to his surroundings and (as Ron puts it) looking as if "one good hex would finish him off".[76] However, we soon learn that appearances are deceiving and, unlike his predecessor (the illustrious, lying and conceited dandy Gilderoy Lockhart), Professor Lupin is a man of substance: he is a talented wizard and a skilled teacher who is also (again, unlike Lockhart) modest and endearing.[77] He is one of only a handful of brave witches and wizards who defiantly call the Dark Lord by his name ("Voldemort" instead of the safer and more popular euphemistic "You-Know-Who" and "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named"), and he inspires confidence and trust in his pupils by empowering them. He encourages them to think beyond the confines of the curriculum and their independent training outside the classroom eventually leads to the formation of Dumbledore's Army (a clandestine group of pupils who play an instrumental role in the ever-growing resistance to and eventual overthrow of Voldemort). Yet a mysterious aura surrounds Lupin, which is evinced in his curious

[74] Rowling 2003:273.
[75] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[76] Rowling 1999:60.
[77] Rowling 1999:70, 99–106.

relationship with Snape, his debilitating illness, and his hovering between concealment and candour like a tightrope walker. We soon learn that this dualism is part of his very nature: Lupin is a kind and sensitive man who turns into a bloodthirsty and untrustworthy beast during the full moon. Kate Behr argues:

> Not only is Lupin's character a touchstone within the narrative as the snobbish elements despise and distrust him while the 'good' characters like and respect him, but the depth of Lupin's self-knowledge and the mixture of benevolence and brute violence in his character make him a model for Harry, who must also recognize, acknowledge and control the darker elements within himself.[78]

Rowling uses the tragic figure of Remus Lupin, the unlikely object of Tonks's affection and social outcast who is forced to live a life of isolation and rejection due to factors beyond his control, to show us that people are often judged by societal norms instead of by the merit of their characters and that discrimination (including gender preconceptions and injustices) touches people's lives in painful and far-reaching ways. Lupin's courage under fire is typical of male heroism; but his untrammelled aggression in wolf form is a warning against masculine propensities to violence.

Rowling uses characters' animagus forms to highlight different aspects of their personalities. Peter Pettigrew's animagus form is a rat, which indicates his treacherous character and the fact that he "ratted out" his best friends so that they could be murdered and imprisoned. His first name alludes to the Apostle Simon Peter, who denied his redeemer three times, and his surname (Pettigrew) refers to his small (physical and moral) stature. Because he changes into a rodent with a long tail, he is also known as Wormtail; even when he is not in his animagus form, he retains the features of a rat: "His skin looked grubby, almost like Scabbers's fur, and something of the rat lingered around his pointed nose, his very small, watery eyes."[79] Wormtail is a weak sycophant who sides with whoever seems to be the strongest in a given situation at a particular time. Sirius tells him: "You always liked big friends who'd look after you, didn't you?"[80] He is particularly reprehensible when he is uncovered as a lying and cowardly murderer in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and grovels before one potential helper after another to extricate himself from the sticky situation. However, even this squeaking vermin of a pathetic little man is steeped in ambivalence in that he has good

[78] Behr 2005:116.
[79] Rowling 1999:269.
[80] Rowling 1999:271.

and bad character traits. Like many other boys in the magical world, Wormtail is an "outsider" who never quite fits in anywhere and reminds us somewhat of the inept Neville Longbottom before his transformation. Yet, despite the fact that Sirius calls him "a weak, talentless thing",[81] he does manage to turn himself into an animagus at a young age (even though it is with much help from his friends), uses an extremely powerful curse to blow up a street and kill a dozen muggles with his wand behind his back, and brews a complicated potion so that the Dark Lord can regain his physical form.[82] He therefore clearly has the potential to succeed and to lead an honourable life, but the self-centred choices he makes keep him in perpetual subjugation and mediocrity. Wormtail dies when the new silver hand Voldemort gave him strangles him – a clear sign that the Dark Lord knew that his cunning and ambitious servant's propensity for treason and weakness would sooner or later lead him to betrayal. In the end, he is such a mixed bag of human incongruity that he inspires both sympathy and revulsion. Wormtail's death is not only due to his treachery of Voldemort: he is bound by Harry's saving his life and has to protect Harry from harm when Harry is imprisoned in Malfoy Manor in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. In this last act, Wormtail shows his divided loyalties perhaps most clearly.

