Chapter Eight

From Sexist to (sort-of) Feminist
Representations of Gender in the Harry Potter Series

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In this chapter, we consider gender representation in the Harry Potter series and examine specific books and characters. Elizabeth is a woman in her forties and Trevor a man in his twenties: we have very different life experiences and ways of approaching the texts, and yet our analyses are similar—the Harry Potter books, like many popular books for children, mostly reinforce gender stereotypes. Many children yearn to be lost in literary worlds where they can experience adventure, heroics and power, and that means that girls read a lot of books with boys as the hero, such as Pony Boy in *The Outsiders*, and Sam Gribley in *My Side of the Mountain*. When boys and girls adventure together, boys usually have more fun. For example, in the *Box Car Children* series, older brother Henry is having the lion share of adventures, while the younger sisters cook and clean, typical of the kind of text that irritates my children. Even *Winnie the Pooh* is dominated by male characters. Pooh, Tigger, Christopher Robin, Owl, Piglet, Eeyore are all male. The only female is Kanga, the mother of the little boy animal, Roo.

Reading the first Harry Potter book with her son, Elizabeth really hated the way Hermione cowered in fear when faced with the troll, and was disappointed that she had to be rescued by the boys. While Ron and Harry successfully and bravely faced a horrible 12-foot tall troll (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, pp. 174–176), Hermione couldn’t move and had sunk to the floor in fright. Scenes like this, together with the absence of powerful females, were disappointing. As she read through the first four books, it was clear that the Harry Potter books featured females in secondary positions of power and authority and replicated some of the most familiar cultural stereotypes for both males and females. This was the focus of Elizabeth’s chapter in the first edition of this book.
But, as it turns out, Harry Potter is a long and complex series with much going on and with multiple, contradictory, and even transgressive representations of gender. Yet, as we will detail, while the last three books showcase richer roles and more powerful females, we find that women are still marginalized, stereotyped, and even mocked. The overall message related to power and gender still conforms to the stereotypical, hackneyed, and sexist patterns of the first four books, which reflect rather than challenge the worst elements of patriarchy.

Why Gender Critique Matters

Is consideration about sexism important, since the books are fun to read and have a lot to recommend them? We think so. Gender representations, like other forms of cultural ideology, both obscure and justify oppressive practices even though interpretations of the meaning of gender can be dynamic and multiple (Connell, 1987, 1991, 1993, 1995; Messner, 1997; Pyke, 1996). Gender representations are personal ways to understand ourselves, others, and society but they are also impersonal reflections of macro-level power relations (Bourdieu, 1977; Chafetz, 1990; Connell, 1996; Foucault, 1980; Lipman-Blumen, 1984). Though both feminist and poststructuralist theories tell us that texts can be read from multiple, contradictory, and even transgressive positions, it is still important for criticism to reveal dominant and hegemonic conventions. Though any one gender stereotype would not be significant, repeated and varied examples of demeaning stereotypes are very significant. In addition, these gender ideologies are especially powerful because the books are pleasurable and popular. Part of the pleasure comes from the “comfort” of the stereotypes and the recognizable character types and situations.

How do these ideologies work? Influence, art, and interpretation lies with the reader rather than the author and text. Sumara (1993/1999) points out that:

The way in which we come to know ourselves in the literary work is not embedded in the work, but rather emerges from our own interaction with the work. It is in this interactive process, manifested in the feeling of being lost, that the reader of the novel is sometimes able to find feelings, ideas, possible worlds that/s/he did not have prior to the reading.

(p. 293)

The most compelling ideology comes in the form of the more subtly suggestive and pleasurable reading. Barthes (1976) describes two types of literary pleasure, plaisir and jouissance. A reader feels plaisir when familiar cultural and ideological situations are mirrored in literature. Readers overwhelmingly describe the Potter books as pleasurable works in which the young reader can readily be lost. In the Potter books, character types and the hierarchies of
class, culture, and gender are very much the same as those in other popular books and movies and in real life situations. The type of pleasure called jouissance, in contrast, “unsets the reader, jarring him out of cultural assumptions, bringing her to the brink of the abyss” (Tobin, 1988, p. 213). If this occurs, it seems more likely to be inspired by details of fantasy and by the implicit critique technology described by Sheltrown in this volume. Thus, the Potter books are ideologically conservative, read for plaisir, but to some readers could be innovative in plot complexity, language use, or in the visual, technological, and magical detail. Yet, even the more creative and original components do not seem unsettling. As Susan Sontag (1990) has asserted, “real art makes us nervous” (p. 8).

All books present ideology and authors do so with different levels of intention.

Sutherland (1985) classifies ideology in children’s literature as the politics of assent (which reflects and reinscribes societal norms), the politics of advocacy, and the politics of attack. Ideology is invisible in books focusing on “assent,” whereas books featuring the politics of advocacy and attack either promote or denounce particular socio-cultural practices. Yet, this seems too simplistic. In the Harry Potter books, all three occur. The Harry Potter series reflects and reinscribes societal norms; some passages advocate norms and others attack norms. Furthermore, Hollindale’s (1988) observations that ideology in children’s literature is not “a political policy … it is a climate of belief” (p. 19) seems more accurate for the Harry Potter books. Below we detail this climate of belief and consider in particular, representation, roles, relationships, masculinity, and mothers.

Gender by the Numbers

In order to reveal dominant conventions, feminist theories of children’s literature have pursued multiple levels of analysis, beginning with female representation in literature. How much narrative space is devoted to males? Like Winnie the Pooh, the Harry Potter books are dominated by male characters. Among the students named in the first four books, there are 29 girls and 35 boys. By the end of the series, based on the list at Wikipedia and counted by Ellen Ott for this chapter, among characters with some role (as opposed to characters mentioned in passing or historically without developing the plot) there are 115 females to 201 males mentioned in the series as a whole. Further, the more important characters are predominantly male. The main characters are two boys, Harry Potter and Ron Weasley, and a girl, Hermione Granger. The characters, that are frightening, evil, or suspected of evil, are overwhelmingly male in the first four books and primarily male in the later books. These include Voldemort, Draco, Wormtail (Peter Pettigrew), and Severus Snape. In the first four books, those described as Death Eaters, the evil wizards who followed Voldemort, include a married couple, Mr. and
Mrs. Lestrange, and 16 males. Within the first four books, the Ministry of Magic, the seat of power, all of the ministers are male except for Bertha Jorkins, who is described as gossipy and absent minded. Most of the irritating (but not evil) grown-ups are female. These include Mrs. Figg, Professor Trelawney, Rita Skeeter, and Aunt Petunia, who has twice the neck of the usual person, which comes in handy when she is craning her neck over fences for gossip.

