

Harry Potter and the Closet Under the Stairs:
Coming Out in the Wizarding World
Lauren Marie Capaccio, University of California, Santa Barbara

The following abbreviations will be upheld throughout the paper:

HP	<i>Harry Potter</i> , the complete series (but not the character)
SS	Book 1, <i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i>
CoS	Book 2, <i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>
PoA	Book 3, <i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i>
GoF	Book 4, <i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>
OotP	Book 5, <i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>
HBP	Book 6, <i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince</i>
DH	Book 7, <i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</i>

The Heteronormative World of Harry Potter

It has been over a decade since author Joanne Kathleen Rowling first charmed audiences worldwide with the magic and mystery of her esteemed *Harry Potter* series, and yet enthusiasm for the books has not waned in the years since their initial release: even after the seventh and final installment of *HP* hit bookshelves in the summer of 2007, the frenzy over the young wizard continues to reach new heights. *HP* is what is known as a “wainscot” fantasy, one that takes place parallel to our world and at times even interacts with it, and inarguably some of Rowling’s fame is owing to her ability to construct a story that seamlessly blends elements of fantasy, history, and cultural myth with the modern world, creating a series that eschews easy genre classification while still remaining within the realm of her readers’ prototypical concepts of reality (Le Lievre).

Yet, while *HP* may exist in a category of its own, it finds its roots in myriad popular stories, from the classical hero quest to the modern coming-of-age tale of boy into empire, and at the most basic level the series functions as a 21st reimagining of the nineteenth-century British boarding school novel (Smith 70). In the vein of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and other similar bildungsromans, *HP* centers on the privileged education and maturation of its eponymous protagonist from the mere “boy who lived” to a more archetypal hero for the masses (SS 17). Still, Rowling is no stranger to the struggle for gender equality—publishers actually advised her to release *HP* under her initials for fear boys would not read a book authored by a woman—and she intentionally challenges the traditionally masculine narrative by writing in characters who are frequently marginalized in similar stories, the most notable being Harry’s close female friend and intellectual superior Hermione Granger, whose subversive role within the series is furthered by her parents’ Muggle, or non-magical, statuses (Nel 23). In doing so, Rowling restructures the “venerable genre of the boys’ school story” through a feminist lens, infusing “concerns with gender... into a literary tradition dominated by same-sex educational institutions” (Pugh and Wallace 260). The result is a colorful portrayal of life within the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, but in spite of Rowling’s open striving for the rights of the disenfranchised the depiction of certain cultural groups remains severely limited in the series, and as Tison Pugh and David Wallace are quick to point out: “Heteronormativity is alive and well at Hogwarts” (263).

The term “heteronormative” was coined in the early 1990s by queer theorist Michael Warner, who argued that true social change could happen only through confronting any

dominant culture that presumes a mimetic alignment of biological sex and gender identity, and celebrates reproductive, marital relationships as fundamental to social order. Due to its “hetero” prefix, heteronormativity is often misinterpreted to describe the way heterosexuality stigmatizes gays and other queers as unnatural—what is actually heterosexism at play—but this limited definition forecloses much of the complex analysis that has stemmed from Warner’s initial discourse on the subject¹. In actuality, Warner was attempting to theorize the often-subtle way in which sexuality had become naturalized and regimented in society, to the point where an idealized sex/gender dynamic was so widely accepted as default that it could be equated with what it meant to be human. In this way, heteronormativity does not just imply a prejudice against homosexuality, but rather an institutionalized group of pressures that transcend mere attraction to conform to a specific gender relationship based upon anatomy, psycho-social traits, and class. The problem with the casual assumption of heterosexuality is that it has unfortunate ramifications for those who do not fit within the prescription of bourgeois, appropriately gendered sensibility—namely gay, the poor, or minority groups. Furthermore, the appropriation of conventional masculinity and femininity that occurs within the heteronormative community from the implication that a person’s behavior is defined by his or her gender is exceedingly constricting and patriarchal. For instance, consider how the most common stereotypes about men and women are perpetuated by the image of the traditional nuclear family, the embodied hallmark of heteronormative bliss².

Within *HP*, heteronormativity functions as a means of reiterating class relations and reinforcing a gender hierarchy articulated through biological essentialism, specifically with regards to women and the social imperatives of motherhood and family-building. Not only does *HP* consistently evoke a paradigm where all major characters actively seek out heterosexual relationships, as evidenced by the epilogue to *DH* depicting happy, nuclear pairs seeing their children off on the Hogwarts Express platform, but non-normative gender identifications are equally as wanting. In their article, “Heteronormative Heroism and Queering the School Story in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* Series” Pugh and Wallace attribute these ideological effects of heteronormativity to the increasing need for Harry to emerge as a dominant, masculine figure as the novels progress, thus creating a hierarchy of the sexes that leaves women ultimately subservient to men, who are in turn eliminated for the competition they pose to Harry’s burgeoning position as a hero.

In contrast to Pugh and Wallace’s approach, this essay is more concerned with how *HP* represents a project of Othering, that is to say the way in which the series gives primary position to certain characters while silencing or marginalizing others. It is no coincidence that the power holders in the wizarding world are overwhelmingly heterosexual, affluent, full-blooded wizards, and also decidedly unlikable characters who harbor prejudices against those who are different because of race, socio-economic status, or pedigree. While the majority of important characters in the series (including Lord Voldemort) are excluded from this privileged class, what feels at first like an intentional effort on the part of the author to subvert the idea of heteronormativity by alluding towards the dangers of unquestioningly identifying with the normative, Rowling’s

¹ For the purposes of this essay, the term “gay” or “homosexual” is indicative only of the presence of same-sex attractions, whereas “queer” refers more generally to a disruption of cultural normativity.

² While the nuclear family does not necessarily have negative implications in and of itself, it nevertheless illustrates a number of normative expectations and social constructions that align with heteronormative ideals, namely that families include two parents, a dominant male who works to provide sufficient financial security, and his wife, who is relegated to the household duties of cleaning and child-rearing.

surface level egalitarian attempts to foster inclusion and “trumpet resistance to normativity are actually mired in the very normativity they promise to escape” (Pugh and Wallace 276). Despite Rowling’s proclamations that *HP* is intended as a “prolonged argument for tolerance” the books are filled with blatant instances of sexism, and even the cavalier declaration of Dumbledore’s homosexuality after the release of *DH* seems profoundly homophobic (Rowling³). Therefore, by examining the different portrayals of Others in the text, represented by werewolves, house-elves, witches, and even Dumbledore himself, as well as the way they each resist or reaffirm their societal and gender roles, I hope to gain a better understanding of Rowling’s world as an unsound space of heteronormative production, and to reveal deeper repercussions for readers than were previously acknowledged.