Rowling increasingly and skilfully blurs the boundaries between "good" and "bad" as the series progresses in order to underline the fact that "evil" is not easily identifiable and human motives and morality are complicated. She shows that "good" people (such as the real Alastor Moody and Sybill Trelawney) are often unattractive and that "evil" people (such as Voldemort and Umbridge) often hide their cruelty and deceit behind a pleasing façade. There are no moral metanarratives in Rowling's world: "good" people can have chunks of their noses missing and nasty character traits, while "bad" people are often good-looking and become deceitful and/or disloyal because of their circumstances or misguided ambitions. In Rowling's world, people are defined by their choices and the actions they take on a daily basis. This view is echoed by Sirius Black, who claims that no one is purely good or purely evil. He tells Harry when Harry alludes to Umbridge being one of Voldemort's followers: "... the world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters."[83] Rowling shows that even Voldemort, who is the personification of evil in the novels, could have chosen to become someone other than the bullying monster he becomes. She draws numerous parallels between

[81] Rowling 1999:271.
[82] Rowling 1999:259, 34 & 35; 2000:556–558.
[83] Rowling 2003:271.

him and Harry to show that they have had a similar start in life, but he has willfully chosen to follow a crooked path. Tom Riddle (junior) thrives on deception and manipulation, even changing his name to Lord Voldemort to create a false sense of majesty and grandeur because he has a warped sense of his own power, masculinity and finiteness. Yet he commits the biggest self-deception of all: by denying death, he also denies life (as can be seen in his deformed physique and the fact that his soul is scattered in seven pieces across the magical world). Veronica Schanoes[84] discusses the complicated portrayal of morality in the *Harry Potter* books and contends that Rowling deliberately subverts our expectations so that we can see and think beyond Harry's adolescent perspective and conventional character assessment.

With his hook nose; pale skin; greasy, black hair; and unpleasant demeanour, Severus Snape is undoubtedly Rowling's most unlikable, mysterious and multilayered character. He is a highly talented and accomplished wizard not only in conventional wizardry, but also in the Dark Arts. He comes across as an unemotional and calculating character and no doubt these characteristics result from his double life, which keeps him precariously and dangerously positioned between the two most powerful wizards in the world. Yet it is also a façade to hide the emotional scars of the ridicule and abuse he suffered as a child and his lack of social skills. We learn that his parental home was abusive, that he was labelled a freak from an early age and that he was a victim of bullying at school which often left his masculinity in tatters. Snape is an inscrutably dark character whose mastery of mind-reading (or legilimency) enables him to control his reactions and feelings with such skill that he becomes unreadable and unknowable. He is also an expert manipulator who plays situations to his advantage, as is evident in his provocation of Sirius in the kitchen of Grimmauld Place during which he sends Sirius into a rage while he remains remarkably calm.[85] Even when he does not have to be on his guard against exposure as a double agent, he delights in power and control because he has learned to use the norms and standards of the society he knows to his advantage. He sadistically humiliates and intimidates the pupils in his Potions classes (especially those whom he regards as weak and/or incompetent), shows favouritism to Slytherin pupils and seems to bear grudges for life (especially against the marauders who bullied and humiliated him in his youth). Even though James Potter risked his life to save him, Snape adamantly refuses to acknowledge that James had any good in him and continues to believe that James

[84] Schanoes 2003:132.
[85] Rowling 2003:458–461.

only saved him to avoid being expelled from school.[86] It is possible that Snape (whose name echoes "snake") resents James's more successful version of masculinity. Lupin tells Ron, Harry and Hermione: "Severus … especially disliked James. Jealous, I think, of James's talent on the Quidditch pitch … ."[87] He continues to hate James even after his death and despises being indebted to him. Years later, he transfers this hatred onto Harry, whom he maintains is as "arrogant as his father, a determined rule-breaker ... attention-seeking and impertinent."[88] Perhaps his deep loathing of Harry is also because Harry is a perpetual and painful reminder that he lost Lily to James. Yet he saves Harry's life numerous times because of his undying love for Lily and he never proves unworthy of Dumbledore's trust or sways from his opposition to Voldemort. Although Snape sacrifices himself, he does so as a service of love to Lily and loyalty to Dumbledore – and not because of a simple altruistic desire to save the world.[89] Ultimately, Severus Snape remains a complex mixture of good and bad, who hovers between love and hate to the bitter end. Harry's final judgment on him, though, remains as "one of the bravest men I knew",[90] leaving readers with a positive impression of a deeply complex man.

