



Alice's Academy

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Men in Cloaks and High-heeled Boots, Men Wielding Pink Umbrellas: Witchy Masculinities in the *Harry Potter* novels

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"Children's culture is not the result of purely top-down forces of ideological and institutional control, nor is it a free space of individual expression. Children's culture is a site of conflicting values, goals, and expectations".

Henry Jenkins, *The Children's Culture Reader* (p. 4)

J. K. Rowling has been accused of perpetuating patriarchal social structures by relying on traditional male-centered heroic narratives, and she has been lauded for creating feminist fairy tales; she has been vilified for championing feminist-inspired witchcraft, while being praised for getting reluctant boys to read; the characters who populate the fictional world of her novels have been described as sexist and stereotypical, or, conversely, as feminist role models. While not always directly stated, what is at stake in these debates is not so much the meaning of literary texts, but the effect that meaning may have on the children who read the texts and, in this case, on the gendered beings they will eventually become. The assumption often underlying these debates is one of an innocent childhood, a conception of the child as a blank slate onto which culture is written, which "'empties' the child of its own political agency, so that it may more perfectly fulfill the symbolic demands we make upon it" (Jenkins 1). Instead of assuming a "top-down" relationship between J.K. Rowling's texts and her readers, I want to instead read the space between reader and text (identity and culture) as one of continuous negotiation marked by contradictions and "conflicting values, goals, and expectations." In other words, the contradictory readings by critics of portrayals of gender in the *Harry Potter* series coexist because, as is the case with many of the better children's texts, these complex novels function in a space between, where dominant ideology is simultaneously re-enforced, challenged, and negotiated. 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.

Several critics have already focused much attention on Hermione and other female characters in the series like Professor McGonagall, Mrs. Weasley, and, increasingly, Tonks and Ginny, but I will focus my discussion primarily on the male characters in the novels, and the ways they perform a variety of masculine identities. Much attention has been paid, in feminist children's literature scholarship, to depictions of female characters. While this is necessary and important work, a continued focus on women and girls as the primary subjects of the study of gender in children's literature could run the risk of further naturalizing masculinity; of perpetuating the assumption that girls are gendered, while boys are just naturally boys [2]. Furthermore, those critical texts that have discussed male characters in the *Harry Potter* novels at length have tended to focus on the extent to which male characters are or are not stereotypical. While calling attention to stereotypes is important, it also can assume that there is a direct,



unproblematic correlation between the behavior of characters portrayed in texts for children and children's behavior. Furthermore, 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 of shifting, layered gendered identities that exist within, on the margins of, or in opposition to cultural norms.

Through her novels, Rowling shows us that—while there is a dominant version of masculinity that is favored in western culture and that often is imposed through mainstream society—many boys and men do not easily conform to this hegemonic masculinity. According to John Stephens, "that many boys find the contemporary world bewildering is often attributed to a lack of correspondence between their experiences of living in the world and a perceived demand to conform to the hegemonic masculinity of their society; that is, the form of masculinity most privileged or desired" (ix). The *Harry Potter* novels depict this tension that exists between societal expectations and the experiences of boys who don't always conform. Furthermore, in making this tension visible, Rowling not only creates complex male characters that boys can relate to; she 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.

Boys have been the subjects of much scrutiny over the past few years as parents, educators, and psychologists work to understand what has been called "The Boy Crisis." This so-called "crisis" has created an entire body of pop psychology and parental advice books aimed at helping us to cope with boys who are—depending on the expert—too masculine, too gay, too illiterate, too tied to biology, too much under the influence of feminism, too angry, too unemotional, and so on. Some say that feminism has emasculated our boys and claim that boys will be just fine if we acknowledge their biology and just "let boys be boys." Others claim that patriarchy, not feminism, puts too much pressure on boys to be unemotional and tough at the expense of their emotional wellbeing. Shifting definitions of masculinity and conflicting views about the current "boy crisis" play themselves out in children's real, lived experiences in school, at home, on television, in interactions with parents and other adults, and in the texts that make up children's culture and literature. In fact, these conflicting messages play themselves out in much of the criticism written about the *Harry Potter* novels, where boy characters are criticized for a range of behaviors and attitudes, including being interested in sports, being insensitive jerks, and, conversely, for being feminized wimps. Indeed, much of our ambivalence about contemporary masculinity—especially our anxieties about boys and what boys ought or ought not to be—is visible both in the body of criticism written about gender in the *Harry Potter* novels and in the books themselves. In her essay, "Accepting Mudbloods: The Ambivalent Social Vision of J.K. Rowling's Fairy Tales," Elaine Ostry writes, "The popular response to *Harry Potter* seems to reflect a truth that we adults do not want to own up to: when it comes right down to it, we do not really know what we want from children's literature, comfort or change" (90). Ostry is discussing Rowling's ambivalent portrayals of race and social class in the *Harry Potter* series, but her observation could also apply to the responses to depictions of gender in the books: the body of criticism discussing portrayals of gender in the books shows that "we do not really know what we want."