On Wizards and Others: Being Queer in the Wizarding World

Modern day queer theory draws a great deal of discourse from discussions of the Other outlined by Michel Foucault, who emphasizes that “people construct their identity in opposition to others” (Elma 46). The crux of Foucault’s argument is dependant on a binary classification system that defines things by negating the characteristics of something else; for example, to be homosexual is to be not heterosexual, to be male is to be not female, and this same diametric cleave can be applied to *HP*, so that to be Muggle (or werewolf, house-elf, etc.) is understood to be fundamentally not wizard. While people engage in the practice of Othering all the time without necessarily stigmatizing or marginalizing, the term has evolved out of Foucault’s original philosophy to understand the way in which certain cultural groups define different cultural groups as a means of excluding them from some faction of society. Because the concept of the constitutive Other functions as a way of differentiating and stratifying, it often emerges as a product of a heteronormative landscape, and representations of Others effectively challenging the status quo can potentially de-center an agenda of heteronormative privilege. Within *HP*, Others are featured overwhelmingly in the pejorative sense, and Rowling’s structure of the wizarding world is maintained by the subordination of Others through a rigid system of classification, in an attempt to critique the dangers of systemic intolerance and persecution. However, as much as Rowling condemns ideologically motivated violence, the series cannot be described as entirely anti-discriminatory, for even as she attempts to neutralize typical divisions by presenting a diverse cast of characters, she creates a world in which some beings are born into castes they simply cannot overcome, and that render them inherently inferior.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the distinction between the magical and Muggle worlds. The earliest tension in the series stems from Harry’s inability to assimilate into life in Little Whinging with his aunt and uncle, who Rowling presents in the opening line of *SS* as “Mr. and Mrs. Dursley of number four, Privet Drive, [who] were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much” (1). The Dursleys are frequently noted to be “the last people you’d expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious,” whereas Harry’s mere existence is defined by his unexplainable ability to survive Voldemort’s killing curse as an infant, as well as the unique lightning bolt scar that is left on his forehead as a reminder of his distinctiveness, even within the wizarding world (*SS* 1). Despite the pretense of providing a point of reference for the reader (are we not normal too?), from the Dursleys’ almost immediate

³ For a full transcript of Rowling’s now-famous interview at Carnegie Hall visit: <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/2007/10/20/j-k-rowling-at-carnegie-hall-reveals-dumbledore-is-gay-neville-marries-hannah-abbott-and-scores-more>

animosity towards the wizarding world and our hero, Harry, emerges an us versus them schema that gets echoed throughout the seven novels, and it is worth noting that even good characters are shown to exhibit this same fear of the quintessential Other: when Professor McGonagall meets Dumbledore on Privet Drive she recoils at the idea of leaving Harry with his aunt and uncle, exclaiming, “Dumbledore—you can’t.... You couldn’t find two people who are *less like us!*” (SS 13, emphasis added). Throughout the rest of the series this antagonism is repeated and reversed, yet out of the dichotomy the reader is never meant to question the wizarding world’s superiority, for the same reason that no wizard nor witch ever simply gives up his or her wand and lives as the Muggles do. Aside from lacking the obvious advantages of magic, Muggle Britain seems like a decidedly unhappy place to be. Furthermore, while the wizarding world may remain hidden from Muggle view, the two societies do not function completely independently from one another. Rather, wizards are constantly manipulating the physical space to accommodate their growing culture, and the series is full of stories of Muggles being injured on the wrong end of a spell, both accidentally or as victims of the Death Eaters’ righteous, pureblood dogma. If Muggles happen to stumble upon magic on their own, members of the wizard government are sent to modify their minds and cause them to forget the event.

From the wizard/Muggle binary it becomes clear that belonging to the category of not-wizards can have unfortunate ramifications, as it means being kept from the position of power. To make matters worse, the world of *HP* is stratified in a way that predominately favors factors outside of the characters’ control, so affluent, pureblood wizard families like the Malfoys occupy the place at the top of the social hierarchy, and conversely, others are assigned roles beneath them with little to no social mobility. In addition, the marginalization of minority groups within *HP* is often conflated with real-life issues of cultural heteronormativity, so deconstructing the function of these Others provides readers with valuable insight into a series that simultaneously totes resistance to normativity while still flirting with its underlying regressive ideology. Never is this more evident than in the case of werewolves in the wizarding world, and the transformative nature of lycanthropy can be seen as the ultimate realization of Othering, because the majority of the lycanthrope’s time is spent in human form, thus creating a situation where a being who seemingly belongs to the normative group has the potential to shift into something monstrous in both form and morality without detection (Green).

The fluid condition of the werewolves’ identity challenges *HP*’s rigid social order and thereby casts “the lycanthrope as an ostracized, reviled figure in...society,” the target of a range of bigotry including prohibitive legislation to heavily restrict the werewolf’s ability to find employment (Green). Remus Lupin—whose fate is foreshadowed by Rowling’s cleverly allusive naming—discusses the difficulties he has faced due to his lycanthropy: “I have been shunned all my adult life,” he explains to Harry, “Unable to find paid work because of what I am” (PoA 306). While the sensitive reader undoubtedly sympathizes with Lupin, his depiction in light of his marginalized status is not without problem. Instead of challenging the intolerance he faces due to his lycanthropy, Lupin consistently seems to reaffirm the negativity that surrounds werewolves in the wizarding world, something made even more unsettling due to the easy interpretation of the deep-rooted social prejudices against lycanthropes as an allegory for homosexuals in our society⁴. For instance, similar to homophobia, “lupophobia...[is] founded

⁴ Critics have described the shunning of werewolves in the series as commentaries on any number of social inequities including racism and xenophobia which have similarly engaged with the literature of “passing,” a term that refers to a person (most often of mixed heritage) who belongs to a stigmatized ethnic group choosing to identify as Euro-American to avoid incurring social prejudices. While these interpretations hold merit, they fail to provide an

upon a fear of the Other,” and the discrimination the werewolves face is unique in that they can potentially “pass” as members of the normative group for a short while—self preservation through the denial of self (Pugh and Wallace 267). However, a great deal of the distrust and anger that surrounds the lycanthropes is a direct product of society’s ineffectual means of distinguishing their Otherness, as well as the possibility for anyone to be a werewolf without their knowing. Lupin manages to remain in the closet about his lycanthropy when he first accepts his teaching position at Hogwarts, but after news of his condition is leaked he quickly resigns his post, fearing backlash from parents and students because of what he is.