The lasting impression of Rubeus Hagrid is of a man "twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide"[91] bursting into the ramshackle house on a rock in the middle of a raging ocean where an irrational Vernon Dursley has carried off his family and Harry to hide from the menace of magical abnormality that is threatening to engulf his well-ordered life:

> A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.
> The giant squeezed his way into the hut, stooping so that his head just brushed the ceiling. He bent down, picked up the door and fitted it easily back into its frame.[92]

Yet Hagrid is anything but the fearful man-eating ogre of traditional fairy tales and folklore. Although wizards and witches in the magical world regard giants as stupid, brutal monsters

[86] Rowling 1999:210.
[87] Rowling 1999:261.
[88] Rowling 2007a:545.
[89] Rowling 2007a:551, 549, 551–553.
[90] Rowling 2007a:607.
[91] Rowling 1997:16.
[92] Rowling 1997:39.

because of their well-earned reputation for violence and have fought numerous bloody wars to contain their murderous tendencies and savagery, Hagrid does not conform to societal preconceptions about giants and Rowling uses his character to highlight social discrimination and injustice. This gentle half-giant does have traditional giant traits such as an enormous body and immense physical strength; he tends to be uncouth and awkward; and he is less vulnerable to jinxes and immune to magical potions such as polyjuice potion. However, he is also soft-hearted, hospitable and extremely loyal to his friends. Dumbledore tells McGonagall that he would trust Hagrid with his life and Harry says he is one of the bravest people he knows.[93] The very first time we meet Hagrid, he alights from a huge motorcycle with a bundle of blankets in his muscular arms that swaddles the infant Harry Potter. A minute or two later, this gigantic man "let out a howl like a wounded dog",[94] sobbing his heart out over the loss of the Potters and the precarious lot of their orphaned baby. This is a "feminine" moment of quasi-maternal nurturing, and is borne out by Hagrid's care for magical "monsters" throughout his career. Eleven years later, he is the first nurturing person Harry meets after spending the first decade of his life in virtual isolation in the Dursleys' abusive home, bringing warmth to his life and preparing sizzling sausages for his hungry stomach (as a mother would). As a half-giant, Hagrid – like Lupin – is an example of how stereotypes and unfair judgements and preconceptions can impact on and wreak havoc in people's lives: as a young misfit at Hogwarts, he is wrongly blamed for opening the Chamber of Secrets and expelled from the school; his wand is broken as a sign of disgrace but he hides it in a pink umbrella and occasionally uses it even though he is barred from doing magic. Wannamaker points out that Hagrid is both conventionally manly (large, hairy and riding a motorcycle) and nurturing/motherly (taking care of human and animal babies, planting pumpkins, baking cookies and making tea). She observes: "Boys can identify with and admire a man who is neither feminized nor excessively masculine, a man who comfortably embodies a range of masculine traits."[95] Rowling's giant is sensitive and emotional, tends to be naïve to the point of being easily exploited by strangers, and often appears like an unkempt but cuddly child.

[93] Rowling 1997:16; 1999:35.
[94] Rowling 1997:17.
[95] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

Webb points out that there are a number of "abandoned boys"[96] in the series (Voldemort, Harry, Hagrid, Sirius and Lupin) who are orphaned or neglected/rejected by their families and/or society:

> Each of these boys make a different choice about his path through life, but each is clearly aware of that choice, and reminded of it on a regular basis by the difficult circumstances of his life. It is to the credit of Harry and still more of Severus Snape that they can review and in Harry's case affirm, in Snape's case even change to, a choice that is personally difficult and painful from moment to moment. [97]

Contrasted with these boys are a group of spoiled boys, whom Webb calls "pampered little princes":[98] Dudley, Draco and the young James Potter, who all come from privileged homes but are associated with moral crudeness. Webb observes: "There is a risk in pampering: it can produce self-satisfaction and arrogance, the clear certainty that one's own situation, beliefs, and affiliates are the only right way to be. Even Ron Weasley … has been sufficiently pampered by the cosiness of The Burrow to accept without question the prejudices of this status and society."[99] Webb explains that although Rowling emphasises the importance of personal growth and progression throughout the series, she also shows clearly that growth can be hampered by "pampering": "It takes Dudley Dursley, Draco Malfoy, James Potter and even Albus Dumbledore … years to move beyond the limited self-seeking fostered by their pampered childhoods."[100] Although Voldemort is also an "abandoned boy" who does not have a pampered upbringing, he becomes self-pampering in his incessant yearning for power and his denial of death – to the extent that his growth is stopped altogether. It seems Rowling is suggesting that heroic masculinity (such as Harry's) ideally develops in conditions of hardship and emotional privation, which provoke young men to make independent choices.