The girls on the Quidditch team provide another example of how token inclusion reinforces inequality. Though the girls often score in the earlier books, their scoring rarely wins the game. It is ultimately unimportant. Catching the Snitch wins the game and the Seekers that do this are male. In order to find the Snitch, Cho Chang trails Harry instead of going after it for herself (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 261). The girls are not involved in the most complex moments of play and never play dirty or get badly hurt. Feminist researchers in physical education (Flintoff, 1994; Hasbrook, 1999; Scraton, 1990) have observed that male students and teachers consider competitive sports to be a “naturally male” activity. This concept of naturally competitive males is reinforced by the fact that the captains are male, and their hard, rugged names, Flint and Wood, emphasize their masculinity.

In the Order of the Phoenix, however, a startling number of new female characters are introduced and others are newly developed. The expansion is so extreme that it reads as a willful attempt at gender inclusion. Rowling adds numerous female characters into the history of this world and into the present action, and she expands many of the existing girls’ and women’s roles. This includes the first examples of female villains, such as Bellatrix Lestrange, a Death Eater, who breaks out of Azkaban. Newly introduced is the Order itself as an organized form of power distinctive from the Ministry of Magic and Rowling populates it with women. Harry picks up a photograph of the original Order of the Phoenix in which “those hidden right at the back appeared at the forefront of the picture” (p. 174). This seems like an apt metaphor for the transformation of gender presentation in this book. We find out that prior to Fudge, Millicent Bagnol was Minister of Magic and that Emmeline Vance and Marlene McKinnon were in the Order of the Phoenix. Nymphadora, a.k.a. Tonks, a fighter, and an Auror, is a current member, introduced as a powerful witch amongst the group entrusted with escorting Harry away from the Dursleys. Newly mentioned in the Ministry are Mafalda Hopkirk who works for the Improper Use of Magic office, Amelia Susan Bones as Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and interrogator for Harry’s trial and many more women in the Ministry who will be detailed later. Amongst the students, Pansy Parkinson, Padma Patil, and Hannah Abbot and are elevated to prefect, and Angelina Johnson expands her role to become captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team. Ginny is suddenly a substantial person, and George says in reference to her Bat-Bogey Hexes, “size is
no guarantor of power” (p. 100). Luna “Loony” Lovegood is introduced as an eccentric but not unimportant collaborator for the good guys. Mrs. Weasley is seen as a political person for the first time since she is a member of the Order of the Phoenix, and we see Mr. Weasley supervising the chopping of meat and vegetables (p. 82) and attending to other domestic tasks while in previous volumes all domestic work was left to Molly.

*The Deathly Hallows* also introduces a variety of new female characters that play important roles in plot development. Harry and Hermione are nearly killed by Bathilda Bagshot’s dead body, which had been inhabited by Voldemort’s snake Nagini. They sought her out because of her connection as a friend of the Potters, a mentor to Dumbledore, and author of *A History of Magic*. Professor Burbage is eaten by Nagini in the first scene after being tortured by Voldemort for educating Hogwarts students on Muggle culture, she is something of a revolutionary considering Voldemort’s eugenics proposal to eradicate Mudbloods. The introduction of Dumbledore’s mother, Kendra, and sister, Ariana, frame his adolescent malevolence to acquire “the Hallows” and rule the Muggle world.

Throughout the series the presence of women develops quantitatively—there are more of them—as well as in terms of their influence—they do more. In the later books, Rowling depicts women in positions of leadership in which they often control the actions or even the thoughts of male characters, as the very many females develop beyond the stereotypical femininity in which they have previously been cast. For example, Mrs. Weasley, initially a narrowly written, exclusively domestically minded, worrying mother, seems transformed in the final battle of *Deathly Hallows*. She sheds the apron and oven mitts for a fierce and aggressive tone as she engages Bellatrix Lestrange in a duel. Harry is surprised but pleased by her change: “Harry watched with terror and elation as Molly Weasley’s wand slashed and twirled” (p. 736). Rowling’s most matriarchal character finally leaves “The Burrow” and involves herself first-hand in violent conflict with the Death Eaters. Another instance of change in character occurs in the same battle for Hogwarts, where Minerva McGonagall assumes leadership in protecting the school. She questions the Slytherins’ loyalty to preserving the school and the wizarding community from Voldemort’s control and gives them an ultimatum.

I shall expect you and the Slytherins in the Great Hall in twenty minutes, also…. If you wish to leave with your students, we shall not stop you. But if any of you attempt to sabotage our resistance or take up arms against us within this castle, then, Horace, we duel to kill.

(p. 602)

In preceding situations McGonagall would have deferred to a male superior or consulted with her colleagues rather than being decisive on the spot.
Throughout the series journalist Rita Skeeter has been solely responsible for reporting all news/gossip to the wizard community by way of the Daily Prophet; essentially, besides the Ministry of Magic, she is the voice that the public hears. In Deathly Hallows, Skeeter releases a biography, The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore, in which she reveals Dumbledore’s initiative to establish wizard rule over the Muggle world. Rita’s persistent ambition and obnoxiousness has finally earned her a big story that changes the way the wizard community views one of their most influential leaders. By exposing Dumbledore, Rita Skeeter secures significant influence in the male-dominated society, which is a first for female characters. Similarly, Dolores Umbridge’s position in the Voldemort administration affects the entire wizard community. Umbridge is in charge of filtering all Muggleborns out of the community, her official title reading “Senior Undersecretary to the Minister, Head of the Muggle-born Registration Commission” (p. 250). Another example is Bellatrix, when in Deathly Hallows she asserts her authority as a Death Eater when Lucius Malfoy challenges it, saying “you lost your authority when you lost your wand, Lucius! How dare you! Take your hands off me” (p. 460)! Voldemort trusts Bellatrix with one of the Horcruxes, which she hides in her vault in Gringotts.

Hermione’s development in Deathly Hallows is showcased when for the first time she gives readers a glimpse of personal ambition. She retorts Scrimgeour’s suspicions of her considering a career in “magical law” by saying “No, I’m not, I’m hoping to do some good in the world” (p. 124). With this ambition Hermione separates herself from her partnership with Ron and Harry that has defined her and possibly restricted her for the past six years.

The Final Verdict: Feminist or Sexist?