Harry Potter and the Great Gender Divide: The Current Debates

The *Harry Potter* novels have received a vast amount of critical attention in both the popular and the academic press, especially considering their recent publication and the fact that the series is not yet complete. Within this body of criticism, the novels have been both praised and vilified for their depictions of gender. Much of this criticism has focused on female characters in the novels, and has argued that girls and women are not portrayed as often or as richly as the boys and men in the books. Some critics also complain that the female characters are boring when compared to their fun and adventurous male counterparts, and that the girls and women are often portrayed in ways that are one-dimensional and stereotypically feminine. These criticisms are valid because the portrayals of gender roles in the *Harry Potter* novels often are not ideal, and sometimes do border on the stereotypical: Professor McGonagall often is stern, while Professor Dumbledore is delightfully eccentric and wise; and groups of girls whisper and giggle, while the major boy characters concern themselves with serious and life-threatening situations. For example, in the most recent book in the series, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, except for female Death Eaters watching Dumbledore's murder, the most dramatic and important



moments are played out among the male leads: Dumbledore is killed by Snape when Draco is unable to complete his task, and, earlier, Harry and Dumbledore travel to a treacherous cave to search for a Horcrux that contains part of Voldemort's soul. The women are engaged in battle, but clearly on the sidelines, and in less important supporting roles. Even Tonks, introduced in the fifth novel, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, as a tough female Auror, falls apart and becomes ineffectual in the sixth novel because she is lovesick. Furthermore, as some critics have pointed out, 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 an ancient Oedipal struggle that distances women and constructs them as Other. In response to these critiques of gender portrayals in the novels, other critics and fans have rushed to the defense of Hermione, McGonagall, and Rowling. Some claim that Hermione is a role model for girls because she is strong and clever; that girls in the novel play equally with boys on the Quidditch field; that Ginny and Tonks are smart and capable; that Mrs. Weasley's nurturing motherliness should be valued; and that McGonagall is a respected adult character, who is a role model and mentor for boys and girls alike. Yet others argue that the characters in the novels are indeed imperfect, and therefore, believable and likeable.

These varied, sometimes opposing, interpretations of the series are all valid because the *Harry Potter* novels are complex, character-driven works that often depict gender in nuanced, layered, and contradictory ways. Some critics have come to the conclusion that these books are so popular with fans because they re-enforce hegemonic notions of gender (and social class, imperialism, race, etc.)—that readers prefer books that make them feel comfortable with conventional beliefs or familiar narratives and that do not challenge the status quo. Conversely, others claim that readers are drawn by the books' feminism and that the books work to subvert dominant ideology. I, however, do not think the novels would be as popular as they have been if either of these generalizations was true.

In 2000, Christine Schoefer started a furor among Harry Potter fans when she published an essay in Salon critical of Rowling's depictions of gender in the first three *Harry Potter* novels. In the essay, "Harry Potter's Girl Trouble," she wrote, "Girls, when they are not downright silly or unlikable, are helpers, enablers and instruments. No girl is brilliantly heroic in the way Harry is, no woman is experienced and wise like Professor Dumbledore." Her short essay drew harsh criticism from Harry Potter fans who, "protested Potter's innocence on e-mail discussion lists, barraged Salon with negative letters, and even sent hundreds to Schoefer herself" (Elliott). Many fans saw accusations of sexism as a wholesale dismissal of the books and characters they held dearly. They jumped to the defense of Rowling by saying that Schoefer was over-reacting, and they pointed out aspects of the books that are not sexist. In an article titled "Stepping on the Harry Potter Buzz," Jane Elliott criticizes the fans' defense of the books. In her analysis of Schoefer's article and the backlash that followed it, Elliott claims that the women readers who disagree with Schoefer, even those who consider themselves feminists, do not want to be critical of Rowling: "For Schoefer, the reluctance of readers to discuss sexism in the Potter series indicates that we take comfort from the conventional roles reproduced in the books" (Elliott). Elliott, here, seems to dismiss defenses of portrayals of gender in the novel as coming from naïve readers who simply don't understand the ways we all are being constructed by our culture.

Elizabeth Heilman makes similar assumptions about Harry Potter fans when she adds to this argument in her 2003 essay titled "Blue Wizards and Pink Witches: Representations of Gender, Identity and Power," where she points out that, "ordinary people do not realize the extent to which their ideas of gender are culturally created" (231). Heilman thoroughly works through the first four books in the series, creating an exhaustive list of examples to support her argument. There are more male characters than female characters, and the male characters receive more attention, are portrayed in more positive ways, and are more important. Hermione, she argues, is relatively powerless and is Ron and Harry's helper, rather than an equal partner in their adventures. According to Heilman, in addition to perpetuating negative stereotypes of girls and women, the novels also portray men and boys in stereotypical ways: "In the *Harry Potter* books, boys are stereotypically portrayed, with the strong, adventurous, independent type of male serving as a heroic masculinity, whereas the weak, unsuccessful male is mocked and sometimes despised" (231). According to Heilman, Harry succeeds at being masculine, not only because he is good at sports and accomplishes heroic deeds, but also because he is being compared to men and boys who fail at masculinity: for example, she claims that Cedric Diggory is from a lower class and Neville Longbottom is feminized. I disagree with Heilman on these points because it is never clear what social



class the popular and handsome Cedric belongs to and because Neville's character is quite complex. In fact, as the series progresses it is increasingly clear that Neville is parallel to Harry on many levels and his difficult childhood, painful family history, and quirky behavior make him one of the more interesting and admirable secondary characters in the novels. 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 behaviors. 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 another recent article, Terri Doughty also argues that the *Harry Potter* books appeal to readers because of conventional portrayals of boys and men. In her essay, "Locating Harry Potter in the 'Boys' Books' Market," an essay that considers the books' mass appeal to boy readers, she writes that, "The Harry Potter books do not problematize masculinity; this is, perhaps, one reason for their appeal for boy readers. Rowling follows an older narrative tradition, in which the boy-hero comes to maturity supported by a cast of 'fathers' who are there when he needs them, but who also let him make his own way when he needs to do that" (253). Harry must "fight a man's battles" and does so with the help of male mentors and against a powerful male antagonist. Doughty does not see this traditional male-centered hero narrative as negative, though. On the contrary, she believes that boy readers—who often must read about flawed male characters in much fiction written for young adolescents—need positive role models. "Rowling has tapped into a kind of collective unconscious need to be reminded that boys have a path toward maturity to follow, and they can indeed make it, both with help and on their own" (257). While I agree with many of Doughty's points, especially the idea that boys (and girls) can benefit from positive male role models, I question whether boys need *traditional* models of masculinity to follow, or whether more unconventional, more nuanced portrayals of masculinity might not be more useful, especially in a world where constructions of masculinity are evolving, and researchers are questioning the effects of the expectations of traditional masculinity on boys. "Paradoxically," write Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, "traditional assumptions about maleness are repressive mostly because they claim not to be" (165). Many boys who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity are, at times, ridiculed or bullied, and those boys who do conform are often brutalized into manhood through physical and mental trials. Therefore, simply demanding that boys always behave in ways that are non-traditional or expecting children's books to portray male characters that serve as non-traditional role models is unrealistic considering the complexities of identity within culture, and could even be potentially dangerous in a playground culture that sometimes violently polices a "boy code" of traditionally gendered behavior.