The *Harry Potter* books start off with a series of strange happenings that rattles the "perfectly normal"[101] suburban and mundane lives of the Dursleys: on his way to work in the morning,

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[96] Rowling 2007a:558.
[97] Webb 2008:17.
[98] Webb (2008:17) uses Dumbledore's designation when he tells Harry in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: "Five years ago ... you arrived at Hogwarts, neither as happy nor as well-nourished as I would have liked, perhaps, yet alive and healthy. You were not a pampered little prince, but as normal a boy as I could have hoped under the circumstances." (Rowling 2003:737)
[99] Webb 2008:18.
[100] Webb 2008:19.
[101] Rowling 1997:7.

Mr. Dursley notices "weirdos" in the street who are dressed in peculiar clothes (a man who has to be older than him is wearing an emerald-green cloak!); on his way back home in the afternoon, an old man in a violet cloak hugs him and calls him "a muggle".[102] Tison and Wallace point out that the Dursleys' fear of magic is very similar to homophobia in that "both are based on the shame of petty people who fear losing cultural approbation due to a personal or familial connection to the non-normative".[103] Wannamaker says:

> … much of the behaviour in the Wizarding world, of which the Dursleys disapprove, is behaviour that does not conform to conventional ideas of gender. … Dursley's disturbing encounters with the Wizarding world are often described in ways that are gendered. Specifically, they involve men behaving in ways that are not conventionally masculine: manly men do not wear violet and they certainly do not hug other men. Because Dursley has been constructed as such an unsympathetic character, Dursley's negative reactions to these "abnormal" gender performances lead readers into the pleasure of approving of these strange characters and this odd subculture, which are able to "rattle" Dursley. [104]

Later in the series, Rowling reveals that, unlike most of the people in the muggle world (whose encounters with wizards and witches are wiped from their minds by members of the Accidental Magical Reversal Department), the Dursleys are aware of wizards and witches but regard them as freaks and aberrations – what they call "that sort" – and their culture as foreign, inferior and sinister.

Albus Dumbledore is unconventionally masculine and, to muggle eyes, looks like a freak.[105] Rowling describes him as follows when she introduces him in the first book of the series:

> Nothing like this man had ever been seen in Privet Drive. He was tall, thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak which swept the ground and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore.[106]

[102] Rowling 1997:8, 10.
[103] Tison & Wallace 2006:265.
[104] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[105] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[106] Rowling 1997:12.

Dumbledore is Hogwarts' delightfully eccentric schoolmaster: he defies the dress code of normative masculinity by donning an array of colourful robes (including purple and crimson-red) and changing his wizard hat for a flowery bonnet to amuse his pupils, has a childlike fondness for sweets (but is not particularly fond of Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans because he has often put a vomit-flavoured one in his mouth), often addresses his pupils in nonsensical jargon to welcome them at the beginning of the school year, has a knack for using ludicrous passwords to his office, enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling, and claims to like knitting patterns. He is also immensely wise and highly talented, is considered by many as the greatest wizard of all time and despite his benign nature, is the only wizard Voldemort fears: the examiner for his final school examinations (NEWTs) remembers he "did things with a wand I've never seen before"; he was "the most brilliant student ever seen at the school" and "won every prize of note the school offered"; and he is renowned "for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood and his work on alchemy".[107] Because of his intelligence and wisdom, and despite the fact that he is venerated by witches and wizards, Dumbledore leads a solitary life. The only close friendship in his life was his homosocial bond with Grindelwald (a young wizard whose genius was eclipsed by his lust for power and supremacist ideals) and it ended disastrously. He is acquainted with grief and hardship, and admits that he is far from being a saint. Rita Skeeter's scandalous biography of him reveals his flirtation with "pureblood" supremacy in his youth and numerous skeletons in his family's cupboard, including his resentment of his troubled sister and her tragic death. However, he repented of his youthful misdeeds, carries the lessons he has learned with him for the rest of his life and becomes a more altruistic person because of it. Despite being known as the son of a muggle-hater in his youth, he becomes a crusader for diversity and tolerance, promoting the protection and rights of muggles and other downtrodden beings. He is an undisputed leader in the magical world, but does not uphold the alpha-male model of masculinity. Although he can be accused of being Machiavellian in cunningly manipulating Harry and Snape to defeat Voldemort, it is clear that his ultimate goal has been both to help Harry to survive his violent feud with Voldemort and to rid the world of the Dark Lord once and for all. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, he tells Harry:

> I cared about you too much … I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives that might be lost if the plan failed. In other words, I acted exactly as Voldemort expects we fools who love to act.

[107] Rowling 2003:627; 2007a:22; 1997:77.