Another congruency between werewolves and gay men emerges from the struggles of their respective families and friends as they try to cope with the news that a loved one has been infected with lycanthropy (Pugh and Wallace 268). Mrs. Weasley is devastated after her son is attacked by Voldemort’s werewolf henchman Fenrir Greyback, and even as the Weasleys rally around Bill, Mrs. Weasley’s lamentation, “and he was g-going to be married!” implies that lycanthropy has repercussions beyond the physical manifestations of the disease (HBP 622). Although his fiancée tries to negate Mrs. Weasley’s fear—“It would take more zan a werewolf to stop...me!”—her expectation that Bill’s lycanthropy will most likely lead to “fractured familial relationships” suggests that the werewolves’ general failure to form interpersonal bonds is part and parcel of their condition, opposed to a culturally engrained aspect of society’s discriminatory attitudes towards these textual queers (HBP 623, Pugh and Wallace 267). In a similar manner, while Lupin is, in many regards, a sympathetic victim of the consumptive nature of lycanthropy, Rowling’s depiction nevertheless fails to absolve him of culpability for his own emotional estrangement, and his strained relationship with those around him is a direct product of his reluctance to engage the social constructions of friendship or family building.

Lupin’s reticence towards Harry is particularly indicative of his emotionally stunted and often erratic behavior. During his year as a professor at Hogwarts, Lupin remains distant and cool towards Harry, choosing not to disclose his close personal friendship with Harry’s father, who not only encouraged him to accept his condition, but actually found a way to transform alongside him every month so he would not have to suffer it alone. Harry’s sensitivity to the dementors stationed at Hogwarts leads to several severe injuries, but despite his extensive defensive training Lupin does not think to offer him assistance until Harry specifically requests his help, nor does he share his knowledge of Sirius Black’s ability to disguise himself as an animal, though he believes Black poses a threat to the boy. Even once Lupin eventually explains his long history with the Potters (a revelation that is, in fact, made by Sirius), he never attempts to connect with Harry the way other adults in the series do (Green). As the novels advance, so does Harry’s need for a father figure to turn towards or emulate, but regardless of the fact that “Remus's ties to Harry's past make him the logical choice...he eschews the responsibility” (Green).

It is almost as though Lupin believes his status as an outsider gives him leave to shun domestic conventions entirely, and he uses his lycanthropy as an excuse to shirk his paternal obligations and place emotional distance between himself and others, both with regards to young, orphaned Harry as well as towards his own biological family. Throughout the novels Lupin’s greatest flaw remains his complete lack of agency, which reaches its apotheosis in *DH* when he deserts his pregnant wife, Tonks, in order to join Harry in the dangerous search for

adequate understanding of Lupin’s characterization—namely his feelings of failure and his reluctance to be emotionally vulnerable—and so the parallel between lycanthropy and homosexuality is ultimately a more cogent one. Furthermore, lycanthropy bears many of the markers of HIV, an analogy that is developed later in this essay.

Horcruxes, rationalizing his abandonment with concerns that his unborn child will “be like [him]” (213). Lupin’s ambivalence stems from his “internalization of . . . society's belief in his inherent worthlessness,” and although he is temporarily rebuked by Harry and returns home, before he can demonstrate any maturity as a father both he and Tonks are murdered in the final climactic battle against Voldemort; in any case, “whether Lupin would have thrived as a result of his family's love or would have buckled under the pressure remains unclear” at the series’ conclusion, but either way his failure reflects unfavorably upon homosexuals’ ability to function within the realm of normative close relationships (Green).

However, by far the most disturbing aspect of the metaphor between lycanthropy and homosexuality is the way the “parallels slip increasingly into the realm of pederasty” the more they are developed, so that if werewolves are to “serve as a queer figure within the world of the *Harry Potter* books . . . they must then also serve as figures of . . . child sexual abuse” (Pugh and Wallace 267-268). In *PoA*, Lupin validates parental anxieties over having a werewolf teaching their students, admitting, “I could have bitten any of you . . . That must never happen again,” and his inability to control his own lupine behavior implies that homosexuality, by proxy, is also a kind of animalized disease that puts children who associate with queers at risk for infection or death (403). The only other lycanthrope in the series with a developed characterization is Fenrir Greyback, the notoriously malicious werewolf responsible for biting both Bill Weasley as well as Remus Lupin. As Lupin explains, Greyback initially joined Voldemort’s army not because he supported the Death Eaters’ cause, but because doing so would afford him greater access to potential victims:

Fenrir Greyback is, perhaps, the most savage werewolf alive today. He regards it as his mission in life to bite and to contaminate as many people as possible [and] . . . Voldemort has promised him prey in return for his services. Greyback specialises in children . . . Bite them young, he says, and raise them away from their parents, raise them to hate normal wizards. (HBP 334-335)

So while it may have been initially exciting to consider the link between lycanthropy and homosexuality, given *HP*’s investment in the performance of heteronormativity, the analogy fails to represent queers as positive, or even normal, members of society. In contrast to Greyback’s pederastic targeting of children, Lupin goes to great lengths to hide his lycanthropy or else to remove himself from society, creating a dichotomy in which “good” werewolves are those in the closet or otherwise invisible, and who try to tame their inherently dark, internal urges (Pugh and Wallace 268). Furthermore, lycanthropy’s method of transmission through the exchange of bodily fluid—in this case a werewolf’s bite—evokes obvious parallels to HIV and AIDS, conflating homosexuality with a contagious disease and “[marking] all queers as quite literally sick” (Pugh and Wallace 268). In spite of advances in potion making that can prevent the werewolf from being dangerous to others during an outbreak, being labeled with lycanthropy precludes a person’s fundamental humanity in the eyes of the larger magical community, which is why Lupin is never described as being a victim of an incurable illness; he is only ever a werewolf, and ultimately, by remaining so passive Lupin is passing up the opportunity to “stand his ground not only for himself but also for other werewolves suffering the same appalling discrimination” (Green).

As a queer figure Lupin epitomizes the politics of internalized self-hatred, and his denial of agency has become such an engrained process that it no longer needs society’s disdain or

influence to affect it. Lupin's assumptive lack of self-worth stems from his perception of Otherness and is therefore characteristic of *HP*'s heteronormative milieu, harkening back to Michael Warner's original definition and serving as the predominant link between werewolves and another minority group in the series: house-elves, an oppressed species that has been responsible for the cooking, cleaning, and general maintenance of homes in the wizarding world for centuries. However, the house-elves' position in society differs from the werewolves' as well as from the traditional slave narrative, because in spite of their ill treatment they seem to actually enjoy being enslaved; at one point Ron jokes that helping his mother prepare for wedding guests is "like being a house-elf" but "without the job satisfaction" (DH 106). Some elves, once released from their families, merely expect to be relocated and continue their duties elsewhere, whereas others develop deep, personal bonds with their masters and go to great lengths to protect them from harm, often at great personal sacrifice. Therefore, rather than viewing the house-elves in *HP* solely as a type of labor workforce, their role in the wizarding world is better understood within the heteronormative archetype of the nuclear family, functioning as un-liberated 1950s housewives who derive "a sense of purpose...[and] the very core of their identity from service to the home and family" (McDaniel 185-86).