To say that gender is socially constructed is not the same as saying we can easily adopt gendered behaviors that are unconventional without facing social consequences. Conversely, individuals with agency are not entirely helpless before cultural forces. In other words, 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. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler uses the idea of gender performance to complicate the biological/constructivist dichotomy and to address questions of agency. We should be wary of positing the natural as something that can simply be written over by discourse, just as we should be wary of claiming that the body is something outside discourse. She argues instead that gender performance involves a "matrix of gender relations" that is both imposed and performed in ways that are tenuous. The gendered foundation of the subject is always tenuous because identity must be established in opposition to an abject, and that abject always threatens the subject at the same time as it works to construct it. If masculinity were natural, boys would not need to police gendered behaviors of themselves and their peers on the playground; boys and men would not need to continuously prove that they are not feminine. Therefore, the continuous performance of a masculine identity working to establish itself in opposition to anything feminine, paradoxically works to mark those aspects of gendered identity that are performed, that need to be proved. In other words, the abject is an "enabling disruption critical to the matrix of gender performance" (23). While the abject—that which disrupts bodily borders or a conception



of a whole and fixed self—is crucial to gender identity and performance, its presence also opens up gaps that can make performance visible and create moments of "productive crisis." The *Harry Potter* novels open up spaces of "productive crisis" through their depictions of non-hegemonic masculinities existing in opposition to cultural expectations and through depictions of non-traditional heterosocial relationships. These contradictions and tensions may be what draw in savvy child readers, who would not be as attracted by didactic texts that advocate rigidly defined, traditional or non-traditional gender roles. The construction of gender is fluid and ongoing (for both children and adults); it requires thinking, acting, conforming, resisting subjects, who are influenced by, but are not always blind to or helpless in the face of a monolithic "Culture."

This is not to say that children's negotiations of identity within culture(s) are the same as adults'. Children have less experience of the world than adults and are afforded less agency because of unequal power structures. As Jenkins writes, "children are subject to powerful institutions that ascribe meanings onto their minds and bodies in order to maintain social control," and, "children's culture is shaped by adult agendas and expectations, at least on the site of production and often at the moment of reception, and these materials leave lasting imprints on children's social and cultural development" (26). On the other hand, children also are not entirely helpless before culture. Children often "resist, transform, or redefine adult prerogatives, making their own uses of cultural materials and enacting their own fantasies through play" (27). The fan culture surrounding the *Harry Potter* books is a perfect example of such agency on the part of readers because some fans of the books rewrite story lines and re-invent characters, situations, and relationships in fanfiction, on fan websites, and in email discussion lists.

Several *Harry Potter* fan web discussion lists, for example, treat the topic of gender in the novels in intelligent ways that we, as academic critics, should not be so quick to dismiss. 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." One fan is particularly on the mark in pointing out that the critics who want the *Harry Potter* books to portray an ideal feminist world "seem to be operating on the basis that somehow, books written for or read by children should have a 'message'—they should reinforce whatever is Politically Correct or Socially Desirable at the time, never mind whether or not it is realistic" (The Sugar Quill). These fans—whose age or gender we can't tell from the pseudonyms they use on the web—are clever enough to see that debates about issues like gender focus mainly on what we believe is at stake culturally and politically in children's identity development.

One critical article that looks at gender in the *Harry Potter* books in a complex, nuanced way is Eliza Dresang's "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender." Dresang argues in defense of Hermione and McGonagall but does so by looking at the books and the characters through various feminist lenses that offer a multiplicity of readings. Some critics, for example, are critical of Hermione's "plastic surgery" in *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*—Hermione's big front teeth are straightened and made smaller and her hair is no longer bushy when she attends the Yule Ball with Viktor Krum. But Dresang acknowledges that feminist criticism is not monolithic, and discusses the different ways Hermione's actions can be viewed using different feminist approaches: "Radical-libertarian feminists maintain that females have the right to do whatever they want to with their bodies, while radical-cultural feminists would more likely disapprove of using the body in this manner to attract male attention" (233). Dresang acknowledges that the portrayal of gender in Rowling's novels creates a "mixed and inconclusive picture" (236) and that the books do not represent utopian possibilities, but instead depict "the far less than ideal reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (238).

This brief summary of much of the criticism about gender in the *Harry Potter novels* shows that Rowling has been able to tap into some of the anxieties contemporary children and adults feel about gender, and to portray these anxieties and uncertainties 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. It is within these contradictions that spaces can open up to view gender, specifically masculinity, in the novels in alternative ways.