Female characters become more prevalent as the series continues, their pragmatic femininity develops beyond strictly feminine attributes, and their roles may be more representative of an equally distributed gender hierarchy. But does their presence in authoritative positions satisfy a rich feminist conception of equality? Molly Weasley leaves The Burrow to protect her children and duels to defend her daughter, making her aggressive assertions consistent with her mothering role. Worse, her battle with Bellatrix in which she screams, “YOU BITCH” (cap. sic) (p. 736) reads like a catfight added for comic relief. The funniness of the scene relies on mockery of both women. Does McGonagall assume leadership only because Dumbledore is dead? When she is faced with the first opportunity, is it merely her duty by default? Why didn’t she initiate the coup before Harry arrived? When McGonagall is portrayed shouting “charge” in battle, it is funny because, like Molly Weasley, she is acting out of character. Rita Skeeter may be the most powerful, independently professional woman in the series, but she is constantly discredited by Harry; her character is manipulative and untrustworthy. Consistent with the series,
Skeeter is another female denigrated because of her less than desirable feminine appearance. Her moving portrait is described as:

a woman wearing jeweled glasses with elaborately curled blonde hair, her teeth bared in what was clearly supposed to be a winning smile, wiggling her fingers up at him. Doing his best to ignore the nauseating image, Harry read on.

(p. 23)

Rita Skeeter’s work is made interesting and, therefore, widely read because of her ability to twist the truth; her lies define her career.

Similarly, deception characterizes Umbridge’s and Bellatrix’s rise to powerful positions. In the Order of the Phoenix, Umbridge was appointed Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher but was working as a spy for Minister Fudge to discredit Harry and Dumbledore. Her work earns her a promotion to “High Inquisitor,” a position she abuses to set more tyrannical regulations, until she is appointed Headmistress of Hogwarts. Her resume of underhandedness eventually earns her the position of Senior Undersecretary to the Minister where she works on a kind of Mudblood genocide of the wizard community. Harry describes her appearance as similar to “a large, pale toad” (Order of the Phoenix, p. 146). Bellatrix has an obsequious loyalty that is mocked by Voldemort. Speaking to him, “her voice constricted with emotion, ‘it is an honor to have you here, in our family’s house. There can be no higher pleasure.’” Voldemort mocks her saying, “that means a great deal Bellatrix, from you” (p. 9). She isn’t respected and is only kept because of her faithfulness. She fails Voldemort when her Horcrux is stolen from her Gringotts vault by Harry, Ron, and Hermione. She is ultimately contemptuous to both the good guys and the bad guys.

Hermione’s advanced knowledge of magic shows potential beyond the other students, but she has only exercised her gift to aid Harry’s quests rather than focusing on her own career. He is the hero; she is but an assistant. In the Goblet of Fire Hermione starts S.P.E.W., “Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare,” an organization to fight for the rights of house-elves. Independently, she pursues the cause but her organization is portrayed invalid or trite in comparison to Harry’s endeavors in the school. Hermione is so wrapped up in Harry’s goals that hers may be suppressed or unrealized. Ruthann Mayes-Elma (2006) concurs that the pragmatic identity-attitude of female characters is suppressed because they do not actively construct their own identity; only once they figure out they are oppressed can they do something to change their status (p. 80). However, Hermione seems perfectly content with her subordinate partnership with Ron and Harry. Hermione’s adolescent preoccupation with Ron an object of romance and her ultimate marriage to Ron solidifies her dependent identity in the trio.
The Helper Females: Hermione and McGonagall

The sexism present at the end is also throughout the series. Males are represented more often, but they are also depicted as wiser, braver, more powerful, and more fun than females. It is not simply who is present, but also how characters are portrayed, and what they do, that matters. Most of the girls are depicted as anti-intellectual and most keenly interested in the low-status magic of the Divination class. At the height of action, females are not typically very involved, and they are always fearful and emotional. The relative powerlessness of females is most evident in the portrayal of the main character, Hermione. In Chapter 16, during the action-filled denouement of the first book (Sorcerer’s Stone, Chapter 16), Harry, Ron, and Hermione are working together towards the Sorcerer’s Stone. Hermione shrieks, screams, and speaks “nervously,” reactions the boys do not have. Though Hermione’s knowledge helps them along, Harry sends her back. She agrees with this decision, throws her arms around Harry, and says, “Harry—you’re a great wizard you know.” He says, “I’m not as good as you.” And she responds, “Books and cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery and—oh Harry be careful!” (p. 287). Thus, Harry’s ability to make friends and be brave establishes him as the true great one, and, he is the great one in every book.

Hermione, and female characters in general, react differently to conflict than male characters do in the series. In Deathly Hallows, when Harry and Ron argue about pursuing the remaining Horcruxes, their dialogue is described by shouts, anger, and standing in positions of physical dominance: “his words pierced Harry like scalding knives” (p. 307). Hermione is described as being barely audible over the pouring rain. She transitions from participating in the conversation to becoming the mediator of her infuriated friends, “tears pouring down Hermione’s face” (p. 308).

This type of scenario occurs repeatedly. Sometimes females begin an action scene as a token presence, but something usually happens to them. Hermione is primarily an enabler of Harry’s and Ron’s adventures, rather than an adventurer herself. Though she is much more active and important in Deathly Hallows than in the early books, she is asleep in the tent when Ron and Harry get the first Horcrux and oddly, though we are told that she gets the third Horcrux, this is only mentioned in passing, not described in rich detail like the heroics of the boys. Ermelle Fife (2006) defines characters with Hermione’s enabling presence as “wise warriors,” comparing her to the Greek Goddess Athena, born armed from the head of Zeus, “a mentor and guide to numerous heroes, and is seldom a deity of aggression, but of defensive warfare” (p. 1). Hermione embodies Fife’s theory and displays her defensive attitude in their discussion of which of the “Hallows” would be most effective in a confrontation. Hermione chooses the Invisibility Cloak in order to avoid violence and denounces Ron’s choice of the unbeatable wand because “the wand would be bound to attract trouble” (Deathly Hallows, p. 415).
In the middle of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione is the one who makes the important Polyjuice Potion, which works fine for Harry and Ron, leading them into further adventures, but goes awry when Hermione uses it on herself. She accidentally turns herself into a cat, which causes her to sob and pull her robes over her head. She is hospitalized for weeks. In another plot twist, she is later immobilized by being turned into a "petrified person" yet, in her immobilized condition, she provides crucial information, which Ron "tugs and twists" out of her hand. Hermione's knowledge is important, but it is primarily used for Harry's adventures, not her own. In the *Goblet of Fire*, she teaches Harry how to summon his broom, which helps him triumph in the Triwizard Tournament and escape Voldemort, but Hermione, of course, does not compete or face Voldemort herself.