A quick look into the house-elves' responsibilities is very illuminating: their powers revolve around providing food and care for their wizarding family, and they are bound to these duties in a way that often transcends their personal moral preferences. Their work is seen as essential to everyday life—they are called upon for chores multiple times a day—but it is also devalued and underappreciated, so much so that people forget they are even there. Furthermore, instead of being paid for their work the elves are rewarded only with intrinsic gratification for their commitment to their family, which allows them to overlook the verbal and physical abuse they are often subjected to. There is an intense amount of internal pressure to conform to their prescribed roles, and house-elves who renege on their responsibilities are threatened with expulsion from the home. When one elf in particular, called Winky, is discharged for possessing a wand, she is unable to cope with the loss of her structured environment, and falls into a deep, alcohol-fueled depression. A wizard's wand is a symbol of his magical education, and the purposeful exclusion of the house-elves from any kind of formal training is a type of power assertion to keep them "brainwashed," as Hermione says, and from altering the status quo (GoF 239). Rather than offer Winky assistance, the other house-elves see her as weak for failing in her position and scorn her as well, another example of their self-policing tendencies.

The case of the house-elves is a particularly interesting instance of the un-recuperated Othering that occurs in the series, because unlike with Muggles or the other non-wizard groups Rowling creates a sub-culture of activism for their cause, implying a conscious interest in advancing the novels' socially progressive agenda. In *CoS*, Harry's successful defeat of the basilisk and his subsequent destruction of Voldemort's first Horcrux were both made possible with the help of the Malfoys' house-elf Dobby, and in return Harry sees that Dobby is freed from the Dark Wizard family. Throughout the remaining novels Dobby proves himself a valuable and loyal companion to Harry, frequently keeping tabs on the boy's welfare and popping up at opportune moments when needed. However, the most fervent campaign in the series is initiated by Hermione, who learns of the house-elves' enslavement in *GoF* and forms The Society for the Protection of Elfish Welfare (S.P.E.W.) to raise awareness of the indentured workforce behind the doors of homes and schools in the wizarding world. However, in both cases the efforts to increase elfish rights are largely met with resistance from the elves. When Hermione hides socks and hats around the Gryffindor Common Room in an attempt to liberate them—being presented

with clothes is the only thing that breaks a house-elf's bonds of servitude—the elves grow angry and refuse to clean the tower anymore, perceiving her endeavors as a direct slight against their workmanship. Similarly, Dobby fails in inspiring his peers to seek freedom, which is due in part to the lackluster example of self-actualization that he projects for the other elves at Hogwarts, where he accepted a position after leaving the Malfoys. Although he receives a modest salary for his work, it is uncertain whether Dobby ever truly overcame his intrinsically submissive nature, and it often seems like his care-taking responsibilities merely transferred to Harry upon his release from the Malfoys, leading his fellow elves to view his relationship with Harry as an imprudent divergence from custom rather than as an act of autonomy. In the eyes of the other house-elves, Dobby is essentially committing himself to another without the reciprocal security provided by the bonds of a recognized social contract, a kind of liminal state akin to that of a mistress, who renders services but receives none of the physical or emotional stability that comes with belonging to a traditional family unit. Likewise, Hermione's deceptive practices to try and trick the elves into freedom, such as hiding clothes amid the trash, is unsuccessful at rousing their support because it fails to recognize that access to resources is not sufficient without a concomitant internal motivation to use them; it takes more than a sock to empower an elf, but rather a comprehensive education that neither Hermione nor Dobby seeks to supply.

Although the house-elves and the werewolves are only two specific instances of Others out of *HP*'s wide and inspired bestiary, given their alignment with heteronormative constructs like the nuclear family they are especially emblematic of the crushing weight of ideological normativity that elsewhere triumphs in the novels. By highlighting the ineffectiveness of the struggles of individuals like Lupin or Dobby against the systemic inequality facing minority groups in *HP*, the series reinforces their inferiority and upholds the importance of maintaining the status quo. However, ethnic Others are not the only victims of Rowling's problematic project of Othering, and the "cultural logic of heteronormativity" similarly thwarts the opportunity for non-traditional gender representations to develop in the series as well (Pugh and Wallace 268).

Deconstructing the M/Other: Female Archetypes in the Wizarding World

While heterosexuality is at the heart of heteronormativity, the definition goes further to include the pervasive belief that individuals fall into distinct and complementary genders, and links "appropriate" activities and social behaviors with physical genitalia (Schilt and Westbrook 441). Although Rowling successfully adapted many elements of the traditional school story to resonate with her modern audience, she clung to one aspect of the genre that seems particularly old-fashioned: clear gender role delineation. Despite Rowling's deliberate promotion of social consciousness in other capacities, her wizarding world still embraces fixed, narrow depictions of the sexes, and one of the most critical debates regarding the books since their inception has been centered on gender relations and the puzzling representation of women in the series, which often feel at odds with her intended egalitarianism. Even aside from Harry it is undeniable that men dominate the novels' narrative space, and apart from the unsettling disproportion of important male versus female characters the case against Rowling is additionally fueled by the lackluster portrayals of the few women that exist in Harry's world. As Gallardo and Smith argue in their article, "Cinderfella: JK Rowling's Wily Web of Gender:"

The issue is not whether Harry is radically different from the myriad heroes, male and female, who have come before, but whether the

series as a whole challenges in any meaningful way what it *means* to be identified as male or female, masculine or feminine. (92)

By repeatedly deferring to conventional gender stereotypes, Rowling (albeit subtly) preserves the inequality between the sexes by reiterating the very “gender hierarchy that subordinates women to men” (qtd. in Schilt and Westbrook 441). Since it seems unlikely that a series written by a mother for her daughter would purposefully advocate any form of sexual discrimination, the misogynistic undertones that run rampant throughout the text can be taken as further evidence of the unintentional, deleterious effects of institutionalized heteronormativity (Nel 20).

The main arguments for or against a literary work as sexist typically focus on whether women hold secondary roles to men, which is why on a surface level Rowling’s treatment of women seems no less than progressive; the different social spheres the characters operate in throughout the seven novels appear to be incredibly co-operative. In *SS* it is revealed that Hogwarts was established some thousand years ago as an equal partnership between two witches and two wizards, and although it can be argued that Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff are currently considered lesser houses (the latter being frequently chastised in the series for being made up of “duffers”) there is no evidence that Godric Gryffindor or Salazar Slytherin ever consciously denigrated their fellow female founders (*SS* 80). Rowling continually emphasizes women in positions of power outside of Hogwarts as well, with numerous witches serving throughout history as political leaders or other judicial figures, only adding to the glamorized idea of the wizarding world as a post-feminist landscape “in which gender is no longer an issue that needs much attention” (Pugh and Wallace 268). Unfortunately, the insertion of passing characters like Millicent Bagnold and Elfrida Clagg—former Minister of Magic and Head of the Wizards’ Council, respectively—has counter-intuitive ramifications, because “the danger of this veneer of gender equity is that it can be taken as proof that the books are not sexist...[masking] the extent to which women’s agency in the books is muted” (*OoTP* 93, Pugh and Wallace 268). As Christine Schoefer points out, “the range of female personalities is so limited that neither women nor girls play on the side of evil” in the first several novels (qtd. in Gupta 127). Consider the girls on the Quidditch teams as another example of “how token inclusion reinforces inequality” (Heilman and Donaldson 142). Despite their efforts on the field, the outcome of the game ultimately comes down to the action of one player, known as the Seeker, who is almost always a boy (Heilman and Donaldson 142). The only exceptions to this are Cho Chang and Ginny Weasley, who both spend most of their time chasing Harry rather than the ball.