Witchy Masculinities in the *Harry Potter* Novels

Issues of masculinity in the *Harry Potter novels*—depictions of male characters, the structure of Wizarding subculture, the structure of the novels as works of literature, and the relationships between boys and boys and girls and boys—should be examined in ways that acknowledge the complexities of contemporary children's culture and current thinking about boys and masculinity. For example, over the past decade there have been many texts published, predominantly parenting advice books, about rearing and educating boys. Unfortunately, quite a few of these books have black and red covers and seem to invoke fears about boys and violence, illiteracy, Attention Deficit Disorder, and emotional instability. One of the more prominent books has been Dan Kindlon and Michael Thomspon's *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*. While the therapist authors have been accused of basing too many generalizations about all boys on a narrow population of their troubled boy patients, the book does point out some damaging cultural misconceptions about boys that are worth noting:

It is vital that parents and teachers not take boys at face value, even though they sometimes insist, furiously, that we do so. They often present us with an apparently simple set of needs: Ninja Turtles, Nike shoes, exciting and violent video games, and support for their athletic ambitions. It may seem that every boy wants to 'be like Mike.' But it isn't so. Boys want different and complicated and conflicting things. (xii)

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 hegemonic masculinity because it keeps them in a position of privilege over girls.

For example, Heilman seems to argue that the surface of the *Harry Potter* books is sexist and one can only read the books as feminist if one reads against the grain of the text. She writes, "though both feminist and poststructuralist theories tell us that text can be read from multiple, contradictory, and even transgressive positions, it is still important for criticism to reveal dominant and hegemonic traditions" (223). While this is most definitely true and there are aspects of the *Harry Potter* novels that could be interpreted as supporting hegemonic and patriarchal notions about gender, there is, however, also much in the *Harry Potter* series that combats dominant ideology. One does not even need to read against the grain of the text because there are complex and contradictory portrayals of gender right on the surface of the text, and evident to even the youngest or most literal-minded reader. Heilman writes, for example, "the girls on the Quidditch team provide another example of how token inclusion reinforces inequality" (226). In this example, Rowling's depiction of coed sports teams is dismissed as tokenism, even though Rowling purposefully uses the make-up of the teams to make a point about inclusion: in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* the only house *without* girls on their Quidditch team is Slytherin, and they are the "bad guys." Rowling's point here is obvious even in a surface reading of the text: the Slytherins, who exclude wizards who are not of pure blood and who mock lower-class wizards, can also add sexism to their list of antisocial beliefs and practices. In the other houses at Hogwarts, boys and girls play equally together and there are several girl Quidditch players referenced in positive ways in each text of the series, sometimes as valuable and famous members of professional teams—girl and women Quidditch players are not merely tokens.

When we read with the grain of even the first and simplest novel, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (HPSS), which is an introduction to the Wizarding world, many such examples occur. For example, Rowling establishes marked differences between the "normal" Muggle world and the "abnormal" Wizarding world—differences that are often articulated through different portrayals of gender and



different relationships between men and women. Gender in the Muggle world, as represented by the Dursleys, is portrayed as being normative, while gender roles in the Wizarding world are sometimes not as easily categorized. Both "normal" and "abnormal" are defined for us in the opening chapters of *HPSS* by Mr. Dursley, Harry's awful uncle. The Dursleys, in many ways, are like the exaggerated caricatures of villainous adults that populate so many beloved children's books—a type of character (ala Roald Dahl's Aunts Sponge and Spiker) that resonates with children because they often feel powerless in the face of arbitrary adult authority. Mr. Dursley quickly comes to represent the grumpy adult, who stands in the way of children's aspirations and desires: "He didn't approve of imagination" (Rowling 5). He is that sort of adult who tells children to stop daydreaming and to conform to constricting norms. In this sense, then, he also represents the voice of dominant culture. The first two sentences of *HPSS* set the Dursleys up as killjoys by describing them as people who "were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense" (1). In contrast, the Wizarding world is fun and exciting, "strange" and "mysterious," and the Dursleys are the prudes who try to keep Harry (and also the readers who identify with him) from accessing this world of adventure, this "abnormal" subculture. The Dursleys disapprove of anyone who dresses differently or behaves oddly: they can't tolerate Harry's untidy hair, they won't allow Harry to ask questions or to describe his dreams, and they believe that all wizards and witches are "freaks." Also, because it is not clear to the uninitiated reader in the opening chapters of the first book exactly what the Dursleys disapprove of, the reader can substitute a variety of words or phrases into the Dursleys' vague condemnations. Mr. Dursley refers to Lily Potter's associations with "her crowd" (7); Harry can't ask the Durleys any questions because "they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas" (26); and Dursley says, "I'm not having one in the house, Petunia! Didn't we swear when we took him in we'd stamp out that dangerous nonsense?" (36). Since readers do not, at this point in the book, know that these statements are referring to wizards, all sorts of social transgressions—some of them gender transgressions—come to mind.

This separation between "normal" and "abnormal" (or subject and object) can have profound meaning for child readers who feel like "freaks" because they do not conform to societal expectations. For instance, after surveying 75 gay male fans of the *Wizard of Oz* stories, Dee Michel concluded that many gay men have been fans of Oz since they were very young children. Michel theorized that gay men are attracted to Oz from a very early age because of the escape from the everyday, normal world that the stories represent. Gay boys can begin to feel different or outside of the norm from as young as 3-5 years of age. According to Dee, with Oz, they can fantasize about leaving the ordinary world and escaping into a strange, fantastical, colorful world that welcomes them and their supposed "abnormalness." Similarly, boys (both heterosexual and homosexual) who do not easily conform to hegemonic versions of masculinity also may find comfort in the "abnormal" Wizarding world of the *Harry Potter* novels. The Wizarding world, like Oz, is far more attractive than the mainstream culture partially because "otherness" is welcomed and celebrated—at least when compared to the rigid values of the Dursleys [3].