> Is there a defense? I defy anyone who has watched you as I have – and I have watched you more closely than you can have imagined – not to want to save you more pain than you had already suffered. What did I care if numbers of nameless and faceless people and creatures were slaughtered in the vague future, if in the here and now you were alive, and well, and happy? I never dreamed that I would have such a person on my hands.[108]

Ultimately, Dumbledore's close friend Elphias Doge's obituary best describes this great wizard:

> Albus Dumbledore was never proud or vain; he could find something to value in anyone, however apparently insignificant or wretched, and I believe that his early losses endowed him with great humanity and sympathy. I shall miss his friendship more than I can say, but my loss is as nothing compared to the wizarding world's. That he was the most inspiring and the best loved of all Hogwarts headmasters cannot be in question. He died as he lived: working always for the greater good, and to his last hour, as willing to stretch out a hand to a small boy with dragon pox as he was on the day that I met him.[109]

Rowling's portrayal of male characters in the *Harry Potter* novels shows that hegemonic masculinity is enforced and perpetuated by individual and groups of boys and men who police traditional gendered behaviour and force males to smother parts of themselves (which are marked as "feminine" or "effeminate" by societal norms) in order to conform. Boys who do conform (such as Dudley Dursley and Draco Malfoy) are often brutalised into manhood through physical and mental trials, while boys who do not conform (such as Neville Longbottom and Severus Snape) often have to endure bullying, humiliation and ridicule. Wannamaker points out that all this constricts boys' development and identity formation. She writes:

> The authors of "Raising Cain" argue that many boys suffer because hegemonic ideals of masculinity deny them access to their emotions and to unconventional forms of masculinity. Furthermore, parents and educators who conceive of masculinity in hegemonic ways participate in denying boys a "rich emotional life" and other alternative ways of being masculine. Well-meaning educators, parents, and critics sometimes make assumptions about boys, their literature, and characters within that literature that can oversimplify boys' emotional complexity and that assume boys' complete complicity in perpetuating stereotypical gender roles: we sometimes assume that "all boys", even those who are unconventionally masculine, always already work to perpetuate

[108] Rowling 2003:739.
[109] Rowling 2007a:24.

> hegemonic masculinity because it keeps them in a position of privilege over girls. [110]

Wannamaker also argues that Rowling depicts the complexities of shifting and layered gender identities within, on the margins of or in opposition to cultural norms. She not only creates complex male characters who face the same problems and have to endure the same difficulties many adolescent boys in the real world experience, but also opens up possibilities for "redefining masculinity in broader, more inclusive, less confining ways that ultimately can benefit both boys and men, and the girls and women in their lives".[111] Wannamaker concludes her article as follows:

> The varied depictions of Harry, Hagrid, Neville, Ron, Dumbledore, Lupin, Malfoy, and other male characters in the *Harry Potter* novels show us that unconventional versions of masculinity are quite prevalent – not merely "private dissatisfactions" – and these depictions show boys that are not alone in their difficult negotiations with, on the margins of, and against hegemonic masculinity. By portraying a cast of boys and men performing a range of masculine characteristics and doing so in negotiation with hegemonic masculinity, Rowling's novels open up more possibilities for boys, portray broader definitions of what it means to be masculine, acknowledge a readership able to grapple with contradictions, and give readers characters and situations that test and contest the constructed borders of gender.[112]

The characters in the *Harry Potter* books are so complex and multilayered that one can write volumes about them. Rowling's portrayal of them shows that just like gender, human nature is not fixed but fluid and multifaceted; her characters evolve as the series progresses and they are continually redefined and often transform according to the opportunities they are given and the choices they make, despite the gender constructs of society.

[110] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[111] Wannamaker 2006:sp.
[112] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

CONCLUSION

In the rapidly changing and globalising world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, gender relations centre on plurality and difference; gender theories focus on the complexity of men and women and highlight institutional and societal factors that impact on the formation of identity. Feminists such as Butler (1990) and Mary Joe Frug (1992) have argued that essentialist and dichotomous categories of gender are no longer useful. Contemporary gender theories are therefore multiple and often overlap to reflect the diversity and complexity of masculinities and femininities in a world in flux. Postmodern theorists focus on the complex, fragmented and disorganised condition of society and hold that individual women and men not only differ from each other but are also diverse in terms of interrelated social factors such as age, class, race/ethnicity and gender. They maintain that because people differ historically and cross-culturally, femininities and masculinities are the result of ongoing processes of social construction through language/discourse, performance and repetition.