In this example of the Quidditch team, readers can begin to see how Rowling’s status as a vanguard for classically liberal feminism is tempered by the numerous instances of clear gender stereotyping present throughout the seven novels, and it becomes more significant to consider the implications of gender-based language, rather than simply the roles women occupy, in determining whether or not the series is truly forward thinking in its treatment of gender differences. Just as frequently are women championed in positions of authority are they described as gossipy, bossy, or overly emotional, words never used in relation to their male counterparts, and as Elizabeth Heilman articulates, “Though any one gender stereotype would not be significant, repeated and varied examples of demeaning stereotypes are” (140). Beyond the plethora of floral names that dot the landscape of *HP*—suggesting weak, unimaginatively domestic women—Harry’s world is full of simpering girls, overweight loudmouths, and crazy old witches, most of whom are inevitably judged for their maternal tendencies. In true school story fashion, the majority of the adult characters’ physical appearances (male and female) are in

some way representative of their internal attributes, but unlike men such as Dumbledore, whose tall stature, long beard, and casual eccentricity denote him as wise, the description of women in the series is far less flattering. For example, Harry's neighbor Mrs. Figg is a timid, dotty figure, and is characterized as being a "mad old lady" who made him "look at photographs of all the cats she'd ever owned" and whose "whole house smelled of cabbage" (SS 22). When we first encounter Professor McGonagall on Privet Drive she is noted as being "severe" with her hair "drawn in a tight bun," and is immediately recognized by Dumbledore who claims he has never seen anyone "sit so stiffly" (SS 9). There is Mrs. Dursley who is "thin and blonde and [has] twice the usual amount of neck" to accommodate her propensity for spying on her neighbors, and even the portrait that guards the entrance to the Gryffindor common room is known only as the Fat Lady, an obese, shrill woman who spends her time blathering and drinking tea with other paintings (SS 1).

However, receiving the brunt of the gendered language is Hermione Granger, who despite her intellect and problem-solving skills is reduced to out-of-character and stereotypically girlish outbursts at every turn. When Rowling is not labeling Hermione an "insufferable know-it-all"—which she does with alarming frequency in the series—she has her "shriek," "squeal," "squeak," "wail," "whine," and "whimper," and at any sign of confrontation she promptly bursts into tears (PoA 172). In SS, Hermione is surprised by a troll that is let into the castle and finds its way into the girl's bathroom, where she has spent her day crying after being insulted by Ron. When the boys go to find her, she is frozen, "mouth open with terror" before finally "[sinking] to the floor in fright" (SS 176). While it is hard enough to envision the brilliant Hermione needing to be saved by anyone, the manner of her rescue is a further example of the gendered hierarchy within the books. Despite Ron's inability to levitate a mere feather earlier in the day, being again annoyingly corrected by Hermione, he manages to perfectly charm the troll's club and disable him, allowing the three of them to escape unscathed. Eliza Dresang addresses Hermione's restricted agency in *HP* with relation to this gender typing, and concedes:

Her hysteria and crying happen far too often to be considered a believable part of the development of Hermione's character and are quite out of line with her core role in the book. They add nothing to an understanding of her persona or its individual caricature, nor, for the most part, anything to the story. Thus, they can only be interpreted as 'how silly, weak girls act,' which is unfortunate from the point of view of feminist analysis (223).

This biased image of Hermione is due in part to Rowling's modern rendering of the traditional school story, where a hero and his best friend are commonly joined by a third companion, "corresponding to the 'rule of three' policy that historically operated in many boarding schools" (Smith 74). Karen Smith explains that boys "were often required to travel in groups of three...to discourage 'unnatural' closeness" because boys' schools were "constantly contending with the fear and the reality of homosexual experimentation in single-sex, boarding-school life." (74) Therefore, in "queering" the typical boys' friendship through the addition of Hermione, "the Harry/Ron relationship is diluted by the presence" of a girl, allowing for classically intense male bonding without any traces of homoeroticism (Pugh and Wallace 260, Smith 75). Unfortunately, this position seems to limit Hermione's ability to develop into a compelling character, and the majority of her accomplishments only serve to further Harry's adventures rather than her own. The end of *SS* exemplifies this disparity: in the last of the

puzzles leading up to the Sorcerer's Stone, Hermione and Harry are faced with a riddle, which Hermione quickly solves to allow a single person to pass on. When Harry tells her to go back and send for help, she is overcome by his bravery, and with quivering lip she cries, "Harry—you're a great wizard, you know?" (SS 287). After Harry responds, "Not as good as you," she scoffs and exclaims, "Me! Books! And cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery and—oh Harry—be careful!" (SS 287). These three attributes can be seen personified by the central trio—Ron the loyal companion, Harry the courageous one, and Hermione, who is clever—but while the boys develop an immediate connection within ten minutes together on the Hogwarts Express, Hermione "has to prove that she is more than just a grind before the other two take her on to complete the triumvirate" (Smith 74). In other words, Ron's allegiance is accepted without question whereas Hermione has to repeatedly demonstrate how her intelligence is useful. Until then, and this is most noticeable in the first four books, she is conspicuously absent from any major happenings.

Another piece of stereotypically girlish behavior that gets attributed to Hermione is anxiety about body image. Even before we know her name she is noted as having "a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth," something for which she is mocked more frequently by her classmates than for her brains or Muggle parents (SS 105). Most of the teenage girls in Harry's world—such as Quidditch players Katie, Alicia, and Angelina, or Divination friends Pavarti, Padma, and Lavendar—reiterate the conventional friendship triad discussed in detail by Karen Smith. They are all virtually indistinguishable from one another, from their identical interests to their uniform attractiveness. Hermione, on the other hand, is friendless apart from Harry and Ron, and therefore relegated to the "unpopular" category, which at the small school of Hogwarts comprises her, the spacey Luna Lovegood, and resident ghost Moaning Myrtle, who is constantly lamenting her bullied looks even after her untimely death. In this way, Rowling resorts to the age-old trope that girls fall into one of two boxes, pretty or smart, with the latter having regrettable implications for one's social standing.