Hermione's maternal attributes are reinforced by Harry and Ron. In the *Deathly Hallows*, Hermione assumes an overwhelmingly matriarchal role during her, Harry's, and Ron's time spent alone hiding from Death Eaters in the forest. Throughout the seventh book Hermione is obligated with carrying a magical beaded bag that has no limit to what it can hold, she consistently pulls essentials from the bag that save or make Ron's and Harry's lives comfortable. After sneaking into the Ministry of Magic, they're forced to Disapparate into the wilderness to avoid detection. Hermione's bag wasn't packed in anticipation of a camping trip and they are all hungry. Ron assumes that Hermione is to blame for their lack of food, but it is Hermione that reinforces stereotyping of domestic responsibility in their exchange. Ron complains "my mother can make good food appear out of thin air." Hermione responds arguing "Harry caught the fish and I did my best with it! I notice I'm always the one who ends up sorting out the food, because I'm a girl, I suppose!" (p. 293). Hermione risks going to the supermarket despite the presence of bounty hunters and Death Eaters searching for anyone connected to Harry; she helps Harry regardless of the potential implications of going into public. At Harry's seventeenth birthday party Ron compliments Hermione after she decorates the room with streamers, saying "You've really got an eye for that sort of thing" (*Deathly Hallows*, p. 119). She is rewarded for her feminine characteristics but portrayed as "nerdy" when she tries to compete in the classroom. Harry's masculine tendency to delve head first into conflict drive the action of the stories; accordingly, his style of heroism trumps Hermione's rational and defensive approach. Harry has the final veto for all decisions. Pugh and Wallace explain females in relation to male leaders, saying "women are presented as only taking actions within the purview of men, and their actions are depicted as largely irrelevant or unreasonable when they step outside that authority" (p. 14).

In *Goblet of Fire*, Fleur, a female, is "allowed" to be one of four students competing in the Triwizard Tournament, but she ends up last. During the second task, she gets tangled up in weed and cannot save her own sister.
Harry has to save the sister. Though Fleur is important enough to become one of the “seven Potters” flying as a decoy in the tense opening to *Deathly Hallows*, her inclusion in the mission seems jarring because she is a superficial, love-struck ditz preoccupied with wedding planning in the previous volume, the *Half-Blood Prince*.

In action scenes in each book, these characterizations are repeated. Hermione speaks in a “terrified voice” (*Chamber of Secrets*, p. 336) or a “petrified whisper” (p. 339). Harry and Ron are never described in this way. Furthermore, though Hermione’s knowledge is sometimes useful, it is Harry’s “stupid” bravery that really saves the day. It is important that both Harry and Ron have knowledge when they need it, but they are not bookish like Hermione. Research on boys’ school culture suggests that bookishness and academic achievement are considered feminine (Mac and Ghaill, 1994; Paetcher, 1998). When Harry attacks the troll and rescues Hermione in *Sorcerer’s Stone*, it is described as “both very brave and very stupid” (p. 176). In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, in a scuffle with a suspected evil doer, Rowling narrates: “Perhaps it was the shock of Harry doing something so stupid, but Black didn’t raise the wands in time” (p. 340). In this passage, Hermione is not helpless. She kicks Sirius Black. Yet, when females are given token power, their inequality is reinforced, and their status is not enhanced. The kick is a minor effort and Black turns out to be a good guy, not a serious opponent.

Among the adults, Professor McGonagall seems to mirror Hermione as a smart female of clearly secondary status. Like Hermione, she is book-smart, but not wise, powerful, or brave. Like Hermione, she is a stickler for rules and is often described as having her arms full of books and spilling them (*Sorcerer’s Stone*, p. 267; *Goblet of Fire*, p. 205). Her characterization is reinforced by her physical description. Her hair is worn in a bun and she has beady eyes and square glasses. McGonagall’s secondary status is also evident in the nature of her interactions with students. Unlike Headmaster Dumbledore, students can trick her. Ron and Harry successfully lie to her, for example, at the end of *Chamber of Secrets*. They told Professor McGonagall that they were on their way to visit Hermione in her sick bed, when, in fact, they were scheming to get into the Chamber of Secrets. It would be hard to imagine Dumbledore being fooled by these two boys. It also would be inconceivable to imagine Dumbledore responding emotionally as McGonagall did, with “a tear glistening in her beady eye” (p. 288). She is sentimental and lacks discernment.

McGonagall is also something of a mother figure, concerned that students get enough sleep and stay well. For example, “The Gryffindor party ended only when Professor McGonagall turned up in her dressing gown and hair net at one in the morning to insist that they all go to bed” (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 265). Professor McGonagall also makes motherly inquiries of Potter: “Are you sure students from un depictio literatur to be co; were mc cle. Tete t ters wer were ma McG with stu by men climax o who call Minerva voice is o power. Fudge, a (pp. 705 ideas go without women i

**Emotion**

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you sure you feel all right Potter?” (Chamber of Secrets, p. 90). Even the female students are depicted as motherly and more gentle. Boys are told to back away from unicorns. “They prefer a woman’s touch” (Goblet of Fire, p. 436). This depiction is consistent with research on the portrayal of women in children’s literature. For example, Barnett (1986) found females in children’s storybooks to be comforting, consoling, and providers of emotional support, while males were more likely to be represented obtaining a goal or overcoming an obstacle. Tetenbaum and Pearson (1989) also found that female storybook characters were depicted as more caring and concerned about relationships than were males.

McGonagall’s secondary status is evident not just in her “soft” relations with students, but also in her relations with peers. She is effectively silenced by men when offering her opinion about what to do next at the dramatic climax of Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire. She is chastised by Dumbledore, who calls her by her first name. “Why are you disturbing these people? Minerva, I am surprised at you” (p. 703). Watch as Professor McGonagall’s voice is drowned by Fudge’s and see that Dumbledore, in contrast, can assert power. “Listen to me, Cornelius’ said Dumbledore, taking a step toward Fudge, and once again, he seemed to radiate that indefinable sense of power” (pp. 705–706). At the conclusion of this passage, Professor McGonagall’s ideas go unheeded and she is dismissed on an errand. She “nodded and left without a word.” The relative powerlessness of the two most masterful women in the series only underscores female weakness.