Social constructionists also contend that people are constructed and construct their experiences and discourses on the basis of social factors such as gender. They believe that as individuals, we are part of a social system that creates and maintains inequality and social divisions and exclusions in both the private and public spheres of life because of underlying political and ideological interests. Since social conditioning is a process, social phenomena such as gender differences that give rise to marginalisation and oppression can be challenged, changed and ultimately eradicated. In this way, social constructionism can lead to political action and change by enabling us continually to question and deconstruct fundamental beliefs about ourselves and our world; it reintroduces choice as an ethical prerequisite for human behaviour.

Amanda Cockrell points out that by making very little in the magical world stagnant, "Rowling says to her reader from the start: Do not count on anything staying still. This may look like your world, but do not count on it being what you thought it was."[1] Like the animated photographs, the portraits whose subjects leave their spaces to visit other portraits, and the shifting and befuddling staircases at Hogwarts, the *Harry Potter* novels enable us to look at our world with different and renewed perception.

[1] Cockrell 2006:28.

It is not only in the apparently insignificant but charming details of the books and Rowling's complex characterisation that the books force readers to re-evaluate their worlds. One of the main themes of the books is the deceptiveness of appearances: maleficent Voldemort possesses and inhabits the body of the seemingly harmless Professor Quirrell; beguiling Gilderoy Lockhart turns out to be a cowardly charlatan; the traitor Wormtail wiggles his way back into wizard society as Percy's and then Ron's pet rat and manipulates appearances so that Sirius is falsely accused of murder; the helpful teacher Mad-Eye Moody is a pernicious impostor; metamorphmagi and animagi who change their appearance at will abound – the list is endless. Perhaps the most astonishing twist in the tale is that the diabolical Snape turns out to be a "good guy" in the end. Consequently, despite Harry's deep-seated abhorrence of Snape throughout most of his school life, he tells his son in the epilogue to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* that the bravest person he ever knew was a Slytherin. Ironically, it is Lupin (whose lycanthropy is hidden) who teaches his pupils not to trust appearances and that a shift of perception can force a Boggart to change its normally frightening form into something that can be laughed at.

Colin Duriez explains that this central theme of appearance versus reality is also evident in that the magical world with its fantastical creatures and items is part of the muggle world and yet hidden from muggles: "The all-pervasive contrast between appearance and reality in the fictional stories forces readers to apply judgement to the real world – what is appearance and what is reality?"[2] He also says: "Stories write large the ability of symbolic language to help us to see the world in a fresh way or to restore ways of seeing that have been lost."[3] Like the Dursleys, who "become more aware of the magical world by having Harry among them",[4] Harry, Ron and Hermione's joys and tribulations open up for us a window on the reality of the human condition. Rowling's books can therefore open our eyes to the injustices around us so that we can work towards ameliorating them. Thomas avers of the books: "They've made millions of kids smarter, more sensitive, certainly more literate and probably more ethical and aware of hypocrisy and lust for power. They've made children better adults, I think. I don't know of any books that have worked that kind of magic on so many millions of readers in so short a time in the history of publications."[5]

[2] Duriez 2007:170.
[3] Duriez 2007:238 & 239.
[4] Duriez 2007:171.
[5] Gibbs 2007:sp.

Yet many ardent readers of the *Harry Potter* series (myself included) found the epilogue contrived and disappointing in terms of its apparent reinforcement of patriarchal gender roles. Although it is consolatory in that it reassures us of the lasting friendship of the three friends, and underlines Rowling's message of tolerance and emphasises the moral complexity of individuals,[6] it also grates on a feminist conscience to see Hermione and Ginny (the two strong-willed and spirited females who challenge authority and set their own course throughout the seven books) seem to succumb to the age-old social constructs of self-sacrifice, motherhood and domesticity. But a closer look at this seemingly idyllic ending reveals that Rowling does not even allude to these heroines following in the footsteps of Molly Weasley or succumbing to domesticity like the house-elves. She simply leaves the scene open to interpretation: "All was well" (Rowling's equivalent of the fairy-tale ending "And they all lived happily ever after") can hastily be interpreted as indicating that the magical world has become an ideal world with an equitable social order in which all its members experience true freedom because they are not valued according to social constructions of sex, race and/or class. However, we know that a fairy-tale ending is incongruent with the rest of Rowling's seven-volume tale and human experience has taught us that it is more probable that old inequalities persist: this last sentence should therefore instead be read as "all was well for now" or "all seemed well". We know that it will require more than the Dark Lord's death for the magical world to enter idealised bliss. Giants, house-elves, centaurs and various "halfbreeds" fought bravely and selflessly alongside witches and wizards in the final battle against tyranny, but their fight encompassed no social revolution to eliminate class, gender, and racial prejudice and oppression. In the end, the magical world's heroic stand against Voldemort boiled down to no more than a unified reaction to his usurpation and the common threat to the wellbeing of all. The oppressive nature of the state remains because the resistance only questioned who could wield its power.