Since the narrow-minded Dursleys are so unpleasant, readers are led to disapprove of the dreadful, abusive, "normal" Dursleys and, conversely, to find pleasure in the "abnormal" and "freakish" things that distress the Dursleys. The fact that Mr. and Mrs. Dursley are depicted as conventional in their gender roles becomes conflated with the other unpleasant aspects of their personalities and beliefs. Mrs. Dursley is a doting, stay-at-home mother and a gossip who spies on her neighbors. Mr. Dursley is described as "a big, beefy man with hardly any neck" who is "the director of a firm called Grunnings, which [makes] drills" (1). He is successfully masculine in very conventional ways. Ian Harris, in his book, *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*, writes about various societal expectations men are expected to fulfill in order to succeed at hegemonic masculinity. In contemporary capitalistic society, men should make a lot of money and rise to the top of the corporate ladder. He writes that, "successful men aspire to be leaders" and they are "not happy when others control them" (109). Mr. Dursley superficially fits the contemporary mold of masculine success: he is a large man, he is the head of his household, he directs a successful business, and the company he works for produces the manliest of products: drills. Dursley also works to pass his knowledge of how to be manly on to his son, Dudley, who is a conventionally masculine boy because he is big and a bully. Furthermore, Dudley also does not participate in such "girly" activities as reading—the very thing that male readers of *HPSS* are doing as they learn about Dudley. The



description of Dudley's extra room illustrates much about the way his character is revealed as excessively, stereotypically, and negatively masculine:

Nearly everything in here was broken. The month-old video camera was lying on top of a small, working tank Dudley had once driven over the next door neighbor's dog; in the corner was Dudley's first-ever television set, which he'd put his foot through when his favorite program had been cancelled, there was a large birdcage, which had once held a parrot that Dudley had swapped at school for a real air rifle, which was up on the shelf with the end all bent because Dudley had sat on it. Other shelves were full of books. They were the only things in the room that looked as though they'd never been touched. (37-8)

This description of Dudley's room works to construct him as a violent boy with a nasty temper and as a boy who never reads.

Several recent studies examining boys and literacy have reached the conclusion, among others, that many boys see reading as a feminine activity. In his book *Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture*, Thomas Newkirk writes that "boys often feel that an open show of enthusiasm for schoolwork, particularly in the language arts, can undermine their identity as a 'real boy'" (39), and in their book, *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*, Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm claim that, while boys are all different in their interests and aptitudes, overall, "a variety of research shows that boys learn to read later than girls and never catch up. They trail girls in almost every literary measure in every country and culture from which data are available. They are particularly behind when it comes to reading novels and narrative fiction" (xix). Young male readers, however, make up a significant number of the fans who enthusiastically dive into Rowling's lengthy narratives. Because Dudley has already been established as an unlikable bully by this point in the book, readers (especially, those boys who are fond of reading) can take pleasure in the fact that Dudley doesn't read books and that they do.

In *The Irresistible Rise of Harry Potter*, Andrew Blake claims that that Mr. Dursley and Dudley are not merely exaggerations, but represent a disturbing norm for many men and boys: he writes,

Harry is brought up in the world of real boys in suburban Surrey, with real, surrogate or stepfathers like Mr. Dursley, who play no part in their children's education beyond sending them to school, and never read at home themselves. In this world, boys are more interested in computer games and football than in reading and writing. But Harry becomes a willing reader as soon as he is introduced into a world in which books and reading are important. (31)

Boy readers who are victimized by other boys because they do not easily conform to hegemonic masculinity (perhaps because they are called 'bookworms' or 'nerds') can take pleasure in the unflattering portrayal of a macho, semi-literate bully, and in the power that Harry and his friends in the Wizarding world gain from reading. While Harry and Ron are not as studious as Hermione, reading is central to their survival at Hogwarts, and textbooks, letters, diaries, and the Wizarding newspaper are featured prominently in each novel. There are no television sets at Hogwarts, while the television seems to always be on at the Dursley's and Dudley seems even to have owned several television sets of his own over the years.

Like his father, Dudley Dursley is also unlikable because of his excessively conventional masculinity. In *HPSS*, we witness this "normal" behavior being passed from father to son through discussions about Smeltings, Mr. Dursley's old private school, which Dudley will attend and, which we assume, is not coeducational. The boys at Smeltings "carried knobby sticks, used for hitting each other while the teachers weren't looking. This was supposed to be good training for later life" (32). In order to become men, boys, traditionally, are often expected to go through violent rituals that "build character." In his book *Proving Manhood*, Timothy Beneke argues that boys are often subjected to painful initiation rituals that prepare them for manhood. He writes that, "symbols of masculinity often contain and express a history of suffering successfully endured" (42). Rowling is clearly mocking this mentality through her comic description of the Smeltings stick, and both Dudley and Mr. Dursley are made to look ridiculous through their rigid adherence to exaggerated and stereotypical masculinity, and the character-building rituals associated with it.



It is in contrast to this "normal," Muggle family that we are introduced to the Wizarding world. Much of the "abnormal" behavior in the Wizarding world, of which the Dursleys disapprove, is behavior that does not conform to conventional ideas of gender. In the first few pages of HPSS, Mr. Dursley is "enraged" to see strangely dressed people out on the street and is specifically horrified to see a "man [who] had to be older than he was, and wearing an emerald-green cloak! The nerve of him!" (3). Later, Dursley is distraught when an old man, wearing a violet cloak, hugs him. "He had been hugged by a complete stranger. He also thought he had been called a Muggle, whatever that was. He was rattled" (5). 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.

Once this relationship between the Muggle and Wizarding worlds is established, we meet Professors McGonagall and Dumbledore. The Dursleys do not meet them at this point—they would, we assume, be horrified if they did—but we see these characters as the Dursleys might because they first appear in the Dursley's world, on their very doorstep, with the threat of an opened door and a prudish judgment always lingering in the background of our introduction. We, as readers, understand that the Dursleys would be appalled to meet a man described in this way:

Nothing like this man had ever been seen on 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 that 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. (8)

The purple, floor-length cloak and high-heeled boots introduce Dumbledore as a man who is in sharp contrast to Mr. Dursley. He is depicted as unconventionally masculine in his appearance—as "freakish." McGonagall also is "abnormal," especially when compared with the image-conscious Mrs. Dursley. 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" (9). Our first impression of these great and powerful wizards is that they are quirky folk who don't quite perform their gender properly. The fact that the Dursleys would most certainly disapprove makes us like the professors even more. Indeed, in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Rowling finally has Dumbledore and the Dursleys meet in a scene that is both funny and pleasurable for the reader because the Dursleys are as horrified and uncomfortable in Dumbledore's presence as we had hoped they would be. Dumbledore—who "looked quite extraordinarily out of place" (47) in the Dursley's living room—has a bit of fun making them feel even more uncomfortable when he playfully bounces teacups off of their heads (45-56).