**Emotional Females**

The females are emotional and cry readily throughout all seven books. In Sorcerer’s Stone, Hermione overhears Ron saying that she has no friends and soon after, “Harry and Ron overheard Parvati Patil telling her friend Lavender that Hermione was crying in the girls’ bathroom and wanted to be left alone” (p. 172). This demonstrates both the portrayal of girls as gossipy and the portrayal of Hermione as emotional and vulnerable. At the end of the first book, Hermione is publicly recognized for “the cool use of logic in the face of fire,” and she buries her face in her arms. “Harry strongly suspected she had burst into tears” (Sorcerer’s Stone, p. 305). Lavender Brown cries when her pet rabbit, Binky, is killed by a fox (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 148). Pansy Parkinson is in tears after Malfoy was “attacked” by a Hippogriff (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 118). In Deathly Hallows, after escaping Gringotts on the back of a dragon, “Ron kept sweating at the top of his voice, and Hermione seemed to be sobbing” (p. 544).

Sometimes female crying is described more subtly. McGonagall, regretting her treatment of Pettigrew, “sounded as though she had a sudden head cold” (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 207). In another example, “Mrs Weasley kissed all of her children, then Hermione, and finally Harry. Do take care, won’t you
Harry,” she said as she straightened up, her eyes oddly bright (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 72). Yet males rarely touch or cry. Acceptable male tears occur when Dumbledore had an aesthetic response to music (Sorcerer’s Stone, p. 128) or when Wood “sobbed unrestrainedly” after winning the Quidditch game (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 312). Moaning Myrtle reports that Draco was crying in the bathroom and instead of humanizing him, the detail reinforces his weakness of character. Even death is an occasion for female, but not male, emotional outburst. At Cedric’s death it was only girls who “were screaming, sobbing hysterically” (Goblet of Fire, p. 672). As sports team members, the girls exhibited girlish behavior by giggling at the possibility of playing with handsome new captain and seeker, Cedric Diggory. “‘He’s that tall good looking one, isn’t he?’ asked Angelina. ‘Strong and silent,’ said Katie and they started to giggle again.” By contrast, the boys concentrate on the implications of new leadership in the opposing team. “‘Mustn’t relax! Must keep our focus!’ shouts Wood, his eyes bulging” (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 169).

Quidditch is not the only context for giggling. The books are littered with references to giggling girls, although there is not a single reference to giggling boys. For example, “Mrs Weasley was telling Hermione and Ginny about a love potion she had made as a young girl. All three of them were rather giggly” (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 70); “Groups of giggling girls often turned up to spy on Krum” (Goblet of Fire, p. 317); “Girls giggling around Cho” (p. 396). “Parvati will you go to the ball with me? Parvati went into a fit of giggles” (p. 401).

Though they are portrayed as giggly, emotional, gossipy, and anti-intellectual, many of the girls are lazy characters. Certain traits do not seem to be authoritatively owned by any one female character, but, instead, are presented in groups. In the first four books, Alicia Spinnet, Angelina Johnson, and Katie Bell are typically mentioned en masse and give identical responses to situations. It seems that Rowling was using her “cut and paste” function. When girls are mentioned individually, they are often indistinct. In Chamber of Secrets “Fourth year Alicia Spinnet … seemed to be nodding off against the wall behind her. Her fellow chasers, Katie Bell and Angelina Johnson, were yawning side by side opposite” (pp. 107–108). In Prisoner of Azkaban, “Wood pointed at Alicia Spinnet, Angelina Johnson, Katie Bell” (p. 144). “Angelina, Alicia and Katie had come over too” (p. 110). Later, “Angelina, Alicia and Katie suddenly giggled” (p. 169) when they found out Cedric Diggory was to be the new Seeker for Hufflepuff.

It is not until Goblet of Fire (p. 261) that we find out Angelina is “a tall black girl.” This late detail reads as a diversity afterthought. Other grouped female sets are the Parvati Patil, Padma Patil, and Lavender Brown group and the Pansy Parkinson and Millicent Bulstrode set. At Bill and Fleur’s wedding, Fred moves through the crowd dealing with “a gaggle of middle aged witches” and “a pair of pretty French girls who giggled and allowed him to escort them.
inside” (p. 138). A “group of fourth year girls was whispering and giggling on the other side of the door” (p. 138) to Harry’s compartment on the Hogwarts Express in Half-Blood Prince. This repeated grouping reinforces a tendency for readers to interpret females as types, rather than as individuals. It also reinforces the idea of the sociological construct of the communal and friendly girl compared to the individual and competitive boy. Chodorow (1978), for example, believes that girls retain pre-oedipal attachments to their mothers and “come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others” (p. 169).

Body and Appearance Obsessed Females

The inferior position of females is further reinforced through characterizations that highlight their insecurities and self-hatred, especially as it relates to their looks, bodies, and specifically feminine attributes. The “Fat Lady” in the portrait at the entrance of Gryffindor Tower is an example of this. She has no personal name and is never called anything but the “Fat Lady” or a very fat woman. Her size and gender define her. She is characterized as lazy, inattentive, gossipy, and more concerned about her appearance than her work. After her portrait (herself) is slashed, a male ghost reports: “‘Ashamed your headship sir. Doesn’t want to be seen. She’s a horrible mess. Saw her running through the landscape on the fourth floor, sir, saw her dodging between the trees. Crying something dreadful,’ he said happily” (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 161). Strong, negative body image messages are conveyed through the main character, Hermione. It is significant that the two “bright” females are unattractive and unsexy.

Professor McGonagall is a severe-looking, tall woman who has black hair worn in a tight bun, and square spectacles. When Madame Delacour is introduced she is described as “a beautiful blonde woman” who “was most accomplished at household spells and had the oven properly cleaned in a trice” (p. 108). Hermione is introduced in Sorcerer’s Stone as having “a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair, and rather large front teeth” (p. 105). In Goblet of Fire, when Rita Skeeter reports that Hermione is “stunningly pretty,” Hermione is ridiculed. “Stunningly pretty? Her?” Pansy Parkinson had shrieked the first time she had come face to face with Hermione after Rita’s flattering newspaper article had appeared. “What was she judging against—a chipmunk?” (p. 316). Hermione is only presented as the attractive date of Vickor Krum after she has a form of plastic surgery. She lets her teeth remain shorter after a corrective spell (p. 405). She is transformed like Cinderella and, like many tomboys in teen novels, into a “princess.” She becomes physically acceptable.

But she didn’t look like Hermione at all. She had done something with her hair; it was no longer bushy but sleek and shiny, and twisted up into
an elegant knot at the back of her head. She was wearing robes made of a floaty periwinkle blue material, and she was holding herself differently somehow ... the reduction in the size of her front teeth was more noticeable than ever.