In *CoS*, an unfortunate accident with polyjuice potion leaves Hermione's face covered in fur, and even Myrtle mocks her mishap saying she will "be teased something *dreadful*" (226). Embarrassed by her hirsute reflection, all-star student Hermione hides her face for weeks in the infirmary, forsaking class to save herself from social ridicule. Hermione's hermitic behavior is especially notable considering her proclivity for study later drives her use of a device that turns back time so she can take twice the normal course load (once her visage is back to normal, of course). Apart from the gendered language, the association of low self-esteem with female body image issues is one of the primary ways in which women's agency in the series is constricted, as evidenced by Hermione's repeated choice of looks over books that leaves her absent from crucial moments in the plot. It is not until Hermione undergoes a kind of plastic surgery in *GoF* to alter the size of her front teeth that she is positively recognized for her appearance, and her physical transformation is rewarded both by the lustful advances of Quidditch champion Viktor Krum and later Ron Weasley, but also by greater inclusion in the central story arc. Both of Hermione's parents are dentists in Muggle society, suggesting adequate opportunity to fix Hermione's teeth prior to her attendance at Hogwarts, and making her later acquiescence to peer pressure even more of a disappointment from arguably the only strong female role model in the series. Interestingly though, the "unattractive" girls like Hermione or Luna are much more prominent characters overall, actually affecting the course of events in the seven novels rather than merely being grouped together in passing descriptions, as is the case with the other female students. This may be intentional on Rowling's part, an attempt to show solidarity for intelligent women, but it

is more likely that these girls' homeliness equates to androgyny, allowing them to float unthreateningly in and out of Harry's otherwise homosocial world without being misconstrued as a love interest.

The surprising death of Cedric Diggory at the end of *GoF* marks an interesting turning point for *HP*. Up until then, the books follow a formulaic structure similar to Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* or other serial British boarding school stories: each succeeding novel corresponds to an academic year, and features its own self-contained central drama or mystery that is resolved by the book's conclusion. Suddenly in book five things change, the plot gets darker and more complex, and Rowling introduces three new strong and influential women on both sides of the moral continuum. Auror Nymphadora Tonks, Dolores Umbridge of the Ministry of Magic, and escaped Death Eater Bellatrix Lestrange each assert their power in different ways, but are nevertheless remarkably transgressive characters in comparison to the women like Mrs. Dursley who populate the first four novels.

Unfortunately, in spite of their distinct contributions to the series, Rowling's portrayal of Tonks, Umbridge, and Lestrange still suggests an ideal of womanhood that supports traditional gender role delineation and places mothering at the top of the list of suitable activities for females. These three women have one superficial trait in common, being an adult, which in the world of *Harry Potter* is aligned with family building and the larger societal imperative of motherhood. Apart from Professor McGonagall, whose age, school-marm profession, and severe coiffure mark her as a stereotypical spinster, the few important, mature females in the series are all nurturing parents—a role perhaps originated to fill the void left by the death of Lily Potter, Harry's own self-sacrificing mother⁵.

In many ways Umbridge is the antithesis to Professor McGonagall. McGonagall is strict but comforting, and it is clear she cares very deeply about her students and fellow faculty members. On the other hand, Umbridge is a career woman, and her "most obvious pretense is her disquieting performance of femininity" when her only real passion is upholding the responsibilities of her job, whatever it takes (Gallardo and Smith 94). Like her name, which hints at something deeper about her character, beneath Umbridge's giggles and pink bows is a profound hostility, a sign of a woman's independence taken to the level of cut-throat, selfish ambition. In a world where women are known as relationship-builders—for instance women like Tonks or Ginny Weasley are the pursuers in romantic situations, and Hermione is frequently patching up Ron and Harry's friendship—it is understood that Umbridge's villainy stems from her lack of family or community; to put it simply, her lack of ability to love.

At the other end of the spectrum is Nymphadora Tonks, who clearly illustrates the limits of motherhood on female agency in the series. Readers first meet Tonks after she joins the Order of the Phoenix in book five. She is an Auror, a type of elite wizard police officer, largely rejecting the convention that "certain classes of persons" like women "must be hidden away from danger while others (usually men) fight" (Gallardo and Smith 94). Even her preference to be known by her surname rather than the flowery "Nymphadora" immediately aligns her with the masculine characters in *HP*. In addition, she is a tomboy, admits to never quite mastering the

⁵ Keeping in line with Rowling's propensity for both floral and prophetic naming, in early Christian art the lily is the flower associated with the Virgin Mary, representing her purity and innocence, and was also an ancient Egyptian symbol of fertility. Furthermore, Greek lore associates the lily with fecundity and motherhood, stemming from the story that the flower was created from the breast milk of Hera, which additionally emphasizes Lily Potter's role in the series as the perfect, archetypal mother figure, who serves as a model for all other women in the series (Pastoureau 99-100).

household spells, yet still revels in her innate ability to change her appearance at will, a nod towards the feminine that bridges the usually disparate gap between the sexes. However, in *HBP* her independence is curbed by her unrequited infatuation with Remus Lupin, so much so that she is unable to metamorphose any longer and her Patronus changes into a wolf, a literal representation of the protection she believes only the man she loves can offer. By *DH*, readers are presented with an entirely domesticated Tonks, who is transformed from cool Auror to Lupin's "doting wife and homemaker" (Gallardo and Smith 92). She emerges from the homestead to fight in the final battle at Hogwarts, only to be murdered alongside her husband by Bellatrix Lestrange, thereby orphaning her newborn son and confirming that mothers as women with agency beyond motherhood are not a cultural priority in *HP*.