Our first impressions of Hogwarts's Grounds Keeper Rubeus Hagrid are also presented to us through the lens of Muggle "normalcy." He arrives on Privet Drive astride a giant motorcycle and is holding a bunch of blankets that contain the infant Harry Potter. He is both conventionally manly—large, hairy, riding a motorcycle—and nurturing—caring for a baby. When the three wizards leave the infant on the Dursleys' doorstep, Hagrid's shoulders shake, we assume, because he is overcome by emotion: "Wiping his streaming eyes on his jacket sleeve, Hagrid swung himself onto the motorcycle" (16). These layered portrayals of Hagrid are even more pronounced when we meet him a second time at the shack in the sea the Dursleys have escaped to, and he makes a dramatic entrance brandishing a pink umbrella. Hagrid, initially, is a terrifying figure who knocks down the front door and says, "Ah, shut up, Dursley, yeh great prune" (49). However, in addition to being Harry's rescuer, he is also a nurturer. When he pulls a crumpled birthday cake out of his magically abundant overcoat and he makes sausages and tea for a hungry Harry, Hagrid is both manly and motherly. Later in the book, we see Hagrid's ambiguously-gendered personality again when he adopts and cares for an illegal baby dragon. "'I've decided to call him Norbert,' said Hagrid, looking at the dragon with misty eyes. 'He really knows me now, watch. Norbert! Norbert! Where's mommy?'" (236). Even though Hagrid's tenderness is often portrayed, as in this scene, in ways that are comic, the seemingly incongruent combination of both traditionally masculine



and unconventionally masculine traits in a man so large and strong is what makes him such a beloved character. 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.

Harry also possesses masculine traits that are both conventional and unconventional, which work together to create a complex, imperfect boy struggling to figure out who he is. He is, as Ximena Gallardo and Jason Smith have pointed out, a "Cinderfella" who has been "feminized" by the abuse he received at the hands of the Dursleys. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate the characters described in the books from the charming and handsome actors who play them in the film versions of the texts, but in the novels, Harry and his friends are often described in ways that are not conventionally attractive. When we meet Harry in HPSS, he is described as "small and skinny for his age" (20) and as having hair that grows "all over the place" (21). His glasses are taped together because Dudley has punched him in the nose so many times and, according to Gallardo and Smith, he "inhabits 'feminine' spaces" such as the cupboard under the stairs (197). However, it is important to point out that being abused or being a victim often does, but should not define the feminine. Furthermore, because boys are often victims of what Kindlon and Thompson call "the culture of cruelty," where boys endure physical and mental abuse from other boys, victimhood should never be defined as exclusively feminine. Significantly, even though many boys are victims of bullying, most boys do not report acts of cruelty to adults "because they know the acts are so intimate and so obviously hurtful that any teacher or parent would disapprove and there would be penalties to pay; the repercussions could be worse than the original incident" (74). Within this social context, then, Dudley and Draco may represent for many boys their own tormentors on the school playground, about whom they cannot speak for fear of being labeled a tattletale, or because they have been taught to believe that boys are not supposed to be victims. Harry's numerous encounters with bullies are not so much a feminization of his character, as they are a realistic portrayal of the complexities of being a contemporary boy.

Perhaps better, more positive examples of Harry Potter's so-called "feminine" or unconventionally masculine traits could be seen in the fact that he shares treats with Ron when he first meets him, or the point that—more than anything else—Harry longs for a family and to be part of a community, or that, as the novels progress, he learns to empathize with others. Indeed, learning to understand the feelings of other characters is a key aspect of Harry's coming of age. In *Harry Potter and Goblet of Fire*, for example, he learns that Neville lives with his grandmother because his parents were tortured so cruelly by Voldemort that they lost their sanity and can no longer recognize their son. "Harry shook his head, wondering, as he did so, how he could have failed to ask Neville this, in almost four years of knowing him . . . Harry sat there, horror-struck. He had never known . . . never, in four years, bothered to find out . . ." (602-3). Harry not only identifies with Neville, but also chastises himself for never having thought about Neville's situation, for not caring enough about his friend. Another example of Harry's emotional growth is when, in book five of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry must struggle with strong and mixed feelings as he learns about events in the past that involved his parents and their friends. He learns, for example, that the father he has idealized and some of the adult males who have become his mentors, all took great pleasure in tormenting a young Severus Snape. Harry is deeply troubled by the cruelty of his male role models and learns to develop empathy for Snape, a character he has, until then, despised and feared [4]. Harry, who learns as the series progresses that he has much in common with the younger Voldemort (Tom Riddle), even learns to feel empathy for his enemy. Empathy is conventionally viewed as a "feminine" trait, but Kindlon and Thompson rightfully question defining such characteristics as "feminine" at all and argue that, *when our culture allows them to be*, boys are just as sensitive and emotional as girls.