(p. 414)

The message to girls is: get a makeover. You are not okay. It is disturbing that the females that are most physically beautiful—the Veelas—are not even human. They are portrayed as male fantasy sex objects able to seduce, beguile, and confuse males. Yet, all females are influenced by super-human standards of beauty. Only some girls who conform to a certain rigid standard of beauty can have a date. Yet, Ron and Harry, not described as good looking themselves, get dance dates with “the two best looking girls in the year” (Goblet of Fire, p. 411).

This is a dangerous, and yet a common message. Many females dislike their natural appearance, purchase a variety of products and perform a range of beauty regimens that can be ridiculous, painful, and even life threatening (Fallon, 1990). Women who want aesthetic cosmetic surgery have particularly low self-esteem (Hueston, Dennerstein, & Gotts, 1985). Research also indicates that many adolescent girls value their looks more than their intelligence and schoolwork (Tiggerman and Gardiner, 2000). It is particularly unfortunate that Hermione, a good student, changes her teeth to become more good-looking.

Hermione is not the only female student worried about looks. Eloise Midgen tried to charm away acne and ended up taking off her nose. Moaning Myrtle, a ghost, was an ugly, outcast, pimple-afflicted girl who wouldn’t have died had she not been hiding out because, as she explains, “Olive Hornby was teasing me about my glasses” (Chamber of Secrets, p. 299). The girls buy WonderWitch love potions and pimple vanishes—not the boys. Research shows that teenagers with acne suffer emotionally and are at greater risk of “psychological disorder” (Papadopoulos, Walker, Aitken, & Bor, 2000). Moaning Myrtle is viciously treated. Looks clearly matter. This portrayal of females, which highlights looks and reinforces low self-esteem, is politically and economically significant. In a capitalistic system, the creation of an insecure female helps to sell clothes, accessories, and various beauty products and processes. As Gilbert and Taylor (1991) explain, gender ideologies are powerful because they “work at an unconscious level through the structuring of desires, as well as at a conscious or rational level” (p. 135).

Mothers and Girlfriends without Boundaries

In spite of their efforts to be beautiful and accepted, the females in the Harry Potter series are often treated with secondary status in familial and romantic relationships, and the women show often inappropriate boundaries in their
relationships. Nuclear families, such as the Weasleys and the Dursleys, have stay-at-home mothers and employed, head-of-the-household type fathers. The mothers are bossy, and are so over-involved with their children they are stifling, spoiling, and inappropriate. This includes Molly Weasley, Dudley’s mother Petunia, Draco’s mother Narcissa and even Lupin’s mother. Women are also over-involved and lack self and power in romance. The Auror, Tonks, literally loses her power to metamorphose and begins to “look like moaning Myrtle” because she pines for a man she loves. Lavendar’s obsession with Ron is a central satire in Half-Blood Prince. Hermione’s love-scorned pique with Ron seems out of bounds. Perhaps most dramatically, a poor response to love gone wrong intersects with poor mothering in the figure of Merope, a name that sounds like Morose. She is so mistreated first by her brother and father, and then in her romantic relationship, that she abandons her child through suicide.

If she had been emotionally stronger and been able to maintain better boundaries in her relationships, might she have given Tom Riddle/Voldemort enough love to prevent sociopathy? Harry experienced extreme child abuse like Merope but he is strong enough to feel self-respect after the experience. Some of his confidence comes from the knowledge of his mother’s self-sacrificial love. Where is Merope’s mother? The central theme of the novels, the battle between good Harry and bad Tom seems to have roots in their mothers—the good, self-sacrificing, pretty, charming mother Lily and the bad, self-destructive, failed, “plain, pale” mother, Merope.

The men have determined Merope’s fate and indeed the men are in charge of the relationships. In another family, Albus Dumbledore’s little sister, Ariana, was completely at the mercy of the male influences in her life. At six years old, three Muggle boys saw her performing magic and “they got a bit carried away trying to stop the little freak from doing it” (Deathly Hallows p. 564). After that she couldn’t control her magical abilities and Aberforth, her other brother, describes the damage saying “she was never right again” (p. 564). It became Albus’ responsibility to take care of her. She became a burden, and was accidentally killed in a duel between Albus, Aberforth, and Grindelwald, initiated by an argument about Ariana’s impediment to Albus and Grindelwald’s plans.

Men determine whether the relationships are on or off. Ron decides when to romance Hermione, Lupin decides when to marry Tonks, Harry decides when to romance or break up with Ginny. From the beginning, Harry and Ron are in charge, even as much younger boys, when placed in a dating relationship at the Yule ball and are totally disrespectful to Parvati and Padma Patil, their dates. “Harry felt as if he were a show dog being put through its paces” (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 415). Ron totally “disses” Padma: “‘Aren’t you going to ask me to dance at all?’ Padma asked him. ‘No’ said Ron, still glaring after Hermione” (p. 423). Early in the series, Ginny is the archetypal girl and
is presented as deeply passive, weak, and receptive. She has a crush on Harry, which disables her. She becomes literally mute and still. Later, she is weak enough to be fully possessed and used by the evil Lord Voldemort. In *Deathly Hallows*, she becomes a stereotypical "catch"—the popular girl. Harry's attraction to Ginny is based on her lack of stereotypical female characteristics. "She was not tearful; that was one of the many wonderful things about Ginny, she was rarely weepy. He had sometimes thought that having six brothers must have toughened her up" (p. 116). In his desire for Ginny, Harry defines what attributes are favorable in women, marking all the feminine distinctions that characterize the plurality of female characters as undesirable.

As Luce Irigaray (1985) describes, women become paralyzed or hysterical because they have no means and no metaphors for expressing desire. In *Deathly Hallows* Luna Lovegood is "sucking her finger in a dreamy fashion and looking Harry up and down" (p. 141). Considering her name, her identity is consumed by her sexuality. Cho Chang is the beautiful and exotic Asian love interest of Harry, and serves more as a symbol rather than as a fully developed character. This is disturbingly suggestive of what Kim (1990) describes as race and gender hierarchies that have objectified Asian Americans as permanent outsiders. "Asian men have been coded as having no sexuality, while Asian women have nothing else" (p. 71). In *The Deathly Hallows*, in the midst of planning a coup on the Death Eaters' control of Hogwarts, Harry is distracted by his two love interests.

Ginny was now climbing through the hole in the wall ... Ginny gave Harry a radiant smile, he had forgotten, or had never fully appreciated how beautiful she was ... Harry's mouth fell open. Right behind Lee Jordan came Harry's old girlfriend, Cho Chang. She smiled at him.