Aside from Lord Voldemort, Bellatrix is the greatest villain in the novels, and "the most important piece of Lestrange's description as a monstrous female is that she, like Umbridge, does not display the motherly feelings commonly associated with women" (Gallardo and Smith 96). However, her psychological violence surpasses even Umbridge's, and her cold murders of cousin Sirius Black in *OoTP* and later her niece Tonks at the end of *DH* solidifies her deviation from Rowling's traditional, family-oriented woman, rendering her a kind of Lady Macbeth-like anti-mother. Her first name, Bellatrix, comes from the Latin word for "female warrior," indicating a "presence of phallic aggression" within her that recalls Lady Macbeth's soliloquy at the beginning of the play, in which she calls for "spirits" to "unsex" her and replace her feminine wiles with the presumably masculine "direst cruelty" that would allow her to commit murder without remorse (Oxford English Dictionary, Gallardo and Smith 95, I.v.41-44). Critics Gallardo and Smith further elaborate on her ruthlessness in their article "Happily Ever After: Harry Potter and the Quest for the Domestic": "In *HBP*, for instance, [Bellatrix's] callous attitude toward the fate of her nephew Draco is purposefully contrasted to that of her sister Narcissa, who is almost out of her mind for worrying about her son" (96). Bellatrix's retort, "You should be proud... If I had sons, I would be glad to give them to the service of the Dark Lord" emphasizes her lack of understanding or empathy for the fundamental instinct to protect one's family (*HPB* 177). Unlike Umbridge, who eschews family-building altogether, Bellatrix engages the practice enough to demonstrate her misinterpretation of its function: she follows her parents' wishes and makes a "respectable, pure-blood marriage" to Rodolphus Lestrange, but it is a relationship largely devoid of connection other than their mutual loyalty to the Death Eaters' eugenics agenda (*OoTP* 113). She never expresses any concern or affection for her husband; rather her fanatical passion is reserved only for Voldemort, who lacks any emotional capacity and continually rebukes her interest in him. Truthfully, there is something sad about their interactions, and it is clear that disappointing her master is a great inner fear of Bellatrix's. Yet despite her efforts to prove herself a valuable companion—unlike many Death Eaters she professes her allegiance even after Voldemort's initial downfall, and she continues his defense to the point of hysteria whenever she senses a slight against him—he frequently mocks or ignores her, driving her to more vicious displays to gain his attention, such as personally killing any family members who fight against him. Bellatrix represents unhealthy love taken to the point of mental instability, ending in her clichéd last stand at Hogwarts against Mrs. Weasley—the anti-mother versus the good mother incarnate. Readers "are to understand that Lestrange does not stand a chance against Molly Weasley because the latter is fighting for more than herself: she is fighting for her children," whereas Bellatrix, like the other malicious characters, eventually dies alone (Gallardo and Smith 97).

It is easy to see why Rowling, a mother herself, would incorporate themes of maternal responsibility into her stories, and the impact of her own mother's death is even embedded in the plot in the characterization of Lily Potter. Bloodlines do play an important role in the series, and often Rowling's treatment of good versus bad characters comes down to the differences in family dynamics. Examples of the nuclear family structure abound (like the Weasleys or the Tonks), and ultimately even the fundamental distinction between Harry and Lord Voldemort comes down to a mother's love. Although she died when he was in the cradle, Lily's love grounds Harry and protects him from harm, whereas Voldemort's mother died in childbirth, bitter and alone and thus relegating her son to the same fate. Rowling explained in an interview that that the Dark Lord is the direct product of a loveless union, and that "everything would have changed if Merope had survived and raised [Voldemort] herself and loved him" (Rowling). However, the denial of that innate connection precludes his emotional development, so much so that Dumbledore famously says to Harry "If there is one thing Voldemort can't understand, it's love" (SS 299). Being a mother offers it's own kind of redemption as well, like in the case of Narcissa Malfoy, who recovers from her allegiance to Voldemort in time to save her son Draco, and Harry as well. Conversely, women who stray from the path of motherhood are depicted as wicked or impotent, such as Professor Umbridge and Bellatrix Lestrange. This conservative dichotomy is one of the major failings of the *HP* series, and contributes to the lackluster critical reception of the epilogue to *DH*, set two decades after Voldemort's last stand where a now-married Harry, Ginny, Ron, and Hermione deposit their children at King's Cross Station before school. While Voldemort's defeat promises readers the happy ending they were expecting from the series, Rowling takes "the reinstatement of moral order at the end of *DH*" further than perhaps necessary, to create "a space for heteronormative relationships to triumph, as they have triumphed throughout the novels" (Pugh and Wallace 190). There is nothing inherently wrong with seeing the primary trio settled in their futures, and Harry's love match with Ginny provides the reader with closure in the sense that Harry finally found the family he had been missing throughout the series (specifically the Weasleys, which both he and Hermione are now legally a part of). However, "although this ending fills in the lack left by the loss of 'Lily and James'—the heterosexual couple at the center of all events in *Harry Potter*—it has unfortunate repercussions for the otherwise subtly transgressive nature of the series," because it suggests that "the real quest of the main characters was to restore the traditional nuclear family" (Gallardo and Smith 104). This trumpeting of "heterosexual desire is [further] celebrated in the discovery that Harry's godson Teddy Lupin is 'snogging... Victoire!' which prompts Harry's youngest child, Lily, to comment, "it would be lovely if they got married!" (Pugh and Wallace 190). This saccharine conclusion to the series is a disappointment to the readers who are invested in the cultural framework of the books, a decade long in the making, because although the last image Rowling leaves readers with is one of hope, it also simultaneously validates the series' overwhelming conformity to normative sexual orientations and their concomitant restrictions on female agency, a much less inspired message.

So Dumbledore's Gay: Re-reading *Harry Potter* through a Lavender Lens

It would be hard for an academic inquiry into the function of heteronormativity in *HP* to be comprehensive unless it at least briefly took into consideration Rowling's treatment of non-normative orientations within the text. Interestingly missing from *HP*'s anthropological hodgepodge of characters are members of the LGBTQ community, and perhaps it was not until

Rowling's posthumous outing of Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore in 2007 that this absence became fully realized. While various online forums and fan fictions had been supposing an occurrence like this for years, not once within the scope of the seven novels was a character's sexuality ever directly or indirectly questioned, and Rowling's interview insight ("*I always thought of Dumbledore as gay*") has latent repercussions for *HP* and the millions that love the series (Rowling).

When the revelation was made the listening audience immediately burst into cheers, and many still applaud her diligence in bringing a brilliant, powerful, and gay character to the realm of fantasy fiction, a kind of exclusive club previously teased for its frequent homoerotic tension between heavily fraternal comrades—Samwise/Frodo, Kirk/Spock, even R2D2/C3PO—without any realization of the stories' sexual undertones (Cloud). However, others were not as reverential, and in truth Rowling's after-the-fact announcement can only be read as problematic in its implications for the queer community. While Dumbledore's alleged homosexuality is certainly a step towards understanding the wizarding world as a more wholly diverse environment, it hardly trumps the overarching heteronormativity that is present throughout the seven novels. Instead, it raises a plethora of concomitant issues about an author's ability to "reinterpret a story outside of the pages of actual text," and rather than being queer-affirmative Rowling's disclosure actually has the potential to retroactively cast Dumbledore and homosexuality in a distinctly unflattering light (Pugh and Wallace 191).

First of all, readers have to wonder why Dumbledore was unable to simply tell them about his sexuality himself. Not only did Rowling's confession come after the series' conclusion, but it was also made two years after Dumbledore's death at the end of *HBP*. As John Cloud points out, *HP* adds up to "more than 800,000 words before Dumbledore dies...yet Rowling couldn't spare two of those words to help define a central character's emotional identity: 'I'm gay.'" Critics Pugh and Wallace further contend that "if Dumbledore's homosexuality was not important enough to include within the narrative trajectories of the seven novels, mentioning it after the series ends comes a bit too little, too late" (191). Although some ardent fans argue in favor of Rowling's conviction that Dumbledore's sexuality is evident within the text, the examples they give in support—such as his love of knitting, eccentric dress, or "flaming" pet phoenix—seem like such tired tropes about gender-appropriate interests that it hardly promotes a queer-positive reading of the books (Netburn).