With Harry, we see a boy who is working to understand his emotions, often within the context of hegemonic masculinity, as he grows and matures. Some critics have pointed out Harry's masculine traits and the masculine structure of the novels' narratives as being negative characteristics of the books. As critics have pointed out, Harry is a boy and behaves as many boys do—he is good at and enjoys sports, he is not terribly interested in his studies, and he is, at times, insensitive. But, compared to the hyper-masculinity of Dudley and Mr. Dursley, Harry is not stereotypical in his gendered behavior. In order to better understand the complex masculinity embodied by Harry and some of the other male characters in the books, we need to work to understand it within the context of contemporary boy culture. For example, while it is stereotypically masculine that Harry must shake off physical injuries he suffers on the



Quidditch field, he also must endure being much more sensitive than his peers in many instances. The Dementors, for instance, affect him more deeply than they affect any of the other children, both male and female. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, both Harry and Ron's little sister, Ginny, are distraught when a Dementor boards the Hogwarts train. Ginny is "shaking like mad," but Harry is the only student on the train who faints. "Harry didn't understand. He felt weak and shivery, as though he were recovering from a bout of flu; he also felt the beginnings of shame" (86). Harry cannot exhibit behavior—fainting—that is unconventionally masculine without suffering social consequences. After the fainting spell, he must endure months of taunting from other boys. Professor Lupin, who also doesn't live up to ideals of hegemonic masculinity because he is poor, shabbily dressed, and a werewolf (an "other" in the Wizarding world), becomes a mentor to Harry and helps Harry to understand the despair he feels when Dementors are near. He tells Harry, "you have nothing to be ashamed of" (187), that it is okay for boys to feel and express emotions.

For many boys expressing emotions or being sensitive is complicated. In his book, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, William Pollack argues that many boys feel compelled to adhere to a "boy code" that limits their emotional expressions. He reports that

Even very young boys reported that they felt they must "keep a stiff upper lip," "not show their feelings," "act real tough," "not act too nice," "be cool," "just laugh and brush it off when someone punches you." These boys were not referring to subtle suggestions about how they "might" comport themselves. Rather, they were invoking strict rules they had absorbed about how they "must" behave, rules that most of them seemed to genuinely fear breaking. (23)

Harry often "keeps a stiff upper lip" when he is knocked off his Quidditch broomstick or when he is injured by a dragon and keeps on playing in the first task of the tri-wizard tournament, but he is also a boy who feels a range of emotions and who struggles with appropriately expressing these. For example, after his ordeal with Voldemort and the Death Eaters near the end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Harry is overcome with emotion, but still aware of the "boy code." Harry is talking to Mrs. Weasley about Cedric's death and his feelings of responsibility and sadness, and he begins to cry: "Now the burning feeling was in his throat too. He wished Ron would look away" (714). Hegemonic masculinity is enforced, often, through the male gaze—men and boys must perform their gender appropriately before one another. We see this when, even in a tragic moment, Harry worries that his best male friend will see him cry. Significantly, though, there is no mention of Ron turning away as Harry sobs in Mrs. Weasley's arms, and more importantly, Ron never chastises Harry for this display of emotion. Contemporary boys working to negotiate their identity must reconcile feelings they have that may sometimes be at odds with perceived norms of behavior, 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 behavior. Rowling is able to depict Harry's emotional vulnerability within a realistic context that makes it believable enough for boys to relate to.

Harry is also unconventionally masculine in his choice of best friends. Public schools are often coeducational, and girls and boys have many opportunities to interact in the classroom or in after school activities. However, when they are not required to socialize together, most boys and girls do not choose to do so. In her essay, "Boys and Girls Together . . . But Mostly Apart," Barrie Thorne reports that "in nearly every study of school situations where kids from age three through junior high are given the opportunity to choose companions of the same age, girls have shown a strong preference to be with girls, and boys with boys" (331). In the *Harry Potter* novels, while their individual performances of gender and their interactions with one another may not always be ideal, the simple fact that Harry, Ron, and Hermione are friends—and best friends, at that—is an example of gendered behavior that is unconventional. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, for example, rumors circulate that Harry and Hermione are boyfriend and girlfriend. The two insist they are not dating and are "just friends," and despite the teasing they endure from other children, they remain friends and do not end their close relationship. In their essay, "Playing in the Gender Transgression Zone: Race, Class, and Hegemonic Masculinity in Middle Childhood," C. Shawn McGuffey and B. Lindsay Rich found that social spaces that involved heterosocial interactions were those most likely to be sites of patrolling and stigmatizing behaviors. "High-status boys maximize the influence of hegemonic masculinity and minimize gender



transgressions by identifying social deviants and labeling them as outcasts" (618). We see this over and over in each book of the *Harry Potter* series, as Draco, Crabbe, and Goyle taunt Harry, Ron, and Hermione. These scenes function as a criticism of the social enforcement of hegemonic masculinity because readers are meant to identify with the protagonists being taunted, not with the stereotypically masculine bullies doing the taunting. Furthermore, readers witness the unconventional, heterosocial friendship among the three main characters as it endures, strengthens, and evolves over the years in each book.

This aspect of the books is especially significant when discussing the books as examples of fantasies that use motifs of the hero myth. In her book, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, Margery Hourihan convincingly argues that, "As Ursula Le Guin points out (Le Guin 1993a: 8) heroes are traditionally male and the hero myth inscribes male dominance and the primacy of male enterprises" (68). This is indeed often the case with the *Harry Potter* novels because Harry is a boy, most of his mentors are men, and most of his enemies are men. Hourihan writes that, "if he does not travel alone the hero travels with a band of brothers, as Jason did with the Argonauts, or with a devoted male companion who is usually his inferior in some way" (77). By the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry is indeed beginning to follow the more conventional path of the heroic quest: "he simply knew that the task of discovering the truth about the real Horcrux had to be completed before he could move a little farther down the dark and winding path stretching ahead of him, the path that he and Dumbledore had set out upon together, and which he now knew he would have to journey alone" (635-6). However, although Harry feels alone at the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Rowling does not seem to advocate the idea of the lone hero. For instance, there are several places in the book when Voldemort is portrayed as evil precisely because he is a loner. Dumbledore, in explaining why Voldemort made Horcruxes to preserve parts of his soul, explains that Voldemort does not want to be dependent on others. "Voldemort likes to operate alone, remember. I believe that he would have found the thought of being dependent, even on the Elixir, intolerable" (502). Harry and Dumbledore, conversely, seek out the help of others and see themselves as part of a community.