(p. 582)

This scene further excludes women from situations that require leadership. While Harry is concerned about saving the wizarding world, Cho and Ginny are portrayed as aloof to the condition, focused on their attraction to Harry.

In a study of young romance readers, Willinsky and Hunniford (1993) found that because adolescent girls read in a realist manner, texts represent a dangerous seduction. Girls tend to read romance texts as preparation for the romances they foresee as part of their immediate future (pp. 91–93). Willinsky and Hunniford maintain that "[this] reading is like having your fortune read in good faith with the tingle of excitement in watching it unfold in the crystal ball" (p. 94). Yet, both boys and girls potentially suffer from such power imbalances.
Stereotypical Masculinities

In order for a theory of gender identity to be inclusive, gender identity conventions must be understood as equally though differently alienating for men and for women. Female archetypes tend to describe types of powerlessness, whereas dominant male archetypes tend to describe types of powerfulness. To the extent that each distort reality and circumscribe choices and free will, each are limiting, hegemonic, and alienating. There are quite narrow and specific identities suggested for both males and females in the Harry Potter series. In the Harry Potter books, boys are stereotypically portrayed, with the strong, adventurous, independent type of male serving as a heroic expression of masculinity, while the weak, unsuccessful male is mocked and sometimes despised.

As R. W. Connell (1996) reminds us, types of gender representations “do not sit side by side like dishes in a smorgasbord; there are definite relations between them.” For example, “some masculinities are more dominant than others” (p. 212). The form of masculinity that is culturally dominant in a given setting is called hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic cultural practices are those in which most people give “spontaneous consent” to the “general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci, 1978, p. 12). A certain type of boy “naturally” seems better. Often people do not realize the extent to which their ideas of gender are culturally created. As Connell explains, “hegemonic” signifies a position of cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist alongside. The hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity; it is simply the most valued (Connell, 1996, p. 211). Hegemonic masculinity is straight, strong, domineering, and oppresses not only women, but also the many men excluded from it. Even “subscribers” may find its norms unattainable (Messner, 1997, pp. 7–8). David Wallace and Tison Pugh (2006) conclude that the protagonist’s masculinity, Harry’s, must be stronger than that of all other surrounding male characters, “especially in relation to gender and sexual orientation difference” (p. 2). Therefore, Harry can act independently, while male characters around him may not be capable. Although Ron is a very important male character, he doesn’t have the capacity to act independently; an adolescent with a very protective mother often shows this in his personality. Lupin, Sirius, Dumbledore, and Mad-Eye Moody all die, allowing Harry to overcome the adversity of losing his strong male influences, and develop own dominant masculinity.

Nearly all of the males seem to be engaged in power struggles. Yet, the reader has a very clear idea of which males are in top positions. The coolest males seem to be Harry, Dumbledore, and Bill Weasley, who works for Gringotts (the bank) in Egypt and has a ponytail. The traits of powerful males include bravery, confidence, class status, and personal charisma. Although the
Weasleys are poor, Bill’s status is different. He displays both cultural and financial power. Dumbledore is a leader and is interested in chamber music, which is suggestive of upper class status. We know that even Harry has money.

Harry’s status is interesting. At first he appears to be an outsider and thus neither dominant nor powerful. He is a skinny boy with tousled hair who is trying to find his place. And yet, as the stories progress, he obtains significant status. He becomes rich and famous. He has some of the best stuff, such as a top quality broom and an Invisibility Cloak. He is also a school sports star able to get a date with one of the prettiest girls in the school. Part of Harry’s appeal comes from the fact that he is introduced to us as a skinny, orphaned outsider and yet he goes on to have success in every important venue of masculinity. He seems anointed. Research suggests that maintaining peer status and moving from “nerd to normal” are chief preoccupations of the young adolescent (Kinney, 1993). Harry’s success is satisfying to any reader who wants power or vindication. Yet, if Harry simply achieved status and remained unproblematically popular, there would be little narrative tension. Thus, Rowling often places Harry in situations in which other students or the wizarding world are mistrustful of Harry. He is repeatedly vindicated.

Harry’s triumphs are reinforced by the fact that in the series, most males are not powerful or in positions of cultural authority and leadership. Just as token inclusion reinforces the inequality of the females, the multitude of males who are insecure, low status, and less than fully masculine reinforce the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Percy Weasley lacks power because his Hermione-like rule following undermines his masculinity. Cedric Diggory is not a dominant male because of what appears to be his social class status. Hufflepuffs are loyal and good workers, but not intelligent leaders. Being a pretty boy “thickheaded” Hufflepuff is unmanly. “He’s that tall good looking one isn’t he?” said Angelina. ‘Strong and silent,’ said Katie. ‘He’s only silent because he’s too thick to string two words together,’ said Fred impatiently” (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 169.)

Cedric displays a form of working class masculinity. When male self-esteem is undermined by being an insubordinate and taking orders from others, men who are working class reconstruct their position as embodying true masculinity by focusing on their strength, endurance, and capacity to tolerate pain.

(Donaldson, 1991; Pyke, 1996)

This is the sort of tough, dumb masculinity Cedric possesses.

There are numerous non-dominant adult males in these books who are deeply undesirable. These include Argus Filch, Professor Flitwick, Gilderoy Lockhart, Professor Slughorn, Professor Quirrell, and Peter Pettigrew or...
"Wormtail." Their negative portrayal serves as a textual warning. They demonstrate the consequences of failed masculinity. No boy readers would want to be like any of them. Argus Filch is the failed wizard owner of Mrs. Norris, the cat. Owning and doting on the cat makes him seem effeminate. Filch is a Squib, which means that he was born of a wizarding family but cannot do magic. The frustration this failure causes contributes to his antisocial behavior and his nasty bullying of students. "Tiny little Professor Flitwick" drinks cherry syrup and soda with ice and an umbrella, decorates with live fairies, speaks in a squeaky voice, and is emotionally sensitive. For example, when he was afraid, "he let out a squeal" and then "burst into tears." He faints after telling everyone that there is a troll in the castle in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. This portrayal is in the same book: "Now don't forget that nice wrist movement we've been practicing!" squeaked Professor Flitwick, perched on top of his pile of books as usual. "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick" (p. 171). Professor Flitwick is characterized with words and images that are connotative of crude cultural stereotypes of gay men.