We are forewarned of this futility in the very structure of magical society, which is set out in all its glory in the atrium of the Ministry of Magic:

> Halfway down the hall was a fountain. A group of golden statues, larger than life-size, stood in the middle of a circular pool. Tallest of them all was a noble-looking wizard with his wand pointing straight up in the air. Grouped around

[6] Webb 2008:19.

> him were a beautiful witch, a centaur, a goblin and a house-elf. The last three were all looking adoringly up at the witch and wizard.[7]

The dazzling fountain reflects the hierarchical and gendered order of existence in the magical world and its perniciousness is not readily apparent: the wizard occupies the dominant position and towers over all the other creatures, including the witch (who is most probably the only female in the group). In addition, the centaur, the goblin and the house-elf are portrayed as adoring the witch and wizard, while we know that these disempowered and downtrodden creatures have no other choice but to "look up to" and revere their oppressors. Harry quickly realises that it is an illusion:

> He looked up into the handsome wizard's face, but close-to Harry thought he looked rather weak and foolish. The witch was wearing a vapid smile like a beauty contestant, and from what Harry knew of goblins and centaurs, they were most unlikely to be caught staring so soppily at humans of any description. Only the house-elf's attitude of creeping servility looked convincing.[8]

This is not a very positive picture, either of women's position in the magical world or of the way witches and wizards view other magical beings. This deceptive fountain is temporarily replaced by a more sinister, but also more honest, one after Voldemort seizes control of the Ministry:

> The great Atrium seemed darker than Harry remembered it. Previously, a golden fountain had filled the centre of the hall, casting shimmering spots of light over the polished wooden floor and walls. Now a gigantic statue of black stone dominated the scene. It was rather frightening, this vast sculpture of a witch and a wizard sitting on ornately carved thrones, looking down at the Ministry workers ... . Harry looked more closely and realised that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women, and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards.[9]

This horrid fountain does not only conjure up images of piles of naked, mangled bodies during the holocaust and other genocides in human history when human beings perpetrated

[7] Rowling 2003:117.
[8] Rowling 2003:142.
[9] Rowling 2007a:198 & 199.

unspeakable atrocities against other human beings, but also reinforces the fact that oppressive power and social ills are seldom remedied by a change of regime.

Indeed, we see 19 years later in the epilogue that the division between muggles and witches/wizards continues; factions among witches/wizards persist; and house-elves (and other magical creatures) are still oppressed. The placid similarity to the past is an indication that inequality and oppression continue in the wizard world and that the heroic battle at Hogwarts quelled the threat of civil chaos only temporarily because the discontent of the oppressed still smoulders beneath the surface. Voldemort's statue of the social order in the foyer of the Ministry has probably been replaced with the old dazzling one or with another one that reflects another regime's social ideology. The Dark Lord's bid for power was not the first onslaught on magical government and world order – and neither was it the last. Thousands were slaughtered during Grindelwald's autocratic uprising "for the greater good" and pure-blood prejudice is not confined to Hogwarts or Britain: in the east, the Durmstrang Institute for Magical Study follows the same supremacist ideology, selecting its pupils on the basis of the purity of their blood and teaching the Dark Arts. Even in the muggle world, Harry's dog-obsessed Aunt Marge – with her spine-chilling prejudices about blood and breeding – shows that Voldemort's racist mentality lives on. Harry's scar has not bothered him for almost two decades, but at any time another tyrant can rise to equal or surpass Voldemort's self-aggrandisement, cruelty and oppression.

Even though a thoughtful reading of the epilogue shows us that very little has changed in the magical world, we cannot simply revert to our own social conditioning and gendering to jump to the conclusion that our heroes and heroines have succumbed to constricting gender roles. Rowling confirmed this during a webchat in 2007. After being asked about Hermione's future, she answered: "Hermione began her post-Hogwarts career at the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures where she was instrumental in greatly improving life for house-elves and their ilk. She then moved to the Department of Magical Law Enforcement where she was a progressive voice who ensured the eradication of oppressive, pro-pureblood laws."[10] It seems that Hermione (and, by extension, Ginny) might not have succumbed to domesticity after all, but might choose to follow the path of the emancipated modern woman who has a supportive husband, a loving family and a rewarding

[10] Rowling 2007c:sp.

career. Here Rowling again shows that even though it is hard to change the social order, individuals can still choose to work for social change by questioning and actively opposing inequality and injustice.