Furthermore, in a series that regularly champions allegiance to one's family, Dumbledore's one instance of same-sex attraction towards his childhood friend Grindelwald is stigmatized by the repercussions of his love: he uses it as occasion to "shirk his responsibility to his biological family," and an argument between the boys ends in the accidental death of his sister (Pugh and Wallace 190). Therefore, rather than instilling a sense of pride in readers over Dumbledore's greatness *and* gayness, his ensuing silence must be interpreted as shame over his homosexuality, implying "a lack of personal integrity that is completely out of character" (Cloud). Before Rowling's announcement, Dumbledore's characterization appeared deeply rooted in a literary tradition that had previously produced powerful, wise mentors in the vein of Gandalf from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, who were so devoted to metaphysical endeavors that mentioning their sexuality would seem downright petty. While Rowling often made a conscious effort to depict Dumbledore as more human, more fallible, than the traditional fantasy genre wizard, the relevant link between his sexuality and his development in *HP* is missing, and in some ways mentioning it at all reduces his profound personal struggle over right and wrong to disillusionment over an adolescent crush.

However, given Rowling's assertion that his homosexuality is, in fact, germane to the series, it becomes important to consider why Dumbledore was not only gay but also alone in a series as much interested in romantic couplings as defeating Lord Voldemort, and the question that precipitated Rowling's now famous answer was actually inquiring whether or not, "Dumbledore...ever [fell] in love himself" (Rowling). For all Dumbledore waxed poetic about the prevailing power of love, it seems like his numerous pieces of advice to Harry could have been better situated in the context of his personal experience. Other adult characters' heterosexuality is built into their characters, like in the case of Snape or even Hagrid, but in contrast, Rowling's construction of Dumbledore is as "desexed as any priest—and, to uncomfortably extend the analogy, whose greatest emotional bond is with an adolescent boy: scarred, orphaned, needy Harry" (Cloud). Even bearing in mind the difference between authorial intention and the third person limited perspective of the novels, in which readers see the world of *HP* almost entirely filtered through the eyes of a straight, teenage boy who is admittedly not a particularly keen observer of social issues, Dumbledore clearly failed in finding some other gay wizard to settle down and spend his final years with. Consequently his homosexuality can be understood as the reason for his perpetual celibacy, which is both incredibly sad while still managing to reinforce the novels' heteronormative paradigm that love outside a lifelong commitment is wrong, and should therefore be avoided. Ultimately, Rowling's portrayal of Dumbledore in light of his sexual orientation "cannot eclipse the two-tiered world of her fictions, in which heterosexuality is celebrated and homosexuality is silenced," only now she can also receive accolades for her so-called transgressive integration of a queer-identifying character, without having made any real commitment to developing his place in the series (Pugh and Wallace 191).

However, the idea of homosexuality existed in *HP*'s world before Dumbledore's outing at Carnegie Hall, so he alone cannot be credited for disrupting the heterosexism that is present throughout the books, or conversely responsible for defending the series from allegations of homophobia. Unlike other popular novels, Rowling does not merely eschew recognition of homosexuality, yet when mentioned it is only as a joke or an insult, like when Harry's cousin Dudley sneers at him in *OoTP* with an accusation that the recently deceased Cedric Diggory is Harry's boyfriend (15). By including such an overt reference, Rowling openly acknowledges the possibility of same-sex attractions in Harry's world, and thereby produces a need for a positive portrayal of homosexuality to counteract these prejudices, at least if the reader is supposed to holistically apply the anti-oppressive themes to real life. While it is understood that the slur is uttered by a bad character, and hence not something that should be emulated, there is no corresponding affirmative message or person to counter this negativity like there is with resisting the racial discrimination or economic divisions that are likewise prevalent in the wizarding world. This should not be interpreted as advocacy for tokenism or any other perfunctory inclusion of gay characters in children's literature, merely as the desire that if the LGBTQ community is represented, it is in a tasteful and responsible manner.

Now, of the noticeably distinct reactions to the news of Dumbledore's sexuality, some were enthusiastic, others decidedly not so, but a good handful of people responded with a mixture of indifference and confusion over why this information was debate-worthy at all. As the books provide no compelling reason to include Dumbledore's orientation—the narrative started and was resolved fully without its mention—for many readers Rowling's announcement has no impact on their understanding of the series. However, although her statement may not have direct implications in furthering Harry's fight against Voldemort, as part of creating or disrupting a

heteronormative milieu that extends past the seven novels, the gender roles and sexual orientations that litter the pages of *HP* are important to consider, especially given their relevancy to today's social climate. There are numerous scientific articles that endeavor to establish that books are edifying for children and teenagers, and the majority of the reports conclude that reading "young adult literature is one of the most meaningful and enjoyable ways for [kids] to inquire into social responsibility because [they] can situate this content into the...books" (Wolk 667). As with other forms of social ideology, representations of gender and sexuality in popular media have the potential to obscure and even justify oppressive practices, so repeatedly being exposed to hegemonic conventions that vilify homosexuality and non-normative gender identifications reinforce in children a dominant, heterocentric view of society (Heilman & Donaldson 140). Just in terms of exposure, readers of *HP* see the characters grow to torture and kill, watch their friends die and suffer deep, psychological trauma themselves—all topics Rowling thought appropriate for her audience, and it is unclear why the sole issue she skirted around was something as tenuous as personal identity.

The *HP* series is great fun, and I would not deny anyone the pleasure of reading the books. Nevertheless, the politics of *HP*, while broadly anti-discriminatory, are far more complicated at the level of individual identity. Rowling's claims about her intended egalitarianism conflict with the operation of sexism and heteronormativity in the books, in a way that curbs character development and dictates the narrative trajectory of the series. Because of *HP*'s unquestionable influence and the scope of its audience, it becomes informative for readers to consider whether or not the series effectively challenges heterosexual dominance by creating non-straight spaces of cultural production and reception. Despite Rowling's appropriation of women in positions of power or even her decision about Dumbledore's homosexuality, *HP* still represents a hierarchical project of Othering, reiterates a congruent alignment of the relationship between sex and gender, and fails to interrogate the fiction of compulsory heterosexuality, so that even "where characters' sexualities are not indicated in the...text, a wider cultural logic dictates that heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved" (qtd. in Tosenberger 202). Therefore, the series' avowed interest in challenging convention is subsumed by its entrenchment in heteronormativity, and so the fantastical world of *HP* "becomes infected with the banal" (Pugh and Wallace 268). In frequently limiting her characters' agency by creating parameters they cannot overcome, like Lupin's queerness hindering his emotional development or Hermione's feminine sensitivity precluding her contributions to the plot, Rowling upholds a view of society that simply cannot be described as progressive, one, unfortunately, very much like our own.

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