Even though Harry feels, near the end of the sixth book, that he must journey alone, his friends probably will not allow him to do this. Ron says, of himself and Hermione, "We're with you whatever happens" (651), and Harry seems ready to accept their offer of help and companionship. This is both like and unlike friendships in traditional heroic narratives. Hourihan writes that,

In stories in which the hero travels with a band of comrades the bonds between the members of the group are stronger than any friendships with outsiders, especially with women, and are represented as somehow 'higher,' more pure and more intense than any relationships involving sex. In this way they function as romantic images of the boys' gang, the sporting team, or the group of men who work and drink together and share a special camaraderie, which in Australia has been given almost mystical status in the concept of 'mateship'—something no mere woman can understand. (83)

Harry has a band of comrades, but his comrades are not exclusively male. Hermione will clearly be by his side in the seventh book, and, from what we've seen in the first six books of the series, it would not be surprising to see Ginny and Luna included in on his quest as well. Harry's romantic involvement with Ginny, who he likes, in part, because she is outspoken, smart, and a good Quidditch player, further complicates the tradition of the male band of comrades. Harry wants to protect Ginny from harm, but she has shown on several occasions an unwillingness to be protected and an ability to fight her own battles. Harry sometimes has stereotypical misconceptions about girls, but the girls present in his life as part of a community of friends function to dispel some of these misconceptions: his heterosocial relationships with Hermione, Luna, and Ginny set him apart from the traditional heroic male with his male sidekick(s). Significantly, in fact, the only exclusively male "bands of comrades" we see in the books are groups of bullies: Dudley and his gang of thugs, and Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle. The books' male villains—Voldemort, the Dursleys, and Draco—are mostly portrayed as excessively masculine bullies.

Interestingly, Draco Malfoy, who is portrayed as conventionally and negatively masculine for much of the series, is drawn sympathetically for the first time near the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Both Harry and the reader learn that Draco, who is miserable about the horrible task Voldemort is forcing him to attempt, confides in Moaning Myrtle and cries in front of her. Myrtle says of him, "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" (462). In a pivotal scene, Harry is shocked to see Draco crying, and Draco becomes enraged when he realizes Harry has witnessed this show of emotion, when he has been exposed as unconventionally masculine before the gaze of a male peer. "Malfoy gasped and gulped and then, with a great shudder, looked up into the cracked mirror and saw Harry staring at him over his shoulder. Malfoy wheeled around drawing his wand." (522). Draco, always one-dimensionally cruel, is depicted here as a victim of Voldemort: he is a terrified boy whose father is imprisoned and who must kill his headmaster or be killed. By the end of the sixth book, Harry has hardened toward Snape, Dumbledore's murderer, but he has learned to see Draco, his enemy for six years, in ways that are more ambiguous, more sympathetic: "Where, Harry wondered, was Malfoy now, and what was Voldemort making him do under threat of killing him and his parents?" (640). This new understanding for Draco Malfoy is in part due to Draco's demonstration of behavior that is not stereotypically masculine, and in part, to Harry's increasing maturity and ability to feel empathy.

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 behaviors on the part of male characters in order to raise a particular point: these unconventional 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 while suppressing meanings that might otherwise create a foundation for the subversion of the existing hegemony" (122). In other words, when Hagrid is nurturing or emotional, he is *not being feminine*, he is expressing an aspect of masculinity that is at odds with hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, we sometimes see these expressions of unconventional masculinity policed throughout the books because that is what, realistically, happens to boys and men. Harry often, for example, polices himself by holding back tears and by restraining other expressions of emotion. Significantly, unconventionally masculine behaviors are not portrayed negatively by Rowling. In fact, she paints sympathetic characterizations of boys and men who often have experiences and emotions at odds with the norm, and who struggle to understand these.

Bird writes that, even though many boys and men struggle with fitting into the mold of dominant masculinity, "masculinities that differ from the norm of hegemonic masculinity, however, are generally experienced as 'private dissatisfactions' rather than foundations for questioning the social construction of gender" (123). 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 they 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.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank the following people who read earlier drafts of this essay and gave invaluable revising and editing advice: Steven D. Krause, Mary Thompson, and Michele Fry.
2. In the third edition of *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer write, "although considerable work has been done with sex-role stereotypes in children's literature, rethinking how the 'natural' is produced in texts for children is work that has yet to be done" (242).



This is changing with recent works like Kenneth Kidd's book, *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale*, and John Stephens' edited collection, *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film*. However, much of the scholarly work about gender in the *Harry Potter* novels has primarily focused on stereotypes.

3. Giselle Liza Anatol problematizes the "otherness" of the wizarding world in her essay titled, "the Fallen Empire: Exploring Ethnic Otherness in the World of Harry Potter." She writes that "Rowling employs a discourse of difference—one that appears to embrace the landscape of the foreign and the situation of the outsider, heightening the books' appeal to children who remain outside of positions of power and agency in society" (164). However, she goes on to complicate this reading, "Beneath this aspect of foreignness, however, lies the fact that the excursions to Hogwarts are not away from the homeland and to a symbolic colonial outpost, but rather journeys back to Harry's true homespace," (167), a homespace that is marked as imperialist, for example, by colonialism in the form of Bill and Charlie's colonial enterprises in far-off lands.

4. At the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* Snape has become an even more mysterious, ambiguous character. There is much debate among fans about Snape's role as Dumbledore's murderer, about Harry's interpretations or misinterpretations of Snape's actions, and about the future of their relationship.

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