When Rowling was voted *Time* magazine's Person of the Year for 2007, she explained during an interview with the magazine why she wrote the epilogue. The journalist who interviewed her, wrote:

> The ending, naturally, was the most controversial part of the book. It would have been so much neater just to kill Harry. "I've known that all along", she says, but that was never her plan. To her, the most notable thing, the real bravery, is to build after a trauma. Some fans were disappointed that after all his adventures Harry's greatest concern in the end is whether his son will fit in at Hogwarts. "It's a bittersweet ending", she says. "But that's perfect, because that is what happens to our heroes. We're human. I kept arguing that 'love is the most important force, love is the most important force'. So I wanted to show him loving. Sometimes it's dramatic: it means you lay down your life. But sometimes it means making sure someone's trunk is packed and hoping they'll be O.K. at school."[11]

This brings us back to Rowling's resolve that the books should reflect the real world and not some far-off utopia.[12] Because of the all-encompassing process of gendering, British society is inherently sexist, with the masculine being privileged over the feminine and heterosexuality being preferred to other forms of sexuality. Gender in contemporary Britain is problematic and this is reflected in the magical world.

In the *Harry Potter* books Rowling lets her characters traverse gender roles on an individual level, but also spotlights the gender normativity that exists in Britain and the magical world on a societal level. Characters like Hermione, Neville and Hagrid gain personal freedom by transgressing traditional gender roles and societal expectations without heedlessly upending the social order. At the same time, they are willing to work for social change. Rowling uses a more subtle but also more effective form of social activism that achieves more than simply glossing over the gender inequality that exists in the real world by creating a utopian magical society without sexism or launching a storm of protest that will prove as ineffective as Hermione's Society for the Protection of Elvish Welfare. She shows that her characters first have to acknowledge inequality and oppression (and get others to do the same) before they

[11] Gibbs 2007:sp.
[12] See page 5 of this dissertation.

can work towards changing it for the good of all. Although the process is slower and more wearisome, it is also gradual and therefore does not cause chaos or fear. The anarchy and darkness of Voldemort's failed coups have proven that one cannot force change onto intelligent beings.

Another central theme of the books is that choice plays a major role in the formation of character and destiny. Rowling illustrates that human nature is complex and diverse: "good" people often make poor choices and "bad" people are often not as wicked as they seem. Severus Snape is a primary example of someone whose background and countenance forebode ill, but who nevertheless mapped his own destiny through his choices; Sirius and Regulus Black exercised their moral choices against their family's wishes and long-standing prejudices; Merope Gaunt also took control of her own destiny despite her bleak upbringing. In explaining how social constructionists refute the charge that their relativistic stance offers very little in the way of addressing real social problems, McCarthy[13] writes:

> As one focuses on *how* social realities are created and on *what* the processes are by which some realities are privileged and others are silenced, ethical choices emerge for each actor. One is thus faced with the choice, through one's actions, interactions and speaking, of continuing, changing or subverting particular social realities … . In this way each actor continuously places his or her "truths" at risk and orients their views and actions to transformation … . So, while frequently appearing to maintain an uneasy status quo, social constructionism can also be seen to provide a radical orientation in its particular focus on actor choice and non-choice, thus refuting any charges of a rigid social determinism. In this way the processes by which both privileging and marginalising are generated and enacted are brought into view ushering in considerations not only of ethics but also of political dilemmas.

Wannamaker explains that to maintain that gender is socially constructed does not mean that unconventional gendered behaviours can be adopted without social consequences or that individuals with agency are helpless against cultural forces: "… to say that gender is entirely imposed by culture onto individuals who are blank slates is just as deterministic as claiming that gender is shaped solely by biology".[14]

[13] McCarthy 2001:255.
[14] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

My social constructionist study of Rowling's portrayal of gender in the *Harry Potter* series has shown that, although she uses the prevailing gender constructs of contemporary British society to remain true to her resolve that the magical world should reflect reality, she nevertheless shows her readers that gendering is a social process, gender is fluid and existing gender assumptions can be challenged. As Wannamaker[15] points out, possibilities for redefining gender assumptions become more inclusive and less confining because the books depict societal expectations together with characters who do not always conform to or fit into stark gender categories. Just as Rowling shows that evil and good are culturally defined concepts that can overlap in individuals, not everyone fits snugly into minutely defined boxes of "masculine" and "feminine" in terms of their identities or sensibilities. Ultimately, fixing identities – on the basis of gender or any other social determinant – is always oppressive.

[15] Wannamaker 2006:sp.

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