Such negative portrayals reinforce the vilification of non-dominant masculinity and femininity common in many school settings. There are no gay people nor gay couples in these books and they end with a virtual parade of heterosexual married pairing. Gay young people and young people who do not conform to dominant gender identities are at particular risk, and this series reinforces heteronormativity. We find Rowling's claim, after the series was completed, that Dumbledore was gay as offensive since a recognizably gay Dumbledore could have helped reduce stigma. There is no evidence of this. Gay teens are much more likely than their peers to be the victims of violence and harassment, to drop out of school and to think about and attempt suicide (O'Connor, 1995; Stoeb & Chiriboga, 1998). In the Harry Potter books, numerous expressions of non-dominant masculinity are instead mocked.

Gilderoy Lockhart is characterized as a deeply conceited man whose bravado and mannerisms serve to hide his utter incompetence and fearfulness. He carries stacks of autographed pictures with him most of the time and is jealous of attention given to Harry. He has coiffed golden, wavy hair and wears curlers at night. He wears robes in a wide array of colors, including forget-me-not blue, lavender, turquoise, mauve, lurid pink, deep plum, jade green, and midnight blue. Certainly this vain, fearful, pink-robed, curler-wearing man is less than masculine, even though many young female students like him.

Both Quirrell and Wormtail are weak males. Their physical possession by Lord Voldemort emphasizes their lack of masculinity. Professor Quirrell is nervous, prone to fainting, pale, and often trembling. Who would suspect p-p-poor, stuttering Professor Quirrell of being connected with Voldemort? Quirrell became a host and a slave to the disembodied Voldemort.
Peter Pettigrew, known as “Wormtail” since he can take the form of a rat, is described in his student days as that “fat, little boy” by Madame Rosmerta (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 207). McGonagall recalls him with the description, “Stupid boy ... foolish boy ... he was always hopeless at dueling” (p. 208). McGonagall says Pettigrew “hero worshiped Black and Potter” but was “never quite in their league, talent wise” (p. 207). His failure to compete with the dominant males leads him to be vulnerable to possession and use by the evil Voldemort.

The boys who do not measure up to the masculine ideal are consistently derided and are actively excluded from participation in school social life. This is quite similar to what occurs in many schools in Great Britain, Australia, and the U.S.A. (Epstein, 1997, 1999; Martino, 1995, 1999; Kehily & Nayak, 1997). In Rowling’s books, boys establish their masculinity by avoiding behaviors common to the girls and the less masculine males. Hegemonic males do not express fear, cry, giggle, or gossip, and they are not concerned about their appearance. Hegemonic males are good at sports and have access to things, money, and prestige. Socialization into this type of competitive, unflinching masculinity helps to create consumers, soldiers, and corporate strivers. It also reinforces contempt rather than sympathy and public support for the downtrodden.

Among the students, Neville and the brothers, Colin and Dennis Creevey, are portrayed, in varying degrees, as “wimps.” Language used to describe them reinforces their lowliness. Creevey sounds like creepy. Neville sounds like snivel. Although other boys are often hurt in Quidditch, Neville leaves in disgrace after he fell off a broom during a Quidditch lesson. “Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch.” (Sorcerer’s Stone, p. 147). He is viciously mocked. His unattractiveness to girls is emphasized by Pansy. “‘Ooh, sticking up for Longbottom?’ said Pansy Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl. ‘Never thought you’d like fat little cry-babies, Parvati’” (p. 147). Neville is also victimized by teachers, such as Snape. During Potions lessons, “Neville regularly went to pieces” (Prisoner of Azkaban, p. 125). Snape says “tell me boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours?” Neville is described as “pink and trembling. He looked like he was on the verge of tears” (p. 126). Neville is a poor student and a poor athlete. The misery this boy experiences is a testament to the consequences of failed masculinity. Slowly, he fights back, starting with standing up to bullies and eventually transforms. Neville’s reinvention as an important friend of Harry’s, as a member of Dumbledore’s Army, and ultimately as a boy capable of surviving a face off with both Bellatrix and Voldemort serves as an echo case to Harry’s, and enhanced the trope of emerging masculinity. Both begin as weak, skinny, outsiders and yet become men.

Implications: Disrupting Gender Stories

As Walkerdine (1990) explains, there is a need for gender-neutral stories that are equally appealing to gender-confining, stereotypical, and prejudicial pleasure. stems from confronting pleasure deconstruction. Even the formal elements of Childrendeduction have been constrained with what we might learn within society. those practices are not studied well.

Given these works into current classroom reproducible young readers, it is important to consider experiences of gender more than the traditional ones. These tend to embody: Barnett, J. Barthes, B. Bourdieu, P. Chafetz, M. Chodorow, N. Connell, R. W.
material. Can this be? Such books would create a different kind of reading pleasure. We believe that part of the popularity of the Harry Potter books stems from their highly familiar depictions of gender and power. Novels that confronted readers' stereotypes would elicit either rejection or the unsettling pleasure of jouissance. Yet, all texts can be resisted, read against the grain, and deconstructed. We urge Harry Potter readers to think about these portrayals. Even though we are experienced critical and feminist readers of texts, our formal examination of these books revealed more than initial casual reading. Children talking with each other, with parents, or with teachers should question how to achieve "common sense" ideas about femininity and masculinity and consider who is served and who is harmed through gender ideologies. Certainly books such as these help to normalize a world in which most child-care workers and secretaries are female and most world explorers, engineers, and firefighters are male. In educational settings, critical discussions about literature, culture, and gender ideology can be very productive (Davies, 1989, 1993, 1997; Lee & Beach, 2001; Peyton, 2000; Yeoman, 1999). Children can learn what Bronwyn Davies (1989) describes as the discursive practices of society. When this happens, children "are able to position themselves within those practices in multiple ways, and to develop subjectivities both in concert with and in opposition to the ways in which others choose to position them" (p. xi).

Given the enormous readership of the Harry Potter texts, scholarship on these works and thoughtful consideration of ways to introduce critical themes into curriculum is very important. Such critiques help readers, parents, and classroom teachers to consider the ways that literary portrayals potentially reproduce and legitimize inequality, and even help create identity. Even if young readers are not actively seeking lessons in gender identity, they can be learned. For this reason, feminist critical pedagogy encourages educators to examine the ways in which popular texts, such as these books, mirror dominant relations and function to legitimize such relations of power and gender experiences (Lewis, 1997; Luke, 1997). In this way, the critical gaze, rather than the books themselves, become the focus of reading and of curriculum. These texts are particularly useful starting points for discussions because they embody both engaging and constricting themes and images.

References
working-class men on the margin of the labour market. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 27(2), 141–171.


